

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County



February 25, 2022

www.controlgrowthnow.org

Vol. 33, No.1

Arise *for* Integrity



Attend

Control Growth Now's
33rd Anniversary

**Annual Meeting
and Luncheon**

Saturday

March 19

More Information on
Pages 7-9

Sign Up **TODAY!**

controlgrowthnow.org



Growth is exploding. We can no longer afford to let our local governments be controlled by developers who handpick, bankroll and control our politicians. It's time for integrity, among Republicans, Democrats and others, to protect our neighborhoods, taxpayers, environment, traffic mobility and quality of life.

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Help Honor Mark Spiegel and John Meisel on March 19



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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



Take Back Sarasota County

Regardless of the outcome of the developer-backed March 8 referendum to repeal election of our County Commissioners in single member districts (see article on p. 3), our community needs to come together like never before.

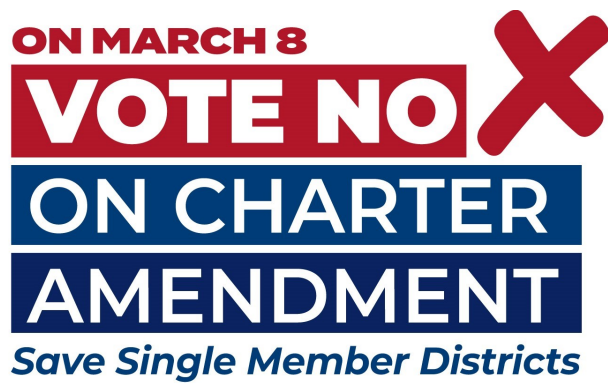
It is time, now more than ever, to take back our community from the vise-like grip of the Developer Cabal. Our traffic mobility, neighborhoods, environment, affordability and quality of life depend on it.

Two of the five County Commission seats are up for election. If we keep single member districts it will be easier for principled candidates to reach the voters in one-fifth of the County each. But even if the elections will be Countywide, if we all work together, including in the Republican primaries where the choices will largely be made, we can make a stand to protect our community.

Also in the cities of Sarasota, Venice and North Port, important elections will be held for Commissioners and Council members.

Some day, as Shakespeare said, the worm will turn. The people will say enough to growth out of control and political corruption. Let that day come this year.

President, **Control Growth Now**



There is a very important referendum on and before March 8, on a ballot following a vote on extension of the local option school tax.

It's a Charter Amendment to repeal single member district election of County Commissioners, approved by 60% of the voters by initiative and referendum in 2018. Instead, if it passes, all Commissioners will be elected Countywide.

Please vote NO, urge others to do so and donate or volunteer for the cause if you can at www.keepdemocracysafe.org.

Joining Control Growth Now in opposition to the repeal of single member districts are Citizens for District Power, Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections, the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, the Sarasota City Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, the Siesta Key Coalition, the Siesta Key Condominium Council, the state and local League of Women Voters, the *Sarasota Herald Tribune* and many others.

The County Commission put the measure on the ballot at the behest of the Developers' political machine. Developers love Countywide elections because it costs five times as much for a Commission candidate to reach the voters than in a single member district. That advantages the candidates who the Developers hand-pick and bankroll in each election, and then control once they take office. They were scared in 2018 when a princi-

pled Republican candidate almost won a squeaker of a primary against the Developer-owned incumbent Mike Moran. So they got their Commissioners to put repeal on the ballot.

Just as in 2018, Developers are spending heavily to try and defeat single member districts, this time hiding behind Dark Money PACs and a secret corporation.

Their main theme this time is that you should vote yes on the Charter amendment to get back your right to vote for all five Commissioners. However, what you would get back is a very weak vote, in which people from the Airport to North Port decide who represents your district. With single member districts, you have a much better shot at getting a Commissioner who will truly be responsive to you and your neighbors as their constituents, rather than their big-dollar Developer contributors.

Multiply that effect in all five districts and we can get a County Commission that acts for a change to make Developers build around nature rather than over it, protects our neighborhoods and traffic mobility and makes growth pay its own way.

Sarasota County simply too big for Countywide elections. Not only does it make it too costly to campaign without the Big Developer Dollars, once elected it is difficult for Commissioners to keep in touch with their constituents. That is why of the 14 counties with populations as big as Sarasota County (as well as the next three below us) only four elect their County Commissioners Countywide. The rest have only single-member districts or mostly single member districts.

Please help us turn out a vote on March 8 to say NO to repeal of single member districts!



Several years ago, the Developers' political machine (we call it "the Cabal") sought to completely take over the Sarasota County Commission and largely succeeded. It makes sense for them. If you can spend tens of thousands of dollars on your chosen candidates and reap millions as a return on that investment by controlling them after their election, it's the best bet around.

