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Citizen-Led Government Reform Group Scores First Major Victory Legal Opinion Sets Stage for Dismantling of Sweetheart Deal for Good Ol' Boy Network

NEW SMYRNA BEACH, FLORIDA (July 29, 2009) – Concerned Citizens of New Smyrna Beach (CCNSB) announced today that it had achieved the first victory in a recently launched effort to reform its local government. The City of New Smyrna Beach is a well known resort community of 23,000 full-time residents located northeast of Orlando. In a 46-page legal opinion rendered this month by an Orlando law firm (see www.reformnsgovt.org), it was determined that a ninety-nine year lease of a city-owned property with forty three boat slips was void because the City had no power or authority to enter into such agreement. The lease between the City of New Smyrna Beach and a private men's club, known locally as "The Anglers Club", provided the club with exclusive use of a multi-million dollar waterfront property for a mere twenty-five dollars (\$25) a year. In an environment of shrinking City revenues and a higher tax burden being levied on local residents, the CCNSB contended that the long-standing sweetheart deal for the Anglers Club was an inappropriate use of public property for private benefit, which deprived the City of substantial revenues that could alleviate the need to again raise taxes on New Smyrna Beach residents.

Formed in September 2009 by a handful of resourceful retirees the CCNSB has focused its efforts on extracting accountability and fiscal responsibility from its elected officials. Bill Koleszar, Vice Chairman and Co-founder of CCNSB stated, "Business as usual is no longer acceptable. With the momentum this victory provides us, we are going to continue the fight to reign in the unchecked spending and sweetheart deals that benefit the few at the cost of the hardworking taxpayers of New Smyrna Beach".

Instead of carrying pitchforks and torches, the CCNSB has challenged the status quo of City Hall by using shoe leather and legal prowess to uncover inefficiencies and abuse. Indeed, the group has recently questioned several items in the proposed 2010 City budget, including \$14,000 for City employee coffee and \$30,000 for ornamental "painted fish". "After my husband passed away I had to start managing my own finances and was shocked at how high my property taxes were on my

little condominium”, said Boni Cass, a 69-year-old retired widow living in New Smyrna Beach. “I very much respect the CCNSB and its efforts on my behalf. I don’t know how to fight City Hall. All I know is that if my taxes go much higher, I’m not sure I going to have enough money to buy my prescription medicine or gifts for my grandchildren. I worked hard my whole life, I just never imagined that I’d be faced with these hard choices”, stated Ms. Cass.

This legal victory by the CCNSB lays the foundation for its efforts to effect city-wide elections this November and county-wide elections in November 2010. Tom Gifford, a New Smyrna Beach taxpayer, described this victory succinctly. “It took a small group of angry, highly resourceful taxpayers only 180 days to overturn sixty-five years of taxpayer abuse committed by their elected officials”. Two current City Commissioners, Jack Grasty and Randy Richenberg, voted to support the private men’s club in 2005 and the same two Commissioners this month voted for a 27% hike in the City property tax. Mr. Koleszar observed, “It seems that our elected officials care only about two things – spending our tax money and being reelected. It is time that the taxpayers say NO to both.” Both Commissioners will stand for election this November. Keep your eye on this one! It could set the stage for a taxpayer revolt in county-wide elections next year”.

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