

# CONTROL GROWTH NOW

# News

## Save Sarasota County



March 10, 2008

Formerly GEO, the Growth-restraint and Environmental Org.

Vol. 19, No.1

# GRIDLOCK ALERT!

## Join Us

Sarasota County faces a choice between too much growth and a sustainable future.

The developers are strong.

Only together can we balance that strength.

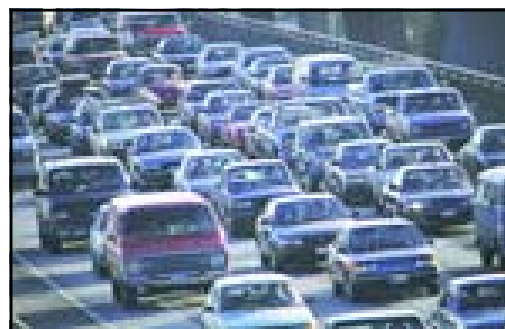
Join Control Growth Now. Please do it today.

Return Card Enclosed

Say it ain't so, Joe! (And Jon and Nora, Shannon and Paul).

All five County Commissioners have voiced support for a staff proposal to let local developers overcrowd our roads.

The scheme would increase the amount of traffic a developer can add to a road beyond what is allowed today.



*Scheme Would Let Developers Overcrowd Our Roads*

Come Hear  
Bill Earl and Bill Zoller  
*Control Growth Now*  
Luncheon Meeting  
**March 29**

11:30 AM Osprey Inn  
See Back Page - *Reservations Required*

Return Card Enclosed

Developers want to build several large projects at locations that cannot handle the projected traffic. One of them is the huge Benderson development at US 41 and Stickney Point Road.

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# Control Growth Now News

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(941) 364-8777  
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## President's Message



## Just Say No To Overgrowth

As Control Growth Now this month begins its twentieth year of service to the public interest in Sarasota County, we find ourselves faced with the biggest threat of overgrowth in our community since the Sarasota 2050 scheme that opened up the eastern County to urban sprawl.

As detailed in the cover story that takes up most of this edition, all five Sarasota County Commissioners have voiced their public support for terrible proposals to increase development intensity west and south of I-75 by allowing far more traffic congestion than is allowed today. They have also sat silent as staff proposed weakening neighborhood compatibility standards, also to allow more intense development.

We respect that it is our elected officials, not us, who have the responsibility to make the final decisions in matters that greatly affect our daily lives. However, we are also not blind to the undue influence that developers and other powerful interests all too often have upon the decisions of officials at all levels of government.

Just as our presidential candidates have been urged not to ignore their base, we urge our County Commissioners not to disregard the opinions and the interests of those who they claimed to speak for in their campaigns.

President, **Control Growth Now**

## Commissioners Could Gridlock Our Roads — Ctd. From p.1

Under present County regulations, we're supposed to be protected from traffic congestion.

It's called "concurrency" — a rule that roads must be sufficient "concurrent" with — that is at the same time as — the development's traffic impacts and if they are not the development must be denied.

Roads are graded A through F, just like a report card. The County has set an



"adopted level of service" developers must meet for concurrency. It's generally C for County roads and D for state roads.

The problem has been that the County has allowed developers to get away with traffic studies that make the assumptions needed to underestimate traffic and get a project approved.

Also, several years ago the County changed the way it calculates traffic in a way that made roads seem better without actually improving them. C roads became B roads, E roads became D and so forth.

Even then, many roads and intersections have become so crowded that even the most creative traffic engineers can't find a way to allow developers to build as intensely as they want without violating concurrency.

Several big and influential developers have hit this roadblock. One is Benderson Development, which bought and destroyed an affordable mobile home park at US 41 and Stickney Point Road. Although traffic congestion there is perhaps the worst in the County, it wants to build a huge commercial and condominium complex that cannot be

approved under existing concurrency rules.

Other bottlenecks blocking intense new development which would gridlock traffic are at Fruitville Road west and East of I-75 and at Bee Ridge and Cattlemen Roads.

Indeed, even beyond these locations, County staff are concerned that concurrency will soon require the County to say "no" to intense development proposals up and down roads **throughout Sarasota County**.

