Issue 38 opponents are using the phrase “keep Worthington working.” They believe that Worthington already has a process in place that is affective at using resident feedback for a final outcome that works for all parties involved. They also believe that it will hurt economic development.

Their opposition is predicated on three assumptions:

1. That residents pay attention to city commission, board, and council agendas and decisions at all times.
2. That the future flow of zoning law changes will be consistent with the past flow of zoning law changes.
3. That the city cannot bring in additional income tax revenue without zoning law changes.

**Assumption 1: That residents pay attention to city commission, board, and council agendas and decisions at all times.**

Consider this: When was last time you read the City Council minutes? When was the last time you looked at a municipal planning commission agenda? When was the last time you attended an Architecture Review Board meeting?

There are very few people who attend these meetings. In our Council meetings, it is common for zero residents to be in attendance. There are ‘watchdog’ groups that have sent representatives to meetings the past couple of years in order to make sure they are fully informed. Even though the entire process for zoning law changes is public, many residents do not know what developments are being planned until it is too late. Issue 38 will ensure meaningful involvement.

Furthermore, it is common knowledge on Council that residents who engage in the process must realize that their comments are to be heard, but not necessarily incorporated in any way. Since 2014, this fact is demonstrated in at least two processes: the UMCH public input process, which only incorporated three comments out of 439 comments; and the Showe Development (pocket park) project, where a group of more than 100 residents signed a petition to support of purchasing a small plot of land on E. New England Ave. The group also stated publicly that they would fund the development of said park, and Council stately publicly that money was not the issue. All but two Council members (Smith and Chosey) voted to reject these residents.

**Assumption 2: That the future flow of zoning law changes will be consistent with the past flow of zoning law changes.**

Issue 38 opponents are not taking into consideration the zoning map. Worthington’s zoning map was created in 1971 to sustain the city financially for up to 15,000 residents.

There is a clear difference in vision from City Council, city staff and city ‘planning consultants.’ Their vision is to aggressively change the zoning map and the zoning laws to allow more developments that will not be conducive to the city’s financial sustainability. This vision is based on development trends and high-density housing trends identified in studies like the Arthur C. Nelson report, which is coveted by planning consultants.

This vision can be found in the Worthington Comprehensive Plan and in city staff documents.

Council has approved more zoning map changes in the past two years than the previous 12 years combined. There are at least three large properties that will likely be re-zoned in 2016 (UMCH, E. Wilson Bridge and Stafford Village). You can start to see the zoning map change drastically.

I have voted in favor of all but one re-zoning development, because those projects were done responsibly and they integrated Worthington’s character. The community favored these changes. Responsible re-zoning development can occur as long as there is community input at every stage of the planning process, including once the zoning change is approved. By the time the news of a zoning change reaches the general public, it might be four to 11 days after the zoning change is approved by Council. For residents who are unaware of the change until this point, they would only have about 10 days to obtain approximately 1,000 signatures for referendum. Issue 38 will allow more time for the general public to get involved, if needed.

**Assumption 3: That the city cannot bring in additional income tax revenue without zoning law changes.**

Currently, there are 1,019 non-residential parcels in Worthington where developers can re-develop without re-zoning or changing the zoning law.

In recent months, two companies have committed to growing their businesses in Worthington without re-zoning. Trivium and FC Bank will collectively generate more than $14 million in annual taxable payroll, which will be substantial revenue for the city. This type of business is non-controversial, good for Worthington’s budget, and does not require changing our zoning map or our character.

From 2007 to 2014 Worthington saw a total NET growth of 900 jobs. There were a total of six re-zoned properties, which accounted for 0% of that growth and 0% of the income tax revenue in that period. City staff has done a great job building and growing businesses in Worthington that do not require zoning law changes.

The inherent impact of Issue 38 will prompt re-zoning development managers to talk to the community and residents prior to requesting a zoning change. If the developer feels that the community would not support their proposed use, then they can revise the proposal.

To this point, it is important to know how I came to this conclusion. Since 2001, there have been 16 developers requesting zoning changes that would have been impacted by Issue 38. I contacted each of these 16 developers (totaling 28 land parcels) and was able to talk to 11 developers directly. All 11 said there would have been no difference in the outcome of the development if they were required to wait 60 days instead of 20 days. Most of them said it would have prompted them to communicate more with the community to make sure the project was worthwhile before requesting the change.

The developers were all project managers at the time of their respective re-zoning change. They include the developer leads for CF Bank, FreshThyme, UDF, Linworth Crossing, Verizon Retail, Holiday Inn, Linworth Baptist Church, WODA group, and three others in confidence.

As owner of a media and market research company, I can tell you that this information is consistent with standard business practices. Responsible companies will find a location that makes sense to them based on target market, demographics, and brand identity. Regardless the waiting period, Worthington is a desirable location for businesses. We do not compare to other central Ohio communities because Worthington is unique.

If your vision for Worthington’s future is to maintain the unique, family-family character, then look to your representatives on Council. Many of them do not share that vision. In a democracy, citizens can elect their representatives. Unfortunately, two members of Council have never been elected in a contested election.

My vision is to protect Worthington’s family-friendly character while growing Worthington-based businesses. Re-zoning and zoning law changes should be made carefully and with proactive community input.

Protect Worthington’s character. Keep Worthington’s zoning map working. Vote yes on Issue 38.

Doug Smith

member of Worthington City Council