

Retirement From Front

was both a reflection on his career and a final plea for support and understanding for the department he helped build.

“Born and raised in this city, love the city, love the county,” Reik began, his voice breaking as he stood before council members, fellow firefighters, and residents. “This is all I’ve ever done. I wanted to be the best career fireman.”

Reik, who also served with the Lexington Fire Department until his recent retirement from that post, recounted how he joined Lancaster Fire in 2006, just three days after graduating high school. “My dad was a fireman on the fire department my whole life. I was born and raised around the fire department. As a kid, that’s all I wanted to be.”

His voice grew more strained with emotion as he reflected on the sacrifices of the job and his decision to step away. “This is my 20th year in fire service. I’ve had a rough career, done a lot of close calls. I’m gonna enjoy it with my family. Sorry,” he said, pausing to collect himself. “I took the department from 11 firemen to around 30 firemen now. I’ve updated our training command with some of the best around. I’ve wrote

over \$530,000 in grant money in the last three years.”

Choking up further, Reik continued, “I figured the best way to go out is on a positive note, but I appreciate everybody for everything. It was a tough decision that I made on the holidays. But I’m very happy and proud of all of our accomplishments.”

Throughout the speech, Reik made clear that his departure was not a resignation from service to the community, but a necessary step to rebalance his life. “I just recently retired a week and a half ago from Lexington Fire Department. So I got the time in there, time in here, and I just need to focus on, you know, I want to enjoy my family. It’s all I’ve done since I was in high school. So 20 years of my life, I’ve woke up all hours of the night making runs, a lot of bad runs, drew a bunch of bad cards. But I’m still here, so I’m happy.”

Flanked by firefighters and supporters—many standing in the hallway due to limited seating—Reik asked the council to appoint Assistant Chief Dustin Whitehead as interim fire chief. “He’s over 28 years in the fire service... He’s a state fire instructor. I still stand behind the guys. I will still help with grants. I will still do whatever I’ve got

to do.” Reik reaffirmed his commitment to the city.

“At the end of the day, I live here. I’m invested here. My kids are here. My family’s here... Why would I not want the best of the best?”

He closed by reiterating his gratitude for the opportunity to serve. “I just respectfully thank you guys for everything and I appreciate the last 20 years here.”

While Reik’s retirement announcement was met with gratitude by some, Councilman Danny Waters’ objections to the process exposed underlying frustrations and long-standing communication issues between the council and the department.

But the lack of advance notice to the council prompted a sharp response from Waters.

“I was notified probably 15 minutes before I came here that you were stepping down,” Waters said. “We do a lot of knee-jerk decision[s] as a council. I’m not pointing down anybody out here, but this needs to stop.”

Waters stressed the importance of council input before naming even an interim replacement.

“We need to go through and give other people opportunities and chances and just let us talk it through,” he said,

clarifying that while he had no specific objections to Whitehead, the decision process felt rushed and exclusionary. “I’m not saying he’s not going to get it because he’s probably the leading candidate. I don’t know anybody right now because I didn’t know anything about this until just a few minutes ago.”

Reik defended both the timing of his announcement and his choice of successor, pointing to Whitehead’s 28 years of fire service, state instructor certification, and operational experience. He also pushed back against Waters’ complaints, taking aim at what he saw as disengagement by several council members.

“With all due respect, if you were so involved—not to be blunt about it—but out of every council member in this room in the last three years, I don’t know if maybe one of y’all has come down for a three-minute conversation,” Reik said. “None of you all have come to the fire station but one person, you know, once or twice.”

He singled out Waters directly: “Yeah, he stood outside one day complaining about other council members, but I’m not worried about that. He didn’t ask questions about fire department. I can tell you that much.”

The tension boiled over moments later when Waters clashed with a volunteer firefighter—identified as David Williams—during a heated exchange over the council’s involvement and visibility at the department. Waters accused Williams of previously telling council members to “F themselves” and storming out of a meeting.

“Aren’t you the same one that got mad one night and told them all to F themselves and walked out the door?” Waters said, pointing across the room. “I’ve got other people that will testify to that.”

Williams denied the allegation, and another volunteer fireman stepped in to defend the department’s accessibility and training schedule. “Y’all need to come out and see what we do,” the fireman said, noting that training takes place every Thursday and is open to anyone who wishes to attend.

The mayor attempted to restore order. “All right, this isn’t conducive,” Mayor Gaffney interjected, signaling for the conversation to move forward.

Despite the contentious discussion, the mayor reiterated that appointing an interim chief falls within his authority and pledged to follow formal procedure for filling the position permanently. “At

the end of the day, the council approves the fire chief,” Gaffney said. “Not the interim designation, but from interim to actual fire chief, this council would approve who that person is.”

Assistant Chief Whitehead, sitting quietly through most of the discussion, offered assurances when prompted. “Colby and I have been together pretty regular for 15 years or so... We’ve worked together and been in some pretty crazy positions,” he said. “He’s here to help me get this thing going.”

