



CHRISTOPHER HARRIS | CJ

Artist Brian Covert paints a bourbon barrel lid on Saturday, on a theme about the growth Somerset and the Moonlight Festival has seen in recent years.



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Lauren-Michael Sellers performs at Saturday's Moonlight Festival in downtown Somerset.

VANDALISM

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threat to the water supply, but rather during the theft and vandalism of the communication site, the locks were cut off of the lid of the water tank in that vicinity.

“Because the locks were cut off, we wanted to make sure nothing had been done (to the water),” McClendon said.

The vandalism was discovered around 8:30 a.m. Monday, and the boil water advisory was issued shortly after.

McClendon said that water samples were being sent to a testing lab in Lexington, with an eye on getting that testing done as quickly as possible and, hopefully, issuing an all-clear by Tuesday evening.

He said that sample testing usually takes 48 hours to do, but because this was a high-priority event effecting the entire water district, the testing company said it would expedite the process as much as it could.

Meanwhile, McClendon said that emergency crews were out trying to repair the damage to their electrical equipment as quickly as they could.

“All of our communication hardware is at this tank site, where it relays the information back from the entire system – from all the other tanks, all the other pump stations, all the communications for our system route through this one site,” he said.

Whoever was responsible has “stolen all the communication antennas, all the wiring, and all of the electrical hardware, and we had a security camera up on site there. From what it appears, they’ve come in the fence from the back side of it. They broke the pole down, stole the security camera, and stole all the wiring that went to it. They done probably \$50,000 worth of dam-

age,” he said.

They also climbed the water tank and stole the coaxial cable there, he said.

The person or people responsible were likely looking for copper, he said.

“And the bad thing is, they didn’t get \$25 worth of stuff, because most of that wasn’t even copper,” he said.

Until repairs to the equipment are finished, crews are having to “run the entire system by hand without any information,” he said. “We’re driving back and forth to tanks checking the (water) levels, checking the pump stations, and having to operate everything manually at this time.”

McClendon said that it looked like the first systems went down shortly after midnight Monday, which is when he believes the first of the vandalism occurred.

He asked that anyone who may have any information on this incident to contact WPCWD or the Pulaski County Sheriff’s Office.

He added that the Kentucky Division of Water is conducting its own investigation, and that the Kentucky State Police have been notified.

McClendon noted that information about the boil water advisory connected with this situation, as with all of their advisories, was sent out as part of the Pulaski County RAVE alert system.

This is the same system that sends out alerts on inclement weather and other safety concerns.

McClendon encouraged those who have not signed up for RAVE to do so.

More information about RAVE can be found at the Pulaski County Office of Emergency Management’s website: pulaskio-em.com.

Homelessness Conference explores society’s role in affordable housing crisis

BY CARLA SLAVEY
COMMONWEALTH JOURNAL

A community cannot help those who are unhoused if they don’t understand how it effects everyone. That is why organizations like Help the Homeless do what they can to foster awareness for an issue that effects everyone in the community, whether they believe it does or not.

Last Friday saw the results of one of Help the Homeless’s community outreach projects as the fourth Homelessness Conference took place at the Center for Rural Development.

Not only did the conference feature organizations with resources to assist those who are unhoused or are facing homelessness, it gave a platform for several of those organizations to inform the public about why the community as a whole should care about the rising homelessness crisis.

For example, Adrienne Bush, executive director for the Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky, said that back in 2024 a study was conducted trying to determine how many homes were needed to solve the housing crisis at that time.

“And what they came up with was that we are short about 200,000 homes,” she said.

That is not just people who would be considered the stereotypical homeless person, she said. “We were talking about our seniors, our folks on fixed incomes, people who are disabled, and people who are working in service sector jobs, like in our gas stations, and as our home health aides, and as our childcare workers. Those are folks who fall into that income spectrum.”

Then, she explained, “In 2029, if we do nothing on a



CARLA SLAVEY | CJ

Ashley Spalding with the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy explains to an audience how someone can get caught up in a revolving door of citations and jail time for being unhoused.

policy level but hope and pray things are going to change, we can expect this deficit to grow ... to about 287,000 homes.”

Two out of three Kentuckians in the extremely low income bracket are paying more than half of their income on rent each month, she said, highlighting the need for more affordable housing options.

She noted that there is a bill just passed by the U.S. Congress that would offer some help to the situation, called the 21st Century Road to Housing Act.

“Some of the important things in it that are helpful for people to recognize is that it does authorize disaster recovery assistance for housing for the next three years,” Bush continued. “That may be something that, unfortunately, may be applicable to Kentucky in the future.”

However, at the same time Congress worked on HR1, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill, that causes hardships for low-income people because of the changes

it makes to Medicaid and SNAP benefits.

“Those changes will likely mean barriers to obtaining Medicaid and SNAP assistance. And that is going to make rent harder to afford,” she said.

Then, there is the issue of the criminalization of homelessness, as Ashley Spalding with the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy explained.

The very fact that homelessness is considered an offense means that it prevents those who are experiencing it from getting ahead in a meaningful way.

She offered the example of someone who is cited for unlawful camping, which prevents someone from sleeping or using camping equipment in a public place.

The first time someone is caught doing that, they are cited and given a court date, she explained.

They are then expected to show up in court and pay a fine up to \$250 dollars plus court costs.

“So, we’re talking about people who are unhoused, who don’t have financial resources, and so they are looking at needing to get to court on a certain time, and be able to work out those logistics,” she said.

A second citation for the same offense now becomes a Class B Misdemeanor, meaning they can be arrested and put in jail for up to 90 days, on top of receiving a second \$250

fine and court costs.

They could also receive a bill for certain jail expenses as well such as a \$50 booking fee, she said.

And if they can’t pay those costs, they are scheduled for a hearing in front of a judge. But it may be difficult to get the notice of the hearing to that person if they have no fixed address. Or, Spalding said, they may have difficulty getting to the hearing, which results in a warrant being issued for their arrest.

In other words, the system is built for failure for those who are already trying to get their feet back under them, she said.

As part of the conference, Help the Homeless and its Executive Director Jessica Lee presented three awards to recognize individuals and organizations who have gone above and beyond to try to address the need in the community.

Individual awards were given to Loren Lovins for his work in developing the Pulaski County Housing Coalition website and SKYHope’s Melissa Estep for her work with the coalition as well as for helping those struggling with addiction.

The St. Mildred’s Catholic Church Outreach organization was also awarded, with Lee paying special tribute to Mary Guffey, who passed away in June and who was a major presence with that organization.



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Loren Lovins gives thanks for being selected to receive an award from Help the Homeless for his work in connecting Pulaski residents with affordable housing.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Somerset-Pulaski Economic Development Authority (SPEDA) 306 East Mt. Vernon Street, Suite 316, Somerset, KY 42501, has filed an application with the Energy and Environment Cabinet to place fill across and construct a culvert in Big Spring Branch. The property is located on the north side of Barnsburg Road approximately 0.6 miles east of the intersection with Pine Hill Road and upstream of the existing box culvert under Barnsburg Road. Any comments or objections can be submitted via email to: DOWFloodplain@ky.gov Kentucky Division of Water, Floodplain Management Section, 300 Sower Blvd. Frankfort, KY 40601. Call 502-564-3410 with questions.