

CONTROL GROWTH NOW

News

Save Sarasota County



February 21, 2015

www.controlgrowthnow.org

Vol. 25, No. 1

CELEBRATE INTEGRITY

Join Today

Basic rules to protect our environment, neighborhoods, traffic mobility and taxes are under attack.

Developers control our County Commissioners more than ever before.

Help us resist and overcome. Join or renew in Control Growth Now today.

Return
Card
Enclosed

Heaven Knows We Need It

Please attend our picnic and annual meeting on March 14 to help us celebrate integrity in local civic activism and the dire need for it in our local government.

As of the 2014 elections, the Sarasota County Commission has fallen under the complete and



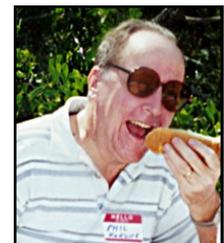
Cathy Antunes

CGN Citizen of the Year

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SEE YOU AT THE PICNIC

Saturday March 14



Please see page 8 and the flyer for details and return the enclosed card for your reservation. **Free to members and guests.**

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Control Growth Now News

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

**Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome**



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President's Message



Exposing The Emperor

In "The Emperor's New Clothes", Hans Christian Anderson tells of two weavers who promise an Emperor a new suit of clothes that is invisible to those who are unfit for their positions, stupid, or incompetent. Not wishing to be seen as any of that, the Emperor pretends that the clothes are visible to him. When the Emperor parades before his subjects in his new clothes, no one dares to say that he doesn't see any suit of clothes until a child cries out, "But he isn't wearing anything at all!"

Like that child, we have a duty to tell the truth. The Emperors of Sarasota County, we dare to say, have no clothes. Our County Commissioners are naked in their increasingly obvious obeisance to the development interests who chose them and bankrolled them to election.

Can we shame the politicians into changing their ways? Perhaps not likely, but it's worth a try.

Can we alert the crowd to their Emperors' nudity?

Yes, that at least we can seek to do, in the hope that the people eventually choose leaders who are fit for their positions and who clothe themselves, for a change, in unadulterated integrity and allegiance to the proper interests of those who they purport to represent.

President, **Control Growth Now**

Celebrate Integrity - Continued from p. 1

utter control of the big developers who have made it their business to recruit and bankroll candidates for public office.

For the first time in decades, there is now a unanimous vote on the County Commission for whatever the developers want, and an obvious contempt for the public interest and public opinion.



On March 31, Commissioners will consider actually doing away with transportation concurrency, the rule that adequate roads must be in place concurrent with (that is at the same time as) a proposed development, or the developer must identify needed improvements and pay its share of their costs. Developers would be relieved of even having to do a traffic study! At the same time, Commissioners will consider keeping transportation impact fees artificially low, in keeping with their consensus a few months ago to extend their 50% cut in those fees “indefinitely.” What fees are left would be allowed to be used for buses and bike paths as well as roads (which would be a good idea if it was by an additional impact fee, not just an expanded use of an inadequate one). That is in keeping with the view expressed by at least one Commissioner that traffic congestion is good because it will encourage people to ride buses (as if buses don’t get caught in traffic too).

This follows the Commission action to gut the Sarasota 2050 Plan to allow massive, standard urban sprawl out east and south without timing, at the taxpayers expense (see story on page 4) and two moves against environmental protection.

Developers trumped nature in the County’s amendment of zoning codes to delete the requirement that developers preserve pine flatwoods as part of their open space in Urban Service Area districts where open space is required. Also, amazingly, the County Commission converted 43 acres of Pinelands Reserve conservation land into a shooting range, with lead pollution from shot which is proven to endanger wildlife and water quality — in clear violation of the Comprehensive Plan, which states that recreational use of conservation land shall be limited to activities which are resource-based and environmentally benign.

