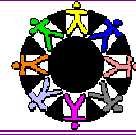


# CONA COMMENTS



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

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

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## National expert speaks on importance of US Constitution in our everyday lives at March 9 CONA meeting

Nationally recognized constitutional authority Rebecca O'Dell Townsend speaks on the origin and importance of the U S Constitution at CONA's March 9, 2009 meeting, 7 PM at the Sarasota Garden Club. Townsend starts with the basics such as the form of government we have, why we have that form of government, the purpose of our government, the purpose of our Constitution, and where the concept of inalienable rights originated. Townsend's presentation has received acclaim from a wide variety of groups, including the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, The Federalist Society, Constitution Party chapters, the Constitution Committees of Florida and Georgia, Kiwanis Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and We the People chapters.

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).



Hurricane damage can devastate a neighborhood and its residents.

## Does your neighborhood or condo association have an emergency plan?

A new hurricane season is around the corner. Is your condo or HOA ready? If it hasn't already done so, your association needs to prepare an emergency or disaster plan for dealing with hurricanes. Start by creating an emergency plan for association owned facilities and then follow up with checklists for individual unit or homeowners to follow.

- Identify which speakers or experts can work with or speak to the association on the subject of preparing for hurricanes.
- What must be done to secure the association's property, and who will be responsible for those tasks before the storm?
- Create a checklist telling residents how to handle an emergency in the building or in their unit, (where fire extinguishers are located, where electric panels are and how to turn off power in their unit, and where water or gas lines are and how to shut off such services to their unit).

Association Hurricane Plan *continued on page 2*

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**Has your neighborhood joined CONA?** Costs \$35 per year. Go to CONA's website for info on

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

Email: [conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net)



## I am not psychic, but growth machine still threatens Sarasota County

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

Recently I put together a scrap book of published articles I've written over the past eight years warning about the growth and environmental policies in Sarasota County and the State of Florida. Without exception, every one of those dire predictions has come true.

No, I am *not* psychic or a genius! I simply come from Florida's future having lived in coastal California for 20 years before moving to Sarasota. Using only my five senses I learned firsthand what happens to the economy and the environment when common sense is not applied to the equation and when "profit at any cost" is in charge. When the decision makers don't consider the *really big picture*, life gets out of balance and destruction follows inevitably. And you don't need to have lived somewhere else to "know" the outcome of this irresponsible, selfish behavior. All you have to do is keep an open mind and be willing to learn from others' mistakes. The handwriting is all over the walls of our information system.

When I arrived in Sarasota in 2000 from Laguna Beach, California, I missed the mountains and the views they create. But I soon came to greatly appreciate the vegetation and nature that was still abundant here (in contrast to California), the glorious waterways and the less crowded conditions (density and traffic). This more than made up for the views I had enjoyed in California!

A few months after arriving in Sarasota I became aware of the rush to develop every square inch of land at any cost. I was so disappointed, angry and motivated to stop the insanity that I had witnessed in California before Sarasota County was similarly destroyed. I tried to "educate" the public and the local government about the precious resources here that many were taking for granted (you don't know what you've got till it's gone) but I was dismissed as a newcomer. At one public hearing I was even told by an official that I should go back to California!

Well, as you know I was not discouraged from civic activism and have worked diligently ever since to protect what I can of our quality of life. However, we have fallen prey to all of the predictable results of our greed and ignorance. I've talked about the past here to establish my credibility in discussing the future.

Kaplan, continued next column



Do we really want Sarasota County to look like Broward County (above) in the future?

Kaplan (*continued from left column*)

Some of you may believe or hope that if we hang in there for a few years, we can get the economy here back to business as usual. However, please believe me this time when I tell you that is *not* going to happen! The growth machine is on life support and will continue to suck the life out of us *if* we let it. The big difference between California and Florida is that California was and is not dependent on two industries to support its economy or they would be in even worse shape as their growth machine collapsed.

