

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News Save Sarasota County

March 4, 2011 *Working To Protect Our Homes, Pocketbooks and Community* Vol. 22, No.1

Good Sense Under Attack

Join Today

Basic rules to protect our environment, neighborhoods, traffic mobility and taxes are under attack.

Developers control state and local officials more than ever before.

Help us resist and overcome. Join or renew in Control Growth Now today.

See p. 10 for
Membership
Form

CGN Needed Now More Than Ever

Controls on growth and development exist for good reasons.

They were adopted to preserve our natural environment, prevent traffic gridlock, avoid adverse impacts to neighborhoods and home values and make growth pay its own way

rather than be subsidized by tax hikes.

All that now is at risk as politicians are moving to gut growth management at the state and local level.

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SEE YOU AT THE PICNIC Saturday March 26



Please see pages 8 through 10 of this newsletter for details and registration for the picnic. **Free to members and guests.**

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Control Growth Now News

Is A Publication Of
Control Growth Now

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(Mon-Fri 9-5)



**Annual Membership Dues
Are \$20 Per Year**

***Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome
As Are Contributions
To Control Growth
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**Tom Price
Secretary**



President's Message



Rising To The Challenge

Things have never looked bleaker for advocates of wise growth management and environmental protection in Florida and Sarasota County.

We have a Governor and Legislature who want to dismantle growth management laws and the agency that enforces them. We have a County Commission which is more under the control of developers than it has been in the last 30 years, and the developers are pushing to gut local protections of the public interest.

This is, however, not a time for despair. Now more than ever, this is a time for increased activism and resolve.

What we need to do is shine light upon the darkness as best we can, remind the politicians of their public trust and encourage and support good candidates for elected office.

We will ultimately prevail because right is on our side. Very few actually want to sacrifice the environment, neighborhoods, traffic mobility and their tax dollars to pave the way for development at the public expense. There will inevitably be a backlash against those who would put the profits of their political patrons over the interests of the people they were elected to serve.

We must continue to strive for what is good and just. We can't afford not to try.

President, **Control Growth Now**

Good Sense Being Bulldozed - Continued from p. 1

To paraphrase Rahm Emanuel, the developers' mantra today seems to be, "Never waste a good crisis." They are arguing that the crash in real estate development justifies dropping controls on development, in order to stimulate it.

What this ignores is two things. First, again, those controls are there for good reasons which remain good reasons today. Do we really want congested roads, neighborhood incompatibilities, environmental destruction and tax hikes just to bail out big developers?

Second, the construction crash occurred because of oversupply. How does it make any economic sense to add even further to that oversupply by giving a stimulus to construction, particularly if it comes at the public expense? A December 16 article in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune acknowledged that builders are struggling because they are competing with a flood of properties already on the market, including foreclosures.

Who do we want to help out, the builders or everyone else trying to sell their homes? Do we want to further depress prices and marketability of housing as well as vacant offices and shopping centers by seeking to artificially add to an already glutted supply?

Unfortunately, the builders and developers seem to have more political clout than everyone else. Despite County Commissioner Joe Barbetta's claim to the Council of Neighborhood Associations last fall that "developers have no influence" over his decisions, the Herald-Tribune editorial of October 12 correctly noted that "we realize that ... campaign contributions can impact land-

use decisions and comprehensive plans."

And developers have become more politically active than ever before. In addition to flipping Joe Barbetta from a controlled growth advocate to their most reliable vote, developers are heavily funding other candidates, directly and through campaign committees, and are recruiting candidates in advance.

This is paying off for them.

In Sarasota County, Commissioners on January 26 slashed road impact fees in half, after deferring an increase twice, leaving the fees at only a third of what a consultant is needed for development to pay for the roads needed to serve them. This came right after the County Commission and School Board (whose campaigns are also heavily funded by builders) cut school impact fees to zero, despite the fact that the

School Board continues to buy land and repay loans for new facilities to serve new growth.

At the hearing to slash road impact fees, Commissioner Jon Thaxton asked developer Pat Neal whether he would pass the savings on to home buyers. Mr. Neal refused to answer the question, instead saying, "Commissioner, what we are asking is for you to help a struggling industry." In other words, what he wants are higher profits, which a February 13 Herald-Tribune article reported have fallen from 12 to 9 percent in the past nine years for new home sales. Higher profits at our expense.

