

# The Woodford Sun

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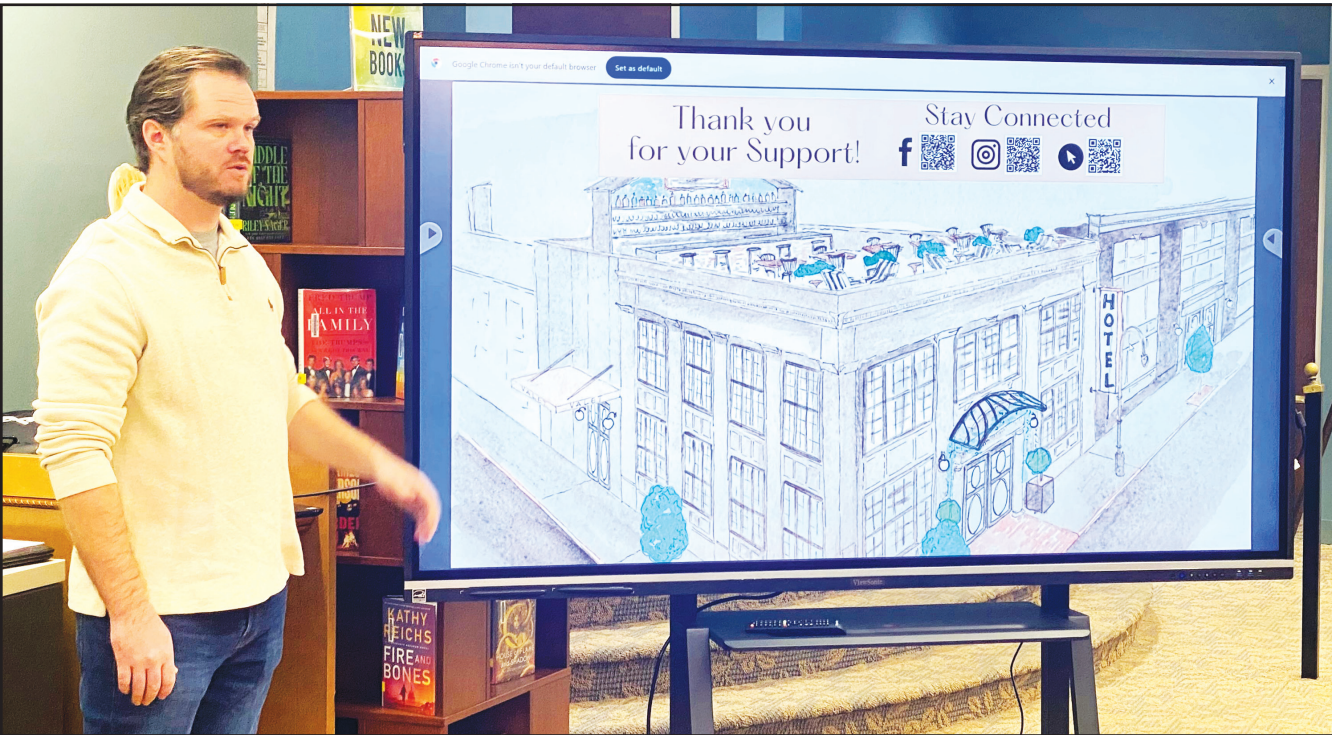
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## Owners give update on downtown hotel project in old Woodford Bank building, with changes



PLANS FOR THE NEW ALDENBERG HOTEL, an old-school steak restaurant, a rooftop bar and a boutique distillery were unveiled by Jarrod Williams, a member of the ownership group, at the monthly Chamber Coffee at the Library on Tuesday, Dec. 10. (Photo by Scott White)

By SCOTT WHITE  
MANAGING EDITOR

The owners of the old Woodford Bank and Trust building at the corner of Court and Main streets gave an optimistic update on their long-planned boutique hotel and distillery project during the Dec. 10 Chamber Coffee at the Library event.

Jarrod Williams and Jordan Mefford explained that a financing hurdle that had arisen in late summer had been overcome, saying, "We were and are dealing with four separate banks for financing, monetiza-

tion of tax incentives from the state as well as other grant and incentive programs," but these are now solved.

