



## Rettig chosen to build Amendment 4 war chest

The folks supporting Amendment 4, the ballot-box planning amendment, have a simple message. Between now and November, when Florida voters have to turn thumbs up or thumbs down on ballot-box planning, Florida Hometown Democracy will try to convince Florida voters that all manner of destructive development is going up across Florida because public officials are in the pockets of developers and give them anything they want. So land use decisions should be given to voters.



**Julia Rettig**

That's nonsense, of course. But anyone who's paid the slightest attention to politics over the years knows that there is often a market for nonsense.

Those opposing the everyman-a-land-use-expert fantasy have a harder, but not undoable, education job to show how having Floridians votes on the thousands of comprehensive plan changes across the state every year would slow the state's economy to a crawl and harm, not just developers and business types, but every Floridian.

It will take money to defeat this very bad idea, and a large coalition of business, community and labor organizations have banded together to bring in the money and execute a voter edu-

cation campaign. The state's real estate organizations are working with Citizens for Lower Taxes and a Stronger Economy to get this done. NAIOP of Florida and The Florida Apartment Association have appointed well-known Florida real estate veteran Julia Rettig to see that the money is raised and to oversee their interests in the educational campaign.

Rettig, who operates Tampa Bay Development, is a sound pick for this tough and thankless (who really likes to ask for money?) job. She knows the industry and the players. She was president of NAIOP of Florida in 2001. She knows the issue, she's organized, and she knows how to get things done. She also goes at things directly. So if you've heard from her by the time you've read this but haven't gotten back to her, you may as well do it now. She's not going to let you off the hook easily.

Rettig knows this is a bad year to be raising money for anything. Times are tough all around, and especially so for real estate. But this one isn't just about this year. It's about all the years to come. It's about whether Florida is to have a future.

"I know dollars are limited, but this is game-changing," Rettig said. "We're in the fight of our lives. If you think the economy is bad now. See what it would be if this passes. This is a no-growth initiative, period. Those

### PERSPECTIVES



**Larry Thornberry**  
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who have appreciated and benefited from living and doing business in Florida will have to participate."

Rettig said Florida will be getting help from out of state real estate firms because this is a national as well as a local fight. If Amendment 4 passes here, that would give energy to similar efforts in other states. Amendment 4-like efforts have already been defeated in Arizona and Colorado with significant help from the real estate industry, she said. Because of the national implication, Rettig expects help from national real estate organizations.

Part of the challenge facing the industry and the other sectors opposing Amendment 4 is to fashion a message that can be clearly understood in a politically active year.

Voters have to understand that developers are not getting the free ride Hometown Democracy alleges they are enjoying and that politicizing the planning process would damage everyone, not just make things difficult for development.

"This is about the entire

economy," Rettig said. "It's not just about developers. It's also about schools and hospitals and things we need to function as a society. This is about property rights too."

Another part of the educational effort is to put to rest the idea that development in Florida is not regulated, or that residents are left out of the current process.

"In Florida we're scrutinized at the government level like nowhere else," Rettig said. "It's difficult to get things done here, and Florida is one of the most expensive states to develop in. The process is already inclusive of voters. It gives power to residents."

### The other side

How hard the Amendment 4 battle will be this year will be at least partly determined by how big an effort the pro-4 forces put up. This is hard to predict now. How much the anti-growth forces behind Hometown Democracy supporters will spend will likely be determined by how likely they think they are to succeed.

Currents polls show a level of support for the idea, but few Floridians know much about the amendment and its likely effects now. And the forces lined up against Amendment 4 - business, labor, government, most of the state's media - are formidable. Out-of-state money may avoid this one in favor of other battles elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Florida

Hometown Democracy has appointed a campaign manager to push the pro-Amendment 4 case. She's Julie Hauserman of Tallahassee, formerly a reporter for the St. Petersburg Times and the Tallahassee Democrat. In recent years she's worked as a consultant to various environmental and political groups.

Here's what she said to the Times about her appointment:

"I've been covering issues about Florida growth for two decades. I've watched the ugly strip-mall sprawl get worse and the quality of our communities deteriorate. At the same time, out-of-state corporations who don't care about our hometowns build badly-planned developments, fill their pockets, and leave taxpayers to pay the bills for clogged roads, crowded schools, and polluted waters. Florida Hometown Democracy is a way for us - the ordinary citizens who love Florida - to win back our votes from the special interests."

She's even more direct in this statement on her personal Web site.

"Florida needs your voice and your energy every day to repel the rapacious greedheads who want to turn our state into a parking lot!"

Charming.

*Larry Thornberry is a Florida Real Estate Journal contributing editor.*



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