

Celebrating 157 years 1869-2026

The Woodford Sun

158th YEAR - No. 1 — 10 Pages

Versailles, Kentucky

January 8, 2026

\$1.00

Neighbors voice opposition to short-term rentals on Church Street

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Two requests to operate short-term rentals (STRs) in townhouses on Church Street were opposed by neighbors. They voiced concerns about changing the character of their neighborhood during a public hearing on Jan. 5.

The Board of Adjustments (BOA) approved conditional use permits (CUPs) allowing STRs at 377 and 381 Church Street after adding conditions to address concerns from neighbors, including who they can contact if they have any issues with someone renting the STRs.

“Being a short-term rental allows us to put... conditions on them...,” BOA Chair Tim Turney told neighbors in response to their concerns.

“If they were just to rent (the townhouses) outright to somebody,” the BOA would not have “the right and obligation to set restrictions on them...” He also told the neighbors if they have a complaint related to a violation of the permit, they can contact the Planning Commission staff to address the situation.

Other conditions included a requirement that renters must park their vehicles in

the STR’s two-car garage, and anyone who rents must be 25 years old or older to address concerns about college students staying in the STRs.

“I’m not going to spend the money to make this a beautiful place for people to come stay to have it destroyed, abused; nor do I want any of my neighbors to be abused (by actions of our tenants),” applicant Melinda Moore said. She told the BOA that she did not have a problem with the age restriction for renters or providing a contact number to neighbors who have concerns.

During the hearing, neighbors said approving the STRs will negatively affect the daily lives of the six people who live in the two townhouses next door to the townhouses proposed as STRs.

“These are our homes,” said Kathy Lawson, who identified herself as a Church Street resident for 12 years. After coming home from work, she and her neighbors want to sit in their backyards to get away from everything, Lawson told the BOA.

She said allowing up to 12 guests to stay at these STRs would negatively impact the privacy of the people who already live on Church Street.

“These are people that care for one another, look out for one another,” said Sharon Tankersley of the residents of Church Street. “We are invested in each other’s well-being in a way that only long-term residents could be.” She and Lawson also shared their safety concerns related to adding traffic to a very narrow street.

“Unfortunately, we have no control over city streets and congestion. I wish we did,” said Turney.

In their applications for CUPs, Moore (377 Church Street) and AJ Bruwer (381 Church Street) both stated they want to operate STRs in adjoining three-bedroom townhouses with a maximum of six guests and parking for two vehicles in a garage. Quiet hours would be from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m., and there will be no events or large gatherings in the STRs, the applications stated. Those conditions were adopted by the BOA in motions to approve the CUPs.

The STRs would provide accommodations for guests and visitors who want to experience Versailles and Woodford County, said Steele Rouse, an attorney representing both applicants.

He also noted the off-street parking in garages serving renters of these STRs would result in no traffic or parking impact for the residents of Church Street.

Under the zoning ordinance, STRs are a conditional use in the City of Versailles in medium-density residential (R-3) zoning districts. Both of the properties on Church Street are zoned R-3. STRs are prohibited in single-family residential (R-1) zoning districts, but allowed as a conditional use in the other residential districts, according to the city’s ordinance.

The ordinance limits dedicated STRs (only used by guests) to a maximum of six guest rooms/suites, and defines an STR as a dwelling unit or a portion of a dwelling unit leased for a tenancy of less than 30 consecutive days.

Both of Monday’s CUP requests were for dedicated STRs.

Election of officers

The BOA voted unanimously to keep the same officers this calendar year, so Turney will continue as chair with David Prewitt serving as vice chair and Ken Winkfield as secretary.



A REDTAIL HAWK perched on a “No Parking” sign in Versailles must have had a rough New Year’s Eve. He told Sun sports reporter Bill Caine that he had missed his ride and was still a little too wobbly to fly. (Photo by Bill Caine)



Cassie Prather

By BOB VLACH
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Woodford County saw “a stark increase in influenza right after the new

‘Stark increase in influenza’ after new year, Prather says

year,” according to Woodford County Public Health Director Cassie Prather. As of Jan. 3, the increase in cases had nearly tripled compared to what the county was experiencing before the holidays, she said.

An increase in flu cases after the holidays is not unexpected, “but not this much of an increase,” Prather told the Sun on Tuesday. A significant contributor in the large increase was that the strain of influenza mutated after the flu shots were formulated and in arms, she explained.

The new strain, subclade K, did not emerge in the Southern Hemisphere until later in its flu season, and that strain has now made its way to the United States, Prather said.

“And so this vaccine is a little bit of a miss,” she added, but getting a flu shot will still decrease severe illness and hospitalizations.

“So, it’s definitely important to get your flu shot,” Prather said. However, she said health officials are seeing a decrease in the number of people getting the vaccine

compared to other years. Coupled with a less-effective vaccine, she said, “It’s a bad combination.”

