

Senate Insurance & Financial Institutions Committee

TESTIMONY OF MARK A. WAGENBRENNER AS AN INTERESTED PARTY REGARDING HB 38

December 1, 2020

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Hottinger, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Insurance & Financial Institutions Committee:

My name is Mark Wagenbrenner and I am the President of Thrive Companies and Wagenbrenner Development here in Columbus, Ohio and I am presenting this written testimony regarding HB 38. In particular, I strongly support the adoption of the amendment which I understand is before the Committee which would provide for a limited COVID-related property tax complaint filing limitation waiver in temporary, uncodified law (“the Amendment”). I represent the third generation of developers that started with my grandfather building homes, churches and schools in Central Ohio and my father and uncles developing the stores, offices and apartments along Grandview Avenue. Never before have we faced such daunting times as we battle against the carnage caused by the COVID Pandemic.

We have seen about one third of the restaurants and many retailers go out of business already, including well known establishments like Matt the Miller and Spagios, which had anchored Grandview Avenue for nearly 50 years. We suspect more permanent closings are imminent as the recent COVID surge has already caused steep drops in sales heading into the most critical holiday season for many struggling small businesses. We have worked with nearly all of our tenants to restructure rent and in many cases grant permanent rent forgiveness.

We also have seen major shifts in the office market. Pre-pandemic we had two large users looking at our 130,000 square foot spec office building at our Grandview Crossing project. Both companies delayed signing negotiated leases initially because of the shock and fear of the pandemic. Now both tenants are starting their searches over again. We face steep drops in rent as they now have new options, and we are forced to compete against space being dumped as large users are subletting spaces they now no longer need in a post pandemic world.

For many real estate industry sectors to survive they need every possible tool to combat this brutal pandemic. One such tool is the Amendment being presented before the committee. It gives property owners the flexibility to seek temporary relief of lower property taxes caused by the blatant impacts to property values caused by COVID. If taxes were to be temporarily lowered, consistent with the temporary impact to property values, it would give property owners a bridge to get over the pandemic.

Hopefully this will prevent fire sales and foreclosures that historically cause huge disruptions in inventory, inventory that will be needed in 2021 as the vaccines are distributed and we return to a new normal world.

I urge the committee to take immediate action to include the Amendment and then pass HB 38 this calendar year so we can get urgent relief. In many counties and in particular Franklin, due to the triennial property tax review cycle, this bill has to be passed very quickly so 2020 values due in 2021 can be contested prior to the upcoming March filing deadline.

Please let me know if I can do anything to aid in the passage of this critical amendment.