

Midway, a model of land use planning makes it a “unique, special” place

By SCOTT WHITE
MANAGING EDITOR

In the early 1990s, the local government of Midway was facing an existential crisis...aging infrastructure, a tiny payroll tax base, and many residents dealing with higher property taxes and city water rates. There was no one moving in, its only real payroll tax came from the tiny Midway College, and the town was even facing the loss of its historic school, long overdue for replacement, with the possibility of the new one being built near Merewood in Versailles.

But, today, Midway is a jewel.

Blessed with a de facto “moat” around its historic core by I-64 and protected farm land, Midway is now, 35 years later, on solid fiscal footing with the build-out of Midway Station, a downtown and culinary industry generating jobs and attracting tourists, two major festivals, and the transformation of the college into a university.

This did not “just happen.” It is the realization of visionary thinking, problem solving, and creative leadership by city councils and mayors, beginning with Carl Rollins and now Grayson Vandegrift. Midway is an exemplar of a new paradigm in government planning where citizen, stakeholders, policy makers, community leaders, and the business community worked together.

According to Rollins, mayor from 1990-1994 and again 1996-98, in 1990 “(the town) had no money, water bills were outrageous, the sewer plant had serious needs, and most of our infrastructure was 100-years old. Our only real payroll tax came from the elementary school and Midway College. Downtown wasn’t generating very much.” But, when a large tract of land across I-64 went up for sale by the Roach family, Rollins saw an opportunity. “The town itself (then) was not going to be able to generate the revenues we needed to address infrastructure much

less attract new, younger residents, but we worked with the Woodford County Economic Development Authority (EDA), and they purchased the land which is now Midway Station with plans to develop it into a mixed-industrial use which would expand our (payroll) tax base and give make everything more secure.”

Midway moved forward to incorporate that land within its urban service boundary and being the process of re-zoning the land from agricultural use. “We got sued by 72 people, some of who weren’t from here, to stop this. But, we moved forward because it was the only real solution,” said Rollins. “It took five years to settle and by that time the whole country was in a major economic downturn but we had laid the foundation.”

Three other pieces, all related to each other, were also part of that new foundation while respecting the essential character of the town.

Around 1990, a large tract of farm land on Leestown Pike (near the exit onto I-64) just east of Midway was sold to a developer who planned to build a residential development, what is now Northridge Estates. Being Woodford County, it met with significant opposition. Yet, a big part of why it’s plan was approved by the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission was the developer donated a significant piece of the land to the city for what became Walter Bradley Park and Northside Elementary, which was opened in 1992,

“Northridge turned out to be positive because it gave us an influx of new residents, lots of young families, and the expected increase in children helped us persuade the school board to keep a school in Midway,” Rollins explained. This area was also brought into the Midway urban service boundary – providing new housing while not disturbing the historic neighborhoods with the park and school forming a “bridge” to the new

section of the city.

“Keeping a school in Midway was critical,” said Rollins, “The school board wanted to close and sell Midway Elementary and build a new school close to Merewood. We got some good advice from the Superintendent then, and we formed a small group to persuade the school board to keep it in Midway, and that became Northside Elementary.” Northside now has a student population of 380, and is rated 188 of 703 elementary schools in Kentucky by US News.

Thanks to this planning, when the economy began recovering Midway Station began attracting light industry and commercial companies like Lakeshore Learning, Dever Golf Cars, and several bourbon storage facilities, all adding to the tax base with several hundred new jobs and more on the horizon.

All while still maintaining the essence of what makes Midway, as current Mayor Vandegrift says, a very, special, unique place.

Vandegrift, now has served two rounds as mayor from 2016 - 2023, and May, 2024 to the present, also says the leadership of Rollins and others was critical, “(Midway’s success) is a series of good leaders, you know there has always been differences of opinion on how to do the specifics, Midway is very unique, people use that word a lot, but we really are.” Creating Midway Station, creating Walter Bradley Park and the new school as part of a large, successful residential development, built the foundation for the city’s current success.

