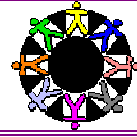


CONA COMMENTS



Sarasota County Council Of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.
Serving HOA and condo associations since 1961

President: Ann Kaplan

Editor: Bill Earl

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McCarthy tells how new north county park will provide green economic stimulus and recreational opportunities at CONA meeting at April 13

Sarasota County Parks Director John McCarthy will present development plans for the Nathan Benderson Park (formerly Cooper Creek Park), at CONA's April 13 meeting at 7 pm at the Sarasota Garden Club 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts).

The park's potential as an international training and competitive rowing facility which can bring rowing teams from all over the world to Sarasota County will be discussed. Other improvements include the construction of nature trails, boat and bicycle rentals, as well as a restaurant. McCarthy will be accompanied by Paul Blacketter of Benderson Development which is participating in this public - private project.

Members of the public and the media, as well as CONA members are invited to attend and ask questions. The meeting will be at The Sarasota Garden Club, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts) at 7 PM.



CONA President Ann Kaplan presented 2009 CONA citizenship award to Cardinal Mooney H. S. student Lauren Gwynn. Story on page 4.

Can we get along in face of more attacks on neighborhoods?

By Bill Zoller

Many of us involved in Sarasota County's neighborhoods have worked for years to depolarize conversations about the future of Sarasota County. It seems that every time the neighborhoods, "our side," makes an effort to get along with "the other side", the big money developers, a Trojan Horse is wheeled right in to our neighborhood. Thus, while we are lulled by the pretty horse and all the sweet talk, they make another power grab and push us aside.

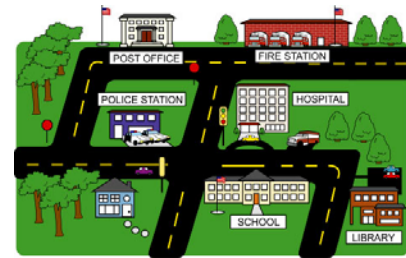
The Elected Mayor Now (EMN) PAC, with its campaign for a Sarasota City Charter Amendment to expand the City Commission and to have an elected mayor, is a perfect example of the sort of power grab I mean. This extremely ill-conceived proposal was an attempt to weaken the neighborhoods, to disenfranchise the minority community, and to manipulate the system to guarantee that the good ol' boys would be able to run the show again. The EMN PAC raised almost \$100,000 from the "business" community, with a substantial part of that coming from a leading realtor and her son. In addition, the Citizens for a Better Sarasota (CBS) PAC joined in and also spent considerable money in the effort to push this amendment through. You may remember that CBS was the PAC that mounted one of the most shockingly nasty campaigns to defeat Joe Barbetta in 2006 (they failed, of course).

Zoller continued on page 3

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Has your neighborhood joined CONA? Costs \$35 per year. Go to CONA's website for info on www.conasarasota.org
Email: conasarasota@comcast.net



Foreclosure pricing threatens neighborhoods and homeowners

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

Foreclosures are bad for everyone except the speculators who contributed to the problem to start with. The way many foreclosures are being handled now creates a "NO WIN" situation for all but a very few (those that can afford to take advantage of others' desperate situations). The banks/lenders lose money, the value of every home in the neighborhood suffers much more because these sales are now "comps" for all other sales in the area and the people who owned the houses are usually in dire straits. On top of that, the overly low foreclosure sales prices set the bar for future foreclosure prices so the banks continue to lose more money than they need to (and we bail them out) and realtors/brokers earn less commission per sale and licensed appraisers earn nothing. Often the property sells for less than what was owed on the loan. For that amount the bank could have negotiated with the owners and saved all the grief. And so the snow ball of loss gets bigger and bigger.

Until a few days ago I thought that these "fire sales" on foreclosures and short sales were arbitrary prices set by the banks. But, thanks to an article I read in Sunday's Herald Tribune Real Estate Section (3/29) by Kenneth Harney, I now understand that the problem also lies with BPOs (Broker Price Opinions) which are used by many banks instead of standard property valuations by licensed appraisers. Real estate agents with little or no appraisal training are selling BPOs to banks for \$50., well below the cost of licensed appraisals. They frequently under value the property to ensure quick sales which helps them get more BPO orders from the bank, a big source of income for them.

