Woodford Fiscal Court becomes first in Kentucky to ban data centers outright

Due to out-of-state travel of White, the Sun's Wednesday print deadline, and the Fiscal Court's meeting on Tuesday last week's meeting story is being reported this week. The Sun apologizes for this delay.

By Scott White
Woodford Sun Staff
Report for America corps member

Woodford County Fiscal Court, unanimously, followed up on the quick action it took a few months ago by requesting the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission to draft a text amendment that would enact a complete ban on data centers in the unincorporated areas of the county, the geographic area it governs. With the second reading of the ordinance banning data centers at the Fiscal Court's regular meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 8, this process was concluded and is now law,

Versailles and Midway each followed the Fiscal Court's lead, making data centers illegal throughout Woodford County.

The Fiscal Court was the first municipal body in Kentucky to enact a total ban, as opposed to enacting a restrictive ordinance, which is the course other Kentucky communities have taken.

"By taking this decisive step of banning data centers, we lead Kentucky in protecting our boundaries, honoring our farm families and safeguarding the quiet character of our countryside," Kay said. "This is not about 'closing the door on technology.' It's about holding the line on a heritage we treasure, for Woodford County's future is rooted in our land and farming. We, all of us, proudly stood together to protect it."

The ban goes into effect with the publication of the ordinance in *The Woodford Sun.*

Bourbon Chase permit

During the Fiscal Court's meeting of the Committee of the Whole, which occurred immediately prior to the regular meeting, the court took up the permit request of Ragnar Racing Group (Ragnar) to use county roads for several legs of its annual two-day Bourbon Chase team run event.

Several residents and equine breeding operations near Midway opposed the permit on health and safety grounds.

Since the last Fiscal Court meeting where this issue arose, discussions were held between Ragnar, Michelle Lyons, who represented the farmer group, Kay and Magistrate Liles Taylor, which resolved the issue.

Ragnar agreed to make changes to its race rules for the leg of the race that runs along Spring Station and Woodlake roads near Midway. If a participant defecates, urinates, litters, trespasses or photographs or videos on private property, including of livestock, then the participant is automatically disqualified instead of being subjected to a "three strikes, and you are out" rule which, otherwise applies.

Ragnar will also have professional safety officers or police patrolling this leg, not volunteers, to enforce the rules.

In addition, the County Road Department will obtain and post signage along this route with these warnings. Kay confirmed with Magistrate Mary Ann Gill that before signs are purchased and the cost is known, the Fiscal Court will need to approve the expenditure.

Lyons advised the court that her group was agreeable to the granting of the permit based on the agreement of Ragnar to make these changes. She also said, "I want to thank Judge Kay and (Taylor) for really helping; we worked really hard, and I hope we can have it solved this evening."

During the regular meeting, the court approved the Ragnar permit request on the condition that it perform as agreed and the county receive the traffic safety study from the Transportation Cabinet that Ragnar is required to also obtain.

Opioid settlement fund program

County Treasurer Melody Traugott reported on the progress of the Kentucky Association of Counties (KaCO) pilot program designed to help counties invest their opioid settlement funds into effective programming. As Traugott reminded the court, Woodford County was one of 20 counties selected for the cohort, which will be meeting regularly throughout the year with an end product that will be presented at KaCO's annual convention.

"We are meeting in smaller groups, sharing our strategies, learning from peers, receiving technical advice and training," Traugott said. "We are working to develop actionable strategies at the local level."

Traugott said she will be accompanied at the next meeting by Nancy Blackford, coordinator of the Woodford County Agency for Substance Abuse Policy and Woodford County Jailer Michelle Rankin to involve their agencies in the process.

Traugott also updated the court on two opioid fund initiatives it had previously approved. The county has now partnered in purchasing five Net Devices, which are used to reduce the effects of withdrawal from opioid use for people with substance use disorders seeking recovery. She also advised that the Woodford County Health Department had filled the position of Opioid Abatement Resource Specialist, which is being funded with opioid settlement funds, and the person was to start in the next week.

Treasurer's report

Traugott reported the current balance of the county's money market account was $11,005,109.20.

Versailles City Council gets status report on Hibramble Park

By Scott White
Woodford Sun Staff
Report for America corps member

The news that came out of the Versailles City Council on Tuesday night was a status report from Mayor Laura Dake in response to a question from Councilmember Fred Siegelman about the status of the default by the owner of Highbramble Park on its obligations to the city.

Dake told the council that the City of Versailles Public Properties Corporation, a separate public entity that deals with property owned by the city, including the handling of municipal financing, met and voted against the request of the Versailles Standardbred Group, the owner of Highbramble Park located on Paynes Mill Road, which operates a harness racing training center, for an additional 60-day extension to cure its default, with the bank financing its debt service reserve repayment.

Dake told the *Sun* that a letter to this effect was sent to the bank, which starts the clock on the required action the bank needs to decide on.