“Midway punches above its weight,” Vandegrift says. “A great example I’m really proud of is the new water supply agreement with the Frankfort Plant Board. It came from looking and planning long term, and we began exploring it in 2019.” The new agreement, which is now being constructed, provides Midway’s water utility with a water supply at half the cost of Kentucky-American Water Company (KAWC),

and protects residents from the regular rate increases KAWC was passing on nearly every year.

Vandegrift also appointed a task force to identify a possible company interested in building a distillery in or around Midway given the town’s integral history in the development of the industry. This led to the opening of Bluegrass Distillery’s new craft, single stack distillery at Elkwood Farm off Leestown Pike in the Spring of 2025.

Another significant event was the sale of the land which became part of Midway Station from Homer Freely, adding another 138 acres and on which Lakeshore Learning, Woodford County’s second largest employer after the school board, now sits. But, part of that transaction included the gift to the city of 14 acres on the far eastern end of the Station abutting the S. Elkhorn Creek.

“I don’t want to get ahead of myself, but the city park board is looking at what we can do with that land,” Vandegrift said. “It may be more like trails and creek access, but

who knows. It will, though, be in keeping with our approach of if we are a small city and that is intentional . . . we want to be small.”

Another recent addition to the city’s park system is Blue Jay Park behind the old Midway School (which is now part of Ouita Michel’s culinary empire and apartments). “Blue Jay Park has been a big addition to our system and provides that side of town with green space, I see kids playing over there all the time. Vandegrift pointed out, “great communities have great parks, and we are committed to that.”

The issue of affordable housing is also on Vandegrift’s and the council’s radar. “No one wants to see another farm sold and a 300 house development go in,” he said. “Our philosophy as a community and local government is we want to stay small, that is Midway’s identity . . . we think there are buildable locations inside the urban service boundary where there already is the necessary infrastructure.. Now, I can’t speak for the council, but if an

opportunity came up, it was a small plan, and was contiguous to the city limit, then we might be willing to consider something like that, I think we’d have an obligation as the elected body to do that, but what we want, and what can be used, are buildable areas already in the city.”

Thinking about what it was like in Midway forty years ago, Rollins chuckled over an experience he had just a few days ago. “I was coming west on I-64 and it was early. Traffic on the (Midway I-64) ramp was really backed up.” he said. “Folks who know me, aren’t surprised if I complain about something, but, had to laugh, I sure couldn’t complain about getting in that traffic because it was all going over to Midway Station.”

And, to make it even more perfect, and visionary, it wasn’t turning left to go into historic Midway, instead it was going into the new part of Midway which is helping keep the town a small, unique place which makes all of Woodford County proud.

Hunter tells overflow crowd: no truck stop is coming

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

During a Nov. 13 public hearing on proposed changes to the zoning ordinance for Versailles, Midway and Woodford County, Planning Director Steve Hunter told an overflow crowd that he didn’t know how the rumor started, but no truck stop is coming to Versailles.

“I can say with 100 percent certainty there is not a truck stop coming to Versailles. There’s not a zone change that’s been filed. There’s not a project that’s been submitted,” Hunter said.

“We’ve been getting emails and texts and getting a beating on Voices of Versailles,” he said, “but I can tell you there’s no project and what we’re putting in the ordinance (a definition for truck stops) is 100 percent to deter potentially a future (truck stop) use coming to our town.”

He then added that the ordinance language being added for truck stops would limit that use to industrial zoning districts, and there is currently no industrial land available.

Hunter said a development south of town on Troy Pike will have a convenience store



AN OVERFLOW CROWD filled the second-floor courtroom of the Woodford County Courthouse for a Nov. 13 hearing on proposed amendments to the zoning ordinance that would increase the density in residential zoning districts. People voiced their opposition to those changes during the Planning Commission hearing, while others supported the changes for in-family land conveyances. (Photo submitted)

on two acres and some apartments, but not a truck stop.

HOUSING

Continued from p. 1

properties with more than 30 acres, which will significantly reduce the number of rural lots being created on land zoned for agriculture uses, Hunter said. One in-family lot, which must be at least two acres, could be created as a conditional use on 32 to 49 acres, with two lots allowed on 50 or more acres.

Additionally, rural residential developments would become a conditional use in the ag zone.

