

# 'Big Green' Initiative 547 grows bigger than its aspirations

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Special to The Times

**N**eal Peirce is America's most respected urban affairs writer. Indeed, he almost invented the "think locally, act locally" approach to tackling the problems of our cities. Peirce has a special credential in our region: His daughter lives in Bellevue and he has a deep affection for Puget Sound country, reflected in the "Peirce Report" prepared for this newspaper one year ago.

It's troubling, then, to find that Peirce's recent column (The Times, Oct. 8) comparing California's "Big Green" initiative and Washington's Initiative 547 seems based on an incomplete reading of the facts:

■ Peirce says the California measure is "the most elaborate (39-page, 16,000-word) piece of environmental legislation ever placed on a popular ballot ... (and) now enjoys no better than a 50-50 chance

of passage." Peirce goes on to call Washington's Initiative 547 "very different," apparently not realizing it is just as lengthy — 16,000 words.

■ Peirce pictures 547 as straightforward and says, "by contrast, California's 'Big Green' plows some very fresh ground in American law ... Except in a national emergency, new offshore oil and gas leasing would be off limits ... and there'd be an elected 'environmental advocate.'" Peirce seems not to be aware that 547 also bans offshore drilling, and also institutionalizes environmental advocacy with a \$400,000 appropriation to fund activism by private groups.

■ Most serious is that Peirce repeats the misleading picture 547 supporters give of history: "The Washington Legislature made a stab at a growth-management bill in its 1990 session. But developers and their allies succeeded in emasculating it so completely that angry environmentalists wrote a tough substitute measure (the initiative)."

The core of Peirce's argument is that

547 is no more radical than Oregon's land-use law or Florida's concurrency law. What are the facts?

First, Washington is now committed to an Oregon-style land-use law, whether 547 passes or is defeated. The 1990 growth-management bill, far from being emasculated, enacted the same basic system of urban-growth boundaries and integrated land planning that exists in Oregon. The law is sure to be beefed up even more when the 1991 Legislature acts on the Growth Strategies Commission final report just released.

Second, Washington already has a system of developer fees, created through the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) to mitigate impacts of projects, and augmented by the Growth Management Act. In fact, the governor vetoed a part of the act prohibiting imposition of fees from both sources on the same project, thereby allowing heavy fees to be levied.

Third, no state has ever tried to live under an Oregon-style land-use law and a

Florida-style concurrency law at the same time. Each system is in itself very tough. The Oregon law prohibits any growth beyond the established urban limit without a demonstration of "public need." The Florida law prohibits any development unless the roads and other public works are fully in place in advance.

If it passes, 547's requirements will go into effect Dec. 6, 1990. In the opinion of many top public and private planners in this region, the concurrency requirement will shut down virtually every building project. That's because it shifts the region from a system of phasing in capital improvements on an affordable, six-year schedule to requiring them immediately.

Initiative supporters claim they made the final decision to circulate petitions because of pleas by planners that they do so. Why then is this state's association of planners on record unanimously against 547?

Initiative supporters claim that a fine growth-management bill, spearheaded by House Speaker Joe King, was gutted in the

Senate, and that the initiative is merely an attempt to save the House's good work. Why then is Speaker Joe King one of 547's leading foes, who co-authored the voter's pamphlet argument against the initiative?

The Growth Management Act of 1990, and the Growth Strategies Commission report that will go to the 1991 Legislature, are a giant step forward and an enormous challenge for this state to implement. Initiative 547 goes much further by combining the two most stringent growth limits in the United States. We would be the first state to make such a misguided attempt.

This is what causes 547 to be truly radical.

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