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## [The Hometown Democracy Debate Heats Up](#)

Amendment 4, also known as [Hometown Democracy](#), will be *the* ballot initiative to watch in 2010. The highly-controversial amendment cleared another hurdle yesterday when the Florida Supreme Court issued an advisory opinion to Attorney General Bill McCollum stating that a revised financial impact statement now complied with state law.

“Local governments will incur additional costs due to the requirement to conduct referenda,” [the court opined](#). The impact on state government; however, “will be insignificant.”

Amendment 4 would require that any comprehensive land use plan changes approved by city councils or county commissions go before the public in the form of a ballot referendum. Critics say that requiring the public to vote on all comprehensive changes would clog up local ballots and could necessitate dozens of referenda throughout the year. On the other hand, proponents contend that local politicians are too dependent on large developers for campaign funds and have been quick to approve amendments in the past.

The recent legislative session only served to further heighten the stakes as the Legislature moved to strip much of the existing growth management policies currently in place in an effort to jump-start the state’s flagging real estate industry. To the dismay of many, Charlie Crist—a self-proclaimed environmentalist—went along with the Legislature’s efforts. As a result, many previous opponents of Amendment 4 are beginning to change their tune, including *Florida Times-Union* Columnist Ron Littlepage. Littlepage cited the Legislature’s near-stripping of concurrency requirements and the on-going Craig Airfield controversy in announcing [his shifting position on the initiative](#). (*Interestingly enough, several local governments, including Weston, Key Biscayne and Miami Beach, have [filed suit to block the rewrite of growth management laws](#). They argue that eliminating concurrency created “unfunded mandates” for local governments.*)

Despite their opposition to the recent moves by the Legislature in regards to growth management, the [St.](#)

[Pete Times Editorial Board is not convinced that Amendment 4 is the answer.](#) They cite the “St. Pete Beach experiment” in detailing their distaste for the initiative. St. Pete Beach, the *Times* said, demonstrates that “land planning via referendum is a messy, unpredictable business that leads to higher government costs due to litigation and a stalemate when it comes to development.”

On its face, some argue that the amendment demonstrates an abdication of voter responsibility. If the voting public is unhappy with politicians rubber stamping the requests of developers, they argue, then voters have an obligation to show up at the polls in support of individuals who pledge their commitment to uphold the comprehensive plan.

One thing is for certain—it will be a high-stakes, expensive war as the Florida Chamber, developers and real estate interests make an all-out effort to prevent the amendment from reaching that magical 60%.

The ad wars on YouTube have already begun. A sampling, including a satirical reprise of the 1970’s era “Crying Indian” PSA, can be viewed below.

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