

Life without parole conviction upheld for Samuel Baker

BY CARLA SLAVEY
COMMONWEALTH JOURNAL

The Kentucky Supreme Court has upheld the conviction of a Pulaski man who was sentenced to life in prison after a jury found him guilty of first-degree Murder.

Samuel Lee Baker, 27, was found guilty in 2024 in the shooting death of Robert Claunch.

He was given a sentence of life without the possibility of parol.

Baker appealed that sentence, asking for the jury's decision to be thrown out because, as Baker and his attorney contend, the jury was not allowed to choose to convict on a lesser charge of Criminal

Trespassing instead of the Murder charge.

Baker also contended that certain evidence submitted during the trial by the prosecution should not have been admissible.

Part of that evidence was testimony about Baker's police pursuit and arrest in Casey County hours after Claunch was killed, as well as evidence surrounding an escape attempt Baker underwent in November 2023, in which Baker cut off an ankle monitor and fled Pulaski with his then-girlfriend.

The two were apprehended in

Kansas.

The Kentucky Supreme Court ruling stated that both the Casey County and Kansas arrests

were found to have taken place because of Baker's actions concerning the murder or to evade court hearings on the Murder charge, citing previous court law that concludes "proof of flight to elude capture or prevent discovery is admissible

because 'flight is always some evidence of a sense of guilt.'"

The court also ruled that Criminal Trespassing charge could be considered a lesser included offense of Burglary, where a

person may have knowingly entered a residence they were not welcomed at while not having the intent to commit a further crime.

However, the evidence presented at trial must support the proof of the lesser included offense, the court stated, and in its review, the court said there was no supporting evidence in Baker's case.

Evidence at the trial showed that on the night of March 18, 2021, Baker had gone to the home of his father, Ronald Baker, while Claunch was there as well.

Samuel Baker got into an argument with his father.

Ronald Baker told his son to leave the property, then went into his bedroom. He said that he then

heard gunshots and came back to the living area of the residence to find Claunch lying on the floor after having been shot.

Ronald Baker also said the he heard Samuel Baker's vehicle leaving the area.

Samuel Baker was spotted later that evening by an Amish farmer coming out of a barn with items that didn't belong to Samuel Baker.

The farmer's report to Casey County 911 led to the police pursuit and eventual arrest of Samuel Baker. A gun matching the description of the one used to kill Claunch was found near where Samuel Baker was arrested.



SAMUEL BAKER



COURTESY OF SOMERSET FIRE DEPARTMENT
Firefighters from multiple departments battled a residential fire at Buck Tail Drive on Sunday afternoon.

Hot weather slams firefighters at Burnside blaze

BY CHRISTOPHER HARRIS
COMMONWEALTH JOURNAL

Sunday's severe heat conditions took their toll on firefighters battling a Burnside-area blaze.

With temperatures in the high 80s and humidity that made it feel much hotter, units were

called out to a residence on Buck Tail Drive that caught fire Sunday afternoon around noon.

Burnside Fire Chief James Martin said that one of his firefighters had to be transported to Lake Cumberland Regional Hospital by the Somerset-Pulaski County Rescue Squad for treat-

ment for heat exhaustion symptoms.

Martin confirmed that the firefighter is doing okay now and was released later Sunday evening.

A few other firefighters from the various departments on scene — a mix

SEE BLAZE, PAGE A7



COURTESY OF KYTC
Work along the Ky. 914/Slate Branch intersection is scheduled to be completed by July 31.

Ky. 914/Slate Branch intersection work on track for July 31 completion

BY CARLA SLAVEY
COMMONWEALTH JOURNAL

While the construction taking place at the Slate Branch/Ky. 914 intersection won't be completed by July 4, it is on track to be completed by its July 31 deadline, according to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet District 8 office.

In fact, Amber Hale, spokesperson for KYTC District 8, said that contractors seem to be working ahead of schedule — or at least were before this week's worth of predicted rain moved in.

The project is to build an R-Cut, or Reduced Conflict U-Turn, at that intersection to replace a traffic light that was destroyed in May 2024.

Ever since, a traffic pattern of having right-turns only off of each side of Slate Branch was installed. Motorists have had to make U-turns on Ky. 914 to get to the other side of Slate Branch.

Meanwhile, Ky. 914 travelers who want to turn left onto either Slate Branch side have had a designated left-hand turning lanes with barricades.

The new construction taking place is meant to make those turns more permanent, Hale said.

"It's the exact same thing we've had set up there for the past couple of years. It's just going to be permanent and better," Hale said. "I'm going to say 'better' because the way it was set up it was tight, with all those reflectors through there. They're making wider lanes, longer lanes, they're going to put some barriers in there to keep people from crossing over."

She said that despite the congestion and confusion that some motorists may have within the construction zone — and Hale herself admits it's a little confusing — everything seems to be going smoothly with the work.

"It's kind of an odd area, even before they started it, the way that the road curves through there and the larger intersection as it is," Hale said. "When I'm going through there, it's a little much, but it's part of the construction process. Just follow the signs and slow down is the main thing. If people will just slow down, everything should flow through."

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PUBLIC NOTICE

AN ORDINANCE 2026-___ ADOPTING THE CITY OF FERGUSON, KY, ANNUAL BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2026 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027, ESTIMATING REVENUE SOURCES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE OPERATION OF CITY GOVERNMENT. **SECTION 1:** That the annual budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026 and ending June 30, 2027 is hereby adopted as follows: Reserves Released from Restriction: 125,000; INCOME - OCCUPATIONAL TAX 49,000, MOTOR VEHICLE TAX 11,000, PROPERTY TAX 68,000, FRANCHISE FEES, LICENSES/PERMITS 109,000, Rental of Property 109,200, INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX 108,000, MUNICIPAL ROAD AID 20,486, SEVERANCE TAX 2,355, INTEREST 874, OTHER INCOME 86,000, INTERGOVERNMENT REVENUE CRF 122,500, PARK DEPT RENTAL FEES 20,000; ESTIMATED REVENUE: 706,415, RESOURCES AVAILABLE 334,215. EXPENSE APPROPRIATIONS - POLICE DEPARTMENT SALARIES 45,000, POLICE DEPT OPERATING EXPENSE 38,100, New Build City Hall 250,000, PARK EXPENSE: OPERATING EXPENSE 30,000, ELECTRIC UPGRAD 20,000, ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSE: SALARIES 35,000; OPERATING EXPENSE 171,177, FIRE DEPARTMENT 8,000, CONTINGENCY SNOW REMOVAL/ROAD MAINTENANCE 10,000; TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS 587,277, SURPLUS OR (DEFICIT) 101,138. **TOTAL BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 - \$587,277.** This amendment becomes effective immediately upon passage and publication.