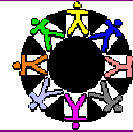


# CONA COMMENTS



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

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

President: Ann Kaplan

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## Attorney Dan Lobeck speaks on 2009 HOA and condo association law changes and weakened growth controls at June 8 CONA meeting

Sarasota attorney Dan Lobeck will speak about recent changes in condo and HOA law at CONA's June 8, 2009 meeting at 7 pm, at the Sarasota Garden Club, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota (Corner of US 41 and Blvd of the Arts). Lobeck will also address important proposed changes in growth management law impacting all Sarasota County residents.

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. Members of the public and the media, as well as CONA members are invited to attend and ask questions.

**No CONA meetings or newsletters in July or August. See you in September.**



## Be heard on neighborhood issues

### CONA wants your association's input on county-wide neighborhood issues

One neighborhood association has a hard time "fighting city hall," but 70 associations working together through a coalition such as CONA are hard to ignore. One of the major benefits of CONA membership for your association is the leverage which comes with joining together with many other neighborhoods across Sarasota County. But, to be effective, CONA needs to know the most important issues facing each of its member associations.

That's why CONA President Ann Kaplan is asking CONA members and newsletter readers to let her know the top five issues facing your condo or neighborhood association. Please bring this up at your next association meeting and ask your membership or board to rank the five most important issues facing their association. Then send them in to CONA before September 1st so that they can be compiled and presented to CONA's board for future CONA actions, meetings, and speakers addressing the most important neighborhood issues of county wide interest. Please send your top five issues to [conasarasota@comcast.net](mailto:conasarasota@comcast.net) We look forward to hearing from you.

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Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.



## It's EASY and SMART to Start a Neighborhood Watch

By CONA President Ann Kaplan

As many of you know, I represent the Siesta Key Association in CONA but live in an un-gated neighborhood with no formal homeowners' association. We've been experiencing more than the usual petty crime since the economy slowed down. In fact, a woman was attacked and raped right near our neighborhood recently, in a locked condo building. We have found homeless people living in vacant houses, robbery of personal property, repeated vandalism, illegal rentals with wild parties and a disregard for neighborhood safety by many who speed and run stop signs.

With the downturn in the economy, there are big budget cuts for law enforcement so we have an even bigger problem -- more crime and less protection.

So we have taken the bull by the horns and started the Neighborhood Citizen Patrol with the help of Sarasota County Sheriff's Sgt. Neil Scully (861-5800). He is in charge of this program and there are 81 other neighborhoods participating. We had our first meeting with Sgt. Scully two weeks ago and our operation is already up and running!

The Citizens Patrol program has emerged as a most effective approach to residential safety awareness and involvement. By its visibility in specially marked vehicles, the patrol serves as a strong deterrent against the unlawful actions of potential criminals. The volunteers act as eyes and ears only for the Sheriff's dept. and do NOT ever get directly involved in any incidents. While the presence of the motorized Citizen Patrol on the streets is an important part of the program, the ongoing vigilance of all the neighbors contributes greatly to its success. Young and old, snowbirds and full time residents, able bodied and handicapped -- all of us can contribute to the safety of our residents because there are so many ways to participate.

Another helpful hint: if you see people speeding, running red lights or stop signs, driving unsafely, etc. you can phone 365-TAGS and anonymously report the incident. You need to report the location, incident and license plate number. That will generate a warning letter from the Sheriff to the owner of the vehicle telling them that they were observed breaking the law in a certain manner. Sgt. Scully tells us that it is very helpful in changing behavior as most people who receive the letters say they weren't aware that their kids (or they, themselves) were doing these things. Repeated reports to 365-TAGS about the same vehicle will result in more serious action by the Sheriff's Dept.

*Continued top next column*

## Kaplan Neighborhood Watch *continued*

When times are tough, we need to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and do what it takes to get what we need (a quote from my father and probably, yours). However, that does NOT mean that we let our civil servants off the hook! We need to continue to make sure they are doing their job for us in the most efficient manner and to speak up frequently and loudly to tell them our needs and when they are not being satisfied.



