

‘No one loves like Dickson loves’ - Pitney

Mayor, officials review winter storm impact, response

At the Feb. 2, 2026, Dickson City Council meeting, Mayor Don L. Weiss and other officials reviewed the response and ongoing recovery efforts from winter storm Fern.

Dickson Mayor Don L. Weiss Jr.

“In 1994 when we had the storm, this storm has been compared to that somewhat. In ’94 the storm came in on a Thursday night about 10:00 and by about 4:00 or 5:00 am the freezing rain had stopped. Dickson Electric had very, very widespread outages in 1994. There had not been a lot of work done by Dickson Electric at that particular time on their right-of-way upkeep of trying to keep the trees and the limbs away from the lines. The roads kind of took care of themselves in 1994 because on Friday morning by 11:00 it was 55 degrees outside and everything was already melting, which actually hurt DES in a lot of ways because things were melting so fast when those limbs sprang back up they broke off and landed on a line.

“This year, 2026, as you know, on Jan. 24, Saturday, we’re seeing somewhere in the neighborhood of 3-4 inches of snow about citywide. Then on Sunday morning, sometime early, early Sunday morning, it started sleet and we received somewhere between a half and once inch of sleet that was on top of the snow that was already on the ground. Then about 7:00 or 8:00 Sunday morning, the sleet turned to freezing rain and we got about another half inch of freezing rain on top of the sleet that had fallen on top of the snow. And we continued to have freezing rain throughout the day on Sunday. And here’s the big difference from ’94: the temperatures never raised. The temperatures actually dropped and everything continued to freeze to even worse than what it was when it hit the ground to start with.

“We have about 200 miles of City streets, which we’ve had road issues with, especially since Sunday when the freezing rain started. Because of the low temperatures, all of the snow and the sleet and the freezing rain turned to ice that just literally almost adhered to the roads underneath. Our plows are gravity-type plows. They’re made to push snow, not break ice. They just won’t push ice out of the way. Our crews were out constantly from Saturday on. We started the week with about 130 tons of salt. That was the most salt we’ve had on hand in at least the last two or three years. We used all of that 130 tons this past week in salt. We have three salt trucks. One of our salt trucks went down on Tuesday. We were able because of the Governor’s executive order to obtain some salt from TDOT and they refilled our salt bin yesterday with 100 tons of salt. So, we have another 100 tons that we were able to get from TDOT yesterday and we’re probably going to be able to get some more from them over this next week and I think we’ve already put out about 10 tons of that 100 tons today. But we’re down to two salt trucks. We have three salt trucks on hand. On one of the spreaders, the motor went out. We tried to replace that motor Tuesday and Wednesday and we were unable to find another motor for that. But we think we should have one in today or tomorrow.

“On Friday, Jan. 23, I called a meeting of (City Administrator) Mr. (David) Travis, (Administrative Assistant) Mr. (Chris) Norman, (Police) Chief (Seth) Lyles, (Fire) Chief (Richard) Greer and Mike Osman, who is over our (Office of Emergency Management). We met along with Mr. (Paul) Pitney from the YMCA to make sure the Warming Center was going to be open and to see what type of help we were going to need at the Warming Center if it got as bad over the

weekend with the weather forecast as they were talking about. We were also able to conference in... Mr. Jay Lovendusky with the Red Cross on Friday during that meeting. In speaking with him at that meeting, we were able to determine how many cots they would have, what they would be able to do at the YMCA if we had to go from a Warming Center to a 24/7 shelter. We were also able to have Mr. Lovendusky come and meet our staff at the Senior Center and the Tenssco (Community) Center around 12:00 that same day. And we were able to get the Senior Center and the Tenssco Center approved as Red Cross shelter sites if needed. The Senior Center would have been the secondary Red Cross shelter if we would have needed it during the week and the Tenssco Center would have been the tertiary site if we would have needed. The Y had been running the Warming Center since about Jan. 20, I believe. The Red Cross came in and actually converted it from a Warming Center to a 24/7 shelter on Monday morning (Jan. 25) about 7:00. Our police department, our officers there were able to transport people who could not get to the shelter. They made multiple, multiple transports of our citizens to the shelter there at the YMCA. The Red Cross did turn the shelter back over to the Y as a Warming Center (Sunday) morning (Feb. 1).

