

Celebrating 156 years 1869-2025
The Woodford Sun

157th YEAR - No. 29 — 12 Pages

Versailles, Kentucky

July 17, 2025

\$1.00

Versailles city council approves contracts at its July 15, meeting

Councilman Fred Siegelman responds to attacks from Midway councilmember

By SCOTT WHITE
MANAGING EDITOR

At the end of the July 15 Versailles City Council meeting during the time councilmembers are given the opportunity to make comments outside of the agenda, Councilmember Fred Siegelman said he “felt obligated to respond” to comments made about him and the Versailles City Council by Midway City Councilmember Steve Simoff at the June 7 Midway Council meeting.

As reported by the Sun in its July 10 edition, Simoff, during his time for open comment at the July 7 Midway City Council meeting, spoke strongly about what he believed was a disrespectful reaction by Siegelman and the Versailles City Council towards Midway Mayor Grayson Vandegrift at the June 17 Versailles City Council meeting. Vandegrift appeared before the Versailles council on June 17 in relation to Midway’s request to pay a

lower than contractually required share of the Versailles Police Department’s FY 2026 budget.

This issue was first raised by Siegelman at the May 27 Versailles City Council work session when the lower amount was included in the proposed fiscal year 2026 budget. Siegelman opposed the lower amount. The Versailles council agreed with Siegelman and rejected Midway’s request to pay the lower amount on a 4 - 2 vote at its June 17 meeting. Similarly, the Woodford County Fiscal Court declined to consider Midway’s request as its budget had already been approved, making the issue was between Versailles and Midway, not the county.

At this week’s meeting, Siegelman said, “This council and I were attacked at the Midway City Council, and I want to clear up some lies,” he said. “I never said ‘Midway is bluffing.’ What I said was that the citizens of Midway wouldn’t want

to lose the services of the Versailles Police Department. I didn’t threaten anyone on this council, and since the vote (to reject the Midway decrease request) was 4-2, that speaks for itself. In fact, I suggested Midway look at increasing one of its tax rates to cover (the increased cost of providing its share of the police force) and they did it. They raised the insurance premium tax to 9 percent, which, as Mayor Vandegrift said, covers the full cost of the increase.”

Siegelman responded directly to the comments directed at him by Simoff, saying, “I take offense at what Steve Simoff said that I was rude. I was not. Just like Mayor Vandegrift said in their last meeting about their councilmembers, I was meeting my fiduciary duty as a member of this council (in opposing the reduction). I was not rude; I went out of my way to say this was no reflection

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HOT AND HUMID IS HERE! A fast-moving, strong thunderstorm raced through Versailles on Sunday night, July 13, around 8 p.m. with lots of lightning and winds. Remember to stay “weather aware” this time of year with Woodford Alerts, a community emergency notification system provided by the Woodford County Fiscal Court that covers Woodford County, Midway and Versailles. It can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play. (Photo by Scott White)

The Importance of Being Ernest

Lloyd writes book, doing documentary about his Uncle Jim Varney

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Curious about his Uncle Jim Varney’s life and acting career, Versailles resident Justin Lloyd searched the internet to find more information about Varney and his portrayal of Ernest P. Worrell in commercials and movies. Some of the information was not accurate, so Lloyd viewed writing a book about his uncle as an opportunity to set the record straight, he told the Sun last week.

Lloyd said watching YouTube posts from people who talked about how much they

adored Ernest “really spoke to me and really made me want to write something comprehensive about his life.”

So in 2008 (eight years after his uncle died), he decided to write *The Importance of Being Ernest: The Life of Actor Jim Varney* because he wasn’t sure anybody else would ever write a book about Varney. His mom and her sister talked about writing a book about their brother, but that never happened, he said.

Also, knowing people who knew Varney during his life and career were not getting any younger, “this was the time to do it,” Lloyd said.

Now, he’s working on a documentary about his uncle and the iconic character Ernest, whom he portrayed in thousands of commercials and later in movies.

“He loved the fame, and obviously the money that came with it, but it did prove hard for him to break away (from Ernest),” Lloyd acknowledged.

However, he said there are examples of Varney portraying other characters later in life, most notably Jed Clampett in the 1993 Beverly Hillbillies movie and voicing Slinky Dog in two Toy Story movies.

Lloyd said it took him several years to find a director with whom he wanted to collaborate on the documentary.

He chose David Pagano to direct because of the “deep dives” that he and co-host Erin Natal took into Varney’s career on their Ernest Goes to Podcast.

“They even came to Versailles, to my house in 2016, and interviewed me in person for the podcast. So I got to know both of them and became friends,” said Lloyd.

With a trailer for the documentary finished

and close to 40 hours of interviews, he said, “We’re now just trying to put it all together.”

