

THE SARASOTA

No. 43 — July 12, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida

PARKING METER COMEBACK?

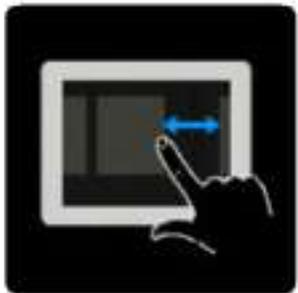
DENIED A SEAT

ONWARD

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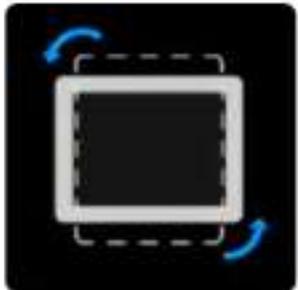
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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

New County Editor Roger Drouin had a busy breaking-in period this week, as the County Commission pushed through a gamut of business before it headed off on summer recess.

Fortunately, Roger's reporting experience with the city came in very handy, as one agenda item — the proposed sale of a parcel in downtown Sarasota — was an issue he had handled at length in the past.

Roger's debut in the *News Leader* also marks the widest range we have roamed yet for an issue — from north Sarasota County all the way down to North Port, with the City of Venice thrown into the mix.

The other news Roger tackled this week was an EMS dispute between the City of Venice and Sarasota County, along with the County Commission's decision not to put former colleague Jon Thaxton on the Planning Commission.

Cooper Levey-Baker was back on the "2050 beat," a place where he has become very much at home, as evidenced by the clarity of his explanations.

Stan Zimmerman, likewise, is the best reporter I know for making the Sarasota Community Re-development Agency discussions not only comprehensible but also enjoyable. You do not have to be a policy wonk to appreciate his latest CRA story this week.

As for Siesta Key: A bit of laughter in the County Commission Chambers Wednesday reflected board members' relief that six years of legal action between the county and Siesta businessman Chris Brown was over at last. That was not the only Siesta topic, though. The future of outdoor merchandise displays in Siesta Village and island trolleys also had board airings.

I encourage you not to rush through this issue.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher





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PARKING METER COMEBACK?

Burns Court property owners are interested either in joining the Downtown Improvement District or creating a district of their own. Photo by Norman Schimmel

BURNS COURT IS LOOKING TO JOIN THE DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT AND TALK ARISES OF PARKING METERS RETURNING TO THE CITY AS A BUDGET NECESSITY

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The merchants around Burns Court are considering joining the Downtown Improvement District, an area of self-taxing property owners using the money for a variety of landscape and hardscape improvements.

The news came this week from John Moran, operations manager of the DID. He said the initiative is at an early stage, so it might entail either an

expansion of the existing DID or the creation of an entirely new one.

Moran added that Sharon Katzman, owner of IOPTICS Eyewear in Burns Court, is trying to round up support for the idea. She has enlisted former City Commissioner Ken Shelin to help. Shelin was on the commission when the current DID was founded.

“*The manufacturer of those famous meters has found a way to refurbish them. ... We can't return them, and nobody else wants them.*”

Eileen Hampshire
Board Member
Downtown Improvement District





Parking meter stumps were removed a while after the other equipment was taken away in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

There are two ways to establish a self-taxing improvement district. The St. Armands Business Improvement District was created by petition and referendum. The downtown Sarasota DID was created by the Sarasota City Commission through an ordinance.

Moran had pulled together some information to help Katzman, including the property tax values of the area under consideration. He said the tax assessor appraised the property at \$57 million, so an improvement district would raise about \$114,000 annually.

Dr. Mark Kaufman, a DID board member, suggested a Burns Court organization might prefer to remain independent. "I'd think they'd want their own autonomy," he said. "They would want to spend that \$114,000 in their area, not downtown." Burns Court is a com-

mercial and business district about two blocks south and east of Main Street along Pineapple Avenue.

THE RETURN OF PARKING METERS?

Parking was a hot topic this week. At their Monday, July 8, budget workshop, the city commissioners were informed the Parking Department would need a "subsidy" of half a million dollars next year to stay afloat. And this year, the department is using nearly as much to plug a funding hole.

