

Citrus County Chronicle On-Line

04/06/2010 Guest Columnist, Winston Perry

By Winston Perry

Amendment 4 not bad

This is in response to the Chamber of Commerce guest column by Josh Wooten on March 30 regarding Florida Hometown Democracy Amendment 4, which I would like to share with the citizens of Citrus County.

Let's start with the suggestion that Amendment 4's passage would stall development.

There is already enough land approved for development in Florida's local master plans (called comprehensive land use plans) to accommodate 80 million to 100 million residents — about five times more people than we have living in the state now.

And even that isn't enough for some land speculators and politicians. From 2007 to 2009, politicians around Florida voted to change local plans to allow a staggering amount of overdevelopment — 520,000 more houses, 1.2 million more people, and 1.3 billion more square feet of commercial and office space. (Figures provided by the Florida Department of Community Affairs.)

The Tampa Tribune recently pointed out that the 1.3-billion-square-foot figure is equal to roughly 13,000 new Walmarts.

The fact is, developers have plenty of land set aside for building right now and into the future. They aren't building because they overbuilt in a frenzy and crashed the market, wrecking our home values, increasing taxes to cover the cost of building the infrastructure to support their developments, and putting thousands of people out of work.

Amendment 4's opponents in the sprawl industry falsely state that Amendment 4 would put "all land use changes" to a public vote.

Amendment 4 does not require voter approval of every new hotel and grocery store, but it would require voters to approve changes to the community's local comprehensive land use plan. For example, voters would be asked to decide if the use of a parcel of land should be changed from farming to housing.

If a developer chooses to build in the many areas already set aside for development in the local comprehensive land use plan, no change — and no vote — is required. When a developer insists on building outside your plan's development area, your local commissioners will review and vote on that local comprehensive land use plan change just like they do now. Amendment 4 adds one new and important step at the end: You will get the opportunity to veto or approve the commission's decision on the next regularly scheduled Election Day. It's that simple. No special

elections required.

If your local commission adopts, for instance, three local comprehensive land use plan changes in a year, then you'll vote on three. If they adopt one, you'll vote on one. On average, Florida commissions vote to approve three or four local comprehensive land use plan ordinances per year.

Our local comprehensive land use plans weren't ever supposed to be changed willy-nilly at every speculator's and politician's whim. But that's what's been happening — land use change applications have increased for the last several years because land speculators and politicians anticipate that Amendment 4 will pass in November and then they will be held accountable by local voters.

Under Amendment 4, the only time citizens would vote is when a developer insists on building outside the already-approved areas. And, again, the public will only vote after city and county officials have thoroughly reviewed and approved a proposed land use plan change first.

As builder Jeff Auslander pointed out, "Amendment 4 is only going to make it difficult for developers who are trying to promote projects in the wrong place."

It is disappointing that so much misinformation is going around about this very wise proposal. To say voters are too dumb to understand development proposals is insulting. Look around Florida, and it's clear we need a change. The wealthy speculators that grow fat from lax rules and permissive politicians are doing everything they can to spread falsehoods about what Amendment 4 would do.

Since the Growth Management Act passed in 1985, a constant blizzard of Land Use Plan changes has assailed one community after another, making wise long-range planning extremely difficult. Comprehensive land use planning has been gutted.

People all over Florida have been protesting unwanted developments, only to find that the deck is stacked against them by the building industry and pro-development politicians.

The net result has been an unending effort to catch up with the needed infrastructure that these plan changes require, with existing residents paying the bills. We are forced into fighting a rear-guard action to protect Florida's wetlands, rivers, water table, agricultural lands and the natural areas most prized for recreation by both our citizens and our visitors who constitute Florida's No. 1 economic engine. I can only comment that, "Growth for the sake of growth, is the ideology of the cancer cell."

Amendment 4 does not destroy representative government. The people are governed by their consent, and in this instance we are taking the decisions about land use changes into our own hands by having the final say at the end of the local decision-making process.

On Saturday, May 8, the Citrus County Council, in conjunction with the Chronicle, will be hosting a forum at the Beverly Hills Lions Club. There will be speakers from both sides of the Amendment 4 issue on hand. Doors open at 10 a.m. with presentations at 10:30 a.m. We encourage you to come out and listen so that you can make an informed decision about this most important Amendment 4.

We believe the voters are smart enough to see through the enormous amount of misinformation that the Florida Chamber of Commerce is spreading throughout the state, and we look forward to a Florida that's better planned and protected, and more accountable after Election Day 2010.

Vote "YES for 4" on November 2. Get the facts at www.FloridaHometownDemocracy.com.

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Winston C. Perry is on the Amendment 4 State Coordinating Committee. He is a Homosassa resident and Inverness businessman.