At the same January 26 meeting, the County Commission voted on its initial goals for the



update of the Comprehensive Plan required every seven years by state law, called the Evaluation, Appraisal and Review, or EAR. Ominously, the Commission voted to review the Sarasota 2050 plan for changes, after Commissioner Christine Robinson called for it to be “updated and streamlined” in order to make it more “practical”, that is easier, on developers. At risk are the plan’s “fiscal neutrality” requirement, to make the developments pay their own way, environmental protections, buffers from rural neighborhoods and provisions for mixed use, walkable communities instead of typical urban sprawl. This comes after the Commission refused to enforce these requirements in approving the first two Sarasota 2050 developments, in the far north and far south parts of the County, saying they will instead enforce them later when the first phases of the projects come in for approval.

The Commission also rejected a proposal by the Planning Commission to include in the EAR goals a measure to have the County weigh the need for new housing developments when considering proposals to change the Comprehensive Plan for them, for the purpose of sustainability of the housing market. As in her motion to gut Sarasota 2050, the motion to strike this came from Christine Robinson, who was appointed to the Commission by the Governor on the recommendation of influential developers.

Upping the stakes further in the EAR process, County Planning Manager Matt Lewis has his sights set on gutting other important public interest protections in the Comprehensive Plan. They include concurrency, the rule that says developers cannot overcrowd our roads, and the policies that reduce density and intensity of proposed development as needed to maintain neighborhood compatibility, as well as eliminating all policies in the Sarasota 2050 plan. His “White Paper”

with these proposals is posted online at the County’s Web site.

The EAR process will continue with numerous public hearings and votes of the Planning Commission over the next two years. Also coming will be hearings on proposals now being crafted behind the scenes, led by the Economic Development Corporation and others, to eviscerate County regulations that are seen to inhibit real estate development, such as controls over storm-water pollution, wetland destruction and neighborhood incompatibility. It is important that citizens of good will be engaged in the process of considering these bad changes.



It is even more important for citizens to become more involved in the process of encouraging and supporting candidates for public office who are not beholden to development interests who would destroy important policies that protect the public interest.

At the state level, the gutting of growth management is on a steamroll. Newly elected Governor Rick Scott has declared himself an enemy of the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the state agency that reviews amendments to county and city Comprehensive Plans. Even though DCA has disapproved only the very worst Comprehensive Plan amendments, such as those that allow illegal urban sprawl, Governor Scott has declared the agency a “jobs killer” and promised to eliminate it as an obstacle to developers. He has proposed folding DCA into the state road department and cutting its employees from 358 to 30, almost all of which would also take over current tasks of the state’s environmental agency, which would also be combined and cut.

Not that it may much matter, as the developer-dominated Florida Legislature is moving to eliminate many of the state’s growth management laws. They include, among many others,

the concurrency law that requires local governments to regulate developers' traffic congestion and the Development of Regional Impact law that controls the impacts of the largest developments so that they don't overcrowd schools and roads and otherwise create regional problems. Also being considered is a bill to suspend statewide for two years impact fees that require developers to help pay for the roads, schools and other facilities needed to serve their developments, so as to place those costs instead on the backs of the taxpaying public.

The move to eliminate controls on developers is being led by State Senator Mike Bennett of Bradenton, himself a developer. Bennett is bold in siding with his fellow developers and against the public interest. At a forum last year, he stated, "I have a problem telling builders and developers what they can do with their property" and "I don't like the term growth management because it implies that growth creates problems that have to be managed."

The fox is in charge of the henhouse and we hens have reason to be afraid.

We have even more reason to fight back by exposing the harm being proposed and being done, and to create a backlash that will restore the public trust to public service.



THE STATE OF THE BAY

by Thomas Price

Every five years the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program has to update its analysis of Sarasota Bay. The analysis of sea grass in Sarasota Bay shows significant recovery over the past decade. Sea grass is an important food source for fish and living habitat for all species. The sea grass acts as a barometer for the Bay's health. Photosynthesizing plants require clear water and sunshine to grow, but we still have a long way to go before the bay recovers from before 1950. The south part of Sarasota Bay below the Stickney Point Bridge is still in need of attention. The main culprits are overdevelopment and storm water run-off. The Bay's condition is linked to economic tourism and this is very important. The environmental community must put pressure on the politicians to maintain a more pristine environment.

Jackson Lab Tax Subsidies Deserve Scrutiny

On March 3, Jackson Laboratories of Maine announced they have chosen Sarasota County to relocate, provided that the taxpayers build their buildings and fund their operations.

Although local politicians and Chamber officials are falling over themselves to endorse this proposal, it deserves careful scrutiny. County voters will be asked to tax themselves \$100 million dollars for the buildings and the state will be asked to pay that same amount or more for operations.

Questions that should be asked include: How much will this cost us per job produced? What other tax breaks and subsidies would also be granted and what will they cost? Is Jackson Labs a sure bet or will it have problems like the recent Sanborn Studios subsidy? What were the reasons Collier County voters rejected a similar tax subsidy for this project? These concerns are in addition to the philosophical issue of what some call corporate welfare. The public deserves answers because it is we who are being asked to pay.



