

Guest commentary: Amendment 4 will create more problems than it will solve

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In his recent guest commentary, Andrew Dickman outlines numerous problems with our state's growth-management process, including voter disenchantment and sprawl. However, what Amendment 4 supporters fail to realize is Amendment 4, a proposed rewrite of our state's constitution which will require taxpayer-funded referendums for all changes to local government comprehensive plans, will not solve those problems; rather, it will exacerbate them.

Rather than giving power to the people, as Dickman suggests, Amendment 4 would turn the growth-management debate into a sound-bit-driven political circus, thereby favoring those with the deepest pockets. With every land planning change, the public would be subjected to a barrage of political campaign-style advertisements aimed at securing their vote. This ill-advised process would boost special-interest influence and sideline ordinary citizens. If Amendment 4 was law, voters in the cities of Naples and Marco Island would decide the fate of redevelopment plans for Immokalee and whether to allow a church on 22 acres in Golden Gate Estates. Neither proposal affects either city, yet a countywide referendum paid for by taxpayers is required because the county's growth-management plan must be amended. It will be the least-empowered and the small property owner who will suffer under the absurd Amendment 4-style system.

Furthermore, Amendment 4 would lead to short-term thinking and piecemeal planning which would promote sprawl, not prevent it. For this reason, leading environmental organizations such as 1,000 Friends of Florida have raised objections to this misguided measure. They know that Amendment 4 will make well-coordinated, responsible growth impossible and lead to the exact type of urban sprawl most Floridians bemoan.

Worse still, Amendment 4 will cost jobs, raise taxes and contribute to Florida's record high unemployment. According to a study conducted by the Washington Economics Group (WEG), Amendment 4 would likely cost Florida more than a quarter-million jobs and reduce Florida's economic output by \$34 billion annually. Every sector of Florida's economy would be adversely impacted, including tourism, energy, telecommunications, retail, health care and education. Florida would also lose 92,000 jobs in the knowledge-based services sector. These high-paying jobs, which represent the future of Florida's economy, are crucial for the full and swift economic recovery of the Sunshine State.

Professor Tony Villamil, a former economic adviser to Gov. Jeb Bush and the lead economist for WEG, stated, "Amendment 4's passage will have potentially devastating consequences to Florida's economy at a time when the economic situation at both the state and national levels is uncertain and at a time when attracting new businesses to Florida is essential for the future recovery and prosperity of the state and its residents."

Villamil's report indicates that Amendment 4 would further damage our economy by killing jobs and raising unemployment at a time when Florida's working families and small businesses can least afford it.

Additionally, the proposal is entirely unworkable. Local comprehensive-planning documents are hundreds of pages long and filled with various general policies and minutiae ranging from allowed uses on thousands of acres to estimated sewage flows. If the county wants to change the sewage estimates in the comprehensive plan, voters would have to approve it. Current state law requires that these plans be updated with amendments every seven years in order to reconsider prior planning assumptions, to accommodate new growth and to provide future direction for the community. However, in the last four years alone, Amendment 4 would have required an average of over 10,599 additional local votes per year in Florida. The staggering cost and impracticality of Amendment 4 make it a recipe for chaos in the comprehensive plan and in the voting booth.

While Amendment 4 is a bad idea in any economy, the current recession would make it nothing short of catastrophic. If you like the recession's impact on Florida's economy, you'll love Amendment 4. If not, Vote "no" on Amendment 4. Floridians who would like more information on the consequences of Amendment 4 are encouraged to visit www.florida2010.org.

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