

PUBLIC

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zoning meeting, Protect McCracken County planned to speak during public comment. Earlier in the week, they posted an announcement saying they would present a draft ordinance listing environmental protections and regulations they wanted the committee to consider.

“We were trying to put together these model ordinances just to, like, submit to the planning commission so that they could take a look at them,” Erica Moore, co-founder of Protect McCracken County, said. “We don’t want to, like, stop the projects. You know, projects are moving forward, and jobs are coming, but we can do it safely.”

Several members came to the meeting intending to speak but were surprised when the committee didn’t move to the public comment section on the agenda. Previously, the group has been able to speak or present documents to the commission. Greg Cannon, the commission’s administrator, said changing the bylaws has been discussed before.

“This has been discussed for several years, and we finally updated



BRYCE ANGLIN | The Sun

Moments after it was clarified that there would be no public comment, Christa Dubrock stood up and asked to speak directly to the commissioners. However, the commissioners did not speak to the public.

the bylaws and came in line with the same policy that the fiscal court has,” Cannon said. “It’s just such a large agenda. Adding something to it is difficult, but not saying it’s impossible or can’t happen. But notify us. We’ll look at what they’re wanting to talk about, and let them know about speaking at the meeting.”

Now, community members must submit their public comment before the meeting for approval. However, community members who attended the meeting intending to speak

were shocked when they couldn’t. When the meeting adjourned, community members addressed commissioners directly, asking for a chance to speak since they were unaware of the changes. However, the commissioners left and did not address the concerns. Cannon explained the new process, but Moore said it was frustrating to not hear directly from commissioners.

“They all rushed out of the room really quickly, which was very disappointing, and they weren’t given any of the information that we had

put together for them at all,” she said.

Christa Dubrock, a McCracken County resident, left work early to attend the meeting. She was one of the community members who tried to speak directly to commissioners as they were leaving. She said the situation was discouraging.

“They’re here to represent us, and to me, they should at least say, ‘No, we’re not going to take public comment,’ but there was nothing. I had to be the one to stand up to say, ‘What’s going on here?’ ” Dubrock said. “They didn’t address

anyone, and didn’t look us in the eye, didn’t even acknowledge us when I was asking them questions.”

Jane Muklewicz, another McCracken County resident, said she was confused when reading the agenda because it had listed an item as “public hearing.” However, when she asked for clarification, she was told that because nothing was listed under the item, it was to be skipped. She said the county should have announced the new bylaw to avoid confusion.

“It would be very, very thoughtful of you if you

would put this out to the public, transparency, so that they know what they have to do if they want to come and speak,” Muklewicz said. “You tell me why you don’t want us to speak, and leave it at that.”

Some members questioned how the commission can dismantle public comment. Amye Bensenhaver, a retired Kentucky assistant attorney general, said that under the Kentucky Open Meetings Law of 1974, public comment is not guaranteed.

“Because the open meetings law does not guarantee, and in fact, does not even address the public’s right to make a contribution or to speak at a public meeting or any kind of public input, because the law does not address that,” she said. “There is no enforceable right to do that.”

While the procedural hurdles do not violate state law, she said the public has provided more input regarding the data center. She said public comments allow county leaders to hear the community’s concerns directly. She said public comment is generally optional, but recommended.

“At this point, they’re exploiting the fact that it’s not required,” she said.

HUB

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day-to-day principal duties, a big part of the position is building relationships with industry partners to pipeline students into high-demand, high-wage jobs in the region.

“A big part of the driving factor here for me is to bring our talent back to Paducah by design, and not by chance,” Ybarzabal said. “Paducah city schools have been around for over 160 years, and we’ve been exporting talent to big cities all across the country and world for all those years. The only way we build a better Paducah is to bring that talent home or keep it here, and so that’s a big part of what we do at the Hub every day.”

Ybarzabal said that with many high-profile industry projects being developed in Paducah and McCracken County, it’s an exciting time to see so many opportunities for students and to help them find their way.

“When I was principal at Clark Elementary, I was sort of on the other end of the education spectrum,” he said. “I had young children coming in as five-year-olds, and they’re learning to read, and they’re building a foundation. Whereas here, we’re helping kids find what they’re passionate about and how they can make a career of that, and connecting them to regional industry partners, and it’s just really exciting to see.”

Ybarzabal said one of the most rewarding aspects of his role at the Hub is seeing students discover and pursue career paths they’re passionate about.

“We have the ability to open kids’ eyes to things that are not even on their radar,” he said. “Like connecting them to schools outside of the state that offer unique pathways for them and very unique skill sets that they can bring back to the community, and I think that’s exciting — that kids go out and get these real-world experiences, gain this knowledge, earn the credentials, and bring that back.”

He shared an example of a student he spoke with just prior to his interview with The Sun.

“He graduated last year,” Ybarzabal said. “We set him up with a co-op with Ingram Barge. He’s a full-time employee at Ingram now, and he was just coming in to check in with us and let us know that he’s gotten a promotion and raise; he’s making good money, happy doing what he’s doing, and it’s exciting to see a student that I had as a kindergartner at Clark now as a young adult being successful in our community.”



KENNA WILLIAMS | The Sun

Local leaders gather on the new playground during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Reidland Community Center on Aug. 25.

REIDLAND

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playground is meant to be accessible for all children — including younger children, athletic kids, nonathletic kids and children with disabilities.

“Playgrounds support mental and emotional health,” he said. “Outdoor play reduces stress and improves moods; it gives the children an opportunity to express their imagination and creativity.”

Reflecting on the years of working toward the project, Clymer shared that the installation of a playground at the Reidland Community Center had been “a long time coming.”

“You think maybe these things wouldn’t take too long or whatever, but a lot of planning goes into it,” he said. “We want to make sure it’s nice; we want to make sure it’s something the Reidland community, and the whole county, can be proud of.”

Alongside Reidland’s new addition, the Paducah Sports Park will also be holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony in the near future.



KENNA WILLIAMS | The Sun

Community members try out the new slide at the Reidland Community Center playground on Aug. 25.

Although the Sports Park is a larger project, Clymer said the playground is still important and a place that the entire Reidland community can walk — or drive — to and enjoy.

“The aspect of it being a dog park adds to that,” Clymer said. “It’s just one of the little amenities that makes a community nicer and more enjoyable for the people, and we’re glad to be able to do that for the people — it’s

just a nice place where people can come and bring their children, their dogs, and enjoy the afternoon [or] morning.”

Clymer added that, when he first came into office seven years ago, the county faced financial instability. However, he claimed that its finances are now back on track, allowing the county to pursue projects such as these.

“We are now stable. With-

out having taken certain steps, we wouldn’t have had the money to be able to do even a relatively small project like this,” he said.

Clymer also described Tuesday’s ribbon cutting as “rewarding,” especially after the project had been in the works for so long.

“I think it’s something that people can be proud of and enjoy it for decades out here,” he said.