

## A Community Conversation & Call to Action: What Reviving Lewis County Could Look Like

By Sam Howard

Over the past six weeks, this series has examined the forces shaping Lewis County's economic future, our location, transportation assets, energy needs, workforce evolution, and infrastructure readiness.

Each topic stands on its own, but together they point toward a larger conclusion: reviving our county is not the result of a single project or decision, but of sustained, informed effort.

Too often, discussions about economic development focus on announcements rather than

preparation. Communities wait for a transformative employer or a defining investment, only to find that opportunity arrives quietly or not at all. In practice, revival is built gradually through planning, coordination, and a clear understanding of what a community can offer and what it needs to strengthen.

Lewis County begins this conversation with real advantages. Our geography connects us to regional and national markets. Our transportation network offers options that many rural areas lack.

### Editor's Note

This column is the seventh part of a guest series authored by Sam Howard, published by The Lewis County Herald as a forum for examining ideas and opportunities related to Lewis County's future.

Howard is the primary author of the series, and the views expressed are his own. I am hosting the series and collaborating in the presentation for *Herald* readers.

Sam and I are lifelong friends, and I have confidence in his vision for Lewis County and in the value of thoughtful discussion about where our county is headed. Readers are encouraged to follow the series and engage in the conversation as it continues.

This installment continues a thoughtful examination of the long-term choices that shape our community's future. Infrastructure is not simply about roads, utilities, or systems we see every day. It is about whether Lewis County is prepared to support opportunity, growth, and quality of life for the next generation.

The goal of this series is not to promote specific projects, but to encourage informed discussion among citizens, local leaders, and stakeholders about planning ahead rather than reacting later. The decisions we make today will influence what is possible tomorrow, and that conversation belongs to all of us.

- Dennis Brown

Our workforce carries practical skills and a tradition of reliability. These are not abstract qualities. They are measurable factors that influence whether companies choose to invest.

Energy and infrastructure have emerged as recurring themes because they underpin nearly every other consideration. Reliable power, scalable systems, and long-term planning signal readiness.

They tell outside partners that a community understands modern requirements and is prepared to meet them. At the same time, these investments directly affect residents' daily lives, shaping affordability, reliability, and quality of life.

Reviving Lewis County will ultimately be defined locally. It may involve manufacturing, technology, logistics, or industries not yet envisioned. It may arrive incrementally rather than all at once.

The specific outcomes matter less than the approach itself: thoughtful, realistic, and grounded in long-term priorities rather than short-term reaction.

A community conversation means engaging with these issues openly and without preconceptions. It means acknowledging



past losses without allowing them to limit future possibilities.

It means asking not only what opportunities we want, but what preparations those opportunities require. Such discussions are rarely simple, but they are necessary.

The closure of the US Shoe factory marked a turning point in Lewis County's history. The next turning point need not be defined by loss. With informed choices, steady planning, and collective engagement, it can be defined by resilience and revival.

That outcome will not come from any single voice or column, but from a shared commitment to understanding where we are and where we want to go.

Your perspective mat-

ters. Residents, business owners, and community leaders all see the county in different ways, and every viewpoint helps shape a clearer picture of what Lewis County can become.

What opportunities do you see? What challenges concern you most? What ideas do you have for ensuring a stronger, more resilient future for our families and neighborhoods?

From those with generations of local experience to those who have resided here for a short time, all opinions and perspectives matter.

### About the Author

Sam Howard is a construction executive and economic development professional with more than 30 years of experience in the building and

infrastructure sectors.

He serves as Chief Executive Officer of Trace Creek Construction, Inc., where he oversees company operations, financial management, and long-term strategy. The firm specializes in design-build construction, construction management, and pre-engineered building systems, with completed projects across the public and private sectors, including schools, hospitals, church-es, judicial facilities, detention centers, and industrial developments.

Howard also serves as Managing Member and Economic Development Manager for Northeast Kentucky Development, where he works to attract new and expanding industries to the region. In that role, he is directly involved in project development, site promotion, and financing strategies, including design-build leaseback models. His work brings him into regular collaboration with local and state officials, business leaders, and community stakeholders.

Howard's focus is on job creation, infrastructure development, and strengthening the long-term economic vitality and quality of life in Northeast Kentucky.

"This year reminded me just how resilient local journalism really is," Brown said. "We may face challenges, but the dedication I see from our members gives me real confidence in our future."

Brown also credited his wife, Tammy, and his staff at *The Lewis County Herald* and WKKS Radio for their support throughout the year.

"My family and my staff made it possible for me to serve in this role," he said. "They carried extra responsibilities at home so I could represent our association across the state. I'm deeply grateful for that."

As he transitions into his new role as past president, Brown said he remains committed to supporting the association's mission and its members.

"This year was never about a title," he said. "It was about strengthening an organization that matters to local newspapers and local communities across Kentucky."

Brown has served as publisher of *The Lewis County Herald* since 1987 and has been with WKKS Radio since 1984. He also continues to serve as director of Lewis County Emergency Management and Public Information Officer for multiple local agencies.