Now the County Commission has launched an 18-month effort to rewrite the entire Comprehensive Plan, no doubt for the purpose of repealing constraints on developers in everything from traffic limits to neighborhood compatibility to environmental protection. Their slogan is “Today, Tomorrow, Together” and tell us that “your opinion is important” but is there any doubt that the only opinions that count to these County Commissioners are the aspirations of their patrons in the development industry?

But we celebrate integrity, where we find it, and hope in the future for more. One bright spot we see is in the new majority on the Sarasota City Commission, which rejected Benderson Development’s bid to pave a park into a shopping center and pay only half its value for it, has expressed skepticism for city staff’s “Mobility Plan” to induce immobility by repealing concurrency for most developers, and seems poised to restore utility and transportation impact fees.

Integrity counts. We need more of it.

SARASOTA 2050 GUTTED



“If you are failing to plan, you are planning to fail.”

-- Benjamin Franklin

For decades, the Sarasota County Commission held the line on urban sprawl, at I-75 and in Englewood.

But the developers kept pushing, even though others pushed back. That led to the Sarasota 2050 Plan, in which the rural lands were opened up to urban development in exchange for protections for the taxpayers, the environment and other citizens' interests.

But then, during the building bust, developers started recruiting and bankrolling County Commission candidates they can control, with an eye towards gutting Sarasota 2050 and replacing it with standard, massive urban sprawl.

On October 22, 2014, the developers won. The rest of us lost.

Sarasota 2050 was gutted. Among the changes:

All timing is repealed

A potential explosion of urban sprawl is now allowed. Policies are repealed that limited development to 150% of demand as projected over 20 years, spread villages in certain areas 15 years apart and allowed the County to defer new development if the growth rate increased by more than 20% over the past ten years' average. Now all the development – a tremendous amount – is allowed all at once. It's the first time in over 30 years that Sarasota County has been without a timing limit on expanded urban development.



Goodbye Greenways.

With rare exception, all new off-site Greenways, depicted on maps as wide swaths of preserved habitat, will instead be developed as subdivisions. That's because developers are now given density rights they previously were required to purchase and transfer off the Greenways. The South Village was given its rights outright. The Central Village has enough rights on site. The North Village (Lakewood Ranch South) was amazingly allowed to count density rights on land it had already sold to the County for \$7 million. And one change gives developers density rights for building affordable housing they were already required to build, instead of transferring them from Greenways.

Fiscal neutrality is destroyed



All monitoring and follow-up reports are repealed, so the phony assumptions in initial reports can never be disproven and corrected. Some Commissioners said that it's

alright that the first reports may be false because those “back-audits” will catch the truth and the developers will be required to pay. But now the back-audits are no more.



For example, an initial report was approved saying that the developer doesn't have to pay for mass transit because at present

no buses run to the vacant land -- even though now the bus route has been added.

Several approved reports assume full impact fees will be paid even though they have been slashed indefinitely. No follow-up reports, no correction. The developer doesn't pay and the taxpayers pay instead.

Also, the developers will now be allowed to count their required affordable housing as if it is market-priced housing, thereby assuming more revenue to the County than will actually be achieved and destroying fiscal neutrality. Further, the specific requirement for a detailed traffic study to determine the developer's road contributions has been deleted.

No more “mixed use, walkable villages”

“Centrally located” mixed use Village Centers to serve the residents have been replaced with commercial strip centers on major highways to serve the regional public. The only thing walkable for residents will be “focal points” which may be merely tiny parks. Numerous “new urbanist” standards are repealed and a full exemption allowed. The “mix” of uses has been changed to effectively allow little more than subdivisions and the Village Center, and the phasing of that mix has been destroyed. Stormwater ponds now count as open space, allowing less natural habitat. Requirements for inter-

nal greenbelts, buffers and road setbacks have been cut to almost nothing.

