

# CONTROL GROWTH NOW

# News

## Save Sarasota County



January 22, 2024

[www.controlgrowthnow.org](http://www.controlgrowthnow.org)

Vol. 35, No.1



# Lourdes!



## Attend

Control Growth Now's  
35th Anniversary  
**Annual Meeting  
and Luncheon**  
**Saturday**  
**March 23**

Please renew or  
start your Control  
Growth Now  
Membership today  
for 2024-25

To attend or join, go to:  
[controlgrowthnow.org](http://controlgrowthnow.org)

## Citizen of the Year

Please attend our March 23 Luncheon and help us honor Control Growth Now's 2024 Citizen of the Year, preeminent local activist for the public interest, Lourdes Ramirez.

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Who's For Uncontrolled Growth?  
Meet Our New CGN Board Members  
A Woman of Action and Principle  
City of Sarasota Under Developer Attack



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# Control Growth Now News

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Annual Membership Dues  
Are \$20 Per Year

*Additional Contributions  
Are Very Welcome*



## CGN Board of Directors

**Dan Lobeck - President**

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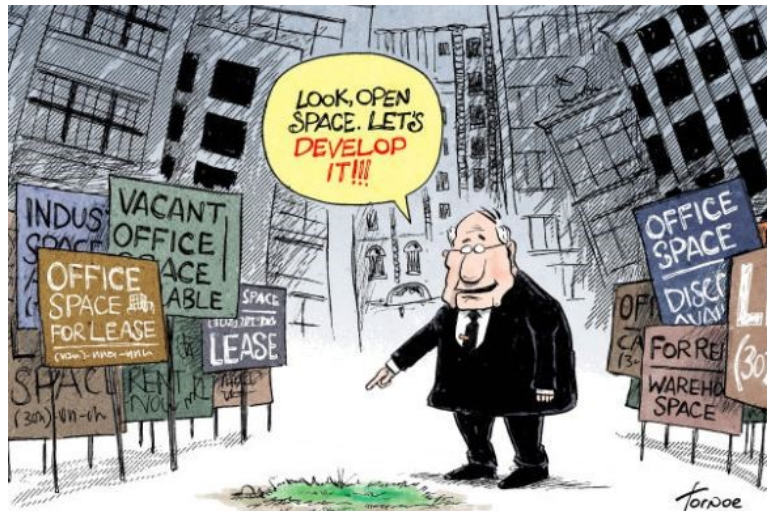
**Mary Ann Gentile**

**Nancy Connelly**

**Cheryl Cook**

**Monica Balicki**

## President's Message



## Control Growth Now

It has been said that uncontrolled growth is the philosophy of the cancer cell.

It's a philosophy not embraced by almost anyone in Sarasota County and its cities. Yet why does it all too often govern our County and City Commissions?

Two words: Developer Dollars. Pat Neal, Randy Benderson and others know that it's a good investment to spend tens of thousands to get their politicians and others in office and then reap millions in return.

In Sarasota County, we're getting urban sprawl and a Plan that more than doubles our population, all at once if the developers want, and mega-hotels on Siesta Key and elsewhere. In the City of Sarasota, developers are pulling strings with City Commissioners to repeal limits on building heights, densities and bars. In Venice, the City Council allows developer kingpin Pat Neal to pave over a preserve for a commercial center. In North Port, the City Commission favors selling out much of fragile Warm Mineral Springs for private development.

What we need are candidates that instead side with the voters and then help them get elected. Lets work together to do that!

President, Control Growth Now

# Welcome New Board Members



## Monica Balicki

Monica retired and moved to Florida in 2018. Prior to this she spent her entire career in the helping profession, first as a Master's Level Psychologist in the State of Michigan and then as a Director of Operations managing three medical centers for a large health care system in Metro

Detroit. With degrees in both Psychology and Business, Monica managed people's behaviors, changed lives, and created a pleasant and productive work environment in the buildings that she managed. She raised cancer screening scores and improved patients' lives on a regular basis through her extensive training in lean methodology and implementation.

Adventure travel has been an integral part of Ms. Balicki's life since young adulthood. She has visited many of our states and National Parks, and over 30 countries and islands worldwide. Year after year Monica becomes convinced on the need to protect and preserve our natural environment. David Attenborough, the natural historian, biologist, and maker of nature documentaries has had a profound impact on her and was instrumental in Monica's decision to spend the rest of her life defending the environment. A recent trip to Alaska, with unexpected lessons learned about the deep reverence and respect for the land that indigenous people have, also helped to solidify Monica's future.

"By controlling growth and curbing the careless desire to fill or kill every green space available, we are essentially preserving and protecting our environ-

ment. We need to think smarter and harder in Sarasota County about what we tear down especially historical buildings and native plants and trees. We need to have more reverence and respect, like the indigenous Americans have, for our land and the things that we have built."