## STORM

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widespread refreezing created slick conditions across much of the county. Brown described the storm as "not a typical Kentucky winter storm," explaining that the mix of snow and ice created a bonded surface that crews compared to "snowcrete," requiring repeated passes and specialized equipment to break up.

He said the prolonged cold limited the effectiveness of salt and other treatments and caused wet pavement to refreeze quickly, slowing progress even with crews working continuously.

Judge Executive George Sparks said conditions were improving as sunshine returned and some businesses were able to reopen, but he urged residents to remain cautious because the cold continued to complicate cleanup efforts.

Sparks thanked residents for their patience and cooperation and said the focus remained on the safety of citizens and first responders. He encouraged residents to dress appropriately for the cold, avoid overexertion while shoveling, and check on elderly neighbors or those living alone.

Officials also continued to push public safety reminders as wind chills dropped below zero. Res-

idents were urged to keep pets indoors as much as possible, use heaters safely, and look out for neighbors who may need help during the prolonged cold stretch.

Lewis County Emergency Management continued to encourage residents to sign up for local emergency notifications. Text alerts are available by texting "lewiscounty" (no spaces) to 78015. Updates are also posted on the Lewis County Emergency Management Facebook Page and broadcast on WKKS 104.9 FM.

### Forecast

Warmer temperatures are expected this week, but forecasters are also calling for a chance of additional snow and Lewis County officials say residents should remain weather-aware and prepared.

At press time early Monday, Lewis County remained under a Level 1 snow emergency, with lingering slick spots and black ice still possible on many roads, especially on secondary routes, bridges and shaded areas. Even as conditions improve, officials urge motorists to continue using caution, slow down and allow extra time if travel is necessary.

Local leaders also offered thanks to the com-

munity for the patience and cooperation shown during the storm response.

"We're grateful for the way our citizens have stepped up. With patience, kindness and common sense," said Lewis County Emergency Management Director Dennis Brown. "Our road crews, first responders and dispatchers have worked long hours in tough conditions, and the public's cooperation has helped them do their jobs safely."

Judge Executive George Sparks echoed that appreciation and reminded residents that severe winter weather is a community effort.

"Lewis County always pulls together," Sparks said. "Keep looking out for one another. Check on neighbors, especially the elderly and those who may need assistance, and lend a hand if you can."

Officials encourage residents to continue basic winter safety steps as the cold weather lingers: dress in layers, use heaters safely, keep pets warm, and be especially careful on untreated roads.

With another chance of snow in the forecast, residents are asked to remain prepared for changing conditions and to follow trusted local updates.

"Our focus has been on making sure KPA remains strong and stable for the next generation of journalists," Brown said. "That means taking our time, asking hard questions, and doing what's right for our members."

During the convention, Brown delivered multiple addresses reflecting on the association's work and honoring longtime staff members David Thompson and Bonnie Howard, who both retired after decades of service.

In his remarks, Brown praised Thompson's 42-year tenure as executive director and Howard's nearly 40 years of service as the association's financial and administrative leader.

"David and Bonnie helped define this organization," Brown said. "Their professionalism, loyalty, and commitment set a standard that all of us benefit from. They've earned every bit of the retirement they're beginning."

Brown also highlighted the work of the Executive Committee, Government Affairs Committee, and partner organizations in drafting proposed legislation designed to preserve public notice requirements in local newspapers.

"That work wasn't

about recognition," he said. "It was about protecting transparency and making sure citizens continue to have access to important public information."

Brown also highlighted the contributions of Jemi Chew, who he named as the Most Valuable KPA Member during the convention. Chew, news editor at the *Berea Citizen* and internship coordinator and college liaison for KPA, has played a key role in strengthening connections between professional journalists and college students across the state.

"Jemi represents the future of Kentucky journalism," Brown said. "She brings energy, ideas, and follow-through. She doesn't just talk about improving our profession. She goes out and does the work."

Brown noted that Chew has been instrumental in expanding student outreach, promoting internships, and encouraging young journalists to become active in the association.

Throughout his term, Brown worked closely with association leaders and staff during a period that included leadership changes, financial challenges, and increasing pressures on local news organizations.

## ID APP

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- Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport

- Blue Grass Airport in Lexington

- Barkley Regional Airport in Paducah

- Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport

KYTC Secretary Jim Gray said the digital ID adds convenience while protecting privacy.

Not all businesses or agencies accept Mobile ID. State law also requires drivers to show a physical license during traffic stops or crashes.

Officials say residents should always carry their hard copy license or ID, even if they choose to use Mobile ID.

Once verified, the Mo-

bile ID becomes active and ready to use where accepted.

Merchants who choose to accept Mobile ID can use a free "Mobile ID Verify App." The two apps communicate securely by Bluetooth, and users can approve or deny what information is shared.

Officials say Kentucky Mobile ID is the first step toward future digital wallet options, such as Apple, Google or Samsung wallets.

Those will not be launched until Kentucky completes a major modernization of its driver licensing system this summer.

More information is available at [drive.ky.gov/mobile-id](http://drive.ky.gov/mobile-id).