Huge subdivisions are allowed far out east

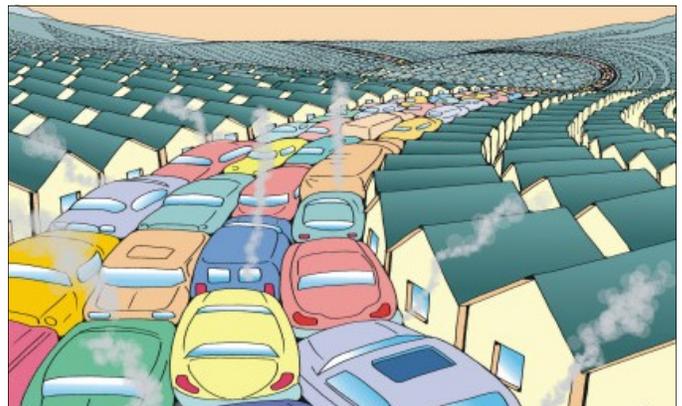
“Hamlets” – less dense urban development allowed by Sarasota 2050 in large areas east (in some cases far east) of the Interstate – will become vast, sprawling urban subdivisions rather than pockets of a limited number of homes surrounded by green space. This will be done by reducing the greenbelts between Hamlets from 500 feet to 50 feet.

Affordable housing is weakened

Instead of requiring housing at affordable prices, a house will now be deemed affordable merely if sold to someone below a certain income, even if they cannot afford it. Also, a huge loophole is created by providing that a developer can avoid the affordable housing requirement by “any other methodology” approved by the County Commission.

The result of this gutting of Sarasota 2050, if it continues to stand, will be traffic gridlock, higher taxes and deeper debt, environmental destruction, harm to city vitality and a devastation of property values from a glut of overdevelopment.

If we don't start electing County Commissioners who are independent of the developers, it is a failure of planning that we as a community will deserve.





Cathy Antunes To Be Honored at Picnic

Control Growth Now is very pleased to honor Cathy Antunes as our Citizen of the Year for 2015. She will be recognized at our March 14 annual

meeting and will share remarks with us at that time.

Cathy Antunes grew up in Westchester County, New York and earned her BA at the University of Virginia. Her varied professional background includes jobs at IBM, teaching LSAT test prep for Stanley Kaplan, working as a realtor in Virginia and a 20-year executive sales career in the pharmaceutical industry with three Fortune 500 companies. Her sales results were consistently ranked tops in the region and nation, earning multiple regional and national awards, and assignments as a brand advisor for infectious disease and allergy medications. As a hospital sales professional, Cathy assisted hospitals in southwest Florida in achieving national patient safety goals.

As a military wife, Cathy lived in cities across the US, including Kailua, HI, Pittsburgh, PA, Manhattan, Newport News, VA, Summit, NJ, San Antonio, TX and the Washington, DC area, developing a deep appreciation for community. She moved to Sarasota with her two sons in 1999.

Cathy's civic involvement began in 2008 when the County intended to move Little League out of Twin Lakes Park as part of a plan to build an 80 million dollar stadium for the Boston Red Sox. She co-founded Sarasota Citizens for

Responsible Government, which sued the County over sunshine violations in stadium negotiations. SCRG efforts held stadium renovation costs to \$32 million dollars and uncovered bid rigging by County procurement. Cathy and other SCRG members also sued the County for enforcement of term limits, resulting in a favorable decision by Florida's Supreme Court in 2012.

Cathy serves as a member of the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations and on numerous boards, including the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations. She was a leader in opposing changes to Sarasota 2050. Cathy writes about local politics in a monthly column for SRQ Daily and on her blog at thedetail.net. She is married to local endocrinologist Jose Antunes and has two sons, two stepsons and one step-daughter.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD IN THE COMP PLAN CHANGES



Sarasota County government has launched an 18-month process to fully revise the Comprehensive Plan, the document that controls development and other planning throughout the County. They say "your opinion is important" so let's let them hear from the people so it's very obvious if they do the opposite of what the people want. Get on their email list by writing to planner@scgov.net. Discussion on the Environment is 3/2-4/30, followed by Mobility 5/4-6/30, Economic Development 7/6-8/30, Utilities 9/1-10/30, Land Use 11/2-12/31 and Quality of Life 1/1-2/27. More information is available at www.scgov.net/CompPlanUpdate.

