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Wilson's Pool Room destroyed by fire

By SCOTT WHITE
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

The Versailles Fire Department (VFD) again proved its mettle in successfully combating a significant blaze last Thursday at 137 Lexington Street, which destroyed Wilson's Pool Room (Pool Room), an iconic Lexington Street business operated by three generations of the Wilson family since 1955, and the apartments on the second floor.

There were no fatalities and only one injury, with one of the apartment residents transported to Centerpoint Health-Versailles emergency room for smoke inhalation evaluation, but was quickly released, per Woodford County EMS Director Freeman Bailey.

One dog, belonging to Pool Room owner Ben Wilson, who lives in one of the apartments, died, though his other dog was able to be rescued by Woodford County EMS.

According to Woodford County Property Valuation Administrator John Paul Coyle, the building is one of the very oldest in town, built in 1800.

VFD received the dispatch call from 911 at 6:05 a.m. and arrived at the scene with the department's newest fire engine at 6:08 a.m. Captain Josh Ritchey was in command of the shift at Station 1 on Locust Street and issued a command call to VPD Chief T.A. Rankin and Deputy Chief Brandon Brown, who both were on the scene within minutes.

Thanks to the efforts of VPD and its partners, the fire was contained and prevented from spreading to adjoining or nearby buildings in the heart of the historic downtown corridor.

The building's age, like so many other buildings clustered downtown, posed a difficult challenge for the firefighters.

"One thing I want people to understand is that the historic buildings in our downtown present significant challenges and risks to firefighters," said Rankin. "Thursday's fire was no exception."



THE VERSAILLES FIRE DEPARTMENT with assistance from 17 other Woodford and non-Woodford County first responder agencies spent over 13 hours battling the fire at Wilson's Pool Room last Thursday, July 13. Constructed in 1800, the Pool Room shares a wall with another building, also constructed in 1800. Pool Room owner Ben Wilson lost one of his dogs and his home. Three other residents were also displaced, but firefighters were able to contain the fire to one building. (Photo by Bill Caine)



VFD FIREFIGHTERS combated the July 9 fire at Wilson's Pool Room from an aerial truck. Using infrared thermal-imaging provided by a drone, VFD Chief T.A. Rankin told firefighters where to direct the water. (Photo by Albert Chandler)

In fact, Brown explained that there were two roofs on the building, which posed serious challenges in gaining access and venting – the newer one was simply constructed on top of the other. And, during the fighting, firefighters had to be evacuated from the building just before the roof collapsed.

The full night shift of firefighters, four in total, led by Ritchey, encountered heavy fire conditions involving both floors of the building. Ritchey immediately directed a "360-degree" search of the entire building, the first priority on arrival at a structure fire. He also "redispached," which alerted the two chiefs and Battalion Chief Max Davis to issue an "all call," which sends a signal that overrides muted devices to all VPD personnel, including full- and part-time and volunteer firefighters, to go to the scene. This also occurred immediately before shift change, so the second shift was able to bring the aerial fire truck to the scene within minutes.

Ritchey's team evacuated four residents, and once the search was complete, they began the initial fighting of the fire. The newest firetruck was added to the fleet two years ago by the Versailles City Council. It held 750 gallons of water, which allowed the firefighters to get to work without having to hook up to a hydrant.

"So, number one, we've done the searches; the next part is to locate the source of the fire or what's on fire," Ritchey said. "The first we saw was in the back (of the first floor of the building) where the pool tables were, and we put that

out. We then really found a decent amount of fire in the party room across from the bar, and it was in the ceiling and we started work on that."

While Ritchey's crew was inside, Rankin and Brown arrived, as well as other VPD firefighters. Rankin assessed the situation and radioed to Woodford County Emergency Management Director Drew Chandler, who was also en route to the scene, being advised about what additional support was needed to fight the fire.

