

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County



February 24, 2005

Formerly GEO, the Growth-restraint and Environmental Org.

Vol. 16, No.1

Big Issues Arise In 2005

Join Today

Sarasota County needs Control Growth Now and Control Growth Now needs you.

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

Together we can make a difference.

Join Control Growth Now. Please join today.

Return
Card
Enclosed

Please Attend Our March Events

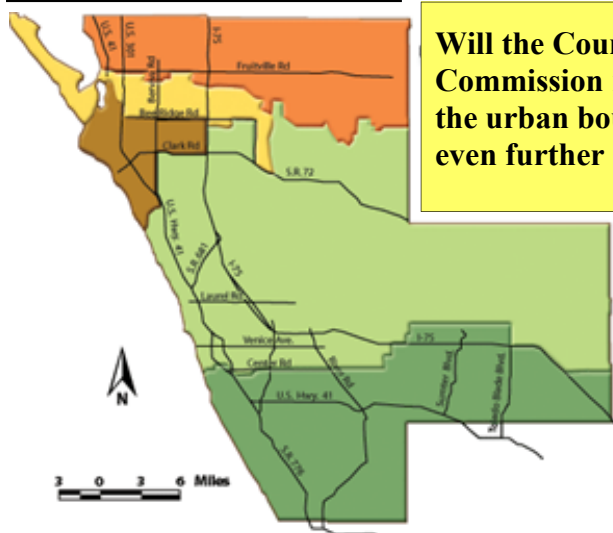
Control Growth now will conduct a rally in downtown Sarasota on **March 5** and will host our annual meeting and picnic on **March 19**. Please see the back of this newsletter for details. We hope to see you there!

Thought the big growth debate has abated now that Sarasota 2050 is adopted, school impact fees are finally in place and city growth plans are completed?

As Tony Soprano might be heard to say, "Fuhgedaboutit!"

The vigilance and involvement of Control Growth Now are needed now more than ever, as Sarasota County and its cities face new growth issues in 2005.

Will the County Commission move the urban boundary even further east?



All of our local Comprehensive Plans are undergoing revision, as required every seven years by state law.

This is known as the EAR process, for Evaluation, Appraisal and Review. One of the hottest issues will be whether the Sarasota County

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Control Growth Now News

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

***Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome
As Are Contributions
To Control Growth
Now PAC***



**Control Growth Now
Board of Directors**

Dan Lobeck - *President*

Judy Johnson - *VP*

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Tom Price

Greg Nowaski

Herb Levine



President's Message



Sarasota 2015?

Jono Miller of the Sierra Club once produced a map of Sarasota County in which he had placed the cities of Bombay and Calcutta to scale, with lots of room to spare. His point was that the combined population of those two cities — 27 million people — could be fit into Sarasota County if that is the kind of growth we want.

We may not be on the verge of densifying as much as India but some days it seems we're well on the way. If current trends in local public policies continue, we will in any event ultimately be far more like a sardine can than Sarasota County was ever before envisioned. It may be what some development interests want but surely it is not the preference of the people.

How then does the public get the growth policies that it wants? By the involvement and advocacy of groups like Control Growth Now and by the election of principled people to public office.

This year and next we will redouble our efforts to build our membership and to urge Sarasota County and its cities to turn the corner towards controlling growth for a change, before we become Bombay — or even Saint Petersburg or Fort Lauderdale. We hope that you are with us in that noble and important cause. Please join today.

President, **Control Growth Now**

Herb Levine Joins Control Growth Now Board of Directors

The newest member of the Control Growth Now Board of Directors is longtime Venice activist Herb Levine. Herb was appointed to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Geri Weinberg.



Herb Levine is President of the Venice Taxpayers League (VTL) and has led that organization for many years. His honesty in testimony before the Venice City Council once caused the Mayor to arrest him—an incident he wears as a badge of honor. He is also the author of a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel set in Venice, titled *Apple*. Herb Levine in his own words:

I spent the first 11 years of my life living on a farm in South Jersey. My family moved to the big city of Camden, New Jersey and in between loving city life, I missed farm life. Camden High School and a few years in the Navy. Did a few years of college in New Jersey and went back in the Navy for the Korean War.

Back to civilian life, some more college and became an Industrial Engineer. Married the girl - almost next door. Four children, four grand children and 54 years later, my wife and I are here in Venice. We were at a convention in Miami about 25 years ago, planned doing the Keys but it was raining down there so we dropped in to Venice to see one of my wife's old friends. We fell in love with the area. Bought some ground on the Island about 23 years ago and built a part-time house about four years later.

