

Affordable Housing: Can it exist in Woodford County and its cities?

By KENNEDY PARKER
WOODFORD SUN INTERN

Affordable housing is an issue in Woodford County. Over the last two years, city and county officials and community advocates have referred to the lack of affordable housing as a crisis, an existential threat to the community’s way of life, and a hurdle to responsible economic development.

Whether it be for middle-class families or service workers, there is a housing issue that needs to be addressed, but the question is, how?

In a 2022 Woodford County Housing Study, the researchers asked 126 participants the top reason that they worked in Woodford County, but did not live within the county. Of those, 32 percent said it was because they could not find a house within their price range, and 11.9 percent

said it was because they could not find a house with the amenities they were looking for.

“The lack of housing options for moderate-income families was the main concern, followed by rising house prices, which make some of the available houses unaffordable . . . When asked about their maximum price range, most respondents selected between \$150,000 and \$400,000 . . . The maximum rental price was above \$700,” the researchers found.

Overall, based on this study, most respondents said there was not enough adequate housing in the county.

Additionally, data provided by John Paul Coyle, the Woodford County Property Valuation Administrator (PVA), from Bluegrass Realtors, shows that the median home sale price in 2022 was \$301,000, with 290 home sales. From Jan. 1

to Aug. 31, 2025, the median home sale price was \$359,000 with 174 home sales.

Local government officials and organizations have differing opinions on how to alleviate the issue.

Housing task force

Ann Miller, a city council member and chair of the Housing Affordability and Attainability Task Force, said she wants people to stay in Woodford County and work here, but the lack of land available for housing inhibits this.

“You’ve got teachers, you’ve got first responders who cannot afford to live here. Or there’s nothing available for them to live here,” she said. “If we take care of the land that we have and use it . . . and we develop it well, smartly, smart growth, as they like to call it, then we have something for

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THE NEWEST Habitat for Humanity home being built in Versailles. (Photo by Kennedy Parker)

Habitat for Humanity’s role in affordable housing crisis

By KENNEDY PARKER
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Habitat for Humanity (Habitat) is another piece of the puzzle to alleviating the housing issue.

Habitat is involved in the task force, and, within Woodford County, it has built 43 houses, starting with the first completed house in 1985 in Midway. An additional house is near completion in Versailles.

Habitat takes the total cost of how much is required to build a house and requires the family that will get the house to pay that cost back, usually over the span of 20 years at zero interest.

“So, this person will start paying back, you know, maybe \$800 a month or whatever it is, which covers their insurance, their loan to us, you know, property taxes, things like that. And then we take that money, and we will put it in the next house we build,” Bruce Finney said.

Ron Baker, president of the Woodford County Habitat for Humanity chapter, said the number one problem the organization is facing is finding lots to build on.

Over the last four years, Baker said, Habitat for Humanity has looked into approximately 80 different pieces of property. Finney said people who are selling the lots either do not return calls, are not interested in selling, or the lot size does not

meet local zoning ordinances.

“So, while we’ve helped 44 families . . . into affordable houses, we’re gonna be stopped again unless something happens. And we have a long list of people wanting to apply for a house,” Finney said.

Baker also said that he thinks people impose a stigma on the term “affordable housing,” and that people are “resistant to change.”

“Well, we’ve had some people in areas where we built say that, you know, it lowers their property values. Which is not true. If you go and actually look at the PVA records, it does not do that,” Finney said. “We’ve had some people say they just all look the same. We like something a little fancier, nicer looking. But then you’re now building something that somebody can’t afford.”

Coyle said there is not enough data “that indicates whether Habitat decreases neighboring property values at this point, one way or another. We would need more sales from surrounding properties to determine if the sales price indicated external obsolescence (obsolete).”

“We also heard from the sheriff’s department that with the houses that we built over there (on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard), the crime rate went down. There was a noticeable reduction in vandalism,

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THE MODULAR HOME on High Street, owned by the City of Versailles and soon to be sold. (Photo by Kennedy Parker)

Mayor Duke keeping eye on ways to improve traffic flow in Versailles

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

The 2023 Palmer traffic study recommended roundabouts at Troy Pike-Falling Springs Boulevard and Tyrone Pike-Falling Springs Boulevard, which was “very intriguing” to Versailles Mayor Laura Duke because those roundabouts are a way for people to continually move in an area where development is occurring, she told the *Sun*.

Duke said roundabouts also significantly reduce fatal and serious-injury crashes, making them “safer than traditional intersections.”

While the recommended roundabouts in the city’s traffic study are not included in the state road plan, those projects are being considered for funding because City Engineer Mary Beth Robson advocated for them, Duke said.

“And it could be four, five, six years before anything happens,” she continued, “but that’s part of what I consider my job and the jobs of the department heads is to look into the future and not just worry about what’s happening tomorrow or next week, but look at what our challenges are five years down the road.

“So I’m looking at these developments that are coming online that will be built over the next two or three years, and I’m thinking, okay what do we need to be doing to make sure . . . our roads can handle the extra traffic.”

To improve traffic flow, the Planning Commission approved a zoning ordinance in September requiring connectivity in subdivisions, which Duke said she calls “the build or bond ordinance.” Those street connections will “help us going forward



Mayor Laura Duke

because connectivity between subdivisions and main roads helps with the efficient flow of traffic,” she said.

Having those roundabouts on the south end of Versailles will reduce some traffic on Main Street and other streets in town, including Montgomery Avenue, Duke said.

