



News

Save Sarasota County

March 11, 2019

www.controlgrowthnow.org

Vol. 30, No. 1

INTEGRITY 2020



Join Today

Will our local growth be controlled as needed to protect our environment, neighborhoods, mobility and taxpayers?

That's up to you, and other voters.

Be part of the solution.

Join or renew in Control Growth Now today.

At controlgrowthnow.org

Many Important Elections Next Year

The voters approved Single Member Districts for Sarasota County Commission elections. This major reform will give principled, grassroots candidates a chance against the big money developer machine. The cost to reach voters is cut by 80% and neighborhoods are empowered. Next year, we have a shot at upending the developers' domination of County and City elections and policies, if we find and

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SEE YOU AT THE PICNIC

Saturday March 23



Please see page 8 for details and return the enclosed card for your reservation. **Free to members and guests.**

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Control Growth Now News

*Is A Publication Of
Control Growth Now*

P.O. Box 277
Osprey, FL 34229-0277



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President's Message



Control Growth NOW

The Sarasota area is no longer a secret. National publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Vogue and The New York Times rave about our charms. We rank high in Top Ten Lists—both the Best Place to Retire and the Sexiest City in America.

So now more than ever is the time for our County and City Commissioners to adopt and enforce measures to control growth as needed to protect the public interests, by new measures and the restoration of those repealed in recent years to serve developers' interests, and should not make changes that do further harm.

Developers should be required to build around the natural environment, not over it. Neighborhood compatibility should be respected, not ignored. Urban sprawl should be reined in, rather than unleashed, and development in our cities should also respect the valid interests of those of us here today.

And growth should be made to pay its own way, by full impact fees and "fiscal neutrality" to build the schools, jails, transportation improvements and other infrastructure needed to handle the impacts of that growth rather than those costs being placed on the backs of the taxpaying public.

Control Growth Now - let's make a difference today, for a better tomorrow for us all.

President, **Control Growth Now**

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support good candidates. Control Growth Now is a nonpartisan organization, so we encourage both Republicans and Democrats, Independents and others, who stand for principle and sound policies, to take on the special interests and let the interests of all of us prevail.

This November, 2019 will provide an early show-down as a preview for 2020, with the election of three of the seven members of the Venice City Council. All will be open seats due to term limits, although departing Council member Bob Daniels is switching to run for the seat which also serves as Mayor. All three of the incumbents are very pro-developer, as is the current Council majority, so this election could return Venice to a controlled growth Council for the first time since 2010. A new group, Venice Tax Watch, will be working toward that end, as will Control Growth Now.

But 2020 will provide the big battleground.

Two more Venice City Council members will be up for election in November, 2020, sensible growth advocate Mitzie Fiedler and Charles Newsom, who usually sides with the developers.

Three of the five seats on the Sarasota City Commission will also be up (the single member district seats): the very pro-developer Liz Alpert; Willie Shaw, who has voted consistently for the public interest (with the exception of his first Lido Pavilion vote, which he sought to reverse) and Shelli Freeland Eddie, who has voted with the public more often than not but has several key votes before her prior to next year's election.

Biggest of all will be the three single-member district elections for Sarasota County Commission. We strongly hope incumbent Mike Moran meets his end, having alienated many east County voters with his support for a concrete crushing facility next to the Celery Fields and others with his reliable support for the developers' political machine. Already two candidates have shown interest, Republican Frank DiCicco, who ran a strong late race against Moran in 2016, and former Sarasota Mayor Fredd Atkins, who is a declared candidate as a Democrat.



Incumbent County Commissioner Nancy Detert (R) will also be up for election, in south County. It is not known whether the Developer Cabal will put up an opponent due to her popularity and wide name recognition from her many years of public service, which is

why they supported her in 2016. However, Commissioner Detert has voted against the big developers on some key votes, so that remains to be seen.

The third County Commission seat, in mid to south County, is being vacated by term-limited Charles Hines, so it is an open seat. Former County Commissioner Jon Thaxton (R), with a history of strong support for the public interest, has expressed a possible interest. The rumored candidate of the Developer Cabal is Planning Commissioner Ron Cutsinger (R). However, as to this seat and the others, it presently remains to be seen how the races will be affected by redistricting which the Commission has planned, which could be used to cut out some candidates' residences and include others.

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Two more hot contests will be on the Sarasota County School Board. Eric Robinson, an insider of the Developer Cabal who handles their dark money PAC's, is up for reelection. So is Caroline Zucker, who the Cabal will target for defeat if she runs for reelection. Both are Republicans, although it is a nonpartisan election. If the Cabal takes both seats, it will control the School Board and may eliminate school impact fees, which are already only at 25% of full funding, and there will be no chance of increasing them to meet the demands of rampant growth.

