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November 30, 2012

Michael Busha, Executive Director
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council
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Victor B. Dover
Dover, Kohl & Partners
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Gentlemen:

I have been to California a number of times over the past decades. Often, particularly when traveling through newer neighborhoods, I was surprised by the quality of the roads. Not simply the asphalt, but the aesthetics were very pleasing. Coming back to Indian River County I often wondered why California roads seemed somehow better than roads in Indian River County, how they somehow seemed more pleasant to travel along.

It was not until after I became an elected official that the reason for the difference in the roads came to me; cost per mile. In Indian River County we pay for new roads with impact fees. A road costs so much. A low-density county such as Indian River only generates so many dollars per mile to use to build roads. California has many high-density communities. These communities, with the same impact fee per unit, can generate many times what Indian River can generate for each mile of road built and can therefore, with no greater burden on the individual family, build roads with greater aesthetic appeal. Years ago Indian River County made a choice to be and stay a low-density County.

The result of this choice, to become the low-density County that we are today, is perhaps the most defining feature of our Community. As an elected official in Indian River County the fact that we are a low-density community is brought up more often than any other feature of our community as that which separates us from our neighbors to the south and that mentioned most often as the reason why they have chosen to live in Indian River County.

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I thought of this again during the breakout session of your October 25th "Work Group Road Show" (WGRS). As I understood the first exercise, which our group did not do, it consisted of a number of sets of pictures. Basically, in each set there was an aesthetically pleasing picture matched with a plain, drab uninviting picture. People were asked to pick, which picture they preferred. Not surprisingly, the pretty picture was generally picked. Just as I would, all things being, equal pick the aesthetically pleasing California four-lane highway over the drab Indian River County road; people picked the pretty picture over the drab picture.

However, all things are not equal. And there was no discussion of what makes things unequal. In this case, there was no discussion of cost to the community. For example, it was never asked: In order to have the aesthetically pleasing road, would you be willing to triple the average density in the County?

This is only one aspect of a process that I found to be disingenuous. All of the citizens at the breakout table that I was at, left with the feeling that we were being manipulated, that the decisions had basically been made in advance and that the entire exercise was simply an attempt to justify the already arrived at decisions. One participant said that she felt like a third grader going through the exercises.

This is just one example of what many felt to be a very flawed process. Other examples include:

1. While the meeting was publicized, there was little to indicate to the citizen, who was not intimately involved in the process, what the WGRS would be trying to accomplish. The agenda itself was an example of form over substance. There was nothing in the Agenda that would indicate to a citizen what, if anything, at the WGRS might be of interest to her. Therefore, there was nothing to indicate that something important might be happening that would require her to take time out of her day to attend.
2. Just as disturbing was the answer given to a question asking who was behind the Seven/50 initiative. The citizen was told that it was "partners at different levels who joined in, more than 200 partners growing all the time." This was a disingenuous answer. The backup that I have says that the answer to the citizens question should have been something like: "In June 2010, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development (HUD), in conjunction with EPA and USDOT, awarded a grant of \$4,250,000 to The Treasure Coast and South Florida Regional Planning Councils (Councils) to conduct a comprehensive regional planning study through the national Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) grant program." The answer given, that the formation of the Seven/50

Washington. Agencies, I will note that have no knowledge of our local community and whose values, goals and objectives are often the antithesis of the values, goals and objectives of the majority of the citizens of Indian River County. (Later, when pressed on the issue by members of the audience, Mr. Dover did reply that the process was driven by the Federal government).

3. I was struck by the fact that at the breakout table at which I was sitting, there were four citizens (counting myself as one) and also four staff or interested partner members (for example, at my table someone from a planning council, FDOT and the consultants). The team leader would ask something and it always seemed that another interested party would try to drive the citizens in a pre-determined direction. There was no open contentious debate. It felt more like a cleverly designed indoctrination session.
4. A number of the participants thought that the morning was an exercise in manipulation. That the breakout sessions, the mini-polls, the "pick one word" to form a word cloud, and other exercises were no more than activities designed to drive the process to get the results already chosen by the planners and consultants. I would have to agree with them. It was a very professionally driven process. It was all very pretty. However, it was nearly void of substance. Never was it mentioned that things come at a cost. That if you pick one thing you must forgo the other. Yes, you can do this but then you will have to sacrifice that.

Many including myself believe that the entire WGRS was a flawed and manipulative event. My problems with the WGRS, indeed the entire Seven/50, Sustainable Communities Initiative process, however, run much deeper than the half-day event. My greater problems and concerns deal with the core values of the majority of citizens in Indian River County as opposed to the core values of the Sustainable Communities Initiative which were never discussed at the WGRS event.

An important line in the May 2011 "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity" submitted by the Southeast Florida Regional Planning Council on behalf of the Southeast Florida Regional Partnership, which brought the Seven/50 and WGRS to Indian River County states in part that it would "address the deeply held values in the region". It may. But none of these "deeply held values" were discussed at the WGRS. More importantly, many of the values of the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity", are inconsistent with, if not anathema to, the values of the majority of citizens in Indian River example. I can only surmise that this is why there was no discussion of these values at the WGRS.