The new hotel is set to open this spring, perhaps as early as April. The \$10 million project first took shape in 2019 when a group of investors led by local entrepreneurs and co-owners of the Amsden, Alex Riddle and Williams, purchased the bank building, which sits at the heart of downtown and has been vacant since Citizens Commerce Bank, the successor to Woodford Bank, moved to its current location.]

The project has always planned to include a hotel and higher-end restaurant that centered on a boutique distillery, tapping into the county's long history of bourbon and equine industries. Though this remains the focus, Williams and Mefford announced changes and new plans.

The hotel will now be named The Aldenberg, which, as Williams explained, is the surname of the architect who designed several landmark buildings in Central Kentucky, including the Woodford Bank building. There will be 29 rooms configured

into larger suites or rented as an entire unit for significant events like weddings or conferences.

Emily Riddle, Alex's wife and co-owner of the Amsden and a member of the project's investment group, has designed "90 percent of the furniture, which is being specially made, along with each of the rooms having its own unique interior design by her," said Mefford.

An experienced general manager, Jason Fontaine, has been hired and is in place to help oversee the final details and hiring. Williams said the

hotel restaurant expects to hire 55 employees, some part-time, and hopefully most will come from Woodford County. "Why Woodford County and Versailles for a hotel like this?" asked Williams. "We see Versailles and Woodford County presenting a big opportunity for the eastern part of the Bourbon Trail, since the western end is dominated by Louisville and large corporate brands. We see Versailles as the 'front door' to the whole trail, and we want to help visitors craft their own experience of the trail with the equine piece and good dining and hospitality options Versailles has."

Mefford added, "We see Versailles as the 'what's next' for tourism and the Kentucky experience."

One new feature that was announced is that the rooftop will offer both a bar and a limited menu service for hotel guests and the public. Williams said it would be the only rooftop view in Versailles and that it "shows off what a great town Versailles is, and we are hoping the rooftop will become a gathering spot for locals as well as visitors." Instead of a Spanish tapas style restaurant, which had been announced before, the new hotel will offer a "really good steak house, but not like Ruby's or Tony's white-cloth restaurants in Lexington," said Allison McClure, director of marketing for Mefford Contracting. "The steakhouse will be called 'Silks,' and will be more old school . . . if you know about the Golden Steer

in Las Vegas, that is what we are going for with Silks."

According to its website, the Golden Steer has operated since 1958 and was a favorite of the "Rat Pack." Mefford Contracting is the general contractor on the project and Jordan Mefford is the founder. The boutique distillery continues to be at the center of the project. Mefford said a specially crafted 500-gallon still has been made in Vancouver. The hotel will purchase its mash from Bluegrass Distillery in Midway and begin bourbon, gin, and vodka production this summer. Distilling runs about every six weeks and produces about 200 gallons of spirits. The group is also involved in several other projects in Woodford County, including the Standardbred training facility on Paynes Mill Road and the entertainment complex going in at the old Kroger on Marsailles Road. Williams said they plan to tie in, from a tourism point of view, the equine piece from the Standardbred training facility and the bourbon piece from the hotel. Williams said the ownership team is excited to hold some "soft openings" this spring, followed by a big celebration open to the public with tours of the hotel, rooftop and restaurant. Dempsey Smith, Mefford's sales manager, said, though final plans have not been decided on, "We do know the Guinness World Record for the largest bourbon tasting is 2,000, and it'd be neat to set a new record."

## Rural broadband fiber internet system moves to next phase

By SCOTT WHITE  
MANAGING EDITOR

"This is big news," Woodford County Judge-Executive James Kay said when the All Points Broadband Contract agenda item was taken up by the Fiscal Court at its Dec. 10 meeting.

The availability of reliable internet service to much of the rural area of Woodford County has long been an issue. However, with the approval of the contract between All Points and the Fiscal Court, this will no longer be an issue.