This practice is illegal in 23 states but must be legal here because I found advertising all over the internet for BPOs in Florida. Because of the harsh impact this is having on all property values, consumer groups have called on the Fed and State governments to outlaw the use of BPOs as substitutes for proper appraisals in distressed property transactions. *If you agree, please contact your state and federal reps NOW to support this effort.*

Let me give you an example from my neighborhood: There is a home on my street that just sold as a foreclosure for $\frac{1}{2}$ the price of an almost identical property a few doors down that closed just a few months ago as a regular sale.

This foreclosure house that sold for $\frac{1}{2}$ the price of an already depressed market price is now our most recent Kaplan, continued next column

Osprey neighborhood wins (at least for now) as BCC defers out of scale hotel

Excerpt from Sarasota Herald Tribune by Zac Anderson:

'The hotel would have been one of Sarasota County's largest, with a waterfront restaurant and public access to Little Sarasota Bay. But County commissioners worried that the 184-room, 57-foot building would cause too much disruption in an older residential neighborhood in Osprey and unanimously voted Tuesday to postpone action on the plan, telling the developer he needed a total overhaul for the development to receive favorable consideration when it is considered again in October.

"I think it's too intense," said Commissioner Shannon Staub. "It's definitely out of scale," added Commissioner Joe Barbetta.

"It's just out of character with the area," said Commissioner Jon Thaxton.

The hotel proposal by Dr. Anilkumar Patel on 5.5 acres split the Osprey community, pitting economic development against neighborhood compatibility.'

For the full article go to

www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090408/ARTICLE/904081042

Kudos to county commissioners, but keep your eye on this one it is touted as economic development and is being supported by the Revitalization Committee and was recommended for approval by the Planning commission.

Kaplan (continued from left column)

neighborhood "comparable" sale upon which all future sales are based. With many more foreclosures still to come, our market will not recover for many years if this practice is not stopped now! We will be trapped in our homes far longer until our values return to a reasonable level where we can break even when we sell.

Most of us have just one home in which we live year round and did not contribute to the speculation frenzy that drove us to the BUST. But we all are living with the consequences of the behavior of a few bad apples. We have to stop letting the "few" get away with the bad behavior that ruins it for all! As my kids used to ask, "Does one ruin it for all?" referring to our consequences for misbehaving. This is why our society needs so many laws and the ability to enforce them—there are those who will always try to take advantage.



Can we get along? *continued from page 1*

The EMN PAC was headed by attorney Tom Luzier, and the campaign that they mounted was, in my opinion, divisive and full of distortions. Fortunately, on 10 March, the City voters soundly trounced the proposal by a 2-1 margin. Now, if we consider that the Citizen's Voice a PAC formed to oppose the anti-neighborhood city initiative which was outspent 10-1 and the amendment was defeated 2-1, I figure it was really a 20-1 defeat! After the defeat, Luzier had a column in the Herald-Tribune that tried to spin their fiasco in such a way as to attempt to convince folks that people really wanted the mayor thing. *However, it is clear that the voters knew exactly what they wanted... or did not want!*

In addition to this debacle, the CBS folks have now turned their sights on Terry Turner, a candidate for Sarasota City Commission whom they perceive to be a "threat" to their being able to get whatever they want. In the primary, they mailed out four disgusting mailers attacking Turner for, among other things, being successful! The fact is, Terry Turner served on the County Planning Commission, and his votes were always considerate of our neighborhoods and of the environment. Terry also worked with Citizens for Sensible Growth (CSG) to help get the three County Charter Amendments passed that will help keep growth where it is planned and protect our environment, and he served on the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee. Turner has been endorsed by the Sierra Club, the only one of the nine candidates to be endorsed by Sierra. In spite of the efforts to defeat Turner, he garnered the most votes in the primary, and now is in a runoff with the second- and third-highest vote-getters. The runoff will be 14 April, and we can expect that CBS and others will once again try to bring out their big guns to defeat Terry. Nasty robocalls and mailers to city voters have already begun.

So, can we get along with these folks? Not at the moment, for sure! Of course, if they lose once again, they will put on their fake smiles and soft words and come a-courting neighborhoods once more. As City Commissioner Dick Clapp said they will have to make changes before they come a-courting: "It begins with a commitment to truthfulness and the basic ethics to which we subscribe as a nation and as individuals. These discussions should begin with an apology for attack ads and distortions of positions."



Drastic water restrictions in Tampa Bay area are proof of non-sustainable growth

For years elected officials in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties approved massive new residential growth without regard to their ability to provide a sustainable, reliable water supply for such developments. Now residents of those counties are paying the price after the regional water agency imposed drastic water restrictions including prohibition of residential and charity car washing, any use of fountains or water features, and most pressure washing. There is also a mandated 78 degrees minimum for air conditioned public buildings. These are on top of very restrictive lawn and garden watering rules.

