

Builders, neighborhoods balk at Lexington's new planning rules

BY BETH MUSGRAVE AND KENDALL STATON
bmusgrave@herald-leader.com
kstaton@herald-leader.com

A state-mandated overhaul of Lexington's planning ordinances designed to speed-up approval of projects met with resistance and complaints Tuesday from developers, council members and neighborhoods alike.

The Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council will discuss the overhaul of the ordinance at a May 13 meeting after extensive discussion and comments during two meetings on Tuesday.

The council was supposed to take its first vote during Tuesday's work session, but because of the questions and concerns raised, it voted to delay voting until May 13.

In 2024, the Kentucky General Assembly passed House Bill 443, which directed cities and counties to change zoning ordinances to make them more objective and also allow for more staff or administrative review rather than public hearings.

Commerce Lexington, the city's business chamber, lobbied the legislature to pass the bill, legislative



RYAN C. HERMENS rhermens@herald-leader.com

Vehicles drive along West Main Street in downtown Lexington.

lobbying records show. Builders have complained for years it takes too long to get developments through Lexington's planning process.

Now, those same developers who lobbied for the changes in Frankfort don't want the city to pass the new objective standards, which they say are too strict or onerous. Neighborhoods, meanwhile, are concerned about the lack of public input.

Lexington Council mem-

ber Emma Curtis said she hoped the legislature was paying attention and would work with the city before passing legislation that affects Lexington. City planners said no one from the legislature talked to planning staff before passing the bill.

Some legislators have said the intent was not to take away public comment. However, the bill clearly calls for administrative or staff approval rather than public hearings, Curtis and

city officials said.

"It has put us in a difficult position," Curtis said. "We are all looking for the best bad option."

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

The city has worked for more than a year on the changes to comply with HB 443. The Planning Commission voted in April to approve the changes.

Under the changes, no public hearing would be required if a developer files

a development plan for a new project that does not include a zone change. If the developer meets all the criteria, staff could approve that development plan within 30 days, said Keith Horn, the commissioner of planning and preservation during the council's General Government and Planning Committee on Tuesday.

If the developer asked for a waiver of any of the city's planning rules or a health and public safety issue is raised, a public hearing on that final development plan before the planning commission would be conducted, Horn said.

Adjacent property owners of the proposed development would be notified if a waiver is filed and could speak before the planning commission.

Daniel Crum, principal planner, said Tuesday the impetus behind the changes was to make all of the city's rules objective and not subjective.

"We had to make sure we were not leaving any subjective language," Crum said.

There is no requirement to separate an entry into a development from a railroad crossing. Under current land use ordinances would require a developer to meet with city traffic engineers, who would have discretion on where that entry would be placed.

Under the changes, those standards are now set out in the ordinance, Crum said.

Crum said city planners made multiple changes to the proposed ordinance after speaking with developers and neighborhoods.

The lack of a public hearing on final development plans is concerning for neighborhoods who often find it tricky to navigate a sometimes byzantine planning process, said Walt Gaffield, president of the Fayette County Neighborhood Association.

Less public comment could translate to bad development, he said.

Meanwhile, builders and developers say the new objective standards are too rigid and could slow approval of development plans.

"Commerce Lexington opposes the division of planning's attempt to fast-track new regulations that will make infill and redevelopment even more costly and cause additional and unnecessary delays. Higher costs equal less infill and redevelopment," said Carla Blanton, president of the board of Commerce Lexington.

Blanton urged the council not rush through approval of the changes.

But the city is running out of time. House Bill 443 directs the city to have the changes in place by July 1.

Crum said if the city doesn't make the changes it could face lawsuits.

Beth Musgrave:
@HLCityhall

Central KY men among more than 200 arrested in federal child porn sweep

BY TAYLOR SIX
tsix@herald-leader.com

Nine Kentucky men were arrested recently as part of a nationwide FBI operation to identify, track and arrest child sex offenders.

More than 200 arrests were made across the U.S. as part of a five-day FBI initiative that incorporated all 55 field offices, the FBI said in a news release Wednesday.

In Kentucky, the FBI Louisville office secured 10 federal indictments

and six arrests. Three people in state custody will be transferred to a federal prison. One person remains outstanding, and one indictment is under seal, according to the FBI.

Indictments include:

- Jason Back, 42, of Salyersville, was charged with online enticement of a minor.
- Jesus Chavez, 32, of Somerset, was charged with five counts of producing child pornography.
- Jordan A. Cobb, 33, of Salyersville, was charged with online enticement of a minor and cyberstalking

of a minor.

