

Amendment 4 a bad idea for Florida

BY ABEL HARDING | STORY UPDATED AT 11:17 PM ON MONDAY, JAN. 4, 2010



When Florida voters go to the polls in 11 months, they'll vote for a new governor and U.S. senator. They'll also decide the fate of Amendment 4, which has the potential to clog future ballots and repeatedly drag voters to the polls to approve every future change to a county's comprehensive plan.

In Duval County, that would have meant dozens of additional ballot items in 2009 - a depressed year in real estate.

It's not hard to see why Amendment 4 - or the Hometown Democracy initiative as it is known - is attractive to some. In a bid to "boost growth," the Florida Legislature rolled back much of the state's growth management laws in the past legislative session. In a state where debate has raged for decades over the negative effects of unplanned growth, the move was both surprising and disappointing.

Amendment 4, which would require referenda for every change to Jacksonville's comprehensive plan, is not the answer.

In 2006, the small town of St. Pete Beach passed legislation similar to the Hometown Democracy initiative. The results have been ruinous.

St. Pete Beach learned quickly that voter-approved comprehensive plan changes can be both cumbersome and expensive. After developers and community leaders launched a campaign to push through a new growth management plan that narrowed the city's version of its Hometown Democracy-style laws, St. Pete Beach was sued. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees later, development slowly returned.

Both sides of the debate have tried to spin the St. Pete Beach story to their benefit. Opponents argue that development would grind to a halt and courts would be flooded with legal challenges. Supporters assert that the lack of a defined process - where planners reviewed changes, a commission voted in favor of them and voters had the ultimate say - was who was responsible for St. Pete Beach's problems.

There is no doubt that Florida must get serious about smarter development. The glut of unoccupied homes around the state is testament to the fact that developers greatly overestimated demand, and that local governments failed to provide necessary checks and balances.

But, by subjecting every change to a county's comprehensive plan to a referendum, voters are giving elected officials license to stop doing their jobs.

In Duval County, Jacksonville City Council members are charged with responsibly amending our comprehensive plan. If they fail to exercise those duties in a trustworthy manner - and there are certainly times when they have not over the years - then they should be replaced in the next election.

According to the Duval County Supervisor of Elections Office, the last election called in North Florida, which featured a state Senate seat and two Atlantic Beach races, cost taxpayers nearly \$700,000 and voter turnout was less than 4 percent. One can only imagine the cost to taxpayers that scores of additional ballot initiatives would create, not to mention the difficulty associated with getting voters to the polls.

Amendment 4 is not the way to solve Florida's growth problems. Electing honorable officials and holding them accountable is.

User Comments



no byline??

Submitted by averagedude on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 8:16 am

"Amendment 4 is not the way to solve Florida's growth problems. Electing honorable officials and holding them accountable is." Obviously the person writing this article is living in a fantasy land of their own making. While amendment 4 may not be the perfect answer, looking for "honorable" politicians is a joke. Have you seen the city council at work lately? Do you really think they can better predict the growth planning of this state or city? Not when they are truly concerned only with getting re-elected. I for one have had it with the Jax city council, a bunch of morons who do not deserve to be in ANY elected office. One bad decision after another. The mayor, our governor and our joke of a senator Bill Nelson certainly do not qualify as "honorable". Maybe Marco Rubio will be different.....

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Who did write this pap?

Submitted by EJefe on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 9:04 am

This looks almost like something from the developers' lobbyist boilerplate. I would like to see a byline also averagedude. Also T-U: Shouldn't this be in the "Opinion" section? Or do you now offer opinions as business "news"?

"But, by subjecting every change to a county's comprehensive plan to a referendum, voters are giving elected officials license to stop doing their jobs."

What a joke of an argument. If the elected officials WERE DOING THEIR JOBS, Amendment 4 wouldn't be on the ballot.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



The elected are only the result of the voters

Submitted by Bobb on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 9:11 am

The politicians pander to the voters who think they will gain an advantage by electing them. Voters (and people in general) are only interested in their own self interest. If a politician tries to run on a platform of fairness and improving the lifestyle not only of the current voters but of future generations, they will only get th



random votes of the citizens who did not take the time to learn about the candidates. Its the greed of the voters who are desperately trying to get something more than what they can provide for themselves that shapes our political system.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



You won't believe this

Submitted by [averagedude](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 9:47 am
http://townhall.com/columnists/FloydandMaryBethBrown/2010/01/01/obama_executive_order_alters_your_legal_protections?page=1 Amazing. Please read and pass on to everyone you know. THIS MUST END!!!

