



Journal Save Sarasota County



March 18, 2002 The Growth-restraint and Environmental Organization Vol. 13, No.1

Sarasota 2050 Guts Growth Controls

Urban Boundary, Timing, Concurrency At Risk

Join GEO

Now as never before, Sarasota County needs GEO and GEO needs you.

We must act together now or lose our best chance to rescue our future.

Together we can make a difference.

Join GEO. Please do it today.

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Sarasota 2015?

On July 17 and 18, the Sarasota County commission will hold its final hearings and vote on "Sarasota 2050", a scheme to repeal the County's controls on growth.

Sarasota 2050 would gut growth controls east, west, north and south, not just in the long term but also immediately.

While most of the focus has been intense urban "Villages" in east County, this scheme would also repeal the timing of urban growth and intensify growth and traffic west and south of I-75.



Attend The 13th Anniversary
GEO Luncheon

April 6

11:30 AM

Ramada Inn Osprey

See Back Page - *Reservations Required*

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While developers and pro-growth groups are applauding Sarasota 2050, public interest organizations are lined up against it. As the plan heads now for state review, the battle for the future of our community is far from over.

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GEO Journal

Is A Publication Of
**The Growth-restraint
and
Environmental
Organization**



**P.O. Box 277
Osprey, FL 34299-0277**

**(941) 364-8777
(Mon-Fri 9-5)**

**Annual Membership Dues
To GEO Are \$15 Per Year**

***Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome
As Are Contributions
To GEOPAC
GEO's Political Action
Committee***



GEO

Board of Directors

Dan Lobeck - *President*

Judy Johnson - *VP*

Neil Bass - *Treasurer*

Geri Weinberg - *Sec'y*

Tom Price

Greg Nowaski

Bruce Pitzer

President's Message



Sarasota County is at a crossroads.

In one direction lies a community in which growth is controlled in a manner which protects our quality of life.

In the other direction lies a future in which growth controls are abandoned in favor of traffic gridlock, water shortages, tax hikes, classroom crowding, environmental degradation and the other consequences of unrestrained development.

The decisions made this year and in the years to come will determine which path is followed by Sarasota County. As in years past, GEO can play a major role in affecting the outcome.

Already, we have had some impact on the text of Sarasota 2050, such as the deletion of a policy to weaken neighborhood compatibility protections. Much more needs to be done, however, in this and other matters, to preserve and strengthen proper growth management and environmental protection.

That's where you come in. By joining or rejoining GEO, you help us be strong as an organization, for there is strength in numbers. By participating in our efforts, contacting Commissioners, speaking at meetings, writing letters to the editor or participating in our occasional activities, you do even more. Your next opportunity to be active is to attend GEO's biannual membership luncheon on April 6. Please send in your reservation today. We hope to see you there.

Let's help Sarasota County choose the right direction. Let's do it together.

GEO President

GEO Is **FOR**

- ★ **High Concurrency Standards, To Avoid Overcrowding**
- ★ **Strong Rules on Urban Sprawl and to Protect the Environment and Neighborhoods**
- ★ **Fees And Taxing Districts to Make Growth Pay Its Own Way**

Sarasota 2050 Guts Growth Controls

They call it Sarasota 2050 so it sounds like it won't happen for a long time.

The fact is, however, that Sarasota 2050 would open up Sarasota County to intense development in both rural and urban areas **immediately** as well as for years to come.

Sarasota 2050 would erase the I-75 barrier to eastern urban growth and open up the rural lands to **100,000 more residents** than allowed today. Remarkably, this scheme would allow **all** that additional development **now**, not 50 years from now.

This would replace the current plan to allow only ten years of urban growth at a time, based on official state population projections.

Perhaps even worse, Sarasota 2050 would allow more intense commercial development and densities in the **existing urban area**, along US41, Bee Ridge, Clark and elsewhere. It would also allow developers to overcrowd our roads by weakening "concurrency" controls on new growth.

Overdeveloping The Rural Lands

Since planning began in Sarasota

County over 30 years ago, **I-75 has stood as a barrier to eastern urban sprawl**. It has held firm, with the exception of 600 acres added in 1989 and 200 acres added in 1996. Sarasota 2050 would **erase that barrier**, opening up the rural lands to intense urban development. Significant agriculture would be relegated to an "Agricultural Reserve" in the far southeastern part of the County.

