

Garrard County Finalizes Election Plans for May 2026 Primary with Consolidated Voting Locations

By Ted Cox

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Garrard County, Kentucky has formalized its election plans for the upcoming May 19, 2026, primary, including the consolidation of precincts and designation of multiple voting centers across the county. The details are documented in the County Election Planning Report submitted by County Clerk Kevin Montgomery and include key logistical information intended to enhance accessibility and efficiency for the county's over 13,000 registered voters.

The county will utilize the same precinct consolidation plan that was implemented

in a previous election, as permitted under state election regulations. This approach reduces the number of separate precincts in operation on Election Day by centralizing voting at larger, more strategically located centers. According to the report, these plans have already been approved through the required state Board of Elections (Form SBE 74) process.

In-person voting on Election Day will be held at several consolidated voting centers and precincts, including:

- Garrard Middle School (304 W Maple Ave)
- Camp Dick Elementary

- (279 N Camp Dick Rd)
- Paint Lick Elementary (6798 Richmond Rd)
- Cartersville Precinct (1155 Copper Creek Rd)
- Buena Vista Precinct (3385 Kennedy Bridge Rd)
- Buckeye Precinct (Hwy 1131 Bethel Rd)

Each of these locations is outfitted with Verity Scanners, ADA-compliant Verity Duo machines, and electronic poll books and printers to streamline the voting process. All locations report having sufficient parking and will be staffed by 4 to 8 election officers, depending on the site.

Early in-person voting and no-excuse absentee voting

will take place at the Garrard County Clerk's Office located at 15 Public Square, Suite 5, in Lancaster. The same location will house the county's absentee ballot drop box, which is placed in the hallway of the courthouse to ensure secure access to voters submitting ballots early.

Each of the consolidated voting centers was selected for its accessibility and geographic centrality within Garrard County. For example, Garrard Middle School is situated in the heart of Lancaster, while Camp Dick Elementary is located off one of the busiest highways in the county, providing easy access for residents in

northern Garrard. Paint Lick Elementary serves the eastern region, and Cartersville is located in a rural south-eastern area.

County officials emphasized that the decision to consolidate voting locations and expand early and absentee voting options was made with consideration for the local workforce. The report notes that 85% of Garrard County's workforce is employed outside the county, making flexible voting hours and central locations a necessity for accessibility. The chosen locations allow voters to cast ballots either before or after commuting to jobs outside the county.

Public awareness of the election plans will be promoted through local newspapers, social media (including Facebook), the county website, and community meetings. Each designated vote center will also be clearly marked and promoted to ensure voter familiarity.

The Garrard County election plan for May 2026 reflects a continued effort to streamline voting logistics, improve voter accessibility, and meet the practical needs of a mobile working population through consolidated, well-staffed, and strategically placed voting locations.

Garrard County Fiscal Court Reviews Finances, Approves Routine Measures

By Ted Cox

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The Garrard County Fiscal Court convened Monday, February 9, to address routine county business, approve financial measures, and review the county's fiscal position, with Judge Executive Chris Elleman presiding.

The meeting moved quickly through the agenda, beginning with old business, of which there was none. The court then approved the minutes from the January

27 meeting following a motion and second, with all members present voting in favor.

Attention then turned to approved transfers. County Treasurer Jennifer Seagraves explained that one of the larger transfers reflected judge incentive payments that coincided within the same budget period due to timing differences in when the incentives were issued. After discussion, the court unanimously approved the transfers.

The court also approved

payment of county bills, including corrections to vendor listings that had been misclassified at the previous meeting. Two additional invoices related to emergency medical services were noted as having arrived earlier that morning and were included for approval. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

A review of the county's most recent financial statement indicated continued fiscal stability. Judge Executive Elleman reported that the county had met its

debt obligations and was experiencing a strong year in occupational tax revenue. He also noted a significant deposit to the road fund, totaling approximately \$1.2 million, received from the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, with minor adjustments expected to be reconciled in future payments.

