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Ford Motor expresses concern about Mason

BY: **ANITA WADHWANI** - MARCH 18, 2022 2:24 PM



📷 Residents of Mason, Tenn. pray at a community meeting March 10. (Photo: John Partillo)

Ford Motor Company officials are in communication with the Tennessee Comptroller about its financial takeover plans for Mason, Tenn., a small majority Black town located less than five miles from the automaker's new electric vehicle plant, a company spokesman said Friday.

However, Virginia Rivers – Mason's Vice Mayor – said no one with Ford has reached out to any of the town's leaders.

Tennessee Comptroller Jason Mumpower announced this week the state would be taking financial control of Mason, over the objections of elected officials [who have said race is playing](#)

a [role](#) in the state's focus on their town – an allegation Comptroller Jason Mumpower has denied.

The statement from Ford said company officials are “aware of the long-running situation between Mason and the State of Tennessee but we have not been directly involved.”

“We have reached out to state and local community leaders to express concern and learn more,” read the statement from Angie Kozleski, a Ford spokesperson.

“As we ramp up construction of Blue Oval City this year and move toward production in 2025, Ford is absolutely committed to being a good neighbor and providing inclusive and equitable opportunities for West Tennesseans, including the residents of Mason.”

Rivers said she is concerned Mason officials are being bypassed in communications with Ford. Neither she, nor Mayor Emmitt Gooden or any of the town's elected alderman have heard from Ford, she said Friday.

“Who is Ford referring to when they state that they reached out to local community leaders to express concern?” she said. “It most definitely has not been the leaders of the Town of Mason.”

Kozleski clarified after publication of this story that Ford officials had reached Van Turner, Jr., president of the NAACP Memphis branch. The Tennessee Conference of the NAACP has offered support to town officials.

Blue Oval City is Ford's \$5.6 billion electric truck and battery plant, expected to generate 26,000 jobs – directly and indirectly – when it becomes operational by 2025. It represents a massive new investment in west Tennessee, and elected leaders in the three-county area surrounding it are preparing for a population boom, new businesses and other developments.

Mumpower has cited a [20-year history of financial mismanagement in Mason](#), and suggested that the prosperity expected to land in the region may bypass Mason if it's perceived as lacking sound governance.

Mason's elected officials – all but one are African-American – have said they believe the financial takeover is coming just as they are about to reap benefits that could restore the town's financial footing after years of fiscal mismanagement, and in two instances, fraud during previous administrations led by white elected officials.

Mason officials and the Comptroller are [scheduled to meet next Tuesday](#) about the state's new financial oversight.

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Anita Wadhvani is a senior reporter for the Tennessee Lookout. The Tennessee AP Broadcasters and Media (TAPME) named her Journalist of the Year in 2019 as well as giving her the Malcolm Law Award for Investigative Journalism. Wadhvani is formerly an investigative reporter with The Tennessean who focused on the impact of public policies on the people and places across Tennessee. She is a graduate of Columbia University in New York and the University of California at Berkeley School of Journalism. Wadhvani lives in Nashville with her partner and two children.

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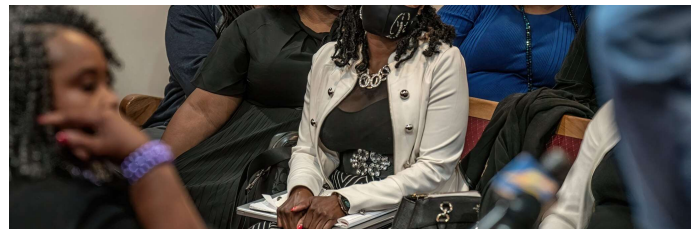
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