“On Monday, Jan. 26, we reconvened at the YMCA with those people that I mentioned earlier to reassess the situation that we were in on Monday afternoon. We were able to have (Executive Director) Mrs. (Stacey) Levine from the (Tennessee River Chapter) Red Cross there at that particular meeting. I was in constant communication throughout the week with Mr. Travis, Mr. Norman, both our chiefs, Mr. Osman, with Mrs. Levine and Mr. Pitney there at the Y and with the Red Cross.

“We were in constant communication with Mr. (Darrell) Gillespie at the electric department. He and I spoke at least once a day if not two or three times a day on different situations here in the City. And I certainly want to thank him and his department and their crews for all the work that they did. If you were here in '94, comparing what they did in 2026 to '94, there is no comparison to what they were able to do this time.

“I also want to let you know that Horizon Medical Center. Mr. Wyatt Chocklett, the CEO there, was in communication with us on a daily basis keeping us up to date on the needs at the hospital and the challenges that they faced there. They were about to run out of fuel in their generator at Natchez (Emergency Room) and their generator at Horizon Medical Center. Our Public Works Department was able to transport a little over 500 gallons of fuel to Natchez and to the hospital to keep their generators up in case they needed them.

“We were able to get Eubank Paving Company to come in and grade several of the roadways for us. We talked to Mr. (Michael) Eubank, Mr. Travis did, on several occasions. They came in, I think, on Wednesday and Thursday and did some grading for us. But they had to wait until the sun's out or they were in fear of messing our roadways up trying to grade the ice because the ice just does not grade very easily. But they were able to come in, I know they did South Hummingbird and some other areas for us there.

“Mr. Travis was in contact with Mr. (Scott) Miller at the Water Authority (of Dickson County). We had spoken with Mr. Gillespie on Tuesday and his trucks were having trouble getting in and out of the driveway there on Cowan (Road) at the electric department. He was afraid he was going to lose a truck or two because of the ice situation there. In talking with Mr. Miller, he was able to take a couple of their big pieces of equipment that the Water Authority has, over to that intersection there at Beasley (Drive) and Cowan (Road) and help the city grade those areas and get the ice removed so the electric department trucks could get in and out. Mr. Miller's crews actually ended up grading Cowan all the way from Walnut Street to Beasley Drive for us. So, I want to thank them for what they did.

“This morning at 11:00, Mr. Travis, Chief Lyles, Chief Greer, Mr. Osman, Mr. Norman, (Public Works Director) Mr. (Bret) Stock and myself had a debriefing for about two hours talking about what had transpired all week, what we felt like we had done right, some of the missteps we may have taken during the way. We talked about future equipment needs. We’re going to begin to revise our disaster response. We’re going to relook at some of what we called our priority streets and update some of those. Everybody in that meeting this morning was tasked with leaving that meeting to work on certain things in their departments and citywide and we’re going to meet again in the next two or three weeks to begin to narrow that process from the broad approach that we took this morning.

