

# Louisville Times Citizens seek accountability with petition

## Residents want transfer of urban renewal power

By Chalan Harper  
Colorado Hometown Newspapers

When the Louisville City Council last year agreed to allow an unelected group of citizens to make decisions and control funds concerning local urban renewal efforts, more than a few eyebrows were raised.

At the time, residents Don Atwood and John Leary spoke to the council about the lack of accountability in a non-elected board and expressed concern over control of millions of dollars.

In response to concerns, city council members approved a cooperative agreement with the Louisville Revitalization Committee (LRC) that specified the city council would approve all expenditures of urban renewal dollars.

For Atwood and Leary, that agreement just did not put their minds at ease on the issue.

On May 9, the pair filed a formal petition with the Louisville City Clerk petitioning for a ballot initiative that would transfer power from the LRC back to the city council.

"I think the concern is that they are not responsible to the electorate," Atwood said this week. "I think there really needs to be some accountability and the only way I know of to find accountability is to have it in the hands of elected officials."

One of the reasons Atwood and Leary are worried is the commission members seem to hold a high standard of power which places city council members in a reactive position, rather than one of decision-making, Leary said recently.

In 2003, a study proposed the urban renewal district of 110 acres between the Burlington Northern railroad and Colo. Highway 42. In 2005, the LRC established blight in that area.

Last year, however, the LRC doubled the size of the area of the blight study and included within it the Pow-Wow grounds, much of downtown Louisville and the King Soopers and Christopher Plaza shopping areas.

The new expanded urban renewal district had expanded from 110 acres to 228 acres.

It is estimated that about \$77 million in tax rev-

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enues could be generated over the next 25 years in the newly expanded district.

That's where the worry began for Atwood.

"There's supposed to be a cooperative agreement, but state law says the cooperative agreement can be terminated at any time by either party," Atwood said. "We're talking about 25 years and nobody can tell you who is going to be there 25 years from now."

Atwood said he worries that a future LRC panel could terminate the agreement and misuse millions of dollars in funds.

According to information posted on the PreserveLouisville.org Web site, taxpayer money diverted to the LRC is deposited into bank account, which the LRC controls.

Another key to the issue is fiscal analyses.

The initiated ordinance would require city council members to receive a fiscal

analysis before allowing any diversion of sales tax revenues.

Once the city clerk ensures the petition is in order, Atwood, Leary and other proponents will begin gathering the needed signatures of five-percent — about 600 John Hancocks — of Louisville's registered voters.

Atwood said he doesn't think getting that amount of signatures will be difficult.

"There's going to be a lot of support for moving it to elected officials," Atwood said this week.

Atwood said he could foresee some disfavor from some members of the city council, including the mayor, but said that he will see what happens.

If the petition is successful and the ballot initiative is passed in November, control of the LRC would automatically transfer almost immediately to the city council, Atwood said.