

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County

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www.controlgrowthnow.org

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BOOM



Sarasota County and its cities are growing like crazy. It's nothing compared to what is coming, as approved plans just begin to be developed and the reins on growth are being dropped by our local governments.

The main problem is a political machine led by local developers that handpicks candidates for public office, bankrolls them to election and then reaps a return on their investment in favors from elected officials.

The need for sensible controls on growth is greater than ever before.

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Attend

Control Growth Now's
29th Anniversary

Annual Meeting
and Luncheon

Saturday

March 10

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controlgrowthnow.org

★ Come Hear ★
and Honor

Celery Fields Activists

Tom Matrullo

and Glenna Blomquist

CGN Citizens of the Year

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

***Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome***



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President's Message



Solutions

Growth cannot be stopped. But it can be controlled. If growth is out of control, as it is today, then we suffer significant adverse consequences to traffic, neighborhoods, nature, education, the economy and the taxpaying public. For almost 30 years, Control Growth Now has promoted an agenda which accepts the benefits of growth while guiding it in a way which helps protect and advance our valid interests. The idea is to serve the people, not just the developers who increasingly choose, bankroll and control our policy makers. Our plan, in a nutshell:

- Restrain plan amendments and rezoning to the full extent allowed by law so that development does not get ahead of improvements to the roads, schools and other facilities needed to serve it.
- Make growth pay its own way, with maximum impact fees and true fiscal neutrality, to provide the funds needed for the facilities required by that growth instead of placing that burden on the backs of the taxpaying public.
- Build around nature rather than paving it over, avoid adverse impacts to neighborhoods, require developers to assist affordable housing and do the other things needed to place our quality of life first and the aspirations of developers second.

Is that really too much to ask?

President, **Control Growth Now**

Why We Honor Tom and Glenna

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 our community. This year we have two who, with others (including Adrien Lucas, who unfortunately has since moved to Colorado), have shown us that people power can prevail.

On August 23, 2017, the Sarasota County Commission held a hearing on a plan to change an office designation on public land adjacent to the nationally renowned birding preserve, the Celery Fields, to allow an industrial facility for crushing concrete and other construction waste. It was for sale of the property to developer Jim Gabbert, a generous contributor to County Commission candidates favored by the developers' political machine.

Through intensive organizing, research and education and a record turnout at the hearing that overflowed into two other rooms, the Celery Field movement defeated the land use change by a vote of 3 (Detert, Caragiulo and Hines to 2 (Maio and Moran). They now have a Fresh Start Initiative to seek more sensible uses for the public parcels adjoining the Celery Fields.

Please attend our annual meeting on March 10 to honor and hear from our Citizens of the Year for 2018, Tom Matrullo and Glenna Blomquist.

Glenna Blomquist

Glenna retired to Sarasota from St. Petersburg in October of 2014, lucky to find an older home on a half-acre on Palmer Boulevard. She immediately noticed an unmanaged growth problem in her own

neighborhood east of I-75. In less than 18 months, the surrounding cow pastures were developed, threatening this once rural area offset by canopy and gravel roads. While on a morning bike ride, she noticed a yellow sign for a density increase at the dead end of an adjacent pasture. That was the last straw! She typed "control growth" in Google - and what popped up! Control Growth Now. She wrote an email, determined to connect, and so impressed the group that she was persuaded to join its Board of Directors, on which she continues to serve.



Glenna also created her Nextdoor.com neighborhood, naming it Mockingbird Parish. She recognized that the residents along Palmer Boulevard needed a voice to fight for common interests such as traffic, housing density and wildlife displacement. A chance introduction to Kafi Benz at the Audubon dedication at Celery Fields put her in touch with the Council of Neighborhood Associations. She has also joined the Board of the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida became a student of the local system, attending the County's Civics 101 classes.

When her neighbors on Palmer Boulevard started to worry about the James Gabbert contract with the county,

Glenna stepped up and became a competent and valuable contributor to what became the Palmer East Group representing a dozen neighborhoods. She put her well-honed skills and knowledge to work in creating and organizing commission presentations. She continues on the Executive Council of the Fresh Start Initiative. Currently, she is working with a group of Boleyn Road residents regarding a proposed conservation subdivision, likely to cause stormwater problems for existing residents.

