

Questionable decisions doomed architectural gem near Maxwell St development

BY ZAK LEONARD



By now, passersby on E. Maxwell and Stone Avenue will have noticed the gaping hole in the neighborhood where 13 National Register-listed buildings once stood. As this type of mega-development accelerates in Lexington, the public’s ability to monitor such projects is increasingly being curtailed.

Recently, the House Bill

443 ZOTA removed public comment from the approval process for some development plans. But the city’s planning staff’s aversion to community input runs deeper than this. In attempting to stave off the wrongful demolition of the 1920s John F. Nunan House at 245 Stone Ave., the Blue Grass Trust has found itself challenging a bureaucracy that appears to bristle at any oversight and circumvents administrative review procedures.

When the Planning Commission approved the final development plan for The Maxwell, a 7-story, privatized dormitory, the

Blue Grass Trust took some solace in the fact that it depicted the intact Nunan House within the project site. Originally, the Stavroff developers had wanted to tear down this architecturally significant, Tudor Revival-Craftsman bungalow and put an outdoor trash compactor in its place, but the Commission vocally objected to this idea. We therefore had every confidence that the developers were responding to such feedback — and perhaps the historic preservation goals of our city’s comprehensive plans — by incorporating the Nunan House into the revised plan.

Trust officials were quite surprised, then, when Stavroff filed for a permit to raze the Nunan House shortly after the final plan was certified. We leapt into action and managed to get this application withdrawn. However, planning staff then contended that 245 Stone Avenue was not, in fact, included in the site plan and claimed that all the information on that document indicating otherwise was simply the result of “clerical errors.” We took issue with this interpretation and requested an administrative review by the Board of Adjustment, which the city’s zoning

ordinance permits. Planning staff refused to accept that application. We then sought an appeal of their rejection, but that overture was blocked as well without any compelling legal justification.

Planning staff apparently recognized that their “clerical error” argument was specious, for The Maxwell’s builder on July 3 submitted a minor amended development plan that removed the Nunan House entirely. The distinction between minor and major amendments here is of paramount importance: major amendments require the sanction of the Planning Commission, whereas Planning staff independently approve minor changes.

Classifying the removal of a National Register-listed building from a site plan as “minor” is especially troubling. In theory, developers could promise to preserve historic resources to win support for their plans, only to pro-

pose a minor amendment and tear them down after the fact without commissioners being any the wiser. In this instance, Stavroff sold 245 Stone Avenue to the Theta Chapter of Kappa Alpha Order for \$1 long after the plan’s certification, and the fraternity only last week demolished it.

We are concerned about planning staff’s enhanced ability to work unilaterally without oversight by the Commission, the Board of Adjustment, or community members. This case seems to make a farce of administrative review as codified in the zoning ordinance. Despite the adversity we encountered, the Blue Grass Trust will continue to challenge questionable deviations from final development plans that ultimately sap the public’s faith in the integrity of the planning process.

Dr. Zak Leonard is the historic preservation manager for the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BARR’S JOB

Just when we needed a good laugh, the Republicans supplied it, sputtering outrage over Democrats breaking a quorum in Texas. Where were they when ALL Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives (including U.S. Rep. Andy Barr) abandoned their posts in July?

At least the Texas Democrats left on high principle, to block Republicans from rigging the next election by carving up voter districts. Barr, on the other hand, fled Washington under House Speaker Mike Johnson’s, R-La, orders, all to avoid a vote on the sordid Epstein files.

Texas, welcome to our world: In Kentucky, we have been asking Barr to, in your words, “show up” and “do the job” since last January. Instead, Barr handed the House’s power of the purse to Elon Musk and DOGE. We asked him to use Congress’s tariff powers to protect Kentucky; instead, he stood by and allowed the president to impose tariffs illegally. We asked Barr to show up for his constituents; he cowered in hiding instead. He recently highlighted his inaccessibility again, choosing only to appear at Fancy Farm, far outside his district.

The Texas lawmakers may already be back on the job. But when will Andy Barr be?

Anne Chesnut, Lexington

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

When we elect someone to represent us, we expect them to show up — not just in Washington, but here at home.

