



LOBBYISTS FOR CITIZENS

March 4, 2019

CERTIFIED MAIL/RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Attorney General Dave Yost
Office of the Attorney General
30 E. Broad Street, 14th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Mr. Yost:

Lobbyists for Citizens is a 501(c)4 Non-Profit organization dedicated to upholding honesty and transparency in government at all levels. We are very concerned about a situation in Lake County involving the Lake County Ohio Port & Economic Development Authority (LCOPEDA) and their project known as The Better Flip Concept Project.

The LCOPEDA, a port authority governed by ORC 4582, accepted the land and existing structure located at 557 E. 305th Street in Willowick, Ohio in December of 2017. A budget was supposed to be crafted prior to the Board taking on the project, but they accepted the property anyway. The project's budget was set at \$150,000 (approved by resolution of the Board), and a transfer of those funds were made to a dedicated line item for the project in the general fund in March of 2018. By October 2018, Mr. Rantala, the Executive Director of the LCOPEDA and project manager for The Better Flip Concept Project requested the Board approve another \$60,000 (making the total cost of the project \$210,000), which they unanimously approved. On February 27, 2019; Mr. Rantala again asked the LCOPEDA Board to approve an additional \$89,000 (making the total cost of the project \$299,000), which they unanimously approved. This project has now doubled in cost from the initial \$150,000 budget.

Lobbyists for Citizens is very concerned about the following:

1. It appears that the LCOPEDA is attempting to circumvent the competitive bidding process as required by ORC 4582.12.
2. The project involves the remodel of the existing structure and the addition of 220 square feet (1,115 at the start of the project and 1,335+/- square feet upon conclusion of the project).
3. The project is over budget by nearly double (initial budget was \$150K and is now \$299K).
4. The LCOPEDA was given the land and existing structure by the Lake County Land Bank.
5. The LCOPEDA is in violation of ORC Sunshine Laws as they have been non-responsive to our attempts to obtain information regarding the Better Flip Concept Project through written records requests.
6. The LCOPEDA is in violation of ORC Sunshine Laws as they have refused to provide requested financial information regarding the Better Flip Concept Project in their public meetings, which we have attended.
7. The LCOPEDA allows public comment in their public meetings, which is reflected in their Rules and Regulations; but has recently begun limiting questions to only one (1) question per person (this stipulation does not appear in the LCOPEDA Rules and Regulations).
8. Contractors working in the City of Willowick are required to register with the city, and we are unsure of whether all the contractors performing work on the Better Flip Concept Project are registered with the City of Willowick.
9. We have attempted to obtain the names of the contractors working on The Better Flip Project through written records requests but have been unsuccessful.

We have never seen a public entity work so hard to conceal information about a project. The Executive Director, Mark Rantala, and the entire board of the LCOPEDA are derelict in their fiduciary duty to the Lake County taxpayer. Additionally, we are stunned that a remodel (with an addition of 220 sqft) can cost \$299,000 when the land and existing structure was gifted to the Port Authority.

Please accept this letter as our formal complaint against the LCOPEDA for violations of the ORC and our request that a thorough investigation into The Better Flip Concept Project be commenced post haste.

Sincerely,

Brian Massie, President