



Update on Community Outreach

Background:

Since acquiring all of Stafford Court and Stafford Village three years ago, National Church Residences has determined that these senior living complexes need significant reconstruction, due to age of the complex, the size of the units, and the unmet need for senior housing in Worthington.

With more than 340 senior complexes in 26 states and Puerto Rico, National Church Residences is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Upper Arlington, Ohio and dedicated to advancing better living for seniors, enabling them to remain home for life.

Stafford Court/Stafford Village, built in the early 1970s by National Church Residences and an affiliate of Worthington Presbyterian Church, has served seniors who are still independent but prefer to live in a communal setting. The site currently includes 88 apartments, most of which are market rate rentals with 13 supported by federal housing subsidies. The organization prefers to maintain this general model in the future.

Future Plans:

Stafford Court/Stafford Village consists of units sized at an average of 445 square feet and limited off-street parking, as reflective of the standards for affordable senior housing in place at the time of its construction. It has been an important community asset for nearly 50 years.

Standards have evolved, however, and the entire complex needs updating, with consideration given to the size of each of the individual senior homes and the amenities now considered central to an attractive, safe and convenient option for later life.

National Church Residences desires to proactively step address these issues. The organization has invested more than \$100,000 in property upgrades over the last two years. However, before developing a comprehensive plan and design for the site, National Church Residence leaders sought community input on how to ensure the enhanced property will be an asset to the entire area, as well as to residents.

Their community engagement process has reached more than 400 people since March 2018.

- Community conversations included more than 50 individuals, including city government and non-profit leaders, experts on senior issues, neighbors, residents, former site owners and members of the Worthington Presbyterian Church, members of the Old Worthington Association and members of the Worthington Alliance for Responsible Development (WARD).
- A resident survey afforded the organization the opportunity to hear from people who call Stafford Court/Stafford Village home. Fifty-nine residents chose to respond.
- Finally, respected private research firm, Illuminology, conducted a telephone survey of 300 Worthington residents. The survey was completed between May 3 and May 14, 2018 and has a margin of error of 5.7%.

The following summarizes the key findings of National Church Residences' first phase of community engagement:

- The need for more senior housing in Worthington is both well documented and understood.
- The design or aesthetics of the upgraded site matters to many community members.
- Neighbors ask that parking and greenspace be included in the overall site improvement process.
- The walkability and convenience of the current location is highly valued by residents.
- Some neighbors and community leaders want the site to stay affordable and diverse even if it impacts funding for design.
- National Church Residences, where known, earns favorable ratings.



Key Findings:

1) The shortage of senior housing options in Worthington is well documented and well known among Worthington residents.

Of all central Ohio cities, Worthington includes the highest concentration of those 65+ (19.1%), as well as the highest concentration of households with a resident 65+ (30.7%, according to data from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC).

MORPC data also reveals that, compared to other area suburbs, Worthington was ranked last among all Columbus suburbs for availability of senior housing for residents.

The need for more senior housing seemed to be an accepted fact in most of the community conversations. Some shared specific stories of people forced to move out of Worthington and away from family to find single-story, age-appropriate options.

The community survey captured that nearly half of residents believe Worthington needs more of the housing “they might want to live in as they grow older.” Eighty-seven percent found

it moderately or very important for Worthington’s housing stock to incorporate options for seniors living independently. **In fact, 81% of residents somewhat/or strongly agreed that the City of Worthington’s government should encourage the development of more housing options for older adults.**

The survey also revealed that:

- Though nine of ten respondents think it moderately or very important that older adults live near family and friends, almost a third knew an older adult who had to move away from Worthington to find suitable housing.
- Ten percent now care for a senior and nearly another third expect to care for a senior sometime in the next five years.

National Church Residences is acutely aware of these demographics and opinions and the reality that housing needs exceed current capacity. For example, the organization currently has a two-year waiting list for two-bedroom residences at Stafford Court/Stafford Village.

“There are limited downsizing options for people like us who want to keep living in Worthington. The walkability and access to services and transportation that the Stafford Court/Stafford Village site offers doesn’t exist anywhere else in the community.”

— A senior living in Worthington’s Historic District



2) Many who were part of one-on-one or small group conversations give a high priority to the aesthetics, or the design of the site, and how well it fits into a historic neighborhood.

This point was clearly articulated by some neighbors, members of the Old Worthington Association and some public officials.

Several people also expressed a desire to avoid “looking institutional” and to not appear to exceed two stories in height from street-level.

