

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County



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Formerly GEO, the Growth-restraint and Environmental Org.

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SHELIN, PALMER, ATKINS GO FOR GRIDLOCK

**“Let Them Ride Buses”, Say Sarasota City Commissioners
(Ignoring the Fact That Buses Get Caught In Traffic Too)**

Big Developer Gets Green Light To Overcrowd US 41, Fruitville Road

July 21, 2008 is a day that will live in infamy. That is when the Sarasota City Commission voted 3 to 2 to allow a developer for the very first time to completely congest major roads in and around the City.

They did it for The Proscenium, a hotel-condo-office-retail development that the City's top transportation planner once called “the most traffic intense project that ever came to the city”.

Fortunately, this was just a preliminary vote of approval. There will be an additional, final vote of the City Commission some time in the months to come.

If a state agency rules against the City Commission's request for exemption from state and regional review, the final votes could be delayed until after next spring's City Commission election.



That is significant because two of the three votes in favor of the developer came from Ken Shelin, who will be up for election, and Lou Ann Palmer, who is retiring and will be replaced with a new Commissioner. City Commissioners Kelly Kirschner and Dick Clapp stood with the public interest and voted to uphold traffic standards and in favor of state and regional review.

Control Growth Now is working to persuade the state

agency, the Florida Department of Community Affairs, to deny approval for the exemption of the development from state and regional review as a “Development of Regional Impact.” It is CGN's position that the exemption is not available due to a state rule that requires that adequate facilities

be in place or committed in the city's capital improvements plan.

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Save the Date: March 28 - 20th Anniversary Picnic and Meeting!

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President's Message

Controlling Growth Now

With Sarasota County's rate of population increase now down to 1% last year, developers and their politicians are saying that now is the time to drop the reins on growth.

Three things about that.

First, 1% is close to the usual average growth rate for Sarasota County in recent decades of about 1.5%. It just seems low compared to the extraordinary increases of 2.6% each in 2004 and 2005, before the current correction began. Also, a 1% annual growth rate remains fast by international standards — For example, it's 40% higher than the growth rate of China, where it's about 6/10 of a percent per year.

Second, do we forget so soon that the current difficulty in selling homes and moving office and commercial property is due in large part to an oversupply, created by liberal development and rezoning practices of our local governments? If County and City officials had been less generous to developers in recent years, perhaps the supply would have been held closer to a sustainable demand and as a result there would be fewer problems in our real estate market today. Do we really want to worsen the problem by adding further to the oversupply with even looser growth policies?

Third, and most important, if we have been given any breather in the rate of growth, now is the time to take the time to get our growth policies right, not to make them worse, before the next boom begins. We have a chance to save our communities from traffic congestion, pollution, habitat destruction, water shortages and neighborhood incompatibility and to make growth pay its own way.

Don't drop the reins. Control growth now. It's more important more than ever.

President, **Control Growth Now**

Don't Let Developers Overcrowd Our Roads (Ctd. From p.1)

If the DRI exemption is denied by the state (or is reversed in a legal challenge by Control Growth Now), then it is to be hoped that state and regional agencies will stop the dodge used by Commissioners Shelin, Palmer and Atkins to let the Proscenium developer overcrowd the affected roads.

Those Commissioners misapplied a fairly new state law which allows a developer to proceed upon paying a "proportionate fair share" of the road improvements needed to serve the development's traffic.

The problem is that although the City voted to take the developer's money, it has no plans to come up with the more than 35 million additional dollars needed to build all the needed road improvements.

Tax hikes? Nope. The City simply has decided not to make the road improvements needed to accommodate The Proscenium's traffic and instead to allow intolerable traffic congestion on US 41 along the bayfront and on Fruitville Road from that point east, as well as who knows where else.

City Manager Bob Bartolatta at the July 19 meeting which approved The Proscenium: "There will be more traffic congestion ... ". City Planner Susan Montgomery at that same hearing: "Traffic will get worse ...".

What an incredible repudiation of the public interest and public opinion! In the City's own annual opinion polls as well as those of the County, traffic congestion always appears at or near the top of people's concerns. Nowhere on the list does the public express concern about developers not being able to add as much traffic to our roads as they would like.

The public opposes undue traffic congestion for good reasons. Studies show that it pollutes the air and bay, harms commerce and tourism, increases accidents and road rage, wastes expensive gas, increases heart attack fatalities by delaying ambulances, harms health by stress, reduces family time, diverts traffic through neighborhoods and degrades our quality of life.

Incredibly, the pro-growth politicians and their staff tell us that traffic congestion is good for us because it will force us to ride the bus.

Lou Ann Palmer, when she voted for the Proscenium traffic congestion scheme on July 19: "We need to do what we can to change the behavior of

people using cars to get everywhere they want to go." City Planner Susan Montgomery at that same meeting: "We need to move people not cars" (as if people don't drive cars).

What is ignored in this excuse for allowing developers to congest our roads is that buses get caught in traffic too. As such, people will still drive their cars and everyone will be miserable. Except perhaps the developers of The Proscenium, as they count their millions gained at the expense of the rest of us.

Keep posted as this important story develops.



As this photo illustrates, **buses get caught in traffic too**. They are not a good excuse for allowing developers to overcrowd our roads.

Good News On Gridlock From The County Commission — *For Now!*

As we reported in the March *Control Growth News*, Sarasota County Commissioners were moving forward with a scheme by Jim Ley and County staff to allow developers to further overcrowd our roads at congested locations throughout the County. Again, the excuse was to force people to ride buses.

We are pleased to report that this effort appears to have been shelved for the moment. However, that might just be until after the coming County Commission elections. We will remain vigilant and keep you informed.

Our Recommendations For the Aug. 26 Election

Control Growth Now urges that you vote on Tuesday, **August 26**. Our recommendations are as follows:

County Commission - Shannon Staub
Although Shannon has all too often sided with the forces of overgrowth, she usually comes around if she hears enough from the public. In any event, she is a far better choice than her challenger, Barbara Gross, a consistently pro-development North Port City Commissioner. This is an open primary, so everyone can vote.

Charter Review Board - Stephen Aiken
This is an important opportunity to replace incumbent Cathy Layton, a developer, with someone committed to restoring the Charter Review Board to its historic role in advancing the public interest. (Republican primary)
County Property Appraiser - Jim Todora

Jim Todora has been fair and professional in appraising properties for tax purposes. The challenger, Bill Furst, is being bankrolled by big developers, who apparently want him to shift the tax burden from them to the rest of us.

Charter Amendments - NO to Both
These very bad proposals would create obstacles to Charter amendments by citizens and the Charter Review Board, including blocking them from the ballot until court approval, a two year limit on signatures and the potential for a biased "economic impact statement" produced by the County.

Also, we support long-time member **Cynthia Crowe**, who is running for Republican Party State Committeewoman.



Save The Date: **Saturday, March 28, 2009**
Control Growth Now
20th Anniversary Pot Luck Picnic and Annual Meeting
Colonial Oaks Park (Honore Avenue South of Bahia Vista)
Picnic Outdoors 11 to 1, Meeting Indoors 1 to 2