Reik confirmed he would remain involved during the transition.

“There will be no transition errors, there will be nothing... Things will keep going just like nothing ever happened,” he said. “I promise you the way it’s set up now, the next person that takes that spot will get my full attention.”

As the meeting wound down, several council members expressed appreciation for Reik’s decades of service. However, the evening also laid bare the friction between the fire department and city leadership, raising broader questions about communication, oversight, and how best to manage critical transitions in public safety leadership.

Stipend Account From Front

possibly decades. The decision comes amid growing public scrutiny, internal frustrations, and questions about whether the additional payments exceeded legally approved salary amounts.

The discussion centered on a fund referred to as the “stipend account,” which has reportedly provided Lancaster mayors with additional compensation above their base salary. Council members debated whether the payments were authorized, who approved them, and whether the city should attempt to recoup the funds. The issue has gained traction following allegations of misappropriation of public money, although no formal charges or findings have yet been made.

Councilwoman Michelle Ballew emerged as one of the strongest voices calling for transparency and action. Referencing feedback she said she received from numerous residents since the prior meeting, Ballew described a sense of public disillusionment and a lack of confidence in city leadership.

“What I’m about to say, you all may not like,” Ballew began, “but since the last meeting, I’ve had an astronomical amount of people approach me about the misappropriation of funds. I just don’t think as a council we’ve handled it correctly and to the fullest... I think the public at least needs an explanation of how recouping the funds — or not recouping them — is a positive.”

Throughout the meeting, Ballew emphasized that her stance was not personal but rather a reflection of community expectations and her duty as an elected official. She drew a stark contrast between how the city handles fiscal obliga-

tions imposed on residents and how it appears to have handled potential overpayments within government.

“When the trash rates are increased, we ask the average citizen to pay that. They have to pay their dues. We can’t just do what we want to do and then expect the public to be happy,” she said. “These are reasons why people don’t trust the city government. They think when you raise taxes, it’s a scam or a gimmick.”

Other council members, including Marshall Norton, Brandon McGlone, Joe Naylor, and Danny Waters, joined the discussion, acknowledging the concerns and exploring potential paths forward. McGlone asked about the total amount of questionable payments made over recent years, to which Norton replied, “It was \$20,181,” referring to Gaffney’s increased payments through November 2025.

McGlone pressed for clarity about the duration over which such payments were made. Norton responded that the figure covered through November 2025 but that the stipend system may have been in place as far back as three previous mayoral terms, or further. At that point, the discussion shifted to the potential involvement of the Kentucky Attorney General.

McGlone expressed support for involving the Attorney General’s office to determine what legal or financial action, if any, the city should pursue. “We need to look at all avenues, and I think that that first avenue should be the attorney’s attorney,” he said, later making the formal motion to request the AG’s opinion.

While some council members, including Waters, briefly discussed the possibility of holding an executive session to deliberate privately, McGlone

objected strongly to the idea, citing transparency and public accountability.

“I believe that would be against KLC [Kentucky League of Cities] guidance,” he stated. “It’s public matters, public money, it’s public funds... let’s hash it out and do it in front of the public. That’s what they put us here for.”

City Attorney Jonathan Baker provided legal guidance during the meeting and cautioned the council that any opinion issued by the Attorney General would likely be advisory in nature. “They just issue opinions,” he explained. “They don’t a lot of times take actions. They may not say what to pick, but they may say what’s appropriate or inappropriate.”

Nonetheless, Baker agreed to begin assembling the necessary documentation and financial history in preparation for submitting a formal request. This will include a full accounting of all payments made through the stipend account and a review of the approved salary figures in past administrations. Norton noted the difficulty of pinpointing those figures, stating that minutes from past meetings provided no clear documentation of the mayor’s authorized salary.

“I read the minutes all the way back to 2000, and I never saw a dollar amount anywhere in the minutes,” Norton said, while Baker added that anything

paid above the approved salary, regardless of whether it was taken or granted, must be reviewed.

The conversation further revealed uncertainty over who originally established the stipend and how it evolved. McGlone suggested that the practice may have originated with former Mayor Don Rinthen, referencing a \$20 monthly gas stipend. “It started with Don, I guess, with his 20 bucks in gas that he got once a month. Allegedly,” he said. “So from the beginning of the stipend.”

Council members ultimately agreed that the inquiry should cover all past administrations from the inception of the stipend practice, not just the most recent three terms. Norton clarified, “You don’t need to say three. You need to take [it] all the way back when it started.”

By the end of the discussion, McGlone moved that the council formally request the Attorney General’s opinion on the stipend account — specifically, to determine its legal standing, the appropriateness of the payments, and what actions the city may take regarding funds disbursed above the legally approved salary. His motion was seconded and brought to a roll call vote.