“This afternoon after that meeting, Mr. Travis and Mr. Norman and I met with Mr. Pitney and Mrs. Levine about the Warming Center and the Red Cross shelter. We discussed kind of the same things. We talked about the good things we were able to do there. We talked about some of the things we could have done maybe a little better along the way. It’s the first time we’ve ever had to transition from a Warming Center to a full-time, 24/7 shelter. We actually thought at one point in time, matter of fact I guess it was on Monday, we sent our crews to the Senior Center to grade that parking lot because we thought we were going to need the Senior Center as a secondary shelter. I think the most the shelter had at one point overnight was 52 or 53 people. But we feel like with the Y staff, the Red Cross staff that they brought in, the 24/7 shelter there went about as well as we could expect. Our police department was able to help them out when needed. We did have a couple of instances there where they had to call the police in. There was actually one arrest made there. I can’t go into detail about that, but there was one arrest made during the time the shelter was open. But we did talk more about the future needs there if we have to do this again. They’re talking like we may face this again in the next two or three weeks. I hope not. I know Mr. Gillespie hopes not. But if we do, we kind of have that process down to how we can move from that Warming Center to that shelter now, especially with Mrs. Levine being here local, we think that’ll be much easier now than what we anticipated on the Friday that we first all met.

“On Saturday, Jan. 24, I did sign Executive Order #2026-1 establishing a local state of emergency here. That allows us to do some things through FEMA and TEMA as far as getting some reimbursements on dollars that we have had to spend because of this emergency response. I can only do that for seven days by statute. I signed another Executive Order #2026-2 on Saturday Jan. 31) that extended that local state of emergency for another seven days. So, we can do that every seven days as long as we need to.”

City Administrator David Travis

“The event started late Saturday night. Early Sunday morning our crews went out. We had the three plows out, three salt spreaders. As he mentioned, Tuesday we lost our biggest piece of equipment, the big truck, the motor went down in it. That was Saturday-Sunday. Monday morning the crews kind of shifted. They saw that their efforts were futile, the ice just wasn’t moving, the salt wasn’t helping much with the very cold temperatures. We resorted back to skid steers, mini (excavators), front-end loaders, anything we had that had a downforce, something with some hydraulics and some weight to push some ice. We started using those.

“A lot of our forces were helping clear trees. We were trying to stay in contact with Mr. Gillespie’s crews to see if there were any roadways that needed trees cut and removed so that they could get in and out, keep traffic going.

“We suspended all sanitation services, of course. All of our forces moved to the roadways, sidewalks, parking lots, things that we could make a little dent in. That just played out for the rest

of the week. We were out spreading the salt all we could. We were using any piece of equipment we thought would help.

“We reached out to our local people. We reached out to some contractors. Mr. Eubank had already done North Hummingbird (Lane) on his own. I made the call and he was like, ‘If I can help you anywhere else, let me know.’ So, we let him know and he went out and took care of some spots for us.

“We had some correspondence from the state. Everybody saw Gov. Lee sent out an executive order that allowed state forces to work on municipal streets. Mr. Osman, Mr. Stock and myself put together a list and sent it over. They helped with some of those roadways to get those back open and cleared.

“As the Mayor mentioned, we’re probably going to rethink some of our priority streets. We focus a lot on the industrial park but I think the industrial park is starting to see the same thing some other places are: if the people can’t get out of the neighborhoods they can’t get to work anyway. So, we might need to work on more of our larger collector streets, such as Hummingbird, Pond and those type roads. That came out of our meeting this morning.

“Our plan for trash this week... in the morning at 6:30 we’re going to start running trash routes at drivers’ discretion. We’re asking our citizens to have all their trash cans out no matter what day your pickup is. If your normal pickup day is Thursday, Wednesday, whatever, go ahead and put it out tomorrow morning and we’re going to run the roads we can run and as the week progresses we’re going to go back and hit those roads again and again and by Friday afternoon we plan to run the whole route probably twice. If we come by and get it tomorrow and they can fill it back up, go ahead and fill it back up. That’s our plan to get sanitation caught back up. The dump was closed a couple days last week so we couldn’t run regardless. They’re open and going and ready for us.

