



# Save Our County !

## Gridlock, Urban Sprawl On Local Agenda



**Attend**  
The Control  
Growth Now  
**Annual Meeting  
and Luncheon**  
Saturday  
**March 31**

More Information on  
Pages 7 & 8

Registration on p.9  
— Now Only \$15 —



★ **Come Hear** ★  
**Lourdes Ramirez**

President, Sarasota  
County Council of  
Neighborhood  
Associations

**CGN Citizen of the Year**

When development picks up again, they want no rules.

It's politics, pure and simple. Dangerous politics.

Developers are bankrolling our County Commissioners with big fundraisers, and they want payback.

They are targeting controls that prevent developers from overcrowding our roads, that make growth pay its own way, that hold projects beyond the Interstate to a higher standard and that protect neighborhoods and the environment.

All, they say, must go.

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# Control Growth Now News

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**Pete Theisen**

**Alex Coe**

## President's Message



## Storm Clouds On The Horizon

As set forth in our cover article, 2012 is a year in which basic growth management controls are on the chopping block in Sarasota County. If forces of unwise greed prevail, then once the economy rebounds our traffic mobility, environment, neighborhoods, health and pocketbooks are all at risk.

It is a time of great danger.

It is also a time of great opportunity. We have a compelling message which is shared by many groups and individuals who see no sense in destroying the special charm and quality of life that attracts many to our community. What we all need to do is work together make our voices heard, and heard effectively.

Politics governs public policy and the only thing that matters in politics more than money is an aroused electorate.

Let us then join together not in steps backward to a time when uncontrolled development diminished so much of Florida but forward to a better day in which both private and public interests work together for the common good.

It is our time to shine and shine we must, if the storm clouds over Sarasota County are to be dispelled and the light of a better tomorrow is to illuminate our path.

**President, Control Growth Now**

## Gridlock, Urban Sprawl on Local Agenda - Ctd. From Pg. 1

### Giving a Green Light To Gridlock

Soon to come will be a push to let developers overcrowd our roads, by eliminating the restriction known as concurrency. That rule provides that a development cannot be approved unless the roads and other facilities needed to serve the development are in place concurrent with — that is at the same time as — the impacts of that development. If a road serving a development does not have adequate capacity to handle its traffic, the development is denied, unless the developer pays for any road improvements needed to add adequate capacity, if such improvements can be made.

Concurrency has been called the linchpin of the state's growth management law, that is you pull it out and everything else collapses. However, last year, the Florida Legislature effectively repealed growth management, leaving it to each city and county to determine their own rules. That includes whether to have concurrency for roads, as well as for schools.

The proposal working its way up in Sarasota County is to repeal traffic concurrency and replace it with what will be called a "mobility fee". This is a fee to be paid by a developer to help fund buses and roads, in addition to admittedly inadequate impact fees.

So where development is now limited along an overcrowded road, it would instead be allowed without constraint, totally gridlocking the road, so long as the developer writes a check to the County. That would be true even if roads cannot be improved sufficient to handle the traffic, such as in urban areas where the roads are already as wide as they can be.

A good example of this new approach in action is the vacant property on US 41 just north of Stickney Point Road, owned by Benderson Development. Indeed, due to the strong political influence of Benderson in County politics, this move may be designed largely to allow more intense development on that land.

At present, the amount of density and intensity of development allowed on the Benderson property is constrained by the fact that the road and intersection at that location are among the most congested in the

County and have been improved about as much as they can be.

If the new scheme is approved, however, there will be no limit on the amount of traffic Benderson can add at this location, bringing traffic flow to a long, grinding standstill at the southern entrance to Siesta Key and creating an intolerable chokepoint for commuters between south County and Sarasota on US 41.



This follows on the tail of actions by the County Commission within the past two years to eliminate limits on square footage coverage of buildings on commercial properties — which was specifically lobbied for by Benderson — and to allow unlimited building heights for the sort of mixed use development Benderson says it intends for this site.

Expect County Commissioners who embrace this proposal to say nothing about repealing concurrency and letting developers overcrowd our roads. Instead they will spin this as a great new fee to give the County more money for roads and buses.

This not only hides the main purpose and effect of the change but it ignores the fact that the County Commission last year slashed road impact fees by 66% to help developers, for at least three years.