We cannot stimulate our economy by creating development and construction projects because we have such an *excess inventory* of housing, office and commercial space that prices will be kept artificially low until the inventory is reduced to healthy levels. The artificially *low prices* keep us trapped in our current homes so we can't seek better employment elsewhere or sell our homes unless we're forced to at a loss which does not stimulate the economy. We won't stimulate the economy by creating just more *minimum wage jobs* by building roads and infrastructure that feed the parasitic growth machine.

One of the only ways we can stimulate our economy now is by attracting healthy (non-growth related) corporations to build headquarters in Sarasota County. This can provide middle to upper income jobs and tax revenue. Sustainable energy technology, agriculture and service companies are good examples of industries with a future. I have been told that the conditions here are not conducive to recruiting new industry. Well, that's because we have to *create* the right conditions/incentives and one of them is already in place--affordable housing. The other conditions must be created or approved by our elected officials.

Let us take control of our present and future by facing the hard facts of reality and making the effort to change the way we do business so we can survive and then thrive again in a healthy, sustainable lifestyle. I do NOT want to say "I told you so" again in another 8 years. We can start to face the future head-on by reading the new book—"Paving Paradise" by Pittman and Waite.



## Community Thoughts.... By Bill Zoller Time to get green or not is now

As "things" have become serious, it's time for us to get serious as well. The new reality of Florida as a slow-growth state is beginning to sink in. The past head of the Orlando Metro Homebuilders Association aptly summarizes Florida's boom or bust History:

Long ago the state of Florida implemented a low-taxation structure in an effort to attract capital... We constitutionally banned a state income tax at this time to demonstrate to the world this fact.

This model was further exemplified when Walt Disney was granted his own "municipal status" for what is now Disney World. Florida wanted capital investment — that is, growth. This model formed one of the two granite boulders under our taxation structure. The more growth, the more jobs, the more tax revenues to state and local governments. The second granite boulder was tourism. Attract tourists, and they spend. Tax hotels, build airports, increase sales taxes. Tourism supplemented the existing inexpensive tax base, and everything worked. About 15 years ago, things changed. Growth was excessive. Every effort was made to manage it, stall it, delay it, tax it, and fee it to death. The process to produce housing became hostage to every conceivable school board, county commission and newspaper. Now growth has, in fact, stopped. And in many parts of the state, the population is declining. Florida must now debate and decide the taxation model that will effectively move this state into the next century. Certainly, the debate regarding growth is finished. We want it managed, clean, and green.

Yet, what are we hearing from the local development community here? They are asking for impact fees to be lowered so they can build more houses. Has it not sunk in that we have more houses, in every price range, than there are people to occupy them? So we should lower impact fees so they can build more houses to stand empty and force the value of our existing housing even lower, yet require infrastructure nonetheless? This strikes me as desperation on the part of people who have only one fixed idea as to what they can do, and they want to keep doing it, although it will only exacerbate the existing situation.

*Zoller continued next column*



Hurricanes *continued from p 1*

- Prepare a list that includes emergency contact information for 24-hour plumbers, electricians, and your property management company.

*Resources to help in your planning:*

*FEMA's website tells what to do before, during and after a hurricane:*

[www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/index.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/hazard/hurricane/index.shtm)

Florida's Emergency Preparedness Center offers a host of useful information about what to do and when a hurricane or other disaster occurs:

[www.floridadisaster.org/bpr/EMTOOLS/Severe/hurricanes.htm](http://www.floridadisaster.org/bpr/EMTOOLS/Severe/hurricanes.htm)

*Sarasota County's Emergency Preparedness site offers specific local information on flood zones, evacuation areas, shelter sites, etc.:*

[www.scgov.net/EmergencyServices/HurricanePrep/hurricaneprep.asp](http://www.scgov.net/EmergencyServices/HurricanePrep/hurricaneprep.asp)

*Zoller, continued*

As recent articles in the local papers have pointed out, Florida has become a slow-growth state, and it is expected to remain that way for years into the future. Now is when we need to get serious about how our area is going to maintain itself and not allow decay to creep in. Now is when we need to re-order our priorities and to figure out how we can, possibly, catch up our infrastructure to acceptable levels for the growth that created an infrastructure deficit here. Now is when our local governments need to bring their best ideas to bear on, at least, maintaining what we have, and at best, on improving it. Our governments can no longer count on the tremendous revenue streams that our own Ponzi Scheme brought in year after year.