Just this past year, we have seen the County Commission: (1) repeal affordable housing as a requirement for increased density in the Sarasota 2050 Plan and elsewhere, (2) reroute a rural road away from its function as an I-75 reliever, directly east through two nature preserves, to (in the words of a County staff memo) "open up the area for development by the major landowners in that area," including Cabal Capo Pat Neal; 3) approve excessive mega-hotel development on Siesta Key, including a complete exemption of hotels from existing density caps, in violation of the Comprehensive Plan; and (4) approve the Hi-Hat Ranch development for 13,511 houses and 450,000 square feet of other development very far east

of I-75, under an Order that requires improvement of only four of 16 identified roads that will be overcrowded from the development and which amazingly excuses the developer entirely for paying for any road improvements in exchange for its "promotion of telecommuting, ride sharing or transit" as "intended" to relieve traffic congestion from the development.

Now, the County Commission is allowing the Lakewood Ranch developer to write its own plan for even more standard urban sprawl in northeast Sarasota County, replacing areas now planned for lower-density "Hamlet" residences.

In this time of booming growth, Control Growth Now calls for Commissioners committed to reasonable controls on that growth, to restrain excessive development that overcrowds our roads and other facilities, protect our neighborhoods and environment, provide for affordable housing, and make growth pay its own way rather than putting the costs of growth on the backs of the taxpaying public.

\$2 Billion Surtax Gives Dollars to Developers

They call it pennies for progress — a one percent sales tax added to the state tax, which County Commissioners want to extend for 15 more years, starting in 2024.

Far from just pennies however, it adds up to \$2 billion, for added spending by the County, cities and School Board.

Plans are being drawn for all that money, with a County Commission meeting scheduled for March 8 for their second look at a project list, a public hearing March 29 and a voter referendum on November 8.

Unfortunately, all too much of the County's money, almost \$100 million or over 10% of the County's

share, is set to go to two roads and other facilities to open up development east of I-75, including Pat Neal's road-to-nowhere described in the article above. Numerous existing needs — for clean water, sidewalks, nature, traffic relief and much more — are instead cut from the project list.

The School Board also plans to spend its money for a new school east of I-75 near Clark Road to serve eastern sprawl. The City of Sarasota may squander millions on a new performing arts center to replace the iconic Van Wezel, with inadequate parking and to which many cannot afford tickets, again instead of other pressing needs. Keep posted. The voters get the final say in November.



Under Cover Concerns

Sarasota Planning Director Seeks to Repeal Controls!



Steve Cover

City of Sarasota Planning Director Steve Cover is covertly conspiring to lift limits on building heights and massively increase densities.

On April 19, 2021, Cover got a 3 to 2 approval from the City Commission to conduct a year of public “input” sessions to

gauge community reaction to his scheme. After strong initial blowback on April 19, however, Cover canceled that approach and now — over ten months later — is opting for stealth in sneaking through his proposed changes.

Ignoring the fact that people are moving to Sarasota in droves because of its charm, Covert told the Commission last April that we should cease being “Any City USA” and create an “exciting skyline” with buildings like the Sears Tower in Chicago. City Commissioner and developer darling Hagen Brody responded to objections from existing residents by saying, “We can’t be guided by comments like, ‘Don’t block my view.’”

In addition to amending the Comprehensive Plan to allow unlimited building heights and a doubling of density, Cover seeks to eliminate public hearings and Commission votes for land use changes, in favor of more closed-door, behind-the-scenes “administrative approval.” This follows his pattern as former Planning Director for Arlington, Virginia, where he was lauded by developers for such “streamlining” of approvals and for a more lax enforcement policy.

Although Cover seeks to justify his moves as promoting “Attainable Housing”, Commissioner Kyle Battie (who usually favors developers) responded at a recent meeting that the City’s requirement of paltry contributions to help families earning 120% of Area Median Income (\$92,640 a year) in return for height and density increases was “hijacking affordable housing” as an empty excuse for developer giveaways.

Operating in tandem with Cover’s moves is a push by development interests to amend the City Charter for a Strong Mayor and to repeal the requirement for a supermajority vote for the City Commission to amend the Comprehensive Plan to increase building heights and densities. Under public pressure, the Charter Review Committee reversed its vote to put that change on the ballot, having been added by Committee member and developer planner Phil DeMaria.

Control Growth Now will present further information on this to our members and others as events unfold.