Discussion also included updates on emergency medical services revenue. Treasurer Seagraves reported a temporary dip in monthly collections, attributed in part to billing cycles

and deductible-related factors, though both she and Judge Executive Elleman expressed confidence that revenues would rebound in the following month. Officials highlighted that annual EMS revenue has increased substantially over the past two years due to improved billing practices, placing the department on track to exceed \$1.2 million for the year.

Additional financial items included ongoing adjustments related to APAC tax receipts, which are still

being finalized for the new calendar year. Overall, county officials characterized the budget as solid midway through the fiscal year, noting that earlier adjustments had positioned departments to operate more sustainably.

The court concluded by unanimously approving the monthly financial statement.

Lancaster Faces Ongoing Meter Reading Challenges as Council Discusses Temporary Solutions

By Ted Cox

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During the Lancaster City Council meeting held on Monday, February 2, city officials discussed growing concerns over the inability to accurately and efficiently read approximately 800 of the city's 1,800 water meters, prompting a proposal for temporary outsourcing as a stopgap measure.

Mayor Michael Gaffney presented the issue, noting that the city's current automated meter reading system — which relies on signal communication between water meters and a mobile antenna unit — is failing to

capture data from nearly half of the city's meters. City staff members Stacy and Dale are tasked with overseeing meter readings, but the volume of unreadable or "dead" meters has become unmanageable for the small team.

"These two employees just don't have the hours in the day to do this," Gaffney stated. "And pulling staff from water and sewer operations just to cover these readings isn't sustainable for the city's daily operations."

The dead meters require manual readings, a labor-intensive process involving physically visiting each meter, recording the read-

ings by hand, and inputting them into the system — a task the mayor described as "boots on the ground" work.

While temporary assistance has come from other city departments Gaffney emphasized the need for a more structured and reliable solution until the city can move forward with replacing the faulty meters altogether.

Lancaster has applied for a substantial grant through Kentucky Waters, totaling approximately \$900,000, which would allow the city to replace all 1,800 meters with new cellular-read models. The grant would also cover installation, which the city would likely contract

out, as internal staff resources are insufficient for such a large-scale replacement effort.

However, the city does not expect to receive a decision on the grant application for another three to six months.

In the meantime, Gaffney proposed hiring outside help to read the malfunctioning meters. Citing local industry practices, he estimated the cost of hiring meter readers at \$0.50 to \$1.25 per meter per month, potentially totaling \$800 to \$1,000 monthly.

Councilman Joe Naylor commented that finding a reader for less than \$1 per meter was unlikely and added that some companies

he had worked with charged slightly more. He offered to share contacts from former employers that might be able to provide contracted workers within the region.

Gaffney acknowledged the suggestion and noted that he had already reached out to several entities and was awaiting responses.

Although no formal vote was taken during the meeting, the mayor stated he was willing to proceed with council approval and welcomed any motions of support. He clarified that the action may fall within executive authority but preferred to keep the council fully informed.

The council did not reach

a final decision on hiring outside meter readers but expressed general support for addressing the immediate needs of the utility department until the grant outcome is known.

The issue highlights an ongoing infrastructure challenge for small cities like Lancaster, where limited personnel and aging equipment place added strain on municipal operations.

City Council Reviews Youth Sports Updates and Facilities Planning During February 2 Meeting

By Ted Cox

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At the February 2 Lancaster City Council meeting, Parks Director Dylan Ward delivered a detailed update on the city's youth basketball program and outlined plans for upcoming spring sports, highlighting financial sustainability, facility use, and community engagement efforts.

Ward reported that the basketball program has generated \$4,160 in registration fees so far, while expenses — including uniforms, referee payments, and a new requirement to hire custodial staff — have totaled \$3,194. This leaves a current surplus of \$966, with projected additional costs of \$815 through the remainder of the season. "Unless something unplanned or drastic happens,

we'll come out at the end of the season with a little over \$150," said Ward, emphasizing that the program is effectively self-sustaining.

A significant change noted during the meeting was the requirement by schools to employ custodians to clean up after games, due to previous issues with post-event cleanliness. Ward stated this has not yet caused any problems but is now a mandated cost for use of school facilities.

