
CONA COMMENTS



SARASOTA'S ONLY COUNTY-WIDE ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

SINCE 1961

WWW.CONASARASOTA.ORG

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School property tax extension will be debated at Feb. 8 CONA meeting

Whether the optional one-mill school property tax should be extended will be decided by Sarasota County voters in a March special election called by the School Board. The proposed tax will be the topic at CONA's February 8 meeting, 7 pm at the Sarasota Garden Club at 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts). School Superintendent Lori White and Jane Goodwin, who chairs the PAC seeking renewal of the tax, will debate Rod Thomson, Editor of the Gulf Coast Business Review, and Rich Swier, prominent Republican and political blogger. The voter referendum on the proposed school tax will be held on March 16, 2010. One mill is one tenth of a cent (\$0.001). If your house has an assessed value of \$200,000.00, the proposed tax extension would cost you \$200 in taxes payable to the school district.

CONA, the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, is a county-wide coalition of over 70 neighborhood and condominium associations and individuals, organized around making Sarasota County more neighborhood friendly.

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



Whether you are for or against the proposed Sarasota School Board tax, be sure and vote in the special election on March 16th.

Upcoming elections important to Sarasota neighborhoods

By Bill Zoller

Upcoming local, state and national elections are more important this year as foreclosures mount, business failures continue and the housing market is moribund (sounds better than "dead"). Voters have a lot on their plates this year.

On the way to the state and national elections in November, we will have a series of important local elections involving taxes and membership on the county commission. In a special referendum on March 16, Sarasota County voters will decide whether to extend for another four years the optional Sarasota School District one-mill school property tax. This will be the subject of CONA's meeting on 8 February, so be sure to come learn from those on both sides of the issue.

In August, we have the primary election for two county commission seats; those for Districts two and four. The incumbent in District Two is Joe Barbetta, Republican, who is running for his second term and who, until recently, was unopposed. Stephen Aiken, also a Republican, has filed for this race, so, unless any other candidates file, the August 24 primary will determine the winner. **Zoller, continued on page 3**



CONA's Mission Statement



Do our elected officials really want to go back to the same old uneconomic overdevelopment?

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

As a neighborhood activist and environmentalist concerned with protecting, preserving and improving our quality of life by keeping 'scrape-and-pave over-development' in check, I have a very hard time understanding the mentality that has sustained this impractical, inefficient and costly method of "economic development".

As someone who relies on common sense and the general sensibility that we should be free to do as we please **as long as we harm no one else in the process**, I don't get the presumed logic of those who believe it is their right to do anything they please even if they DO harm others in the process and convince themselves that this practice is ethical. I understand that all people do not think alike, but normally there are degrees of differences, not such extremes, especially in the same culture. I also understand that some people are greedy, motivated by the need for profit at ALL cost.

What I don't get is why others (especially elected officials and those in their employ) would accept, condone or promote this behavior by giving them special exceptions to the law or just looking the other way when the best interests of the larger community are not being met! Is it possible that those who condone this behavior haven't really thought about what they're doing, haven't analyzed the big picture, are just doing things out of habit? In some cases, this is probably true, but if any of them have seriously considered all the pros and cons and do NOT stand to profit from their action, then I can't find the rationale, unless they just have an overwhelming need to please certain people!

In the meantime, some people are stuck in the past, in the habit of doing things the same way regardless of the outcome. They hope that if they can just hang in there a while longer, the local economy will return to business as usual. Well, as the Economist Sean Snaith told the Sarasota Economic Development Council last week, that is not going to happen! You know Einstein's definition of insanity- - when you do the same thing over and over, expecting different results! We need our business and govt. leaders to think creatively, to learn from others who have already solved similar problems, to get out of their comfort zone and learn about other ways of doing things. As our circumstances change, so must our ways of achieving goals but we must make sure our new methods are practical and ethical

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 sensible 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.

Kaplan, continued

There are other ways to do things. I know of at least one established employer in Sarasota County that has increased its sales and profits in 2008, 2009 and as projected for 2010. This same organization has also been hiring new employees during the same time. Their business is so healthy in this "lousy economy" because they have quickly and continually reacted to changing conditions. They have been making changes to their products, their production methods, their channels of distribution and to their marketing methods. This is a great example of how to thrive despite the market but it does require EFFECTIVE CHANGE. All of us must react and evolve our thinking as the environment changes or we will be left behind whether it is as individuals, families, businesses or whole communities. I sum up with another Einstein quote: "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Let's hope our elected officials remember this maxim as they seek to enhance economic development.

Has your neighborhood joined CONA?

- Costs only \$35 per year for neighborhood group or association.
- Personal (nonvoting) memberships are available for individuals(not organizations) for only \$20 per year.
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Go to CONA's website for membership forms and more info: www.conasarasota.org

Zoller, important elections continued

The District Four county commission race is more complicated. Incumbent Nora Patterson (Republican) faces a Republican challenger, Mark Smith, in the August primary. In November, the winner of that Republican primary will face the winner of the Democrat primary. The two Democrats running for District Four are Rasheen Davis and Mark Hawkins.

