

Zoning change decision could clear path for a VA clinic in E'town

BY GINA CLEAR
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

In front of a large audience of veterans and homeowners on opposing sides of a zoning issue, the Elizabethtown City Council heard first reading without discussion to move forward with a zone change its Planning Commission did not recommend.

The property at 2111 Ring Road and 1151 Pear Orchard Road is zoned R3, urban residential, with the request for a C-3, regional commercial, zone map amendment, which was recommended by the city's planning department personnel.

Councilwoman Mika Tyler, who was present at the Planning Commission meeting July 8 in which the commissioners recommended denial of the zone change by a 3-2 vote, made the motion Monday to read the ordinance approving the zone change citing its alignment with the city's comprehensive plan and land use plan, which identifies the property as a potential commercial property, as some of the reasons for approval.

Behind the request is developer Hamstra-Juliet JV from Dallas, who has identified the property as a potential site for a Veterans

Administration Medical Clinic. Chad Suito, who represented the developer, said in the July 8 hearing it would be a 60,000-square-foot clinic possibly offering optometry, audiology, dietary, women's health, general health, mental health and imaging services. The site is across Ring Road from another major development which includes a Publix grocery store.

The company is a private developer who builds properties designed for VA Clinics and then leases the property to the Veterans Administration but has yet to sign a contract with the VA for the site.

In the July 8 meeting, several residents who live in neighborhoods near the site and a homeowner directly next to it spoke in opposition of the zone change. Many were present Monday to deride the council for not adhering to the commission's recommendation.

After hearing the first reading, Brown Gwynn, who lives in Foxfire, was first to the podium to question why the council didn't follow the recommendation of its commission that took into consideration traffic and other impacts.

"There's been some miscommunication, everybody in this room appreciates veterans," Gwynn said

looking at the rows of veterans present for the meeting. "The only reason I'm able to stand here and say this is because of what you all have done in your service."

Gwynn believes reporting of the potential zone change has misrepresented of what the residents near the property were in opposition.

"And, in my opinion, because of the way the news media reported this, most of the veterans felt like the vote of the planning commission and the speakers at the hearing that day were opposed to a veterans clinic in Elizabethtown," Gwynn said. "And that's 1,000,000% away from the truth. The truth is, everybody there that I talked to and saw, plus the planning commission, felt like Elizabethtown was a wonderful place for a veterans clinic and we need it and we want to do anything we can to support the veterans clinic."

The clinic just didn't have to be at that location, Gwynn said, along with others making the same point, some saying the clinic should be located on the south side of town, later in the public comments portion of the meeting.

Mayor Jeff Gregory reminded the public that the city has no power to force a developer to purchase and

build on property in which they are uninterested and that developers choose sites they feel best suit their needs.

Stan Routt reminded the council that while the developer says they plan to build a VA clinic on the site, it is not guaranteed as other developers could be shopping for sites for the already approved clinic in the Elizabethtown area.

"... The VA's 2026 budget submission report to Congress as shown under the 2005 to 2025 major medical leases not yet completed list confirms the VA's intent to establish a VA medical center in Elizabethtown," Routt said. "This action is currently in the acquisition process, which means they've got it on the plan, but they may not even have a request for quote out here for it. This means there is no formal contract awarded to anyone for the actual construction and timing of the project. Contracting companies in their march toward being able to submit a quote or bid for this work must include a firm site proposal, generally, along with other details. So there may well be several companies quoting this work while using other sites in E'town. The work is expensive, lucrative and competitive for construction and for

the leases. The first-year lease alone is estimated at \$16.671 million."

Many veterans in the audience thanked the council for its consideration of the project as they cited having to seek services at clinics in Fort Knox — a problem for veterans with a felony — Grayson County or the VA hospital in Louisville.

"I've been fighting cancer since 2006," said Walter Reed, who is in his late 70s. "Every couple of years I either take chemo or radiation. My wife cannot drive in Louisville. She's too nervous. So therefore, I have to find someone to take me."

While Reed said he relies on a multitude of friends, the added complexity of finding someone to take him either 30 minutes or an hour away for treatment is an obstacle a clinic in Elizabethtown would eliminate. He and other veterans who spoke said with the aging of the more than 14,000 veterans in the area, time is of the essence.

"We fought for you, fight for us," Reed told the council.

The council is expected to hear second reading on the matter at 4:30 p.m. Aug. 4 at its next regular meeting at Pritchard Community Center in Elizabethtown.

Alvarado, Kentucky's first Hispanic state legislator, echoes Trump in launching congressional bid

BY BRUCE SCHREINER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Republican Ralph Alvarado, who made history as Kentucky's first Hispanic state legislator but then left to become Tennessee's top public health leader, reentered Bluegrass State politics on Thursday by announcing his bid for an open congressional seat targeted by Democrats in 2026.

