

Mayor, City of London file lawsuit regarding ethics board appointments

BY MACEE SWAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

LONDON — Mayor Randall Weddle and the City of London have filed a lawsuit in Laurel Circuit Court seeking a judicial declaration clarifying the legal authority of the mayor and city council in appointing members to the city’s Ethics Board, while also requesting a temporary restraining order halting the board’s activities.

The lawsuit was filed last Friday, Feb. 20, by London City Attorney Larry Bryson on behalf of Mayor Weddle and the City.

Named as defendants are the London Ethics Board, Jane Winkler Dyche and Mandy Bargo; the London City Council; and individual council members Kelly Greene, Judd Weaver, Jim Baker, Justin Young, Donna House, and Anthony Ortega (who recently resigned), each listed in their individual and official capacities.

In the filing, the mayor and city

ask the court to declare the legal rights and obligations of the mayor and council in the ethics board appointment process, to declare the appointments of Dyche and Bargo void, and to invalidate any actions taken by the Ethics Board at its Feb. 19 meeting.

The lawsuit also seeks a temporary restraining order prohibiting the Ethics Board from conducting hearings or making further appointments until the court can hear the matter.

According to the complaint, the appointments were made while Tracie Handley was serving as acting mayor during Mayor Weddle’s impeachment last September. The lawsuit asserts that Handley lacked legal authority to appoint ethics board members and that the appointments were made without a lawful quorum, rendering subsequent actions invalid.

The filing contends that under KRS 83A.080, non-elected ethics

board members are to be appointed by the mayor, subject to council approval, and that no statute authorizes the city council or the Ethics Board itself to make such appointments.

The lawsuit further reports that actions taken by an unlawfully constituted board are void under Kentucky law.

Mayor Weddle and the city argue that allowing the Ethics Board to continue operating in its current form would cause “immediate and irreparable injury and harm” to the City of London — citing public confusion regarding the legitimacy of the board, uncertainty surrounding ethics decisions and damage to public confidence in city government.

The lawsuit also references Mayor Weddle’s prior impeachment by the London City Council, noting that those actions were overturned by the Kentucky Court of Appeals, which affirmed that Weddle re-

mains the duly elected mayor of the City of London.

The filing asserts that actions taken during the period of impeachment, including ethics board appointments, were therefore without legal effect.

Additionally, the complaint points to upcoming municipal elections, stating that ethics board appointments carry terms of at least three years and could extend into the tenure of a future city council, potentially binding future elected officials.

Both city council attorneys issued statements in response to the lawsuit.

“In regards to the recent lawsuit, the immediate and irreparable harm is that he does not allow this legal board to function. There has been an outpouring of constituent calls wanting to file ethics complaints in regards to the NCIC issue, and even more calls on the Harless issue [in reference to the December 2024

London Police officer-involved fatal shooting],” said Council Attorney Christy Shannon. “And while I do not contend that the ethics board would have authority over these complaints, that would be unknown until the complaints can be reviewed and evaluated by the board.”

Council Attorney Chris Wiest also commented on the filing.

“It is a silly, contrary-to-law, lawsuit and we will respond in the next couple weeks,” said Wiest. “But, it does present an excellent opportunity to seek appropriate deflatory relief counterclaims against the Mayor for continuing violations of a number of city ordinances.”

The case is now pending before Laurel Circuit Court, where a special judge will determine whether to grant the requested temporary restraining order and issue declaratory relief regarding the authority of the mayor, city council and ethics board.

Festivals, Fairgrounds and Funding: Tourism officials discuss upcoming events, planning for future

BY NITA JOHNSON
CORRESPONDENT

LONDON — Progress on the fairgrounds development, World Chicken Festival and local Chamber of Commerce were topics of discussion during Tuesday, Feb. 25’s monthly meeting of the London-Laurel Tourist Commission.

Jamie Harrison, county tourism board chair, said he could not call the meeting to order or could not take votes as only three board members were present and four were needed for a quorum.

Despite the lack of a quorum of board members, those present heard from City Tourism Director Chris Robinson, Fairgrounds Director Christina Sowders and Chamber Director Deanna Herrmann regarding upcoming events and future planning for the Fairgrounds property.

Sowders said her office at the fairgrounds property was scheduled for delivery last week and that several events were already scheduled for the property now known as the Wilderness Road Event Center. The ASA tournament is set for late May and the return of the “county fair” is set for July. Sowders said that much work is

left to be done before the county fair and other events can take place, including parking areas and clearing of rubbish remaining from the tornado from May 2025. She explained that the company that cut and removed the fallen trees from the park and fairgrounds property “took what was good and left the rest.” Much of the back part of the fairgrounds property still has debris caught in them as well as many of the lanes used for the ASA tournament.

“We’ve gone out and looked at them and moved some of the lanes away from the power lines,” she added.

Further development of the property for future events, such as barns for Agriculture shows and fairs is also a financial concern — one which was presented to both London City Council members and city and county tourism officials last month.

“Your support would be appreciated,” Robinson said.

Kim Collier, Executive Director of the London Laurel Tourist Commission, agreed that development of the property is essential.

“We need a place to have events,” she said.

Harrison reiterated that the budgets of the two tourism

commissions were vastly different. The county tourist commission is funded through a 3% transient tax charged on hotels, motels and short-term rentals totaling around \$700,000 per year. The city tourism commission is funded by the 3% restaurant tax, which generates an estimated \$16 million per year.

“As we’ve said, our budgets are vastly different,” Harrison added.

Collier, however, said she sees the need for the two tourism commissions to work together.

“I’ll have to discuss it with the board but I think we can commit to \$500 a month for five years,” she said.

Sowders added that the goal for the fairgrounds property is to generate enough revenue through events to be self sustainable.

“But we can’t have events until we get bathrooms and other things to host multi-day events,” she said. “We need a full access road and improvements on the property like barns for Ag Fairs. That will be Phase III of the project.”

The water stations used for events such as the ASA tournament were destroyed in the tornado as well, with tourism officials searching for coolers, tables and chairs to host this year’s event.

Deanna Herrmann, Executive Director of the London-Laurel County Chamber of Commerce also gave a report to county tourism officials. Herrmann said the next Chamber Luncheon will be on Thursday, Mar. 18. The chamber is partnering the first week of March with the school system for Read

Across America Week celebrating Dr. Seuss, a children’s author whose stories have remained popular throughout the years. Herrmann said local officials go into the classrooms and read books during that week, which also exemplifies the chamber’s focus on reading. That is enhanced by the chamber paying for postage for children under age 5 to receive an age-appropriate book each month through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

“The Chamber pays the postage on the books and we spend around \$4,000 a month,” she said. “We’re always seeking sponsors for that because some cities have run out of money for it.”

The chamber office will be moving into the former theater space at Heritage Hills and construction for that project is

underway.

Herrmann also outlined some of the other programs sponsored by the chamber. Those include Women in Business and Miss Business — a program that brings high school business students for an all-day seminar with female business leaders for workshops on completing resumes, dos and don’ts for job interviews, and Work Ready program that prepares students for immediate entry into the workforce after high school graduation.

The Redbud Ride, set for April, was also discussed, with a planning meeting set for the last week of February.

The London-Laurel Tourist Commission hosts its monthly meetings on the third Tuesday of each month at 12 noon at the Heritage Hills office off Tom Jensen Highway.

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