It is false for proponents of this plan to state that they are required to do this by state law, in order to accommodate projected population. The County itself last year calculated that there is **enough capacity in the existing urban area** to absorb projected growth to 2017 and enough in the "future urban" area in Englewood to last almost until 2050. **No more is needed**. Certainly not all this.

What the County has now done is **ignore the official state population projections** which the law requires us to accommodate. Instead, the County is now projecting growth based on the last ten years' average of *building permits*, which has outpaced population growth, in order to try to justify adding more urban land.

Accelerating Overgrowth

Even if the County could justify this **huge increase in growth**, it cannot justify **removing the present limits on the timing** of that growth. The present Comprehensive Plan merely requires the County to accommodate at least 133% of the projected population from 1995 to 2005 and in fact provides enough urban land for 200% of that ten years' growth.

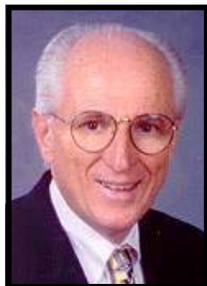
Sarasota 2050 overrides that limit, *against the unanimous recommendation of the Planning Commission*. It provides enough urban land to accommodate 200% of the County's inflated growth figures over a **twenty** year period. Commissioners and consultants have publicly acknowledged that this **will immediately allow all of the new urban growth** planned east of I-75. Adding to premature growth is that each Village can have its own sewer plant, upon County approval.

While the plan provides that the Commission "may" deny development if the growth rate soars more than 20% in any year (which it surely will), there is nothing to require it.

Commissioners seek to soothe us by stating that "of course that development won't happen all at once" but

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Misguided County Commissioners



David Mills



Nora Patterson



Shannon Staub



Paul Mercier



Jon Thaxton

Choosing You Over Developers

County Commissioner E-Mail Addresses:
All end with @co.sarasota.fl.us : dmills npatters sstaub pmercier jthaxton or call 955-53444

Sarasota 2050 Guts Growth Controls

it will instead be “controlled by the market.” The fact is that the timing of growth is now controlled by the County and no longer will be if Sarasota 2050 is implemented. The



County would, in effect, **drop the reins on growth.**

“Protecting The Environment”

Sarasota 2050 supporters state that it will protect the environment. If that is true, then why do the **Sierra Club, Sarasota Audubon Society, Manasota-88, GEO and other environmental organizations** dismiss the environmental protections as inadequate and **oppose this scheme**, as do many other civic organizations?

While maps of Sarasota 2050 show extensive greenways, 82% of it is **already in public ownership** or protection and much of the rest is already slated for acquisition with existing funds. All told, **only 15,000 acres** of greenway would be added, an amount environmentalists have described as meager.

The figures which some Commissioners use to describe the acreage being “protected” by Sarasota 2050 include the 50% **“open space”** required in each Village. However, this land may be used for **golf courses**, stormwater ponds and other development features which are generally not considered “protection”. The 50% open space requirement is no greater than the existing open space in the Palmer Ranch.

Also, Sarasota 2050 allows the County Commission to approve more destruction of wetlands in a Village or Town Center than is allowed by the current Comprehensive Plan. New roads are also planned to cross wildlife corridors. Urban development is planned in areas with extensive wetlands and

other habitat. The impacts of Sarasota 2050 are a **whopping negative to the environment**. That is why environmentalists overwhelmingly oppose it.

The So-Called “Villages”

Another falsehood about Sarasota 2050 is the claim that they will be “walkable Villages” with sufficient shopping and jobs to serve residents’ needs.

In fact, however, the rules of Sarasota 2050 are so loose that they could be little more than **regular subdivisions and shopping centers**. The plan merely requires that a bare *majority* of the housing in a Village be within a 1/4 mile radius of a **“focal point”** (even if across a lake or other barrier) or be within an undefined “walking distance” of that “focal point”, which the consultants say would be less than five miles. What’s most amazing, though, is that a **small park**, without any shopping or other amenities, qualifies under this scheme as a “focal point.” So much for walk-to-shop.

Also, the plan is so loose that a 3,000 acre (9,000 house) Village could include as little as 50,000 square feet of retail and office development, little more than a convenience store. Even if more shopping is provided, though, **Village residents will continue to drive west of the Interstate to malls, beaches, theaters, restaurants and other attractions, overcrowding the roads and those destinations.**



Traffic Gridlock

Regional transportation planners project that our

roads will soon become even more crowded just with the development on the books today. Sarasota 2050 will greatly add to that traffic congestion problem. Even the consultants who prepared the plan acknowledge that it will significantly increase traffic on roads throughout the County.