Alvarado, a medical doctor and the son of immigrants, will compete for Kentucky's 6th Congressional District seat now occupied by Republican Rep. Andy Barr, who is in a hotly contested race to succeed Sen. Mitch McConnell, the former longtime Republican Senate leader, in next year's midterm election.

Seen as a rising conservative star during his years in the Kentucky Senate, Alvarado pledged to align with President Donald Trump's "America First" agenda as he kicked off his congressional campaign.

"Kentuckians are fed up with open borders, sky-high prices and unelected bureaucrats who trample our freedoms," Alvarado said in a statement. "I'm running for Congress to fight for working families, stop the invasion at our southern border once and for all, and fight the woke agenda."

Republican state Reps. Ryan Dotson and Deanna Gordon entered the House

race earlier, also touting their conservative credentials and setting up the prospect of a competitive primary next spring.

The Democratic field also grew Thursday, with former federal prosecutor Zach Dembo entering the campaign. Dembo, also a former policy adviser for Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, said his focus will include creating good-paying jobs, fighting back against Medicaid cuts and opposing tariffs that he said are hurting crucial Kentucky industries.

"Central Kentucky deserves to have a representative in Washington who stands up for families, works to lower their cost of living, expands access to affordable healthcare and protects their safety," Dembo said in a statement.

National Democrats list Kentucky's 6th among dozens of districts nationally that they're targeting in hopes of winning back the narrowly divided House in 2026. Other Democratic candidates for the Kentucky congressional seat include ex-state Rep. Cheryl Stevenson and David Kloiber, a former Lexington city councilman.

Alvarado's campaign said he preserved his Kentucky ties while working in Tennessee, noting that he maintained his longtime home in Clark County in the district and continued to do medical work in the district. He typically returned

home multiple times each month.

He was the first Hispanic member of Kentucky's legislature, his campaign said, having been first elected in 2014. He has said his immigrant parents made big sacrifices to get him a good education. His father was from Costa Rica, and his mother is from Argentina.

Alvarado ran for statewide office in Kentucky as then-Gov. Matt Bevin's running mate in 2019, but Bevin lost his reelection bid to Beshear. Alvarado left the Kentucky Senate to step into the role as Tennessee's health department commissioner in Republican Gov. Bill Lee's administration in 2023.

Lee last week announced Alvarado's departure from the state health department, saying Alvarado "faithfully served Tennesseans throughout his tenure."

Alvarado's role in promoting Bevin during the 2019 campaign could surface as an issue in next year's congressional race as Bevin's pugnacious style turned off many Kentucky voters.

The 6th District stretches from central Kentucky's bluegrass region to the Appalachian foothills. It flipped between Democratic and Republican representation for decades, but Barr has locked down the seat for the GOP for more than a decade, fending off a tough Democratic challenger in 2018.

Conversation with Army officials to keep Patton Museum open begins

BY GINA CLEAR
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The work to what local leadership hopes is an alternative to closing the Patton Museum is underway.

In a meeting last week, representatives from a number of entities came together at the Knox Regional Development Alliance in Radcliff to meet with a senior representative from the Army Museum Enterprise at the Center for Military History, said retired Col. Lance O'Bryan, KRDA president and CEO, although O'Bryan did not disclose the official's name.

"He shared details concerning the closure or consolidation of 19 Army museums, including the Patton Museum," O'Bryan said in a prepared statement following the meeting. "We appreciated the frank, candid conversation we had with him, even if we didn't agree with the rationale they are using in regards to museum closures, specifically the Patton Museum."

As reported earlier, Patton Museum Foundation Board Chairman Bill Betson said he has learned the museums on the closure list don't meet a 100,000 visitor-a-year threshold to keep open. The Patton Museum sees about 50,000 visitors a year.

The move is part of a what Army officials are calling a "major overhaul of the museum system" but was still "pre-decisional" however, senior Army leaders had approved the plan in concept, *Task & Purpose* reported.

The reduction would leave the Army's roster of museums at 12, including keeping the museum at Fort Campbell.

The report also cited a senior official saying financial constraints also contributed to the decision.

Despite disagreeing with the rationale, O'Bryan said the meeting was the initial round of what can be up to a two-year process to find a solution.

"That meeting was our first meeting in what will be a long-term process in trying to find a solution," O'Bryan said in a brief update to the Lincoln Trail Area Development District Board. "So trying to lay the foundation, we understood the environment of the community, we understood the environment of the history and we understood the environment on Fort Knox. That just kind of laid the foundation for what I think will be a continued long-term exercise to ensure that the Patton Museum maintains relevancy in our region."

