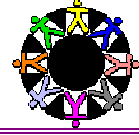


# CONA COMMENTS



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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## Sarasota City Commission candidates debate at February 9 CONA meeting after city charter change presentation

Eight of the nine candidates running for the two open Sarasota City Commission seats in the March 10 election have accepted invitations to debate at CONA's Monday, February 9, 7:00 PM meeting. The debate will follow a brief point-counterpoint presentation by two advocates for and against changes to the Sarasota City Charter which change the way commissioners are elected.

Members of the public and the media, as well as CONA members are invited to attend. 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 on January 12. Please visit CONA's web site for detailed directions: [www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)

### SARASOTA COUNTY COUNCIL OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS INC.

P.O. Box 15788 Sarasota, FL 34277  
[conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net)



Sarasota realtor Michael Saunders and her son Drayton have contributed most of the money to a Sarasota anti-neighborhood political action committee.

## Real estate interests give big bucks to PAC seeking to change Sarasota city charter

### Proposal would weaken neighborhood and minority representation on city commission and give big money backed candidates an advantage

Real estate heavy weights, developers, and builders have donated over \$23,000 in an attempt to have the Sarasota City Charter amended to weaken the voices of neighborhoods and minorities in Sarasota city elections. Michael Saunders and her son Drayton, President and Vice President, respectively, of Michael Saunders & Company, real estate brokers, by themselves gave more than \$18,000 of the total of \$23,000 in contributions received by the PAC. Other prominent real estate or development interests donating to the PAC include realtor and county charter review board member Cathy Layton, builder Ron Burkes, and Michael Shelton.

Although it is called the "Elected Mayor Now" political action committee, the group's proposal does much more by changing the balance of power on the city commission from five commissioners in which the majority of three commissioners are elected by the neighborhoods in which they live and are accountable, into a new seven member city commission in which a majority of four commissioners are not elected by their neighborhoods but at large across the entire city.

*Charter continued on page 2*

#### IN THIS ISSUE OF CONA COMMENTS:

2	Sarasota to have post disaster plan
2	Tips for dealing with an attorney
3	County to hold tree trimming workshop
4	Commissioners vote to establish Sunshine environmental advisory board
<b>Has your neighborhood joined CONA?</b> Costs \$35 per year. Go to CONA's website for info on <a href="http://www.conasarasota.org">www.conasarasota.org</a>	
Email: <a href="mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net">conasarasota@comcast.net</a>	



## Sarasota Co. first to have “post-disaster” rebuilding plan

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

CONA has a committee that is working with Sarasota Co. govt. and other community interests on the “Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan”. Our county is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> that will have a **comprehensive** plan in place by the end of 2009 that covers **housing, infrastructure and public facilities, environmental restoration and economic redevelopment**. The goal of this plan is to save the community time, anguish and money in the recovery effort AFTER a disaster has struck. This is NOT about responding before and during the disaster. This plan is about how we get life back to normal after the storm has passed.

We have learned much about what NOT to do from other regions who have weathered the big storms. However, no one had a **comprehensive** plan in place before their disaster that worked well to ease the pain of their recovery efforts.

Every disaster is different but there are numerous predictable things that can be planned for in advance.

In the rush to rebuild after destruction many opportunities to include hazard mitigation will be lost if not anticipated with a plan to include those in the rebuilding effort. If we do it the right way and in the right places, we will avoid dealing with the same problems down the road and improve our quality of life in the meantime.

I can't even begin to express in a few paragraphs how many aspects of our lives will be affected (by any disaster) and how much coordination that requires from so many sources. It's overwhelming just to read about but would be much more so to deal with in reality.

If this Sarasota County plan is built thoughtfully and responsibly for the highest good of all residents into the future, it will truly be a meaningful accomplishment! Anyone who is interested in providing insight for this project should contact Ann Kaplan at [Annkaplan@msn.com](mailto:Annkaplan@msn.com) or 312-9225.



