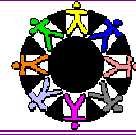


CONA COMMENTS



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

WWW.CONASARASOTA.ORG

President: Ann Kaplan

Editor: Bill Earl

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Burrus and Ramirez nominated for CONA Board, to be voted on at December meeting

Lourdes Ramirez, President of CONA member Siesta Key Association, and Bob Burrus, President of CONA member Sorrento Ranches HOA, have been nominated to become members of CONA's Board of Directors. Burrus has years of neighborhood leadership experience and has appeared before both the Venice City Council and the County Commission as an advocate of neighborhood issues and the need for new development to be compatible with the character of existing neighborhoods. Lourdes Ramirez, representing thousands of Siesta Key Residents, has made herself an expert on local land use and land use planning issues before the county commission.

In announcing the nominees, CONA President Ann Kaplan said, "both Lourdes and Bob bring valuable neighborhood leadership experience and in-depth knowledge of county and city government that will enhance CONA's ability to work with and help protect Sarasota County's neighborhood and condo associations and groups."



CONA December 14 board election and holiday meeting will honor member associations and leaders

Association presidents, CONA delegates to be honored at meeting

December 14th 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 2010 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 2010. We look forward to seeing as many neighborhood leaders as possible at this meeting.

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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

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Sarasota County losing its green?

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

A few weeks ago the Board of County Commissioners voted NOT to adopt an ordinance designed to protect "Baby Grand Trees" (large shade trees that could grow into "Grand Trees" which ARE currently protected). Several years ago the Commissioners directed their volunteer Tree Advisory Council and county staff to develop this ordinance because large canopy trees on private property were not protected until they reached the rare size to qualify for "Grand Tree" status.

The tree council and forestry staff members worked on this project for 2 years, holding several public workshops during the process. After fine-tuning the language and responding to public input, it was ready to present to the Commissioners for adoption as an ordinance.

At the last minute some business/development special interests overwhelmed the five Commissioners with an attack on the ordinance based on protecting personal property rights. Most of those who opposed the ordinance began their testimony with how much they loved trees BUT.... They even prepared a biased analysis as to why this was a bad ordinance and most of the BCC (except Jon Thaxton) took the bait! The discussion between the BCC and the "opponents" reminded me of the current oil drilling propaganda where special interests are creating all kinds of confusion and fear through misinformation, which is what I said to them on behalf of CONA at the hearing.

Instead of sending the ordinance back to the committee to make some adjustments, four of the five Commissioners voted to permanently kill the "Baby Grand Tree" ordinance, as demanded by the developer/business interests (They are even talking about weakening the current "Grand Tree" protection ordinance to satisfy the whims of the developers!). The Chair of the Tree Advisory Council said that when he spoke to all five Commissioners several weeks before the vote, they were all supporting the proposed ordinance. Then the "opposition" came out of the blue, mounted their swift and deadly campaign and everything changed! You may wonder what happened and why this became such an issue for some developers when the ordinance was primarily designed to protect large trees on individual lots that are already developed.

Continued next column



Is Sarasota County failing to protect younger trees that could become grand trees such as shown above?

Kaplan, Green County? continued

I, too, wondered about this as it was "much ado about nothing". However, when you realize how bad the building business is now because of over-building, greed and speculation, the developer interests feel a need to flex their muscles just to prove that they still have clout with County Commissioners even if it's not about an issue that really matters to them! But for 4 of the County Commissioners to fall for this obvious ploy greatly disappoints and concerns me. They are much smarter than that and we must hold them to their promises to protect the best interest of the MAJORITY of their constituents not the pocketbooks or egos of the special interest minority.

Board to consider recommending new mission statement, other bylaw changes

At its December meeting CONA's Board of Directors will consider several changes to CONA's bylaws, including a new mission statement. The bylaws with all proposed revisions may be viewed by members at CONA's website by going to the members' page and logging in. The proposed new mission statement reads as follows:

PROPOSED NEW CONA MISSION STATEMENT

CONA exists to: (1) further the overall interests and provide a voice for homeowner and condominium associations and neighborhood groups throughout Sarasota County, Florida; (2) provide practical association-related information to and encourage networking between member associations on common concerns and issues; (3) urge local and state government to encourage smart growth and protect existing neighborhoods from incompatible development, adverse environmental impacts and other actions adverse to Sarasota County's neighborhoods and the overall public interest.



Community Thoughts.... By Bill Zoller

Values and Revenues

The magic date of 1 January 2010 is almost upon us. What is so special about this date, other than it is New Year's Day? It is the date that our Property Appraiser, Bill Furst, must, by law, set the value of all the real estate in the county (including all the incorporated cities). No matter what might happen to real estate values over the year, 2010's values, for tax purposes, will have been set on 1 January. Absent another miracle over the month of December, this means that property values for 2010 will be less than the values in 2009. Housing is still in the dump, and commercial real estate is also suffering mightily.

