Morristown’s Cox receives 2021 City Manager of the Year Award

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. ----- Dating back to the days of Davy Crockett, the city of Morristown has long held a reputation for economic development and growth with an eye on future progress.

One of the reasons Morristown continues to thrive is because of the leadership of City Manager Tony Cox over the past 11 years. Serving as a stabilizing force within the city, Cox is always the first to tackle new challenges and give credit to others for hard work.

It is for this reason that the Tennessee City Management Association (TCMA) has recognized Tony Cox as its City Manager of the Year for 2021. Cox was presented the award Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021, at the 81st Annual Conference of the Tennessee Municipal League (TML) held at the Chattanooga Convention Center.

Cox holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and government and a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He is also a graduate of the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service’s Senior Executive Institute. He came to the city of Morristown in 2010 after 26 years of experience in city management in Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia.

When Cox was first appointed city manager of Morristown, he faced a divided board, a divided community, and a lack of confidence in city service delivery. Within a few years, Cox managed to unite the city’s leadership, the community at large, and improve confidence in the city’s operations. He also provided staff with new recruitment and development opportunities that are reflected in the quality and talent of employees at city hall.

Under Cox’s leadership, the city of Morristown has seen numerous financial improvements including addressing issues flagged by the Comptroller’s Office and seeing the city’s fund balance grow from less than $50,000 to more than $12 million over a 10-year span.

Cox has also guided efforts to improve water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure in the city. He led the effort to address TDEC’s order on sewer overflows by implementing a program to bring the city into compliance and reorganize sewer and water operations to prevent duplication. He also helped to establish a stormwater fund and began addressing erosion and stormwater issues throughout the city.

Other improvements under Cox’s leadership have included a new “shepherding program” that assigns planning department staff to a project from beginning to end; the reorganization of city departments to create more efficiency; a new building program to add a new fire station, new public works facility, and new community center; and assisting in the expansion of the Morristown TCAT by coordinating use of the existing public works facility.

Cox also led the effort to purchase the property of the Old Morristown College site and created a new 50-acre city park, the first major park addition in years.

As city manager, he also:
• helped implement a new farmers’ market area and green space for event use,
• addressed issues in the downtown area,
• coordinated the effort to put a ceiling with a sound system under a unique overhead sidewalk system, and
• assisted the IDB with current manufacturing expansions and location of new manufacturing to Morristown.

Throughout it all, Cox is always the first to give others credit for the hard work. He is commonly heard to say: “I didn’t do it, our entire organization did it.” He pushes credit elsewhere, willingly to let the city board and staff receive the accolades for accomplishments. As a result, Morristown officials and staffers have developed a true team feeling within the organization and the community.

Cox has demonstrated what consistent, high-quality professional management is all about. Day in and day out, he shows his commitment to the city management profession. He has a penchant for high standards, for finding, developing, and leading high-quality employees, and for an ability to develop solid working relationships with all of the elected officials he serves.

Always first and foremost, Cox’s main priority is the citizens of Morristown and the people his city serves. He has devoted the best of himself to public service and to the notion that helping others through local government is his calling. His impact on Morristown will be felt for many years to come.

-30-

The Tennessee City Management Association is a professional association of appointed city managers and administrators and assistants that focuses on providing continuing education, technical assistance, training, and information resources to its 130 members. Managers are appointed by their elected boards to oversee the day-to-day operations of their cities or towns. Professional administrators work in partnership with their elected boards to create excellence in local governance.