

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County
★

February 28, 2026

www.controlgrowthnow.org

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Attend

Control Growth Now's
37th Anniversary

Annual Meeting
and Luncheon

Saturday

March 21

Please renew or
start your Control
Growth Now
Membership today
for 2026-27

Kelly Franklin and

Ron Kashden

Citizens of the Year

To attend or join, please go to:
controlgrowthnow.org

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Control Growth Now News

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Annual Membership Dues
Are \$20 Per Year

*Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome*



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President's Message



What About the Taxpayers?

The Sarasota County Commission voted 4-1 to buy a restaurant, stores and boat club near Siesta Key for \$18.1 million, more than twice what it sold for two years ago, with tax money meant instead for environmental lands. North Port and Venice focus on infrastructure to benefit developers at the public expense.

And now, the Sarasota City Commission is still keeping alive a scheme by some elites for a second performing arts center costing \$288 million, to be built while a promise of \$200 million from the elites' donations evaporates and the taxpayers are left holding the bag even more than now known. And that's plus many millions more taxpayer dollars to build two large parking garages and the site work and utilities for the new buildings. This would add a 2,200 seat hall to the Van Wezel's plenty-big (see photo above) 1,741 seats, although there is talk of reducing the Purple Cow to 500 seats at an additional cost of untold millions.

Years ago, Control Growth Now was the first to oppose this scheme, proposing instead that the funds for bayside improvements be used instead to replace asphalt with garages for the Van Wezel and using the rest of the taxes for more pressing needs.

Who's looking out for the taxpayers?

President, Control Growth Now

County Commission Candidates Respond

County Commissioners Mark Smith in District 2 and Joseph Neunder in District 4 face challengers, Kristina Sargent and Jim DeNiro respectively, in their August 18 Republican primary elections. Here are their answers to questions from CGN:

Should infrastructure to serve new development be paid by impact fees on developers or by the taxpayers?

Mark Smith: Impact Fees

Kristina Sargent: Infrastructure that is directly necessitated by new development should be funded primarily through legally defensible impact fees and proportionate share contributions. Existing taxpayers should not be asked to subsidize growth that primarily benefits private development. At the same time, Sarasota County government and planners must ensure that impact fees are predictable, fairly calculated, and legally sound so they withstand scrutiny and avoid unintended economic consequences.

Joseph Neunder: YES. New development should be funded by impact fees and value capture so existing taxpayers are not subsidizing growth's long term infrastructure liabilities; general taxes should focus on maintaining and upgrading what already exists.

Jim DeNiro: I firmly believe infrastructure necessitated by new development should be funded by impact fees, not shifted onto the backs of existing taxpayers. Growth must pay its own way.

Should infrastructure spending focus on avoiding problems for current and expected residents rather than opening up new land for development?

Mark Smith: Infrastructure spending needs to focus on catching up with the "entitlements" already granted on "new land development".

Kristina Sargent: Infrastructure spending should first protect the quality of life of current residents

while responsibly planning for expected growth. That means prioritizing stormwater management, road capacity, school concurrency, and public safety before opening additional land for development.

Joseph Neunder: From both fiscal and environmental perspectives, priority should be fixing and right-sizing current systems and serving already entitled or expected residents, not extending expensive roads, sewers, and utilities just to open speculative new projects/greenfield land.

Jim DeNiro: Our focus must be "Infrastructure First." We should prioritize fixing existing bottlenecks and protecting current residents before subsidizing the opening of new lands for development.

Should developers be required to build around the natural environment rather than over it?

Mark Smith: Build around the natural environment.

Kristina Sargent: Encouraging infill development should always be the preferred focus, compared to eating up land and creating sprawl. New developments in new land should always be incentivized to preserve and set aside green spaces and parks and accommodate the existing environment into plans. Protecting wetlands, preserving tree canopy, and respecting floodplains is not anti-growth, it is smart growth. Sarasota's environmental assets are economic assets.

Joseph Neunder: YES. Requiring developers to design around wetlands, tree canopy, floodplains, and wildlife corridors reduces future flood and heat island costs, preserves ecosystem services, and avoids public spending on mitigation and disaster recovery.

Jim DeNiro: We must require developers to build around our natural assets. My "Water-First" mentality means protecting our canopy and watersheds is a non-negotiable requirement for responsible planning.