Although the Hillsborough prohibitions are not yet applicable to Sarasota County, they may be necessary in the future. In the boom growth days, the Englewood Water District and the City of North Port were prime examples of certifications of future water supply for proposed new development which may not be sustainable.

The lessons from Hillsborough County seems simple: 1) don't permit new growth if you cannot guarantee future potable water supplies under worst case conditions, and 2) don't rely on unreliable, large scale desalinization technology as Tampa Bay did because such technology is unreliable. Even after millions of dollars of cost overruns and delays the massive Big Bend desalinization plant relied upon by Hillsborough and Pinellas, still doesn't supply the promised amounts of water.

Current Sarasota County water restrictions are strict but not yet prohibitory as in Hillsborough and Pinellas. For a list of restrictions apply in Sarasota County go to www.scgov.net/environmentalservices/Water/Conservation/WaterRestrictions.asp or call the Sarasota County call center at 941-861-5000.

Can't we get along? *continued*

The people behind these attack PACS have a lot to apologize for if they want to be a part of the broader community. They have chosen to make themselves outsiders in the community, and if they choose to persist in these unacceptable behaviors, they will make themselves irrelevant. Keep in mind: it is their choice.

Fifth annual CONA Evie Anderson Memorial Award for Civic Engagement to Lauren Gwinn

CONA President Ann Kaplan presented the annual award to Lauren Gwinn a senior at Cardinal Mooney HS. Lauren is a very active member of Community Youth Development (CYD) sponsored by Sarasota County. She has exhibited great leadership qualities, an excellent work ethic with lots of enthusiasm, dedication and insight. Lauren has participated on the County's Human Services Advisory Council and the Coalition for Inclusion and Diversity. She has founded the Diversity Club and Unity Day at her school to promote respect and understanding among students. Her very worthy community, school and enrichment activities are too numerous to mention here. Her future goals of helping others through emergency room medicine show that she will continue to serve her community well. CONA is very proud to acknowledge Lauren's civic accomplishments with this award. We wish her continued success in college and beyond! The award is named in memory of CONA's long-time Treasurer and community volunteer Evie Anderson.

Sarasota County launches free prescription discount card

All county residents will be able to get a free discount prescription card under a program announced April 6 by Sarasota County. The Coast2Coast RX card is expected to save residents an average of 35 percent on the retail cost of prescriptions. The discount card also will make medications available and affordable for people with chronic diseases who are uninsured or unemployed.

The free cards will be available in county facilities and local pharmacies. The company has also created a Web site at www.coast2coastrx.com/sarasotafi so people can print a card and use it immediately. Residents without Internet access can use computers at public libraries or pick up a card at most major chain pharmacies and many independent pharmacies within Sarasota County.

The Coast2Coast Rx discount card is honored at all major chain pharmacies and many independent pharmacies. Although the card is not insurance, it can save people anywhere from 5 percent to 70 percent on virtually all generic and brand-name drugs. For more information, contact the Sarasota



Bee Ridge Road meetings may bring improvements and urban transit.

Meetings on improving Bee Ridge Road

According to Chair Julie Morris, efforts are now underway to beautify and make Bee Ridge Road corridor more livable and a model for local urban transit. Last year, Sarasota County's Summit for Environmental Action (SEA) chose Great Communities/Great Transit as one of its priorities for implementation. A SEA committee is hosting community conversations on transit-oriented development (TOD) and smart growth through a case study of the Bee Ridge Road corridor. They are asking stakeholders, including Bee Ridge area CONA member neighborhoods, to envision a better Bee Ridge corridor, one that would meet the needs of adjoining neighborhoods and businesses and make better use of transit, walking, and biking. The SEA group will attend the April CONA meeting with posters and surveys to gather ideas and visions from CONA before and after the meeting. In addition, on May 1st from 1:00 – 4:00, the group will host a Community Forum at Suncoast Polytechnic High School.

Runoff in Sarasota City Council elections April 14th

Sarasota City Commission candidates Suzanne Atwell, Paul Caragiulo and Terry Turner will face each other in the April 14 Run-off election. Early Voting began Monday, March 30. As noted in this month's column by Bill Zoller (page 1), fast growth development interests are attacking candidate Terry Turner. If you live in the City of Sarasota, please get out and vote, whichever candidate you support.

Joining or renewing your association's CONA membership is simple

Just Go to our CONA website and download membership form www.conasarasota.org
Email: conasarasota@comcast.net