



Oak to Ninth opponents denying reality

By Mike Ghielmetti
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ALMOST a year after their referendum petition was found to violate California law by the Oakland City Clerk and City Attorney, opponents of the Oak to Ninth neighborhood renewal project continue to ignore the facts and make false claims.

The ongoing barrage of outlandish statements made by referendum organizers demand that we respond and set the record straight. To get to the truth, we have to look no further than the facts that are emerging from the very lawsuit referendum organizers filed last year. Specifically:

-Referendum organizers circulated an incomplete petition, in violation of the election code. They attached a draft ordinance which on its face had notations such as "Not accurate to be updated"; "City Council draft of 7/3/06"; "City Council draft 6/20/ 06."

-Despite cloaking themselves as grassroots community volunteers joining together to circulate the petition, referendum organizers paid a team of more than 30 professional signature gatherers almost \$42,000 to do much of the signature gathering. These professional signature gatherers go from city to city using techniques that they have developed to get signatures on petitions, no matter what the petition supports or opposes. The professional signature gatherers get paid for getting people to sign petitions regardless of their validity.

-Although the law requires that only qualified Oakland residents work as signature gatherers, evidence shows that some of the signature gatherers used by the Oakland opponents of Oak to 9th came from out of town.

-Petition gatherers used fliers riddled with false and misleading facts about the project to win signatures.

The referendum organizers have fought at every turn to keep their professional signature gathering efforts cloaked in secrecy. They went so far as to try to get the Court of Appeals to stop a superior court judge from enforcing an order he had issued allowing us to see who has circulated the petitions and whether or not they had complied with applicable state law. The Court of Appeals summarily rejected their attempt to interfere in the process.

Oakland deserves better than this. We deserve the truth. The Oakland City Council approved the Oak to 9th project after a long, open public process and with the support of local groups like Friends of Oakland Parks, the Greenbelt Alliance, Alameda County Central Labor Council, Oakland Community Organizations and the Oakland Chamber of Commerce.

We believe in the right of referendum. We also believe that the rules that have been created to assure that referendums are conducted so that the public has a full and honest disclosure of the relevant information are also important and need to be followed.

The approvals for Oak to 9th were granted as part of a public and open process, and the project was required to comply with scores, if not hundreds of state and local laws.

It is not asking too much to ask the referendum proponents to comply with the few specific rules that assure for all of us that the referendum process is fair and equitable to all.

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