A new roundabout accessing Kroger and the new commercial development planned on the Edgewood property will reduce vehicle stacking on Lexington Road/U.S. 60 East toward town, she said.

The city-built road ends at the property line where TKC Distillery will be developed on land zoned for industrial uses. The roundabout also has spurs connecting to grocery and home improvement stores that will be developed east of Kroger.

“It’s an investment for the city,” said Public Works Director Bart Miller of a road that Duke said was constructed by the city with half its cost being covered by a Kentucky Product Development Initiative grant and the other half covered by the sale of the industrial land to TKC Distillery.

“The road,” she said, “was built as an economic development engine . . .”

Given the plan to develop the Edgewood property was in litigation for several years,

the city got the best results because one-third of the 336-acre property is occupied by a Standardbred track on land that remains zoned agricultural, she said.

At the corner of Paynes Mill Road and U.S. 60 East is 18 acres zoned for professional office uses, so Duke said, “It is zoned appropriately for a hospital.” However, there have been no public commitments by Bluegrass Community Hospital or any other medical facility to locate on that site.



A ROUNDABOUT accessing Kroger has spurs connecting to grocery and home improvement stores that will be developed to the east of Kroger. “The road,” said Versailles Mayor Laura Duke, “was built as an economic development engine . . .” It is the first roundabout in Versailles. Duke said a 2023 traffic study recommended adding roundabouts on Falling Springs Boulevard, one at Troy Pike and another at Tyrone Pike to improve traffic flow. (Photo by Bob Vlach)

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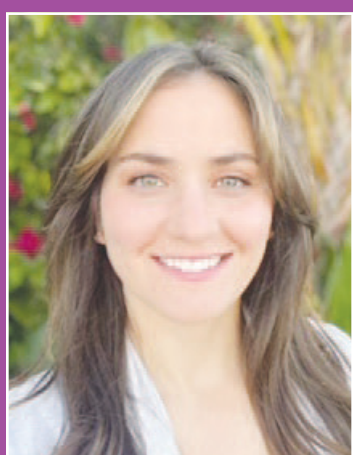
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Protecting farmland has been Graddy’s lifelong passion

By **BOB VLACH**
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Reflecting on his career as an attorney supporting laws and local zoning ordinances to protect farmland, Hank Graddy credits putting urban service boundaries around Versailles and Midway as an early milestone in protecting land from being developed in Woodford County.

Early on, Woodford Countians supported efforts to stop the development of Gainsborough Farm, Graddy said, by coming together as Woodford Save the Land, which evolved into the Woodford Coalition. The organization’s mission: “We want to save farmland. We want healthy downtowns, but we don’t want to sprawl into the countryside. We want to protect the viewshed on U.S. 60,” which Graddy said has been largely accomplished on the drive from Versailles to Frankfort.

Anyone who takes a drive on Old Frankfort and Pisgah pikes can’t miss the beauty of those scenic corridors, Graddy said.

He said preservationists have been largely successful in protecting farmland by enacting an Equine Preserve area in north Woodford County. He also acknowledged, “We’ve lost parts of U.S. 60 going to Lexington.”

Graddy said until the development of Edgewood Farm on U.S. 60 East moved forward, he was confident land between Kroger and The Kentucky Castle would be protected.

“We had a large crowd (that opposed rezoning Edgewood Farm from agriculture to commercial and residential). We did pack the courthouse in 2016,” he said. “But ... that may have been the last time we packed the courthouse with people from across the county on one theme, protect the urban service boundary.” (The courtroom on the second-floor of the courthouse was packed with an overflow crowd last Thursday, Nov. 13 for a public hearing on ordinance amendments that included language to increase the density of residential zoning districts and address concerns related to subdividing farmland with in-family land conveyances.)

“... The Edgewood defeat was a crushing defeat for me,” said Graddy, “because something I believed would *not* happen happened. That is land in the Lexington and Frankfort scenic corridor, the north side of U.S. 60 ... was being opened up for new development...”

While that defeat was crushing, a lawsuit settlement did result in replacing 1,000 homes in the Edgewood plan with property being rezoned back to agriculture.

“But it is still horrifying to me that what I thought was a line that would last, failed so easily when the right forces were aligned against what I thought was the county’s future,” he said.

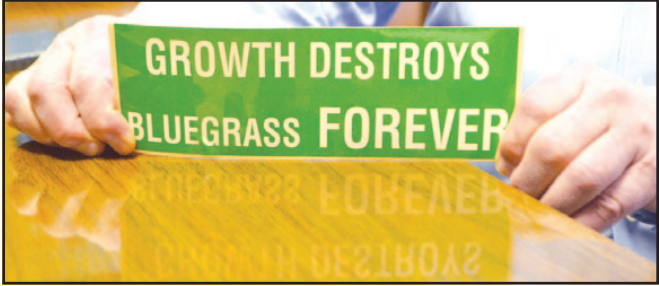
He’s now hopeful that Paynes Mill Road will become the new buffer to preserve land on the north side of U.S. 60 East to The Kentucky Castle.

These days, Graddy said there’s a phenomenon taking place across the country in planning and zoning.

“It is fairly easy,” he said, “to get people aroused about something they see as a threat to their subdivision ... people showing up for a fight in their neighborhood happens across Kentucky,” but not for broader land-use concerns.