The recommendation to approve the in-family language will go to Woodford Fiscal Court and the city councils for a final vote that would enact the changes.

Residents of the county voiced their support for amending the ordinance to protect rural land during the hearing.

“Our intent is to love the land, enjoy the land, live on the land and keep the land,” said Ann Bakke. She described herself and others in the crowd as first-generation Woodford Countians who do not “want this land divided up further.”

Citing an objective in the Comprehensive Plan, Hunter said residential growth is encouraged within the urban service boundary, while residential growth outside the boundary is discouraged to preserve the rural character.

Hunter began by giving an overview of the proposed changes to Articles II and VII of the zoning ordinance, referencing a PowerPoint presentation he gave two days earlier during a meeting with some residents of south Woodford County.

His presentation included background information about how the commission got to this point, noting that the proposed text amendments have been in the works for two years.

Hunter noted the commission asked Woodford Fiscal Court to impose a moratorium on creating smaller in-family lots on agricultural land while they worked on amending what was described as an exemption to the county’s 30-acre rule.

The moratorium, which was not enacted, was supported by the Agricultural Advisory Review Board. That body, whose members are appointed by the county, wrote, “This is an unintended consequence of decisions in the mid-1990s that created the rural residential zone and continued to permit the in-family conveyances. The purpose of these two decisions was to protect our most valued and productive resource, our agriculture land ... while maintaining the tradition of family farming in Woodford County. Yet the evidence is clear, these strategies have failed.”

Based on the building permits issued in the county (outside the urban service area) from 2016 to 2025, 321 homes had been

constructed in the agricultural zones over those 10 years, according to Hunter.

And during the two-plus years since discussions began to amend the in-family ordinance, “We keep losing land,” said Lori Garkovich, who serves on the Ag Advisory Review Board.

Midway lot rezone

The commission recommended that Midway City Council approve the rezoning of .456-acre at 341 North Winter Street in Midway from R-2 two-family residential to R-3 medium density residential in order to create three single-family lots. Two of the lots will front North Winter Street and the other will front First Street.

Property owners Antony and Natalee Johnson-Bayes are planning to remove an existing home in disrepair. Johnson-Bayes told the commission that the proposed lots are similar in size to neighboring lots.

Neighbor Robin Barry told the commission that she does not want three houses on the lot next door to her lot because “it seems like too much.”

In response to a question from Commissioner Whitney Stepp, Johnson-Bayes said they will not pursue a conditional use permit to operate a short-term rental in any of the homes, and agreed to make that a condition of the zone change.

Paynes Crossing

The commission approved a minor plat that subdivides a 39.522-acre tract at 462 Abingdon Avenue in order for a sale of that property, which is a portion of the Paynes Crossing subdivision being developed on the south side of Lexington Road. Ball Homes, which is developing lots in Unit 1 of the subdivision, is selling the 39.522-acre tract to another developer, Hunter said.

He noted that 518 lots were approved during the rezoning of the Paynes Crossing property to single-family residential, and homes are now being built and sold in Unit 1. The lots are located to the east of Gleneagles subdivision.

Consolidation plats

The commission approved a consolidation plat allowing the Woodford County Fire Protection District to consolidate three lots and create a .855-acre lot at 61 Big Sink Road.

The commission approved a consolidation plat allowing Robert and Sheila Wade to consolidate 10.425- and 6.375-acre land parcels to create a 16.8-acre lot at 5088 Delaney Ferry Road. The property is zoned agricultural.

Chair ending her tenure

Before next month’s meeting, the commission will host a reception for its Chair Patty Perry. It’ll be Perry’s final meeting because she isn’t seeking to be appointed for another term.



The Woodford County Courthouse and county government offices and agencies give the following closure notices in observance of the Thanksgiving Holiday:

**Wednesday, November 26, 2025
open half-day, closing at noon**

Thursday, November 27, 2025 – closed

Friday, November 28, 2025 – closed

Please note the Woodford County Courthouse will close at 4 p.m. on Friday, December 5, 2025 to prepare for the “It’s a Wonderful Woodford Christmas Tree Lighting” on Court Street.

