

Opinion

Gulf Breeze NEWS

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On the Spot:

WHERE WE PUT PEOPLE "ON THE SPOT" TO ANSWER A QUESTION "ON THE SPOT."
 By Franklin Hayes

How would you like to see local governments spend your tax dollars?

Are we 'stupid, ignorant' voters?

Hometown Democracy is a citizen campaign to change our state Constitution in the 2008 election. The idea is for local voters, not elected officials, to make major growth decisions. They key word here is major - not every little detail. Due to last years' amendment they now need a "super majority" or 60 percent vice the original 50 percent they needed prior to the Florida Developers and Chamber of Commerce campaign to change that requirement, mainly in response to the threat the Florida Hometown Democracy movement posed to business in Florida. They are just under 100,000 out of 650,000 left to go on this last push to get on the ballot and the opposition is getting frantic.

Former Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, John Thrasher, has recently sent an "extremely urgent" letter to thousands of Florida voters who have previ-



ously signed the Florida Hometown Democracy Petition. The letter in question tries to scare petition signers into changing their minds. His letter however fails to mention that he is a lobbyist now with the Southern Strategy Group which represents such large development and business groups as Disney and Associated Industries of Florida (the outfit running this signature revocation drive) and the St. Joe Co. The same St Joe company that donated 2,000 acres of wetland to be used in Panama City with the promise that they would "save" 9,000 acres next to it for

running Florida. Surely they won't stand for that.

In the end if Thrasher and his clients win this one, we all lose even smaller developers who actually care for their communities and want "smart growth" and not a haphazard free-for-all.

Local politics in Florida has become dominated by local and state government in Florida whose only purpose is to help build something on every vacant piece of land in this state as long as there is a dollar to be made. Face it, this state is "for sale!"

Is this what you truly want? Let your voices be heard and ignore Thrashers panicked and absurd threats in his letter. In fact "x" through it and send it back in the self addressed envelope that they are paying for, they can afford it! Download and sign the petition now and don't let him or anyone else tell you that you are foolish, stupid or ignorant for doing so.



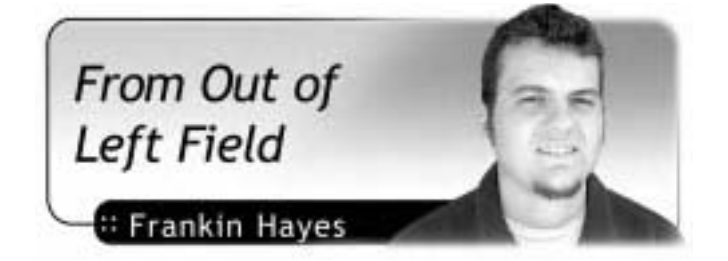
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Development requires delicate balance

The issue of development always seems to be a double edged sword. On one side you have those who like things the way they are and on the other side you have those who can't stand the way things are.

I personally have found myself on both sides of the blade.

As a teenager, I couldn't stand living in the Pensacola Bay Area. I often described it as a cesspool, where various elements of society came together to melt in the sweltering Florida sun.



However, when I got a little older and began to travel I saw that the area really has much to offer and its relaxed atmosphere was more an amenity than a burden.

like Orlando, New York or Los Angeles, there is certainly more to do but you pay a price. You pay with your time as you sit in traffic or literally pay ridiculous amounts of money for parking.

Northwest Florida has come a long way since the mid 90's but a certain amount of commercial development is still needed to keep our young people in the area.

A lot of people my age chase greener pastures elsewhere, only to return when they are broke or ready to start a family.



"School improvement in general."
 -Chloe Johnson
 Gulf Breeze



"Public transportation. It might be nice to take a bus somewhere like downtown Pensacola instead of driving."
 -Carrie Baker
 Gulf Breeze



"To help people for lower cost housing so that we don't have as many homeless families with children."
 -Carlene Thornton
 Gulf Breeze



"On stuff to do after school. A lot of kids do bad stuff after school. A fishing program would be cool."
 -Chris Davies
 Gulf Breeze

Florida Hometown Democracy is deceptive

A deceptive campaign is underway to strip Florida landowners of their private property rights. A special interest group, Hometown Democracy, Inc., is working to garner support for a Constitutional referendum that it claims will stop unwanted development and redevelopment from occurring in our state.

However, there's something that this proposal's proponents aren't telling citizens: If it's approved, every land owner in Florida will find his or her individual property rights severely compromised.

Under Florida's dysfunctional and overly centralized system of land use planning, property owners who want to use their land in a manner of their choosing can't do so without first obtaining two separate land-use labels approved by state and local government entities.

Owners must obtain a zoning label from their local gov-

VIEWPOINT

By Carol Saviak

ernment. They must also obtain a future land-use label that allows their intended use. The latter label may require not just one but two layers of approvals in a process involving both state and local government entities. This process can take several years and tens of thousands of dollars in attorney's fees to obtain.

Despite these hurdles, thousands of land owners exercise this option every year and are granted labels that will allow them to exercise their inalienable rights to own and use their property as they see fit.

The Hometown Democracy initiative proposes to add even greater costs to the financial and cost-of-time burdens currently imposed upon landowners. This initiative would force all property owners requesting changes in their future land use labels to win popular support

via public referendum.

This would essentially turn every Florida land-use decision into a political popularity contest. Popular land uses, such as large homes on multi-acre lots, might be readily approved by a majority of voters, but practical but unpopular uses, such as gas stations, apartments, grocery stores, churches, and any number of other essential services might have little hope of winning a majority of the popular vote.

Much more disturbing to anyone who has read anything about the founding ideals of American government is the fact that this proposed referendum seeks to replace our American system of representative government with a form of direct democracy over property rights.

The authors of the U.S. Constitution designed our representative form of democracy to check government's power and to protect the rights of individuals and minorities from

domination by self-interested majorities.

This anti-growth referendum now disguised as a measure aimed "returning power to the people" will have the opposite effect. All Florida landowner will lose their current ability to seek a fair hearing on their land use classifications and instead will be forced to bear the incredible burden of waging a political campaign simply to assert their property rights.

Voters may face a profound ballot question in 2008: Do you want to stop growth in Florida if the price is trading away your own private property rights and destroying the foundation of individual freedom so fortuitously granted by our nation's Founders? Let us hope the answer will be "No!"

Carol Saviak is an adjunct scholar of The James Madison Institute, a non-partisan policy center based in Tallahassee, and is the Executive Director of the Coalition for Property Rights.