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Will our State Representatives again betray the valid interests of their constituents in return for Developer Dollars in their campaigns?

With two weeks left in the 2026 Florida Legislature at this writing, that remains a pressing question.

A year ago, the Legislature passed a bill, SB 180, with a last-minute amendment by our local State Representative Fiona McFarland. She falsely stated that it merely would require local governments to allow a structure to be rebuilt after hurricane damage. In fact, however, it forbids local governments from approving any regulation or process which would be more “burdensome or restrictive” on developers. Restored wetland protections, for example, have been blocked by that new law.

The Florida Senate has now passed SB 840, to largely reverse SB 180. However, no evident support has arisen in the House, which also needs to approve it.

Moreover, additional extreme mandates on cities and counties to greenlight massive increases in densities and intensities of development, both near homes and as urban sprawl, are pending this year, including Senate Bills 354, 1342 and 948.

When Legislators acted years ago to repeal state growth management laws, they said we should put control in the government closest to the people. But now they seek to put control in the government closest to the developers — at the state level.

Shame on our representatives if they don’t change course and stop betraying the voters who elect them.



State Rep. Fiona McFarland of Sarasota



Control Growth Now officers Cheryl Cook and Monica Balicki urge our Legislators to repeal SB 180, which prohibits “burdensome or restrictive” measures on developers. See the video on our website at www.controlgrowthnow.org.

Kelly and Ron: a Team of *Action and Principle*



Control Growth Now proudly honors downtown Sarasota's dynamic duo, Kelly Franklin and Ron Kashden as our 2026 Citizens of the Year for their sustained and effective civic advocacy on behalf of Sarasota's neighborhoods, environment, and historic character.

Few residents have done more to safeguard Sarasota's parks and public lands for future generations. They led Preserve Payne Park to keep the central city park open, active, and accessible to all. They were also active in transforming much of the Bobby Jones golf course into a nature park and regional stormwater system, and spoke out against commercialization efforts at Paul Thorpe Park, Ken Thompson Park, and St. Armands Circle Park, emphasizing that green spaces are essential to urban livability.

Ron's analytical precision has made him one of the community's most trusted citizen experts on environmental health and city policy. In 2025 he received the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA) Neighborhood Award for Outstanding Service, including a Public Survey to collect citizen data and input about air quality, infill development and neighborhood livability, as a CCNA Vice President. Ron has been a leading advocate for environmental justice, working to convert a polluting industrial site into affordable housing and connecting land use policy with public health.

Both Kelly and Ron emphasize the relationship

among parks, stormwater design, and green infrastructure in fostering resiliency.

Kelly is a former publishing executive who worked with the American Institute of Architects and later studied architectural history at UF CityLab Sarasota. Her design fluency and civic leadership have guided neighborhood discussions on zoning, infill, and tree protection. As past president of the Laurel Park Neighborhood Association, she helped residents defend neighborhood character against over development.

Her cultural advocacy has been steadfast and creative. She supported The Players Theatre's use of the Payne Park Auditorium, launched KeepTheVanWezel.com to preserve Sarasota's landmark performing arts hall, and tried to prevent destruction of the "Avenue of Art" Centennial sidewalk paintings in Burns Square.

Ron's financial and analytical expertise complements Kelly's design advocacy. His independent assessment of the proposed Sarasota Performing Arts Center provided a clear, fact-based analysis of cost, feasibility and community impact. He now applies his practical vision to the Colson Collective, working to adaptively reuse the historic Colson Hotel as a community hub honoring its central role in Sarasota's Black history.

Together, Kelly and Ron have stood at the forefront of ethics, transparency, and good governance. When a public official circulated a doctored image attacking Kelly during Ron's 2024 City Commission campaign, she responded with professionalism. Their insistence on correction, oversight, and reform helped expose broader issues of misinformation and integrity in public communication. They continue to remind city leaders that honesty and accountability are the foundation of public trust.

Ron and Kelly's civic commitment grows from deep personal roots in Sarasota. Kelly, who grew up in Bradenton, and Ron, a retired financial technology executive and CPA, were married at New College's rose garden.

They live in the 1926 Dr. Walter Kennedy House, a Mediterranean Revival residence designed by the same architect as for Ca' d'Zan.

