

Ballot issue has merit in city

By Don Atwood

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In a recent edition of the *Louisville Times*, Chuck Sisk, mayor and chair of the Louisville Revitalization Committee (LRC), and LRC member, Michael Menaker, questioned the value of the recently filed citizens' ballot initiative.

That initiative would transfer the urban-renewal powers of the appointed LRC to the elected city council.

Let's look at their objections one at a time:

- "Maybe a majority of city council members don't want the (urban renewal) responsibility or the authority." — Even if that is true, it is irrelevant. The city council is Louisville's elected body and takes on the duties Louisville citizens give it.

- "The city would lose the valuable experience found on the revitalization panel." — That is wrong. Under the initiative, the LRC would continue to exist as an advisory board.

- The ultimate authority already rests with the city council by virtue of "the agreements that are in place." — Not according to state law, which makes any urban renewal authority autonomous. The "agreement" in place hardly makes the council the "ultimate authority." It specifically says "the LRC shall be responsible for carrying out its duties and functions" under state law. And, at any time, four members of the LRC can terminate the agreement.

- The LRC will not control \$77M, only "about half that much" — The LRC's documents say it estimates that over 25 years it will collect \$42.1M and \$35.4M (\$77.5M) in property and sales tax revenues. Even if it "is about half that much," do Louisville taxpayers want tens of millions of tax dollars in control of an autonomous, appointed body?

- "Transferring power to the City Council could adversely affect the city's ability to attract and retain business, as some businesses may see having to go through city council for approval as an extra step." — That is nonsense. Mayor Sisk can't have it both ways ... saying the council already has the "ultimate authority" by virtue of "agreements" in place, and then saying the "extra step" of getting council approval would deter business development. Under the initiative, there is only one step: approval by the Council acting as the urban renewal authority.

- "The (LRC) has the ability to start conversations with both property owners and developers ... something outside of the city council's bounds." — This is simply wrong. The city council regularly approves highly complicated agreements with contractors and property owners. It directs the city manager, or one or two council members to conduct "conversations" necessary to forging said agreements. The petition places this issue on the November ballot. Then, Louisville voters will have a chance to vote on it: Who should directly control urban renewal and the \$77M — unelected persons, or elected officials?