

Lakewood Strategic Growth Initiative Moves Forward With More Than 7,500 Signatures

LAKEWOOD-A grassroots group Friday submitted to the City Clerk more than 7,500 signatures from community members who want to help guide the future of their community by placing a growth management initiative on November's general election ballot.

The group, Strategic Growth for Lakewood, needs 5,165 signatures of qualified Lakewood electors in order to place the proposal before City Council, which can choose either to adopt the ordinance language contained in the initiative or send it to the November ballot. The City Clerk must verify the petitions contain enough valid signatures to qualify for the ballot.

The proposed ordinance would manage residential growth in the city by limiting new residential units in a given year to 1% of existing units. "This is not a 'no growth' initiative," said Cathy Kentner, a spokesperson for Lakewood Strategic Growth. "We do not want to stop growth. We want to manage growth in an effective manner in order to mitigate its effects on our city and allow our infrastructure to keep up."

To achieve that goal the proposal would require builders and developers to secure allocations for building permits based on the number of new dwelling units built, Kentner said. She noted that unbridled growth has left Lakewood 20 years behind on mitigating such growth-related effects as traffic, noise, light pollution, overcrowded schools and over-burdened parks and open space.

Mid-size and large projects, those seeking permits for 40 or more units, would require approval from City Council at a public hearing, returning community voices to important land-use decisions. "For the past four years, decisions about large projects have been left to the city planning director, an administrator who has routinely approved high-density, high-profile, high-end apartments with as many as 300 units." Kentner said, "Returning these decisions to City Council would allow the community voices to be heard again."

"Those voices are largely ignored, as they were in the rewrite of the Rooney Valley master plan and in decisions on redevelopment along Colfax which in years past was the focus of the City's vibrant economy" Kentner said, "The initiative would not only limit the rampant growth plan for the scenic Rooney valley, it also would ensure the redevelopment of Colfax and other areas declared blighted by the city.

"Colfax in recent years has been the targeted area for most subsidized housing projects planned for the city. The initiative includes a separate pool of allotment for affordable housing and provides a vehicle for locating such projects throughout the city instead of isolating them in one area." said Anita Springsteen, co-petitioner of Lakewood Strategic Growth,

"We do not need 'dysfunctional' growth, we need to continue ensuring Lakewood's already diverse stock of housing opportunities is available to satisfy the demand," Springsteen said. "And sending decisions on larger developments to City Council would provide more affordable ownership opportunities by encouraging town-home, condominium, and residential

development in addition to affordable rental units. This is preferable to limiting development to high-end, unaffordable, huge apartment complexes that are starting to dominate our streetscape, while failing to provide variety and creating high concentrations of people.”

Organizers of the petition drive said the thousands of signatures collected were the result of a strong commitment from community volunteers and the widespread community concern about Lakewood’s future.

“We want our neighborhoods and local businesses to decide the vision for our community, and not leave it up to the whims and bottom-line profits of developers,” said Strategic Growth Lakewood’s Heather Wenger