Five of the ten seats on the Sarasota County Charter Review Board will be up for election. Residents throughout the County will be eligible to run in these partisan elections, in which a candidate must reside in a district but is elected countywide. There is no filing fee or petition required to run. All five incumbents are Republicans. One, Donna Barcomb, is leaving the Board to run for State Legislature so at least District 2 will be an open seat. Pat Wayman in District 3 has generally voted with the public interest. While the others are a mixed bag, the worst Charter Review Board members are among the five who will not be up until 2022.

On the North Port City Commission, three seats will be up for election, including very pro-developer incumbent Vanessa Carusone. Three Longboat Key Town Commission seats will be up in March of 2020.

Eight of the eleven Circuit Court Judges will be subject to possible election challenge. Although that has been rare in the past, a challenger upset an incumbent Circuit Court Judge here in 2018 so that could happen again. Also up for election in 2020 is one of the five County Court Judges (David Denkin).

The Sheriff, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections and Clerk of Court will be up, as well as the State Attorney and Public

Defender, although history shows incumbents in those seats are often unopposed. All five of the area's State Legislators are up for election as well as State Senator Joe Gruters.

With the President of the United States also on the ballot, a high turnout can be expected in the general election, as well as perhaps in some primaries.

We hope that 2020 will be the year in which voters will face good choices among candidates for local office, including those who dare to stand for principle and integrity, particularly in the three single member district elections for Sarasota County Commission, as well as others.

Integrity 2020. Let's make a difference!



Green Light to Gridlock ?

Our County Commissioners are repeatedly demonstrating that they care more about pleasing development interests than they do about our transportation mobility. They just granted big increases in density and building height to Benderson Development at overcrowded US 41 and Stickney Point Road, for its Siesta Promenade, without even an argument that the law required it. Similarly, they changed land uses to allow a huge hospital in a residential area which will leave Venice Avenue east of the site heavily congested and the Jacaranda Boulevard Roundabout within 1% of failure. The County faces a \$2 billion deficit in funding transportation needs over 20 years yet Commissioners keep making it worse. Sitting in interminable traffic, frustrated with delays? You know who to blame.

Massive Density Increases Advancing

County Doubles Densities for Smaller Units

On March 13, the County Commission doubled densities in multi-family developments for units 750 square feet or less, throughout the entire urban area except on barrier islands.

So if the land near your home is now zoned for up to 13 units per acre, it will be allowed to go to 26 units per acre.

That could go as high as 50 units per acre (double the 25 now allowed) if the development meets certain criteria, under two policies of the Comprehensive Plan. One policy requires that 15% of the units be "affordable" and in a Commercial Center, with 10% nonresidential use, and the other requires 30% "affordable" housing.

This scheme gives no consideration to traffic impacts or neighborhood compatibility. It would, for example, allow twice as much density in the Siesta Promenade development which will already gridlock US 41 and Stickney Point Road, on top of the big density and height increases the Commission recently granted, if the unit sizes are decreased.

This is being pushed by County Commissioner Alan Maio. Commissioner Nancy Detert had expressed skepticism that increased densities create affordable housing, as that has not proven true in the past. Nevertheless, she joined the other four Commissioners in voting for the density increase.

Next, the Commission will consider a proposal by Alan Maio to let your neighbors build a second house on their lot, if in the urban area and not on a barrier island, again doubling densities without any consideration of traffic or compatibility.

City of Sarasota Considers 100 Units Per Acre

The City of Sarasota is already plagued by traffic congestion even as much new development has been approved but is only now being built. That has never bothered the pro-developer City staff, who urge a "new paradigm" of embracing traffic congestion to force people out of cars to walk, bike or take buses (that get caught in traffic too) wherever they need to go. Never mind the age of many residents, the heat and rain much of the year and the length of many trips.



So it is no surprise that the staff is joining with developers and others to massively increase densities in the City. While the larger effort in the much-reviled "Form Based Code" has been put on the back burner, big density increases are moving forward for what is called the Rosemary District. That is about 24 blocks, north of downtown between

Fruitville Road and 10th Street and Coconut Avenue and North Orange Avenue.

A 2014 density hike to 75 units per acre contributed to a boom of expensive condos, hotels and other development to this area, the former home of Sarasota's first African American community. Although some bought into the idea that density would bring affordable housing it has instead done the opposite. The current median housing value in the district is \$697,000. There has also been much criticism of the narrow setbacks and sidewalks and lack of parks and open space in this poorly planned area.

The density bonus recently lapsed and meetings have been held to see what to do next with remaining development in the district.

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Bits and Pieces

The allowable density in the Rosemary District is now 25 units per acre. The city could keep that fairly liberal density, improve standards for setbacks, sidewalks, open space and parks and require that any density increase, up to some modest cap, be affordable housing. But no, that would be too reasonable.

Instead, it is proposed that developers be allowed an increase to up to 40 units per acre with the same bad standards as have been criticized except sidewalks that are effectively only 8 feet wide, some improved building design (but not greater setbacks) and a 50% increase in the public art fee.