## Real estate interests give big bucks to change city charter *(continued from page 1)*

CONA's board voted unanimously to oppose the proposed city charter changes believing such an approach would provide less direct representation to minorities and neighborhoods and could allow special interests to use paid, expensive mass media (television, radio and newspaper) advertising to reach low information voters urging them to support candidates backed by special interests. Such advertising is usually unaffordable by grass roots, neighborhood friendly candidates.

A group called Citizens' Voice has been formed to oppose the developer funded proposal. Those donating to oppose the proposed changes to the city charter include former mayor Mollie Cardemone, and current city commissioners Lou Ann Palmer and Dick Clapp. If you would like to join these and other community leaders opposing the anti-neighborhood changes to the Sarasota City Charter, contributions should be sent to:

**The Citizens Voice PAC**  
c/o Gerry Swormstedt, Treasurer  
1100 Imperial Drive, #204  
Sarasota, FL 34236.

## Tips if your association deals with an attorney

If and when your association deals with an attorney there are several steps you can take to hold down attorney fees and get what you need from the lawyer:

- **Designate a contact person** to deal with the attorney- this will prevent conflicting requests from different committee members and bills for work requested by a board member but not authorized by the association.
- **Ask the attorney to prepare an “engagement letter”** spelling out, at a minimum, 1) exactly what you want him or her to do, 2) how the attorney will be paid, and a cost which cannot be exceeded without written authorization from the association.
- **Share all the facts with the attorney –** withholding facts or embarrassing information will only hurt the association's case and cost it more in legal fees in the long run. If the attorney is to properly represent your group he must be aware of all the facts whether they help or hurt your case



## Community Thoughts.... By Bill Zoller The Good News

In spite of all the bad news that seems to roll over our community, state, and nation daily, there are good things happening. CONA, in a joint effort with the Siesta Key Association, is taking on the task of reviewing all the new proposals for the County zoning ordinance. Frequently, these important documents are vetted continuously by consultants hired by development interests, while the plain old citizens and neighborhoods have no one representing their interests. Having CONA and the SKA interacting with staff as the regulations are being formulated puts these public interest groups on a somewhat more even footing with the special interests. This is a very good thing.

In the City of Sarasota, as special interests attempt to pass a charter amendment on March 10 that would expand the City Commission by 2 at-large seats (one of which would be the elected mayor), a group of citizens have formed a PAC to defeat this ill-conceived proposal. See Bill Earl's story for more details on this issue, but the good news is that citizen watch-dog groups are paying attention to attempts to adopt this sort of amendment, and they are organizing to fight it.

The City of Sarasota also has an election on March 10, and 2 existing at-large seats are up for grabs. Lou Ann Palmer's seat will be open, because she is retiring after a long career with the City. Ken Shelin's seat is the other one, and Shelin will be running again. Including Shelin, there are a total of nine announced candidates for these two seats, and voters will be able to vote for two candidates. If no candidate gets more than 50% of the votes, a runoff will be necessary. It will be interesting to see which candidates garner the support of the neighborhoods, inasmuch as this is a very hot-button topic in the City. It appears that Terry Turner, a former member of the County Planning Commission and of the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee, has several strong neighborhood folks working on his campaign. He has been endorsed early on by County Commissioner Jon Thaxton.

The County's revenues continue to take big hits from the continuing slide in the economy, and job losses continue unabated. The only good thing I can take from all of that, though, is that we will have a hiatus from the frenzied overdevelopment that threatened so many of our resources. The community is paying a high price for this collapse.

*Zoller continued next column*



Learn about tree trimming at Feb 9<sup>th</sup> county sponsored meeting.

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## County to hold tree trimming workshop

Want to learn more about how trees should be trimmed? Tired of FP&L's over trimming of trees in your neighborhood? Sarasota County's Environmental Services, Urban Forestry folks will be holding a discussion of managing our urban tree canopy, tree maintenance, and the possibility of creating a licensing program for tree trimming in Sarasota County

When: February 9th

Time: 4:00 pm.

