

# BUDGET: Cost of living adjustments, nine jobs added for 2025-2026 budget

to add new piping, he said. “It was a hefty price to do that,” Jenkins said. “That’s just one of many issues. There is some piping in this city as old as some of us that needs to be addressed. ..So, I propose a cost of \$234,500 to develop and implement a storm water utility fee to look at that.” Jenkins believes the fee will allow storm water issues to be addressed and “relieve the general fund,” he said. Going over more budget items, Jenkins is “proposing a 2.9 (percent) cost of living adjustment for all city employees,” Jenkins said. Nine additional positions to be added are a building inspection permit technician, an additional police captain, two police officers, three

firefighters, and one code enforcement officer, he said. “I am also reinstating the civilian 911 coordinator,” Jenkins said. “That used to be done by the lieutenant in police, but now that’s taken out. We want to make sure we now go put a civilian in that spot.” Jenkins addressed park maintenance. “Oftentimes we talk about putting something in new,” he said. “But, you know what? Let’s fix what we have here first. “You want quality of life improvement? Fix what we have. Then, what we think we need, we can approach that later. We have an array of great parks here.” Other projects include replacing a ladder truck for Georgetown Fire Department and acquiring a

gripper truck, and working on street maintenance projects, Jenkins said. “Chief (Tim) Thompson came up here and talked about the fire engine,” Jenkins said. “The ladder truck, 38 percent of the time, is not in service. In order for him to do what he needs to do, he needs to have resources to do that.” The gripper truck will help public works, he said. “(The gripper truck) runs continuously every day,” Jenkins said. “So, (that has) put a toll on it. It’s gotten to a point (where) we need to look at that.” Changes from fiscal year 2025 include extension of Lexus Way, construction and staffing of a new fire station, exploring a larger 911 dispatch facility, and expand space for Georgetown Police Department.

“It gets to a point where we need to stop talking about things and start doing,” Jenkins said. “We know that growth is coming. We want to make sure we put an avenue in place to ensure, when that happens, we are ready to go with that.” A proposed \$250,000 would be used in the design of a new fire station, he said. “This would expand the city’s fire service footprint for the first time since 1996,” Jenkins said. “This is 2025. Look at the growth. Look at the demands and then what we need to do.” “Major changes” in fiscal policy from last year include a fund balance policy; increasing the city’s purchasing power and improvement of efficiency; procurement for

authorizing use of property purchase; a nonprofit agency funding policy, Jenkins said. The fund balance policy addresses funds to cover emergencies, he said. “We put in play how much money we (are) going to leave in our fund balance to make sure we cover ourselves in case of an emergency down the road,” Jenkins said. “We never had that. ... That’s looking ahead.” Addressing purchasing power and property procurement helped lead competitive bidding, he said. “I want to acknowledge we are growing,” Jenkins said. “We still have growth coming. It is our job as a council, and me as mayor, executive officer for this city, to provide an avenue to meet that growth. The way we do that, we give

people resources to provide services.” Providing resources is what Jenkins requests of city council, he said. “Take a bold step forward,” Jenkins said. “At the end of the day, do what’s right by people. That’s what we are here to do. Sometimes, people on a higher level forget that—who we work for—our stakeholders are 40,000 people. Their expectation is that nonnegotiables are: fire/police protection, water/sewer, (and) growth. “They don’t care about your excuses we’re going to give them. They want to know, when they pick that phone up, on the worst (of) worst days, somebody’s coming without delay.” Georgetown City Council meetings are available for viewing on YouTube.

# CLIMATE: Areal droughts, warmer water temps affecting tornado prevalence

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Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, conducted research about the shift, authoring a paper in 2018 that noted the change. Since then, he’s continued to monitor the trend and says the trend is ongoing. “It’s still more prevalent in the southeast,” he said. “And we’re seeing more evidence of that each year.” Gensini tracked tornado reports from 1979 to 2018 for his initial study, but also noted atmospheric conditions in the areas at the time that were favorable for the formation of tornadoes. Gensini blames a combination of weather phenomenon for the increase in Arkansas’ tornadoes. A drought in the southwest is taking away needed moisture for the formation of twisters in the traditional Tornado Alley region. More than 67% of Arizona is experiencing “extreme” and “exceptional” drought conditions — the two highest levels of drought, according to the