ATTORNEY HANK GRADDY said he’s optimistic about the future of Woodford County because local leaders and people coming here understand the importance of preserving and protecting farmland. “The issue of growing too fast is now teed up,” Graddy said, “and I think ... the community will look at that, and we’ll discuss rate of growth and making sure that we’re not a place of unrestrained growth.” (Photo by Bob Vlach)



HIS MOTHER KITTY was the author of “Growth Destroys the Bluegrass Forever,” local attorney Hank Graddy said. The other part of what he described as the bumper sticker wars, “Growth is Good,” infuriated her, he said. (Photo by Bob Vlach)

He’s also optimistic that people who moved to Woodford County want to preserve the land that compelled them to come here.

“The issue of growing too fast is now teed up and I think ... the community will look at that, and we’ll discuss rate of growth and making sure that we’re not a place of unrestrained growth,” he said.

Moreover, he said, “There is concern that we’ve opened the spigot a little too wide and we need to close it down a little bit, and part of closing it down was taking the houses off of Edgewood (farm property).”

Protecting farmland

Graddy said he’s continued to have a steady stream of land use cases, including large ones like Edgewood and smaller ones, in Woodford County and across Kentucky since 1977.

“I’ve been trying to make planning and zoning work in a way that protects farmland,” said Graddy, who grew up on a farm.

From an early age, he said, “It was pretty clear I was going to become a lawyer. And it was pretty clear that I was going to use my law degree to try to protect the farms.”

His father and grandfather were farmers and his family has been farming in Woodford County since the early 1800s.

He said Welcome Hall Farm on Clifton Road and Greenwood Farm on Steele Road “were very important to our family, and my life strategy was I was going to get a law degree and I’m going to use my advocacy to help protect the family farm. And frankly, that has happened. I’ve sort of accomplished that purpose.”

Graddy said he started law school at the University of Kentucky in 1972, a month before the U.S. Congress enacted the Clean Water Act. That led to a career as a land use and environmental law attorney, but his classes at UK taught students about subdividing and developing land – not how to protect farmland. “This was infuriating to me,” said Graddy, who described the Clean Water Act as “one of the greatest environmental laws in our history.”

Graddy said he started searching for ways to use laws to protect the farmland. “I attended conferences on land use and began to discover there is a growing discipline on farmland protection,” he said.

Early in life, it was his grandmother Louise Garrett Graddy, who he described as “a passionate preservationist,” who taught him to value nature and “holding onto the woods.”

His mother Kitty took on advocacy for protecting farmland after marrying into the family, Graddy said. He said she was the author of “Growth Destroys the Bluegrass Forever.” The other part of what he described as the bumper sticker wars, “Growth is Good,” infuriated her, he said.

During those years, Graddy said there was a county-wide appreciation among people anxious to protect the farmland. “And we have put certain protections in place and they are working pretty well,” he said, noting those protections have been successful in north Woodford County. In this area of the county designated as Equine Preserve, he said, “We’re doing a state-of-the-art job protecting that farmland and providing a home for the Thoroughbred industry...”



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Versailles Public Works

Improving water, sewer, streets to stay ahead of growth

By **BOB VLACH**
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

To plan for the growth that is coming, the Versailles Public Works Department has been busy upgrading and replacing waterlines and increasing the city's capacity for wastewater treatment, according to city leaders.

Public Works Director Bart Miller and Utilities Manager Mitzi Delius joined Mayor Laura Dake for a recent interview with the *Sun* to discuss ongoing efforts to stay ahead of residential and commercial development happening in the city.

"There's a lot of work that goes on ... It's not flashy, but it's just critically important to the smooth running of the city," Dake said.

The city's water and wastewater treatment plants both have sufficient capacity for many years, Miller told the *Sun*.

He said the water treatment plant can treat 10 million gallons a day and it currently averages about 3.3 million. Sylvania's two plants were among the city's largest water users before closing, he said, so that freed up capacity to accommodate a growth in users.

The wastewater treatment plant can now treat up to six million gallons a day, which is also sufficient to accommodate additional users going forward, he said.

Delius said sanitary sewer lift stations going out toward Falling Springs Boulevard were recently tested, and they have sufficient capacity for new development in the south end of Versailles. Because of maintenance costs associated with lift stations, she said, "We take them out of service when we have the opportunity."

New lift stations are more efficient, so Versailles has fewer now than when he started with the city in 1999, Miller said.

Water and sewer impact fees paid by developers (based on how much water a residence, business or factory uses) provide a revenue source for the city to make improvements and maintain those utilities, Miller said.

The impact fees (tap, water and sewer) will produce revenue totaling \$300,000, according to estimates in the enterprise fund budget for July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026.

Sewer lines are cleaned and waterlines are tested on an ongoing basis. And when the city is informed that smaller lines are not providing a user with sufficient pressure, we "try to get those replaced," Delius said.

Waterlines have been replaced on Preston Court, and city workers are now upgrading two-inch lines to six-inch lines on Highview Drive, she said.

"We just finished a project on Frankfort



VERSAILLES MUNICIPAL UTILITIES workers are pictured hydro-excavating a hole in order to replace a water hydrant at the Versailles Cemetery. The truck was purchased by the city in October for \$560,000, according to Versailles Public Works Director Bart Miller. In many cases, the truck is more efficient for excavation work than backhoes, he said. In addition to excavating dirt for water and sewer repairs, the truck is used extensively for cleaning sewer lines as well as maintaining the sewer lift stations, he said. (Photo by Bob Vlach)

Street (paid for with grant dollars)," where "a lot of those customers complained about low pressure, and the lines were old," she said.

Delius, who's been with the city for 14 years, said Versailles has more two-inch waterlines than she would prefer, and those older lines will eventually be replaced with six- or eight-inch lines.