Similarly, of those residents who offered suggestions through the community survey, some said it should “fit” the architectural style of the neighborhood (10%) and to be careful about the height of the redesigned property (9%).

“The New England village feel of Worthington includes a number of traditional architectural styles. The most important thing is to pick one and execute it faithfully with high quality, custom materials.”

— A Worthington City Council member

“Any new projects should complement the existing neighborhood design while incorporating their own unique and customized qualities. The focus should be on longevity.”

— An Old Worthington Association representative

3) While many said Stafford Court/Stafford Village had been a good neighbor, there were suggestions for improvements as the property is upgraded. These include fewer cars on the street and preserving and/or enhancing greenspaces.

This point was clearly articulated by some neighbors, members of the Old Worthington Association and some public officials.

Residents prioritized improvements to exterior maintenance and the grounds over even individual unit upgrades, specifically calling out sidewalks, grounds maintenance, benches and tree pruning. They also seek more parking on site.

Some neighbors pointed to the inconveniences and safety hazards created by on-street parking and said the updated site must do more to keep cars off the street. On-street parking issues are exacerbated especially when emergency vehicles are called. Sidewalks also were a requested upgrade.

“The parking and the traffic can get bad at certain times of the day. Otherwise this is a quiet neighborhood that values things like our gardens and greenspaces.”

— A Stafford Court/Stafford Village neighbor

4) Some leaders and neighbors spoke to the importance of keeping Stafford Court/Stafford Village in its current location, citing it important to preserve the walkability of the site and how it keeps residents connected to the overall community.

Fifty of 59 Stafford Court/Stafford Village residents who participated in our survey pointed to the walkability of the current site as one of the three best reasons to live at the community. Likewise, about two-thirds of residents say they moved to this location because it kept them close to family and friends. This correlates with the community survey results, which show that a majority of respondents said it was important for older adults to live near family and friends.

Several residents also appreciate the positive partnership with the neighboring Griswold Center and their transportation services. Others pointed to the easy walk to the drug store, grocery, nearby churches and other great community events such as the weekly summer farmer’s market.



“Other senior communities in the region are away from everything. This is right in the middle. Stafford Court/Stafford Village can make Worthington a leader as an ‘age-friendly community,’ and one that allows for more intergenerational connectedness.”

— A regional expert in senior living/housing

5) Some neighbors appreciate and want to maintain the socio-economic diversity of residents at Stafford Court/Stafford Village. Others felt that aesthetics and design were more important and, if necessary, favored raising rents.

Some neighbors commented on how the current residents are well integrated into the community. They expressed an interest in seeing a similar mix of affordable and market rate rents moving forward.

“Obviously we care about the look of the community from a design standpoint, but we also care about the well-being of our friends & neighbors.”

— A Stafford Court/Stafford Village neighbor

Others strongly advocate that a high-end design that “fits” the community be the overriding goal, even if it means making affordability a lesser priority.

“We believe the site has to be an asset to the historic district and favor whatever rent structure is required to make it so.”

— A member of the Old Worthington Association

6) To the extent that National Church Residences is known in the community, the organization is seen favorably.

Most government leaders were aware of the nonprofit, several valued National Church Residences' longevity as it has served seniors for more than 55 years, and others noted that it was known for quality and for being a good neighbor.

Just over half (54%) of Worthington residents report some awareness of National Church Residences. Of those who know of the organization, almost all express positive (45%) or neutral (54%) opinions about the nonprofit.

Residents were generally positive about the organization since it took over site ownership of the entire campus over the last two years and invested \$100,000 in upgrades to date. Others were concerned about what more upgrades would mean to their rent.



"Stafford Court/Stafford Village is a good place to live. I think they do a good job of listening to our needs."

— A Stafford Court/Stafford Village resident

Summary

National Church Residences has sought out guidance from neighbors, preservationists, Worthington residents as well as community and government leaders. The nonprofit will reflect upon all of this input as it begins working with The Jones Studio to create a plan or plans for the site. These designs and plans will be shared with the community – including reconnecting with those who offered suggestions during this early phase - before any official requests are submitted to the City, the Architectural Review Board, and, of course to Worthington Council.

As is often the case, a healthy tension exists between aesthetics, or "fitting" in this New England-style historic district, and the desire to serve Worthington seniors with affordable living costs. National Church Residences remains committed to finding mutually constructive solutions that advance the entire community and the seniors who choose Stafford Court/Stafford Village as their home.