November 10, 2025

Mayor Carolyn Riggle and City Council Members,

What are the effects of vacant housing on a community? Research and studies have shown when housing declines, the effects are a perceived decrease in the value of neighboring homes and neighborhoods. It becomes a less desirable area for potential buyers, and there is an increase in the crime rate, vandalism and theft. There is also an increase in health and safety risks. The physical structures are unsafe, and the potential for bio-hazards such as pests, mold, and other unsanitary conditions increase. The emotion toll on neighbors is hopelessness, frustration, and a diminished pride in the community. A final cost to the community is an increased demand for police, fire and code enforcement services which cost additional money to the tax payers adding to the negative impact on the community. There is a loss of tax revenue and a decrease in the property value of surrounding properties. Often, these vacant properties are left to deteriorate with little to no maintenance and the cost of repair and restoration increases making it less likely for the property to be acquired by a new, responsible owner.

This sounds like big city problems.

This is Delaware, Ohio.

I would like to bring attention to an incident that occurred Tuesday, October 28, 2025 at the property of 46 W. Central Ave. The property is situated on the northwest corner of W. Central Ave. and N Franklin St. and has been vacant for 20 years.

The police were called to this property and discovered a severely emaciated dog tied up in the basement. The owner of the dog contacted the Humane Society of Delaware County the next day, Wednesday October 29th wanting his dog back and on Thursday October 30th, the Humane Society duct taped a court order on the basement door of a vacant building for the owner of the dog to appear in court on Wednesday, November 5th or to call and surrender the dog. The dog was surrendered. The dog will be given medical treatment and held as ‘evidence’ as the Humane Society continues to build an abuse case against the owner of the dog

In response to this incident several days later, I sent a FB message to Carolyn Riggle’s re-election page asking what are her plans are for the vacant housing and the homeless population in our community. I received a response regarding community programs to assist the homeless population, the facilities available and potential future resources of land donation for a facility. In her response, she asked “What vacant properties are you referring to?”

I am very disappointed Carolyn would ask, considering her re-election campaign sign was placed in front of 46 W Central Ave. Carolyn knows where I live, as she mentioned in her response to the homeless population the “warming center at the church across the street from where you live”.

The property at 46 W. Central Ave was a multi-family property, last purchased in 2004. The owner gutted the building down to the studs and removed all utility services. It has remained in this condition with minimal maintenance now for two decades.

The side porch was removed about 12-15 years ago after complaints the porch was falling apart and possible squatters reported on the property. Plywood replaced the doors on N. Franklin St. The basement continues to be unsecured.

Over the years there have been several squatters in this building, last summer a family of raccoons resided there and now this latest incident with an abused dog.

Currently, the property has at least two broken windows. The grass is maintained; however, shrub weeds grow 2-7' between the building and the sidewalk along N Franklin St. Two front porch posts are no longer secured to the ground and additional vertical boards are propping up the porch. It is not a safe structure. In addition, weeds and poison ivy have covered the front porch for several years.

A second property, 67 W Central Ave located on the same block across the street is an old brink home, formerly used as the Christian Science Reading Room. Had the property been maintained it would have been considered a treasure in any community. This property has since been gutted to the studs and has no utility service. The property has four fully boarded up windows, what looks like a failing back wall and another four broken window panes on separate windows along the side and front of the property. The county auditor's records show the property last sold in 2020. It is becoming another long-term vacant property.

The owner of 46 W Central Ave is East End Properties, LLC. Terry Whiteside is listed as the LLC agent. He is a co-owner of Whiteside Manufacturing, Inc. and holds title to real estate under Whiteside Properties, LLC, Whiteside Holdings, Whiteside Manufacturing, Inc., East End Properties, LLC, CGSG Investments, LLC, Indy Investments, LLC, DTKS LLC, TWRW LLC, WHWH LLC, and Terry Whiteside. The Delaware County Auditor lists 82 properties/vacant lots listed under theses owners. There may be other listings not identified.