The council discussed the possibility of charging admission to games, but Ward confirmed that no such charges have been implemented this season. "We've only had one game, thanks to the ice and snowstorm," he said, adding that mid-season changes would likely cause confusion among families. However, he

acknowledged that admission fees could be considered in future seasons as a potential revenue stream.

Regarding scheduling, Ward noted complications caused by school closures and emphasized the need for a master calendar. He committed to producing one with updated school availability. Councilman Brandon McGlone reaffirmed the importance of this scheduling tool, while also expressing appreciation for Ward's efforts. "I think you're doing a good job," McGlone said.

The Parks Director also spoke about increasing community engagement through social media. Over the prior 28 days, the city's Parks and Recreation page received approximately 70,000 views and 7,000 interactions — an

85% increase from the previous month. Ward attributed this growth to consistent content like "Wayback Wednesday" posts and seasonal registration announcements. He expressed a desire to deepen community interaction beyond game days.

Looking ahead to baseball and other spring sports, Ward reported that registration is expected to open by the end of the week. He also noted that the city receives an annual \$30,000 allocation from the county for Parks and Recreation, of which only a small portion has been used. This reserve will fund spring sports expenses, including facility upgrades, referee

costs, and sponsorship initiatives. "We still have that whole balance that we can use," he stated, adding that these funds will prevent any major costs from affecting the city's Parks and Rec budget.

Responding to a question from Councilwoman Michelle Ballew, Ward clarified that all basketball games are played at the GC facility, with the exception of kindergarten and first-grade games, which are held on Fridays at Camp Dick. "That way they don't have to get the little kindergartners up at 8 o'clock in the morning," he said, noting the schedule had worked well in the limited game time available so far.

Ward also addressed the

challenge of gym availability due to school scheduling conflicts. He is currently in talks with local churches such as Forks of Dix and First Assembly to potentially use their gymnasiums. "If we can get with the churches... we don't have to worry about rescheduling," he explained, seeking to avoid the disruptions caused by reliance on school properties.

Mayor Michael Gaffney closed the discussion by thanking Ward for his update and ongoing efforts to support Lancaster's youth sports and recreation programs.

City Renews Chamber Membership

By Ted Cox

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At the Lancaster City Council meeting held Monday, February 2, council members unanimously voted to continue the city's platinum-level membership with the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce for 2026. The decision aligns with previous years' support and follows the county's own renewal at the same level.

Lancaster Mayor Michael Gaffney opened the discussion by highlighting the tiered structure of the chamber's membership program, noting that the city had previously subscribed at the platinum level—costing \$2,500 annually. Gaffney also confirmed that funds for the membership were included in

the current budget.

Councilman Brandon McGlone voiced strong support for maintaining the highest tier, citing the chamber's continued success in fostering local economic development. "They're growing businesses, getting businesses to work together, hosting meet-and-greets and member dinners," McGlone said. "They've exceeded my expectations."

Councilwoman Michelle Ballew acknowledged the chamber's work but raised broader concerns about fiscal restraint. "Everything that comes across this table, we can't approve financially," she said, referencing other significant budgetary commitments the council has undertaken, including raises and other spending

items. Nevertheless, she did not oppose the chamber membership outright, instead suggesting the need for caution in cumulative spending.

Councilman Joe Naylor emphasized the importance of the membership in supporting local business.

and moved for approval. Ballew ultimately agreed to second the motion after a brief discussion on the budgeted funds.

The motion passed with no opposition, confirming that Lancaster will continue its platinum-level support for the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce in 2026. The move reflects the city's ongoing commitment to regional economic collaboration and business development initiatives.



Garrard Mills Photo Contest Designed to Be Welcoming and Fair

Organizers of the **Bake the Heart of the Mill** photo contest at Garrard Mills say fairness and inclusiveness are central to how the contest is being run.

To ensure that each participant's entry is considered equally, individual photos are not being shared publicly during the submission period. Instead, all entries will be revealed together after the contest closes.

"This approach keeps the focus on participation rather than comparison," organizers explained. "We want everyone to feel comfortable sharing their story."

The contest continues through the end of February and is open to all members of the community.

Details and submission information can be found at www.garrardmills.com or on the Garrard Mills Facebook page.