Those who are holding on to the notion that if they just wait a year or two, "things will return to normal", need to quit kidding themselves. Not only does this community not want to go back to the days of untrammled, irresponsible "growth", but the demand for houses and commercial development will not return to anywhere near those go-go levels. Florida's history has long been one of boom and bust... that pattern has been one of our major problems. Now is the time for us to get our house in order and to focus on a sustainable economy for our community. Agriculture, anyone?

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).

## Should developer PACS decide Sarasota city elections?

If you live in the City of Sarasota you really ought to vote in the March 10 election. In previous issues we've reported on attempts by real estate-developer interests to change the basic structure of Sarasota City Government by disenfranchising neighborhoods and minorities through a political action committee supporting an amendment to the city charter called "Elected Mayor Now." CONA's board unanimously voted to oppose this fundamental change in city government because of its adverse impact on neighborhoods in future elections and the advantages the new proposal gives to big money, developer backed candidates.

Now another developer PAC has weighed in with attacks on a candidate for city commission. In the supposedly nonpartisan city council elections, a PAC run by developers-contractors Fred Derr and Donald McDonough has attacked candidate Terry Turner by claiming that Turner, a successful businessman, economist and civic leader has donated to Democratic candidates in the past and that Turner has lost touch with average voters. These attacks on Turner, who is endorsed by the Sarasota Sierra Club, comes from a PAC with contributions almost exclusively from wealthy developers and real estate interests. CONA does not endorse individual candidates. We do, however, suggest that city residents carefully consider who is attacking and who is supporting Turner and weigh that information when they vote on March 10.

### REASONS TO JOIN CONA

1. Receive CONA support when your neighborhood is threatened by incompatible development.
2. Network with other associations and solve problems through CONA.
3. Give your association a county-wide voice.
4. Hear, meet and question candidates for public office at CONA
5. Attend interesting, informative monthly CONA membership meetings.

### Joining or renewing your CONA membership is simple

Just Go to our [CONA website](http://www.conasarasota.org) and download membership form [www.conasarasota.org](http://www.conasarasota.org)



County official advises homeowners on ways to prevent loss of their homes through wildfire as pictures above

## Protecting your neighborhood and house from wildfires

Many CONA member neighborhoods are in areas subject to wildfires, especially during the current drought. Each year many homes are destroyed by Florida wildfires. Lightning, burning debris or carelessness start wildfires. Sarasota County Fire Chief Brian Gorski warns that "lack of concern and lack of fire safety measures can be disastrous. Most Florida wildfires are caused by lightning strikes. Arson and carelessly discarded cigarette butts are also a big problem." Here are some of the measures Gorski suggests to protect your home and neighborhood:

- Define your *defensible space*, a minimum of 30-foot non-combustible area around your house that reduces the intensity and risk of a wildfire from starting or spreading to your home.
- During a large-scale fire, when many homes are at risk, firefighters must focus on homes they can safely defend.
- *Clear flammable vegetation and debris* by 30 feet and install heat resistant soffit vents.
- Store firewood, propane, or gasoline as far from the house as possible.
- *Clean gutters and roof of leaf litter* and pine needles.
- *Keep a clear space of at least 2-3 feet* from the side of the house when planting landscaping.

During times of limited visibility due to wildfires, travelers can get up-to-the-minute reports on major evacuation routes, bridge and road closures, and roadways with toll suspensions by calling 511 or by visiting [www.FL511.com](http://www.FL511.com). Residents can also visit [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net) and click on the All Hazards button to obtain more information about wildfires. They can also contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 to ask for more information.

### CONA

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