



Yes To Amendment 4

Give Voters Final Say Over Comprehensive Land Use Changes

Over a million Floridians, led by citizen activist Lesley Blackner and others, have signed enough petitions to place an important and needed proposal on the ballot in November 2010, as an amendment to the Florida Constitution.

If approved by 60% of the voters, it will require voter approval for any amendment of a City or County Comprehensive Land Use Plan after it is approved by the City or County Commission. Such amendments almost always increase densities and intensities at a developer's request, beyond those allowed in the Plan today.

This is an important measure to give the voters the ultimate say over major changes in land use, to better protect neighborhoods and the environment and to prevent traffic congestion, tax hikes and other consequences of overgrowth.

It is needed more than ever before, as overdevelopment has created a glut of vacant houses, condos, offices and stores which is making it difficult for property owners to sell and rent, depressing property values and harming the economy.

Developers and politicians who want to keep their exclusive power over such major land use changes are spreading false accusations about the amendment.

New, expensive special elections will not be required for each Plan amendment. The amendments may be held until the general election already scheduled every two years. If a developer wants a special election, the developer can be required to pay for it.

Votes will not be required for every small change in land use which comes along, such as rezonings, special exceptions, variances and permits. Voter approval will not be required for Mrs. Jones to paint her house or for Mr. Smith to put in a swimming pool. It will be required, however, for a big developer to amend the Plan to change his property from ranchland to an intense development, or to quadruple the density on land next to your home.

It is not true that hundreds of Plan amendments will be put before the voters every year. Sarasota County only has adopted an annual average of six Plan amendments over the past

twenty years, and the local cities even fewer. Statewide, each county and city has adopted an average of 4.2 amendments per year. Further, it is to be hoped that the requirement of voter approval will reduce the number of Plan amendments now given away all too freely by City and County Commissions. After all, a Comprehensive Plan is supposed to be a long-range map for future development which should not be changed willy-nilly just to please some developers who want to build ever more intensely than presently allowed. It may not be written in stone but it shouldn't be written in jello either.

The measure will not stop all development and thereby destroy the economy, as the opponents allege. First, they fail to recognize that it is overdevelopment which has crashed out economy and that reining it in will help values as supply better matches demand. Further, current Comprehensive Land Use Plans already allow huge amounts of new development even if they are never amended again. In Sarasota County, for example, the Plan already allows enough new development to accommodate population projections for the next 50 years, as well as considerable redevelopment. Construction could take off at a rapid pace throughout the County and its cities and continue for decades even if the Plan was never amended.

Opponents will spend millions of dollars in their effort to defeat Amendment 4. Based on their efforts to date, the truth will be no obstacle in their campaign.

Supporters of Amendment 4 therefore need to work hard to obtain the required voter approval, to put growth in the hands of the people rather than just the politicians who all too often do the bidding of those whose interests are not always the same as our own.

Please vote for Amendment 4, and if you can contribute to Florida Hometown Democracy or volunteer to help their campaign, at www.floridahometowndemocracy.com.

This may be the last best chance to restore to the people meaningful control over the destiny of our communities.