Important Dates

March 7 - City Commission Meeting on Charter Amendments

April ? - Planning Board Hearing on Cover’s Comprehensive Plan Amendments

May and June or July - City Commission Hearings on Cover’s Comprehensive Plan Amendments

November 8 - Charter Amendment Referendum

August 23, November 8 - City Commission Elections

Why We Honor Our Citizens of the Year

Each year, Control Growth Now honors as Citizen of the Year someone who has shown a devotion to principle in the public interest, for the protection and betterment of the quality of life in Sarasota County and our cities. This year we recognize two men who have stepped forward to provide leadership in their respective communities, to protect and advance their objectives.



Mark Spiegel

Mark, his wife Amy, and a couple of representatives of neighboring HOAs initiated efforts to form a “coalition” in 2020 in response to growing concerns about proposed high-density hotels on Siesta Key. By

2021 the Siesta Key Coalition, Inc. formed as a non-profit. Today, the SKC has community supporting members comprising 71 HOAs and over 6,400 households. The SKC has been a lead educator and organizer of the community, media and professional consultants in the public events and governmental process related to the four proposed high-density hotels on Siesta Key.

Mark has enjoyed community volunteer activities over the years, serving on the Board of Directors of multiple HOAs, Fellowship Christian School, Stand Up for Kids, Inc. of Atlanta, and The Presbyterian Church of Alpharetta, GA. Mark was active in the Alpharetta Rotary Club and as a youth football coach for over a decade

Mark and Amy have been married for 35 years and have two sons, Alex, who resides in Miami, and Garret who is about to graduate from the University of Florida. Mark and Amy have lived

on Siesta Key part-time since 2015 until becoming full-time Floridians in 2021.

After graduating from Harvard University in 1986 with a B.S. in Economics, Mark began a 36-year career in commercial real estate investment and development. He initially gained experience with two of the nation’s largest commercial real estate and apartment developers and managers, Trammell Crow Company and Greystar. In 1997, Mark began to focus on the senior living industry, where he co-founded and led three investment and development companies involving over 80 senior independent and assisted living facilities in fifteen States. His companies created joint ventures with several major institutional capital partners, including the Carlyle Group, Goldman Sachs, the Harvard Endowment Trust, and Health Peak Real Estate Investment Trust.



John Meisel

John spends a significant amount of his time serving his south County community as Chairman of West Villagers for Responsible Government (WV4RG). Since its inception, the group has been focused on activities of the Developers

and Local Government that are detrimental to the community from a fiscal perspective, quality of life, and unethical and/or potentially illegal in nature.

This includes urban sprawl, conflicts of interests in business transactions, and agreements that are not in the best interests of the residents. The primary goal of WV4RG is to support civic responsibility to provide transparency, promote integrity, and educate residents on those topics that impact

them both in the short term and long term.

John and his wife Melanie have been full-time residents of Sarasota County since January of 2019. They decided to locate permanently from Lake Mary, Florida to the area after having a condo on Manasota Key for over seven years. They have two grandchildren that they are raising, 13 and five years old.

John is semi-retired after working over 25 years in the Information Technology field in senior sales leadership roles for companies such as IBM, Cisco, and Hewlett Packard. He is currently working part-time for a startup IT company, Bot-prise, as their VP of Strategic Accounts. Prior to beginning his career in IT Sales, John was in the US Army for over nine years and is a Gulf War Veteran.



Attend the March 19 Luncheon



Please register online at
www.controlgrowthnow.org

Or fill out and mail the form
on page 9, for receipt by
March 17.

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

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 roast-red potatoes. We will hear from our Citizens of the Year, Siesta Key Coalition Chair Mark Spiegel and John Meisel, President of West Villagers for Responsible Government as well as and 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-Third Anniversary*

Control Growth Now Luncheon

Saturday, March 19, 2022

11:30 AM To 2 PM

Mattison's Forty-One Restaurant

7275 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota



Honoring Siesta Key and South County Activists

Mark Spiegel *and* John Meisel

Control Growth Now *Citizens of the Year*

Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 17, 2022

Complete and Mail Form on page 9 or Register Online at controlgrowthnow.org

If Late Call 955-5622 - \$ 19 each (Glazed Salmon, Chicken Piccata or Curried Cauliflower)

Or Register Online at www.controlgrowthnow.org

Yes,
- count me in:

**CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**



(Complete as many as apply - Membership is welcomed but is not required to attend luncheon meeting)

\$ _____ **[\$19 each] Luncheon and annual meeting March 19**

Choose your entrée* - Number: _____ Glazed Salmon
_____ Chicken Piccata
_____ Curried Cauliflower and Rice

\$ _____ **[\$20 each] CGN membership for one year**

\$ _____ (Any additional contribution to our efforts for us all)

\$ _____ **TOTAL**

Thank You!

Name(s) _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

Please make your check to **Control Growth Now** and mail to:

Control Growth Now P.O. Box 277 Osprey, FL 34229-0277