Chandler said he was directed by Rankin to request an engine company (a full complement of a fire shift) and two aerial trucks to supplement what VPD had available. An engine company was needed to cover for the VPD while it and the Woodford County Fire Department (WCFD) were fighting the Pool Room fire in the event other fire calls came in. The aerials, from Anderson and Franklin counties, were used in addition to those of the VPD and the WCFD.

Chandler was also able to arrange—via the Building Emergency Response Team, or BERT, which is made up of regional first responder agencies—for Jessamine County Emergency Management Director Johnny Adams to come and deploy a drone with thermal optics and infrared technology, which Chandler said freed up VPD personnel while providing Rankin with a resource to visualize the fire and direct water flow from the ground and air.

Another example of this was a "mobile cascade system"

See additional coverage on pages 8, 13 and 14.

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Ronald Exantus to serve out his sentence and be released from custody July 29

By SCOTT WHITE
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

The Kentucky Department of Corrections issued a press release last Thursday announcing that, pursuant to state law, Ronald Exantus will have served the sentence issued by the Woodford Circuit Court and is scheduled to be released from Department of Corrections custody on July 29.

The Department said, "The Kentucky Parole Board is not releasing Exantus, and he is not being released early."

The Department went on to say that "as part of the Department's preparations for Exantus's release, on June 5, 2026, the general counsel for the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet contacted Chief Circuit Judge Jeremy Mattox, Woodford County Commonwealth's Attorney Kelli Kearney and Department of Public Advocacy Directing Attorney Josh Miller to give them an opportunity to begin involuntary

hospitalization procedures pursuant to KRS 504.030 and KRS 202A."

The Department said it "does not have legal authority to initiate involuntary hospitalization proceedings, nor to maintain custody of the inmate beyond the expiration of a valid sentence. In other words, unless a detainer or other lawful authority is entered prior to Mr. Exantus's release date, the Department will be required to release him on July 29 in accordance with applicable law."

Responding by letter to the *Sun's* request for comment, the Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts, on behalf of Judge Mattox, said Kentucky ethical rules prohibit judges from commenting on pending or possible litigation.

Similarly, Commonwealth Attorney Kelli Kearney responded to the *Sun's* request, also via letter, advising that ethical rules applicable to Kentucky prosecutors prevented her office from responding.

Planning Commission votes to prohibit data centers

Ordinance changes go to city councils, fiscal court

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

By a unanimous vote on July 9, the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission recommended the city councils in Midway and Versailles and the Woodford Fiscal Court approve a text amendment to Article VII of the zoning ordinance that prohibits data centers in the county.

Planning Director Steve Hunter noted other communities in Kentucky have dealt with data centers in various ways since the passage of House Bill 775 in the 2025 legislative session, which gave sales and use tax exemptions to data centers that locate in the state. Like other cities, Versailles City Council enacted a moratorium to prevent data centers from locating here until ordinances are amended to regulate that use.

Other uses prohibited in any zoning district are landfills and large (Type 2) battery energy storage facilities, according to the recommended text amendment. Smaller-scale (Type 1) battery storage facilities will

be a conditional use in the I-1 light industrial zoning district, according to the proposed amendments to Article VII and Hunter.

Moreover, recommended revisions to Article VII clarify language for the commercial, industrial and professional office zoning districts, including special provisions that will only allow vape shops as a conditional use in B-4 highway business districts. So the Board of Adjustments would have a public hearing on any request for a conditional use permit to open a vape shop. Four vape shops that are already open in Versailles will be grandfathered in.

RV (recreational vehicle) parks will be a conditional use in the B-5 Highway Interchange Service or I-1 light industrial zoning district, with special provisions that they shall be connected to public sanitary sewer and shall be at least 100 feet from any property line.

Revisions to the P-1 professional office district will allow residences on the first or

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GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Monday, July 20, Midway City Council at 5:30 p.m.
Monday, July 20, Board of Education at 6:00 p.m.
Tuesday, July 21, Versailles City Council at 5:30 p.m.