- Austin Hawk, 25, of Pittsburg, was charged with transporting a minor across state lines with the intent to engage in sexual activity.
- Nathan Smith, 30, of Manchester, was charged with two counts of distribution of child pornography, one count of receiving child pornography, and one count of possession of child pornography.
- Michael Moon, 47, of Annville, was charged with one count of receiving child pornography and one count of possession of

child pornography.

- Timothy Ray Dale, 63, of Paris, was charged with one count of production of child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography.
- Finley Wooton, 32, of Hyden, was charged with the attempted production of child pornography.

Olivia Olson, acting special agent in charge of the FBI Louisville Field Office, commended the

said. "FBI Louisville, in lockstep with our law enforcement partners, will continue to use every available resource to protect America's most vulnerable populations, especially our children."

People arrested nationwide included those in positions of public trust, such as law enforcement, military and teachers, the FBI said.

SUBSCRIBE & SAVE!

US WEEKLY

Get 52 Issues For ~~ONLY \$363.48~~ \$51.48!

THAT'S JUST \$.99 A WEEK!

GET ALL THIS & MORE, EVERY WEEK IN US WEEKLY MAGAZINE:

Hot Hollywood: Exclusive celebrity news and the latest scoop from our insiders

Hot Pics: The week's most buzzworthy snapshots of your favorite Hollywood stars

Revealing Interviews: Celebrities share intimate stories about their lives

SCAN NOW TO SAVE!

Or go to www.usmagazine.com/saveme85

UP TO 85% OFF

THE NEWSSTAND COVER PRICE*

George Clooney

Inside His Private World

PLUS INSTANT digital access!

FREE HOME DELIVERY!

ORDERING IS QUICK & EASY!

OR FILL OUT THIS COUPON & MAIL TO: US WEEKLY P.O. BOX 5015, BOONE, IA 50950

☐ **YES! SEND ME 1 YEAR (52 WEEKLY ISSUES) FOR ONLY \$51.48!**

OR

☐ **SEND ME 6 MONTHS (26 WEEKLY ISSUES) FOR ONLY \$30.94!**

Name

Street

City

Email Address

Apt

State

Zip

K5USMN

Option #1 - Pay by check or money order: Make check or money order out to **Us Weekly**

Option #2 - Charge my credit card: Credit Card #

☐ Visa ☐ MC ☐ Discover ☐ AmEx Exp. Date:

Signature Required:

*Savings based on \$6.99 U.S. cover price. Plus sales tax where applicable. Offer valid in U.S. only. Us Weekly is currently published weekly. Double issues may be published, which count as two issues. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first issue. All subscription account payments are non-refundable. Subscriptions are subject to A360 Media's Terms and Conditions: <https://accelerate360.com/terms-and-conditions/> and Privacy Policy: <https://accelerate360.com/privacy-policy/>.

Coroner identifies teens who died in Franklin County house fire

BY CHRISTOPHER LEACH
cleach@herald-leader.com

The Franklin County Coroner's Office has released the identity of the two teenage boys who died last week in a house fire.

The boys were identified as 13-year-old Bently Fields and 15-year-old Rylan Fields. The coroner's office previously said the boys were declared dead at the scene of the fire.

Autopsies were performed May 1. No other updates were provided.

The boys were students in the Franklin County School District. In a statement posted to Facebook, the district said counselors and mental health support staff are available for as long as necessary.

"We are deeply saddened for the family and our school community," the district wrote.

A GoFundMe to raise funds for the boys' funerals said Bently Fields was supposed to graduate from middle school in a few weeks, and he loved to fish and make YouTube videos. Rylan Fields was described as tech-savvy and could fix phones and computers.

A second GoFundMe fundraiser was created to support the boys' step-mother and her 3-year-old

CHRIS LEACH cleach@herald-leader.com

A residence on Flat Creek Drive in Franklin County was destroyed by a fire on April 30. Dustin Fields has been charged with first-degree arson in connection to the fire.

child.

BOYS' FATHER CHARGED WITH ARSON

The boys' father, 43-year-old Dustin Fields, has been charged with first-degree arson in the fire. It happened at his home on Flat Creek Road early April 30, and after firefighters controlled the flames, they found the two boys and a dog dead inside the home.

Dustin Fields was arrested the next day. His arrest citation said he used an accelerant to start the fire, knowing his sons were inside.

A Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives K-9 detected the accelerant on Fields' shoes and at various loca-

tions of the home, including where the boys were found, according to the citation.

Dustin Fields was arraigned in Franklin District Court Monday, where he requested to be released for the boys' funeral.

No action was taken, but the commonwealth attorney's office objected to the motion. Franklin District Judge Chris Olds told Fields to file a motion for the request, and it will be considered.

Dustin Fields' next scheduled court date is May 13 for a preliminary hearing, according to court records.

Christopher Leach:
@ChrisLeachHL