

OTHER VOICES

Reclaim our communities

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The folks who paved over paradise with over-construction and crashed our economy are in full spin mode now that Florida Hometown Democracy is on the November 2010 ballot as Amendment 4.

This amendment to the Florida Constitution mandates that changes to local growth plans (comprehensive plans) approved by your city or county commission must then go to voters for final approval or rejection.

Millions of taxpayer dollars are spent crafting these plans in order to provide for orderly, affordable growth and ensure that your community isn't swallowed by a tidal wave of out-of-control construction.

But it hasn't worked out that way in much of Florida. Too many city and county commissions are too willing to rubberstamp developer-backed plan changes. After all, the business of land-use is politics. And in Florida, developers make it their business to control the politics through generous campaign donations.

Moreover, many politicians are in the sprawl business themselves. The developer/politician nexus helps explain Florida's construction frenzy and the subsequent meltdown.

Amendment 4 gives the people a vote on growth. It will reform the developer/politician dynamic. Not surprisingly, it drives the developer machine crazy.

A campaign designed to spread disinformation is already boiling. Opponents yell about St. Pete Beach to show Hometown Democracy just causes lawsuits. Fact check: The lawsuits are flying because the Hometown Democracy process was not followed.

Under Hometown Democracy, there will be a referendum only after the growth plan change is reviewed and voted on by the city or county commission. In St. Pete Beach, developers held the referendum before the proposed plan change went through review and public hearings. That violates state law.

Our desperate opponents - the "say-anything campaign" - say you'll have to vote on hundreds and thousands of little things. Fact check: Hometown Democracy referenda will track commission votes. So if your commission approves five ordinances approving growth plan changes, there will be five referenda.

If our politicians respect our plans, which have lots of growth built in already, we won't need to vote very often.

Our opponents say we live in a representative democracy and just have to elect better officials. My response: Been there, tried that. By the time they hand out the comp plan changes, it's too late; the damage is done.

Look at your officials. Too many haven't done a good job representing people. Our officials do a good job representing the sprawl machine. They are directly responsible for much of Florida's economic/sprawl disaster. Do you really want to continue with a broken, corrupt status quo?

The U.S. Supreme Court says voters can take back the power when their elected representatives have screwed up. You already get to vote on charter issues, bond and tax questions, etc. Now it's time we step up and reclaim our communities.

The first thing I suggest you do when you read a letter, column or blog in opposition to Amendment 4 is to Google the name of the author. Chances are, the author makes his living off sprawl or works in government (which is often the same thing.)

The "say-anything campaign" is desperate to preserve a rotten status quo. Immunize yourself now.

Lesley Blackner, an attorney, is president of Florida Hometown Democracy, the Amendment 4 sponsor.
