

EDDY NFOR / STATE JOURNAL

From the left, Whitney Potter Schwartz, interim president of Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) and Gov. Andy Beshear engage in a chat before the announcement.

Beshear launches Office of Outdoor Recreation

State Journal staff report

Gov. Andy Beshear joined state officials at Cove Spring Park on Tuesday to announce the formation of the Kentucky Office of Outdoor Recreation.

The office will aid in expanding outdoor opportunities and attract more visitors to the commonwealth. Prior to the announcement, the governor signed an executive order creating the office "to help sustain, manage, and grow our outdoor recreation opportunities through education and local support."

"Our record-breaking $14.6 billion tourism industry is essential to our commonwealth's success, and outdoor recreation is a major driver that this industry and our local communities depend on. The new Office of Outdoor Recreation will expand on opportunities from east to west and north to south to attract more visitors to our New Kentucky Home and further support jobs, local businesses and communities across our commonwealth," the governor said.

Seth Wheat, director of interpretation and engagement for Kentucky State Parks, is set to serve as the office's executive director.

"This is an exciting day for the commonwealth. Outdoor recreation positively impacts so many aspects of life here in Kentucky, and I am eager to help grow this important industry," Wheat said. "With the governor's announcement today, Kentucky is showing its commitment as a place that values outdoor recreation for all the positive economic, physical, and cultural benefits it brings."

Beshear touted the qualities that make Wheat capable of leading the new office.

"Seth brings a wealth of knowledge and hands-on experience as director of interpretation and engagement for Kentucky State Parks," the governor noted. "Seth's background in tourism, specifically outdoor recreation, will help elevate this office and find entirely new opportunities that will take us to the next level."

In addition, the office will oversee the Kentucky Trail Program, a tourism and economic development initiative designed to provide communities with a strategic plan to capitalize on recreational opportunities. The program currently has 32 participating communities that have publicly committed to sharing their outdoor opportunities, culture, history, and stories with guests.

"This office will help connect communities with the resources and support they need to develop outdoor recreation experiences and create new economic opportunities," Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet Secretary Lindy Casebier added. "We appreciate Gov. Beshear's continued investment in Kentucky's tourism industry, making the commonwealth a premier place to visit, work, and live."

Ranking: Salato Wildlife Education Center among state's best attractions

State Journal staff report

A recent ranking of Kentucky's attractions based on Google reviews rated the Salato Wildlife Education Center among the state's best.

The analysis, which was conducted by seobacklinks.com, found that Salato earned 4.76 stars from 1,369 reviews. It placed eighth in the ranking.

To build the ranking, seobacklinks.com ran more than 32,000 Google Maps searches for visitor attractions across the U.S. on Nov. 2 and 3, then searched by name for well-known attractions the first sweep had missed. The analysis kept the 50 attractions in Kentucky with at least 1,000 Google reviews, 250,729 reviews in all: museums, historic sites, arboretums, gardens, nature preserves, parks, caves, a zoo, an aquarium, and a scenic railway. Each was ranked by its exact average rating, worked out from its count of one, two, three, four and five-star reviews rather than the rounded score Google displays. Shops, restaurants, hotels, theaters and event venues, sports, leisure and play venues, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, seasonal events and natural features with no visitor site, such as beaches and lakes, were left out. Ratings for the attractions listed below were checked again on Nov. 17.

Crystal Onyx Cave in Cave City is the best-rated visitor attraction in Kentucky, according to an analysis of Google reviews. The cave averages 4.89 stars from 2,934 reviews, ahead of the Hidden River Cave & American Cave Museum in Horse Cave (4.85 from 3,281) and the Bernheim Forest and Arboretum in Clermont (4.84 from 6,798).

Visitors' reviews show why it comes out on top. In 49 recent five-star reviews of the cave, 36 praise the tour guides and 11 praise the cave formations. One visitor wrote in September 2026, "Our guide was excellent, making it fun while filling us with education."

Ark Encounter is the most-reviewed attraction, placing 22nd of the 50 with a 4.69 average from 42,159 reviews. Mammoth Cave National Park is 21st with 4.70 from 12,950 reviews, while Newport Aquarium is 38th with 4.57 from 22,248 reviews and Creation Museum is 33rd with 4.60 from 16,082.

Oliver Weston, founder of seobacklinks.com, said: "What stands out to me is that a cave in Cave City came out ahead of major parks and Louisville museums. The top 10 covers an unusually broad mix, including caves, forests, wildlife, art, sports and Kentucky history. Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory has more than 13,000 reviews and still ranks ninth, which shows how consistently visitors respond to it. Wherever you are thinking of going, read the latest reviews first to see what recent visitors are saying," noted Oliver Weston, founder of seobacklinks.

SWIM WITH PURPOSE TO TRIPLE MATCH DONATIONS

Through Dec. 31, the Swim With Purpose (SWP) Board will triple match every donation in support of swim lessons and water safety instruction. Your $40 donation to sponsor one child's swim lessons will become $120 — enough to sponsor three children.

"Together, we can give more children the opportunity to learn to swim and stay safe in and around the water," according to a SWP press release.

Donate at www.swimwithpurpose.org.