"We require six inch at a minimum," she said, noting the size of a waterline for a new development depends on water pressure and flow in that area. A six-inch waterline is required for fire hydrants, she said.

The developer of a residential neighborhood is required to construct streets, water and sewer infrastructure that meet the city's standards, Miller said. Those improvements are inspected to ensure they meet city standards before being accepted and maintained by the city. For example, streets will typically last about 10 to 15 years before needing to be repaved by the city, he said.

"Anytime there is a plan that comes," said Delius, "they will submit (construction) plans to us ... for their infrastructure. Once I review those, and I'm okay with them, then I write a letter to state Division of Water saying I have reviewed these plans, we're okay with them (and we have the capacity for provide water and sewer service). And once the development is done, a year after that, we will take responsibility and maintain the lines, both water and sewer, going forward." So before any dirt is moved in a development, "there's a lot of planning," added Miller.

A bond is paid by the developer to ensure a neighborhood is completed. If a developer does not finish the project, which happens occasionally, that bond is recalled and the money is used by the city to complete the project, "so we don't end up with anything half-finished," Miller said. He noted an escalator on the bond keeps up with the costs of making those improvements.

In addition to streets, curbs and gutters, subdivisions are also required to have sidewalks and streetlights, Miller said. He said the sidewalk requirement (with a minimum four-foot width) has been in place since at least 1999.

The city's primary revenue source for maintaining water and sewer services is fee-based (enterprise fund: \$10.26 million this fiscal year), and general fund dollars are used for non-utility-based services, including the maintenance of streets and roads, Miller said. The city receives funds from the state to help maintain streets and roads, with about half of the cost for asphalt replacement coming out of state road fund dollars, he said.

Payroll and property taxes, and insurance license fees are three of the largest tax revenue producers for the city in the \$18.358 million general fund of the 2025-26 budget. The largest revenue source is payroll taxes (\$4.3 million), with insurance fees generating another \$2.8 million. Property taxes generate another \$550,000, according to estimated revenues for this fiscal year (July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026)



THE REPAVING OF EAST GREEN STREET continued into mid-morning Oct. 20. Lexington Quarry Company – the low bidder awarded to do the work – is being paid \$451,242.85 to repave eight streets in the city, according to Versailles Public Works Director Bart Miller. He told the *Sun* that Kentucky Road Fund revenue is paying \$275,000 and the city is paying the rest. The streets being repaved are Arbor Meadow Way, Beasley Road, Commerce Drive, East Green Street, Flint Ridge Road, Helms Deep Drive, Park Street, Thomas Lane and Stourbridge Road, he said. (File photo by Bob Vlach)

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Public safety

Versailles police, fire departments prepare for coming changes

By **BOB VLACH**
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

With the growth coming to Versailles and Woodford County, Versailles Police Chief Rob Young said he's taking a wait-and-see approach to determine how many officers he will need to cover the county's 192 square miles in the years ahead.

He said calls for service at the Versailles Police Department (VPD) have increased by more than 11,000 over the last two years. The calls — "anything from a barking dog to a collision, up to murder" — rose from 28,346 in 2023 to 39,537 in 2024, which was a "substantial increase," he said.

Versailles Fire Chief T.A. Rankin said his department has also seen an increase in calls for service, rising from about 1,300 to 1,500. He attributed most of that increase to the Versailles Fire Department (VFD) responding to and/or assisting on medical calls for service, which account for about 75 percent of its volume, and is a trend in fire and rescue. So, all full-time firefighters are required to get EMT certifications within their first year, and some VFD firefighters are paramedics, he said.

Looking forward

During an interview with the *Sun* lasting more than an hour, Young and Rankin talked about a variety of topics related to public safety, including how their departments are planning for the future.

Young pointed out Woodford County's population increased by 11 percent from 2005 to 2020, according to U.S. Census data. So, as he looks at the developments being planned and moving forward, he said, that means "more vehicles, more population; and for first responders, fire and police, more calls for service. So I would anticipate that call for service (volume) going up."

Besides residential developments that will add hundreds of new homes in the county, plans are also moving forward for two large box stores (grocery and home improvement stores on Lexington Road).

So with a staff of 41 full-time police officers and two positions being added, Young said, "I'm looking at probably having to boost our shift minimums, and that will become difficult. But we have to wait and see because some of these planned developments are not going to happen in an instant."

VFD Station No. 1 on Locust Street is fully staffed with four full-time firefighters on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "That was an industry standard we were trying to reach," said Rankin, "and that's what drove that decision" to add three full-time firefighters in 2021. The VFD employs 15 career or full-time firefighters, with the remainder of about 45 positions filled by part-time and volunteer firefighters, he said.

Because Station No. 1 is centrally located, Rankin said, "our response (time) north, east, south or west is about the same from downtown."

Inter-local agreements with Woodford County and the City of Midway in 2004 meant officers with the Versailles Police Department respond to calls for service across the county. The VPD had 26 officers and Woodford



A NEW TRAFFIC UNIT "has been impactful on our public safety," according to Versailles Police Chief Rob Young, noting the number of traffic citations has increased from 1,126 in 2024 to 2,072 so far this year. Officer Ben Hartley, one of two traffic enforcement officers, is pictured during a recent ride-along by *The Woodford Sun*. (File photo by Bob Vlach)

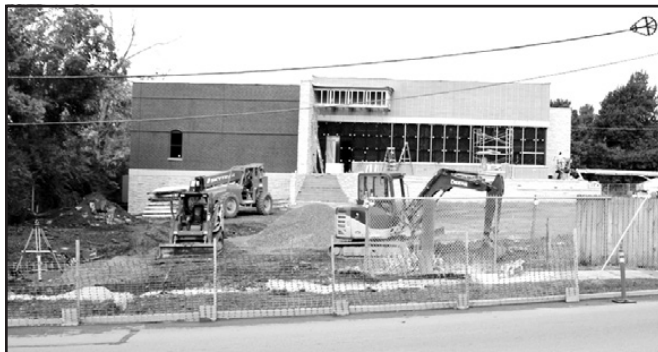
County Police had 15, so "we had just 41 police officers full time (in 2002), and that number hasn't changed until this year," Young said. He said two positions were added in this year's budget and he's looking to fill those positions.