Adding to the traffic congestion will be the plan’s creation of a huge Town Center east of I-75 at Central Sarasota Parkway, with nonresidential development almost as large as Sarasota Square Mall.

Intensifying Existing Urban Growth

Sarasota 205 also **increases** the amount of urban densities and commercial growth allowed **west and south of I-75**. US 41, Bee Ridge Road and Clark road would become “corridors” along which higher densities and increased commercial development will be allowed. Also, areas now limited largely to office parks, at University Parkway, Clark Road and elsewhere throughout the County will be opened up to dense apartment and commercial development.

This intensification of urban development will also be supported by a dramatic loosening of “concurrency” rules, which now state that a development will not be allowed unless adequate roads and intersections are in place “concurrent” with (that is, at the same time as) that development.

Under Sarasota 2050, a development will be allowed to **overcrowd a road** so long as it is served by buses and sidewalks (called a “multimodal level

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controlgrowth.com

Check out GEO’s Web Site !

Meet The GEO Board of Directors



Dan Lobeck

Dan Lobeck, GEO President and co-founder of GEO, is an attorney whose full-service law firm represents over 300 homeowner associations, as well as ManaSota-88. He has been a leader of numerous organizations.

Dan, his wife Joy and 2-year old daughter Lauren live in Hidden Oaks North, off Bahia Vista. They are expecting their second child in May.



Judy Johnson

Judy Johnson, GEO Vice President, is also President of the Osprey Civic Association, where she lives with her husband Alva. They have several children and grandchildren.

Judy is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations and was Natural Resource Chairman of the League of Women Voters of Sarasota County.



Neil Bass

Neil Bass, GEO Treasurer, lives east of the Interstate on Hackamore Rd. with his wife Kathy and has a daughter in college. He is Sales Manager of Nationmak, Inc.

Neil is a 23-year resident of Sarasota County and is originally from Atlanta. He wants to help GEO help citizens promote wiser local development decisions.



Tom Price

Tom Price, who has served for many years on the GEO Board of Directors, is a barber who served on the state board for his profession. He was the Democratic candidate for County Commission District 4 in 1998 and has been active in the National Estuary Program. Tom lives in Coral Cove with his wife, Nancy.



Greg Nowaski

Greg Nowaski has long been active in Sarasota County issues. Greg represents GEO on the Southwest Florida Water Management District Environmental Advisory Council.

Before retiring to Sarasota, Greg lived and worked in New York. He lives in Sarasota with his wife Donna and three of his four daughters.



Bruce Pitzer

Bruce Pitzer is an attorney who lives in the Sarasota neighborhood of Indian Beach - Sapphire Shores.

Bruce was a candidate for County Commission during GEO's major campaign of 1990. He also is a former Director of the environmental organization ManaSota-88.



Geri Weinberg

Geri Weinberg, GEO Secretary and our newest Director, is a mother, grandmother and greatgrandmother who has long been active in Venice civic affairs. She has been a Director of the Venice Taxpayers League since 1993 and is a former president and vice president of Bird Bay Condominium Association. She is also a delegate to the South County Apartment and Condominium Association.

Please Consider Running For Public Office

Elections will be held this fall for many public offices, including County Commission, School Board and County Charter Review Board. Qualifying deadlines are in July. Unsalariated positions require no filing fee. If you want to find out more about qualifying for election to public office, please call GEO President Dan Lobeck at 364-8777 or 955-5622.

Sarasota 2050 Guts Growth Controls

of service”) or if roads are adequate on average in a larger area (called an “area-wide level of service”).

This insanity was adopted on a 3 to 2 vote, with Commissioners Mills, Mercier and Staub voting in favor.



Look Out For The Tax Hikes

Citizens are being told that there will be no tax hikes to support all the new development allowed by Sarasota 2050 because the scheme requires that the east County Villages be “fiscally neutral”. This promise also does not stand up to scrutiny.

All that Sarasota 2050 requires is that the developer **hire a consultant** to produce a report claiming that the Village will require no less public revenue than it will produce to support its impacts (for roads, sewers and other purposes) and that the County “certify” that with a second report.

The problem with this is that these reports **can easily be inaccurate** and then the County will be powerless to do anything about it. (An example of such inaccuracy is the sample report produced by the consultants which assumed only one schoolchild for every five homes).