Glenna draws on her experience as a corporate legal secretary for a large Minneapolis law firm and subsequent 15 years' experience as a project administrator for commercial construction projects in Minnesota

and Florida. She co-founded the Downtown Minneapolis Residents Association, representing 10,000 city dwellers. Civic responsibility is in her blood. She watched her parents participate in her North Dakota farm community, where her relatives built and ran the local telephone company and served on cooperative boards.

Her wish is that individuals – generational and new residents – get involved and work together to protect Sarasota County. She believes that civic engagement is a responsibility and that speaking up and taking action can make a difference.

Glenna Blomquist has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Minnesota.

Tom Matrullo

Tom Matrullo grew up in New York City, attending a Jesuit high school where he was exposed to Classical literature and to methods of analyzing bad arguments. His later work reflected a bit of both, as he taught literature in NYC colleges for a decade before moving to Florida. There he reported on construction, development, and technology for the *Herald Tribune* in the 90's. Then the Internet happened.

While at the paper, Tom covered the FBI investigation and subsequent indictment of The General Development Corporation (GDC) and its officers. GDC's astonishing disregard for planning and its creatively fraudulent promises were a signal lesson in how not to plan a town. Tom also covered the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council at a time when regional planners like Wayne Daltry still had regulatory power and used it to manage the impacts of developers' super-sized schemes.

Years ago Tom found himself frequently hiking at the Celery Fields. The openness, the access to a height and view rare in Florida, the migrating birds all made an impression. The birds knew before anyone else that a special marvel was developing there. People developed an appreciation and a loyalty to it.

Then in 2017, many watched, gobsmacked, as Sarasota County seriously considered siting a proposed waste processing facility on public land right at the Celery Fields. The county's apparent disinclination to seize

the opportunity to protect and nurture this rich gift of Nature -- to do something better than change the code to allow heavy industrial demolition to operate there -- was a wake-up call.

After success in quashing the waste facility, Tom and others felt there had to be a way to protect this sensitive area from similarly absurd notions. The Fresh Start Initiative was born and quickly gathered the support of more than 50 homeowners associations. The plan was simple: Find good ideas for publicly owned parcels at Apex and Palmer that met with positive community support. They proposed a process to the County which approved it on Nov. 28.

Fresh Start is now encouraging residents to develop and evaluate proposals for two 10-acre parcels near the Celery Fields with a deadline of March 1. To assist the Initiative, an Advisory Board has formed to help evaluate the feasibility, environmental impact, and economic potential of proposals. The thing to remember: "planning" involves actual *planning*. *It's not about selling public lands to the first developer with a wallet.*

The Initiative will hold a public workshop by early April. The proposals with the strongest community support will then be presented to the County. The Initiative is doing everything it can to ensure the success of this experiment. They'd like to see it catch on as future proposals come before the County. "Much will depend on whether Sarasota can look beyond piecemeal deals and begin again to be thoughtful about community, context, and coordinated synergies in planning," says Matrullo.

Tom has been writing about Sarasota issues on the Citizens for Sarasota blog (<http://sarasotavision2050.blogspot.com>) for several years. Recently he made a blog for the Celery Fields effort: <http://freshstart Sarasota.blogspot.com>. The message of both is simple: *"The County where writers, artists, innovators like Beatrice Palmer and architects like Ralph Twitchell and Paul Rudolph flourished is worthy of strong public stewardship and healthy open debate about its future. To fail to plan with vision and respect for Sarasota and its people will put an end to the special character that shaped our legacy and that continues to make us unique."*

Control Growth, Now More Than Ever

That Sarasota County is an attractive place to move should be no surprise. With high marks for our weather, beaches, arts and culture, schools, parks and other features, this is a desirable place in which to live. Many of us moved here because it was better than elsewhere. And one big reason is that historically, growth has been more vigorously managed than elsewhere, doing a better job to hold down traffic and taxes and preserve the natural environment.

The secret is out. We're both "The Number One Place to Retire in 2018" (U.S. News and World Report) and "America's Sexiest Small City" (Movoto Real Estate Blog), and are in many other top community lists. Vogue and the Wall Street Journal recently ran glowing reviews. We even have our own MTV reality show.

