

Better Flip is model for county

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Another viewpoint is a column The News-Herald makes available so all sides of an issue may be aired. Jerry C. Cirino is president of the Lake County Commissioners; Richard J. Regovich is mayor of Willowick.

According to U.S. Census data, the cities of Eastlake, Wickliffe, and Willowick have all had declining populations since 1980.

The same data show that the median age in these communities has risen in the same time period, showing that the populations there are aging and new young families are moving in at a slower rate.

In an effort to address this dilemma, the Lake County Ohio Port and Economic Development Authority has partnered with the Lake County Land Bank to undertake the Better Flip project, a significant, comprehensive demonstration of how the 1950s-era bungalows on the western end of Lake County can be updated and made more attractive to young buyers, which serve as a marketing tool to attract new residents to Lake County.

The county has over 16,000 bungalows mostly built between 1948-1956 in the western suburbs of Willowick, Wickliffe, Eastlake and Willoughby.

Most of this housing stock has been maintained and remains viable, but the floor plans are dated and lack the open concept feel so sought after by millennial home buyers.

We recognize the need to address the future of our housing stock in order to maintain the overall viability of our communities as well, and having toured the Better Flip house this week and seeing the progress, we are excited at its potential and supportive of the initiative.

Since its inception, Lake County Port Authority Executive Director Mark Rantala has explained that the Port Authority is not going into the house flipping business, but rather building a model to show how these houses can be given another 50-year life span that will maintain neighborhood values.

The Better Flip house incorporates a range of elements that could be adapted to almost any of these bungalows, including an open-concept floor plan, the addition of a full front porch, a rear deck, a first floor mud and laundry room, and a 140-square foot master bedroom addition with an attached master bath that has its own walk-in closet.

These components can all be used individually or in combination with each other.

To market the Better Flip, the Port Authority will spend the summer running open houses where the public will be able to come and tour the house and understand how they can make similar investments in their own homes.

The Port Authority will also build a website with a series of YouTube videos to make the project accessible digitally, and will work with community partners such as the WilloughbyWestern Lake County Chamber of Commerce and the Lake County Development Council to market the Better Flip to the community.

Additionally, there are significant numbers of empty-nesters in these communities that love their neighborhoods, their neighbors, and the proximity and convenience of amenities like public

parks and shopping. Many of these homeowners are looking for ways to bring new life to their homes, and we think the Better Flip will present them with a model to do so, which will in turn encourage investment in our housing stock to prevent declines in property values and encourage new families to move into the community.

By attracting a new and younger population, we can address the county's labor shortage which continues to grow as boomers retire, as well as reduce the burden of property tax to maintain public services that falls on those who are aging.

We applaud the Port Authority for such forward thinking in seeking to re-imagine the 1950s bungalows for future generations.