Operating budgets

The city's general operating budget for this fiscal year includes expenditures totaling \$2.398 million for the fire department, an increase over last year's \$2.193 million. Salaries account for about \$1.2 million of this year's expenditures, according to the July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026 budget.

The city's general budget includes expenditures for the police department totaling \$7.182 million for this fiscal year, which is higher than last fiscal year's \$6.615 million. Salaries account for about \$4.2 million of this year's expenditures, according to the July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026 budget.

Versailles will receive about \$2.72 million from Woodford County and \$401,566 from Midway for services provided by VPD, according to the general fund budget.



BUILDING A NEW POLICE STATION increased morale significantly, according to Versailles Police Chief Rob Young. He said working in a community where people support the building of a new police station and the renovation and expansion of a fire station "means a lot" because it shows they recognize the value of your work. (File photo by Bob Vlach)

While VPD's shift minimums have not changed since 2004 (six patrol officers on days and five on nights), the need for more officers will be impacted by the City of Midway and whether its council continues an inter-local agreement for the VPD to provide police services going forward, Young said.

VFD/EMS relationship

Because VFD is a support system that aids Woodford County Emergency Medical Services, "I have taken measures to try and dial that back and go to specific calls

only, because there is such an increase (in medical calls for service). And it wears on people," said Rankin. "... If you get woken up by the alarms on our radio three times during the middle night, the startle factor, the adrenaline, all the things that happen within your body, it has a toxic effect long term."

VFD will still respond to all critical incidents, and if EMS does not have an available ambulance in the city to make a run, dispatchers are trained to send city fire, he added.

VPD crimes and collisions

While the calls to service increased by more than 11,000 for VPD, Young said calls reporting crime incidents have gone down. Reported crimes decreased from 867 in 2023 to 714 in 2024, he said.

However, recent incidents include stabbings at Big Spring Park and Circle K, and a shooting on Macey Avenue, Young said. In Midway, which he described as "a relatively safe community," there was a recent armed robbery at the Brown Barrel restaurant, and a man was assaulted with a baseball bat at Corner

on our public safety," he said.

VFD grade

VFD is graded every five years on its response to working structure fires, Rankin said. In addition to personnel, other factors that determine its grade include infrastructure and water supply and how much water VFD can get to densely-populated neighborhoods or multifamily dwellings, he said.

Lauding the city for putting his department in "a really good position" in terms of having a sufficient water supply for his firefighters to fight fires, he said VFD scored a level 2 on its rating, a score assigned by the Insurance Services Office (ISO). "To achieve a level 1 score (the highest ISO rating) we would have to add full-time staffing for a ladder truck and another fire engine," or about 24 more full-time firefighters, who receive an entry-level base pay of \$51,000.

"So with what we have and the size city we are and based on that scorecard, we are as good as we could be," said Rankin. "And that's not just attributed to our full-time staff. That's attributed to the volunteer staffing (reimbursed \$30 per incident) that comes in. When we have a run, they start a clock and our response times have to be within certain timeframes for us to get multiple points to add up to this (ISO) score. So we have a good system and it's working."

"Could we use more people? Always. We could always use more people. But the circumstances we face right now, we are sufficient and we're getting the best grade we could get."

Rankin said the number of applicants for VFD positions has grown from about five to 10 when he became chief to almost 70 for recent vacancies.

"I attribute that to the vision and direction of the department, pay has been increased," and the publicity VFD has received for its deployments to natural disasters as a part of Bluegrass Emergency Response Team, said Rankin. "We've gotten a lot of equipment through grant process. Sometimes that attracts firemen. It's just toys and tools. So, it doesn't take a lot."

"Equipment-wise, we are in a good position," said Rankin. "We just got a new fire engine two years ago."

Rising costs

However, he noted the cost of equipment has "pretty much doubled over the last five to six years," post-COVID. A longer wait time and higher costs have been fueled by big companies buying up smaller dealerships and manufacturers, he explained. The engine purchased two years ago, which cost \$650,000, would cost over \$1 million today to replace, he said.

VPD's oldest engine still in service is a 1988 model, "so we do need equipment," he said, noting his department has a very large budget (about \$50,000 a year) to maintain equipment, noting that those costs are also higher. "We have good equipment, but we have to plan because of the lead times" to purchase a piece of equipment, he said.

If the department's ladder truck were totaled in an

accident today, Rankin said that would cost about \$2 million and take four years to replace. So, if that occurred, "we would have to find a used piece (of) equipment from someone else and buy it," he said.

Two Homeland Security grants provided the department with equipment worth half a million dollars for responses to structure collapse incidents, tornados, earthquakes and other disasters, he said.