Although Sarasota 2050 had a provision allowing the County to increase taxes on a Village based on annual monitoring of the fiscal neutrality, the Commission **struck** that clause under pressure from development interests.

Also, it is very possible that the so-called fiscal neutrality provision will be struck down by the courts. That is because state law prohibits the County from charging anything to a large development (a “development of regional impact”, which is over 2,000

houses) that it does not charge to other development.

Although Sarasota 2050 says the County may deny future Villages if that happens, does anyone really expect a future Commission to do that, after the Villages have been started? Even if it did, all of the Villages could **already be approved** before a legal challenge knocks out “fiscal neutrality” for all of them.



And What About Water?

Amazingly, Sarasota 2050 would add 100,000 more people east of the Interstate than are

allowed today, many thousands more in South County and in the urban area, **before** Sarasota County has adopted a **Water Plan** to show where the needed water will come from.

Sarasota County has no certain source of water supply after its contracts with Manatee County expire in 2011 and 2013. Although Sarasota 2050 says a development will not be approved unless it has water, that only means at the time of approval, not later on.

What Can We Do?

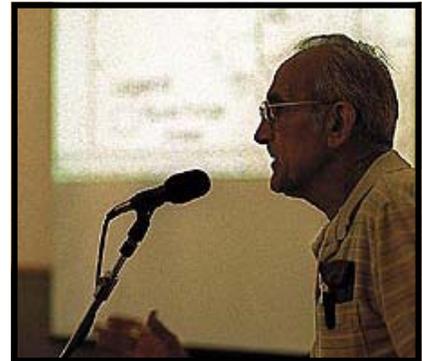
So far, the County Commission has only voted to send Sarasota 2050 to the state growth management agency for review. It will then return for **public hearings on July 17** (North County Admin. Bldg., at 1:30 pm) **and July 19** (South County Admin. Bldg., at 9am) and a final vote.

Citizens can show up and speak at the public hearings. You can also **contact** County Commissioners to let them know your views, by email, phone and in person. We can also encourage and support good challengers to County Commissioners who support Sarasota 2050.

Many groups, including the League of Women Voters and the Council of Neighborhood Associations state that Sarasota 2050 should **not be adopted** until timing is restored and other big changes are made. Few people other than developers and their allies support this irresponsible scheme.

Public policy should respond to the public will and the public interest. We should let our politicians get away with nothing less.

Help **stop or reform Sarasota 2050.** Do it today.



Concurrency At Risk

Pro-growthers such as County Administrator Jim Ley want to allow overdevelopment with “alternative” concurrency standards which permit a developer to congest a road or intersection so long as the roads are adequate “area wide” or so long as the development is served by “multimodal” transportation, that is buses and sidewalks.

County staff will be conducting walk-through “workshops” on this scheme, hidden in a package of Comprehensive Plan amendments on accessibility and walking trails, from 4 to 7 pm March 26 at Venice City Hall and March 27 at the County Administration Building. The amendments will then be heard by the Planning Commission and County Commission. Speak up and **“Just Say No To Gridlock.”**

Bits and Pieces

Boss Hogg Bites The Dust

Congratulations to the citizens of the City of Sarasota for their overwhelming rejection of the referendum on a “strong mayor”. For once, Argus, the Sarasota Chamber and the developers and other progrowthers who proposed this initiative were put in their place by voters who rejected their transparent grab for unfettered power. Congratulations also to Vice Mayor (and former GEO President) Mary Quillin and the other City Commissioners who stood up to the bosses and stood with the people on this issue. Sarasota County Commissioners could learn a lesson.



Mary Quillin

Mills Earns Burnt Eagle Award

GEO is pleased to announce that Sarasota County Commissioner David Mills is the recipient of our “Burnt Eagle Award” for 2001-2002. The Award is given by the GEO Board of Directors to the person who has posed the greatest harm to the environment and good growth management during our award period. By his support of policies to weaken wetland protections, destroy concurrency controls, impact fee hikes and growth timing limits. The SCOPE Board, upon comments by Realtor Michael Saunders, developer attorneys John Dent and Dan Bailey and Herald-Tribune Editor Tom Tryon, sent those recommendations back to the committee for reconsideration. Typical of the reasons given was Dan Bailey’s comment that the committee did not weigh “other policy considerations, such as economic development” in favoring strong concurrency controls. (In other words, its OK if the roads are gridlocked so long as it profits developers). It is unlikely that the SCOPE Board will find similar fault with the affordable housing recommendations, which include holding rezoning hearings before a special master (usually a developer attorney) rather than the Planning Commission, increasing densities and decreasing regulations. The SCOPE traffic committee meets again on March 26, to “reconsider.” Stay tuned.