Monica brings to the Board her passion, her knowledge and skills and her driving force to help protect Sarasota, the county, and the state of Florida.

## Nancy Connelly

Nancy's family settled in Sarasota nearly 100 years ago and was in business on Siesta Key for 70 years. She's a graduate of Sarasota High School, Florida State University (B.A.) and Southern Methodist University (Ph.D.)



Nancy taught at various universities before going into museum administration and non-profit profit association administration. In 2002, she moved back to Sarasota with her late husband from Lancaster, PA, where she was Executive Director of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors – an association with chapters throughout the world, a school of clock and watch repair and a 50,000 square foot museum and research library.

Nancy's background working with board members, staff and volunteers combined with my experience managing budgets will help her become a productive member of the Control Growth Sarasota Board of Directors. She is looking forward to sharing ideas with the Control Growth Board and its membership.

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## Lourdes Ramirez: a Woman of Action and Principle



Control Growth now is pleased to recognize Lourdes Ramirez as our 2024 Citizen of the Year and to hear from her at our March 23 luncheon.

This is not the first time Lourdes has been noted recently for her local civic activism. The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* led with her in its January 14 article, “Movers and Shakers, 16 residents with big impact in Sarasota and Manatee.”

Lourdes’ latest concern has been efforts by developers to avoid limits on density and intensity on Siesta Key to introduce mega-hotels on the already overcrowded island. On August 21, she won a huge court victory in her successful legal challenge to the Sarasota County Commission ignoring its Comprehensive Plan for the hotel developers. Now she turns to leading the opposition by developers to repeal those very limits that the court ruled could not be ignored.

It’s also not the first time that Lourdes has been recognized as Control Growth Now’s Citizen of the Year. For only the second time in its 35 years (the other being for Becky Ayeche), CGN finds that a repeat award is called for, the first being in 2012. She also was given a Citizen of the Year award by the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) in 2014.

Lourdes has been a strong Sarasota County neighborhood advocate since 2001. Lourdes was president of CONA from 2011 to 2014. She also served on the board of the Siesta Key Association (SKA) from 2003-2011 and was president of SKA for five out of the nine years. In 2005, She participated in Sarasota County’s Civic 101 classes and Sarasota’s Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). She was a board member of Sarasota’s League of Women Voters from 2016-2017.

Lourdes twice ran for Sarasota City Commission prior to the voters replacing Countywide voting with single member districts. Fearing her success, local developers raised huge sums to defeat her with candidates loyal to them. There even was an incident in which an agent for developers’ political interests was arrested for stealing her identity to make candidate contributions to discredit her in her primary election.

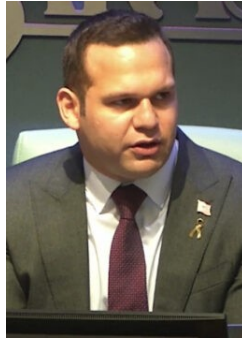
In addition to two successful legal wins over mega-hotels on Siesta Key, Lourdes has worked hard with our local government for better control of tax dollars, easier access to public records, and better government transparency.

Born and raised in New York City, Lourdes has a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Iona University. She has worked for Fortune 500 companies and has owned and operated small businesses. Lourdes has been a resident of Sarasota County since 1999 and has been happily married to Eric for 24 years.



# Save Our Sarasota !

## Covert Forces Push to Repeal Controls!



**City Commissioners Liz Alpert, Erik Arroyo and Kyle Battie**

**Steve Cover and Bill Merrill**

City of Sarasota Planning Director Steve Cover was invited to the offices of Bill Merrill, lead attorney for local developers and the pro-big business Argus Foundation. The purpose: spend a day with him and other developer representatives to rewrite major portions of the City Zoning Code.

Cover attended. And he met with Merrill covertly on other occasions. Now he is pushing many Zoning Code changes to repeal limits on development, including in corridors lining all major roads (backing into neighborhoods) into the City, and downtown.

Although the public was promised (including by Cover, Merrill and City Commissioner Liz Alpert at a Commission meeting on September 19, 2022, when this effort began) that there would be no increase in building heights, the proposed Code amendments now do that, big time, in addition to massive increases in density and intensity.

The fifteen zoning districts affected now generally have a height limit of 35 feet, with the rest at 28, 45 and one at 65 feet.

The revision increases the height to 90 feet. And allows 90% lot coverage. Next to homes.

This is the same Steve Cover who two years ago tried to repeal the requirement of a 4 to 1 City Commission vote to increase building heights downtown but fell just short of the 4 to 1 vote needed to do that, despite strong support from City Commissioners Liz Alpert, Erik Arroyo and Kyle Battie. We can't continue to be "any City USA", Cover said at the time, but need a skyline with buildings like Chicago's Sears Tower. Yes, he actually said that!

Now Cover is pushing for a full review of the City Zoning Code as sought by Bill Merrill and other developer agents to, as Kyle Battie puts it, identify and repeal policies that "stymie" what developers want to do. On January 16, those same three Commissioners voted to begin that process.

