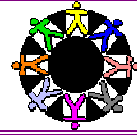


# CONA COMMENTS



SARASOTA'S ONLY COUNTY-WIDE ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS  
SINCE 1961

[WWW.CONASARASOTA.ORG](http://WWW.CONASARASOTA.ORG)

President: Ann Kaplan

Editor: Bill Earl

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## Sexism in County Government? Planning commissioner wants to vote "for most qualified guy"

"Something is wrong on the Planning Commission," said County Commissioner Joe Barbetta at a recent County Commission meeting. It seems strange in Sarasota County where we have a majority of smart, competent woman county commissioners, but our planning commission appears at best insensitive to gender diversity by excluding female planning commission members from chair and vice chair positions. One male commissioner summed it up when he said he wanted to vote "for the best qualified guy."

Planning commission leadership positions have generally rotated among commission members, but in recent years when the rotation reaches a woman, she is excluded. The three women currently on the Sarasota County Planning Commission appear more than competent to chair the planning board: Christine Robinson is an experienced, well-known attorney; Marianne Reilly is an experienced former Mayor; and Laurel Schiller owns and operates a native plant nursery business.

### **Bloc voting against women**

The most recent example of possible gender bias or at least antipathy towards women leaders occurred at the October 16 planning commission meeting. At this annual meeting for the election of chair and vice-chair, Jody Hudgins (a male) and Marianne Reilly (a female), a long tenured PC member, were nominated for Chair.

*Continued on page 3*



## CONA December 8 board election and holiday meeting to honor member associations and leaders

### Association presidents, CONA delegates to be honored at meeting

December 8<sup>th</sup> election meeting will honor the leaders of CONA member associations. The meeting will be held at the Sarasota Garden Club 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts) beginning at 7 PM. "We hope most member association presidents or designated CONA delegates from such associations can attend", said Kaplan. "We need fresh ideas for the coming year as well as more participation by local leaders," Kaplan added.

Directors and officers for 2009 will be elected at this meeting. Under CONA bylaws only member association designated representatives can vote at CONA's Board of Directors elections. After the new board is elected, it will briefly convene to elect officers for 2009. We look forward to seeing as many neighborhood leaders as possible at this meeting. **Has your neighborhood joined CONA?** costs \$35 per year. Go to CONA's website for info on

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## Happy and peaceful holidays to all

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

CONA had a great year in 2008, increasing Homeowner Assn. memberships and successfully supporting many of those HOAs through specific neighborhood problems. We are looking forward to 2009 when we'll again increase our numbers and put that strength to good use for the benefit of our neighborhood assns. all over the county.

Please don't wait to join CONA until you have a big problem with which you need help! By taking advantage of your CONA membership now, you may be able to avoid such problems and gain lots of insight in other civic related issues (and meet great people with whom you have so much in common!).

There is a Florida Statute that protects homeowner associations from lawsuits filed to discourage you from speaking out against the govt. or businesses who propose action that would adversely affect your neighborhood. This is called the Anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) Statute. For example, if you are opposing incompatible development around your neighborhood on behalf of your HOA, the Anti-SLAPP law makes it very difficult for the developer (or govt.) to intimidate you and your HOA with the threat of an expensive lawsuit so that you will drop your opposition to the project.

This law only protects mandatory homeowner associations. Non-mandatory neighborhood associations do not currently have this protection. There are some local organizations promoting new state legislation to cover all residential associations and their representatives. They have asked CONA to voice our support to our state legislators and to urge them to pass the law now. Please contact your state reps and tell them you want ALL neighborhood association reps to be protected from SLAPP.

Happy New Year from your friends and neighbors at CONA! Please contact us to pledge your support.

[Annkaplan@msn.com](mailto:Annkaplan@msn.com).

### CONA needs webmaster and newsletter reporters

CONA needs your help if you have internet or journalistic skills. If you want to get connected and get involved with what's going on in our community, contact Bill Earl at [conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net).



Our constitution prohibits gender discrimination by local governments

## Gender bias on planning commission?

(Continued from page 1).

