

Energy Independence and the Importance of Local Control

By Sam Howard

In recent weeks, this series has explored how location, infrastructure, energy and workforce trends intersect to shape Lewis County’s economic prospects.

One phrase has appeared repeatedly in those discussions: energy independence. It is a term that can mean different things to different people, and without clarity, it risks becoming more slogan than strategy.

At its core, energy independence for a community is not about isolation or a single solution. It is about control. It means having reliable access to power at predictable costs, with enough capacity and

flexibility to support growth over time.

For both manufacturers and households, that consistency matters as much as the source itself.

Local control plays a central role in achieving that stability. Communities that understand their own energy needs and plan accordingly are better positioned to respond to change.

Those that rely solely on outside decisions or short-term fixes often find themselves reacting rather than shaping their future. In economic development, uncertainty is costly, and energy uncertainty is among the most damaging.

Manufacturers evaluate

energy much the same way they evaluate transportation or workforce. They look for redundancy, planning, and clear governance. They want confidence that power will be available not just on opening day, but 10 or 20 years into an operation.

Communities that can demonstrate foresight and coordination gain credibility in those conversations.

For residents and small businesses, the stakes are just as high. Energy affordability affects household budgets, local commerce, and overall quality of life.

Sharp swings in cost or reliability ripple through the local economy, often hitting those least able to absorb them. Strong energy planning balances industrial growth with community stability.

Energy independence does not mean acting alone. Regional coordination, utility partnerships and state-level cooperation all matter. But independence implies participation rather than passivity.

It requires local leaders



and citizens to engage in informed discussion about future demand, infrastructure readiness and long-term priorities.

Lewis County has navigated economic change before. The challenge now is applying that experience to new conditions.

Energy independence, understood as local readiness and control, is not abstract. It is a practical foundation for decisions that affect jobs, investment and daily life.

As this series continues, attention will turn to how outside investors and manufacturers evaluate communities, and what Lewis

management, and long-term strategy. The firm specializes in design-build construction, construction management, and pre-engineered building systems, with completed projects across the public and private sectors, including schools, hospitals, churches, judicial facilities, detention centers, and industrial developments.

Howard also serves as Managing Member and Economic Development Manager for Northeast Kentucky Development, where he works to attract new and expanding industries to the region. In that role, he is directly involved in project development, site promotion, and financing strategies, including design-build leaseback models. His work brings him into regular collaboration with local and state officials, business leaders, and community stakeholders.

Howard’s focus is on job creation, infrastructure development, and strengthening the long-term economic vitality and quality of life in Northeast Kentucky.

Editor’s Note

This column is the fourth part of a guest series authored by Sam Howard and published by THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD to encourage thoughtful discussion about Lewis County’s future. Howard is the primary author of the series; I am serving as editor and host, working with him on clarity and presentation for HERALD readers. While we have been lifelong friends, this series appears because of his professional experience in construction and economic development and his interest in Lewis County’s progress.

The views expressed are those of the author, and readers are encouraged to engage with these topics as the series continues.

- Dennis Brown

COUNCIL

Cont. from page 1

Council Member Richard Walje said he believes the mayor’s salary should be a reasonable amount, adding that the position demands several hours of the serving individual.

“I think that we’re going to attract better quality candidates,” he said. “I think those monies (for a pay increase) would be well

spent,” Walje said.

“I’ve been in this office more in the past 10 weeks than I probably have in the past five years,” Billman stated. Prior to his appointment as mayor, Billman served as assistant police chief. “I took a \$399 pay cut, a week, to sit in this chair.”

Billman said Russell and Ashland each have city managers handling

day-to-day city matters. He said in determining an amount for the proposed ordinance he looked to nearby Flemingsburg where the position is similar to Vanceburg. The annual pay there, he said, is \$32,000.

Grabill and Walje have both filed as candidates for mayor in the next election.

“In my opinion, both of those guys probably need

to abstain on the vote because they’re both running (for mayor),” Billman said. “I’m not running . . . I will not be sitting in the chair come this time next year.”

Council also heard the first reading of an ordinance changing the city’s procurement rules.

The proposed change would lower the amount the mayor can spend without council approval from \$40,000 to \$5,000.

“I think \$40,000 is a lot,” Billman said.

Supporters said the change would give council more direct oversight of major purchases, while still allowing routine expenses to be handled efficiently.