In 2023, VFD created a Special Operations Team made up of individuals who have monthly meetings for training for all kinds of emergency responses, including swift water rescues using boats (purchased with grant dollars and other sources) so they are prepared to respond to flooding events like those occurring earlier this year; and more recently got Frankfort firefighters out of the water safely during a mayday situation on Elkhorn Creek in Franklin County, Rankin said.

He noted firefighters from his department help teach swift water classes and have been recognized by the governor for being prepared for those types of emergencies.

Depending on the scenario of a call for service, equipment may be more important than personnel, said Rankin. "I can't make water shoot up in the air at high volumes by myself," he said.

To prepare for the growth that's coming, Rankin said he has talked to Versailles Mayor Laura Dake and the previous mayor about being creative with funding, with the hope that industrial growth will help pay for infrastructure, including fire trucks.

The cost of vehicles for law enforcement has also resulted in the VPD being creative. Young said he drives

"But now, where our pay is more competitive ... since January, we've brought on nine officers. We still (have) two vacant spots. That's a pretty good position when you compare (us) to some of the surrounding jurisdictions that are struggling to find people."

Recent hires became a priority when his staffing analysis in June showed of the department's 41 full-time officers, eight were retirees who had been re-hired, but could leave at any time if a better opportunity presented itself or just decided to retire again, four others were eligible to retire and five more were eligible to retire in the next five years, Young said. Facing the prospect of being down to 29 officers, he said he had to plan for the future.

Additionally, he said six dispatcher vacancies have been filled, nearly doubling a staff that dispatches all emergency services: 10 total agencies within the county. "To get a dispatcher fully trained where they can be on a console by themselves, you're talking about at least two-plus months. And with officers, it's about a year, from time of application ... to get somebody on solo patrol," said Young.

Before the recent hires, he said officers were being brought in to meet shift minimums. "And bringing them on overtime is a budget killer because now they're coming in being paid time-and-a-half to work that. And it's (a) morale crusher when people just can't get a break from it," he said.

Community support

Describing the former Versailles Police Station on Court Street as inadequate for the work, Young said having a new station has increased morale significantly. He said working in a community



VERSAILLES AND WOODFORD COUNTY firefighters, with the support of other agencies, helped 70-plus residents evacuate their homes near the Kentucky River during the flooding events in April, VPD Fire Chief T.A. Rankin said. He credited swift water rescue training over the last four years for preparing his firefighters to respond to such emergencies. (Submitted photo)

a 2010 Explorer because he isn't involved in pursuits, and his detectives are driving Traverses because they are about \$40,000 cheaper than a fully-equipped pursuit-rated Chevy Tahoe, which costs about \$81,000. VPD is now looking at fully-equipped pursuit-rated pickup trucks to use for patrol because they're about \$7,000 cheaper than the Tahoes, he added.

"That's why our capital budget from last year to this year, we reduced it by about \$200,000," Young said, noting one of his part-time detectives is driving a vehicle with almost 200,000 miles. He emphasized that patrol officers drive the newer vehicles that are fully-equipped and pursuit-rated.

Competitive pay

Since January of this year, Young said nine VPD officers have been hired to fill vacant spots due to officers being lost because of pay disparities with other police agencies. Before a \$10,000 pay increase for officers last fiscal year, VPD lost two officers to Lexington Police (both have since returned) and two others to University of Kentucky Police. Since the \$10,000 pay raise, Young said, "We got a net loss of one because we took one of their officers (at UK)."

"And it really is a matter of people trying to do what's best for their families, and we fell behind for quite a while," said Young of the departures.

where people support the construction of a new police station and the renovation and expansion of the fire station on Locust Street "means a lot" to first responders because it shows your community recognizes the value of your work. It also means police have suitable spaces for doing their jobs, he said.

Young credits the public for helping keep their community safe, and said most people who come here with ill intent typically move on or get themselves in trouble.

"Our community is very quick to let us know if there's a bad actor here, and we try to be responsive to that kind of call," said Young.

Young said he worked in New York City before he and his wife moved here to raise their sons. "Those that come here want to be a part of a good community, like my wife and I," he said.

Dake moved here from Michigan in 1992 because she and her husband also wanted to raise their children in a small community where they felt welcomed. Someone who moves here only needs to attend a Friday night high school football game to see "positive community growth," said Rankin, who also took note of the parades and many other downtown Versailles events, which he described as "community to me."



THE NEW FIRE ENGINE purchased by the City of Versailles two years ago for \$650,000 would cost over \$1 million today to replace, Versailles Fire Chief T.A. Rankin said. The cost of equipment has "pretty much doubled over the last five to six years," post-COVID, he said. Firefighters are pictured with the new engine, talking to students about fire safety at Simmons Elementary School. (File Photo by Bob Vlach)

HOUSING
Continued from p. B1

everybody.”

The task force, created in January 2024, is composed of 15 members, including Versailles City Councilmember Ann Miller, Versailles Mayor Laura Dake, Midway Mayor Grayson Vandegrift, Bruce Finney with Habitat Humanity of Woodford (Habitat) and other members of Woodford County.

“I wanted to be on it because I know that housing is just a critical issue for this community, and it’s... really, it’s an economic development issue,” Dake said.

According to Miller, the task force discovered 197 zoned lots in Versailles a year and a half ago, with nothing on them, but not all these lots are able to be developed. For example, Miller said some of these lots are owned by the city, some have parking lots on them or they are privately owned.

However, she said she is pushing the Woodford County Board of Adjustments, part of the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission (Commission), to allow housing to be built on odd shaped lots that do not have proper configurations, and to move the required setbacks so those lots can be developed.

