

Reviving Lewis County: Looking Ahead Together An Editorial

By Dennis K. Brown

Over the past several weeks, *The Lewis County Herald* has published a series examining the opportunities and challenges that will shape our county's economic future.

From transportation and energy to workforce development and infrastructure, the goal has been simple: to provide clear, practical information that helps our community think seriously about where we are and where we are headed.

This series was never intended to promote a single project, industry, or proposal. It was designed to encourage understanding. Strong communities are not built on headlines alone. They are built on preparation, consistency, and informed decision-making over time.

Lewis County has faced its share of challenges. Like many rural communities, we have experienced the loss of major employers, population

shifts, and economic uncertainty.

Those experiences have shaped us. But they do not have to define our future. Our history shows resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to work together when circumstances demand it.

One theme has appeared repeatedly throughout this series: readiness matters. Communities that succeed in attracting investment and opportunity do not rely on chance.

They invest in reliable infrastructure. They maintain dependable utilities. They prepare sites. They develop their workforce.

They plan for growth before it arrives.

These efforts often take place quietly, long before any announcement is made.

Equally important is the role of community engagement. Economic development does not happen in isolation. It reflects local priorities, val-

ues, and expectations.

Productive conversations, even difficult ones, help ensure that progress aligns with the character and needs of the people who live here.

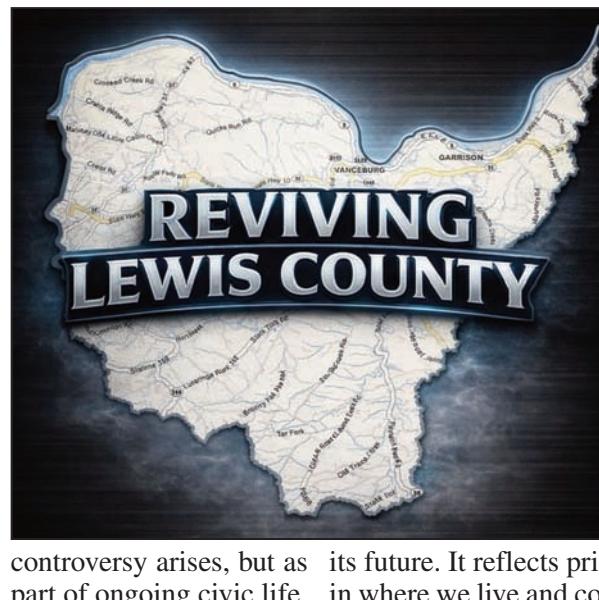
The purpose of this series has been to encourage those conversations. Not to provide all the answers, but to help frame the questions.

What kind of growth do we want? What investments are necessary to support it? How do we balance opportunity with quality of life?

These are questions best addressed together, with patience and perspective.

As a local newspaper, *The Herald* has a responsibility to inform, to explain, and to provide a forum for thoughtful discussion. We are committed to continuing coverage of issues that affect Lewis County's long-term well-being.

That includes reporting on infrastructure, public policy, workforce development, and economic planning, not only when



controversy arises, but as part of ongoing civic life.

Reviving a community is not a single event. It is a process. It unfolds through steady effort, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Progress is rarely immediate, but it is achievable when citizens, businesses, and public leaders work with a common purpose.

We are encouraged by the interest this series has generated and by the thoughtful responses it has received. That engagement reflects a community that cares about

its future. It reflects pride in where we live and concern for the next generation.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Sam Howard for his thoughtful research, clear analysis, and steady commitment to presenting these issues in a way that serves the best interests of Lewis County.

His work on this series reflects a genuine desire to see our community grow stronger and more prepared for the future.

As someone who has spent most of his life reporting on this community and working alongside its people, I remain confident in our ability to meet challenges with determination, integrity, and care for one another.

I am proud to call Lewis County home, and I believe our best days are still ahead.

HB 447

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He cited examples including cardiac monitors costing more than \$46,000, power cots exceeding \$33,000, and ambulances ranging from \$150,000 to \$500,000 before equipment is added. Annual maintenance contracts and rising medical supply costs further strain budgets.

"These are not optional expenses," Sparks said. "They are required to meet state standards and save lives."

When insurance reimbursements are delayed, denied, or paid at low rates, counties are left to absorb the difference, he said.

Many rural counties lack the tax base or financial reserves to do so.

House Bill 447 would require insurers to reimburse out-of-network emergency ambulance providers at the local government's established rate, if one exists, or at the lesser of 400 percent of the Medicare rate or the provider's billed charges.

The bill would also limit patient cost-sharing and prohibit surprise billing for emergency transports.

Raymer said insurers often pay less than half the cost of ambulance services, shifting the burden to local governments.

"When that happens, the shortfall does not disappear," Raymer said. "It falls on taxpayers."

Sparks said the bill addresses one of the main causes of EMS instability.

"Today, providers are often underpaid, delayed, or denied," he said. "Those losses add up and eventually force

providers out of rural communities."

"This bill does not create profit," he added. "It creates stability."

Health insurance representatives have raised concerns about the bill's potential impact on premiums.

The state's actuaries estimate the bill could increase premiums by about \$1.27 per person per month. That amounts to roughly \$60 to \$70 annually for a family of four.

"This is just one of many insurance mandate bills that have been filed this session that would hike premiums. Legislators should know that they are going to be pushing more people to the Medicaid rolls by making

private insurance unaffordable for working families," said a spokesman for Kentucky Association of Health Plans.

Industry officials say the added costs could affect working families already facing rising health care expenses.

Supporters of the bill argue that communities are already paying far more through local taxes and subsidies to keep ambulance services operating.

House Bill 447 is currently assigned to the House Banking and Insurance Committee and has not yet been scheduled for a hearing.

Sparks said he hopes lawmakers will act before more communities face service disruptions.

"House Bill 447 gives other counties a fighting chance," Sparks said. "It protects patients, supports first responders, and helps ensure that when someone calls 911, help is coming."

Lewis County, he noted, was able to build a local solution through significant investment and community support.

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HB 50 was approved on a 92-0 vote.

The two measures now head to the Senate.

"They expressed apprehension, so we addressed their concerns and drafted this bill in response," Callaway said. "We wanted to be clear that LMPD is covered and included as a consolidated local government. We wanted to ensure proper

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