Bits and Pieces



The Sarasota Herald-Tribune reported on February 19 that even though other counties are reversing reductions in impact fees on developers now that construction is rebounding, the Sarasota County Commission is keeping them cut in half. The article also reported that Sarasota County got \$7 million in road

impact fees from Benderson Development for the University Town Center Mall, after that 50% cut. It's not difficult to calculate that **the County lost \$7 million dollars** in road impact fees from the UTC Mall, that could have gone to needed transportation improvements to address gridlock there and elsewhere, but which instead went into Benderson's pockets, by slashing road impact fees in half. That's a pretty good return on investment for Benderson's bankrolling of County Commission candidates, including 50 \$200 contributions to Charles Hines under different names (to get around the \$200 cap).



How about this idea for a very needed amendment to the Sarasota County Charter?:

The Board of County Commissioners shall fund all expansion of the capacity of public facilities required to serve future development by impact fees and other exactions on that development rather than by taxes, to the full extent allowed by law. "Public facilities" include but are not limited to roads, mass transit, sidewalks and other transportation facilities; schools; potable water facilities and supplies; sewage facilities; solid waste facilities; stormwater management; fire and emergency facilities; law enforcement facilities; courts;

jails; administrative facilities; libraries; parks and public hospitals.



Kudos to Sarasota City Attorney Robert Fournier, who minced no words in describing Benderson Development's attempt to buy a City park for a shopping center at half its value. He said that Benderson representative Larry Fineberg "acted more like a gangster than a developer", was "indignant, confrontational and intimidating" with City staff and took the attitude "that nobody says no to Benderson." Fournier said Benderson's approach is that "once they get their foot in the door, they take down the hinges." Too bad no one is watching the door at in Sarasota County government the way they are in the City.



Now it is revealed that Joe Barbetta (who was first elected as a growth control advocate then flipped deep into the developers' pockets) has taken a job with the Benderson Foundation as a consultant, for which he admits he may be paid. This follows years of service by Barbetta to Benderson in matters that include excusing an obligation to build affordable housing at the UTC Mall site, using public funds to build a new road to the mall as well as a rowing facility named after Benderson and functioning as the mall's stormwater facility, repealing limits on the square footage of a shopping area to accommodate Benderson at crowded US 41 and Stickney Point Road and selling County land east of I-75 at Fruitville Road to Benderson for an industrial center at far below its appraised value. Barbetta takes this job after his wife's company, of which he was manager, got work as caterer for Benderson rowing events. Apparently, current County Commissioner Christine Robinson, who is now also executive director of the Argus Foundation, a lobbyist group for developers, is not alone in being ethically challenged. Gravy anyone?

Saturday

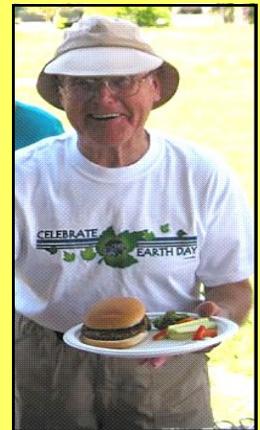
March 14

11:30 - 2

Join Us for Our

**CONTROL
GROWTH
NOW**

Picnic



Again at the beautiful
Colonial Oaks Park

5300 Colonial Oaks Blvd.,
Sarasota

See map and directions on next page



Free To
Control Growth Now Members And All Of Our Welcome Guests

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



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

Reservations Required — Please See Last Page

We Look Forward To Seeing You At Our **Annual Meeting** and Potluck



PICNIC

Saturday, March 14
11:30 to 2

Colonial Oaks Park

Free to
Members and
All Guests!