## Florida Neighborhoods Conference in St. Pete July 9 to 11

Participants can attend workshops, tours and exhibits focusing on subjects such as neighborhood improvements, leadership training, citizen engagement, neighborhood legal issues, partnerships and more. Subject matter experts from across the state will provide advice on many subjects including foreclosures and how neighborhoods can take advantage of the state's new Neighborhood Stabilization Program, controlling traffic through neighborhoods, crime prevention, conservation and sustainability, and connecting with local governments.

**Date:** July 9-11, 2009

**Location:** St. Petersburg Bayfront Hilton

**Transportation:** A FREE shuttle bus is being offered through Sarasota County, Manatee County, City of Sarasota and SCOPE for July 10 and 11 only. Limited seats available. Sarasota County residents, please email [tmast@scgov.net](mailto:tmast@scgov.net) or call 861-5415 for shuttle registration. Or more information.

## Kaplan appointed to County's Environmental Task Force

On May 27th, Sarasota County Commissioners appointed CONA President Ann Kaplan to the Sarasota County Environmental Task Force. The purpose of this Task Force is to advise the Commission in translating the environmental data into policy.

The predecessor committee was dominated by developer representatives and did not comply with open government requirements. The newly appointed Task Force is now operating in accordance with Florida's Sunshine Law, Public Records Laws and the Code of Ethics.



Community Thoughts.... By Bill Zoller

## Citizens Have Work To Do

In the past few years, we have had to react to seemingly non-stop threats to our neighborhoods from land use changes that could cause compatibility problems, traffic concerns, and environmental stresses. It seemed as though rezonings and comprehensive plan changes were the "order of the day", and we had to scramble to organize to oppose those changes that would have been detrimental to our neighborhoods or community. We were forced to be reactive, and we had little time to be proactive. Now is the time to become proactive!

The issues have not gone away, just because there may be no immediate threat looming over your neighborhood. We still have concerns about traffic, safety, resources, environment, compatibility, costs of government (taxes) and....? That question mark is for you to help us with. What better time to work on issues of concern to our neighborhoods than during this hiatus caused by the collapse of the real estate industry? How can we use this hiatus most effectively?

We know that folks like Senator Mike Bennett (himself a developer), are working to use this collapse as justification to gut our growth-management laws and regulations. Sarasota County wisely refused to do away with impact fees as had been requested by developers in order to stimulate the building of more homes. After all, when the market is glutted with unsold homes, what possible reason could there be to build even more? This same "stimulus" logic is now being pushed by forces in the state legislature, and our hopes that Governor Crist would veto the most egregious examples (such as Sen. Bennett's bill, SB 360) were dashed when Crist instead signed SB 360. Crist is now running for the US Senate, and my cynical side tells me that he is now on the dole for political contributions ...which seem to come, in great measure, from special interests.

A recent story in the *St. Pete Times* makes it clear that developers are feverishly seeking permitting for over 600,000 new homes and millions of square feet of commercial buildings! Perhaps this is out of fear that the Florida Hometown Democracy constitutional amendment will make it to the state ballot in 2010. If this constitutional amendment is ratified by 60% of those voting, it will require that all amendments to any comprehensive plan be approved by a referendum. This proposed amendment is being fought tooth and nail by the development community,

## County commissioners get it right on Honore Avenue improvements

Thank you county commissioners for not clear cutting Honore Avenue between Palmer Blvd. and Fruitville Road. Original plans from county staff called for clear cutting over 600 trees along the route and making a concrete corridor between several miles of neighborhoods along Honore. Thanks to BCC intervention the improved Honore will create a neighborhood friendly, park like area where residents can walk safely while cars will navigate pleasant roundabouts and curves.

**Something for everyone!**, is an initiative of Sarasota County government to inform the public of the many great events, activities and things to do for free or at little cost, here in your community. Summer is here, and so are hundreds of opportunities to have fun in the sun! Check out the calendar of events at <http://www.sarasotafl.org>. With so many events to choose from, you are sure to find something to enjoy!