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Bobb

Submitted by [phyllysthemissionary](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 12:05 pm
 Agree, for the most part.

Ciao & Semper Fi, PTM-The Devil's Worst Enemy, <http://www.phyllysthemissionary.com/whatchristiansbelieve.html>

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



This is an opinion piece

Submitted by [Abel Harding](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 10:31 am
 I'm the author and I'm a columnist, not a reporter. That means my pieces will have opinion in them. It appears on the business page because I'm the business columnist.

Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Since when?

Submitted by [Frank Pierce](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 11:19 am
 Since when do voters vote officials out of office for their votes on the Comp Plan? Most voters don't even know what that is, let alone know how their Council member voted on the plan. If developers are forced to communicate with the voters to approve their changes; the voters would know more and that would mean less money for the developers to buy elected officials by funding their campaigns.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



HONORABLE OFFICIALS? I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE LATELY

Submitted by [Live and let live](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 11:21 am
 Abel Harding writes...Amendment 4 is not the way to solve Florida's growth problems. Electing honorable officials and holding them accountable is.

Just wondering, where do we find those "Honorable Officials?" The people of Jacksonville wouldn't know an honest politician if they saw one.

In this town the voters decisions are based on whether there's a Dem. or Rep. at the end of the politicians name. How else would former Atlantic Beach Mayor John Meserve who is under investigation, and accused of using his influence as a public official in shady land deals while receiving \$105,000 in the property transactions from Vestco have gotten elected as a City Councilman? Remember Vestcor? Vestcor is the recipient of over 34 million dollars of the taxpayers money in the form of 1.4 to 1.5 percent mortgage loans. Now Vestcor is asking the city to let them pay back only the interest payments and none of the principal for the next three years.

A conservative believes nothing should be done for the first time.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Thank you Mr. Harding

Submitted by [ElJefe](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 11:30 am
 We appreciate that you have clarified this. May I suggest that you initiate future opinion columns clearly stating that it is your viewpoint?

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Myths & Truths about A4

Submitted by [MLW](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 11:43 am
 1. MYTH; A4 is a "no growth amendment"

TRUTH; A4 does not deny growth. A4 kicks in **only** when a developer wants to build outside the Comprehensive Plan, and **only** when the BCC/CC has approved it. The Comp Plan IS a plan for growth. Since the new one will be drafted in 2025 I believe we have over 15yrs of growth already planned.

2. MYTH; A4 is a "vote for everything" amendment. There will be hundreds of items to vote on, and special elections will be very costly to the taxpayers.

TRUTH; Only comp plan changes, not zoning changes, variances or building permits will be voted on. Even then changes will be voted on **in packages**, the same configuration as the BCC/CC votes. Commissioners or CC, when approving Comp Plan changes, vote on ordinances, which will then be voted on by citizens. If a developer wants a vote to the comp

plan before a regular election, he can pay for that special election himself.

3. MYTH; A4 will destroy jobs and growth

TRUTH; There is enough growth provided for in the states' current comp plan to allow for over 100 million people, more than 5 times the current state population of 18 million. Even if any subsequent changes are approved under A4 there will still be growth, jobs. Controlled growth will encourage a stronger, more diversified economy based upon productive and PERMANENT jobs.

4. MYTH; A4 infringes on property rights.

TRUTH; A4 protects the rights of ALL property owners, not just the influential. Remember, A4 will not kick in unless the BCC approves a change not allowed under the current comp plan.

Developers work in increments, they don't lay all their plans on the table when a comp plan is developed because it will cost them more than what they want to pay. It's my opinion that the changes to the comp plan are the ones that are most costly to the taxpayer.

There will be a major campaign against A4, there is a lot of money and influence behind those who oppose it. If like me, you intend to vote for A4 and believe in it then you need to do your part to keep the myths and truths in front of people.

