

FLORIDA LAW REVIEW

Accusations Fly Between Parties in Casino Initiative Legal Battle

by Dara Kam

A court battle involving a proposed constitutional amendment that would open the door to casinos in North Florida continued to escalate, with a committee linked to the Seminole Tribe accusing backers of the measure of “engaging in a widespread, election-law conspiracy” in the race to gather enough signatures to place the initiative on the November ballot.

The allegations are the latest twist in a lawsuit filed by Florida Voters in Charge, a political committee financed largely by Las Vegas Sands Corp., that accuses the Seminoles of illegally trying to “sabotage” the petition drive by poaching workers and paying people to stop gathering signatures.

But the rival Standing Up for Florida committee, which is funded by the tribe, and that committee’s chairman, Pradeep “Rick” Asnani, slapped back Monday, asking a Leon County circuit judge to decide that the signatures gathered thus far have been “illegally obtained” and should be scrapped.

Documents filed on behalf of Asnani and his committee alleged that Florida Voters in Charge and its contractors “are corrupting the petition process throughout Florida by blatantly violating civil and criminal laws in an effort to secure illicit access to Florida’s ballots.”

The documents, filed by West Palm Beach attorney William Shepherd, allege that petition gatherers are being paid by the signature, a violation of Florida law. The court filings also maintain that a contractor illegally disposed of petitions that were incomplete or erroneous to avoid being financially penalized by the Florida Voters in Charge committee.

The accusations Monday came as Florida Voters in Charge faces a Feb. 1 deadline to submit nearly 900,000 signatures to make it onto the November ballot. According to the state Division of Elections website, the committee had submitted 458,608 signatures as of Monday.

The ballot initiative would ask voters to decide whether to allow pari-mutuel operators in North Florida to add casino games to their operations. The measure, if approved, would open the door to Las Vegas-style casinos along the Interstate 10 corridor in North Florida and is geared toward a facility in the Jacksonville area. Las Vegas Sands has contributed nearly \$50 million to the effort.

The Seminoles, who operate the only Las Vegas-style casinos in Florida, have launched a major attack against the initiative, dropping at least \$20 million into the Standing Up for Florida committee and spending millions of dollars on advertising to dissuade voters from signing onto the ballot measure.

Florida Voters in Charge filed the lawsuit Dec. 1, alleging “parties acting on behalf of the Seminoles have engaged in concerted and aggressive efforts to harass and intimidate individuals who are exercising their legal right to obtain



West Palm Beach attorney William Shepherd alleges that petition gatherers are being paid by the signature, a violation of Florida law.

signatures necessary to place a citizen initiative on the Florida 2022 ballot.” Defendants in the case include Asnani and his committee; Marc Jacoby; Kara Owens; Cornerstone Solutions Florida LLC; and Let the Voters Decide, LLC.

The lawsuit includes details of how signature gatherers working on the initiative were offered money to stop collecting petitions and leave the state until Feb. 1.

Allegations of wrongdoing on both sides have swirled in the case, but the documents filed Monday on behalf of Standing Up for Florida and Asnani ratcheted up the stakes — and the rhetoric.

“The Constitution of Florida is under attack,” Shepherd wrote in one of the documents. “The counter-defendants’ [Florida Voters in Charge and other parties] illicit conduct is an attack on Florida’s election integrity.”

An “emergency motion for a temporary injunction to prevent election fraud” filed Monday asks Dempsey to block Leon County Supervisor of Elections Mark Earley and Secretary of State Laurel Lee “from giving legal effect to all illegally-obtained initiative petitions” related to the casino proposal.

The allegations Monday mirrored accusations in a legal challenge filed by Shepherd in Palm Beach County circuit court. A judge dismissed the lawsuit on Dec. 17.

The documents provide details about Florida Voters in Charge contractors and include testimony from former employees or petition-gathering contractors who accused businesses and individuals working on the ballot initiative of illegally paying employees by the signature, shredding incomplete petitions and “forging signatures on petitions all over Florida.”

“These companies only care about gathering signatures, no matter what it takes,” Shepherd wrote.

Dara Kam reports for the News Service of Florida.