In response, **the staff has proposed measures to increase the allowable density and intensity of development** west and south of I-75. They include the following:

- So-called "multimodal concurrency", which provides that **a developer will be allowed to congest a road in return for providing bus stops and sidewalks**. This is based on the premise that it's actually good to gridlock automotive traffic in order to force people to ride buses and walk instead. Of course as we know, buses get caught in traffic too and most trips can't be done on foot. Then, again, it appears that excuses to benefit developers need not be rational.
- "Long term concurrency management", by which **a developer will be allowed to count a road improvement towards the development's traffic impacts even though its funding is not planned for between five and fifteen years away**. (the County Commissioners have not yet to agree on a number, although staff proposes ten). At present, a developer can only count a road improvement which is one year away, on the basis that by the time the development is complete the road will be built. Apparently that makes too much sense and must be changed.

## Commissioners Could Gridlock Our Roads

- **Lowering the adopted level of service** from C to D on county roads and from D to E on state roads, for favored development projects, thereby permitting more traffic congestion. As Clarke Davis of County staff said succinctly, "You could have lower levels of service where density is preferred."
- **Increasing the number of projects exempt from concurrency** by redefining the "de minimus" (or minimal impact) exception in the current code.
- **Relaxing the current neighborhood compatibility policies** to eliminate present requirements for buffers and other measures, including limits on density and intensity, for favored developments.

At a February 19 County Commission workshop, Clarke Davis of staff painted the picture this way: "US 41 and 301 and the roads between them and I-75 are some of the busiest roads in the County. Increases in density ... would require looking at concurrency differently for them."

This all is essentially what they call a "form-based" approach to development. That means that a development is favored because some pretty renderings show people walking around (a nice "form"), and **the external adverse impacts of the development on the traveling public and on neighborhoods are largely ignored.**

It also falsely presumes that if you have a "mixed use" development, people there will largely stay put at home and won't drive elsewhere for their jobs, shopping and recreation. Empirical studies, such as in the book "Edge City" (available on Amazon.com)

have proven this to be an empty myth.

Another argument in favor of overgrowth in urban areas is that it is the alternative to overgrowth outside of urban areas. Yet many of those who make that argument also favor increasing the development potential of the rural areas, such as was done in Sarasota 2050.

**The fact is that we need not choose between overgrowth outside the urban area and overgrowth within the urban area. The right choice is to choose overgrowth nowhere.**

There's enough development potential in the County Comprehensive Plan already to meet demand for the next 50 years and clearly we are overbuilt today. **It's time to get a grip on overgrowth, not make it worse.**

**Unfortunately, County Commissioners who have in the past stood up for reasonable growth policies are lining up behind this horrendous pro-growth scheme.**

Although individual Commissioners at the February 19 workshop suggested some limits on the measures (no more than two developments per year under the weakened standards and excluding state roads from "long term" concurrency), all of the Commissioners appear to endorse the idea of weakening concurrency and other development standards to allow more intense development than is allowed today, even though that means more traffic congestion.

**Jon Thaxton**, in arguing that the plan should not also weaken standards for treating stormwater runoff, stated, "While **one may argue that we can endure a little more traffic** we can't endure more pollution in the bays." He also specifically stated that he had

## Commissioners Could Gridlock Our Roads

"bought into" the concept of changing the codes to allow more intense development than allowed today and at no point spoke against weakening concurrency.

Even worse, **Joe Barbetta** sounded like pro-growth Sarasota City Commissioner Ken Shelin when he stated, "**We need to create places for people not cars**" (as if people don't drive cars) and that the emphasis should be on buses not automobiles (as if buses don't also get caught in traffic). He then said, in reference to the overall plan to increase the intensity of allowable development,

**"If we don't do this we're going to become stagnant, we're going to lose our revenue sources and people are going to move out."** He then said that he had already received a couple of emails about this, and commented, **"The first thing people think about is traffic. We need to get off that conversation."**

