

County holds off on buying houses for stormwater improvements

By **JACK DOBBS**
The Daily News

A project to mitigate flooding in a neighborhood hard hit by April's weather event will have to wait a little longer as Warren Fiscal Court magistrates on Tuesday postponed a vote that would acquire two houses in the neighborhood needed for the project.

The two homes sit on Hearthstone Circle in the Stonecrest subdivision off of

Russellville Road and both sustained considerable interior flood damage during the storm.

Magistrates heard a proposal on the project earlier this month. Nikki Koller, head of Warren County Stormwater, told the court that the damage inflicted on the homes made repairs cost-ineffective in a neighborhood that has struggled with flooding for years.

Under the proposal, the county would purchase the

houses, tear them down, and then expand a drainage basin that would prevent flooding in the neighborhood and on streets from happening on the scale it did in April.

"This is what we believe would be the best option going forward," Koller said. Judge-Executive Doug Gorman said Tuesday the homes have flooded "more than five times in the past 15 years."

Magistrates raised some concerns about the idea during the Tuesday meeting. Sixth

District Magistrate Ron Cummings expressed concern about county government giving fair market value for homes that received insurance payouts, and concern over the county "setting a precedent" by purchasing private property.

"I understand the need for it, but I'm concerned with long-term implications of the county buying properties in areas where people normally have flood problems," Cummings told the court.

Gorman said the home

owners did receive insurance payouts but the payouts were "considerably less" than the appraisals, totaling to about one-eighth of the appraised value.

"We are not going to be in the business ... of purchasing properties that are flooded," Gorman said. "With the historic flooding we had these two houses have been identified for the area of town that needs to be mitigated."

"These two are strategically placed," he said.

REGION

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including one in five kids, experiences food insecurity countywide, according to FAKH.

Within the past week, the facility had provided space to pack some 1,008 food boxes for the nonprofit assistance organization House on the Hill, according to Manda Barger, FAKH's marketing and communications manager. At Feeding America Lampkin Park — a monthly initiative serving nearly 900 families monthly with food from FAKH — the coordinator Johnalma Barnett saw a need for vegetables the morning of November distribution and picked some up at the facility thanks to donations from Kroger and Sam's Club.

"This (facility) is going to be wonderful for us logistically," added Matthew Brown, vice president of the hot meal distribution nonprofit MEALS INC. "Right now, when we have to work out of Elizabethtown, we're very grateful for it, but if we have an issue with the delivery, that's a long way away for us."

"So, being able to have something that's right on our side of town that we can come and interact with on a weekly basis if we need to is really going to help us be able to get food from Feeding America's (suppliers) to our clients in a more timely fashion."

FAKH is the primary food source at MEALS

INC, which rounds out FAKH's supplies with other local donations and distributes 260 meals on Saturdays to help people through the weekend, Brown said. These are people experiencing food insecurity — including many who are elderly, people who are shut in, immigrant families and disabled veterans, he added.

FAKH also provides most of the food distributed at the local Calvary Care Center, which serves food for some 350-380 families monthly, care center volunteer Steve Jenkins said. Most, he added, likely live at the nonprofit Housing Authority, which has said that it provides housing to 1,400 tenants who make no more than 80% of the household area median income.

"It'll be real helpful being here closer," Jenkins added. "If we run out of food, we can always come here to get it."

The Calvary Care Center serves food Monday and Tuesday as well as Saturday — and in the gap before Saturday, the more on-demand food availability can help the volunteers restock their provisions, volunteer Donna Lawyer said.

FEAR — AND COMMUNITY
During the government shutdown, there was fear from parents wanting to ensure they could provide for their kids, Dennis said. There was fear from food assistance organizations that wanted to have enough for their communities. And there



JACK DOBBS / THE DAILY NEWS
Charles Dennis, head of Feeding America Kentucky's Heartland, speaks during a ribbon cutting ceremony at the organization's new, 12,000 square foot facility in Bowling Green on Tuesday.

was uncertainty over when the shutdown would end.

Dennis said there's a need to acknowledge this fear and uncertainty — and emphasized the importance of community coming together in service of others.

A pause in food stamps prevented \$20.5 million in food benefits from being distributed across the service area of FAKH, which has a yearly budget of \$6 million, Dennis said. But there was also beauty in people's work serving others, as community members rose to meet needs as best as they could, he said.

He recalled FAKH making calls to Houchens and local farmers to purchase additional food, and firefighters, police officers and city workers helping distribute food across Fort Campbell and Elizabethtown.

"When times are tough, community is what stands up," he said.

Investing \$2.3 million countywide, FAKH estimates that it provided 1.4 million pounds of food

across Warren County within the 2025 fiscal year, according to its annual report. Among other initiatives, FAKH purchases food in bulk and sells it at a typically discounted rate to food assistance organizations, also providing a portion free or at minimal cost for transportation and overhead when sourced from the USDA or donations.

During the government shutdown, Gov. Andy Beshear directed \$1 million in emergency funding for FAKH to distribute across its service area — and FAKH allotted \$136,895.23 in food purchasing credits for Warren County assistance organizations.

Dennis recalled a moment that stuck with him at last Saturday's Freeman Lake distribution in Elizabethtown. He was putting apples in the back of a small SUV, when a little boy came out and his face lit up: "Oh wow, apples!" Dennis recalled the kid saying.

