

April 28, 2010

## Amendment 4 will cripple the economy: Joyce Owens

*Joyce Owens - Guest Opinion*  
*news-press.com*

Prior to the start of Florida's lawmaking session, the American Institute of Architects of Southwest Florida jointly hosted a pre-legislative event with local planners and the Southwest Florida Chamber.

We met with elected officials to listen and discuss the issues that could effect the built environment in 2010.

Amendment 4, a proposed Florida constitutional amendment on the November 2010 ballot, was a key issue on the agenda. This amendment will require every revision to city and county comprehensive plans to be approved by referendum.

Florida comprehensive plans, first written in the 1980s, determine how and when communities grow.

Designed to be working documents they are reviewed and updated every seven years.

City and county commissioners have a duty to be informed in order to responsibly and sensibly amend these plans to direct growth and change in a community.

Amendment 4 would give that responsibility to residents. All changes would be decided by ballot at annual elections. Written to sound very "democratic," the amendment implies that voters have a say on the details of their community's growth.

Whether a voter is familiar with the proposed change or personally affected by the outcome, they will need to decide on all changes, large or small.

In an average community, there could potentially be 200-300 changes to be approved each year.

Legally, it will delay both large private developments and public projects like new roads, schools, fire stations, hospitals and public parks, until approval is granted.

Comp plans and planning document amendments are highly detailed documents full of legal jargon requiring expertise and patience.

Imagine attempting to read through and comprehend hundreds of confusing and separate ballot questions and issues — should you sincerely want to be an informed voter.

And how many residents have the experience to understand the implications and repercussions of proposed changes on the entire community?

The time and costs involved to local governments to administer these elections, funded by taxpayers, will seriously increase as cities and counties try to cope with additional and complicated elections for both major projects and minor details.

In 2006, St. Pete Beach adopted a local version of Amendment 4.

The result has been un-workable growth-management process and economic collapse costing the city dearly in legal fees. In November 2009 residents realized the enormous mistake made and voted to

drastically scale back this growth experiment.

In a slow economy, when business or property owners want to expand and local and state governments attempt to encourage corporate investment and relocation to Florida, Amendment 4 will only serve to drive them away.

New projects and changes will be forced to wait until the next election cycle, which can be as long as two years away.

Combined with Florida's existing land-use approval process that can take 12 to 24 months, nearby states such as Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina begin to look very attractive when they can offer entrepreneurs opportunities to break ground in a expedient time frame without the red tape which risks their economic investment.

Such potential delays threaten economic recovery. They will cost our area valuable jobs in a time when we desperately need to get construction projects moving again.

Amendment 4 is being presented with a warm and cozy feeling that democracy will prevail if all members of the community take control of community growth.

The repercussions of putting decision making in the hands of the public, informed or otherwise, will throw into turmoil our delicate recovery.

With the building industry hurting, Florida needs to be especially nimble and adaptable.

As we struggle to get through this recession, adopting Amendment 4 would be just bad public policy.

Vote no on Amendment 4.

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