



## Signatures dissed could mean opportunity missed

By Jim Waters

One member of the Northern Kentucky Tea Party described the process of getting a local initiative on the November ballot as “frustrating.”

It just got worse for the group trying to dissolve a bloated government agency.

Scores of Kenton County citizens, who belong to the Tea Party and the Home Builders Association of Northern Kentucky, have spent months gathering signatures on a petition that would dissolve the Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission on the November ballot.

Kenton County Clerk Gabrielle Summe ruled thousands of them [“inadmissible.”](#)

The ballot initiative would most certainly pass, and here’s why:

- Kenton County residents discovered that they pay more than twice the amount for planning services as residents in neighboring Campbell and Boone counties.
- Furthermore, they found out that Kenton County’s planning machine is spending [\\$4.8 million](#) this year, compared with Boone County’s \$1.6 million.
- Campbell County pulled out of the commission years ago because its county leaders found it unnecessary and costly. When that happened, the commission should have been immediately dissolved because the state policy establishing such commissions mandates that at least two counties hold membership, and that at least one of the counties has population of at least 50,000. According to U.S. Census data, Kenton County – the “one” county comprising the planning commission – doesn’t even have a city large enough to satisfy the law.
- After Campbell County pulled out, Special Judge Sam Neace, deceased, ruled in April of 1984 that the commission must dissolve. But then Neace turned around 60 days later and ruled that the commission could continue.

Don’t ask me why the judge went wobbly. No one seems to know.

Frustration? Beyond it.

It frustrates me — and it should frustrate every resident in the commonwealth — that taxpayers in Kenton County have paid an exorbitant and unnecessary amount of money to prop up a government agency that answers to no elected body and that cannot be voted out of office.

How is it that a determined band of patriots works throughout the hot summer to oversee the gathering of signatures on a petition at fairs and festivals only to have thousands of those signatures ruled “inadmissible?”

How is that Petition Partners, a professional, Arizona-based, campaign organizer, determined before the northern Kentucky patriots submitted their petition that it contained more than enough certifiable

signatures? Yet, Summe's office determined that of the 24,299 signatures submitted — way more than the 17,491 required — nearly 10,000 do not count?

I'm not buying it.

And I'm not buying the process for getting initiatives on the ballot.

A referendum on the Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission requires the signatures of at least 25 percent of registered voters who went to the polls in the previous presidential election in that county. Political candidates who are either Democrat or Republican need only a whopping total of two signatures to get their names on a ballot.

Since we don't want to become another California — where referendums too often marginalize the representative process — it should take some effort to get initiatives on the ballot.

However, the ballot option — which serves as a check and balance when fiscal and judicial courts fail to make the right decisions — should not be impossible.

Someone needs to find a way to frustrate those who stand in the way of the citizenry's efforts to right a wrong at the ballot box.

Failing to do that is “inadmissible.”

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