State Journal staff report

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

To all interested citizens of the City of Frankfort,

The Kentucky Department for Local Development is accepting application materials under the 2026 HUD Community Development Block Grant Economic Development (CDBG-ED) program. The Board of Commissioners for the City of Frankfort intends to apply for financial assistance for the purpose of economic development, industrial growth, and job creation. The project is planned for 1218 Wilkinson Blvd., Frankfort, KY 40601.

The City of Frankfort will hold a public hearing prior to the submission of its HUD CDBG-ED application. The public hearing will be held at **2:00pm** on **December 9th, 2026,** in the **Commission Chambers** located in **Frankfort City Hall** (315 West 2nd Street, Frankfort, KY 40601).

The purpose of the HUD CDBG-ED public hearing is to obtain views of the public on housing and community development needs, review proposed activities, review the proposed application, and solicit public comments. For the HUD CDBG application, technical assistance is available to help groups representing low- and moderate-income persons in developing proposals.

The following information concerning the CDBG-ED program is available for public inspection (during regular business hours) in the Office of the Mayor:

A. Amount of funds available under the HUD program and the permissible range of activities.

B. Estimated amounts of funds proposed to be used for activities benefiting persons of low and moderate income.

C. Plans for minimizing displacement of persons as a result of activities associated with CDBG funds and plans for providing assistance to those persons to be actually displaced as a result of CDBG-funded activities.

D. Records regarding the past use of CDBG funds.

E. A summary of other important program requirements.

COMMENTS ON APPLICATION:

A copy of the CDBG application material will be on file at the office of the Mayor for citizens' review and comment during regular business hours from **November 29th, 2026,** to **December 9th, 2026.** Comments on the proposed application may be submitted to the attention of Mayor Layne Wilkerson, 315 W. 2nd Street, P.O. Box 697, Frankfort, KY 40601 until **2:00pm** on **December 9th, 2026.**

DISCRIMINATION CLAUSE:

The City of Frankfort does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion or disability, and provides, upon request, reasonable accommodation, including auxiliary aids and services, to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in all services, programs and activities. Any persons requiring special needs assistance should contact City Hall at (502) 875-8500 at least five days prior to the public hearing. The TDD number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-648-6057.

NOTE: ADA CONTACTS

Department for the Blind	1-877-KYBLIND	www.kyblind.state.ky.us
American Printing House	1-800-223-1839	www.aph.org
Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	1-800-372-2907	www.kcdhh.org
Interpreter Directory		www.hcdhh.org/access/interpdir.html
State Relay TDD Number	1-800-648-6057	

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NOTICE TO PUBLIC OF NO SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Publication Date: **November 29th, 2026**
City of Frankfort
315 W. 2nd Street, P.O. Box 697
Frankfort, KY 40601
(502) 875-8500

This notice shall satisfy a procedural requirement for the activities to be undertaken by the City of Frankfort, KY.

TO ALL INTERESTED AGENCIES, GROUPS, AND PERSONS:
On or about **November 29th, 2026**, the City of Frankfort will submit a Finding of No Significant Impact to the Department for Local Government for environmental clearance of the Community Development Block Grant under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (PL 93-383) and to undertake the proposed project if approved for funding:

Project Name: City of Frankfort 2026 CDBG-ED Project
Project Purpose: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG-ED)
Project Description: The City of Frankfort is applying for CDBG-ED funds for property acquisition. By purchasing this property at 1218 Wilkinson Boulevard, the City of Frankfort seeks to create additional opportunities for new job creation, economic development, and future industrial expansion.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The City of Frankfort has determined that the project will have no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (PL-91-190) is not required. An Environmental Review Record (ERR) respecting the within project has been made by the City of Frankfort which documents the environmental review of the project and more fully sets forth the reasons why such a statement is not required. This Environmental Review Record is on file at Frankfort City Hall, 315 W. 2nd Street, Frankfort, KY 40601 and is available for public examination and copying, upon request, at Frankfort City Hall between the hours of 8 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. No further environmental review of such project is proposed to be conducted.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

All interested agencies, groups, and persons disagreeing with the ERR decision are invited to submit written comments for consideration by the Mayor of the City of Frankfort to Frankfort City Hall. Such written comments should be received at 315 W. 2nd Street, P.O. Box 697, Frankfort, KY 40601 on or before **December 14th, 2026.** All such comments so received will be considered prior to authorizing submission of the Finding of No Significant Impact or taking any administrative action on the within project prior to the date specified on the proceeding sentence.

ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION

The City of Frankfort will undertake the project described above with CDBG funds from the Department for Local Government (DLG) under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

The City of Frankfort is certifying to the state that the Frankfort Board of Commissioners and Layne Wilkerson, in his official capacity as Mayor, consent to accept the jurisdiction of the federal courts if an action is brought to enforce responsibilities in relation to environmental reviews, decision making, and action; and that these responsibilities have been satisfied. The legal effect of the certification is that upon its approval, the City of Frankfort may use the CDBG grant funds and the state and HUD will have satisfied their responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and related laws and authorities.

Layne Wilkerson
Mayor, City of Frankfort
315 W. 2nd Street, P.O. Box 697
Frankfort, KY 40601