Leading up to November we will also have battles over several proposed amendments to the Florida Constitution. Amendment Four (Florida Hometown Democracy), if passed, will give voters in each city and county the final say on comprehensive plan amendments impacting growth and our quality of life. Other proposed constitutional amendments would change how state and congressional electoral districts are drawn in an effort to eliminate gerrymandering. The Amendment Four battle will be a very nasty one, but no matter what you hear about it, you should be aware that CONA's Board voted unanimously to support Amendment Four. The reasoning behind this decision is that Amendment Four will better protect our neighborhoods and home values from reoccurrence of speculative overdevelopment and excessive home building and flipping, as well as giving citizens the final decision on how and where their community grows in the future.

The idea of drilling for oil within the near-shore Florida waters (up to ten+ miles along the coasts) has not gone away, and it will take an effort on the part of citizens to convince our legislators that it is a very, very bad idea. CONA's board has also voted to oppose oil drilling in near-shore waters.

So the fun is about to begin! For each of us, it means we need to pay attention to the platforms and statements these candidates make as they campaign, because the make-up of our county commission is crucial to what the end decisions about land use, growth, traffic, environment, etc. they determine for the quality of our community.

And if that were not enough, we will also have state and federal offices up for grabs. As the Massachusetts election has shown, every seat in the House or Senate is crucially important to what will happen in Washington and the country over the next several years. We live in tumultuous times, like it or not. The participation of each of us is meaningful. It is incumbent upon us to pay attention, learn about the candidates, and vote our beliefs. Lots of decisions... so think hard and do your best!

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



Citizen Advisory From Sheriff Tom Knight

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is warning citizens about telephone scams being conducted in the area. Detectives received reports this week from people who were called by someone claiming to be with law enforcement that attempts to gain account numbers and other personal financial information.

Residents have also reported phone calls asking them to wire money out of state, usually to Canada but also Chicago, to help a relative in trouble. Sheriff Tom Knight encourages residents to just hang up on these types of calls. "These scammers are crafty and convincing. But as nice as they sound, they are criminals trying to separate you from your hard earned money."

Bee Ridge Neighborhood Association gets a website and a neighborhood patrol

CONA member Bee Ridge Neighborhood Association has launched a website and is in training to start a neighborhood patrol. The neighborhood encompasses the area of Bee Ridge Road to Proctor Road and Swift Road to the Bee Ridge Park. Lane Gillette is the Association President, Cheri Potts is New Membership and Recorder Chair and Adam W. Warner is their Web Developer. Visit their website: www.beeridgeneighbors.org to learn more.

The neighborhood is mostly residential with commercial properties on the outskirts.

The Association is geared toward keeping this neighborhood both a great place to live and a great place to raise children. The neighborhood goals are to deter crime, keep Bee Ridge Park a safe haven for children, help the who are in need, when feasible hire people within our community, and hold community events where everyone can interact in a positive and friendly way. Sounds like a great place to live! Keep up the good work Bee Ridgers.



Oil spill closes another beach.

Help stop oil drilling off Sarasota's beaches, join "Hands Across the Sand" on Feb 13

By Gerry Swarmstedt

The proposal to drill for oil, close to our shores is still floating around Tallahassee .Don't like the idea or the possibility of oil drilling near our beaches? Join other like minded citizens at a beach protest on February 13th at 1 pm Siesta Beach near the volley ball nets and show our strength and conviction against drilling for oil in our beautiful waters.

So, join hands with like minded people. Wear BLACK, to symbolize the oil that will surely wash up on our beaches if they drill and the death of a bad idea!

For more information, or questions, contact Don Kirkley, 493-3085 or Renee Moss, 232-2029 or go the web, www.handsacrossthesand.org

Manatee commissioner endorses Florida Hometown Democracy's Amendment Four to give citizens a vote on future growth.

At a rally last week in Bradenton, Manatee County Commissioner Joe McClash said voter approval of Proposed Amendment Four to the Florida Constitution this November would provide a needed check on the influence of developers who try to sway elections with contributions to favored candidates

At the rally, McClash said "As a county commissioner for a number of years now, I have seen the influence of special interest groups, primarily developers who have spent a lot of money to get certain people elected in this community. Unfortunately, with that (developer donations)comes sometimes expectations to pay back that contribution in the form of votes for changing comprehensive plans, which is a very sacred thing in our county."



County commissioners acted to reject zoning changes at CONA member Gulf Gate association.

County commissioners reject rezone of Gulf Gate golf course

On January 15 Sarasota county commissioners unanimously voted to reject a request to increase zoning density by 700% on the golf course at the heart of CONA member Gulf Gate Neighborhood. Gulf Gate President Jim Muir led the opposition. With help from CONA President Ann Kaplan , Gulf Gate residents packed the commission chambers and convinced county commissioners to protect their long established neighborhood.

CONA member, Gulf Gate Community Association opposed the owner's request that the county commissioners change established zoning from 1 unit /2 acres to 3.5 units/acre. This would have adversely impacted the character of Gulf Gate/Gulf Gate Woods, a residential community of 1,550 homes..In a letter to county commissioners, CONA had urged commissioners to deny the request.

This long established neighborhood is exemplified by well kept homes on large lots surrounded by an abundance of green space which has made it a sought-after area since the mid-1960's. Thanks to our county commissioners for keeping it that way. To learn more about the Gulf Gate Association visit their website: www.ggca.us

Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.

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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.

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