Also expect Commissioners, particularly Joe Barbetta, to argue that the change is wise because it will force people out of their cars and onto County buses. Of course, this makes no sense (even if it was our government's place to try to do that) because buses get stuck in traffic too. (Note the buses in the photo above). And



light timings and lanes devoted to buses fail to make up for the increased traffic congestion they cause.

What it comes down to is that our politicians hope this change will be so confusing and poorly explained by the news media that people will not understand what the politicians are doing. And perhaps they hope they will be out of office before the gridlock hits, so they are no longer around to blame.

One argument you may hear in favor of repealing concurrency is that allowing denser and more intense development west and south of the Interstate will discourage urban sprawl beyond it.

What is amazing is that many of the people saying that will also be the same people saying that we should encourage urban sprawl by loosening controls on development in our rural lands.

### **Gutting Sarasota 2050 For Urban Sprawl**

Ten years ago, the Sarasota County Commission adopted the Sarasota 2050 Plan, a very controversial scheme to allow intense urban development beyond the Urban Service Boundary (mainly I-75) for the first time.

The Plan was sold as a trade-off between allowing urban development in the rural lands in exchange for rules to require the development to better serve the public interest.

Sarasota 2050 requires that a developer transfer its densities off extensive environmentally sensitive lands known as Greenways. It required that the developer pay an extra fee for a long list of public facility impacts, to achieve “fiscal neutrality.” The developments must be mixed-use and walkable, to encourage self-sufficient communities that contain their traffic as much as possible.

The plan survived a legal challenge and weak rules were adopted to implement it. Two years ago, the first of the three allowed Sarasota 2050 Villages was approved, east of I-75 and south of University Parkway, but the lack of market demand has delayed con-

struction. Two other smaller “Settlement” developments under Sarasota 2050 were recently approved in rural lands near Englewood. Despite disapprovals by the Planning Commission, the County Commission allowed the developments despite numerous serious violations of the Sarasota 2050 Plan.

In the coming months, a Comprehensive Plan amendment will be considered by the County Commission to gut Sarasota 2050 by repealing all or most of its requirements and instead allowing standard urban sprawl in our rural lands.

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who as a Planning Commissioner argued that Sarasota 2050 was not strict enough, but who has switched from a growth control advocate to a reliable vote for developers, now argues that it not sufficiently “flexible.” Christine Robinson has made the repeal of Sarasota 2050’s constraints on developers a priority. Even Nora Patterson recently stated that Sarasota 2050 was adopted in “a different time” and that maybe its rules need to be dropped to encourage more development.

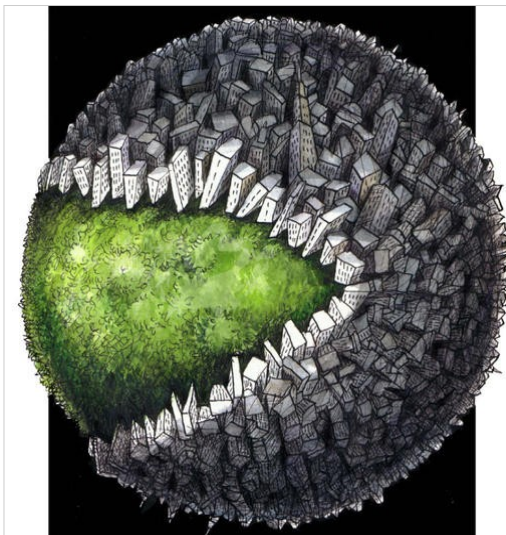
The time to protect the public interest is not temporary, it is eternal. Urban sprawl, particularly urban sprawl that destroys the environ-

ment, burdens the taxpayers and overcrowds our public facilities, is never a good idea.

### **Betrayal of the Public Interest**

Other pending proposals to betray the public interest include weakening environmental regulations and Comprehensive Plan policies that protect neighborhoods and other public interests. There will also be a push to further reduce impact fees, which now for roads are only 34% of what they were, leaving a huge shortfall in the County’s road budget and a threat of tax hikes to fill the gap.