Although Hudgins, who has held a leadership position on the commission for three of the last five years, initially voted for Reilly, he opted not to withdraw his own nomination. In the end Hudgins was again elected chair by vote of all the men present and there was a tie for vice-chair between the young Joe Gruters and female attorney Christine Robinson. The vice-chair vote was then postponed until the next meeting. At that meeting in November, Chair Hudgins switched his original vice-chair vote from Ms. Robinson to Gruters, and Gruters was elected to the position 5 to 2 with all men voting against Robinson.

Perhaps the most interesting moment came when new Chair Hudgins stated he would step down if someone made a motion to install Gruters as chair and Robinson as vice-chair. Under Robert's Rules of Order such a motion is not possible with a sitting chair. For Hudgins offer to be effective, he would have needed to resign so the at a new chair could be elected. He did not do so.

### Policy change favoring diversity rejected

During a discussion on the rules and procedures of the Planning Commission, attorney Robinson made a motion that the chair and vice-chair formally rotate on a seniority basis so as to insure fairness and diversity. The motion was seconded by Reilly. All of the male members voted no to defeat the measure thereby effectively allowing women to continue to be excluded from the chairmanship in the future. One male planning commissioner, Allen, even told Ms. Robinson she was disingenuous in seeking to require diversity and stated he wanted to vote "for the guy" most qualified.

County commissioner Barbetta is right. Something is wrong at the Planning Commission. Three of our five county commissioners (Staub, Patterson & Mason), who appoint planning commissioners, would not stand for such treatment at the county commission level. They and the other county commissioners should investigate and determine if and why the current planning commission membership has excluded woman from leadership positions and whether gender sensitivity training is needed by some male planning commissioners. Alternatively, requesting resignations and appointing a majority of women to the commission might also solve the problem.



**Community Thoughts....** By Bill Zoller

## A generous community

Well, the news just doesn't get better. It's hard to remain optimistic for the long term when there is so much trouble we must go through in the short term. Make no mistake: we are definitely going to go through a lot of trouble before we emerge into more "normal" times. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article projects the bottom of the housing decline at sometime between the second half of 2009 and 20012, and then it says that prices will scrape along at that bottom level for quite some time before turning up again.

So what can we do right now? We can begin by looking around our neighborhoods to see where we can make a difference in someone's life. There are and will be lots of folks who will be suffering because of lost jobs, reduced retirement income, foreclosure, or many of the other problems attendant on the economic collapse we are experiencing. Companies that seemed to be rolling in money just a few short months ago are now experiencing great financial pain. I know of firms I work with who have had to reduce employees' hours by 10% or 20% just to keep those folks employed instead of letting them go.

CONA is a coalition of neighborhoods, and neighborhoods are, by definition, places where we are a community. It is in a community that we can look out for our neighbors. We can be sensitive to their needs. We need also to be ready to do what it takes to keep our neighborhoods functioning and in good order. HOA and condo fees will be hard for some to pay, and these fees are what go to maintaining our immediate physical environment. So there is a lot to pay attention to and to look out for. It is time to ask yourself, "What can I do to help?"

So here we are at the holiday season, feeling a bit glum, fearful, or sad about all the troubles we see all around. If we are fortunate enough to be comfortable in spite of the turmoil, then we are blessed indeed. If we can find ways to share our good fortune with others, then our community will be blessed. One thing the Sarasota community has had in abundance over the years is generosity, and now is surely the time to demonstrate that generosity in spades!

Send us an email with your thoughts ... we'll start publishing some of your concerns in upcoming newsletters. Send to: [conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net).



Elected mayor proponents say the new position would not result in a Boss Tweed type mayor in Sarasota.

## Sarasota elected mayor—at large city commission initiative controversial

### Neighborhoods and minorities would lose voting power and accountability of commissioners

City of Sarasota voters need to pay close attention to the up-coming referendum on changing the basic structure of city government. The press has focused on the proposed change to an elected mayor, but the March referendum would also create a seven-member city commission! There would remain three seats elected by district, but the other four seats (the two current at-large seats, the new mayor, and the new at-large seat) would all be at-large with no requirement that candidates live in different districts. Under this proposed scheme, it could be possible to have up to five commissioners elected from *one district* thus reducing minority voting power and accountability of commissioners to neighborhoods and particular areas of the city. While this might not be the intent, it could well be the unintended reality.