The owner of 67 W Central Ave is listed as Ryan Salsberry according to the county auditor's website and was purchased for $80,000. The tax mailing address is in Worthington's Mount Air neighborhood. He is the owner/educator of JAX Construction. His company webpage states "Ryan is not your typical licensed general contractor. He is the owner you call to get the "true" answer and the honest estimate to your project. Ryan will let you know the truth and everyone he runs into and works with appreciates and enjoys that honesty."

I find Mayor Riggle's response to vacant properties concerning to say the least. She could clearly see the condition of the property when she placed the re-election sign at 46 W. Central Ave. She associated herself with this property and other vacant properties owned by Mr. Whiteside by the

placement of her re-election signs on these properties. It did not go un-noticed in the community. I think at the least, it was a bad look.

Carolyn Riggle campaigned on her experience, providing fiscally responsible leadership and advocating for families and neighborhoods.

How is allowing what was a multi-family building in downtown Delaware to sit vacant for 20 years, generating $631.06/year in property taxes fiscal responsibility for the city and community? How much unrealized tax revenue was lost over the 20 years while this property sat empty and deteriorating? In 2018, the taxation department re-evaluated the improved market value of the building structure and it was reduced from $105,000 to $4,400. The current IMPR is $12,900. The property tax reduction also represents a reduction in the city tax revenue for community services.

How much did the recent police response cost the tax payers? How much do the resources to care for the injured dog and continued investigative work cost the Humane Society? How much do the court expenses cost the city? I would guess more than $631.06 in yearly taxes.

Given the condition of these properties, why have these property owners not been cited for the code violations? Why are property owners allowed to maintain property in such poor condition for 5, 10, 20 or more years in our community?

How are you advocating for families and neighborhoods?

These are just two long-term vacant properties on my block. There are several other long-term vacant properties within several blocks of my home. Mr. Whiteside also owns these properties.

How long will these properties sit vacant with boarded windows and doors, with broken windows and other possible code violations before the city will take action?

A study in Cleveland, Ohio found that properties within 500 feet of a vacant/abandoned property lost 9.4% of their value.

I fully understood that property owners have rights and can maintain a property in various states of repair. Property owners hold vacant properties for various reasons, including speculation and to reduce their personal tax liabilities. However, it is the city's responsibility regardless of who these owner's are to enforce building codes, encourage best use of land practices, and financial responsibility to the community. Turning a blind eye to these properties because the lawn is maintained and the taxes are paid is not good enough and in my opinion is not representing all families and neighborhoods in our community.

Mr. Whiteside is a successful business owner in our community and has a very nice home in the Northwest neighborhood. His neighbors, including Mayor Riggle benefit from the value and

proximity to his home, while many other property owners in the community are negatively affected by his numerous dilapidate or vacant properties.

Mr. Whiteside has the means to maintain and fix-up these properties. There are other property owners in our community that maintain vacant housing in very poor conditions that have the means to repair and properly maintain these properties and choose not to. When these properties are vacant for decades, continue to deteriorate with little to no intervention from the city it looks like complacency.

I am very upset the owner of 46 W Central will shoulder no responsibility for providing a space for a dog to be abused in such a manor. Almost two weeks later, the property has not been secured. A complaint was made on November 5th on the cities web app regarding the condition of the property and three days later, November 8th the case was listed as closed, before you have even read this letter. The property is still not secured. Placing steel bars on the basement door would prevent future squatters and criminal activity on this property. In my opinion, the property is a public nuisance.

Both of these vacant properties are next to the Zion United Church of Christ which is used as a warming center for homeless men when the temperature drops below 25 degrees. These vacant properties are a magnet for homeless but are not safe structures.

So I ask, Mayor Riggle and City Council what is the city doing about the vacant housing is our community?