With Congress on recess this August, our Representative should be holding a real, in person town hall and not be afraid to face their constituents. Not a tele-townhall where questions are screened and scripted. Not a closed-door meeting with a select few. A town hall where every voter has a chance to be heard, ask questions, and get straight answers.

Lately, it feels like too many politicians would rather hide behind press releases and social media posts than face their constituents directly. Public service isn’t supposed to be easy — but accountable. That’s what town halls are for. There are real issues facing our community, like an explanation of the big, beautiful bill and its importance to our state, especially our schools and local hospitals, and so many

others that deserve open and honest discussion.

We deserve to be part of that conversation — not shut out of it. I’m urging U.S. Rep. Andy Barr to step up and schedule a town hall this August. Show up. Listen. Answer questions.

That’s not too much to ask. That’s democracy.

Claire Sigountos, Lexington

FANCY FARM SHENANIGANS

The Herald-Leader noted that Democrats were largely absent from the 2025 Fancy Farm Picnic. But one important Democratic candidate, Ned Pillersdorf who’s running for the 5th Congressional District seat now held by a Republican, was present at the Picnic and wasn’t allowed to speak.

The political chairperson of the event, which touts itself as non-partisan, declined to let Pillersdorf speak on the excuse that his Congressional race wasn’t until next year. However, three Republicans whose races also aren’t until next year were allowed to speak at the event.

Democrats were chided by Republicans for avoiding Fancy Farm this year, but readers need to know about the partisan nature of the ‘non-partisan’ event which may have discouraged some Democrats from attending.

Harwell F Smith, Nicholasville

SPORTSBALL HYPOCRISY

I am reeling from the response the University of Kentucky issued regarding a potential increase in the county occupation tax to offset budget shortfalls in the public schools. UK is against raising the occupational tax to help fund public schools. This is the same UK that has raised tuition regularly to the point that the school is no longer affordable to the average high school graduate. If UK wants to pay the sportsball coach a fortune, they raise tuition and ticket prices. No big deal, education isn’t for everyone. That idea is so woke. Let them watch sportsball.

Daniel Isenstein, Lexington

DEADLY POLICIES

President Donald Trump has contributed to roughly as many American deaths as the 329,000 population of Lexington, Kentucky.

He was president during the first 10 months of COVID-19. His several months of delays in re-

sponse and pursuing multiple false solutions are thought to have contributed to more than 100,000 of the over 1.2 million COVID deaths to date.

His tax policies favoring the one percent meant less anti-poverty and health care funding for the remaining 99 percent. Annually, it is estimated there are 183,000 poverty related deaths in the US.

His reversal of Obama anti-gun policies may contribute to a portion of the over 40,000 U.S. gun related deaths per year.

It is estimated more than 100,000 Americans died from air pollution causing heart attacks, strokes, and other illnesses. His administration has recently weakened dozens of EPA and other pollution regulations.

Since 2017, his anti-climate change policies may contribute to a tiny fraction of annual deaths from hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, excess heat, skin cancer and health stressors.

If not fearing retaliation, faculty at the University of Kentucky could produce a better estimate.

Mark Bird, Las Vegas (formerly of Brandenburg, KY)

SUPPORT SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security is celebrating its 90th birthday on August 14th. As a retired 55-year member of the Carpenters Union, I know how important this program is to our community.

Unfortunately, Social Security is under attack. The current administration and Republican lawmakers are coming after our hard-earned benefits and have already done major damage to this essential program.

Social Security field offices have closed, the SSA workforce has been cut by 12 percent, and the new Social Security Administration Commissioner is talking about replacing experienced workers with artificial intelligence and online services. This all adds up to a back door cut in benefits. The goal is to make it harder for Americans to access the benefits they worked a lifetime to earn.

The reality is we can strengthen Social Security for decades into the future if the wealthiest Americans paid their fair share. Billionaires stop paying into Social Security in early January while most Americans pay all year round.

I’m calling on our Congresspersons to vote against any scheme that will cut Social Security benefits and to strength-

en Social Security instead!