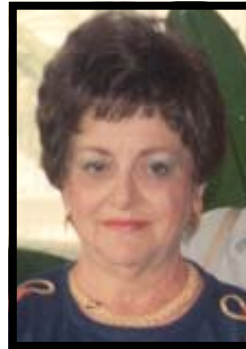
About six years ago, we decided to retire - full time. I had never bothered with politics up to then but some how or other I attended a VTL meeting and I was hooked. From the VTL Board to the Presidency. No problem. A few tears, laughs and most of one night in

jail. The more I see of Sarasota County - the more I love the area and the more I wonder why people are trying to ruin it. And then the same answer always pops up — MONEY!

Gerri Weinberg

Control Growth Now regrets the passing of its Secretary and member of the Board of Directors, Gerri Weinberg, on September 13, 2004.

Gerri was also Vice President of the Venice Taxpayers League and a leader of Bird Bay Condominium Association. VTL President Herb Levine observed that she was the “conscience” of Venice. “Her antipathy towards political bullying, injustice or wasteful government was equally matched by her compassion for the citizens of Venice,” he said.



Gerri was an active and helpful member of the Control Growth Now Board and is very missed.

Syd Adler

Donald Keen

We are also saddened by the recent deaths of two other valued members, Syd Adler and Donald Keen.

Donald Keen was a long-time member who was also active in the Osprey Civic Association with Control Growth Now Vice President Judy Johnson.

Syd Adler was an active and generous member for many years who helped lead the fight for sensible control of growth in east Sarasota County. He is survived by his wife, member Rita Adler.

Hot Issues Face Sarasota County In 2005 — Ctd. From Page 1

Commission betrays the promise of Sarasota 2050 by moving the urban boundary further east, in addition to the Villages provided by the plan.

The intense urban Villages of Sarasota 2050 were justified as an alternative to moving the urban boundary, even though they also dramatically increased and accelerated eastern growth. Now, some developers are urging that the boundary be moved anyway — overgrowth on top of overgrowth!

County staff has identified numerous areas east, north and south of the area that now projects to the east as the urban boundary, calling them “pockets of opportunity” for further urban growth. The staff acknowledges, however, that the new areas are not needed to accommodate projected population as required by state law and the Comprehensive Plan.

Look for Control Growth Now and other public interest organizations to once again do battle with progrowth interests to hold the line on additional urban sprawl.

On other issues, early drafts of the County EAR amendments are promising. They include, for example, no attempts to weaken transportation “concurrency” standards — by which development is limited if it would create excessive traffic — as staff has proposed in the past. Also, amendments to the Environment Chapter would increase protection of important upland habitat, in addition to the present focus on wetlands.

In the City of Sarasota, however, the news is not so good on transportation concurrency. The City in its EAR is actually proposing to **eliminate all traffic limits** on development in over a square mile of the City, including on US 41 along the bayfront!

This square mile area of Sarasota is called the Transportation Concurrency Exception Area, or TCEA. At present, it is not a full-blown Exception Area. Instead, the City for several years has allowed development to exceed previous traffic concurrency standards by a total of 15%.

The new EAR proposal states that “the City will

maintain the existing TCEA boundary, but change the policy to **allow all proposed development**, regardless of concurrency impact.” The draft EAR notes that this “change is necessary as some development projects are beginning to be scaled back in the absence of a fully exempt TCEA in order to meet transportation concurrency.”

Well sure, that’s what concurrency is all about. The alternative is intolerable gridlock. When Sarasota Mayor Richard Martin was asked how he can justify this, he responded, “We want Sarasota to be a walkable community.”

Walkable? Walkable for miles along US41? Walkable when a condo resident needs to get to



the hospital? Walkable when an elderly widow needs to go out for groceries in August? Walkable for tourists traveling from one side of the City to the other? Walk-

able for the delivery of business goods and service? Walkable from Lido Key to 10th Street?

This is pure insanity. It is the use of code words of New Urbanism in an attempt to justify pandering to development interests while forsaking the public interest. Walkability for blocks in the core of downtown makes sense. However, it is just a simple fact that people need automobiles to travel any distance in, around and through Sarasota.

What the City fathers and mothers promise their citizens is polluting, aggravating, economically destructive traffic congestion, just so developers can get even richer at the public expense, and have more money left over for campaign contributions come election time.

City staff is supporting the Commissioners in this. City Planner Mike Taylor has publicly stated that traffic congestion is actually the *goal* of City planning. The City’s Manager of Transportation

Engineering, Sam Freija, was quoted in the Sarasota Herald Tribune as stating that traffic congestion was only “a matter of perception.”

