

Roundabout conundrum goes to Placerville voters

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

An argument blisters amid the weathered storefronts of old Placerville. It boils down to this: When is a traffic circle just a circle? And when is it a conspiracy?

Voters in the town of 10,500 residents are going to the polls in November to decide on a local initiative that would ban the city from constructing anything resembling a “roundabout” or “traffic circle” or “other similar traffic features.”

Measure K would also require a public vote on any project – such as a subdivision or commercial development – if it contains a road with such potentially offensive curvature.

The local initiative has become a curious metaphor for the growth and development battles consuming El Dorado County. Ever since the city announced plans two years ago to build a downtown traffic circle that was to wrap around a 1926 monument erected by the Druids of California, many people suspected ulterior motives.

Federal studies say a traffic roundabout – a circular intersection around a center island – can increase road capacity by 30 percent to 50 percent compared with traditional intersections. They are seen as reducing pollution because vehicles can merge into traffic in the circles and exit on desired streets without idling and spewing exhaust at stop signs or lights.

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