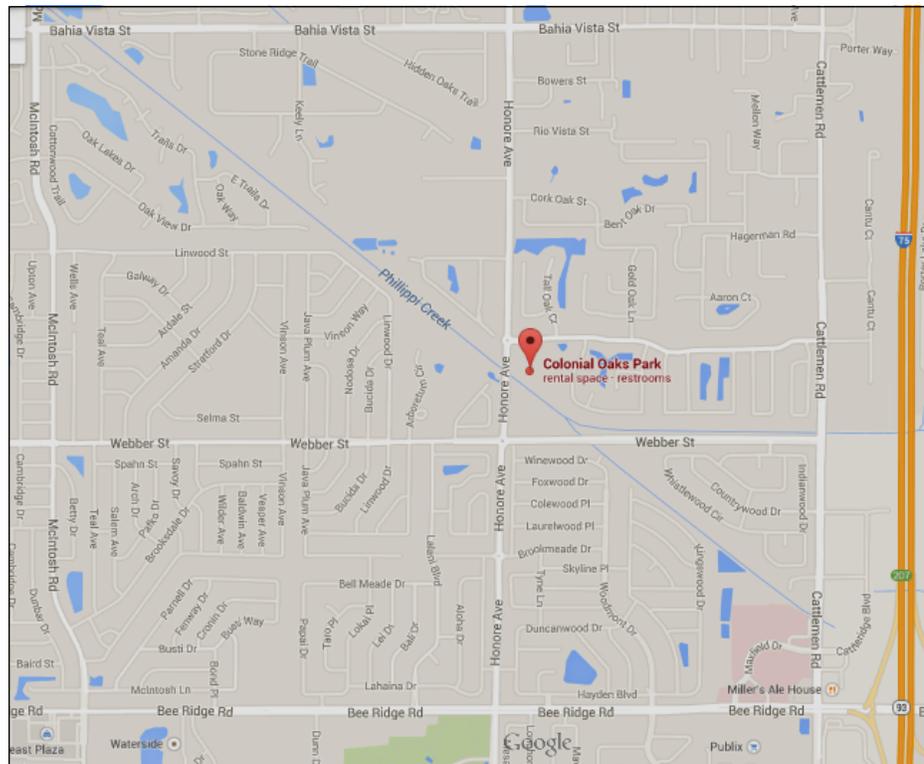
Please mail in your reservation with the enclosed form and envelope

Directions to Colonial Oaks Park

(5300 Colonial Oaks Boulevard, Sarasota 34232):

Go east from US 41 on Bahia Vista St. (which is between Fruitville and Bee Ridge), past the light at McIntosh Rd., take a right at the light at Honore Ave. and follow Honore to Colonial Oaks Boulevard. Turn left to the park.

OR - Take I-75 north to the Bee Ridge Road exit, go west (left) on Bee Ridge, turn right (north) on Cattlemen Rd. Turn left on Webber Street then right on Honore Avenue — or just come straight north on Honore Avenue from the south — then right on Colonial Oaks Blvd. to the park.



Three Ways To **Sign Up For The March 14 Picnic**

(And To Join CGN If You Like)



**Option One: Sign Up Online at
www.controlgrowthnow.org**

Option Two: Print, Complete and Mail This Form

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Please fill out this form and mail it, with
your \$20 check to CGN if you are joining,
to:

Control Growth Now
PO Box 277
Osprey, FL 34229-0277

Please check as many as apply:

I'll see you at the picnic on March 23. With our guests, we'll need _____ hamburgers, _____ hot
dogs and/or _____ veggie burgers

Please sign me up as a CGN member. My \$20 check to CGN is enclosed.

I'm not joining CGN at present but would like to attend the picnic as a guest

Option Three: To just attend the picnic, email your name and
food order to maralph@comcast.net; dlobeck@lobeckhanson.com