Joining O'Bryan at the meeting was Radcliff Mayor J.J. Duvall, KRDA staff and board officers, representatives from Radcliff Tourism and the Patton Museum Foundation, as well as Congressman Brett Guthrie's and Sen. Mitch McConnell's field representatives. O'Bryan also thanked the Fort Knox Garrison and U.S. Army Cadet Command and its senior mission commander for their participation in this effort.

The garrison will serve as a liaison between the working group and the Army Museum Enterprise at the Center for Military History, O'Bryan said.

"We are committed to finding a solution that keeps the Patton Museum open and operating here in Hardin County," O'Bryan said in the statement. "What that looks like in terms of organizational structure, artifacts, exhibits, funding and staffing is to be determined."

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EVENT

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merchandisers were set up in the St. Joseph Cathedral parking lot; but for this year's event there will instead be some of the larger distiller booths in that spot. This is to help alleviate some of the long lines that would stack up at some of the distiller booths as bourbon fans waited on line for special bottle releases.

Councilman David Dones asked KYBF President Randy Prasse about how the ongoing construction of the new Bardstown Aquatic and Recreation Center would affect parking for the festival. Prasse said there will be some logistical issues posed by that, as well as for loading and unloading trucks and setting up the structures on the Spalding Hall grounds. North Fifth Street will also remain closed the Monday after the festival for teardown.

Prasse was also questioned about the earlier date for KYBF this year — a full week earlier than last year — and he said that was to help avoid competing with the Bourbon and Beyond concert festival in Louisville. He also said KYBF would be setting its 2026 and 2027 festival dates soon.

IN OTHER NEWS

• Bardstown Mayor Dick Heaton took time out to recognize Bardstown Fire Chief Todd Spalding and his water rescue team for their heroism during the April flooding. The team performed 22 water rescues, saving some 60 people, as well as their many, many pets.

Spalding called the April flooding "unprecedented,"

but noted that he had the right team for the job to tackle the crisis.

"I definitely have developed a lot of confidence in their abilities," he said.

• The city approved a resolution allowing Bethlehem High School to renew its industrial revenue bonds for the financing of its Athletic Complex. The original seven-year term had expired, and the school wanted to continue to float the bond note at favorable interest rates.

Frank Wilson of Wilson and Muir Bank spoke on behalf of the high school as well as his bank, which is handling the financing.

Wilson noted that the city signing off on the agreement does not make the city fiscally responsible for the bank note. The school was extending a \$1.2 million balance with the move.

• Treasure Davidson spoke on behalf of Bethany Haven seeking a community donation from the city for this year. She also had kind words for Bardstown Police's Olivia Raley and service dog Maverick for her efforts working with those in the community with mental illness, and how her work enhances the services that Bethany Haven provides.

"Between Olivia and our team we've saved multiple lives," Davidson said. "Olivia is getting people into the resources the need to fight mental illness."

City council approved a \$12,000 donation to the Bethany Haven mission, up from last year's \$11,250.

"I'm grateful for the council and community support," Davidson said.

• The city heard the first reading of an ordinance setting its pay classification plan going forward. The move

was needed at least partially because of Spectrum taking over the city's cable franchise and the restructuring of its IT department, and also to create two new public works positions — a sewer system expert and a water system expert. Both of those position have been budgeted for and filled.

• Councilwoman Betty Kelley Hart reported that NELCare received a \$4,000 grant to install drug take-back boxes at Medica Pharmacy and Hurst Drug Store.

• Councilman Franklin Hibbs IV reported that his earlier reporting of 1,200 of the special Bardstown-themed license plates — which feature a bourbon barrel in its imagery — was incorrect. In fact, the state sold 1,606 of the plates in its first year. A \$10 portion of each license plate sold goes for scholarships at the Beam Institute at the University of Kentucky, about \$13,000, while the remainder goes to the Kentucky Distillers Association, also to fund scholarships in the bourbon industry.

Hibbs and Sam Lacy of the

Bourbon Capital Guild said they have seen the license plates not just here locally, but all over the state.

"It's a mobile marketing piece," Lacy said.

• Heaton said he and Councilman Joe Buckman (who was unable to attend Tuesday's meeting) would be heading to Gallatin, Tenn., and Franklin, Tenn., next week to visit those communities' aquatic and rec centers to get ideas to bring back home and possibly implement them in the new Bardstown Aquatic and Rec Center, which is under construction.

"We hope to get some good information from both those communities," Heaton said.

The mayor also noted that with dryer weather in recent weeks, the contractors at the rec center site have started catching up after delays earlier in the spring. He said that the bid for furniture and fixtures for the facility came in under budget, and the flooring bid was right on budget. Contractors will be digging geothermal wells on the worksite in August.