The public is woefully uninformed on this important issue. Control Growth Now will do all it can to wake them up and to mobilize Sarasota’s citizens to take back control of their streets from the forces of overdevelopment, before it is even later than it is.

Speaking of Sarasota’s streets, Control Growth Now supports the efforts of a group known as Save Our Sarasota to push development back from city streets. In particular, the group wants to change the Downtown Code before it is adopted to eliminate a provision which allows developers to

actually extend buildings out over public sidewalks, creating “arcades” to replace existing street trees. Additional setbacks are also needed



to prevent the sort of monstrosity of building mass that just went up on the corners of US 301, Main Street and Ringling Boulevard.

Further, we will be urging the City Commission to resist the pressure of development interests who want to further increase building heights downtown and reduce other restraints on development.

The Sarasota City Commission operates under the slogan, “A city of urban amenities with small town feeling and living.” It’s posted on the wall of the Commission chambers. Control Growth Now will do its best to make that slogan a reality rather than a mark of hypocrisy.

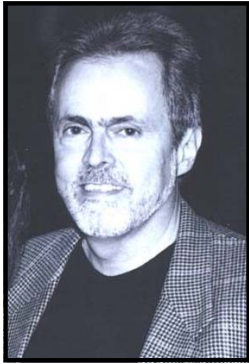
The Cities of Venice and North Port are also taking the first steps towards the drafting of their EAR’s. In Venice, while City Council members and the City Manager have stated a desire to work more closely with citizens and groups such as the Venice Taxpayers League who favor stronger controls on growth, to date EAR workshops have been structured in a way that is

dominated by developers. In North Port, City Commissioners have expressed regret for recent progrowth policies but have yet to commit to the changes needed to make a difference.

Other issues facing our community in 2005 include the following:

- Updates are due for Sarasota County’s impact fees for roads, schools and other facilities. While the County falls ever further behind in making growth pay its own way, building interests are urging delays and new “credits” to reduce the fees even more.
- The Sarasota County Commission will decide whether to sell the railway corridor the County bought for a nature trail to the state with a condition that would allow the state to turn it into a highway, thereby destroying both the environment and neighborhoods.
- The Sarasota City Commission will decide whether to raise property taxes, despite huge increases in tax revenues and City subsidies of developers.
- The Sarasota County Commission will decide whether to reverse its 3 to 2 denial of a proposed Super Walmart on Fruitville Road, despite traffic problems and a violation of limits on commercial development in a “Major Employment Center.”
- Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan Amendments RU-119, for doubling of densities, and RU-123, for commercial sprawl east of I-75, may face legal challenge.
- The Florida Legislature is working on a fundamental revision of the state’s growth management laws. Unfortunately, it is under the guidance of State Senator Mike Bennett of Bradenton, a developer and consistent advocate of progrowth legislation.
- The Florida Supreme Court will rule soon on whether the Florida Hometown Democracy Amendment qualifies for the ballot by being clear and embracing one subject. The measure, which Control Growth Now supports, would require voter approval for any local Comprehensive Plan amendment.





Joe Barbetta for County Commission?

Veteran Sarasota County Planning Commissioner and attorney Joe Barbetta is considering a run for County Commission in 2006. He would seek the

seat being vacated by David Mills, who is running for State Legislature.

This is a remarkable opportunity to replace the most progrowth County Commissioner with a principled advocate for responsible controls on development, to the benefit of neighborhoods, the environment and our quality of life.

Joe was the recipient of GEO's Environmental hero of the Year Award in 2002 and our speaker at that year's annual meeting.

Please email Joe Barbetta to urge him to run and offer your support, at joebarb55@aol.com.

Convention Center Madness: When Pigs Fly

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce has made yet another pitch for a taxpayer-funded convention center - this time on public land near the bayfront!

Despite the recent finding of a County-funded expert consultant that the proposed convention center would require an annual tax subsidy of \$650,000, the Chamber boldly asserts that after six years the convention center would produce a surplus to operate itself and pay down bonds.

When pigs fly.