Even after Hurricane Milton damaged their home in 2024, they restored it as a gesture of faith in Sarasota's architectural legacy and the resilience of its neighborhoods.

In every realm - parks, environmental protection, cultural heritage, and civic ethics - Kelly Franklin and Ron Kashden bring intellect, creativity, and courage to public life.

Their partnership demonstrates how ordinary citizens, armed with facts and conviction, can achieve extraordinary results.

Control Growth Now celebrates them for embodying the very best of Sarasota's civic spirit - a shared belief in community, heritage, and the power of active citizenship to shape a brighter, and more livable, future for all.



County Commission Candidates' Q&A (Continued from p. 3)

Is compatibility with existing neighborhoods a good planning goal, or is that bad "NIMBYism"?

Mark Smith: Compatibility with existing neighborhoods is key to good planning. Bringing back in-person neighborhood workshops will ensure that compatibility.

Kristina Sargent: Compatibility with existing neighborhoods is a legitimate planning principle. Respecting scale, buffering, and transitions between uses is good governance, not NIMBYism. That said, compatibility should not be weaponized to halt every project; it should be applied consistently and transparently.

Joseph Neunder: "Compatibility" is fiscally and environmentally sound when it means human-scale, mixed-use, incrementally denser infill that

uses existing infrastructure efficiently. Compatibility is ALWAYS a HIGH priority. Resident input is ALWAYS welcomed as they are the individuals that LIVE/WORK/Play in the subject development area

Jim DeNiro: Compatibility is not "NIMBYism"—it is the foundation of stable property values and community character. I will advocate for planning that respects the scale and nature of existing neighborhoods.

Is adequate transportation in all forms important, or should congestion be embraced, with "road diets" and other measures which restrict use of cars?

Mark Smith: Adequate transportation in all forms should be the goal. By having workforce housing nearby to employment centers alternate transportation can be used in lieu of cars (biking, walking, electric bikes, scooters). Expanding the existing trail network and including MURTs in new developments is needed. Requiring affordable workforce housing in all new developments reduces the ever-increasing demand on the overburdened infrastructure.

Kristina Sargent: Transportation planning must reflect reality. Adequate multimodal transportation: roads, sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit are essential. We should not intentionally create congestion as policy. Again, planning and providing the needed infrastructure helps alleviate congestion

Joseph Neunder: Adequate multimodal transportation (walking, biking, transit, and strategically managed roads) is essential to reduce congestion, emissions, and expensive road expansion; targeted road diets that improve safety and mode shift can save money and lives, but deliberate gridlock with no alternatives is neither fiscally nor environmentally responsible.

Jim DeNiro: While multi-modal options are important, we cannot "diet" our way out of congestion by intentionally frustrating drivers. We need a realistic transportation grid that moves people efficiently without punishing car owners.



CGN T-Shirts for Sale

Available at the Luncheon, in All Sizes. Cash Only, Please.

\$15



Attend the March 21 Luncheon



Please go to the links on our website at :

controlgrowthnow.org

to sign up for the CGN luncheon on March 21 and, if you choose, to renew or start your membership in Control Growth Now for 2026-27.

All are welcome to the cause of Planning With Integrity.

See you there!

We very much look forward to seeing you at Control Growth Now's annual meeting and luncheon, which is open to the public as well as members. The event is at Mattison's Forty-One at 7275 S. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota (south of Clark Road), from 11:30 to 2.

The menu features a choice of **Rosemary and Lemon Honey Glazed Salmon** or **Chicken Piccata** with sides of vegetable medley and roasted red potatoes, or a **Vegetable Plate of Curried Cauliflower and Rice**, all with brownies and cookies for dessert. We will hear from our Citizens of the Year, Ron Kashden and Kelly Franklin, as well as candidates for local office and an update on hot local issues. This is an event you will not want to miss!

*The Pleasure of Your Company
Will Be Appreciated*

At The *Thirty-Seventh Anniversary*

Control Growth Now Luncheon

Saturday, March 21, 2026 11:30 to 2



Mattison's Forty-One Restaurant

7275 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota

Honoring Ron Kashden and Kelly Franklin

Control Growth Now *Citizens of the Year*

Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 18, 2024

Go to the link (and for membership too if you want) at controlgrowthnow.org

If Late Call 955-5622 - \$ 33 each (Glazed Salmon, Chicken Piccata or Curried Cauliflower)