Pagano, who has a background in animation and live-action films, said interviewing people involved in producing the Ernest commercials gave him insight into Varney’s appeal and one-of-a-kind talent.

Sometimes filming 15-20 commercials a day and possessing what others describe as a photographic memory, Varney captured “magic in a bottle,” Pagano said.

“There’s kind of nothing like it before or since,” he said. “And it ... could’ve only happened in that moment.”

Varney’s exaggerated facial expressions as Ernest, according to someone interviewed for the documentary, were made by an actor who “was a very good-looking man when he wasn’t mugging” for the camera, Pagano said.

Working on this project and watching Varney in movies and commercials allowed the director to see an actor who “did not give less than 100 percent in any Ernest piece that I have ever seen,” he said.

In addition to Varney’s performances as an actor, Lloyd said he filmed Jim’s wedding at his Tennessee home in 1988 and videotaped his memorial service in 2000. Also, during nearly six years of writing and doing research for his book, he found a home video of his uncle from the mid-1960s. Those images of Varney will be “gold” in the documentary telling his uncle’s story.

On a personal level, Lloyd said he didn’t get to see his Uncle Jim as often as he would’ve liked, but he had some “great experiences with him ... and it was always a treat when he came around” because he was so much more than just an iconic character



AS ERNEST, Lexington actor Jim Varney captured “magic in a bottle,” according to David Pagano. The New York-based director is working with Versailles resident Justin Lloyd on a documentary about Varney’s life and career. A trailer of the documentary, which will feature interviews with people who knew and worked with Varney, has been released. (Photo submitted)

named Ernest.

Asked what his uncle would’ve thought about him doing a documentary about his life and career, Lloyd said, “I think he would be happy to know that people are still interested in his story and Ernest. I think he’d be really touched.”

Developer withdraws request for Troy Pike zone change

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

An application to rezone 22.5 acres at 1470 Troy Pike from A-1 (agricultural) to R-4 (high-density residential) was withdrawn by applicant Vision Engineering, LLC (Jihad Hallany) last Thursday, July 10.

Neighbors opposed to the proposed subdivision with 22 town homes and 62 single-family houses voiced traffic and other concerns during the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission’s public hearing on the request in May.

Scott Schuette, attorney for the applicant, sent an email to Planning Director Steve Hunter on July 10 at about 4 p.m. informing him that they had withdrawn their application, Planning Commission Chair Patty Perry

announced at last Thursday’s meeting.

No explanation was given for the withdrawal, but neighbors opposed to the zone change request applauded the decision before exiting the Woodford County Courthouse’s third-floor courtroom to meet with their attorney, Joe Childers. He told them, “It’s the power of the people here that caused them to withdraw this application.”

During the public hearing in May, neighbors of the proposed subdivision and others raised concerns about residential growth in Versailles, specifically on the south side of town.

“If we are not careful to wisely preserve the character of this community, we could jeopardize the very reason why many of us choose to live here,” said Penelope Evans. She said she and her husband

moved here from Lexington in 2008 to get away from the constant traffic gridlock. She said it’s “time to press the pause button before making significant decisions regarding the future of our town,” until the Comprehensive Plan has been updated and approved.

“We need to know when enough is enough—especially as we choose the locations for more housing,” said Kathy Crook, who lives in the Cedar Ridge neighborhood located south of the proposed residential neighborhood at 1470 Troy Pike.

The commission took no action after the hearing in order to consider the evidence and testimony presented. In June, the commission voted to reopen the hearing at its July 10 meeting for additional information from the attorneys representing

neighboring subdivisions and the applicant.

“We would like a little additional time to be able to digest this information, review the law and submit that information to you guys at the July 10, 2025, hearing,” Bethany Baxter, an attorney for the neighbors, said. “In particular, traffic issues have been raised,” noting that different traffic studies have been submitted.

Prior to the hearing in May, Schuette and Hallany met with neighbors to discuss their concerns about an original plan, which included 227 apartment units. The apartment units were removed from the revised plan in response to those concerns.

The proposed Troy Pike subdivision is located inside the Versailles urban service boundary and is designated as a contemporary neighbor-

hood land use in the current Comprehensive Plan. It has been identified as future residential since 1977, Hunter said at the hearing in May.

The Sun did not receive a response from Schuette asking for an explanation about why Vision Engineering, LLC withdrew its zone change application. Childers told his clients that the applicants cannot reapply for a zone change for 90 days, and “who knows if they will or won’t. We don’t know the answer to that question. If they do reapply for a zone change, it may look totally different than this development plan. It could be a lesser zone change ... to an R1-B (single-family residential), for example, which is consistent with some of the other (zoning districts) around it.”

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GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Monday, July 21, Midway City Council at 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday, July 22, Woodford Co. Fiscal Court at 5:30 p.m.