Since the city commissioners reversed themselves a couple of years ago and ordered parking meters removed from downtown Sarasota, there has been precious little revenue from tickets to pay for salaries, signs, vehicles and parking garage maintenance — all part of the Parking Department budget.



Louie's Modern opened in the ground floor of the Palm Avenue parking garage in April. Photo by Norman Schimmel

At the Tuesday morning, July 9, DID meeting, board member Eileen Hampshire raised the specter of the meters' return. "The manufacturer of those famous meters has found a way to refurbish them," she said. "We can't return them, and nobody else wants them."

Hampshire added that the meter maker had discovered a way to intensify the liquid-crystal display so it could be read in sunlight. The difficulty the public experienced in figuring out what the meters showed in bright light was a major complaint when the meters last were installed in the city.

"They will work," Hampshire said. "And they'll cost about \$1,000 per meter, which controls 10 spaces."

She suggested the city experiment with one of the new models. "Put it out there and we can try it out," said Hampshire.

She also sits on the city's Parking Advisory Committee, which, she says, is "making a huge effort to look at the whole thing. We are going to have to have some form of paid parking."

DID STICKS TO ITS GUNS

Normally, when city staffers tell advisory board members they are making a mistake, the figurative response is "All engines, full reverse." But when a senior planner and the downtown economic development director told the DID board members this week that they should revise or eliminate a recommendation about the State Street parking garage, which is in the design phase, the DID dug in its heels.

On June 25, the DID voted 4-1 (Tom Mannau-sa in the minority) to recommend to the City Commission that no more than 40 percent of the first floor of the garage structure be devoted to a restaurant. The district board members said leasing the entire ground floor of the Palm Avenue Garage to a restaurant effectively killed any retail on that block of the street. They warned a similar fate could be in store for State Street if another goliath restaurant took over the entire first floor of the new garage as well.

Ian Black, the Realtor trying to find buyers for the State Street property, and Norm Gollub, the city's downtown economic development coordinator, asked the DID to back off. "I have concerns about unnecessary restrictions on uses for the garage," said Black. "We're in serious discussion with three or four parties."

Gollub urged the use of "guidelines" instead of hard numbers. "We believe as we get into negotiations with a developer, we should be able to guide them to appropriate uses. We think guidelines are adequate enough to emphasize our preferences."

"We have a glut of restaurants now," said Hampshire. "It's starting to look like Ybor City [in Tampa]."

Kaufman agreed. "I have watched St. Armands over the years turn from high-end retail into a food court. I personally think we need restrictions [on State Street]. I would reaffirm what we did."

In the end the DID board kept its recommendation intact, and its representatives will inform the City Commission of that news at the next commission meeting — Monday, July 15. 

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, wearing a black top. She is holding a large, round sandwich with both hands. The sandwich is made with a crusty, golden-brown roll and is filled with layers of green lettuce, a slice of white onion, a slice of red tomato, and a dark, textured filling, possibly meat or a veggie patty. The background is a plain, light color.

This may take a while.

Some things are just hard to resist. Like *The Sarasota News Leader*. It's a feast of in-depth local news, delightful and entertaining features, and — thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota* — access to the best community calendar available.

The first impulse is just to gobble it all up.

But it's better to take it slow and relish every news "morsel." There's no rush.

You have a whole week.

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DENIED A SEAT

Jon Thaxton. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MICHAEL BEAUMIER AND PAUL BISPHAM ARE NAMED TO THE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION, WHILE FORMER THREE-TERM COUNTY COMMISSIONER JON THAXTON RECEIVED ONLY ONE VOTE

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

The Sarasota County Commission on Tuesday, July 9, appointed Michael Beaumier and Paul Bispham to the Planning Commission, denying the candidacy of former three-term County Commissioner Jon Thaxton.

