Written Testimony

**Ohio House Economic and Workforce Development Committee**

**House Bill 252**

## June 19, 2019

Chair Zeltwanger, Vice Chair Powell, Ranking Member Sobecki and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 252.

Blighted properties are problematic for local governments across the state. As you likely know, to be designated a blighted property, the property in question must pose a direct threat to public health or safety, have a tax delinquency that exceeds the value of the property itself, or have conditions that adversely affect surrounding property values and/or limit land use in the area.

We have three such properties in Sidney. They include the former Wagner Manufacturing site, the former Cherry Cheer site, and the former Quality Dairy.

Although each of these sites have buildings in danger of collapse, the largest of the sites is the former Wagner Manufacturing site, and that is the site I will address in this testimony. The Wagner Manufacturing Company was founded by the brothers Milton M. and Bernard P. Wagner in Sidney about 1890, after they purchased the assets of the Sidney Hollowware Company, which began making cookware about 1886.

Construction of the Wagner manufacturing complex began in 1891, and grew to include sixteen interconnected buildings Those sixteen buildings are located at 440 Fair Road in Sidney. They are constructed on 26 identified parcels of land.

The 16 buildings exceed 160,000 square feet of space, and were constructed in 1891, 1920, 1921, 1946, 1959, 1966, 1971, 1981, and 1982. Portions of the buildings are three stories tall. Before the end of the 19th Century, Wagner Manufacturing added a line of cookware that was nickel plated. Unlike cast iron and copper pots, nickel plating does not react to acidic foods such as tomatoes which can taint food. As a result, nickel plated products were ideal for commercial use, such as in restaurants, schools and hotels.

Along with nickel plated cast iron, the Wagner brothers began manufacturing aluminium cookware in 1894. They were one of the first companies to do so. At the height of their business, they had a domestic market share that exceeded 60%. They began selling their products overseas in 1913, and developed a thriving international trade.

The demise of the company began when the Wagner Family sold Wagner Manufacturing to the Randall Company in 1952. Randall was a manufacturer of car parts. Randall was acquired by Textron in 1959. Textron sold Wagner to General Housewares in 1969. In 1996, General Housewares sold the company to the Slyman Group. As unfortunately often happens with legacy companies, each new owner drained as much profit as they could from the company before selling it to the next. The Slyman Group allowed the company to go into receivership, and the assets, including the “Wagner” name, were sold by the bank in 2000.

Unfortunately, the new owner of the property walked away from the site, moving his business to another community in 2005-06. The complex is unfortunately surrounded on all sides by residential areas, although buffered somewhat by the north-south CSX line on the east side.

Most of the surrounding homeowners have been reluctant to put money into their homes. As a result, the “Wagner” property has caused the entire neighborhood to decline.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) ordered the first of several remediation actions at the site in 1993 when the company was owned by General Housewares. In addition to remediating onsite lead contamination, General Housewares removed foundry sand, scrubber sludge, and 6,655 gallons of spent sulfuric acid solution. General Housewares completed this remediation in 1997.

Since the property was abandoned, OEPA has returned to the site, and removed tons of other contaminants. Unfortunately, vandals have entered the property on numerous occasions, removing metals, breaking out windows, and on more than one occasion, attempting to set the complex afire. Portions of the complex have collapsed. Others are in a state of near collapse.

It is estimated that demolition of the complex and additional remediation will cost $1.2 to $2M. While potential developers have looked at the site, no one has been willing to assume the tremendous cost of cleaning up the site.

Sidney is the County Seat of Shelby County – the only city in the county. Sidney has long been a manufacturing center, and has more manufacturing jobs per capita than any other city in Ohio. While Sidney has a population of just over 21K, there were more than 33K W-2 forms filed with Sidney’s Income Tax Department last year, clear evidence that several thousand people come into Sidney every day to fill jobs within the community before returning home to their families.

We are in full support of HB 252 and the creation of the Land Reutilization Demolition Program. HB252 would provide match-funding for the demolition of structures on blighted property such as the Wagner Manufacturing site.

Sidney simply lacks the financial resources necessary to demolish blighted property. HB 252 would help bridge the funding gap, assist us in demolishing this blighted property, and enable us to revitalize the site, which includes nearly ten acres.

I want to thank Representative Greenspan for his leadership in promoting HB252, and encourage the Economic and Workforce Development Committee to forward the legislation to the floor of the House for passage. Sidney could certainly benefit from the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Mike Barhorst, Mayor

City of Sidney

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