

Largo officials opposed to Amendment 4

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LARGO – City commissioners railed Feb. 2 against a proposed state constitutional amendment that would require referendums for changes in local governments’ growth plans.

Largo officials contend that to require a referendum on comprehensive or growth plan amendments will effectively halt development in the city while property owners, developers and the city wait for voters to have their say on amendments in elections.



Commissioners voted 6-1 to approve a resolution in opposition to Amendment 4, which is slated to be on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Mayor Pat Gerard called the proposed amendment “a terrible idea.” “The last mid-term election we had cost us \$70,000, and if we had to have three or four or six of those a year, that would be a real problem for us,” Gerard said.

Commissioner Mary Black said she was against the resolution because when citizens ask that an item be placed on the ballot, she thinks governments have a responsibility to uphold their wishes, particularly when citizens have obtained the number of petition signatures required.

However, she said she recognizes that the amendment would place a burden on the city if it passes.

“Unfortunately, throughout the state, there have been a number of actions that have told the people that they are fed up and it’s enough and that’s why a petition was circulated,” Black said.

She said she was thankful that the staff and City Commission has been wise in making decisions that are good for the city, and she hopes residents will vote against the proposed amendment.

Commissioner Curtis Holmes disagreed with Black's opinion about the commission taking a stand against the amendment.

"We are entitled to our opinion," he said. "We were elected by the people." Referring to previously approved constitutional amendments, he said, "We are already suffering from this class-sized amendment they will have to change." "This proposed amendment is an absolute train wreck," Holmes said. "If we are going to do this week, we are going to be spending a million dollars a year just in referendums." He said that about 98 percent of the people who signed petitions to put it on the ballot were "clueless" about what they were signing.

City officials say that the city seeks public input from citizens throughout the comprehensive planning process so that those who are actually interested in or affected by a specific amendment have an opportunity to be heard.

Florida Hometown Democracy, which calls itself a nonpartisan grassroots group, sponsors the proposed amendment. The organization contends on its Web site "rising taxes, dwindling water supplies and Florida's disappearing beauty are some of the devastating consequences caused by Florida politicians' habit of rubber-stamping speculative plan changes." The Web site said "that the amendment will clean up the corrupt local politics of growth. Developers will no longer be able to buy off a simple majority of a city or county commission with their campaign IOU's." Local governments' comprehensive plans essentially are state-mandated documents that provides the framework and policy direction for land-use decisions.

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