General contractor Beaumier and sod business owner Bispham garnered five and four votes, respectively, while Thaxton

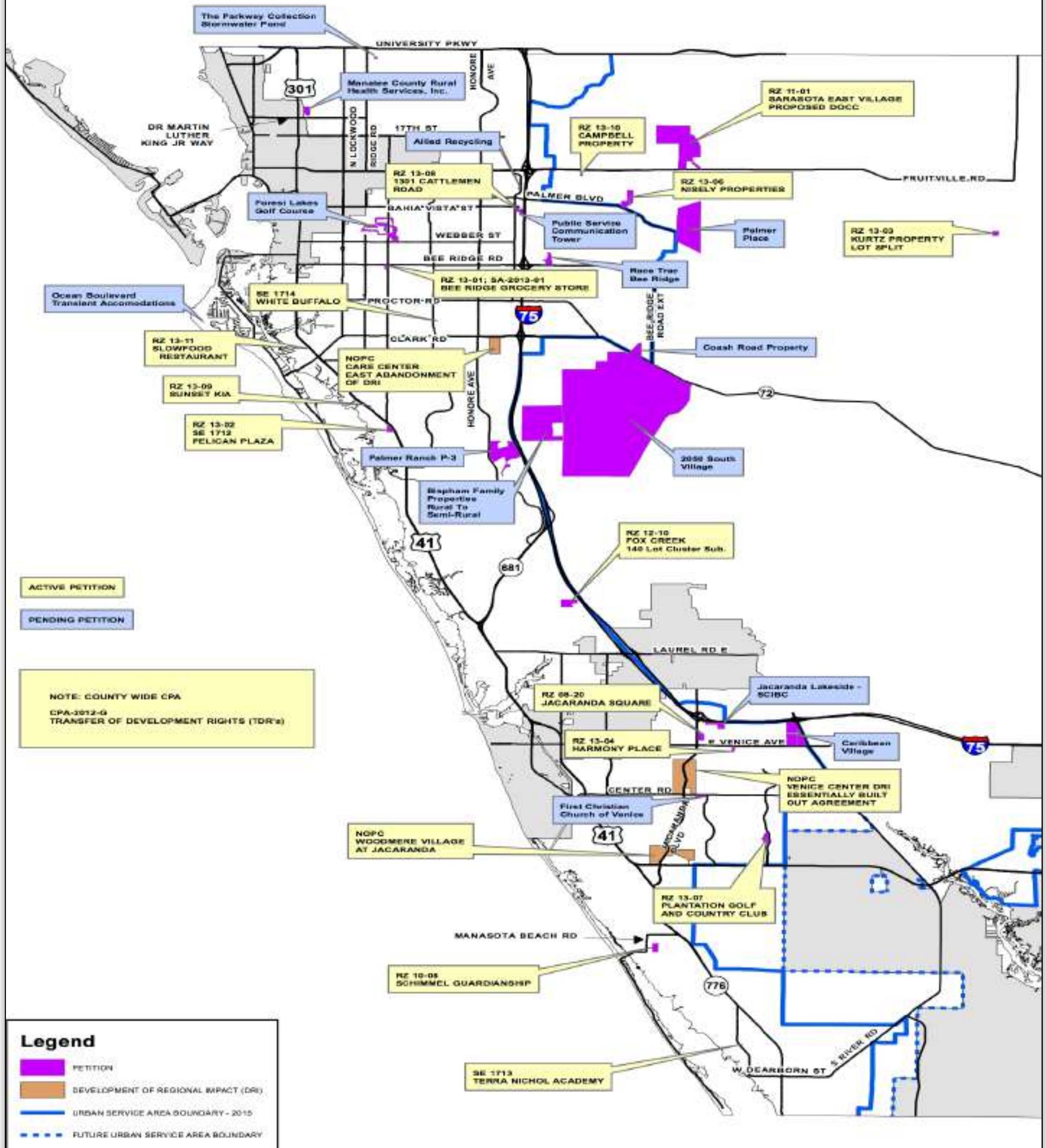
received a lone vote, cast by Commissioner Nora Patterson. Patterson subsequently asked Chairwoman Carolyn Mason to allow her to change her vote so the support for Bispham would be unanimous as well.