CITY OF DORAL NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

All residents, property owners and other interested parties are hereby notified of a **LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY (LPA)** meeting on **January 26, 2022 beginning at 5:30 PM** to consider the First Amendment to the Amended and Restated Master Development Agreement and a modification to the Downtown Doral South Patten Book to transfer a ±1.35 acre parcel of land and 15,000 square feet of office space to the Downtown Doral, Downtown Mixed Use (DMU) development program. The meeting will be held at the **City of Doral, Government Center, Council Chambers located at 8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, Florida, 33166.**

The City of Doral proposes to adopt the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION No. 22-

A RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF DORAL, FLORIDA, SITTING AS THE LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY, RECOMMENDING APPROVAL/DENIAL OF, OR GOING FORWARD WITHOUT A RECOMMENDATION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNING BODY THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE AMENDED AND RESTATED MASTER DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT, AND A MODIFICATION TO THE DOWNTOWN DORAL SOUTH PATTERN BOOK TO TRANSFER A ±1.35 ACRE PARCEL OF LAND AND 15,000 SQUARE FEET OF OFFICE SPACE TO THE DOWNTOWN DORAL DMU DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE

HEARING NO.: 22-01-DOR-05

APPLICANTS: CC Homes at Doral, LLC, CC-WCD TIC and White Course Lennar, LLC

LOCATION: Generally located east of NW 87 Avenue and north of NW 41 Street

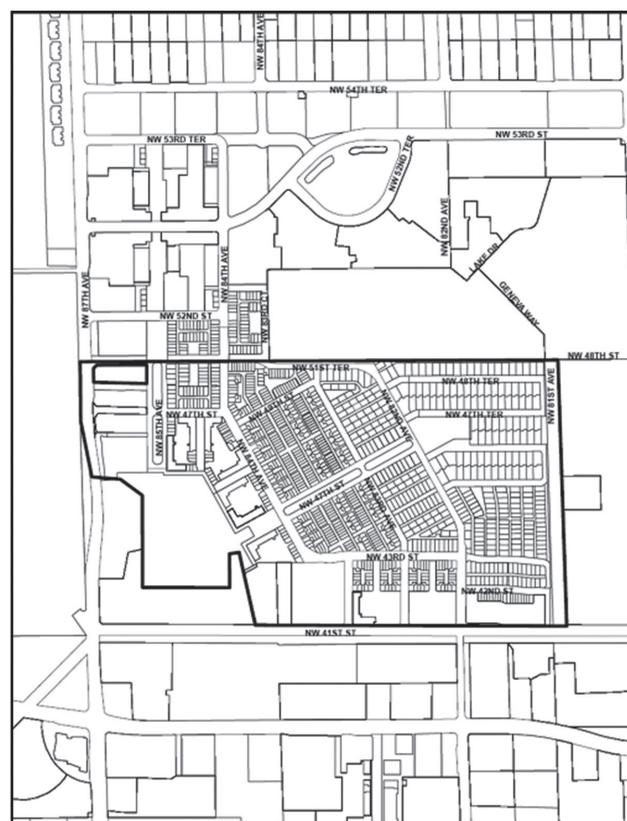
FOLIO: Various folio numbers

SIZE: ±130.15 acres

REQUEST: CC Homes at Doral, LLC, CC-WCD TIC and White Course Lennar, LLC are requesting Mayor and City Council approval of the First Amendment to the Amended and Restated Master Development Agreement and a modification to the Downtown Doral South Patten Book to transfer a ±1.35 acre parcel of land and 15,000 square feet of office space to the Downtown Doral, Downtown Mixed Use (DMU) development program. The development program, as amended, will consist of 2,599 residential dwelling units with a population density based thereupon, 30,000 square feet of retail/commercial/restaurant use, 120,000 square feet of office use, up to 7 acres of civic use, and +/-7.6 acres of publicly accessible recreational land, with building heights of up to 8 stories.

Copies of the Downtown Doral South Pattern Book and First Amendment to the Amended and Restated Master Development Agreement are on file at the City of Doral Planning and Zoning Department located at 8401 NW 53rd Terrace, Doral, Florida, 33166.

Location Map



Inquiries regarding the item may be directed to the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL.

Pursuant to Section 286.0105, Florida Statutes If a person decides to appeal any decisions made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. This notice does not constitute consent by the City for introduction or admission of otherwise inadmissible or irrelevant evidence, nor does it authorize challenges or appeals not otherwise allowed by law. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person who are disabled and who need special accommodations to participate in this meeting because of that disability should contact the Planning and Zoning Department at 305-59-DORAL no later than three (3) business days prior to the proceeding.

Connie Diaz, MMC
City Clerk
City of Doral