One way the task force has tried to alleviate the lack of affordable housing in the county was by bringing a manufactured home into Versailles.

In fall 2024, the manufactured home was placed on a lot on High Street, and in spring 2025, it was opened to the public. Potential buyers then put their names in a hat, and a name was drawn. Miller said this house has yet to be closed on, and the family who won the right to buy it has yet to move in due to waiting on lawyers to complete the required closing paperwork. “When that’s finished, then the housing task force will get back together,” Miller said. “And we’re gonna start focusing on these (197 vacant) lots.”

Dake said the task force does not have anything con-

crete at the moment on its agenda, but said it is “looking at a location potentially to do some infill with some manufactured housing” in Woodford County, similar to the High Street pilot.

Midway
Midway Mayor Grayson Vandegrift said the manufactured home is great for Versailles, but he does not think it is “the next big thing for Midway.” Overall, Vandegrift thinks that the housing issue cannot be solved without federal government intervention.

“I don’t know how communities like us can really solve the problem. I feel like we’re on the front line trying to do everything we can, and we’re not getting any reinforcements from state or federal officials,” Vandegrift said. “The federal government at some point has to put its finger on the scale here as well, or else I think we are going to be talking about this problem again, still, in 10 or 20 years without their help.”

A bigger problem
Judge-Executive James Kay said he thinks manufactured housing is a less affordable option than a Habitat for Humanity house, but less expensive than building a home by a homebuilder, but that there could be ways to grow manufactured housing.

“I think that it is a piece of the puzzle, but it is not the ultimate answer,” Kay said.

Another possibility of alleviating the housing issue is through a housing program that Kay said he has been working on for over a year.

“We funded a large general welfare program that takes care of utilities, assistance, housing assistance—meaning helping people pay their bills... we’re working with the Bluegrass Community Action Partnership to help fund programs for those that are on the verge of losing their house, losing their job, whatever it is,” Kay said.

Kay said that he is working on this program in the current budget to help these families in need.

“Woodford County food pantry is adding on average 30 clients a month, which is a big sign that there are prob-

lems in the economy and that people are struggling,” Kay said. “We’re supporting the food pantry, we’re supporting Bluegrass Community Action and we’re working on some, what I would call, a firewall help for people so that they don’t lose their housing arrangement.”

This program will help find temporary housing for the homeless, provide support funds to help people pay bills and create a legal fund for those who are being evicted or foreclosed upon.

“One of the things that our judicial system is... that if you don’t have an attorney in an eviction or a foreclosure proceeding, you are at a great risk of losing your house, even if you shouldn’t be evicted, or you shouldn’t be foreclosed upon,” Kay said. “I’m working on a program to provide basically an attorney that will, from a pool of local attorneys, that will represent people in evictions and foreclosures, and at least make sure that the people who are doing the right things are not being taken advantage of, or wrongly evicted, or wrongly foreclosed upon.”

Kay also said in order to have “true affordable housing,” Woodford County needs to subsidize land.

“Someone in a low-income scenario can never cover the cost of land. They can never pay the cost of land to ultimately work on renting or owning a home,” Kay said. “Home ownership, or at least a mortgage, is the best possible stability for any family because they are paying for equity.”

All of the officials agreed that Habitat for Humanity, which has built 43 homes in Woodford County, with another one near completion, was part of the solution to this problem.

Looking forward
Dake emphasized that she wants the Woodford County community to have a home for everyone, that it is not just expensive homes, and becoming “like a big, gated community.”

“I want it to be a real community where you have just a big cross section of diversity and different kinds

of people, different socioeconomic levels, and we all work together to make this a great community... housing is a huge piece of that,” she said. So, what is the solution

HABITAT
Continued from p. B1

and that sort of thing... it was a noticeable drop in the crime rate,” Baker said.

Vandegrift believes that the work that Habitat is doing is “a good example of good humans being good humans,” and that they can give people a chance in life, but it still isn’t a complete answer to the housing problem.

“Sometimes people need a chance to get their foot in the door... a lot of times it is just institutional generational struggle... not everybody gets the same start to life. It’s not always fair,” Vandegrift said. “I think Habitat’s role in helping affordable housing is their opportunity. They’re another spoke in the wheel.”

Overall, Vandegrift believes that manufactured

homes and Habitat are both great ideas, because there are more options for people who need affordable housing, and the more options there are, the closer they are to solving the problem.

Dake agreed that Habitat is an option for more affordable housing, but that they have struggled with land prices. Another idea that Kay has for a program within Woodford County is to partner with Habitat because “their program is the most economically efficient program.” Kay said that if they can provide the land, then Habitat can build many more houses in Versailles, Midway and in parts of Woodford County every year.

“I’ve got a large pool of housing acquisition funds, or real property acquisition funds, in the county budget... the thing that I need help with is I need the cities to agree to contribute,” Kay said. “The county doesn’t want to own land in the city... but we need to partner with them so that we are providing public land subsidized so that people can build houses on them.”

problem. Kennedy is a senior majoring in journalism at the University of Kentucky, where she was also an editor of the Kentucky Kernel.

Miller believes that Habitat could make an impact, by instead of building new homes for people, that they can instead repair the homes people already have.

“I think I see the need to help people stay where they are, not abandon their house and go live with their family and move out of the community,” Miller said. “But it’s a double-edged sword, because it’s harder to go into somebody’s existing home and rehab their bathroom, or rehab their kitchen, or fix their gutters, it’s harder.”



