

Vision Worthington

A Review of the Visioning Committee's Final Report, from PCPW and WARD

WARD & PCPW have worked together to offer our united support for the great work done by the Worthington Visioning Committee. Herein, we share our thoughts on how Worthington can transform these vision statements into concrete actions, which realize the goals and aspirations expressed by Worthington city residents — thoughtfully captured, analyzed, and affirmed by the Vision Worthington Committee.

To avoid any appearance of impropriety or effort to misinterpret the Visioning Report's findings, these thoughts and perspectives were shared with and approved for distribution by the Chair of the Visioning Committee, Joe Sherman.

Joe offered some thoughts to contextualize our commentary, and we are honored to include his words:

As a community we are stuck. What is the compromise? Over the years we have heard "Let's do something". Based on input from you — the residents and community members — collectively we [Vision Worthington] have crafted vision statements and principles. A basic roadmap of where we begin to do something as a community, where collaboration and cooperation between residents and City Council improves. Now is the time to move from passivity to action with regard to many issues, including the UMCH property. Will you join in this transition to action?

- Joe Sherman, Chair of the Vision Worthington Committee

On the following pages you will find a series of thoughts positioned side-by-side with Vision Statements.

We hope that our efforts here are seen for what they are: a way of tying together a development outcome at UMCH, including a signature "Worthington Commons", to the vision for Worthington that our own residents have communicated through the Visioning process.

Our efforts come from a place of deep love and respect for Worthington, for what Worthington is and for what Worthington can aspire to be, and for the voices of the Worthington's residents. We hope it is source of inspiration for many of you.

Respectfully and humbly,

The PCPW and WARD Community Groups

Worthington is a diverse and equitable community

Worthington welcomes people across age, race, gender, ethnicity, orientation, gender expression, abilities, income, religion and politics. We are committed to systems, processes, resources, employment and public services that are accessible and fair for all. We recognize inequities and actively work to overcome biases and injustices that create barriers to full inclusion within our community. Diversity strengthens the social fabric of Worthington as we build authentic, lasting relationships and care for one another.

As a community, we:

- Create conditions that increase the diversity of our city to better reflect the racial and ethnic composition of our region.
- Proactively identify, evaluate and address policies and practices that negatively affect underrepresented populations.
- Create opportunities and remove barriers for people from a wide range of ages, abilities and income levels to live in our city.
- Implement policies and foster inclusive environments that increase diversity in public employment, business ownership and community leadership.
- Honor and celebrate our diversity with regular cultural events and multicultural education

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

LC's various plans have all called for high-density residential development that is priced for mid- and upper-level income buyers and renters. Is that an expression of diversity? LC is on record stating that they are not a developer who specializes in affordable housing, and that their plans for UMCH will not include affordable housing.

Conversely, a public commons is the epitome of equality as it provides unrestricted access to all. When built, Worthington Commons' amenities will be available, on a free and fair basis, to any and all.

To be frank, only through city acquisition and control of the creative process, will the sort of equality and diversity, as expressed in the Visioning process, be achieved. We therefore encourage City leadership to sincerely consider acquisition of this parcel to ensure that its development maximizes opportunities for diversity and remains vigilant against barriers to that end.

Worthington offers a high quality of life

Our community is committed to quality housing, services and amenities for all residents. A stable and diverse housing market makes it possible for Worthington residents to put down roots and live full lives here, actively participating and contributing to the wellbeing of the community. Our strong schools, excellent city services, and unique cultural, recreational and entertainment offerings make Worthington the most livable and desirable community in Central Ohio.

As a community, we:

- Ensure Worthington has an adequate tax base to make the desired investments in our city infrastructure and to maintain the quality of city services.
- Promote diversity and preserve community in our residential neighborhoods.
- Value the cultural arts that foster learning, dialogue and expression while providing attractive community spaces, memorable activities and a greater appreciation of diversity.
- Desire walkability and bikeability throughout our neighborhoods and business districts.
- Collaborate with nonprofits, schools, and libraries to continuously improve recreational parks and facilities, life-long learning opportunities and human services for use by our community

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

A close reading of their documents clearly indicate that Lifestyle's multiple proposals do not address housing diversity in any meaningful way. On the other hand, WARD and PCPW strongly support residential as integral to balanced development. We are convinced our community can *both* expand housing diversity and preserve a large contiguous greenspace found in the heart of the UMCH parcel.