Opioid grants

The council approved two grants from its share of the Opioid Settlement Fund administered by the board of the Woodford County Agency for Substance Abuse Policy (ASAP). The grants will be funded 50-50 between the city and the county from each of their shares of the fund. Both grants were already vetted, scored and recommended by ASAP.

The Life Adventure Center, a Woodford County nonprofit, was awarded a total grant of $2,709. The funds will be used to replace archery equipment used in their outdoor programming involving residents impacted by substance use disorder and related mental-health challenges, according to its grant application. The Center uses archery as a therapeutic tool as it "builds focus, emotional regulation, patience and confidence factors, which support substance abuse prevention and recovery."

The other grant recipient was Mentors & Meals, which was awarded $3,000. Councilmember Lisa Johnson, the founder and executive director of the nonprofit, presented the application and recused herself from the vote and left the council chambers while the vote was being taken. The award will cover the costs for one year of one middle school participant in the program. Johnson said the student will be from a family impacted directly by substance abuse.

Contracts

The City Council approved the following contracts: $48,000 to TIA Builders for the construction of a training center pole building for the Versailles Fire Department; $15,875 to America's Bravest Equipment Company for four sets of firefighter turnout gear; $50,699.78 to EarthworX equipment for a new brush clipper to replace a seven-and-a-half-year-old chipper, which will be sold; and $11,800 to J&T Trailers for a water/sewer equipment trailer.

Neighborhood grant

The City Council approved a Neighborhood Grant Program application from Helmsley Subdivision for $2,100 to re-mortar the stone on the subdivision's entrance wall and replace two lights at the entrance.

Allison Ball
Auditor of Public Accounts

Independent Auditor's Report

To the People of Kentucky
The Honorable Andy Beshear, Governor
Holly M. Johnson, Secretary
Finance and Administration Cabinet
The Honorable James Kay, Woodford County Judge/Executive
The Honorable John Wilhoit, Woodford County Sheriff
Members of the Woodford County Fiscal Court

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statement

Opinions

We have audited the accompanying Woodford County Sheriff's Settlement - 2024 Taxes for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025 - Regulatory Basis, and the related notes to the financial statement, which collectively comprise the Woodford County Sheriff's financial statement as listed in the table of contents.

Unmodified Opinion on Regulatory Basis of Accounting

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statement presents fairly, in all material respects, the taxes charged, credited, and paid for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025 of the Woodford County Sheriff, in accordance with the basis of accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the Commonwealth of Kentucky as described in Note 1.

Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

In our opinion, because of the significance of the matter discussed in the Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles section of our report, the financial statement does not present fairly, in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, the taxes charged, credited, and paid of the Woodford County Sheriff, for the period September 1, 2024 through August 31, 2025.

Basi for Opinions

We conducted our audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS) and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards,* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, and the *Audit Program for Sheriffs' Tax Settlements.* Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Woodford County Sheriff and to meet our other ethical responsibilities, in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audit. We believe the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinions.

Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

As described in Note 1 of the financial statement, the financial statement is prepared by the Woodford County Sheriff on the basis of accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws, which is a basis of accounting other than accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. The effects on the financial statement of the variances between the regulatory basis of accounting described in Note 1 and accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, although not reasonably determinable, are presumed to be material and pervasive.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statement

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statement in accordance with accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws. Management is also responsible for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of a financial statement that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Woodford County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for twelve months beyond the financial statement date, including any currently known information that may raise substantial doubt shortly thereafter.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statement as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinions. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not an absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with GAAS will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgement made by a reasonable user based on the financial statement.

In performing an audit in accordance with GAAS, we:

• Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
• Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statement, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statement.
• Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Woodford County Sheriff's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
• Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statement.
• Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Woodford County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant findings, and certain internal control-related matters that we identified during the audit.

Other Reporting Required by *Government Auditing Standards*

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards,* we have also issued our report dated June 24, 2026, on our consideration of the Woodford County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and on our tests of its compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts and grant agreements, and other matters. The purpose of that report is to describe the scope of our testing of internal control over financial reporting and compliance and the results of that testing, and not to provide an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting or on compliance. That report is an integral part of an audit performed in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* in considering the Woodford County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and compliance.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Ball
Allison Ball
Auditor of Public Accounts
Frankfort, Ky

June 24, 2026

State law requires the Auditor of Public Accounts to annually audit fiscal courts, county clerks, and sheriffs; and print the results in a newspaper having general circulation in the county. The complete audit and any other audit of state agencies, fiscal courts, county clerks, sheriffs, and property valuation administrators may be viewed in the reports section of the Auditor of Public Accounts' website at auditor.ky.gov or upon request by calling 1-800-247-9126.

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MIDWAY
Continued from p. 1

agreement."

