

Woodford Advocacy

New group focused on giving citizens voice on land use

BY SCOTT WHITE
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Anyone familiar with the history of Woodford County knows land use and land planning are hot-button issues, and always a top concern of the citizens, landowners, developers, elected officials and no- and pro-growth advocates.

The recent proposed mixed-residential development along the Troy Pike corridor seeking to rezone the last piece of A-1 (agricultural) to R-4 (high-density residential) property in the urban service boundary, which ultimately failed, led to the creation of the newest player in the local “land wars,” Woodford Advocacy, a nonprofit organization.

However, Woodford Advocacy seeks to be something different.

Much of the previous decade’s debates were fierce, emotional battles pitting “no-growthers” against developers who were eyeing acres and acres of rural Woodford County just 20 to 30 minutes from downtown Lexington. Some examples of these emotional-laden land-use fights stretch as far back as the Sycamore Estates development in the early 1970s, or the early planning of the Bluegrass Parkway, which initially chartered a course through the farm land on Paynes Mill-Pisgah Pike-Faywood. Or, more recently, over S. Main Street’s cluster of residential developments, as far as Old Dry Ridge Road or further out at Carpenters Pike.

But Woodford Advocacy is different from the stereotypical “no growth” or “not in my back yard (NIMBY)” groups. Instead, Woodford Advocacy is neutral on growth, and holds a different purpose than opposing discrete proposed developments.

Woodford Advocacy is attempting something much different by providing a group

that centers on education and that creates a new paradigm for community engagement on land use issues.

In mid-spring, 2025, two friends, Joe Johnson, who resides in a contemporary subdivision off Old Dry Ridge Road, but who lived many years in his family’s historic home on Pisgah Pike, and Karen Isberg, who has operated Redbud Hill Farm in southern Woodford County since early 1998, began talking. Neither were aware that a new Troy Pike corridor rezoning request had been filed until they saw small signs posted in the area giving notice of a public hearing in April.

They not only saw a need to understand the proposal, but also wondered why it hadn’t received any attention, nor why people didn’t seem to know anything about it, including city officials.

The two then obtained the developers’ filings with the Versailles-Midway-Woodford County Planning Commission (Commission), met with the developer and immediately foresaw the consequences to an already bustling area, and determined that others who could be impacted by the consequences if the development was built needed to know what was being proposed.

So, they passed out flyers and put up signs at subdivision entrances with a QR code, which then landed on a website Johnson created.

“The idea was to just get factual information out about the proposal, and this is what I put on the website—the plat, the time of the Commission hearing, developer contact, things like that,” Johnson said.

“There needed to be a centralized place where correct information could be read and people could make their own minds up about it without being lobbied.” Isberg added, “People needed to be informed. Neighbors can make a difference on what

gets decided.”

This led to a large turnout at the Commission’s first hearing in April, which then led to the request being tabled to allow for additional study and public comment.

Johnson then compiled an email list of those who had signed up on the website and began moderating group meetings on Sunday nights via Zoom. During these meetings, Johnson walked folks through the approval process of a proposed development from the Commission through a potential appeal to the Versailles City Council.

“We didn’t say ‘here is your opinion,’ but instead educated them on how the process worked and how to present their views,” he said.

Johnson and Isberg also created a template for folks to use to organize their objections on paper. This helped them stay focused when speaking at the public hearing, and then they submitted this written document in the record.

“We saw education as important because if people understand what is going on, where they can make an impact, then they are more likely to get involved,” said Isberg. “People get frustrated. They don’t understand where or how they can make an impact, so what we tried to do is give them a relevant voice in what looks to a lot of people as a really complicated process.”

The large numbers who turned out and spoke at the Commission’s May meeting, and then again showed up at what was to be the deciding meeting in June, were prepared and organized: they signed up to speak, explained their concerns from the podium during the public comment part of the meeting, focusing only on objective, relevant criteria the Commission would base its decision on, avoided emotion and then submitted their completed form to make it part of the record.

As the Sun reported,

the developer withdrew his proposal.

So, with this success, what is next for Woodford Advocacy?