GEO is confident that Commissioner Mills is most deserving of this recognition. The Burnt Eagle Award will be presented to Commissioner Mills at GEO’s April 6 membership luncheon. He may or may not be in attendance to receive the honor.



Will We Ever Get A School Impact Fee?

After more than ten years of dilly-dallying on the issue, The Sarasota County School Board has finally taken a serious step towards the adoption of an impact fee on new houses to pay for the school construction required by new growth. The School Board has hired a consultant to recommend an appropriate school impact fee.

Whether this proves to be sincere or a dodge to increase public support for the March 19 school tax referendum remains to be seen. The time for delay is past. The School Board should promptly obtain and adopt a consultant’s recommendation for an impact fee to fully require growth to pay its own way for schools. Until that is done, GEO will oppose any tax increase for that purpose. If impact fees are appropriate for roads, then are our classrooms any less important?

The Scoop On



SCOPE, “Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence,” is a nonprofit corporation which boasts that it seeks to promote “independent, nonpartisan, citizen based” reforms in local public policy. Its Board of Directors, however, features many prominent names in the growth business and their allies. We previously reported how SCOPE ignored its own volunteer panels and citizen surveys, which chose a strong call for “Growth Restraint” as the top initial issue for SCOPE study, deciding instead to study affordable housing and traffic.

Now, the SCOPE Board has received its reports from those two issue committees. The traffic committee issued recommendations which include strong concurrency controls, impact fee hikes and growth timing limits. The SCOPE Board, upon comments by Realtor Michael Saunders, developer attorneys John Dent and Dan Bailey and Herald-Tribune Editor Tom Tryon, sent those recommendations back to the committee for reconsideration.

Typical of the reasons given was Dan Bailey’s comment that the committee did not weigh “other policy considerations, such as economic development” in favoring strong concurrency controls. (In other words, its OK if the roads are gridlocked so long as it profits developers). It is unlikely that the SCOPE Board will find similar fault with the affordable housing recommendations, which include holding rezoning hearings before a special master (usually a developer attorney) rather than the Planning Commission, increasing densities and decreasing regulations. The SCOPE traffic committee meets again on March 26, to “reconsider.” Stay tuned.

*The Pleasure of Your Company
Would Be Appreciated*
**At The Thirteenth Anniversary
GEO Luncheon**

Saturday, April 6, 2002

11:30 AM To 1:00 PM

Ramada Inn South

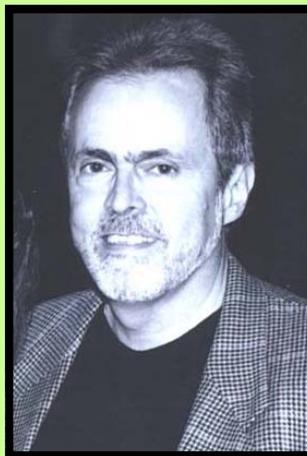
**1660 South Tamiami Trail, Osprey
(Just North of Oscar Scherer State Park)**

Guest Speaker

**And Recipient of GEO's
Environmental Hero
Of The Year Award**

Joe Barbetta

**Sarasota County
Planning Commissioner**



Also Featuring



Jon Thaxton

**Sarasota County
Commissioner**



**Reservations Required - Not Later Than April 2, 2002
Please Fill Out And Return The Card On The Next Page
Or If Late Call 364-0777 Or 955-5622 - \$14 Each (Chicken, Fish or Fruit/Vegetable Plate)**

Yes

**I want to help GEO's
efforts for a better
Sarasota County!**

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Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

**Please Clip and Mail With
Your Check To GEO at:**

P.O. Box 277 Osprey, FL

34299-0277

Complete as many as apply:

\$ _____ \$15 each for annual GEO
membership

\$ _____ \$14 each for April 6 luncheon *

Choice of meal (indicate number):

_____ **Chicken Diablo**

_____ **Grilled Grouper**

_____ **Fruit and Vegetable Plate**

\$ _____ **Any additional contribution**

\$ _____ **TOTAL**

Thank You!

* Reservations must be received by
April 2