

Big issues on 'small' ballot

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The Nov. 4 General Election ballot may be small but the two proposed land-use issues are stirring up a large controversy.

Pro and con citizen activists have launched a campaign to influence the decision of 10,500 registered voters on a measure regarding development in a forest zone. These groups are also seeking to sway about 2,900 voters within the city limits about the proposal to preserve a large sector of the waterfront for a public park.

"This is definitely not a typical ballot," said County Elections Supervisor Lee Shissler.

On Friday, the mail ballots were posted but Shissler said it will be difficult to predict the return rate this year. He said off-year elections with no major candidate races do not usually attract as many voters. However, he believes that a growing community debate over the two local issues could prompt more residents to action.

"I suppose it depends upon how the campaigns are going, if the voters get really excited about these issues within the next week or so it will definitely boost the turnout," he said.

The county-wide measure has been proposed by the Let the People Decide political action committee. The draft ordinance seeks to give voters the right to affirm or deny any county approval of 25 or more homes or overnight lodging units on property zoned for a forest use. LPD contends the measure was "inspired" by Mt. Hood Meadows' plan to build a major housing development on land that provides water to the Crystal Springs Water District. However, the group reiterates that the measure was put forth simply to protect natural resources and not to target any one company.

About 2,900 city residents are being asked by the Citizens for Responsible Waterfront Development to decide whether the city should set aside most of the waterfront for recreational use. The proposed area would include all Port of Hood River property along the Columbia River from, and including, the riverside jetty known as the Hook to the site referred to as the Boat Basin and from the water's edge of the Columbia River to the centerline of Portway Avenue. The CRWD contends the park will attract more tourists and businesses into Hood River and increase the quality of life for all county residents. The group said the issue was brought only before city voters because the municipality has the jurisdiction to enact zoning for the waterfront.

Both CRWD and LPD are being challenged by the Results Through Representative Government, a group which believes that neither initiative is legally enforceable. According to RTRG, both measures seek to circumvent statutory zoning rules and taxpayers will bear the cost for expensive legal challenges.

In addition, the RTRG objects to the waterfront issue being decided only by city residents when the port district is supported by taxpayers within a much larger area who could foot the bill for a park.