Since then, it has assisted folks before the Versailles City Council who demanded that the developers of Legends finish the connection of Edmonds Crossing with Huntertown Road before it could complete the last phase of that development. The City Council responded by passing a moratorium until the Commission could enact new language in the ordinance text to prevent the problem of not completing road construction. Public advocacy worked.

At the recent Nov. meeting of the Commission, Woodford Advocacy assisted a new group of citizens who had concerns about the large-scale text amendments to multiple chapters of the land use ordinances the Commission was scheduled to vote on at that meeting, which then led to the vote being tabled to allow for more study and public comment. For a third time, public advocacy worked.

“Our mission is public education and making sure there is a mechanism for meaningful public participation,” said Johnson. “We are creating a structure for citizens to participate in the decision-making of what Woodford County is and will become. Our role is to help people organize and communicate their views, not to dictate what their opinion should be.”

One of the next items on Woodford Advocacy’s “to-do list” is to work towards a system where the public has sufficient time and knowledge to be able to timely impact on these issues.

Using the pending text amendment changes as an example, Johnson said, “Where did those come from? Who is driving those? By the time anyone knew about them, they were on an agenda to be voted upon, and they are far-reaching and have significant impacts. If (the Commission) voted on those (at the Nov. 13 meeting), then there would have been zero public involvement outside of the planning staff and Commission. As a community,

we need to figure out a way the community knows what is being put on the agenda and can impact the decision-making process. . . . That just doesn’t exist now.”

Though less than six months old, Woodford Advocacy is making its presence felt as a resource for citizen engagement in the government process of land use planning.

“Some folks are saying we are anti-growth. We are not, that is not who we are or what we want to be, that is not the point,” Isberg made clear. “The message is not ‘no growth,’ but thoughtful growth that doesn’t outpace infrastructure like roads and traffic. Look, most of the people who showed up on that zone change on Troy Pike understand they live in houses because of growth, but they don’t want to become Lexington. Woodford Advocacy exists to help people who feel this way have a local resource to make their voices heard.”

For more information about Woodford Advocacy, go to <https://sites.google.com/view/woodfordadvocacy/>



WOUNDED VETERANS drove motorcycles and other modes of transportation into downtown Versailles Friday, Nov. 14. Twenty-two veterans spent time together this past weekend for their mental and physical health while participating in deer hunts, Regional Wildlife Biologist Joe Lacefield told the *Sun*. Lacefield, a resident of Woodford County, said the nonprofit Warrior Outdoor Recreation Therapy began in 2012 after he saw how spending time together benefited veterans with mental and physical injuries. Vets ate meals – prepared by local volunteers – during their week-end spent hunting private lands in Woodford, Anderson, Washington and Shelby counties. The hunts also help control the deer populations from expanding more than we want, with one-third of the meat harvested going to Kentucky Hunters for the Hungry and people facing food insecurity, Lacefield said. (Photo by Bob Vlach)



ON A FUN TRIP to New York City to see The Lion King on Broadway, visit the Statue of Liberty and more, Grandmother Jamie Kay, Mom Emily Downey, and Millie Downey showed up with a sign at the famous Rockefeller Center courtyard where The Today Show broadcasts in hopes of getting on television . . . and, did they ever! Millie and Emily met co-anchor and NBC Chief White House Correspondent Peter Alexander, who began his broadcast news career in Central Kentucky in 1997 at WKYT-TV. Clearly, Millie’s sign caught his attention! From left, Alexander, Millie and Emily. (Photo by Jamie Kay)

Woodford County Homeowners 2026 Homestead Exemption



Are you turning 65 years of age in 2026?

Will you own your Woodford County home, as of January 1?

Is this house your primary residence, as of January 1?

OR

Have you been deemed permanently & completely disabled by the Social Security Administration or Veterans Affairs?

Will you own your Woodford County home, as of January 1?

Is this house your primary residence, as of January 1?

If you answered yes to all 3 – you may be eligible for the Homestead/Disability Exemption. This exemption reduces the taxable assessment of your home by \$49,100 for 2026. Please stop by the Woodford County PVA at the Courthouse, Room 108, to apply or contact us at 859-873-4101 or JohnPaul.Coyle@ky.gov with any questions.

John Paul Coyle, Woodford County PVA

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