Councilmember Mary Raglin asked why the Fire District is "choosing now to proceed with this?" Vandegrift said, "That might be a better question for the (Fire District), but based on their conversations with us (Vandegrift and Gold) on what could be gleaned from that, is it would give them additional tax revenue." Vandegrift said, based on the assessments of the Woodford County Property Valuation Administrator, the total annual revenues under the current rates would be $40,000.

Simoff, rhetorically perhaps, asked, "What makes the (members of the Fire District board) think this is good government?"

Councilmember Logan Nance added, "(This is) a redundant tax on a service (residents and property owners in the proposed takeover area) are already getting at a time when people are struggling."

Vandegrift said, though he could not speak for the Council, he believed he understood their feelings and positions, saying, "We are going to stand up for our firefighters, our taxpayers and our citizens." He concluded the status report saying, "We'll continue to communicate with (the Fire District) and try to convince them that the status quo is working, and if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Landlord-Tenant ordinance

Midway is on the cusp of becoming only the 18th municipality in Kentucky to adopt the "Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act" (URLTA) as an ordinance. This is a law that governs the relationship between the landlord and tenant of a residential dwelling. It provides for the rights of tenants, the obligations of landlords, and sets out a process for resolving disputes that does not involve the city itself. As Hall explained, the URLTA provides strong and enforceable protections to tenants, while also setting out the obligations tenants have in renting the space, such as permissible uses, notice of issues to the landlord and obligations for how to leave the space at the end of the lease. In short, it ensures the tenant is provided with a habitable place to live.

The proposed ordinance received its first reading at the Sept. 8 meeting. As explained by Councilmember Patrick Hall, Kentucky law permits a municipality to adopt the URLTA as a whole without any amendments.

Hall provided a detailed, yet easily understandable, explanation using a PowerPoint presentation of the law, how it works and why it is good policy for a municipality, like Midway, to enact it to govern all residential landlord-tenant rentals. This was an area that Hall saw the need for in his job as a JAG Officer for the Kentucky National Guard when soldiers had problems with their landlords. Seeing the gap in the law and the unequal power it gave to landlords, Hall decided to seek a URLTA ordinance for Midway.

In a text after the meeting, Hall said that though the recent issues with Midway School Apartments were not the trigger for the new ordinance, "I would say that (the new ordinance) is influenced by the situation there."

As Hall explained, in Kentucky, unless a city has adopted the URLTA, then the landlord has very little obligations to a tenant in terms of things like repairs and the habitability of the rental.

Instead, Kentucky is a "buyer beware" state – meaning, the tenant has the obligation to inspect the rental prior to leasing it, and if problems later arise, then the tenant has no effective remedy to require the landlord to fix the problems. The adoption by Midway of the law means this no longer applies, and instead the URLTA ordinance governs.

"(The new ordinance) gives tenants and landlords a system making the relationship more equitable so they can work out problems, which does not involve the city."

The City Council voted to hear the first reading of the URLTA ordinance. It will vote to hear the second reading at its next meeting, and, if it passes, will become law.

Golf carts

The City Council heard the second reading of the new ordinance allowing golf carts to be operated on Midway city streets, with a few exceptions. The vehicles cannot be operated on any state road, which includes Winter Street and Leestown Pike. The ordinance also forbids their use in the I-64 interchange commercial zone, Midway Station and N. Winter Street beyond Holly Hill Inn. The vehicles also cannot be operated on sidewalks, multi-use paths or in city parks.

Violations of any sort are subject to fines from $20 to $500, and repeat offenses can result in a misdemeanor charge.

The proposed ordinance received its first reading at a special meeting held Sept. 2. The use of golf carts for transporting visitors and vendors at the upcoming Fall Festival necessitated the City Council to take action. As Vandegrift explained in earlier meetings, unless a city specifically permitted the use of golf carts on its streets, Kentucky law prohibited them.

Also under Kentucky law, if a city elects to permit their use, then the ordinance must contain very specific requirements set out in statute. As Hall pointed out, "There is very little wiggle room in what a city can do in passing an ordinance; it basically spells out the requirements in the statute."

The proposed ordinance was the work of a special committee appointed by Vandegrift earlier in the summer. The committee researched options and looked at other city ordinances. The result was the ordinance, which had its second reading at last week's regular meeting.

Some of the requirements for the vehicles include: an inspection by the Versailles Police Department that the vehicle has all of the required features; seat belts which must be worn while being operated; headlights; brake and signal lights; a slow-moving vehicle placard fixed on the rear; and other items.

Vandegrift noted that the golf carts used by the Midway Merchants Association during the Fall Festival will all need to abide by these requirements.

Zoning ordinance amendments

Midway heard the second reading of its zoning ordinance, which is identical to the amendments adopted by the Woodford County Fiscal Court and Versailles City Council, banning data centers, landfills and battery facilities within its city limits.

Other business

The City Council approved a request from the Midway Merchants Association to close one side of Main Street (aka Railroad Street) for a Breeders Cup Block Party on Friday, Oct. 30.

The Council canceled its Oct. 5 regular meeting.