Steve Barger, Louisville

TRUMP’S ‘REALITY’

President Donald Trump is just like “professional wrestling.” Both it and he are fake and everyone knows it. His followers either suspend belief or, more likely, just don’t care. He lies about everything.

Former U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynahan, D-N.Y., famously said that “You are entitled to your own opinions, but not your own facts.” For Trump, facts don’t matter. To him, the only reality is what he says it is reality. So, if he wants to show a hurricane in Alabama, he draws it in with a Sharpie. When he sees too many Covid cases, he calls for an end to testing for Covid. When gas prices are over \$3/gallon, he says they are \$2/gallon. And on and on and on... so America’s POTUS is nothing but a prevaricating liar!!!!

Jim Porter, Danville

AUTHORITARIAN STATE

As I watched nightly national news, it was a shock to hear my voice saying, “I’m living in an authoritarian police state!”

It wasn’t the first time for such a thought. After President Donald Trump took over the California National Guard to quell protestors against ICE snatching migrants, I didn’t hear any news report describe his action as starting a “police state,” yet that was my immediate thought, especially when he also deployed Marines. The concentration camps now being built with taxpayer monies stink (literally) to high heaven.

The sickening shock is that it’s the ne’er-do-well, narcissistic, revengeful Trump that the entire Republican Party is backing as a dictator. Project 25 architects took over planning for four years until Trump was elected again, trading the GOP for raw power.

Trump can only be taken out of office, in my opinion, by un-electing all elected Republicans, each and every one of them, including in state legislatures.

Encourage, pick and support candidates who are small “d” democratic candidates so that we finally can acknowledge what our democracy already is, and has been: diverse, smart, kind multiracial, multiethnic human beings.

Ramona Rush, Lexington

Edited by Liz Carey



PIPER HANSEN phansen@herald-leader.com

Construction is ongoing along East Maxwell Street for a private developer’s student housing project near the University of Kentucky’s campus, pictured here on Thursday, July 10, 2025, in Lexington, Ky. Twelve National Historic Register houses were destroyed.

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KATRIB

main isolated on the city’s periphery.

Lexington needs affordable housing — and the university can help. Through his work at the Smart Cities Research Lab and his groundbreaking 2021 book “In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities,” urbanist and Trinity College Professor Davarian Baldwin highlights mutually beneficial partnerships that place affordable housing on university-led sites. He cites the University of Winnipeg, which created a development corporation to build housing for students and community members at different price points.

While each town and gown relationship is unique, the core concept holds: what if UK adopted community benefits agreements that require affordable housing on

university-led developments and extended institutional resources such as free classes, job training, and job guarantees? What if the university contracted with local architecture firms attuned to Lexington’s context and politic, rather than out-of-state conglomerates? As home to Kentucky’s only accredited architecture school, Lexington has the talent pool to lead local housing solutions.

As Lexington’s largest employer, the university is well-positioned and obligated to lead the charge. Doing so would align its daily actions with its stated mission to serve both its student body and the community and Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Leen Katrib is an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Kentucky, a PD Soros Fellow, and a Public Voices Fellow of The OpEd Project.

FROM PAGE 1C

CARROLL

with, and even cleaner than, other clean energy options. It complements our rich energy portfolio. As we face rising grid demands and rapid technological advancement, nuclear provides a carbon-free, high-output solution, strengthening both the grid and our economy.

Paducah has the infrastructure, the history, the workforce, and now the momentum. We are no longer preparing for the future. We are shaping it. I’m proud the Kentucky General Assembly helped lay the foundation for this moment. I encourage the public to learn more about the possibilities of this safe, clean, and efficient technology.

I’m grateful to my colleagues across state gov-

ernment and applaud the Trump administration and investors for recognizing Paducah’s potential.

Let these announcements be a signal: The Bluegrass is not just participating in the future of nuclear energy. We’re leading it.

Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, represents the 2nd Senate District, including Ballard, Carlisle, Livingston, Marshall, and McCracken Counties. He serves as co-chair of the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children and is a member of the Interim Joint Committees on Education; Judiciary; and Health Services. He also serves on the National Conference of State Legislatures’ Nuclear Legislative Working Group.