All of these repeals of public interest protections are advocated as being good because they will encourage development and thereby help our economy. That is false for two reasons. First, regardless of what the rules are, developers won’t build while there is no market for new housing and other buildings. All that will happen is that when the market rebounds and construction



revives, bad development will be allowed. Second, what is depressing the market right now is an over-supply of residential and commercial development. Adding to that glut just makes the problem worse, and makes it more difficult for people to sell or rent their properties and for a decent price.

Because these actions against the public interest make no sense, again the only explanation is politics, that is the undue influence of big developers on our politicians due to the developers' generosity in funding their campaigns.

It is therefore up to civic advocacy organizations such as ours, and individual citizens, to seek to balance and overcome the developers' undue influence by speaking out and protesting these moves in the months to come, at public hearings, in other communications to Commissioners, at every opportunity and in every way.

We must prevent this outrageous betrayal of the public trust. We cannot afford not to try.



## And Some Good News ...

Despite the threats to community interests highlighted in this edition, there has been some good news in recent months, as our County and City Commissioners have at times done the right thing and other breaks have come our way.

County Commissioners replaced Jim Ley, who did no small measure of harm as County Administrator, with Randy Reid, an advocate of more sensible development practices, a competent manager and balanced listener to all voices in the community. Two disciples of overdevelopment in the County's Planning Department, Peter Katz and Matt Lewis, are also now on to other pastures.

Not all of Matt Lewis' actions were bad. In one of his last ordinances before the County Commission, he led them to increase opportunities for public involvement in County-initiated Comprehensive Plan amendments, including several changes we advocated.

On the subject of personnel changes, we are happy to report that Mike Bennett has ended his service as a State Senator, having come up against term limits. Senator Bennett, a developer himself, pushed through several laws repealing reasonable controls on developers.

The Energy Economic Zone, a boondoggle to give taxpayer-funded subsidies to housing developers and others in a sensitive area across State Road 681 from Oscar Scherer State Park, instead became just another economic development grant program throughout the County. Overly broad geographic and qualification

standards were narrowed significantly at our urging, although not as much as we had asked.

The Sarasota City Commission, after our testimony and that of the City Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, rejected a proposal to let the developer win whenever there was a dispute about the interpretation of City codes.

The County Commission followed the Planning Commission's recommendation to scrap two Comprehensive Plan amendments that we revealed to be harmful.

One would have located an intense Town Center to environmentally sensitive lands east of I-75. The other would have replaced intense community-input charrettes in mixed use developments with a meaningless meeting.

An effort to allow retail development in areas now reserved for higher-paying jobs in industry and office parks was trimmed to

a certain zoning category, although it still goes too far.

We almost stopped a County ordinance to allow unlimited building heights and now it is being constrained to commercial properties and excludes barrier islands, although again that still goes too far.

We got the Charter Review Board to reject moves to limit citizen petition drives for Charter amendments.

A scheme to replace two citizens' environmental advisory committees with one stacked by definition with developer representatives was defeated by a 3 to 2 vote of the County Commission.



## Welcome Our Newest CGN Directors

Control Growth Now added three new members of our Board of Directors over the past year. Sharon Guy and Pete Theisen joined the Board a year ago and Alex Coe was added this February, to fill Board vacancies. All three are standing for election to full two year terms at the March 31 annual meeting, together with the remaining Directors, Dan Lobeck, Neil Bass, Tom Price and Greg Nowaski. We are very pleased that all are willing to devote their time to helping Control Growth Now and all of our interests in our community.

**Sharon Guy** - Sharon lives in Sarasota and appreciates the special quality of life in Sarasota. She grew up in the beautiful Berkshires of Western Massachusetts, and learned at an early age how careful zoning and planning protects the quality of life of a community.



**Sharon Guy**

Sharon is an attorney at the Law Office of Sharon M. Guy, PA, focusing in the areas of estate planning, probate, elder law, and corporate practice. While studying law at Quinnipiac University School of Law, she completed an environmental internship at the Connecticut Fund for the Environment.

Sharon has been an environmental activist for many years, advocating for issues including growth management, habitat protection, alternative energy, sustainability, and climate change. She is an avid runner, cyclist and swimmer.