A developer would be able to go to 50 units for providing merely 5% open space in the development or 60 units for 10%. A developer would alternatively get 60 units per acre by the 5% open space and either making half the first floor non-residential or paying into a public parking fund. Remarkably, if a developer provides open space, it can make its building floor space larger than allowed today, by the same amount.

Then there's the 100 units per acre. A developer gets that without any of the other concessions merely by making one-third of the units in excess of 40 affordable (so only 20 of 100) to a family making 120% of area median income (\$84,360 a year). Upon our criticism, some of those units may go lower. It is stated that rent will be monitored and appreciation of sold units limited, without stating in what manner and to what extent.

In a direct conflict of interest, this plan is being crafted and led by a developer in the Rosemary District. It is clear that the "gives" to developers are so great and the "gets" for the public interest in return are so small that development interests, supported by City staff, have dominated the present proposed plan.

The City Commission will hold a public hearing and vote on this proposal on June 3.

- Private business interests have been seeking to take control of 53 acres of public bayfront under a contract which places all costs of an expensive plan on City taxpayers. We have had major success in persuading a City Commission majority to work for a better deal, to protect the taxpayers and maintain public control, while pursuing good improvements.
- Control Growth Now achieved a major victory when the County Commission combined and updated the Zoning Code and Land Development Regulations into a Unified Development Code with very minor weakening, resisting the plea of development interests to gut it in the same manner that they got the Commissioners to gut the Comprehensive Plan in 2016.
- In an act of ultimate irony, the Venice City Council asked its staff to prepare a "Fact Sheet" explaining what a good job the City is doing in managing growth, while at the same time looking to annex 318 acres into the City to let developers build 1,000 new houses and right after rejecting a proposed increase in impact fees to make growth pay its own way.
- There are signs of hope in the City of Sarasota, as the City Commission agreed to consider proposals by STOP!, a citizens' group, to move more development away from administrative approval behind closed doors and to public hearings and votes by the City Commission and Planning Board.
- After ten years of what we warned have been inadequate criminal justice impact fees, which remain too low (in part because land costs are based on the cost of parkland), the Sarasota County Commission finally faces serious jail overcrowding. The solution by some? Change the rules so fewer criminals are jailed.

***Women of Action* To Be Honored at Picnic**

Control Growth Now is very pleased to honor activists Kindra Muntz and Sura Kochman as our Citizens of the Year for 2019. They will be recognized at our March 23 annual meeting and will share remarks with us at that time.



Kindra Muntz

Kindra Muntz is president of the Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections, a non-partisan grassroots organization that promotes verifiable elections, campaign finance reform, media reform and redistricting. In 2018 SAFE sponsored the Single Member Districts initiative to change Sarasota County Commission elections from at-large to single member districts.

A graduate of Harvard University, Kindra worked in management for 18 years at the Aircraft Engine Division of General Electric Company, and five years as a retail broker at Merrill Lynch, before retiring to Florida in 1998.

In 2006, she formed the Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections that led a petition drive for paper ballots and spot-check audits of voting machine counts to ensure accurate elections. The referendum passed in 2006, led to statewide legislation in 2007, and after being overturned by the Florida Secretary of State, was validated by the Florida Supreme Court in 2010. Kindra and three other co-founders of the Florida Voters Coalition won the 2008 Nelson Poynter Civil Liberties Award of the ACLU for their work for voters' rights.

Kindra is President of Unitarian Universalist Justice Florida (www.uujusticefl.org) a statewide faith-based organization that works with inter-faith and secular partners for justice, equity and compassion in public policy. Their core issues in 2018 are Environmental Justice, Democracy in

Action, and Public Health and Safety.

Sura Kochman



For the past four years, Sura Kochman has strived to ensure that the Benderson development known as Siesta Promenade, located at the Stickney Point/US 41 intersection, is done in a compatible manner with the surrounding residential neighborhoods and retail establishments. She has led hundreds in the effort to keep the development from being detrimental to the quality of life, health, safety and welfare, and not cause undue hardship for anyone wishing to access Siesta Key. Although special favors for the development were approved by the County Commission over strong objections, Sura is leading a legal challenge in court.

Sura was born and raised in Sarasota and graduated from Riverview High School. She graduated cum laude from Florida State University with a B.S. degree in Risk Management and worked for Crum and Forster as large lines commercial underwriter, which eventually brought her to New Jersey, where she subsequently met her husband Harry and had two sons.

Sura was on the board of directors of the YMHA in Wayne, NJ for 13 years, Cubscouts Cubmaster and President of the YMHA for three years. She also was on the executive board of Shomrei Torah synagogue. Sura was appointed to the Wayne, NJ Planning Board and was on the Board for 10 years, and chairman for nine of those years.

Sura and her husband live full time in her childhood home in the Pine Shores neighborhood.

Saturday

March 23

11:30 - 2

Join Us for Our **CONTROL GROWTH NOW** **Picnic**



Again at the
beautiful
**Colonial Oaks
Park**

**5300 Colonial
Oaks Blvd.,
Sarasota**



Free To
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