"This is rural electrification moment for us in Woodford County," said Magistrate Liles Taylor, who, along with Kay, has been the point person on this project for the Fiscal Court since 2021. "(The Fiscal Court) is doing this because the existing internet

providers deemed these rural areas unserviceable. They are a business and they decided rural access was not profitable for them to spend the necessary capital to provide that level of access to those homes and businesses . . . their return on investment was too low."

The project will cost \$16 million and be funded with \$3.176 million of the county's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money, \$4.95 million of the state's ARPA money and \$8.5 million from All Points. It must be completed by the end of 2026; otherwise, the unspent ARPA funds will lapse.

Not all of rural Woodford County is eligible, thanks to non-compete provisions being asserted by existing providers like Spectrum and Windstream. To be eligible, the customer must either have no internet service or be deemed "underserved," meaning the wireless speeds are slower than 25 megabytes download and three megabytes upload. Those who do not qualify as underserved and want to improve their internet speed with broadband fiber will be able to switch to All Points in the future, but will have to pay their installation fees. This is because the federal and state programs funding the project have a strict definition of "underserved."

According to prior reporting by the Sun and in interviews post-meeting with Taylor and All Points executive Phillip Brown, the problem of the lack of reliable internet service for rural areas became acute during the pandemic when businesses and schools went from in-person to online. This was

when Kay and Taylor began working with the Bluegrass Area Development District and other counties to explore options and grant sources. By the fall of 2021, following the passage of the federal pandemic relief bill dubbed ARPA, funds for these types of projects became available.

After issuing Request for Information (RFI) and Request for Proposal (RFP) information from potential providers in the winter and spring of 2022, the Fiscal Court selected All Points as the provider it wished to partner with to apply for a rural broadband fiber grant from the state. In August 2023, the state approved the All Points-Woodford County application. Since then, the state has had to resolve award contests from numer-

ous counties before it could even begin negotiating with All Points on the contract to build the system.

This process is now complete. The state and All Points have finalized the contract terms which will govern the project. At this week's meeting, the Fiscal Court approved the agreement between the county and All Points which will release the county's share of the funds as scheduled by the contract.

"We are now at the end of the beginning, and we can move into the next phase which is the actual final design and construction of the project which must be completed under the terms of the grant and the contracts with the state and county by the end of 2026," said All Points executive Brown.

When complete, Brown and Taylor said over 180 miles of fiber will have been installed reaching over 1,800 homes and businesses in Woodford County. Over the next few months, the county and All Points will promote how folks can sign up for the new service.

**Versailles Police Chief Mike Murray**

The Fiscal Court issued a resolution expressing its gratitude for Police Chief Mike Murray for his 25 years of service to the county. Murray, who is retiring effective Dec. 31, thanked the Court for its support.

"It's been an honor to serve as the chief and provide professional police services to the county . . . all of our accomplishments were a team effort. It's been a good run,"

said Murray.

Every magistrate thanked Murray, but Magistrate William Downey's remarks were greeted with more than a few laughs.

"When I was an 11-year-old kid, my bike was stolen, and I reported it to Chief Murray," he said. "Well, he found it in a different part of town. It had been spray painted a different color, but he returned it to me, and I've been grateful ever since for him!"

**Young & New Farmer Grant Program**

There have been 11 applications for the Young & New Farmer Grant Program that began this year. The deadline for new applications is Dec. 31. Kay said after the deadline is met, the screening commit-

See BROADBAND p. 7



THE WOODFORD COUNTY YOUTH FOOTBALL TEAM was honored by the Fiscal Court at its Dec. 10 meeting for winning the championship in its league. Judge-Executive James Kay said, "The Woodford County Youth Football Program exemplifies the Gold Standard. This team has demonstrated not only exceptional athletic ability but also remarkable dedication, resilience and a strong commitment to teamwork, embodying the spirit of excellence on and off the field. These athletes have upheld the values of integrity, respect and sportsmanship throughout the season, setting a positive example for their peers and representing Woodford County with distinction and pride." (Photo by Kristen Bailey)

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### GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Monday, Dec. 16, Midway City Council at 5:30 p.m.  
Tuesday, Dec. 17, Versailles City Council at 5:30 p.m.