And most immediately, on February 20, the City will have their final hearing and vote on a Zoning Code amendments pushed by Cover to proliferate bars — including outdoor bars and with live music — downtown and elsewhere, and in the new "corridor" developments. Again, those amendments got a positive first vote for the same three City Commissioners — Alpert, Arroyo and Battie.

All three are up for election this year.

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### Cheryl Cook



Cheryl is from Miami, FL. In her growing-up years, she lived under Florida's Growth Management legislation, and saw how it worked and all too often now it failed.

After graduating high school, she started and grew a court reporting business with her mother, which they sold in 1998. They subsequently moved to different areas of Sarasota County in 2002. During that time, Cheryl held outside jobs as lawyers' assistant with duties including deposition summaries for national

litigation, practicing international-level witnesses for video of trial, and working in the Federal Court in Miami. As a hobby, she attended dozens of higher education classes which included film, math, electronics and the histories.

Once on the west coast, Cheryl won election to the North Port City Commission where, for four years, monthly, she also represented the People on the SouthWest Florida Regional Planning Council, Charlotte Harbour National Estuary Program, Sarasota County Tourism Development Committee as well as a myriad of subcommittees and regional seminars.

Cheryl Cook was educated in and participated in policies in an attempt to protect her rapidly developing beloved Florida's and its shrinking Growth Management. She follows successful challenges to violations of Comprehensive Plans, those undermining the Florida Constitution, and continues her Florida Environmental Stewardship.

## Say YES to Clean Water

The environment, the beaches, the warm weather — some big reasons why so many of us live here. We take for granted the water that we swim in, the air that we breathe, and the native plants and trees that create the beauty surrounding us, but this environment is in deep trouble. Overdevelopment and careless disregard for mother nature has become a common occurrence in Florida.

We see the damage happening. Nature cannot protect itself. Florida is imploding at its core and people in authority are not protecting nature. Our waterways are being damaged and destroyed by excessive nitrogen and phosphates coming from a variety of sources including phosphate mining, sugar farms, fertilizer run-off, and even by raw sewage being dumped into the waterways. Our waterways are struggling to survive, suffering from algae blooms and red tides, and no longer safe for swimming. Florida's environmental laws are going unenforced.

In order to protect our waters, the **Florida Right to Clean and Health Waters** ballot initiative was launched in April 2022. Its aim is to get a pro-



posed amendment to the state constitution on the ballot, so the citizens may vote to have clean water.

Although a petition drive fell short for 2024, a redoubled effort begins to get the 900,000 new signatures needed to put the amendment on the 2026 ballot. On February 2, 2024, the gathering of petition signatures will start over. **Control Growth Now** members will have several opportunities to support clean water. Please sign a petition when you see them being gathered at government offices such as the DMV, at farmer's markets and fairs, or **[www.floridarighttocleanwater.org](http://www.floridarighttocleanwater.org)**—to print copies to leave at listed drop-off locations or to mail to our headquarters. Discuss the need to sign with others and help us gather their signatures. The time to help protect our precious waterways is now.

For further information and to volunteer on this campaign, contact the co-captain of the Right To Clean Water team for Sarasota county, **Monica Balicki** at **248-225-7637** or **[mjbalicki@yahoo.com](mailto:mjbalicki@yahoo.com)**.





## Victory in Venice

Congratulations to the voters of Venice, in defeating incumbent City Council member Mitzie Fiedler, who sold our her neighbors and the public by approving Pat Neal's theft of a wetlands preserve for a commercial center. Voters also defeated another develop-backed candidate for an open seat. This shows it can be done!



# Attend the March 23 Luncheon



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 Sarasota Square Mall) , from 11:30 to 2.

Please go to the links on our website at :

[controlgrowthnow.org](http://controlgrowthnow.org)

to sign up for the CGN luncheon on March 23 and, if you choose, to renew or start your membership in Control Growth Now for 2024-25.

*We hope to see you there!*

The menu features a choice of **Rosemary and Lemon Honey Glazed Salmon**, **Chicken Piccata** or a **Vegetable Plate of Curried Cauliflower and Rice**. All are served with sides of vegetable medley and roasted red potatoes. We will hear from our Citizen of the Year, Lourdes Ramirez, 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-Fifth Anniversary***

# **Control Growth Now Luncheon**

**Saturday, March 23, 2024**

**11:30 AM To 2 PM**

**Mattison's Forty-One Restaurant**

**7275 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota**



**Honoring a Woman of Principle and Action**

## **Lourdes Ramirez**

**Control Growth Now *Citizen of the Year***

**Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 19, 2024**

at [controlgrowthnow.org](http://controlgrowthnow.org)

**If Late Call 955-5622 - \$ 30 each (Glazed Salmon, Chicken Piccata or Curried Cauliflower)**