Prather said the number of reported flu cases in Kentucky this season is almost 11,000. However, the state did not hit its peak until mid-February last year, “so we still have several weeks to go in this flu season.”

That means there is still time for people, especially the most vulnerable populations (children, the elderly, anyone who is immunocompromised, pregnant or

has an underlying chronic condition), to get a flu shot to help protect them from developing severe symptoms, Prather said.

With the number of flu cases so high this year and children being most affected by the illness, local health officials are working closely with public school leaders to monitor the number of cases in the schools and keep everyone as healthy as possible, she said, noting COVID and RSV cases are also increasing, but not at the rate of influenza.

State health officials reported the first pediatric death from the flu this flu season on Dec. 30. The child had not received a flu vaccine. Flu season typically runs from October to May in Kentucky.

It’s also important to remember that old-fashioned health habits also help to prevent the transmission of flu and other respiratory illnesses, including washing hands often with soap and warm water, covering

See FLU p. 6

Rep. Dan Fister expects productive legislative session



REP. DAN FISTER
(Legislative Research Commission photo)

By SCOTT WHITE
MANAGING EDITOR

Kentucky House Rep. Dan Fister, R-Versailles, discussed his expectations and hopes for the 2026 legislative session, which began on Jan. 6. This will be Fister’s sixth session representing Woodford County, along with parts of Jessamine and Franklin counties.

“This is a budget session, and so we worked really hard over the interim,” he said. “I was in the office nearly every day working with fellow legislators, staff, constituents

to make sure I was prepared.” Kentucky’s biennial budget is passed every even year.

Beyond the budget, Fister said his priority will be to pass “Logan’s Law.”

Logan’s Law

Logan’s Law is named in honor of 6-year-old Logan Tipton, who was murdered by Ronald Exantus in his Versailles home in December 2015, where his sisters and father were also injured in the attack. Exantus was found not guilty by reason of insanity on the murder charge, but found guilty, but mentally ill, on the assault charges at a jury trial in March 2018. He was sentenced to 20 years for the assault convictions. However, under a Kentucky statute, the Kentucky Department of Corrections Parole Board was required to release him from prison on Oct. 1, 2025. He subsequently violated the terms of his reentry supervision and has since been returned to prison, where he will serve out in June 2026.

Fister explained that Logan’s Law will address several of the gaps that led to situations like Exantus’ early release.

“This is something (Reps.) Jason Nemes, T.J. Roberts and I have been hammering on for some time,” Fister said. “We passed some of what was needed in 2024 with the ‘Safe for Kentucky Act’ that required 85 percent of violent offenses be served and making Assault II a violent crime. This (new) bill will also get rid of mandatory early release, like what happened with Logan’s killer, and you can’t have split insanity verdicts like what

happened there.”

Another part of the bill will address situations where a defendant succeeds on an insanity defense.

“What to do with these folks is really broad and vague in Kentucky,” he said. “If a violent person succeeds with a not guilty by reason of insanity defense, the state needs to be able to protect our communities from these people, and this is being addressed. It needs tightening up.”

In addition, Fister said better victim notification in these types of cases is also being built into the bill.

Given the work Fister has put in on the bill during the interim and lining up a large number of co-sponsors, he said, “This really should pass easily.”

Agriculture issues

Fister is currently the vice-chair of the House Agriculture Committee, which he said gives him a good perch to identify and advocate for policies beneficial to farmers and the agricultural community and economy.

Given the significant ag economy in Woodford County, he said it is “always a major focus for me.” Fister pointed to the Kentucky Livestock Innovation Center located on U.S. 60 about two miles west of Midway Road as a major success for the county. The center partners with the Kentucky Cattleman’s Association and the University of Kentucky in “state-of-the-art research and technology involving cattle and other livestock,” he said.

Fister is drafting a bill to add beekeeping equipment to the list of agricultural materials exempt from taxation to help the growing number of honey producers in Kentucky, including some in Woodford County.

“We have also been working on an omnibus ag bill to update laws on a number of issues that will help with inspections and various licensing processes,” he said.

Children and technology

Another issue that he said his constituents have concerns about is the ability of children to access inappropriate content on the internet via smartphones, tablets and home computers.

“We would like to figure out a mechanism which would let parents put restrictions on their children’s phones and iPads,” Fister said. “The problem is bumping up against federal regulations. The cell companies don’t want to do anything for (children) over 13. But even great kids who are doing nothing wrong or intentional can stumble on content that can be harmful.”

Constituents

Fister emphasized he is always available to hear from constituents, and encouraged folks to sign up for his weekly newsletter, which is sent year-round. To sign up, go to: <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/Legislators/subs/House-056.html>.

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