**Pete Theisen** -- Pete is a retired Acupuncturist who was educated at the University of Detroit, Wayne State University, University of Michigan, Manatee Community College and Florida Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

He started working at age eight on his grandfather's farm. He then worked through college in construc-



**Pete Theisen**

**Alex Coe** - Alex, or Alexandra, is a Cultural Sustainability Policy Advisor at Livable Planet Consulting.

She has been a Farmer-Ethnobotanist-Herbalist at Swamp Castle Farm, Creative Director at Gentle Storm Productions and Media Liason for the Education Caucus of the United Nations Commission on sustainable Development, where she remains a consultant.

She received her education from Goucher College and the University of South Florida College of Medicine.

Alex is also a model, a television host and personality and an actress. Her screen credits include Home Shopping Network, Good Morning America, Ron Hazleton's Housecalls, The Art of Being a Woman, Sail Away on CNN and Adventure Quest on Sportschannel America.

Alex is a two-time Mrs. Sarasota. Her hobbies include photography, gardening, raising chickens, boating, snow skiing, reading, golf and bee keeping.



**Alex Coe**



## Lourdes Ramirez Is Citizen of the Year

Lourdes Ramirez, a local civic activist, has been a full-time resident of Sarasota County since 1999. Lourdes first became a neighborhood advocate in 2002 by joining The Alliance for Siesta Key's Future (TASK) in their fight against increased density on Siesta Key. In 2003, she joined the Siesta Key Association as Treasurer and eventually served 5 out of 8 years on the Board as President. Lourdes joined the Sarasota Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) in 2010 and is currently serving as president.

Lourdes' focus over the years has been zoning and planning issues for Siesta Key and Sarasota County. She became involved in the 2003 Sarasota County rewrite of the County's Zoning Code and an active participant in monitoring the 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal report (EAR) of the Comprehensive Plan.

Lourdes has served on many citizen committees to help the County plan for a more resident friendly/safe future and to control growth. She lobbies our elected officials and testifies at public hearings regularly on behalf of the citizens' interests. She is a member of Control Growth Now and Grand Canal Communities Citizens' Patrol. In 2011, she founded Siesta Key Community, a local organization lobbying on Siesta

Key issues. With this new venture, Lourdes created a website that is a serious informational resource for Siesta Key residents and business owners, [www.SiestaKeyCommunity.com](http://www.SiestaKeyCommunity.com).



**Lourdes Ramirez**

Lourdes is not afraid to take on County leadership and the development community regarding residential concerns. She believes in cooperation with non-residential interests but not to the extent of compromising residential quality of life.



### **Attend Control Growth Now's Annual Meeting and Luncheon**



**Saturday, March 31**

Please fill out and return (with your check, as soon as possible) the form on p. 9 for our March 31 luncheon meeting. The event will be at the Red Lobster at 6747 South Tamiami Trail in Sarasota.



This year's luncheon at the annual meeting now has a reduced price of \$15 (compared to a price of \$20 in the past). Call your friends and family and bring them with you!

The menu features a choice of oven broiled flounder, maple glaze chicken or shrimp linguine alfredo. Salad is included as well as a baked potato with the flounder or shrimp and a choice of soda, tea or coffee. Our speaker is Lourdes Ramirez, president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations. This is an event you will not want to miss! Please get in your reservation as soon as possible, as the room has a limit of 75 lunches, although all members will be seated for the annual meeting.

*The Pleasure of Your Company  
Will Be Appreciated*

**At The Twenty-Third Anniversary**

# **Control Growth Now Luncheon**

**Saturday, March 31, 2012**

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

**The Red Lobster Restaurant**

**6747 South Tamiami Trail, Sarasota**



Featuring **Lourdes Ramirez**

**President of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations**

**Control Growth Now Citizen of the Year**

**Reservations Required - Not Later Than 5 pm March 28, 2012**

**Please Fill Out And Return The Form on The Following Page**

**Or If Late Call 364-8777 Or 955-5622 - \$15 Each (Flounder, Chicken or Shrimp Pasta)**



# Yes,

## - count me in:

# CONTROL GROWTH NOW



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

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

\$\_\_\_\_\_ (\$15 each) **Luncheon and annual meeting March 31**

Choose your entrée\* - Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Oven Broiled Flounder

\_\_\_\_\_ Maple Glaze Chicken

\_\_\_\_\_ Shrimp Linguine Alfredo

\$\_\_\_\_\_ (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 salad; baked potato with the flounder or chicken; and choice of soda, ice tea or coffee*