Specifically, we would like to see the dozens of vacant locations around town be developed to significantly address the needs of housing diversity while enhancing the character of these local neighborhoods. The City can also incentivize owners of existing apartments — some badly in need of renovation — to improve their condition and designate them as affordable.

We fully support ear-marking a portion of the tax revenue from the commercial development at UMCH to expand diverse residential development across the entire city.

If Worthington is serious about offering a credible diversity in its housing stock, there are many ways to accomplish this. LC's proposal for UMCH is not one of them.

Worthington is dedicated to the vibrancy of its downtown

The heart of Worthington is a pedestrian-friendly, historic business district and Village Green that attract visitors and bring our community together. Planned by our founders, downtown Worthington is where our past, present and future are linked as it serves as a place of celebration, a niche of unique and local businesses and a hub to Worthington's other business districts and community assets. Old Worthington's historic character is paramount to our identity.

As a community, we:

- Protect the historic character of the Old Worthington business district.
- Make long-term investments to ensure its prosperity as a place to live, work and visit.
- Partner with public/private/nonprofit groups to maintain and enhance the economic diversity of the district.
- Host new and traditional community events that attract residents and visitors, increasing foot traffic to our downtown shops and restaurants.

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

We cannot agree more with the sentiments expressed in this Visioning statement. Further, we applaud the authors for their insight in clarifying that "investments" are the key to realizing this Vision.

As regards the topic of UMCH development, from city leaders we too often hear terms like "cost" and "expense" versus the term "investment". The connotation of this is clear. An expense is what you have to pay to acquire something you need, but don't necessarily desire. On the other hand, investment is what you gladly pay for something you look forward to owning. Said a slightly different way, you can't get what you really want if you use someone else's money to buy it.

WARD and PCPW support Worthington *investing* in the vibrancy of our downtown and extending that vibrancy along the Worthington Mile. Given the city's *historically* strong financial position, there are no insurmountable barriers to the city holding steadfast on zoning and then moving forward to acquire the UMCH property.

By taking both ownership of the parcel, and responsibility for its development, the desires of residents— as explicitly laid out in these Visioning statements — can be realized.

Worthington's economy is balanced and resilient

Worthington is a community with varied, but interconnected business districts that enhance and strengthen each other. A thriving High Street thoroughfare ("Worthington Mile") of diverse business, retail, residential and entertainment options complement the vibrancy, character and walkability of our historic downtown. Robust business districts from Linworth to Wilson Bridge Road to Huntley Road add to the economic prosperity and stability of our city. Worthington residents live and work here as employers are attracted to the unique features of the city and its diverse and skilled workforce.

As a community, we

- Encourage economic development and welcome public input to bring our shared visions to life.
- Attract employers that offer residents stable, good-paying jobs, while diversifying the city's revenue base.
- Incubate innovative solutions through community and business collaboration and partnership.
- Follow a comprehensive, long-term strategy that leads to timely and consistent decisions related to development.

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

The "Worthington Mile" concept is tremendously appealing to both PCPW and WARD. We feel the combination of signature parkland closely coupled to a continuous strip of robust commercial development along High St. can and will provide that vibrant and sustained civic "buzz" that the Visioning Committee captured and described.

We envisage a multi-use space where visitors will find restaurants, retail establishments, perhaps a pub or two, to complement the ample parkland and amenities making up Worthington Commons. It would be just a short walk to either downtown or the Gateway.

These sentiments are precisely why PCPW's proposal, echoed by WARD's earlier whitepaper, call for approximately twice as much commercial development proposed in either of LC's previous two proposals. And keep in mind, this increased focus on commercial will have a significantly positive impact on city tax revenues, something LC-style high density residential does not.

Worthington is a model for environmental stewardship

Nestled along the beautiful Olentangy River, Worthington is a dedicated steward of its land, air and waterways. The parks, paths, woods, green spaces and outdoor recreation throughout our community create a lifetime of memorable experiences. Our dedication to preserving the natural environment is rooted in our desire to live sustainable and healthy lives. We are a community that appreciates the splendor of mature trees, native vegetation and natural waterways.