This doesn't sound like Commissioners who were elected on a platform of controlling growth. It sounds like our pro-growth County Administrator **Jim Ley**, who told the Tiger Bay Club a few years ago that **"congestion" is a "selfish word that does not belong in our discussions about planning for the future of Sarasota County."**

Nora Patterson referred to the proposed Benderson development that would overwhelm the US 41 and Stickney Point intersection and surrounding roads — the south entrance to Siesta Key, in her district — as "one of the most controversial, maybe **one that should happen** but it will be controversial." If Commissioner Patterson weakens concurrency because she thinks the Bender-

son development "should happen", **what will she tell the residents of Siesta Key when they have to wait and wait in polluting traffic to get to and from their homes?** What will she tell the widow of the

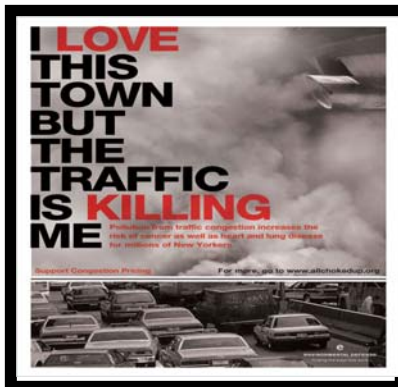
heart attack victim whose husband died because the ambulance couldn't get there in time? What will she tell the people of Sarasota County when she has to explain why she **chose the interests of developers over the interests of the public?**

In each of its annual public opinion surveys, the County Commission is told by its constituents that their biggest concerns are growth and traffic. **Is it responsive to that concern to allow more growth by allowing developers to create more traffic congestion?**

Even such an Establishment-oriented group as the Board of Directors of SCOPE voted unanimously to approve a task force report which enumerated the many **evils of traffic congestion** and explicitly **recommended against the measures to weaken concurrency** which are being considered by the County Commission.

**Our County Commissioners need to hear from us, strongly and soon.** Their email addresses are: [sstaub@scgov.net](mailto:sstaub@scgov.net); [jthaxton@scgov.net](mailto:jthaxton@scgov.net); [npatters@scgov.net](mailto:npatters@scgov.net); [jbarbett@scgov.net](mailto:jbarbett@scgov.net); [pmercier@scgov.net](mailto:pmercier@scgov.net).

This next comes up at a Commission workshop on **April 15. Tell your County Commissioners not to weaken limits on development and not to make traffic congestion worse.**



## Attend Control Growth Now's



# March 29 Annual Meeting and Luncheon



Please fill out and return (with your check, as soon as possible) the form on page 9 for our March 29 luncheon meeting (and for membership if you want). The event will be at the Osprey Inn (formerly the Ramada), as in prior years.



Let's meet or beat the attendance of 100 at our last three luncheon meetings in 2002, 2004 and 2006! Call your friends and family and bring them with you!

The menu features a choice of herb roasted chicken or pan seared tilapia, with rice and vegetables, or a roasted vegetable salad wrap with french fries. Coffee, tea and water are included. The price has been reduced a dollar to \$16. Speakers include our Citizens of the Year Bill Earl and Bill Zoller. Local officials and candidates have also been invited. This is an event you will not want to miss! We'll see you there. (Please note we must receive all reservations by 5 pm March 26).

## "The Bills" Are Citizens Of The Year

Control Growth Now is very pleased and proud to recognize Sarasota County Activists Bill Earl and Bill Zoller as Citizens of the Year for 2008.

"The Bills", as they have been called, are the principal leaders of the group Citizens for Sensible Growth in Sarasota County. They obtained the signatures needed to place a measure on a May 6 special election ballot to require voter approval for any expansion of the County's urban growth boundary. Control Growth Now urges that you vote and that you vote "Yes" in that election, to help hold the line on urban sprawl.

CSG has already succeeded in gaining voter approval for their citizen initiative to require a supermajority (4 to 1) vote of the County Commission for any Comprehensive Plan amendment to increase the density or intensity of land use. Prior to that they persuaded the County Commission to gain voter approval of a measure which put an end to developers annexing land into a city to gain greater development rights, without County approval.