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### *Zoller, continued*

and if it makes it to the ballot, we can expect an extraordinary battle to ensue. It won't be pretty! Still, as CSG proved with its charter amendments here in Sarasota, citizens' votes can be more powerful than special interest money.

There is a lot of work to do. We must determine the major issues on which we need to focus. We need to strengthen our neighborhood organizations. We need to expand our means of communication with our neighborhoods, so that we can keep you informed as we initiate efforts. We need your help and your commitment to be part of the ongoing work of protecting and enhancing the aspects we love about Florida. Much of our work will be focused on our local jurisdictions, but as Mike Bennett's bill shows us, we cannot ignore what is happening at the State level. We need to find and support good candidates for local **and** State office. A bad piece of legislation enacted in Tallahassee can undo or block our best efforts locally. I guess there is no rest for the weary, but the effort is necessary. If we sit by, we will lose; simple as that. We hear a lot about voter apathy, low turnouts, etc., but if we can keep our side energized, we can turn voter apathy to our advantage. Motivated voters in a low turnout election can win the day! Please join the effort. Each of you can be critically important to making certain that we accomplish good things for our community.



While complaining of economic downturn, developers plan and spend money on massive new developments.



Sarasota road contractor Fred Derr runs a developer PAC which attacks smart growth candidates.

## Florida Builders Poised to Pounce

By Kris Hundley, St. Pete Times. Friday, April 17, 2009  
Excerpts from [www.tampabay.com](http://www.tampabay.com).

"TALLAHASSEE - A development boom is brewing under the radar of Floridians distracted by deteriorating real estate values and record foreclosures.

The state is processing an unprecedented number of proposals for new homes and commercial development. If approved, these projects could pump more than 600,000 rooftops onto a market suffering from a surplus of product and slowdown in population growth.

"Also on developers' wish lists: the right to build a half-billion square feet of nonresidential space. Such pipe dreams might seem laughable in today's depressed economy and moribund housing market. But property owners ... are spinning plans that have the potential to unlock hundreds of thousands of agricultural and environmentally sensitive acres to ... development over the coming decades.

"Mike McDaniel, a planner at the state's Department of Community Affairs for 22 years, finds the surge stunning.

'Instinctively, most people would think there would be a slowdown,' he said. 'And it may be true at the other end, where the developers apply for the permit (to build). But there's been no letup here. It's a gold rush.'

"McDaniel said landowners, eager to turn dirt into money, are behind the push for a record number of new planned communities. Regardless of whether these mega-projects become reality, the owners stand to win.

'They want to get the land use change, strike it rich, then move off to where there are not a lot of people,' he said.

But where will that leave Florida?"

Excerpts from [www.tampabay.com](http://www.tampabay.com). Go there to read entire article

## Sarasota city commissioners open up noncompetitive city deal with contractor operating attack PAC

Road contractor Fred Derr is one of the folks who is used to electing politicians favorable to fast growth. He's also an officer and big contributor to a developer funded political action committee or PAC called "Citizens for a Better Sarasota." Derr's PAC used attack ads in an unsuccessful effort to stop the election of smart growth candidates in city and county elections. These were aimed at Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta and newly elected Sarasota City Commissioner Terry Turner. Derr's PAC also allows Mr. Derr and other heavy hitters to get around campaign limits on city and county elections.

Mr. Derr was scheduled to be given a renewal of a large City of Sarasota contract without opening it up for competitive bidding. The newly constituted Sarasota City Council voted to open up Derr's contract to give other contractors a fair chance at the business. Who says elections don't make a difference in opening up government?

## No CONA meetings or newsletters in July & August

Because many members have gone north for the summer and because we all need a break, CONA like many other individuals and organizations will take its "summer vacation" in July and August. Plan on attending our September 14, 2009 meeting.

**Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, Inc.**  
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**Get involved: Join CONA**

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