I've heard it called "mobocracy".....as far as I am concerned there has been a mobocracy in place for a long time.....it's time to change which mob controls it.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)

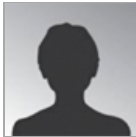


There's enough growth on the Jacksonville area books to last

Submitted by Dori on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 12:05 pm

268 years of population growth (as last reported by DCA). So why would there be a need to overwhelm voters with referendums? ...unless, the local elected officials aren't doing their job by screening new changes to comprehensive plans before it moves on to DCA. Local officials need to do 'their' job if they want to be re-elected, they need to 'listen' to what their constituents are saying when they show up at public meetings, not just look at their watch and 'pretend' they're interested.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



Voters get final word

Submitted by MLW on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 12:43 pm

It must be repeated, A4 kicks in ONLY after elected officials have said "yes" to a change in the comp plan. Everything will run its normal course up to that point.

We've got people who can afford their mortgages but are walking away from them because their house is worth less than their mortgage. This is adding to the housing crisis. Every new home built right now makes an existing home worth less. In order to ever come out of this and return to a healthy market residential growth must be controlled or every single person who owns a home is going to continue to see a decline in their equity for decades to come.

There is ENOUGH growth already contained in the various comp plans throughout the state, there doesn't need to be anymore. If elected Officials were doing their jobs they would put a moratorium on any changes at all that increase the residential development in the comp plans.

"Build it and they will come" only works in the movies.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



"giving elected officials license to stop doing their jobs"

Submitted by Publius on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 1:08 pm

Ah, yes -- and such a wonderful job they have done here in the sunshine state, haven't they? I utterly disagree with Mr. Harding on this issue and would hope that the voters of our state see the truth, versus the hyperbole expressed by Amendment 4 opponents. Hometown Democracy (Amendment 4) will NOT result in excess additional trips to the polls and the attendant expense. The voting is about revisions to the regional land use plans -- not to determine if every proposed development that is legitimate under the existing plans may or may not be undertaken. This is the language of the developers and their crony elected pals who have already over-developed the state and left hundreds of thousands of vacant residential properties and thousands of acres partially developed, cleared Florida turf. Take a drive down route 13 into Saint Johns County and look at the Rivertown dust bowl that has ruined that scenic drive and polluted the river with silt. Drive back up San Jose Blvd through Mandarin to Baymeadows and look at the half-built concrete shell of a condo that sits along formerly pristine riverbank there. Yes, indeed, our elected officials and their banker buddies have done a wonderful job of making northeast Florida a beautiful, inviting, environmentally responsible place to live. **It's time to take the power back and put it in the hands of the people where it belongs.** Vote YES on 4. <http://www.floridahometowndemocracy.com/>

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



If...

Submitted by mikey on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 3:07 pm

If folks could depend on their elected officials to do the right thing when it comes to growth, this amendment would not be needed. It seems that every time a developer wants to change the growth plan, they get their request 'rubber-stamped' by the local officials even if hundreds of homeowners show up to oppose it.

If you look closely, most of these officials are developers or closely associated with developers. They depend on developers' money to run their re-election campaigns. This amendment is a short-cut to get more voter involvement when the comp plan is to be changed. Not a great idea but one that will hold down unrestricted development.

I will likely vote yes.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



I take offense

Submitted by [averagedude](#) on Sun. 1/3/2010 at 3:29 pm

Self interest is a virtue and to suggest otherwise is a sin against not only oneself but humanity as a whole.

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)



amendment 4 is a terrible

Submitted by [apvbguy2](#) on Mon. 1/4/2010 at 12:02 pm

amendment 4 is a terrible idea!

we can agree that fla has many planning issues and problems that need to be addressed but this amendment is not the way to change things.

we live in a representative republic, we do not have direct democracy and this amendment is direct democracy and is a recipe for troubles that we'd never be able to fix.

Most people are blissfully ignorant when it comes to development issues and really are in no position to be making such decisions.

don't be so surprised that after you elect clowns to office a circus breaks out

[Login Or Register To Post Comments](#) [Flag As Offensive](#)

FIND IT!

Powered by [Local.com](#)

Apartments	Beauty Salons	Insurance	Realtors
Attorneys	Car Rental	Loans	Restaurants
Auto Dealers	Dentists	Mortgages	Storage
Auto Parts	Doctors	Movers	Tax Preparation
Auto Repair	Flowers	Pizza	Travel
	Hotels		More...