Where: 1001 Sarasota Center Blvd

For more information, contact: [gflemin@scgov.net](mailto:gflemin@scgov.net)

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### **Zoller, continued**

It is incumbent on this community to use this time to think hard about what we want the future shape of this community to be once we begin to come out the other side of this very difficult time.

Perhaps a good thing for the future will be a refocus on agriculture as an important economic engine here. There seems to be a renewed interest in this fundamental element of any society... the ability to feed itself! Stay tuned for more information on this topic....

CONA remains committed to representing *you* on issues of concern to our neighborhoods and to our entire community. For us to do our job effectively, we need to have your input. So email us at the address below and attend our meetings and tell us your thoughts and concerns. Our meetings are always open to the public. This is a very, very good thing!

### **2009 CONA dues now payable**

If your association is an existing CONA member you should have received your dues invoice by now. If you haven't or want to become a new member go to CONA's web site for a membership form:

[www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)



## County commissioners vote to establish a citizens' environmental advisory committee subject to Sunshine law.

At a January 13 meeting the Board of county commissioners voted to establish an open government citizens' advisory board to replace a staff appointed committee that did not meet in the Sunshine. This followed numerous citizen requests, including one by CONA President Ann Kaplan supporting requests by environmental activists Laurel Schiller and Gayle Reynolds' to change the make up of the previously staff appointed "Open Space Working Group" to an advisory board appointed by commissioners.

Unlike the prior staff appointed committee, the new group will be required to give the public notice of their meetings, not discuss issues "out of the Sunshine" and keep minutes of their meetings. After the vote, CONA President Ann Kaplan said, "We appreciate the commissioners taking this extra step to ensure citizens have a public voice in these important recommendations.

## CONA officer elections results

CONA officers for 2009 were elected at the January 12 meeting: President, Ann Kaplan, Vice President, Carolyn Pope, Secretary, Bill Duerig and Treasurer, Barbara Tisdale. John McBride was also approved to fill a board vacancy. Other CONA directors for the year include Rita Adler, John Krotec, Bill Zoller, Ted Koszarski, Kafi Benz, Dick Sheldon, and Bill Earl. Thanks to all these dedicated folks for taking the time to help make Sarasota County a more neighborhood friendly place!

## County Charter Review Board to consider proposals at Feb. 3 Meeting

At the Sarasota County Charter Review Board's last meeting, four proposals were placed on the agenda for Feb. 3 — two proposals by Sarasota citizens and two by Board Member Debbie Trice. For each proposal, the Board will hear a presentation by its sponsor before voting whether to proceed to the next step in the Board's prescribed process — a Special Committee to research the proposal and make a recommendation to the entire Board. The meeting will be at 6:00 PM in the County Commission Chambers at 1660 Ringling Blvd. in Sarasota. The Board will provide time for public comment on these proposals.

The Charter amendment process has been an issue before both the Charter Review Board and the Board of County Commissioners for over a year. In August, County voters rejected two amendments placed on the ballot by the Board of County Commissioners raising several unresolved issues: (1) how to balance the people's right to vote on petition amendments in a timely manner with avoiding the expense a special election, and (2) how to handle a request by leaders of a successful petition drive to remove the amendment question from the ballot. Charter board member Trice proposes that a committee study these issues and others raised in the amendments voted down in August and in a subsequent editorial in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune.

Replacing the elected County Sheriff with an appointed officeholder was proposed to the Charter Board and rejected in 2008. County resident Richard Alpher is scheduled to present a similar proposal on Feb. 3. Questions by the public and the press during the recent election season included whether the Supervisor of Elections should be a nonpartisan office and whether professional qualifications should be required of candidates for Sheriff and Property Appraiser. The other constitutional offices are Tax Collector and Clerk of the Circuit Court.

**Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.**  
P O Box 15788  
Sarasota, Florida 34277  
[www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)

**Get involved: Join CONA**  
Web site: [www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)  
Email us at: [conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net)