

# Voters Initiate Referendum To Repeal Flawed Venice Land Rules

**Venice** – Venice residents today filed paperwork to initiate a citizens’ referendum to repeal Venice’s new Land Development Regulations (LDRs), which City Council approved in July despite provisions that were opposed by the majority of residents who provided public comments.

Five voters submitted notarized affidavits to initiate a petition to put a referendum before Venice voters to “reconsider and repeal” the LDRs. The new LDRs allow up to 6-story buildings across many parts of Venice, eliminate protections for Venice’s historic neighborhoods and allow large-scale commercial development in residential Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

“I’m saddened that City Council chose to ignore the very clear message they heard from hundreds of their constituents throughout the LDR process,” said Franklin Wright, one of the residents initiating the process. “For more than two years, many, many voters constructively engaged in the city’s process to shape the LDRs, but City Council failed us. This petition is the public’s only recourse to protect what makes Venice special.”

The City Clerk has 10 days to certify the affidavits and then the five residents will have 6 months to gather signatures representing 10 percent of Venice’s 22,123 registered voters to get the referendum on an upcoming ballot. Once the petition is filed with the required number of voters’ signatures, the LDRs will be suspended from taking effect until a referendum is held.

“The Save Downtown Venice petition that I launched during the LDR process was signed by more than 1,400 people this year who were alarmed to learn that historic downtown was at risk,” said Lisa Jarvio, another of the referendum initiators. “I am confident that voters concerned about protecting historic Venice will overwhelmingly support this referendum.”

During the LDR process, hundreds of residents submitted public comments and regularly attended public hearings before both City Council and the Planning Commission. Commenters were almost unanimously opposed to increased building heights downtown as well as the creation of a new Downtown Edge District, which allows up to 75-foot buildings in a neighborhood with one of the most intact blocks of Nolen-era 1920s homes. Yet City Council voted 5-0 to approve the LDRs (with Mayor Ron Feinsod, an opponent of the LDRs as written, absent).

“If the five Council members had represented the will of the voters, we would have a strong new set of regulations in place to guide Venice’s future development. Venice residents were unified that they wanted downtown protected and the John Nolen Plan honored,” said Betty Intagliata, another of the affidavit signers. “Instead, we have a flawed, rushed document that the public opposes and that even City Council acknowledges will need to be fixed soon.”

## **Among the concerns the petitioners’ committee has with the LDRs:**

- After initially acquiescing to the strong public outcry to keep allowable building heights downtown to 35 feet with exceptions only allowed by City Council, the Planning Commission put forward rules that change how building heights are measured. These changes would allow buildings in the historic downtown district over 50 feet tall.

- Height limits in many Venice neighborhoods are now 75 feet. This includes a new Downtown Edge District that covers areas surrounding historic downtown. This district includes the 200 blocks of Pensacola, Milan and Ponce de Leon between Nokomis and Nassau streets, where some of the last Nolen-era 1920s homes exist. In this district, developers could seek approval for 6-story buildings in a residential neighborhood of one-and two-story homes across from Venice Cultural Campus and Jervey Library.
- Under the new LDRs, residential PUDs are facing the real possibility of outsized commercial development of a scale that is clearly not envisioned by the City's 2017 Master Plan, and should only be permitted in areas zoned for commercial use.

For more information about how to get involved, contact:

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