

Valuable Insights from Mentor City Councilman Ray Kirchner

Regarding the Daniel Sawyer House



The City has been highly supportive of Lake County History Center's mission and message over the years. We have also been highly supportive of preserving historic structures when possible as evidenced by the recent restoration of Old Village Hall. Our efforts in obtaining federal funding and providing financial incentives were key in preserving the historic character of the building in perpetuity.

The News Herald article offers a nod towards the work we've done to preserve Sawyer House, yet frames our efforts as producing "little real dialogue or preservation commitment". It closes by encouraging people to press leadership for a solution. Frankly, this is unfair and untrue.

We have had extensive dialogue with the property owner over the past year regarding the preservation of the building. We have attempted to find tenants to fill the space. We have investigated grant opportunities. We have researched every available option short of the financial burden of moving and reconstructing the building at a cost in excess of \$750,000.

Our efforts have been exhausted and we are now at an impasse. The only solution at this point is for a benefactor to step forward to financially support this initiative.

It's unfortunate that countless historic structures throughout Lake County became abandoned and were eventually demolished over the years, long after they became what contemporaries felt were "eyesores" and/or safety risks. The irony that those 60 or 70-year-old structures were demolished to make way for structures which are now 60 or 70 years old themselves. Will our descendants regard the historic value of mid-century buildings in the same regard as we do? Or, will there will be a resurgence of nostalgia for what was once a great building that fell into disrepair?

Ultimately, a property owner is within their right to do as they see fit as long as zoning regulations are met, regardless of our feelings on the matter. We can incentivize. We cannot compel.

I'd like to leave you with this. We have been a good partner to the Lake County History Center over the years, and we'd like that to continue. Please bear in mind that we are as cognizant of the importance of preserving our heritage as you are - and probably more so. My fellow members of Council and I recognize that our legacy, as leaders, is to responsibly maintain a balance between growth and preservation. It's our job to leave Mentor a better place than we found it. We do not make decisions lightly because we know those decisions are likely to impact our community for decades to come.

Although we appreciate the passion some of your members may have, there is time for florid prose and there is a time for genuine action. If the History Center is poised to take the lead and able to find a financial benefactor, you won't find a more willing partner than those of us here in the City to do what we can to help preserve the Sawyer House.

Councilman Kirchner shared these details from the Old Village Hall Renovation Project in Mentor. They illuminate the complex undertaking that is involved in historical preservation. It is a costly multistep process requiring many hours of collaborative problem-solving and planning.

Mentor Old Village Hall

Built in 1888..

Used by City of Mentor until 1976
Empty for several years before NMS
accounting purchased property in 2013
for \$400,000.

Renovations completed in 2017 at a cost
of over \$1.45 million. Total investment
exceeded original estimate by \$700,000
City of Mentor was integral in helping
NMS obtain \$508,420 in Historic
Preservation Tax Credits and Grants
Mentor City Council authorized a
\$50,000 Economic Development Grant
in exchange for a façade easement and
agreement insuring the preservation of
the restored façade which maintains the
historic character of the exterior in
perpetuity.

MEACO helped secure a \$50,000 low-
interest loan

City provided 10-year / 50% tax abatement as part of Old Village CRA



Additional Resources

Renovation Update Video – February 2016

<https://youtu.be/fdiRs6FVd9E>

Grand Opening Video – March 2017

<https://youtu.be/CCvbFVFidfQ>

Restoring Old Village Hall in Mentor Still a Work in
Progress – August 2016

https://www.news-herald.com/news/ohio/restoring-old-village-hall-in-mentor-still-a-work-in/article_891d04a8-aa24-5f24-8b27-8689e458df9d.html

JCI Project Profile - <http://www.icibuilds.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-NMS-Mentor-Profile.pdf>

State Tax Credit Funding Article – December 2014

<https://www.craigslist.com/article/20141218/FREE/141219830/win-some-and-lose-a-big-one-cleveland-area-preservation-projects>