And booming we are. The Census Bureau says that Sarasota-Manatee's population is the eleventh fastest growing in the nation. Sarasota is the second highest place in Florida for growth in construction jobs. Lakewood Ranch (which is moving south

into Sarasota County) and West Villages (in the Venice/North Port area) are in the top three and five fastest-selling master planned communities in the nation, respectively.

In light of this, you would think that our county and city commissioners would find this a time to control growth in a way that protects our mobility, environment, neighborhoods, schools and taxpayers, now more than ever.

Sadly, however, due to unprecedented dominance by developers in local campaigns and elections, most of our politicians are on a full march in the opposite direction. And Sarasota and Venice city staff also are doing all they can to serve the developers with whom they work, betraying the public interest in the process.

The Sarasota County Commission gutted the Sarasota 2050 Plan for growth east and south of I-75's decades-old Urban Service Boundary. Gone are the requirements for large Greenways, buffers,



Attend Control Growth Now's Annual Meeting and Luncheon



Saturday, March 10

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 Marina Jack, 2 Marina Plaza in downtown Sarasota, from 11:30 to 2.



Marina Jack

Register by mail with the form on p. 9 or online with easy payment by credit card through Eventbrite, at www.controlgrowthnow.org. Bring your friends and family!

The menu features a choice of Oscar Grouper, Chicken Caprese or Vegetable Plate. The grouper and chicken include a vegetable and specialty rice, and dessert is included, as well as coffee or tea. We will hear from our Citizens of the Year, Celery Fields activists Tom Matrullo and Glenna Blomquist and candidates for local office, as well as an update on hot local issues. This is an event you will not want to miss!

Control Growth, Now More Than Ever

walkable new-Urbanist communities and “fiscal neutrality” to make growth pay its own way, either repealed or redefined until they are meaningless, with nothing left but the usual urban sprawl. Now on March 14, with the support of their staff and Planning Commission and the urging of an influential builder, Commissioners will hold a hearing on whether to actually ignore the Urban Service Boundary by allowing pockets of urban development well beyond the boundary.

The Sarasota County Commission also eviscerated the Comprehensive Plan by repealing dozens of important limits on development that had protected neighborhood compatibility, environmental protection, traffic mobility and other vital public concerns. As just one example, clustering of homes away from wetlands and other habitats for many years was required but now it is merely “encouraged.” Perhaps most important, they repealed the policy that opened up only enough land to accommodate about ten years of projected population growth at a time, instead adding land for many decades of development all at once.

Now the County is drafting an ordinance to completely eliminate traffic capacity impact studies for rezoning, special exceptions and site plans, so no one will know how much congestion they will cause.

Although growth and traffic top the concerns of residents in the County Commission’s annual opinion polls, they seem not at the top of most Commissioners’ minds. Indeed, at a December, 2017 annual retreat, traffic ranked tenth out of ten in Board priorities, below such items as economic development and jail diversion, and did not even get picked as a priority at all by two of the five Commissioners.

On congested Siesta Key, a majority of the County Commission seems to favor a push by influential developer Gary Kompothecras to allow taller commercial buildings with smaller setbacks. And they

have missed opportunities to shut down a proposed plan by Benderson Development to get higher densities and building heights for the Siesta Promenade project, at US 41 and Stickney Point Road, already one of the most congested and accident-prone intersections in the County.

A Commission majority allowed a developer to turn valuable wetlands, which had been preserved in exchange for other development years ago, into a parking lot, at University Parkway and Honore Avenue. Other wetland preserves throughout Sarasota County remain at risk as a result of this precedent, including one still sought to be paved over for expansion of a nursing home in The Meadows. (Although Control Growth Now lost that first one, we are pleased that so far the Commission is beginning to listen to its environmental staff on the second one, as we urged at a public hearing).



In addition to effectively repealing “fiscal neutrality” requirements in the Sarasota 2050 Plan, mainly east of I-75, the County Commission has lowballed transportation impact fees (now called mobility fees) by cutting the full fee 47.5% in most of the ur-

ban area. The fee methodology also keeps them low by using traffic data from the recession, when people were driving less, to estimate trip length and frequency of new development, the main factors in calculating the fees. This is leaving the County with a deficit of over a billion dollars in building the road improvements the County has identified as needed over the next 20 years. The County also faces shortages for jails, courthouses and other needed infrastructure.