U.S. Drought Monitor. The Drought Monitor is based at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and records weather conditions and patterns weekly. Three months ago, only 17% of Arizona was under the same two drought conditions. A year ago, the state was considered free from extreme and exceptional drought. New Mexico, Texas and Utah have also seen increases in drought in their respective states. Thirty percent of Texas is in “extreme” and “exceptional” drought, an increase from 14% three months ago. “The most intense levels of drought now cover a broad area from southeastern California, southern Nevada, and southwestern Utah through much of Arizona, New Mexico and the Texas Big Bend, said Richard Tinker, a meteorologist with the Climate Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland, and the author of the latest drought report. “The southern Great Plains are drying up,” Gensini added. The dry atmospheric conditions in the south-

west create a dome of high pressure over the western U.S., sapping energy from the atmosphere and forcing potential tornado-producing systems to move further east. The jet stream, a strong current of frigid Arctic air, is also dipping further south into the Mississippi delta region because of the Southwestern drought. Water temperature in the Gulf has also increased on average by one or two degrees, creating the moist, humid air needed for tornadoes. “One or two degrees may not seem much. But think of the difference between 32 degrees and 33 degrees,” Gensini said, referring to the temperature when water freezes. “It’s early in the season, and the waters are warmer. That warm, humid air is heading into Arkansas where the air has been unstable already. It makes things more potent. “We’re seeing weather pattern changes over the last 70 to 80 years that didn’t happen in 100,000 to 120,000 years before,” he said. “There is such a rapid rate of change, and

it’s not lessening.” Of the 144 warnings issued in Arkansas between March 14 and April 14, not all produced tornadoes, said Dennis Cavanaugh, the National Weather Service warning coordinator in North Little Rock. In fact, the Weather Service strives to keep its “false alarm” rate of tornado warnings to less than 80%. Warnings are issued when Doppler weather radar picks up rotation in clouds, signature “inflow notches” that indicate the building of cyclonic air patterns, hail cores and other indicators. The Weather Service also must balance the need to warn people while also not unnecessarily alarming them. Issue too many warnings that don’t produce tornadoes, and the public may become complacent and not heed future warnings as seriously. John Robinson, a former Meteorologist in Charge at the North Little Rock station, used to say that more people were injured in tornadoes while gawking at clouds for confirmation of those tornadoes rather than seeking

shelter when warnings were issued. On the other side, if the Weather Service curtails its warnings and an unwarned tornado does form, results could be devastating. “Radar can’t see tornadoes,” Cavanaugh said. “It can see circulation aloft when it’s likely a tornado is forming. If we wait to see the debris cloud from a tornado that’s on the ground to issue a warning, it’s much too late.” Cavanaugh said continued advances in technology should help the Weather Service lower its rate of false alarms. But the service will always rely on trained storm spotters who can see the lowering of wall clouds — a first step in the formation of tornadoes — and any circulation of clouds overhead. “That’s really not applicable to this year,” he said of the fear that the scores of warnings issued may eventually be ignored. “I don’t think the average Arkansan thought he or she was not warned unnecessarily.” During a round of

storms one April evening, Ryan Vaughn, the meteorologist for KAIT8 in Jonesboro, was broadcasting live storm coverage. At one point, most of northeast Arkansas was placed under a myriad of tornado warnings. Vaughn took a deep sigh on air. “I don’t think I’ve ever said this before, but if you’re anywhere in northeast Arkansas, take cover now,” he told viewers. Tornadoes are formed by opposing winds at various levels. Strong winds in opposite directions cause a shear and a horizontal column of air circulating overhead. Warm, humid air feeds the twister and eventually the column of air begins tilting vertically and lowering to become a destructive tornado. *The Kentucky Lantern is an independent, non-partisan news service. The Lantern is part of the States Newsroom, a national network of journalists covering state and local government. The website is www.kentuckylantern.com.*

# HOUSING: Panelists agree affordable housing not one-size fits all

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got to take a hard look at our R (residential) zones ... and see what types of housing can be built and whether or not those types of housing are typically associated with affordable housing. The other thing we have to do is take a look at our Comprehensive Plan. ... Within that document, there’s a lot of conversation around affordable housing. Right there, with every conversation about affordable housing, there’s this idea of ‘with incentives.’ That requires us to take a look at a known set of tools that we’ve seen in the development community and figure out one of those incentive programs would work for Georgetown. Right now, that’s one of the things we’re engaged in.” Whitehouse: “The city and the county came together to create the Office of Affordable Housing and Homelessness Prevention. Just by creating this office alone, our community is being intentional about wanting affordable housing. There’s been a person now that housing developers can engage with a person whose whole role when they wake up in the morning, they are working on trying to bring affordable housing. Whereas before, they were trying to find somebody who had time to talk about it or had some free moments to discuss it. ... So now there’s a point person for that. “Another way that we are working on trying to make affordable housing is our Housing Needs Assessment that we are completing. We hope that that data will be able to drive and attract people to want to come and help us with our affordable housing issues.