This does not portend well for County and city finances. Over the past year, the County has had to use its reserves to make ends meet, and it has also had to reduce its workforce and to reduce some services. Another year of reduced revenues will eat up more of the reserves and may bring further cuts in workforce and/or services. By law, the County cannot operate at a deficit. Somehow, the County (and the cities) must balance their budgets. If you attended the recent CONA meeting at which Bill Furst spoke, you will remember that he explained that, as an elected official, independent of the county commission, it is his job simply to establish the value of every piece of real estate in the County. It is not his job to establish the tax rate, budget, or anything else. You may also remember that Furst ran on a platform of valuing property at the lowest value he could justify, instead of a higher value, and this message seemed to resonate with the voters. In other words, he has no obligation to establish higher values in order to "help the County with its budget".

Sole responsibility for establishing the budgets of the County and of the cities lies with the commissions of those entities. They take the property values established by the Appraiser, determine how much revenue will be produced (usually at the same tax rate as the previous year as a starting point), and then figure out how it is all going to work. With a potential decline in revenues and with a reduced reserve account, this will mean that the county commission will have to face, once again, the question of whether the tax rate might have to be increased. In an election year, this is, of course, a dreaded possibility! In any event, you can bet that this is going to be a difficult year for our county and city commissions come budget time.

Continued next column



Appraisals for real estate are based on January 1 values. Will the taxable value of your home go up or down next year?

Zoller , Values & Revenues continued

By the time that our elected officials begin the hard work on the budgets, we may tend to forget that the property values they have to work with were established on January 1. Keep that in mind as you read stories about what is happening with property values as we move along into 2010. For our governmental budgets, the only value that counts is the value on January 1.

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



Thank you Rita Adler & John Krotec for your service to CONA, Sarasota neighborhoods and the community

Long-time CONA board member Rita Adler and businessman John Krotec have declined to run again as candidates for the CONA board membership in 2010. Rita Adler who also serves on the Sarasota Circus board and along with her husband, the late Syd Adler, was instrumental in establishing the Sarasota Hermitage Artist's Retreat.

John Krotec who, along with his wife Ann, owns and operates the Environeers store in the Fruitville Crossings Shopping Center, was also a founder of the CONA member Fruitville 2010 Neighborhood Association. Both Rita and John will be missed by all CONA members. Thanks again for you have done for the community, Rita and John.

Tips for protecting your association from fraud

"The same person shouldn't decide which invoices get paid, write the checks, and reconcile the bank account," says Robert Galvin, a partner at Davis, Malm & D'Agostine PC in Boston who specializes in representing condos and co-ops. "It's very important that those duties be split up. In addition, there are various ways people steal, but one of the most popular ways is the fictitious payee. A dishonest manager will make out a check to John's Landscaping Service that looks legitimate. The check is then sent to a P.O. box actually controlled to the dishonest manager. So be very careful that you look at each check so that there's an actual invoice attached to it so you can tell it's not being sent to a phony payee."

Also store blank and unused checks in a secure location, and require that at least one person--or two in a more secure arrangement--signs checks. Employees who sign checks should always stamp or indicate in another obvious way on an original invoice that it has been paid. Finally, ask your bank to deliver duplicate statements to several different employees.

To get five additional ways to prevent embezzlement at your HOA or condo association, see the entire article at The Homeowner Association Leader: <http://www.hoaleader.com/members/360.cfm>



CONA members & neighborhood leaders

Please join us on Monday, Dec. 14 at 7:00 for our Annual CONA Holiday Party at the Sarasota Garden Club, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota.

We'll start the evening with a short membership meeting where we'll introduce all the Presidents or CONA Reps from our member associations in attendance and report on the key issues we tackled this year to benefits our members. Then we'll get on with the festive food, drink and music!

So please be there so we can get to know each other better and learn more about the issues that are most important to your neighborhood!



Happy and peaceful holidays to all

CONA had a great year in 20089, increasing Homeowner Assn. memberships and successfully supporting many of those HOAs through specific neighborhood problems. We are looking forward to 2010 when we'll again increase our numbers and put that strength to good use for the benefit of our neighborhoods 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 issue,s and meet great people with whom you have so much in common!).

Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.
P O Box 15788
Sarasota, Florida 34277
www.conasarasota.org

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

Email us at: conasarasota@comcast.net

Remember: CONA membership dues payable in January. Send your check for \$35 to P O Box 15788 Sarasota, Florida 34277