“I want to commend the police chief, fire chief, Mr. Stock and Public Works, everybody just jumped right in and made everything go as smooth as we could make it go. I think our meeting Friday (Jan. 23) was very good to kind of get everybody on the same page and get a plan going. We were able to work with local charities, our utilities on the phone to set up a good plan and be ready to respond. And we did. Chief Lyles’ group was transporting people. Mr. Pitney’s group was taking care of people. The City provided 360 hot meals to those people who were in the shelter. We provided lunch and dinner three days and that cost the city \$3,626.40. We worked with a local business (Maryann and Wanda’s Eatery) that’s really close to the shelter there. We could basically walk it across the road if we had to, but Chief Lyles’ men went over and served those people, which is great for the camaraderie of the police department. They’d walk in and people would start cheering that lunch was there.

“Mr. Gillespie’s group reached out and our guys were out. If we reached out with a need, you know, the power’s down here and we really need to get something going or the traffic lights are out or whatever that be, his group jumped on it.

“The Red Cross came in and helped. They provided a ton of manpower that we would have been on the hook for in overtime-wise without them. All that stuff just went great. I know it’s not the optimal situation that everybody hoped for, but I think we did really good with what we have.

Red Cross Tennessee River Chapter Executive Director Stacey Levine

“I just want to say ‘thank you’ to the City of Dickson for being an incredible partner in this. This was my first disaster response as part of the Red Cross and I’m so grateful that I got to serve here in my home city because of the incredible partnerships that we had. Like they said, the City of Dickson provided three days of meals. It ended up being six days of a 24/7 emergency shelter,

so six nights that we served. We averaged about 45 people a night on those six nights. And the City of Dickson provided lunch and dinner for three of those days, which is an incredibly generous partnership and outreach.

“Also, the YMCA was an incredible partner and the Dickson County Help Center. We had families in the shelter who, when they left their home, you know, didn’t know how long they’d be there. So, we had needs for a playpen or diapers and things like that and we would just text (Director) Renee Boehm at the Help Center and she’d have those delivered. We have some incredible partnerships here in the City and in the county, some of the county deputies provided transport for people. But the City police officers as they delivered meals, they were celebrities because those meals were so wonderful and warm and delivered right on time every day. And even Chief Lyles was there a few times just taking out the trash. So, I just really want to commend the City and thank the City for doing all that they did.”

Dickson Electric System General Manager Darrell Gillespie

“Working with the City in this disaster was a real benefit to everyone who lives in the City and affected everyone we serve and provide power to. Really appreciate what Dave (Travis) did, and the City street department helping us to be able to just get around was probably one of the biggest challenges.

“The Mayor, we had a call well before this happened several days and with the knowledge that this could be a bad one. And it turned out to be a bad one. We had approximately about a half inch of ice on a lot of trees, a lot of lines. And (it was) most likely the most expensive, without a doubt, and the most number of customers affected since the ’94 ice storm, that the Mayor kind of recounted to, and everyone that was alive and of age remembers that one.

“Knowing the lessons learned over the years and having been through several events over the last several years, we did our best to be positioned to respond as quickly as we could. We had resources already available here in town for us to launch that if it did occur. And when it did, we started that immediately.

“And some of the numbers, to try to kind of give you an idea of the scope of how much resources and what we brought together, we had approximately 136 linemen helping during that period of time with about 38 right-of-way crew members working to remove trees and help clear roadways and just get trees off lines so we could get the lines back up. Along with about 15 support crew members as well. And then all the Dickson Electric System teams that support those folks, finding them places to sleep, feeding those people. It’s a large undertaking and the teams that we have just performed incredibly well.

“We’ve learned some lessons, obviously, from this one and we’ll do things to improve our response in the future. But when you get an opportunity to see a lineman, thank a lineman. It was cold. I mean, we know it was cold. Those guys worked 16-hour shifts and so we were working the entire time to support them. But they were the ones out in the field, making things happen, getting people’s lights back up.

“I hope not to see another one of these. But in the event something like that were to come up, working with the City, with the Mayor and his group, we’ll be ready for whatever comes along.”

Asked about the impact the storm will have on DES, Mr. Gillespie replied, “I’ve got an idea. It’s probably going to be about \$4 million-plus.”