“Another (way) that sometimes people don’t think about is getting creative on what affordable housing looks like. Like (Fleming) said, to open up what kinds of houses we can build and what types of houses we can bring in, and that happens through education. Helping our community to understand that affordable housing is not going to always look like apartments, where it’s not always going to look like single-family homes on an acre. We need to get creative in the situation we’re in. We can’t keep doing what we’ve been doing and expecting different results.” Tooney: “I used to work at the Housing Authority in Sarasota, Fla. ... They created about 1,200 units through a public partnership and various third parties to bring new housing together. ... The Springfield, Mo., Housing Authority, they created a public-private partnership to renovate all of their properties and then build traditional housing. ... What we’re trying to do with the Housing Authority is comparable, to both renovate what we have and then expand within our existing program.” *What is your idea of affordable housing?* Johnson: “From the perspective of the clients that I help, sometimes the best starting place is an apartment building or an apartment complex of some sort. When we’re working on the rapid rehousing and we’re able to help people get into apartments, the best part of that is not just that they get into an apartment. It’s that we continue to follow and help them for more than a year. Through that kind

of partnership ... we can ensure they don’t become dumps. I think there’s other types of affordable housing. ... It means different things to different people, but since I’m representing my community, for us, (apartments are) a great starting place.” Cassady: “As a private developer, a lot of what we’re doing is workforce housing. ... We target people that make 60% of the area median income, people in that community that are making between \$30,000, mid-\$50,000s for a family between two and six. That’s a program from the Kentucky Housing Corporation. ... KHC sends out inspectors regularly to make sure that you’re maintaining your property well. ... Their maintenance standards are higher than what the Kentucky Building Code actually requires. A lot of these projects, particularly because you’re using federal tax credits to get these projects built, there’s a lot of strings attached to those funds to make sure that you’re building a quality community. “... We try to build a community of enough scale where you’re able to mix housing types. ... There’s some amenities. ... You don’t create pockets of, ‘That’s where the low-income people live, this is where the high-income people live.’ It’s better for the community and for the residents at large to have that community feeling in that community mix.” Fleming: “When we look at small, single-family detached homes and we look at something like a three-story walkup (apartment), there’s an entire range of housing options that lie between those two. When we’re talking

about meeting our housing needs, it’s really important to understand that it’s not a binary. ... (That’s) what we call in planning and zoning a ‘missing middle’ of housing, which is everything from duplex, triplex, cottage courts and all those other things that have to be a part of the solution when we talk about affordable housing.” Whitehouse: “I have a quote. ... It’s from ‘The Affordable City’ by Shane Phillips. ‘A reasonable median rent is not the sole measure of an affordable city. The experience of individual households, their stability, their fair treatment and the safe, healthy upkeep of their homes is as least as important.’ ... Trying to be open to, ‘Yes, I may have always dreamed of this white picket fence with the ranch on five acres,’ but that’s not what everybody wants. Listening to your community members and being open to what community can look like, I think that’s really important and being inclusive about what affordable housing is.” Ramsey: “Home ownership ... builds the strength of the community. ... We’ve got a large project that we foresee coming in the next few years. ... We have a large property downtown that we’d like to build affordable housing on. That’s what we do. We discount houses, per se, and find grants and different things to cover the down payment for individuals to get a house, and doing that, putting in duplexes—it’s not apartments, but it’s something that we can partner and make something affordable for someone to move into. “That’s kind of helped us with The Gathering Place. That’s one thing that was

on my heart when I took the position, was to help people in this situation and maybe not put them in an apartment. Maybe they would come to us and go through financial planning and go through

our program and become homeowners. I think, myself, wholeheartedly, that becoming a homeowner is going to keep them here, their families will grow and hopefully they’ll grow.”

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