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Winter Storm Fern Focus of the February Booneville City Commission Meeting

The City of Booneville Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Wednesday, February 11, 2026. Mayor Nelson Bobrowski called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Commissioners Bobrowski, Gay, Harvey, and Campbell (arriving late) were present.

Commissioner Bobrowski moved to approve minutes from the January 14, 2026 and February 5, 2026 meetings, seconded by Commissioner Gay. Motion carried.

Winter Storm Fern came in hard, leaving behind significant damage to water infrastructure across the state, particularly in Eastern and South Central Kentucky. Weeks after the storm, numerous systems are still struggling to restore regular service, with thousands under boil water advisories. Commissioner Bobrowski shared some data regarding Winter Storm Fern's impact on water service interruptions. Post-storm estimates indicated 2,000 households in Kentucky experienced service interruptions, with approximately 12,000 households under boil water advisories. Additionally, an estimated 500,000 households nationwide experienced water service interruptions.

Engineer Paul Nesbitt advised that, "Booneville is not the only people struggling with their water system. Water systems all over the state are struggling. We are not in this alone. What I am saying is you are doing everything you can, and I know David and staff are working hard. Some of these tools we are looking at now, like the Telemetry and Water Line Replacement Phase 3, will help you in the future."

Commissioner Bobrowski asked Paul if he could provide answers as to why this happened and what can be done in the future, from an engineering perspective, to be more prepared and resilient. Paul advised that with older pipe (projects have replaced some pipe), when the ground gets cold, ground movement from freezing and thawing creates stress, and there is not a lot you can do about it. He added that intake issues are a problem every water district is fighting. All the cities he has talked to are struggling. He has spoken with other engineers who work for water districts in South Central Kentucky and other areas, and everybody is saying the same thing: "WE CAN'T GET WATER TO THE PLANT."

Beattyville and Jackson both struggled with the same problem, as well as other districts across the region and state. Communities such as Whitesburg, Hazard, Manchester, Knott, Harlan, Letcher, and Pike counties were all in crisis mode, to name a few, and in the same boat. Water treatment and distribution is a very difficult

thing when temperatures stay that low for days. The Commission asked Paul about designing an intake that would withstand Arctic temperatures that have impacted the system. Paul stated, "Can we design a way around all of this? Yes. You can't afford it. You could throw 20 million dollars at the intake and it could be designed, but it is not affordable nor feasible. There is always a degree of failure beyond what you can engineer for with a finite amount of money. On a daily basis, your system cannot afford to be disaster-proofed to the point it won't fail. It's almost impossible." David Hall explained that the issue stemmed from the extended period of 12-13 days of below-freezing temperatures. Pulling up telemetry maps prior to the storm, everything was completely full. Every tank was full, and the system was ready. Every day, tank levels dropped about two feet off every tank due to people dripping and running their water. There were no infrastructure failures at that point; it was simply increased demand. Every day, levels dropped more and more. Eventually, the intake was lost, and that was what broke the system.

Paul added that people dripping water, while understandable, aggravates the situation. "If I didn't have good insulation in my house, I would probably do the same thing. When I lived in homes without good insulation, I dripped my water when temperatures dropped to zero degrees. It's like a run on the bank it just aggravates the situation. When you have finite resources, you have to address the problem. Your customers cannot afford to pay enough on a water bill to disaster-proof the system. You do the best you can with finite resources." Regarding the intake breakdown, the engineering explanation is as follows. When air temperatures stay well below freezing, moving river water becomes supercooled (below 32°F but still liquid). This forms frazil ice—tiny suspended ice crystals that look like slush. These crystals do not float like sheet ice. They stay suspended in the water column and are pulled directly into intake screens and pumps. As pumping continues, ice accumulates on intake screens, packs into the suction bell and wet well, and slush enters the pump, flow drops rapidly. This is not drops ice it is ice inside the water itself. Eventually, the intake froze, and the plant had to be shut down until a bypass pump could be installed. With all the other factors impacting the system, this became an unavoidable situation that resulted in water service outages across many areas.

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Owsley County Senior Night



Jacob Arnold



Keegan Herald



Brayden Peters



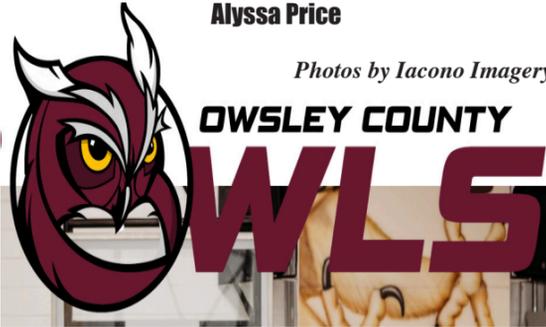
Chase Pryse



Alyssa Price



Lilly Thomas



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Owsley County Cheer Team