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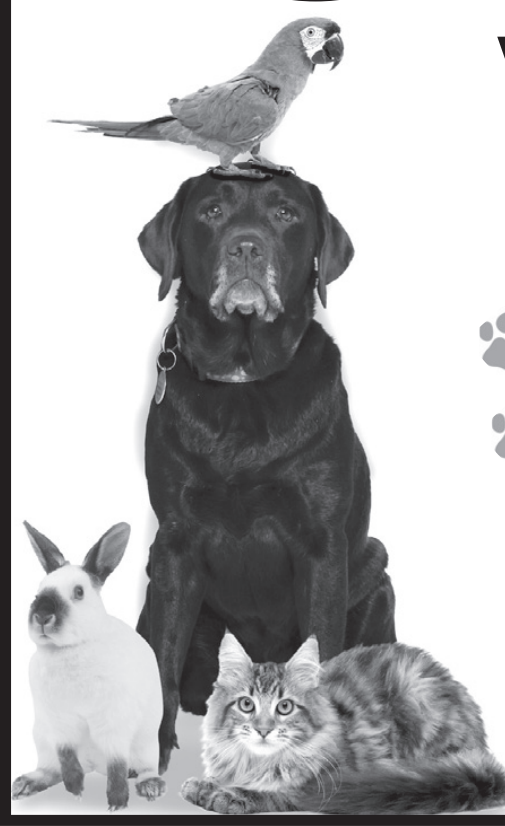
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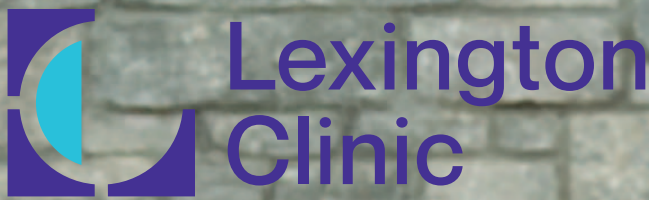
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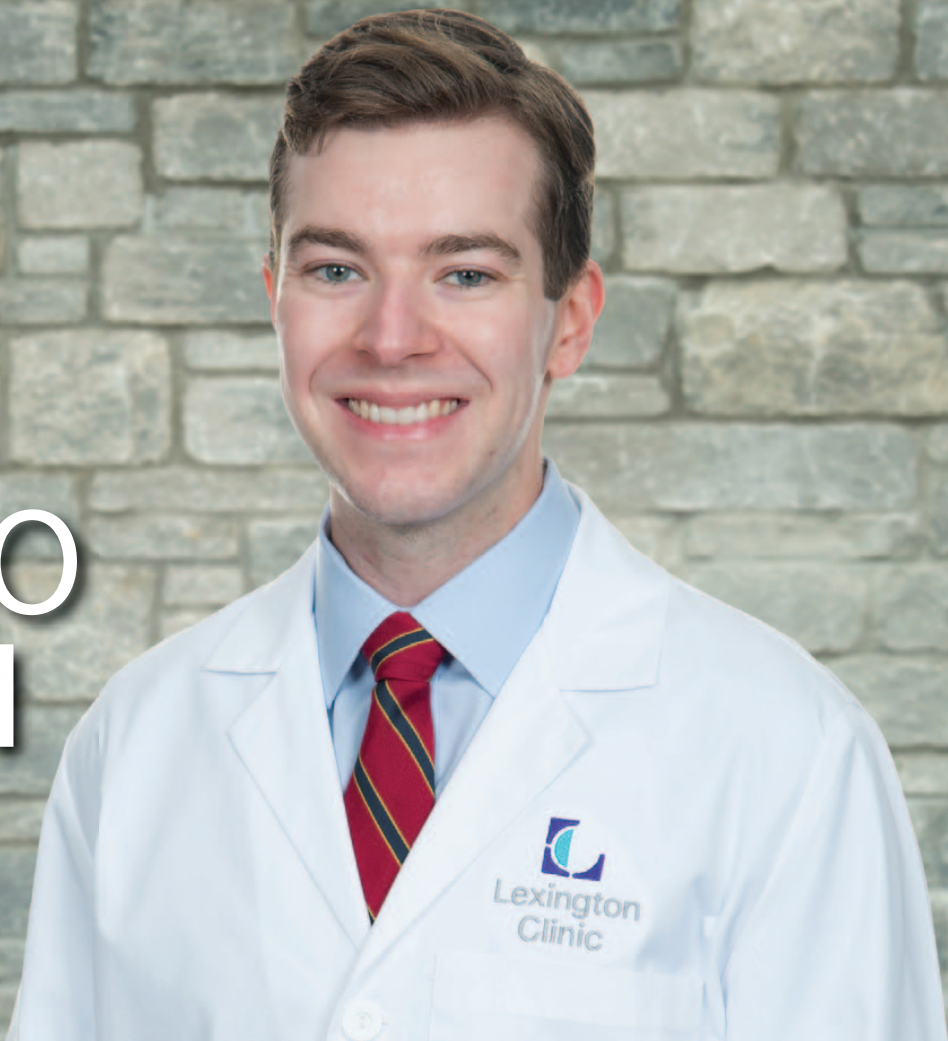
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Regular Fiscal Court meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month beginning at 5:30 p.m. on the 2nd floor Fiscal Courtroom of the Courthouse, 103 S. Main Street. Committee meetings and special meetings are often held prior to the regular meetings. All meetings are noticed and posted on our website, but for more information you can always contact the Judge/Executive's Office.

For meeting notices and meeting minutes please visit the Woodford County website <https://woodfordcountyky.gov>

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