

**Written testimony of Joseph Honerlaw, Chair of the Springfield Township Board of Trustees, before the State and Local Government Committee, March 13, 2018.**

Chairperson Anielski and Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee.

My name is Joe Honerlaw and I am a Township Trustee for Springfield Township in Hamilton County. I have held this office since 1996.

Springfield Township is a first ring suburb in Greater Cincinnati area, consisting of approximately 16 ½ square miles and nearly 40,000 residents. The Township is a home-rule, full service provider of important local services to its residents such as Police, Fire/EMS, Public Works, Parks, Planning and Zoning, and Senior and Community Services.

The Township is a predominantly bedroom community with very little commercial or industrial property. As a result, the majority of the property tax burden is shouldered by the residential property owners. In an effort to change this dynamic and provide a healthier balance in the community between residential and commercial, the Township desired the ability to govern its own land use and development decisions internally; rather than using the one size fits all zoning code and regulations at the county level. Therefore, in 2004, the residents of Springfield Township overwhelmingly voted in favor of adopting a locally-controlled Township Zoning Plan as provided for in Ohio Revised Code 519.03 and 519.11.

The Board of Trustees realize that in order to effectuate any meaningful and beneficial redevelopment of our community we must be flexible and business-friendly in our approach to land use planning and zoning. At the same time, we understand that having community support of land use decisions and zoning enforcement is critical to any successful planning and development efforts. For these reasons, we believe that local control of these decisions at the Township level are imperative to ensure that development is consistent with the desires of the community and in the best interest of the people that elected us.

With these beliefs in mind, we have strived to create Comprehensive Community Master Plans that take into account the needs of the community and at the same time understand the importance of flexibility allowing us to take advantage of the development opportunities when they arise. With professional Township planning staff members, Springfield Township adopted Community Master Plans which are updated every five years. These Master Plans go through an intensive community involvement process involving more than 50 community members providing input. We firmly believe in good sound planning and have demonstrated an excellence in that field for many years. We also believe that plans are just that, plans. Successful communities have the ability to

use their adopted plans as a guide and weigh the technical components and intent of those plans against the realities of the development market. In Springfield Township, we do just that.

Unfortunately, our ability to respond to the ever-changing dynamics of the development community and needs of own residents are often times jeopardized by the unnecessary procedures required by R.C. 519.07 and R.C. 519.12. While the requirement that unincorporated areas submit zoning amendments to the County or Regional Planning Commission for review and recommendation at one time probably had some merit, it has quickly become an antiquated and unnecessary level of bureaucracy that simply just provides a non-binding recommendation that hinders our ability to effectively respond to development opportunities. In every situation we've experienced, the County planning staff, in order to generate their recommendation, is reviewing and interpreting documents that Springfield Township planning staff created, but they are doing so without any context or intimate knowledge of how or why those land use policies were proposed and ultimately adopted. Therefore, in most instances, their recommendation is not in concert with the Township's interpretation. Too often this results in confusion by the developer or applicant, the property owner, and any interested parties as to the legitimacy or merit that the County recommendation may have on the amendment application.

Furthermore, this additional step in the process of zoning amendments, as outlined in R.C.519.12, in many instances prevents local communities from being able to comply with timing requirements in R.C. 519.12, which specify that Township Zoning Commissions must conduct a hearing no sooner than 20 days and no later than 40 days from the time of application. In many instances, due to the requirement that the County Planning Commission must review the application and make recommendations prior to the Zoning Commission hearing, it is impossible to comply with the 40 day requirement.

We understand that regional planning is important, which undoubtedly was a major reason for the creation of county or regional planning commissions, but in many instances that goal isn't possible. Specifically, in Hamilton County, there are 49 political jurisdictions and only 12 of those are unincorporated. This means that only 12 of the 49 are required to submit land use plans and/or zoning amendments to the County or Regional Planning Commission for review. Regional planning is difficult when 37 of the County's jurisdictions are not required to submit their land use plans for review at the County level. Those areas of the State that will benefit from such a review and recommendation should still have that option, but it shouldn't be a requirement that dictates another step in an already overly bureaucratic process. For communities such as Springfield Township, which has a professionally educated and experienced planning staff, the additional step to have another level of review at the County level that provides nothing more than a recommendation seems like an unnecessary step and results in the issues as described previously.

The permissive authority proposed in the changes to R.C. 519.07 and R.C. 519.12, as outlined in H.B. 500, is a reasonable, practical, and beneficial change that ensures the ability of unincorporated areas to request assistance from the county planning commission, but doesn't require it for the communities that are adequately staffed and capable in the areas of land use planning. For the previously mentioned reasons, we respectfully ask that you support the changes to the current law as outlined in H.B. 500.

I thank you for your time and consideration and appreciate your willingness to make meaningful changes which enable the State's local governments to be more responsive to constituents and businesses.