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Older suburbs join forces to lobby state legislators - Trying to get officials to see their problems, goals

Author: Shaheen Samavati
ssamavati@DaytonDailyNews.com

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COLUMBUS Representatives from older, established suburbs across the state, including the Miami Valley, met outside the Statehouse on Wednesday to announce their unity on issues of concern to their populations. "Our goal is to get our legislators to really understand that they've got over a million citizens all over the state of Ohio who are confronting similar issues," said Rap Hankins, a Trotwood City Council member.

The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium has been loosely established since 1999 with groups of suburbs in the Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus area. Seven Dayton-area suburbs joined the consortium in July: West Carrollton, Trotwood, Oakwood, Kettering, Riverside, Harrison Twp., and Vandalia, said West Carrollton Deputy Mayor Jack Jensen.

The statewide group first formally met last spring.

"We've been working together a number of years, but this is the first time we've ever come out with a unified policy agenda," said Kimberly Gibson, First Suburbs spokeswoman. "We're really excited to have (the Dayton area) on board."

Some suburbs in the Toledo area are also considering becoming involved, she said.

The group aims to revitalize communities and raise public and political awareness of problems with people and money moving out of more developed areas.

Ken Montlack, vice mayor of Cleveland Heights, outlined the group's broad platform by calling for honest, efficient expenditure of tax dollars, promotion of sustainable economic development in the state, and regional cooperation.

The group also emphasized improving "first tier" suburbs' infrastructures to retain populations.

The consortium plans to be actively involved in the state legislative process, Gibson said.

Currently it is monitoring a Senate bill that would limit cities' use of eminent domain.

"It's an issue that needs to be studied," Jensen said. "We need to be careful that we don't do something that's unintended."

The group's next meeting will be the second week of November, when members hope to talk with gubernatorial candidates and express their concerns, though that has not yet been confirmed, Hankins said.

"I think many of us who are elected officials, when we look at our budget issues in our cities, have come to the conclusion that we can no longer do this by ourselves," he said.

By sharing resources suburbs can better address problems they all face, he said.

Jensen said they are also able to get better acquainted and establish a higher level of trust with other suburbs in the Miami Valley because of their open communication and common bond.

Contact Shaheen Samavati at (614) 224-1625.

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