

Despicable Desert Sun Editorial Epithet

Content: The Desert Sun editorial board described citizens engaging in a current democratic petition process as "obstructionists". Another reporter described petition signature gathering as an "overdose of democracy".

Palm Springs, California. "[Don't sign the petition](#)" titles an editorial from the local Desert Sun newspaper. It's one in which editors' resort to name calling rather than crafting truthful and compelling arguments.

In 2011 a cabal of downtown business interests, print media, city government officials and a private developer succeeded in their quest for a voter approved 1% Sales Tax increase. Backed by a \$300,000+ campaign they managed to buy 57% of the votes cast. The opposition's \$12,000 campaign garnered the 43% remainder. A substantial portion of the new sales tax is intended for profit-making renovations to private property owned by developer John Wessman - his Desert Fashion Plaza. Wessman and the City Council signed an agreement that provides \$43 million from the tax to benefit his pocketbook by spending on new and renovated structures for his property. Last month the Council passed an ordinance approving the design and construction of Wessman's taxpayer-financed buildings and related improvements. When completed we've been promised a revitalized Palm Springs downtown. Some who have seen the design plans have voiced varying degrees of disapproval as not appropriate for the desired image of downtown.

The Desert Fashion renovation plans were not the subject of last year's Measure J 1% Sales Tax vote. Despite the use of taxpayer funds the architectural design, type and intended use of structures were never submitted for citizen review. The developer's plans were approved by official bodies that, according to one involved individual, represented "a done deal". It was an acknowledgement the conspiratorial forces bringing the project to this point had no intention of permitting meaningful citizen involvement and review. The official approval process was pushed through, over objections, culminating in a new city ordinance.

In California voters have the right to review local ordinances. The process involves collecting signatures on a petition followed by voting for/against ordinance repeal. That process is currently underway in Palm Springs. Signature gathering is occurring and if enough qualified ones are collected the issue will go on the November ballot. The petition seeks to repeal the fast-tracked city ordinance that approved Wessman's Desert Fashion Plaza controversial design plans.

Shortly after the new [Citizens for a Sustainable Palm Springs](#) group launched their petition a downtown business community cabal began a "Decline to Sign" the petition campaign. They prepared and sent an expensive mailer to local households whining over the impact of a citizen vote delay to their pet renovation project. Their glossy two-sided mailer urging citizens against signing the petition consisted of typical campaign rhetoric - and must have cost someone big bucks. A local media columnist referred to the citizen petition as an "[overdose of democracy](#)". (The NRA would probably appreciate his point of view!) The determined "Decline to Sign" opposition apparently believes that citizen review of government, unless undertaken by them, should be limited or possibly not permitted. If that's their view then it's surely one of Hypocrisy in Action!

The latest installment in the citizen petition saga comes from the local paper's editorial board. Desert Sun management, who backed the 1% Sales Tax vote with three editorials, has voiced their alarm over the democratic petition process. They urge the petitioners to "[give up](#)", claim allowing citizens to vote "[would be a disaster](#)" and resorted to name calling "[Frank Tysen and his fellow obstructionists](#)". The local paper long ago surrendered its Fourth Estate role as a community guardian of principles and became an advertiser-oriented mouthpiece. Their unwavering support for public funds enrichment of a private developer in order to benefit their advertising community comes as no surprise. It's when they resort to name calling that they enter the realm of despicable behavior. That appears to be the case with their most recent editorial.

If you believe exercising rights to petition local government is an important democratic principle, then please consider signing the petition. You'll then get a chance to show with your vote either support or opposition to the current Desert Fashion Plaza renovation plans. Please don't be part of the nasty crowd trying to suppress democracy or one who believes questioning politicians or their actions deserves labeling as an "[overdose of democracy](#)".

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