

To: Worthington City Council Members

From: Jim Ventresca, President, Old Worthington Association

Re: 38-40 E. New England Avenue Rezoning Request

After a decade of work on the part of the Old Worthington Association, the City of Worthington and many citizens that culminated in the U.S. Government's April 2010 placement of the Worthington Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places, it is both ironic and troubling that Worthington City Council is considering a zoning change that would allow a poorly maintained albeit historic district contributing property to be rezoned to allow it to be used for commercial purposes. The result would be an unfortunate change of course in a town that has always maintained an appropriate and healthy balance between commercial and residential properties.

All of this is made more concerning by the fact that there is an abundance of empty retail space in close proximity to this residential property. Meanwhile, reducing housing stock by turning residential into de facto commercial properties suggests decline and not enhancement of a historic district that is treasured by all Worthington residents because they enjoy visiting it and they know that it is what makes Worthington distinct relative to other suburban communities that lack our history and character. It is also true that maintaining the historic residential character of this neighborhood is of particular importance to the local property owners who have, collectively, invested millions of dollars to improve their properties over many years.

Striking the right balance between residential and commercial properties will become even more important as Worthington increasingly becomes an inner ring suburb that faces growing challenges and opportunities, including an increasing interest in making the community more walkable. Urban-style housing in walk-able neighborhoods—like those in the center of Worthington—is what's in demand today, and that demand will intensify in the coming years. According to Stan Humphries, the chief economist of Zillow, an online housing-research firm, to support growth in the next decade we need to preserve and nourish our walk-able urban spaces and neighborhoods because most demographic groups tend to prefer them. Millennials—the rising generation of 20- and 30-somethings—are particularly drawn to urban living, seeing it not only as exciting, but as healthy and environmentally friendly.

The proposed conditional use of residential property is a solution in search of a problem. **The applicants did not ask for this.** The actual request came before the MUNICIPAL PLANNING COMMISSION (MPC)—ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD on June 10, 2010 (Item C.2. Rezoning, a. "AR 4.5, Low Density Apartment to C-5, Central Commercial — **38-40 E. New England Ave.** (John & Maureen Coffey) **REZ 05-10**) and is now on the June 21, 2010 City Council agenda.

The OWA also wants to voice its concern about a suggestion in the local news coverage of this matter that the MPC generated this compromise idea because of concern that without a conditional use permit the property would continue to decline. This view is wrongheaded. If the property is not well maintained, why would the city think that a new zoning code would fix the problem? Instead of creating new standards, the city should be about the business of enforcing the ones that are already on the books.

It is also important to note that this proposed zoning change is unprecedented. It has never been codified for AR-4.5; and, according to my initial understanding, where it exists in other zones (AR-3), it has never been applied. Long experience demonstrates that a need has not existed. A reasonable person is lead to the conclusion that this MPC compromise offer (after correctly rejecting a C-5 commercial zoning request) was not a thoroughly thought through proposal and therefore it should be rejected by the City Council.

It is not in the best interest of Worthington to codify an exception for a case prohibited by current code. Zoning ordinances should implement the best theory in community development and serve to advanced our well-thought-out strategic plan.

The occasion of this award of Historic District status must be an incentive to recommit and expand our efforts at historic preservation which is difficult in cases like the present one, not automatic and never guaranteed. We will not advance our position nor even maintain our status if we rest on our laurels in a state of complacency.

For the best possible future of the City of Worthington including the success of the economic development plan, the Board of Trustees of the Old Worthington Association urges you to honor the value of the Historic District and vote NO on this proposed ordinance change. We are confident that if the current owner of 38-40 E. New England Avenue wants to sell that attractive home, there are buyers waiting to get into the Historic District.

The Board of Trustees
The Old Worthington Association

Jim Ventresca, President

c. Matt Greeson, City Manager