Mayor Michael Gaffney called the roll, and each member, including Ballew, Wade, Norton, Naylor, McGlone, Waters, and Mayor Gaffney him-

self, voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

City Attorney Baker confirmed he would prepare a draft request for the Attorney General’s office and circulate it to the council for review.

The meeting then moved on to regular department reports, beginning with Chief Hughes, but the earlier discussion left a significant impression. Council members expressed concern about public trust and stressed the need to act in accordance with both legal obligations and public expectations.

Ballew concluded her remarks with a firm commitment

to her constituents: “I’m not an attorney... but I can say that as a council member and part of this government, I want to be trusted.”

The next steps will involve gathering historical financial data, reviewing city records, and submitting the formal request to the Attorney General, a process that may take weeks or longer. The council’s action marks a turning point in addressing what has become a growing concern for both city officials and residents — how public funds have been managed, and what must be done to restore accountability in Lancaster’s city government.



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Garrard Arts Kentucky History & Heritage Photo Contest

Celebrate America’s 250th Birthday by showcasing your photographs. Entries are due Tuesday, March 10 at Garrard Arts, 206 Lexington St, Lancaster KY. Photos must depict Kentucky history or heritage.

Full contest rules here <https://garrardarts.org/exhibits-%26-contests>
What is the difference between history and heritage? History is what happened in the past. Heritage is what it means to us, how we remember and commemorate, the stories we tell. Heritage is happening now; history occurred in the past. A photo of a historical site or building is history; a photo of the commemoration of a historical event is heritage.

Shop Local at Wherritt House Gifts

Make plans to shop local for gifts and décor at the Wherritt House Gift Shop, located at Garrard Arts Council, 206 Lexington St, Lancaster. The shop is open Tuesday - Friday from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.; closed on Sunday and Monday.

Information About Joining Garrard Arts

To learn more information about joining Garrard Arts and the many opportunities to make art, support the arts, or teach art, visit our website at garrardarts.org or visit the Garrard Arts Center at the historical Wherritt House at 206 Lexington Street in Lancaster. The Garrard Arts Center is open Tuesday through Saturday. Follow our Facebook page @garrardcountyartscouncil and Instagram @garrard_arts

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LEGAL NOTICE

On December 23, 2025 Judge Bill Oliver approved the tendered settlement of the Estate of Eva Sebastian for advertising. The advertisement will be published and the settlement will come on for hearing for final acceptance on February 5, 2026. (1-8-1tc)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Michael Jase Watkins, 1345 Bryants Camp Road, Lancaster, Kentucky 40444, has filed an application with the Energy and Environment Cabinet to remove build up in the bend for dock and to level parking on hill. The property is located at 1345 Bryants Camp Road, Lancaster, KY 40444 10 miles north of Lancaster, on Herrington Lake. Any comments or objections can be submitted via email to: DOWFloodplain@ky.gov Kentucky Division of Water, Floodplain Management Section, 300 Sower Blvd., Frankfort, KY 40601. Call 502-563-3410 with questions. (1-8-1tp)

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We positively will not permit fixed hunting of any character, fishing, dogs or trespassing on our farms. Any violations will be prosecuted. \$2.00 per week or \$51 per year for posted list.

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• Danny & Judy Browning's property at end of Conn's Lane.....	10-26	• Vockery property on Polly's Bend Road.....	10-26
• Carolyn Sparks property at 5252 Lexington Road.....	7-26	• Noah Wagoner and Kelsey Perkins, 10997 Buckeye Road.....	11-25
• Paul Black Farms, Hwy. 1355 (Sugar Creek Road).....	10-26	• Mary and George Watkins Property at 2961 Gabbard Road.....	11-25
• Paul And Suzanne Wells at 4129 White Lick Road, Paint Lick.....	10-26	• Hugh and Amy Johnson, 6198 Lexington Road.....	6-26
• Tammy Fowler, 749 Nina Ridge Road.....	10-26	• Dale Marie Hellard - Barbara French & William Randall Causey Farms at 2178 Hamilton Valley Road, 2636 Hamilton Valley Road And 1454 Hamilton Valley Road.....	8-26
• Mike and Pam Fathergill, 111 Lynnwood Drive.....	6-26	• Frank and Althea Rice, 390 Leavell Ridge Road, 372 Leavell Ridge Road and Rice Farm at Three Forks, all of Lancaster, KY.....	10-26
• Chris and Joy Fathergill, 317 Richmond Street.....	6-26		
• Mary Alice (Paul) Drew, 810 Carry Nation Road Property.....	6-26		
• Kathy Tuogle & Paula Tudor - Jim Clark Road.....	11-26		
• David M. and Rose Walker, 1163 Wolf Trail Road.....	2-26		
• The Kenton Property, 795 and 719 C Valley Drive, Berea.....	7-26		
• Grover Drew Farm, Carry Nation Road.....	3-26		
• Doug and Anna Graves, 319 Richmond Road, Loop 2.....	8-26		

Rates For Posted List - \$2 Per Week.
First Property \$51 Per Year -
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