As a community, we

- Maintain and preserve existing public parks and offer creative common and recreational spaces for all ages and abilities to enjoy.
- Follow a sustainable, balanced approach to new development and green space.
- Encourage the redevelopment of existing buildings to reduce waste and pollution.
- Promote access to local and sustainably-grown food, such as restaurant and school sourcing, community events, markets and gardens.
- Embrace renewable and clean energy production and strive for an overall reduction in energy consumption within the city.
- Strive to be on the leading edge of environmental stewardship.

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

Let's start by acknowledging that the seven acres making up the Tucker Creek watershed are a protected natural area and cannot be developed. So when a developer, like LC, says they want to "protect" these acres, this isn't an act of eco-responsibility. It is merely complying with building rules and regulations.

Looking at the other 35 acres at UMCH, LC's last several proposals have all called for paving over some ninety-plus percent of the remaining property. This is clearly a direct contradiction to both the spirit and letter of this Visioning component.

Further, please note Tucker Creek, which flows west through a culvert under Evening St, descends through Medick Estates, is subject to regular flooding.

Allowing LC to execute on anything resembling their last several proposals is simply asking for an environmental cataclysm. The plan championed by WARD and PCPW explicitly calls for preserving the "sponge" that is the undeveloped natural land at UMCH and will fulfill each of the Visioning bullets cited above.

Worthington's leadership is open, forward-thinking and collaborative

Worthington is a model for civic engagement where citizens participate, contribute and are heard on issues that affect their community. Our elected leaders carefully consider diverse points of view but also take timely and coordinated action to move our community forward. We set the pace for communities like ours, and our government is known for listening to and responding to the voices of its citizens.

As a community, we entrust our leaders to

- Use multiple communication platforms to provide transparency in governance and access to digital education with accurate and objective information on issues impacting the community.
- Strive for consensus building by encouraging and modeling respectful public dialogue and demonstrating benefits to the common good.
- Actively seek to understand the perspectives of underrepresented populations during decision making and increase diverse representation on community boards and committees.
- Carefully consider actions that may impact the livability, viability, sustainability and historic preservation of our city, and then make hard decisions to further progress.

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

In direct alignment with the sentiments of the Visioning Committee, the outcome of the UMCH site should serve the long-term interests of the residents, not the short-term interests of a developer. Like the Visioning Committee, we believe residents should determine what their long-term interests are and the city's action should then reflect this input.

Regrettably, we continue to see evidence that Worthington's current council and staff display the attitude that residents don't know what is best for them. As evidence, let us cite the fact that when Council was presented with 1,110 petition signatures from residents, it was ignored outright. There was no formal, public response from Council President or staff. The message that sends is very clear.

WARD and PCPW's shared goal is to encourage the City to take bold positions; first by seeking to understand resident needs and desires, then enabling results that align to the voices of those residents, finally by taking accountability for elevating Worthington's actual quality of life to the aspiration which is so frequently discussed.

Vision: Worthington is connected

Community members appreciate walking their neighborhoods, biking around town, and the ease with which they can travel to work and other destinations around Central Ohio. Our transportation infrastructure – sidewalks, bikeways, streets and highways – connects us to each other and the region. We are also connected through innovative technology that offers personal, business and educational benefits to all residents. We recognize the importance of adopting and promoting multimodal forms of transportation and digital technology while eliminating barriers to access.

As a community, we

- Invest in making Worthington the most walkable and bike friendly suburb in Central Ohio.
- Improve existing roadways to safely and efficiently integrate bike, public transit and pedestrian mobility.
- Embrace multimodal and high-tech forms of transportation.
- Establish partnerships to provide and support sustainable and convenient modes of transportation, including public transportation and related amenities.
- Integrate smart technologies across the city to improve infrastructure, public utilities, services and more.
- Leverage our existing direct access to highways to attract investment

PCPW / WARD's Point of View

Let's not forget that the UMCH site has the requisite attributes to become our community's crown jewel. Given its central location and size, it will become the crossroads of the community in terms of walking, biking, community.

Developed along the lines outlined by WARD and PCPW, it will (finally) put Worthington on par with surrounding cities offering their residents a signature green space. A space suited for much more than just biking and walking, and with twenty-five contiguous acres, Worthington Commons will offer amenities for recreation, community activities, sports, gardening, etc (built over time, with community input and approved funding).

These are achievable goals if we simply choose to say 'no' to the negatives of LC's high-density proposal: school overcrowding, traffic congestion, negative environmental impacts, and the significantly reduced revenues to city coffers that are intrinsic to high-density residential.