I could not get this letter to you in a timely fashion, were I to try to unpack and articulate all the values expressed in the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity", which are inconsistent with the values held by the majority of citizens in Indian River County but I would like to discuss some conflicting core values, (and please note that I

understand that there are two sides to each of the values. I am not saying which of the values is the correct one. Indeed, a value appropriate for Miami might be right for Miami, but wrong for Indian River County. I am simply expressing what I understand to be "deeply held values" in Indian River County based on having lived here for almost thirty-three years, having worked here for my adult life and having recently been reelected to represent them):

- A. Limited Government: The Citizens of Indian River County understand and believe in limited government. That has been clearly demonstrated since the inception of the 2007 downturn. The County has cut its ad valorem tax take by a third. It has reduced its overall budget by almost 40%. An already frugal culture, understanding the problems and needs of many citizens suffering economically, has cut itself significantly by relentlessly focusing on needs and forgoing wants and by limiting ourselves to essential services. The Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI), being pushed by HUD, the EPA and the U. S. DOT, is part of a culture, which believes that government can never be too large. What is not sustainable is our Country's debt. But at a time when our debt has reached proportions many believe to be immoral, given the burden we are placing on future generations of Americans, these government agencies have been part of a process that has borrowed another \$150,000,000 to, based on a close reading of the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity", reshape America in the image it believes is appropriate.
- B. Local Decision Making: Indian River County has shaped itself like no other County in Florida. A simple drive from the offices of the South Florida Regional Planning Council to the Indian River County offices will attest to that fact. If thirty years ago Indian River County had developed consistent with the "deeply held values in the region", as opposed to the deeply held values of Indian River County, the County would bare little resemblance to what it looks like today. It would look like southeast Florida. And, while we are happy for all those to the south of us who love their communities, we in Indian River County live here because of the ways our communities are different, not because of the way our communities are the same.
- C. Property Rights: The majority of citizens of Indian River County understand that property rights are not absolute and that with the benefits of owning property come certain responsibilities and limitations. But, we believe that property rights are essential for a successful County and for a successful America. We further believe that our County has done a better job of balancing the rights and responsibilities of property ownership than have many communities. The federal agencies behind the SCI both by their actions over the past few years and in the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity" express a very different view of property rights. In short, they believe that property ought to be used in

ways consistent with its best use for the collective. Indian River residents still believe that while understanding and appreciating the needs of the community, it is the individual who should, in the final analysis, determine what is the best use of her property.

- D. Representative Democracy: Indian River County is still a community that believes that Representative Democracy is not only the form of government established at the founding of our County, and that it is the form of government that made America the greatest country in the world but that it is still the best form of government devised by man and still appropriate for our County as well as for our Country. The issue of charter government, a move away from representative democracy towards a more direct democracy, was the biggest issue when I ran for my County Commission seat in 2008. I ran for representative democracy and against charter government, as did others. Charter government was defeated and the citizens of Indian River County reaffirmed their belief in Representative Democracy. The "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity" clearly supports a move away from Representative Democracy. It supports the broadest of possible "Collaborative Partnerships" designed to be a move toward a plebiscitary form of government, a form of direct democracy, inconsistent with a flourishing Representative Democracy.
- E. Fiscal Responsibility: Related to, but not the same as, limited government is the idea of fiscal responsibility. A reading of the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity" shows that its goal is to do more than establish a huge bureaucracy to plan for the future; it plans to be a part of the implementation of that plan. The Blueprint states: "...the Partnership, under the leadership of its Executive Committee will develop a structure for its ongoing operations so it can continue to play a meaningful role in shaping the region's future." Just as no financial information was given on the cost to build or operate anything that this plan might recommend, no financial information has been given on what the annual operating cost will be to maintain the bloated Partnership that the Blueprint is hoping to establish. As I write this, the United States Federal debt is almost \$16.3 trillion dollars. This amount, while large, is dwarfed by the unfunded liabilities of the Federal government, which one website shows to be over \$121 trillion dollars. This is a liability of over \$1 million for each American taxpayer. Locally we can manage, without help from various Federal agencies, whose goals and objectives the majority of us do not share, to build a "sustainable community". What we cannot do is manage the unsustainable Federal debt. We can only say no to a process, the Seven/50 initiative, which will lead us further down the path of unsustainable spending.

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Liberty: The great tension in American politics today is that between Liberty and social justice. Both are required for a democracy to flourish. I believe that Indian River County has found a reasonable balance between the two. The "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity", however clearly pushes for much more social justice at the cost of Liberty. It is pushed by federal agencies, which clearly favor the collective will over individual Liberty. The Mission Statement of the Partnership is one of social justice devoid of Liberty. Other language throughout the Blueprint, indicating that it will address not opportunities but "outcomes", which it will determine, never mentioning the needs of Liberty, clearly, and perhaps reasonably for a new bureaucracy pushed by the U. S. Department of Transportation, HUD and EPA, reinforce the tenets of social justice at the expense of Liberty.

I can understand the desire for people to want to build a better, brave new world. However, after reading the "Regional Vision and Blueprint for Economic Prosperity" and attending the WGRS on October 25 it is clear to me that you are building a world that many in Indian River County will not be able to afford, based on a set of "deeply held values" inimical to the majority of the residents of Indian River County.

Sincerely,



Bob Solari
District 5

BS:mlp