

NEWS

# \$1 billion energy project to create thousands of temporary jobs

BY ROGER SMITH  
MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

PINEVILLE — A \$1 billion energy infrastructure project in Eastern Kentucky is moving forward in Bell County.

Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) announced last week that Rye Development has submitted its final license application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the Lewis Ridge Pumped Storage Project in Pineville. The submission marks a milestone in the plan to build a 266-megawatt pumped storage hydropower facility on reclaimed mine lands near Pineville.

Slated to begin construction in 2027, the project is expected to create approximately 2,300 construction jobs and apprenticeships. Once operational, the facility will employ about 45 full-time workers.

“This project will offer good-paying jobs and apprenticeship opportunities for Kentuckians along with additional economic benefits for restaurants, hotels, and other local businesses across Bell County,” said Colby Hall, executive director of SOAR.

An economic analysis projects that \$104 million will flow into the local economy during the construction phase, according to SOAR’s press release.

Once complete, the facility is expected to generate \$16.5 million annually in local property tax revenue, funding schools, first responders and other public services.

The Lewis Ridge facility will store and release electricity by moving water between two reservoirs at different elevations, operating like a large “water battery.” It will be able to store up to eight hours of electricity and deliver on-demand power for approximately 70,000 homes. As Kentucky’s energy demand is expected to grow by as much as 45% by 2032, officials say long-duration energy storage like this is crucial to maintaining grid reliability.

“Large projects like

Lewis Ridge will play a critical role in Kentucky’s energy future,” said Sandy Slayton, vice president of environmental at Rye Development and project manager for the facility.

“Pumped storage facilities operate around the clock to help ensure homes and businesses can access affordable energy when they need it most.”

The project is being touted as both a tribute to the region’s coal heritage and a model for sustainable development. Developers say that by repurposing former mine land and recruiting a local workforce, Lewis Ridge represents a forward-looking approach to economic and environmental transition in Appalachia.

Construction is expected to continue through 2031. The FERC review process now underway includes environmental assessments, public comment opportunities, and formal hearings.

# TRI-COUNTY

## SELF STORAGE

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Martin County Fiscal Court in a special meeting June 18 (left to right): Recorder Alisha Horn, County Attorney Melissa Phelps, Magistrates Tracy Spence and Ronald Workman, Judge/Executive Lon Lafferty, Magistrates Junior Hunt, Kermit Howell and Cody Slone.

## COUNTY

FROM FRONT PAGE

\$765,500

- Solid Waste - \$111,200
- Occupational Tax - \$1,194,000
- LGEDF - \$1,214,400
- Opioid Settlement - \$352,500
- HUD - \$289,100
- 911 - \$504,200
- HUD - \$6,125
- Document Storage - \$27,050
- ARPA - \$151,000

Magistrate Tracy Spence made the motion to adopt the budget and Magistrate Ronald Workman made the second. With no discussion, those two, along with Magistrates Junior Hunt, Kermit Howell and Cody Slone, voted

unanimously to adopt the budget. It goes into effect with the start of the 2026 fiscal year on July 1. The budget summary is in the public notice section of this week’s newspaper. The full budget is available to the public in the judge’s office.

Lafferty announced the hiring of John Horn as the county swimming pool manager at \$14 per hour. He also announced the county would hire Max Johnson as a lifeguard at \$10 per hour. The Big Sandy Area Community Action Program agreed to pay for 14 of 15 lifeguards.

Magistrates also approved:

- A \$4,321.50 asphalt

milling contract with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. The county will purchase 250 tons of milling at \$15.83 per ton and \$1.42 for handling per ton.

- The claims list of \$1,885,684.58, including a \$1,287,447.58 pass-through grant for Martin County Water District and \$49,500 to the Martin County Economic Development Authority for the purchase of a building in downtown Inez.
- Advertising for bids for gravel for 2026
- Martin County Soil Conservation District’s budget and report. (See the related story in this edition.)

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