Schools are also bursting at the seams, particularly elementary schools, with new demands imminent from booming growth. Yet the Sarasota County School Board adopted school impact fees at only one-fourth the level recommended by its expert consultant and one-half that sought by its Superintendent, leaving us at one of the lowest school impact fees in

Control Growth, Now More Than Ever

the state. Developers are very involved in choosing and bankrolling Sarasota School Board candidates.

The County's operations budget is also facing a squeeze, as increasing revenues from higher property values are failing to keep up with the demands of a growing population. Among recent budget cuts was a reduction of almost \$1 million dollars for operating and maintaining parks and recreation. So much for growth paying its own way. This is no surprise, as an expert retained by the County years ago reported that most residential and nonresidential development in the County costs more in County services than it pays in taxes and as such will require property taxes to increase or services to be cut.

In the City of Venice, over the objections of Control Growth Now in several long public hearings, the City Council voted 5 to 2 to repeal numerous limits on developers in the Comprehensive Plan, concerning traffic, neighborhoods, the environment and building standards, among others. Now the public interest is at risk as the City reviews its Land Development Regulations. The City of North Port has been going through a similar effort to make its Comprehensive Plan more developer-friendly.

In the City of Sarasota, while City staff failed on a 2 to 3 vote last year to embrace traffic congestion in a rewrite of in the Transportation Chapter in the City's Comprehensive Plan, they vow to bring it back to another vote, perhaps this spring. The Sarasota City staff will also soon be seeking Commission votes on an insane "road diet" to reduce Fruitville Road east of US 41 for several blocks from four to two lanes. At the same time they will also seek to make driving more difficult on 2nd and 4th Streets (parallel to Fruitville on either side) by constructing barriers to going straight in some places and turning in others. This, together with abandoning road improvements

and most traffic studies by developers, is all part of staff's scheme to somehow force people out of their cars and to walk and bike wherever they need to go, and to take buses that get caught in traffic too. Sarasota City staff are also favoring developers with a radical "Form Based Code", gutting of the tree protection ordinance and other measures.

What can we do about all this? First, join or renew your membership in Control Growth Now, because in numbers there is strength. Second, stay informed and turn out at public hearings because sometimes those numbers can defeat bad plans, as we saw in the Celery Fields development. Third, support good candidates for public office, such as Lourdes Ramirez, who will again challenge Alan Maio in the Republican primary this August, and hopefully another for the seat vacated by Paul Caragiulo. Democrats also may enter the race, hopefully those with principle.

As Shakespeare said, some day the worm will turn. We hope it happens soon.



Single Member Districts For County Commission Reaches Two-thirds Mark!

This could change everything. Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections (SAFE) is two-thirds of the way to the signatures needed for a referendum on a Charter amendment to elect County Commissioners by single member districts. This would threaten developer control by cutting the cost of most campaigning by 80% and empowering neighborhoods. If SAFE gets enough signatures soon, for a special referendum, it could be in effect for the 2018 County Commission elections, if not then 2020. Go to keepdemocracysafe.org to get and sign a petition, donate or volunteer.

*The Pleasure of Your Company
Will Be Appreciated*

At The Twenty-Ninth Anniversary

Control Growth Now Luncheon

Saturday, March 10, 2018

11:30 AM To 2 PM

Marina Jack Restaurant

2 Marina Plaza, Sarasota



Honoring Celery Fields Activists

Tom Matrullo and Glenna Blomquist

Control Growth Now *Citizens of the Year*

Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 8, 2018

Print and Mail the Form on Page 9 or Register Online at controlgrowthnow.org

If Late Call 955-5622 - \$20 Each (Oscar Grouper, Chicken Caprese or Vegetable Plate)

Yes,



- 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**

\$ _____ (**\$20each**) **Luncheon and annual meeting March 10**

Choose your entrée* - Number: _____ Grouper Oscar
_____ Chicken Caprese
_____ Vegetarian Dish

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

\$ _____ TOTAL

Thank You!

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

Name(s)	_____
Address	_____
Phone	_____
Email	_____

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

** Meal includes vegetables, specialty rice, dessert and coffee or tea*

Alternatively, sign up by clicking on the Luncheon and/or Membership panels at www.controlgrowthnow.org