

Protecting farmland has been Graddy's lifelong passion

By **BOB VLACH**
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Reflecting on his career as an attorney supporting laws and local zoning ordinances to protect farmland, Hank Graddy credits putting urban service boundaries around Versailles and Midway as an early milestone in protecting land from being developed in Woodford County.

Early on, Woodford Countians supported efforts to stop the development of Gainsborough Farm, Graddy said, by coming together as Woodford Save the Land, which evolved into the Woodford Coalition. The organization's mission: "We want to save farmland. We want healthy downtowns, but we don't want to sprawl into the countryside. We want to protect the viewshed on U.S. 60," which Graddy said has been largely accomplished on the drive from Versailles to Frankfort.

Anyone who takes a drive on Old Frankfort and Pisgah pikes can't miss the beauty of those scenic corridors, Graddy said.

He said preservationists have been largely successful in protecting farmland by enacting an Equine Preserve area in north Woodford County. He also acknowledged, "We've lost parts of U.S. 60 going to Lexington."

Graddy said until the development of Edgewood Farm on U.S. 60 East moved forward, he was confident land between Kroger and The Kentucky Castle would be protected.

"We had a large crowd (that opposed rezoning Edgewood Farm from agriculture to commercial and residential). We did pack the courthouse in 2016," he said. "But ... that may have been the last time we packed the courthouse with people from across the county on one theme, protect the urban service boundary." (The courtroom on the second-floor of the courthouse was packed with an overflow crowd last Thursday, Nov. 13 for a public hearing on ordinance amendments that included language to increase the density of residential zoning districts and address concerns related to subdividing farmland with in-family land conveyances.)

"... The Edgewood defeat was a crushing defeat for me," said Graddy, "because something I believed would *not* happen happened. That is land in the Lexington and Frankfort scenic corridor, the north side of U.S. 60 ... was being opened up for new development..."

While that defeat was crushing, a lawsuit settlement did result in replacing 1,000 homes in the Edgewood plan with property being rezoned back to agriculture.

"But it is still horrifying to me that what I thought was a line that would last, failed so easily when the right forces were aligned against what I thought was the county's future," he said.

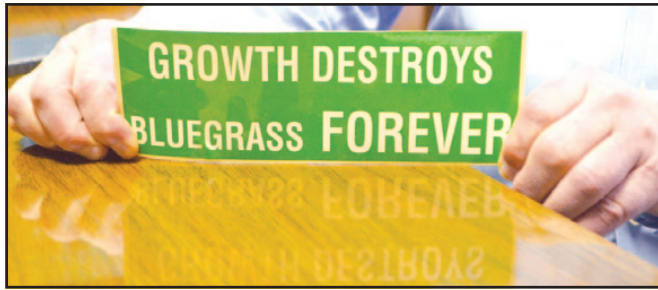
He's now hopeful that Paynes Mill Road will become the new buffer to preserve land on the north side of U.S. 60 East to The Kentucky Castle.

These days, Graddy said there's a phenomenon taking place across the country in planning and zoning.

"It is fairly easy," he said, "to get people aroused about something they see as a threat to their subdivision ... people showing up for a fight in their neighborhood happens across Kentucky," but not for broader land-use concerns.



ATTORNEY HANK GRADDY said he's optimistic about the future of Woodford County because local leaders and people coming here understand the importance of preserving and protecting farmland. "The issue of growing too fast is now teed up," Graddy said, "and I think ... the community will look at that, and we'll discuss rate of growth and making sure that we're not a place of unrestrained growth." (Photo by Bob Vlach)



HIS MOTHER KITTY was the author of "Growth Destroys the Bluegrass Forever," local attorney Hank Graddy said. The other part of what he described as the bumper sticker wars, "Growth is Good," infuriated her, he said. (Photo by Bob Vlach)

He's also optimistic that people who moved to Woodford County want to preserve the land that compelled them to come here.

"The issue of growing too fast is now teed up and I think ... the community will look at that, and we'll discuss rate of growth and making sure that we're not a place of unrestrained growth," he said.

Moreover, he said, "There is concern that we've opened the spigot a little too wide and we need to close it down a little bit, and part of closing it down was taking the houses off of Edgewood (farm property)."

Protecting farmland

Graddy said he's continued to have a steady stream of land use cases, including large ones like Edgewood and smaller ones, in Woodford County and across Kentucky since 1977.

"I've been trying to make planning and zoning work in a way that protects farmland," said Graddy, who grew up on a farm.

From an early age, he said, "It was pretty clear I was going to become a lawyer. And it was pretty clear that I was going to use my law degree to try to protect the farms."

His father and grandfather were farmers and his family has been farming in Woodford County since the early 1800s.

He said Welcome Hall Farm on Clifton Road and Greenwood Farm on Steele Road "were very important to our family, and my life strategy was I was going to get a law degree and I'm going to use my advocacy to help protect the family farm. And frankly, that has happened. I've sort of accomplished that purpose."

Graddy said he started law school at the University of Kentucky in 1972, a month before the U.S. Congress enacted the Clean Water Act. That led to a career as a land use and environmental law attorney, but his classes at UK taught students about subdividing and developing land – not how to protect farmland. "This was infuriating to me," said Graddy, who described the Clean Water Act as "one of the greatest environmental laws in our history."

Graddy said he started searching for ways to use laws to protect the farmland. "I attended conferences on land use and began to discover there is a growing discipline on farmland protection," he said.

Early in life, it was his grandmother Louise Garrett Graddy, who he described as "a passionate preservationist," who taught him to value nature and "holding onto the woods."

His mother Kitty took on advocacy for protecting farmland after marrying into the family, Graddy said. He said she was the author of "Growth Destroys the Bluegrass Forever." The other part of what he described as the bumper sticker wars, "Growth is Good," infuriated her, he said.

During those years, Graddy said there was a county-wide appreciation among people anxious to protect the farmland. "And we have put certain protections in place and they are working pretty well," he said, noting those protections have been successful in north Woodford County. In this area of the county designated as Equine Preserve, he said, "We're doing a state-of-the-art job protecting that farmland and providing a home for the Thoroughbred industry..."



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