**Bill Earl** is a graduate of the University of Florida College of Law. He specialized in environmental and land-use law for more than 30 years. He is the former director of the Eastern Water Law Center at his alma mater. He is a founding member of the Sarasota County Rural Heritage Group, and a board member and former president of the Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA). He is a Marine Corps veteran and father of five.

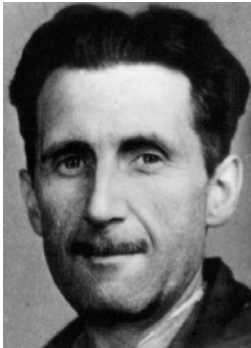


**Bill Zoller** is a native of Bradenton, Florida who remembers when you could eat oysters from Sarasota Bay. He is a graduate of Manatee High School and MIT, where he graduated with a degree in architecture. He worked as an architect in New York and Belgium before moving to Sarasota and establishing his practice in 1971. Bill is the married father of three grown children is also a board member and former president of CONA.



# Bits and Pieces

## George Orwell All Over Again



In his famous book, 1984, George Orwell depicts a future in which the government, known as Big Brother, changes words and phrases in a way that serves its ends, making things sound different than they really are.

Sarasota County staff and Commissioners are taking a page from Orwell in their promotion of measures, discussed in this edition of Control Growth News, to gut the rules that govern how much traffic a developer can add to our roads, known as concurrency.

County Administrator Jim Ley doesn't say they want to weaken concurrency. He says they want "an altered concurrency pattern."

They want to let a developer overcrowd roads by treating a road improvement not budgeted for many years as if it was in place today, and call it "Long Term Concurrency Management", rather than the mismanagement it actually is.

They want to let a developer create traffic gridlock in return for bus stops and sidewalks and obscure the policy by the calling it "Multimodal Concurrency," as if there's anything concurrent about it.

State lawmakers are also at fault for creating some of this terminology and allowing it as an option to local governments.

Just as Big Brother sought to lull the citizens into complacency with this "doublespeak", County officials obviously don't want the public to know what they're really about to do. Otherwise they'd speak to us plainly.

## It's Time For A Green Building Code

The Board of Directors of Control Growth Now has called for Sarasota County and its municipalities to adopt a Green Building Code, to require developers and builders to use construction techniques which have a



low impact on water supplies, energy consumption and the environment.

This proposal was endorsed at an Environmental Summit on February 29 at which Control Growth

Now was represented by Director Tom Price.

We are waiting for any of our five County Commissioners, or candidates, to take up this proposal. To date, the only thing that any Commissioner has been heard to call for is an empty "encouragement" of voluntary measures. The present Building Code does not make safety voluntary. Why should environmental responsibility be any different?

## A New Day In Venice?

Three new City Council members have been elected in Venice, defeating pro-development incumbents on a platform of more effective controls on growth.

Ed Martin (elected as Mayor), Sue Lang and Ernie Zavodnyik are working hard to fulfill their promises. However, at least one 4 to 3 vote against them on an important rezoning shows that the voters may have to make more changes in the election this November.

*The Pleasure of Your Company Would Be Appreciated*  
**At the Nineteenth Anniversary**  
**Control Growth Now Luncheon**

**Saturday, March 29, 2008**

**11:30 AM To 1:30 PM**

**Osprey Inn (formerly the Ramada Inn)**

**1660 South Tamiami Trail, Osprey**

**(Just North of Oscar Scherer State Park)**



Honoring Our Citizens of the Year  
**Bill Zoller and Bill Earl**

**Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 26, 2008**  
**Please Fill Out And Return The Form On The Next Page**

Or If Late Call 955-5622 - \$16 Each (Chicken, Tilapia or Vegetable Wrap)



**Yes,**

**CONTROL  
GROWTH  
NOW**

*- count me in:*



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

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$20 each) **CGN membership for one year**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$16 each) **Luncheon and annual meeting March 29**

Choose your entrée - Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Roasted Chicken

\_\_\_\_\_ Pan Seared Tilapia \_\_\_\_\_ Veggie Wrap

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

**\$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL**

***Thank You!***

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

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**P.O. Box 277**

**Osprey, FL 34229-0277**

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