In my immediate neighborhood, four property owners are making exterior improvements to their properties. My husband and I recently had our foundation tucked pointed and our sidewalks and driveway replaced. My neighbor to the east is gathering estimates and plans to complete work on the outside of her home and my neighbor to the west is progressing with repairs to the property after a fire. The Zion United Church of Christ across the street is replacing the facade of their front steps. That is four immediate neighbors making exterior repairs and improvements to their property flanked on either side by two long-term, vacant/gutter properties is disrepair.

Doing nothing is no longer good enough. There is a high demand for development and many opportunities for redevelopment in our community. How many apartment units have recently been constructed? How many new single family homes are being built? Why are these long-term vacant properties and buildable lots sitting vacant and idle for decades? Community development is not just large projects. You can no longer turn a blind eye and pretend the decay is okay.

Cities have the means to address these vacant run down properties. The most powerful tool is enforcing building codes. It is paramount to fighting urban decay. If current ordinances are not strong enough, pass laws that properly address the problem. Placing a few sheets of drywall in view of a window is not property maintenance to appease code enforcement officers.

It was mentioned in a message November 6th from the Delaware Public Health District there is a task force that different agencies get drawn into on a property. The person had reached out to the city regarding information I had left with her regarding the incident with the dog and said it was noted a complaint was filed with the city afternoon day prior. I would expect that a task force response would be triggered prior to a citizens complaint considering the police were called to the property, a court case was generated and the abuse of an animal. I find it very concerning there is not more communication and a consolidated effort from a 'task force'. The incident occurred a week prior. It should not take a citizens complaint to generate a response. I would think a animal abuse situation in a vacant/abandon building and a potential squatter would bring attention to a property from multiple agencies in a timely manner.

A growing tool for many communities is the establishment of Vacant Property Registrations (VPR). Property owners, banks and servicers would be required to register a vacant property in a specified time period, confirming clear communication between the city and the responsible party. A registry would establish accountability and expectations, it could coordinate department responses, fees would be clearly stated, as well as specific property maintenance requirements, and escalating penalties for non compliance. A VPR incentivizes property owners to maintain properties, redevelop vacant properties/lots and the ability of cities to recover lost revenue. The funds could be used to invest in community redevelopment opportunities and assist/partner with community organizations, such as those providing services to the homeless.

In November 2024, the state of Arizona passed the Arizona Proposition 312, which provides relief to property owners hurt by vacant/abandoned housing. It allows property owners to apply for property tax reimbursement if local government does not enforce laws against properties that are public nuisances.

Local government should be encouraging solutions, not accepting the status quo. Government should use all means available, including adopting new ordinances that address vacant property and homelessness, using land banks to acquire, temporarily hold and care of abandoned properties until they can be transferred to a new owner, encouraging vacant land stewardship to repurpose and maintain vacant lots, and using art, culture and community development to activate spaces. The city should be encouraging redevelopment with a focus on sustainable development such as additional community parks, Habitat for Humanity housing or other small scale development on vacant properties and lots within the city.

I have only focused on two vacant properties in my neighborhood suffering from chronic neglect. There are many other neglected properties in our community. I expect under your leadership moving forward actions will be taken to rehabilitate these properties and neighborhoods. I liked a quote from the Center for Community Progress, "Vacant and abandoned properties are not just empty buildings in the background. They affect people's safety, health and opportunity-and they shape how whole neighborhoods feel." Everyone wants to feel safe in their neighborhood. Everyone wants to live in a thriving neighborhood.

We expect those campaign tag lines to become promises fulfilled. Each vacant/abandon property and vacant lot in our community represents lost opportunity, the least of which is tax revenue that provides vital funding for our schools, police and fire, and other community resources. In recent years, the city has asked the community for additional revenue while overlooking existing opportunities. Yes, property owners have rights. The cost of compliance with building codes and community's ability to address long-term vacant decaying properties and neighborhoods should cost less than non-compliance and inaction.

Delaware is a vibrant growing community we all want to be proud of.

- Wendy Curtin
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