

## REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT SOCIETY

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## BOARDROOM REPORT

### News from recent REIS board meetings

#### Luncheon Programs:

Former lawmaker Carole Green will present the 2008 Legislative Review at the May 13 meeting.

In June, Jennifer Languel, PhD, noted consultant on "green building," will explain the techniques and economics of energy efficient and environmentally friendly design.

#### New REIS meeting location:

REIS luncheon meetings are now held in the Osprey Room in the new Pelican Preserve Clubhouse. After passing the entrance gate, turn left at the 4-way stop.

#### Horizon Council Support:

REIS is supporting the Horizon Council's 2008 Industry Appreciation Event with a \$500 contribution.

#### Education Programs Planned:

June 18, REIS will present a half-day seminar on "Techniques to Survive and Prosper in a Tough Market."

The annual Development Process Workshop is planned for September.

#### Legislative Issues:

Eagle Ordinance: Lee County is considering amending the Bald Eagle Ordinance, making it mandatory to produce management plans for nesting sites and establish perpetual conservation easements for buffers. Would give county staff and advisory committee authority to enforce federal regulations. LPA to review April 28.

Affordable Housing: Lee County is updating its Affordable Housing Study. LPA reviewing proposed changes to Housing Assistance Programs April 28.

DR/GR Land Use: Lee County ad hoc committee and consultants conducted public workshops throughout April.

Impact Fees: Sarasota County delayed a 47% increase in road impact fees on new homes until June 2009 and reduced road impact fees on hotels/motels by 31%.

## SUCCEEDING IN A TOUGH MARKET

REIS is preparing a half-day seminar on "Techniques to Survive and Prosper in a Tough Market," which will include an updated economic forecast, a guide to commercial site due diligence - engineering, legal advice on contracts and lease agreements, and a snapshot of recent commercial market activity. According to Education Chair Matt Rocco, the program will be 8 to noon, Wednesday, June 18, at Pelican Preserve Clubhouse. Details will be sent to members and posted on the REIS web site as soon as they're finalized.

## SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED

REIS Scholarship Foundation awarded a scholarship to Stepfon Norwood, a business major at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU).

Stepfon will receive \$2,500 toward tuition and books. The REIS Scholarship Foundation is supported by contributions from the business community and REIS members.



Stepfon Norwood is a junior, enrolled in the Finance program and aspires to a career in real estate appraisal. He is a member of the Financial Managers Association and is employed by a real estate development company in addition to his academic studies. He also volunteers with Big Brothers and teaches a class at his church.

*From left, REIS Scholarship Chair Tom Woodyard, Stepfon Norwood, and Howard Finch, dean of Lutgert College of Business at FGCU.*

In conjunction with the scholarship, Stepfon receives honorary membership in REIS, where he may attend meetings on a complimentary basis.



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## THE TRUTH ABOUT HOMETOWN DEMOCRACY

By Kevin M. Fitzgerald, CSE

On February 1, the Florida Division of Elections announced that Hometown Democracy, a proposed amendment to the state constitution, did not qualify for the 2008 ballot. This was a victory for all who opposed the amendment on the grounds that it was bad for hometowns and worse for democracy.

As a commercial real estate professional, I understand the need for responsible growth. However, nearly all of my professional peers agree that Hometown Democracy is bad policy and nothing more than an irresponsible attempt to usurp local authority. At the same time, the issue is far from dead, which is why we in the commercial community must continue to inform the public about why it's an ill-conceived idea.

### •Reasons for Defeat

*Because Hometown proponents couldn't attract broad volunteer petitioning support, their efforts relied heavily on a few wealthy extremists to bankroll signature collection. This money fueled an expensive, unsustainable habit. As a result, the proposal failed, falling 65,000 short of the 611,000 signed, verified petitions needed for it to appear on November's ballot.*

The support of the commercial community also made a tremendous difference in defeating this proposal. Among its most vocal opponents was Floridians for Smarter Growth (FSG), a statewide alliance of 101 Florida organizations, 27 county committees, 250 executive committee members and hundreds of grassroots volunteers.

Raising funds to fight the most recent initiative was quite difficult during the economic downturn. But FSG assembled a coalition of Floridians ready to fight for our quality of life and who have faith in our representative democracy. They know a bad idea when they see one.

However, the real credit for this victory belongs to the people of Florida, who for three consecutive election cycles have resisted the vocal minorities' chant for Hometown Democracy. Now that we have won this

latest round, it's time to focus on maintaining our momentum.

### •Gone But Not Forgotten

A recent *Orlando Sentinel* article noted Hometown Democracy bankrollers are bound to be on the ballot in 2010. Accordingly, commercial real estate professionals and developers must remain vigilant, build an even more effective campaign organization and reach even deeper into the heart of Florida.

FSG will continue its efforts to expand its coalition and develop local campaign organizations across Florida. Former State Representative Carole Green is handling the fight in Lee County, while Jim Doane, the public affairs chairman of NAIOP (National Association of Industrial and Office Properties), is keeping watch in Collier County.

As the Florida Legislature heads into session, we in the commercial community must pursue additional reform to our growth management system and constitutional amendment process. We should also be concerned about the way Hometown Democracy is perceived by the public and portrayed by the media as a citizen-driven movement because it's not.

If Hometown were a true citizen's initiative, supporters would have enlisted actual volunteers to build their grassroots network and gather petitions, rather than hire out-of-state signature gatherers. Instead, they ignored the necessity of coalition building and failed to connect to the average Floridian. We must ensure that Florida's constitution is not at the mercy of the paid signature-gathering industry.

More important, we must not let down our guard. Let's seize this opportunity to educate even more of Florida about the true nature of Hometown Democracy. For more information, visit [www.FLSmarterGrowth.com](http://www.FLSmarterGrowth.com).

*Kevin M. Fitzgerald, CSE, is secretary of the Real Estate Investment Society (REIS), president of the Southwest Florida Chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP), and president/principal of the Southwest Florida office of NAI Global.*

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