Dickson Family YMCA Director Paul Pitney

“Mayor Weiss, City Council members and City staff, it’s safe to say this past week was a rare event for our community and for the Dickson Family YMCA. A few days before the weather hit, the City of Dickson gathered partners including the YMCA and walked through what could happen. That planning mattered. Mayor, you were right to prepare and because of your leadership we were ready when the storm arrived.

“What followed was new territory for the Y. At the height of the storm, 53 people spent the night inside the Dickson Y. Over the course of the week, we served more than 100 neighbors. Some needed a safe place to sleep, others needed a hot shower or a warm meal, dry clothes or simply a cup of coffee and a place where they could sit and stay safe.

“And what we saw was something powerful. No one loves like Dickson loves. This week reminded us all of what the YMCA is more than a gym. It’s a place where community shows up for community. And that only happens because we have a City that leads with foresight, coordination and heart.

“And we want to say thank you. Thank you to Mayor Weiss and the City Council for the trust you place in the YMCA as a community partner. Thank you to City Administrator Travis for helping coordinate efforts behind the scenes. Thank you to Chief Lyles, Assistant Chief (Todd) Christian and the Dickson Police Department for ensuring the safety of our guests, our volunteers and our staff and transporting so many families, individuals and people that could not get to the Y on their own. Thank you to Chief Greer and the Dickson Fire (Department) for your response to some of our medical emergencies. Thank you to Bret Stock and Public Works for your help. And thank you to Chris Norman for coordinating communications. Thank you to Rob Fisher and EMA, Sheriff (Tim) Eads and the Sheriff’s Department and many more organizations that worked alongside us, like the Dickson County Help Center and its executive director, Renee Boehm, and her staff members, Jennifer Hagewood and Christie Arnold, Executive Director Liz Wall and the Kinsman Redeemer non-profit and the American Red Cross Tennessee River Chapter led by Executive Director Stacey Levine, who stepped in when the need grew beyond what any one organization could handle alone. And thank you to Darrell Gillespie and Dickson Electric and all the employees and linemen for keeping our lights on and our heat on while so many were in our care.

“This was partnership in action. This was local government, non-profits, churches, volunteers working as one team for the good of our neighbors. At the Y we like to say we’re not just a place to work out or a facility, we’re a place where people belong. This week proved that when things get hard, Dickson shows up. And because of your leadership, the YMCA was able to stand right in the middle of it, doing what we’ve always done: loving, serving, strengthening its community. So, on behalf of our staff, our volunteers and every person that found warmth and safety in our building this week, thank you. We’re really proud to be your partner.”

Recovery continues

The City of Dickson continues to work on clearing streets and is working this week to catch up on its sanitation routes. Dickson Electric System is still making repairs to infrastructure that was damaged and temporarily fixed to restore power. The Dickson Family YMCA will continue to serve as a Warming Station whenever overnight temperatures drop below 18 degrees.

On Jan. 28, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee requested President Donald J. Trump grant an Expedited Major Disaster Declaration for 23 Tennessee counties following significant impacts from winter storm Fern. The request seeks both Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance and Individual Assistance to support response and recovery efforts across the state.

The expedited request includes counties where damage is already evident and expected to easily exceed assistance thresholds, allowing federal resources to reach Tennesseans as quickly as possible. Damage assessments remain under way, and will determine whether additional counties may qualify.

“Winter storm Fern has created significant damage in communities across Tennessee, and state and local officials, first responders and volunteers continue to provide critical support,” said Gov. Lee. “I’m grateful to President Trump for granting federal resources to support Tennesseans, and am hopeful our Major Disaster Declaration will be approved quickly.”

The Expedited Major Disaster Declaration request includes 23 counties for both FEMA Individual and Public Assistance: Cheatham, Chester, Clay, Davidson, Decatur, Dickson, Hardeman, Hardin, Henderson, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Macon, McNairy, Maury, Perry, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Trousdale, Wayne, Williamson and Wilson.