Council heard the first reading to an ordinance permanently closing a portion of Lykins Street between Market Street and the Lewis County Public Library.

The section to be closed runs along property owned by the library and

Kentucky Farm Bureau. Both property owners have consented to the closure, Billman said. The affected portion totals approximately 106 feet.

Billman said the closure reflects current use of the area and will simplify maintenance and access.

In response to a question about trees being removed from city property, Billman said the annual Independence Day fireworks display is fired from that area and safety concerns prompted the decision to remove the trees.

Council Member Angie Patton, who serves as council’s representative

on the Electric Plant Board, provided an update on the city owned utility company. Patton said Rob Kennard had replaced Jack Prater on the board following Prater’s retirement.

She said a review is underway on a proposal to implement battery storage to help reduce peak electric usage, adding that no decision has been made on the proposal.

Council also approved minutes from the December meeting, heard financial and departmental reports and addressed routine agenda items before adjourning.

LAWS

Cont. from page 1

Andy Beshear announced that a provisional license will be issued to those who applied for a license before January 1, which will allow a business to continue operations while an application for full licensure is being reviewed and will expire once action is taken on the pending application. The release notes that no provisional licenses will be issued after January 1.

Colon cancer screening

House Bill 421, signed into law April 2, requires health benefit plans to provide coverage for all

colorectal cancer examinations and laboratory tests specified in the US Multi-Society Task Force on Colorectal Cancer guidelines. This includes ensuring that high-risk individuals, such as those with a family history of the disease or early-onset cases, receive screenings much earlier as recommended by these guidelines.

In other words, Kentucky law now requires insurance plans to cover colon cancer screenings for high-risk patients who are under the age of 45.

For average-risk adults,

colon cancer screening should begin at age 45.

The bill also ensures coverage for all US Food and Drug Administration-approved bowel preparations used for the examination and removes prior authorization requirements for them. It also provides an exemption from the cost-sharing prohibition for health savings account-qualified high-deductible health plans under certain circumstances.

CANDIDATES

Cont. from page 1

District 3 Magistrate Woody Underwood is not running for re-election.

District 4

* Mark A. Horsley filed November 19, 2025.

Rebecca L. Esham Zornes filed December 30, 2025.

Derrick Butler filed January 5, 2026.

Vanceburg City Council

Roger Jahn filed November 7, 2025, for Vanceburg City Council.

Mayor of Vanceburg

Three candidates have filed for mayor of Vanceburg as of Friday, all non-partisan:

Dustin Caseman filed November 15, 2025.

John R. Grabill filed December 19, 2025.

Richard D. Walje filed December 22, 2025.

Mayor Joe Billman, who was appointed to complete the term of Dane Blankenship, has said he will not be running for the position.

County offices such as judge/executive, county clerk, sheriff, jailer, coroner, county attorney, property valuation administrator, surveyor, magistrate/justice of the peace, and constable are partisan offices that require party nomination when multiple

candidates from the same party file and are therefore subject to the January 9 filing deadline.

Unlike county offices, the filing deadline for non-partisan offices is later. Candidates for mayor and city council have until June 2 to file. All candidates for those offices will appear on the November ballot.

Additional candidates may still enter those races before the June 2 deadline.

County Clerk Leslie Collier reminds voters that candidate lists may change if withdrawals or disqualifications occur, and final ballots will be set after all filing periods close and certifications are completed.

REGISTRATION

Cont. from page 1

all 100 in the Kentucky House and the even-numbered state Senate districts will also appear on the ballot in 2026.

The primary election is May 19, although there will be three days of early in-person voting on Thursday, Friday and Saturday (May 14-16) prior to Election Day.

THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD

336 Lions Lane
Vanceburg, KY 41179

Serving Lewis County Since
1924



Lewis County
Health Department

Get Moving

Gentle • Easy • Comfortable

with Diabetes

Join us for weekly movement sessions

We’ll take things slow, follow along with simple videos from the American Diabetes Association, and focus on getting our bodies up and moving — no sweating or high-intensity workouts.

Fridays at 11 AM

Starting January 16th - Feb 13th

- ✓ Chair-friendly
- ✓ Low impact
- ✓ Go at your own pace
- ✓ No experience needed

**Call 606-796-2632
to join us!**



SCAN TO
SIGN UP