Ann Kaplan To Be Honored at Picnic

Control Growth Now is very pleased to honor Ann Kaplan as its Citizen of the Year for 2011. She will be recognized at our March 26 annual meeting and will share remarks with

us at that time.

Ann Kaplan is a rather full time volunteer as a civic and environmental activist for county and state issues of vital concern to our residents, neighborhoods and the citizens, at large, who are the vast (often silent) majority of our population.

When Ann moved to Sarasota 11 years ago from coastal California with her family, they were very appreciative of our flora and fauna, the natural beauty that still existed here in 2000. The abundance of shade trees (in some areas) was especially impressive along with the lower density style of living. A few months after settling in to their Canopy Road neighborhood, she learned that many of the normal sized lots on Siesta Key were being subdivided into 50 ft. lots to replace one house with two. In the process, all those big, mature shade trees were being cut down to make building cheaper and the new houses covered the entire property. This was quite the opposite of what she expected when she moved here!

A few weeks later she attended a County Commission meeting to learn more about the legality of this new trend and before she knew it, she had launched a new "career" as a civic activist. She became a member of the Siesta Key Association Board and when they were reluctant to push the county to formally outlaw the lot splitting (it was already against the zoning code), she founded a new group (TASK- The Alliance for Siesta Key's Future) with the help of friends and neighbors

to fight this "density doubling" loop hole. TASK eventually took their case to court but the status quo prevailed and lot splits were allowed to continue.

When other similar minded groups heard about this lawsuit they contacted Kaplan for more information and advice and her focus broadened to county wide efforts. She has been very fortunate to have the time, energy and support of her husband, Rich, over the last 10 years to devote to working for the improvement of our community's quality of life.

Along with being a member of Control Growth Now, Kaplan is serving her seventh term as president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA), whose members include 75 homeowner and condo associations and neighborhood groups from all over the county and its cities. CONA is celebrating its 50th Anniversary of service to neighborhoods this year.

She is also past president of the Siesta Key Association and is now very active in her ninth year on their Board of Directors, having chaired a variety of committees related to environment and land use/zoning.

Ann Kaplan is a director on the board of Citizens for Sensible Growth, the group that created and organized the three recent County ballot measures (that passed overwhelmingly) to help constrain out-of-control and irresponsible growth.

Ann Kaplan was appointed to the County Environmental Protection Task Force last year which is reviewing current county regulations to recommend changes to protect native habitat from further destruction.

Several years ago she was appointed to the County Tree Advisory Council because of a desire to preserve existing urban tree canopy and to plant anew where it had been destroyed. (Kaplan's mother is still the chairman of her hometown's Shade Tree Commis-

sion which she founded 50 years ago. As kids, Ann and her sisters would help the newly planted trees thrive by hauling buckets of water to them.)

Kaplan also devotes time to personal interests like promoting (or fighting) ballot initiatives for local and state issues that promote the values of protecting our neighborhoods and environment that are her priority and passion. Among her pet peeves are wasteful spending of our tax dollars and the need for excess profit at the expense of others.

Until those problems are solved, Ann Kaplan has her job cut out for her!

We are pleased that Ann has accepted our recognition of her contributions to our community as our 2011 Citizen of the year.



**Lesley Blackner
2010 Citizen of the Year**

Control Growth Now was pleased to honor Lesley Blackner as Citizen of the Year at our 2010 annual meeting.

As President of Florida Hometown Democracy, Lesley led the noble campaign to give voters final say over local Comprehensive Plan amendments. Although development interests defeated the amendment with a \$20 million dollar cam-

paign in which truth was often disregarded, the effort helped to raise voter awareness of the need to better control development. Even the opposition acknowledged that need, although challenging the wisdom of the ballot proposal.

We'll Miss Herb Levine



Control Growth Now named CGN Secretary/Director and longtime Venice Taxpayers League President Herb Levine as our Citizen of the Year for 2009. Many of his friends and colleagues were present to see him honored and to hear him speak about his love for Venice and Sarasota County and of his struggles to preserve our quality of life.

Herb died on November 17, 2010, succumbing to cancer. He is survived by Shirley, his wife of 58 years, three children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Herb will be remembered for his passion for life, his good humor, his warmth and his fierce determination to fight for the public interest despite all challenges. He was instrumental in setting the stage for a change in the Venice City Council to public interest advocates for two years, until the 2010 elections.

The Venice Taxpayers League, which foundered when Herb left its presidency, is being revived by his good friend John Patten, and others.

Our community is a better place because of Herb Levine and we will miss him.