The county commission manages a much larger area and budget than the City, and is able to do it with five commissioners. In the County's case, each commissioner, while elected by all the voters, must live in a particular district. This would not be the case in the city if this referendum should pass. The city referendum is about far more than whether there should be an elected mayor. Several of CONA city-neighborhood members are quite concerned about this proposal, so please give this issue a lot of thought and be sure all your city-resident friends understand the broad implications of this referendum. Let's hope "high-information" voters will carefully study these far reaching changes and that the press will explain the ramifications of these issues to "low information" voters long before election day on March 10.

## Turner seeks Sarasota City Commission seat held by Shelin

A former banker, planning commissioner, and head of the Florida Nature Conservancy who also has economic development experience wants to be a Sarasota City Commissioner? Sounds too good to be true, but apparently it is true. Terry Turner, a man with all these experiences on his resume has filed to run for an at-large seat on the Sarasota City Commission in the March 10, 2009 election. Turner said, "I am seeking a seat on our City Commission because I believe Sarasota must be governed more effectively, especially during these difficult economic times, and because I believe my experience uniquely qualifies me to help Sarasota meet today's economic challenges."

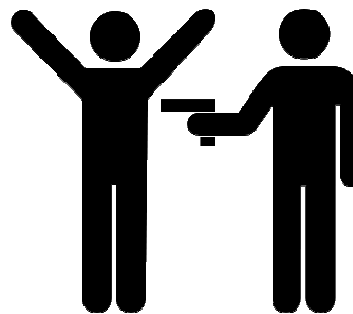
Turner's professional experience includes business management, banking, financial consulting, and economics. "My public service has focused on economic development, land use planning, and protection of the environment," he stated. Turner is a former member of the Sarasota County Committee for Economic Development, the Sarasota County Planning Commission, and is past Chairman of The Nature Conservancy of Florida.

Turner said he believes the City needs commissioners who can facilitate development of a shared vision for the City's future – a vision that will lead to a robust local economy, a vibrant downtown and livable neighborhoods, and that will protect and enhance our environment and our green spaces. "Sarasota needs commissioners who can be trusted to make decisions that are consistent with our vision and who will implement our vision with fiscal prudence and at the lowest possible cost."

Turner is a graduate of the University of Rochester and of Carnegie-Mellon University. He and his wife Nancy, an artist and graduate of the Ringling College of Art and Design have lived in the City of Sarasota since 1997. ###

## New Palmer Ranch Fire Station

A groundbreaking ceremony Dec. 8 kicks off construction of the Sarasota County Palmer Ranch Fire Rescue Station 15. The station is expected to be completed by early fall 2009. The public is invited to the 9 a.m. ceremony at the project location, 9102 Bloomfield Blvd., at Honore Avenue in Sarasota. The project is a cooperative venture by the county, Palmer Ranch Holdings, Ltd., and the homeowner associations of the Palmer Ranch community.



## Ways to protect your neighborhood or condo from crime

**Conduct periodic safety & security reviews:** Security is something that needs to be attended to before criminal acts occur. Review any criminal incidents to determine whether there are weak spots in your security systems. Consider adding security measures and initiating a crime watch program in your neighborhood. City and County law enforcement will be happy to assist your crime prevention efforts.

**Proactively look for security or safety problems:** Regularly walk around your condo or neighborhood grounds looking for potential problems. For example, security lights may need to be replaced or installed. Ask the local law enforcement to accompany you to provide professional advice.

**Keep residents informed and ask for their help:** At meetings, on association bulletin boards and when you make your rounds ask residents to be on the lookout and to call police when there is a potential problem. Invite city or county law enforcement to address your association meetings on avoiding crime.

**Watch and supervise security guards:** If your association employs security guards assign a board member to monitor and supervise their performance. In Florida an association can be held liable for the acts or lack of action by security guards when the association fails to properly supervise such individuals. Does your contract with security firm have an indemnity clause providing owners with reimbursement for guard generated liability?

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**Get involved: Has your association joined CONA yet?** It only costs \$35 per year. Go to CONA's website for info on benefits and how to join.  
**Web site:** [www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)