Studies throughout the country show that almost all convention centers require a tax subsidy and that they are running more red ink



than ever before. A report last month by the respected Brookings Institute shows that cities are spending ever more for new and expanded convention centers despite a sharp decline in the conventions and conferences which use them. The decline is attributed in part to the rise in video teleconferencing and to Internet marketing and sales. The consequent convention center glut is making it "tough for almost everybody" in that business, making centers "clear losers", according the author of the report

The figures presented to the County by the Chamber of Commerce, although unrealistically rosy, actually project a permanent tax subsidy. The Chamber would increase the County tax on rentals of six months or less by 67% (from 3 cents on the dollar to 5) to build and operate the convention center. The Chamber alleges that half of the tax hike could be repealed in 2026 after construction bonds are paid off and another quarter could be repealed in 2042.

The tax hike would hit rentals throughout Sarasota County to benefit a few hoteliers and other businesses in downtown Sarasota. It would also use up revenues which otherwise could go to such purposes as beaches, the arts and advertising, which would more broadly benefit those who pay the tax. It would put Sarasota County at a competitive disadvantage with nearby counties with much lower taxes on short-term rentals.

Further, the Chamber proposal would use City and County property tax revenues to build its parking garage.

In addition, the convention center scheme would convert valuable public land to a private purpose, destroying historic buildings and impacting wetlands in the process.

County and City staff are to study the proposal and report back to their Commissions by April 2.

As a positive piece of news (and you may be reading it here first) the Manager of the Ritz Carlton has declared that the Ritz opposes the convention center and tax hike. Nevertheless, support for the center is strong from well-connected and powerful interests. Control Growth Now will continue to oppose them on this important issue.

Send Them A Message

Your Voice Can Make A Difference

Sarasota County Commissioners

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jthaxton@scgov.net



Sarasota City Commissioners

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LouAnn_Palmer@sarasotagov.com



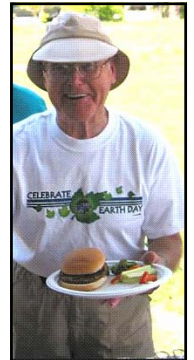
Wade Matthews To Be Honored at Annual Meeting

Control Growth Now will present its 2005 Citizen of the Year Award to Wade Matthews at our March 19 annual meeting at Oscar Scherer State Park, following the pot luck picnic.

Wade, who will also be our principal speaker, is being honored for his many years of activism on behalf of the environment and for control of growth, including as a leader of the Sarasota Audubon Society, which he currently serves as Conservation Chairman.

Wade Matthews is also a leader in other local, regional and statewide organizations, including as a Director of the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida and Floridians for a Sustainable Population. He is retired from a long and distinguished career as a senior diplomat in the U.S. State Department and as a consultant and speaker on international and environmental subjects.

See You At The Picnic!



RALLY FOR RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

Saturday, March 5

1:00 pm

Selby Library Auditorium

Downtown Sarasota

Park in Library Lot, 2nd Street Parking

Garage, Near Marina Jack's or Elsewhere



Presentation By
Dan Lobeck
President of
**Control Growth
Now**

Do you agree that our elected leaders must do more to control growth and the traffic, tax hikes and other problems caused by serving developers instead of the public interest?

Come find out what should be done, with a focus on the City of Sarasota prior to the March 8 elections!

Saturday

March 19

11:30-2:00

Join Us for Our

**CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**

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



**At Oscar Scherer
State Park**

Off US 41 in Osprey

**At the Pavilion by
The Lake**

**Free Park Entry—
(Tell Them You're
Here For The
Control Growth Now
Picnic)**

and Annual Meeting



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



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

Reservations Required — Please Fill Out And Return The Enclosed Card

When will the public say “enough” to control of local government by development interests?

Sarasota City Commissioners have taken the first step to eliminate all “concurrency” limits on growth in a square mile around the bayfront, in order “to allow all proposed development, regardless of (traffic) impact.” They favor tax subsidies of developers, which may include a 67% tax hike for a convention center on public land. New rules would increase densities and allow developers to build over sidewalks. They may even lift limits on building heights.

Meanwhile, the Sarasota County Commission may move the urban boundary even further east and greatly increase densities, while the County faces huge deficits in the roads, schools and water needed to keep up with growth.

Only by joining together can we effectively advance the public interest in these and other very important issues which affect our quality of life and that for generations yet to come. We can't afford not to try.

**Had Enough
Traffic
Tax Hikes
Crowding
Pollution
Overgrowth
?**

Join

**CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**

Save Sarasota County

Yes *I Want To Be
Part of The
Solution* **CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Please Check One:

I will not be attending the Picnic

(see reverse of this sheet for picnic info)

I'll see you on March 19. With our guests,
we'll need _____ hamburgers, _____ hot dogs
and/or _____ veggie burgers

Thank You!

Please **mail this form and your check** for \$20 per Member (or more) to

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