Saturday **March 26** **11:00-1:00**

Join Us for Our

**CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**

Picnic



Again at the
beautiful
**Colonial Oaks
Park**

**5300 Colonial
Oaks Blvd.,
Sarasota**

See enclosed
flyer for map and
directions.



**Free To
Control Growth Now
Members And All Of
Their Guests**

**We Provide The
Burgers, Hot
Dogs, Veggie
Burgers and
Drinks.**



**Bring a Side
Dish or Dessert
to Share, If You
Can**

Reservations Required — Please See Last Page

We Look Forward To Seeing You At
Our **Annual Meeting** and Potluck



PICNIC

Saturday, March 26
11 to 1 Colonial
Oaks Park

Free to
Members and
Guests!

Please see the next page to make your
reservation for the picnic.

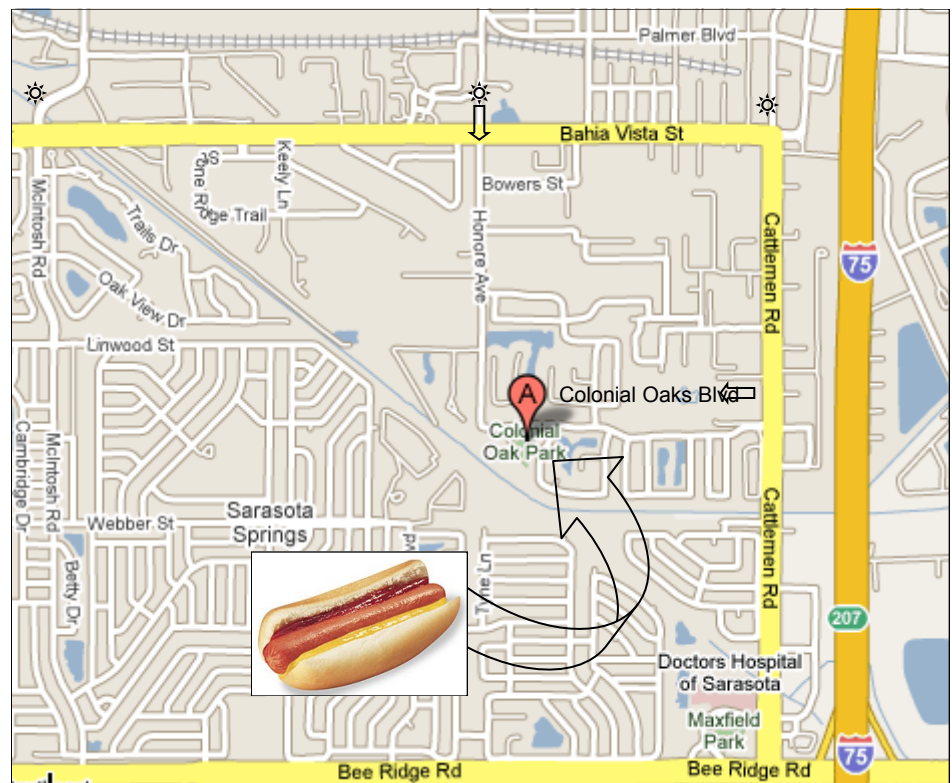
Directions to Colonial Oaks Park:

Go east on Bahia Vista St. (which is between Fruitville and Bee Ridge), past the light at McIntosh Rd., take a right at the light at Honore Ave. and follow Honore to its end.

OR - Take I-75 north to the Bee Ridge Road exit, go west (left) on Bee Ridge, turn right (north) on Cattlemen Rd. Cut through Colonial Oaks left on Colonial Oaks Blvd. to the park OR continue on Cattlemen to Bahia Vista St., turn left onto Bahia Vista to the light at Honore Ave., turn left onto Honore Ave. to the end.

Colonial Oaks Park is on the left off Honore Ave. right near its end. Park and walk past the buildings to the picnic structures next to the open lawn area.

See you there! (Bring a side dish or dessert to share, if you like).



Three Ways To Sign Up For The March 26 Picnic

(And To Join CGN If You Like)



Option One: Sign Up Online at www.controlgrowthnow.com

Option Two: Print, Complete and Mail This Form

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Please fill out this form and mail it, with
your \$20 check to CGN if you are joining,
to:

Control Growth Now
PO Box 277
Osprey, FL 34229-0277

Please check as many as apply:

☐ I'll see you at the picnic on March 26. With our guests, we'll need ____ hamburgers, ____ hot
dogs and/or ____ veggie burgers

☐ Please sign me up as a CGN member. My \$20 check to CGN is enclosed.

☐ I'm not joining CGN at present but would like to attend the picnic as a guest

Option Three: To just attend the picnic, email your name and
food order to maralph@comcast.net; dlobeck@lobeckhanson.com