

Ohio's First Suburbs Unveil Statewide Policy Agenda

The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium (OFSC), an organization of 36 mature, established communities located near Ohio's largest cities, unveiled its policy agenda on August 10th. OFSC is comprised of the Central Ohio First Suburbs Consortium, the Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium, the Southwest Ohio First Suburbs Consortium, and the Dayton First Suburbs Consortium.

The group, representing nearly 1 million Ohio residents, outlined its vision for a strong and prosperous Ohio – one that includes all Ohio communities. The 2005 OFSC State Agenda represents the first time these communities have issued a statewide policy platform. “Obsolete real estate, aging infrastructure, dying commercial areas, older housing stock and increasing social service costs are among the many unique problems Ohio's First Suburbs face” says Kimberly Gibson, OFSC Director.

First Suburbs do not benefit from tax subsidies helping new exurb communities grow, nor do they have the land to continue to grow as these newer areas on the rural fringe do. Similarly, they are not recipients of state and federal assistance directed at blighted central cities. The OFSC State Agenda attempts to educate lawmakers of the unique challenges and opportunities this creates.

“Fix-it-First”

Because First Suburbs were built in the 1960 and 1970s, infrastructure in these communities suffers the effects of time, which are often costly. “A “fix-it-first” model would ensure existing, aging infrastructure is maintained before new infrastructure construction occurs,” says Mayor Lynn Ochsendorf of Whitehall. OFSC supports the renewal of public infrastructure bonds to help in the process, and supports dedicated state funding for maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Revenue Sharing

The OFSC policy statement calls for a commitment to adequate, shared state-local revenues. Virginia Barney, City Manager of Upper Arlington, says, “Job poaching helps no one. By working with our neighbors and the state, we can all share in the prosperity of opportunity, rather than competing for it. That's good for our communities, and good for Ohio.” The group opposes a “TEL” Amendment, stating it would “paralyze the ability of state and local governments to meet critical needs, and would shift a greater tax burden from the state to local governments.”

Economic Redevelopment

OSFC supports economic redevelopment opportunities for established communities, including the implementation of historic tax credits and legislation to encourage adaptive reuse and redevelopment of existing infrastructure. “Many of Ohio's First Suburbs have historic buildings in need of repair, and old retail centers in need of new tenants, but redevelopment and reuse is often more costly than new development. OFSC supports new and existing efforts to make redevelopment and reuse a more viable option for communities and businesses,” says Paul Feldman, Assistant City Manager of Worthington.

Protect Neighborhood and Residents

OFSC also supports efforts to control predatory lending and property flipping. The group specifically supports efforts to implement standards for property appraisers so residents and communities are not taken advantage of.

The Central Ohio First Suburbs Consortium (COFSC) includes Bexley, Grandview Heights, Upper Arlington, Whitehall, and Worthington, and represents nearly 87,000 central Ohioans. Information about the group can be downloaded at www.firstsuburbs.org