"That doesn't leave you," Dennis said.

5 days, she added. Separately, there's the usual supportive care — staying hydrated, taking Tylenol if needed for fevers, and so forth.

Shekar recommended keeping kids from school to protect their school communities if they have a sudden onset of the full-on flu symptoms such as a fever rather than the gradual symptoms of colds or other diseases. It's different from last year's surge in walking pneumonia cases among kids, where doctors advised only staying out of school if symptoms persisted for several days or longer: "Patients (were) not usually that sick — but here with this flu, they're sick, they're tired, they're fatigued (by) myalgia," Shekar said.

demiologic studies and expert reviews finding no credible evidence of causation. Shekar stated that it's been proven multiple times that vaccines don't cause autism.

"Primary care physicians should come out more and say this out loud that vaccines do not cause autism, and should present the data to the public so the fear decreases," Shekar added.

Otherwise, her advice for prevention is more of what's known — measures such as washing hands, cleaning surfaces, avoiding facial contact with hands and wearing a mask.

It's particularly important for people to take these precautionary measures if they're trying to protect vulnerable people around them, Shekar said. These populations include those age

65 or older, with risk increasing if they have lung disorders or other comorbidities such as coronary artery disease, as well as people compromised due to factors such as chemotherapy, and infants under 6 months old — the latter being a population who cannot get the shot.

She also recommended an over-the-counter neti pot nasal wash with salt water for those who get sick — as a notable study in recent months found that nasal irrigation with salt water decreased the time a person stayed sick by two to three days and helped prevent transmission, she said.

The prescription medicine Tamiflu is also useful within the first 72 hours, Shekar added — the earlier, the better, she said. If a person starts it within 48 hours, symptoms typically last less than

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center were to be built in Franklin, the owners of the property would have to be subject to more stringent oversight from local government as to how they could use the land, and the text amendment before the board did not go far enough in providing an avenue for government oversight.

Investors are eyeing a 200-acre parcel situated by Exit 2 of Interstate 65 in the far southern end of Franklin as the site for a data center.

Attorney Tim Crocker, representing the investors, said at last month's planning and zoning meeting that the center, which would likely store large amounts of data from artificial intelligence, cloud computing and other digital operations, could represent "generation-changing money" for local services.

Plans that have been made public call for three facilities of 250,000-300,000 square feet to be built at a \$2.1 billion investment, with construction ramping up over three years and the expectation of 40-50 full-time jobs.

Residents, however, have come out in force against the center, raising concerns about the effect of utility costs on the area, possible environmental and noise impact from the natural gas turbines that would power the facilities and questions about how much water the center would access to cool its systems.

To that end, the city commission also recently passed an ordinance creating an advisory committee of seven to 15 members, including the executive director of the Franklin-Simpson Industrial Authority, to "study the question of data center developments, consider new city ordinances for data center developments and consider if zoning is needed for this type of development and report the findings of the committee" to the city commission at the end of the first quarter of 2026.

City-county industrial authority director Jim DeCesare is on the way out, announcing earlier this month his resignation from the position effective Feb. 13.

"I feel the vote (on the text amendment) is not the end of the story," said Franklin city commis-

sioner Kelly Bush, who moved to form the advisory committee.

The Simpson County Fiscal Court, meanwhile, approved by a 4-0 vote earlier this month the first reading of an ordinance that would require advanced technology centers and integrated energy systems to operate only on land zoned for heavy industry and to obtain a conditional use permit in order to operate anywhere in the county, whether incorporated or unincorporated.

Existing data centers would have 180 days from the ordinance going into effect to obtain a conditional use permit.

No permits, licenses or zoning approvals can be issued for the development or operation of a data center or its related infrastructure unless or until a conditional use permit has been approved.

Simpson County Judge-Executive Mason Barnes introduced the ordinance, saying he believed the county needed to put some safeguards in place to protect itself legally and regulate any data centers that would operate there, and that a process in which county officials can articulate conditions under which it would allow a data center to operate there needed to be enshrined in writing.

Final approval is pending a second reading of the ordinance at a future fiscal court meeting.

"Our stand on it is, while we can't ban the activity, we can at least regulate it and we need something in place that stipulates that we will regulate it," Barnes said, adding that the city government could issue its own ordinance establishing its own guidelines regarding the permitting of data centers, but that ordinance could not be less restrictive than what the county has passed. "This is just a commonsense approach that we have the ability to take to do our very best to safeguard or put guidelines on what happens in our county."

Kentucky is being looked at as a potential hub for large-scale data centers, with the Kentucky General Assembly approving tax incentives this year for some projects.

Proposed data centers in other areas of the state, such as Oldham, Meade and Mason counties, have met with notable opposition from locals, though.

EXPERTS

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2021 to around 84%-85% last year, according to Shekar. It's a significant vaccination decline that also causes a loss of indirect protection from herd immunity, she said — an occurrence where enough people in an area have immunity to a disease to prevent it from spreading easily.

Shekar added that she's seen much more vaccine hesitancy in those past several years, which she would attribute to widely circulated but disproven fears that vaccines cause conditions. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has long and recently pushed claims of causation between vaccines and autism, despite decades of large epi-