“*Not much surprises me anymore.*”

Jon Thaxton
Former Commissioner
Sarasota County

In August, the two new planning commissioners will fill open seats vacated by Cheryl Luehr and Roland Piccone.

PLANNING SERVICES ACTIVE OR PENDING PETITIONS - JUNE 2013



A map shows petitions for new development in Sarasota County that were active or pending as of June. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

Thaxton served on the County Commission from 2000 until 2012, when he could not seek reelection because of term limits. After he left the board, Thaxton took over as the director of community investment for the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. Thaxton said he applied for the open planning seat because he felt it would be a good voluntary opportunity for him to contribute to the county, based on his experience. In addition to his tenure on the County Commission, Thaxton also served on the Planning Commission from 1996 to 2000.

“It is an area I have a great deal of expertise and knowledge in, and a person likes to contribute where they think they will be most helpful,” Thaxton said in an interview with *The Sarasota News-Leader* after Tuesday’s vote. “I won’t throw my hat in the ring as swimming pool inspector.”

He was not surprised, however, by the County Commission’s decision. “Not much surprises me anymore,” Thaxton said.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta was the first to nominate Beaumier, a general contractor with the Mills-Gilbane construction company. Commissioner Christine Robinson also nominated Beaumier, along with Bispham, the owner of Bayside Sod and Stockyard Feed Store in Sarasota.

Thaxton was nearly overlooked by the commissioners, three of whom had served previously with him. Patterson then spoke into a microphone — which was not turned on — to name Thaxton as the third nominee.

The vote marks the second, recent public office defeat for Thaxton, 54. He lost his prima-



Sarasota County Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson consider an agenda matter in March. File photo

ry election bid for supervisor of elections in August.

The former commissioner said he plans to keep busy at his job with the Gulf Coast Community Foundation helping working homeless families find housing and homeless people find jobs.

While serving on the County Commission, Thaxton, an environmentalist, managed to combine his environmental focus with a pro-business mindset, winning a juxtaposition of awards such as recognition from the Coalition of Business Associations and a Lifetime Achievement award from the Venice Audubon Society.

In addition to Thaxton, 11 other candidates applied for the pair of open posts on the Planning Commission.

A FULL AGENDA

Beaumier has become a downtown proponent for economic development, leading his company's effort to try to bring a pharmacy to downtown Sarasota and serving as both vice chairman of the city's Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board and a board member of the Downtown Sarasota Alliance.

Robinson noted there were several well-qualified applicants and that Beaumier had applied on several occasions to serve on the Planning Commission. "They are all worthy, but we only have so many slots," Robinson said.

"He has been on the list several times," Robinson added of Beaumier.

In his application, Beaumier wrote that "A Commission member should be open to all

proposals and be able to review them based on the adopted Comprehensive Plan and be able to provide a thoughtful position."

Bispham, 59, wrote in his application that he would "stay open, informed, and unbiased in helping the bcc (Board of County Commissioners) make zoning and future growth decisions." He added in his application that he had attended about 40 public meetings on the [Sarasota 2050 Plan](#). He has also been an Argus Foundation board member and is a past president of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.

Robinson also noted that Bispham's father, the late Cyrus Bispham, had served on the Planning Commission.

The new advisory board members will likely address a full agenda as a multitude of new developments are proposed on the shoulders of a recovering economy, and as the county addresses proposed changes to the county's 2050 Plan.

"I just heard that you denied Jon Thaxton to the Planning Commission at a time when the Planning Commission would be advising you on the 2050 Plan," Dan Lobeck, an attorney and president of Control Growth Now, said during the afternoon public comments at the July 9 County Commission meeting. "It is shocking."

Piccone is the only remaining member of the Sarasota Planning Commission who worked on the 2050 Plan upon its inception. Because of term limits, he could not keep his seat on the advisory board. 



ONWARD

The Sarasota 2050 plan was designed to prevent urban sprawl east of Interstate 75. File photo

COUNTY PUSHES FORWARD ON 2050 OVERHAUL

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

Urged on by board member Joe Barbetta, the Sarasota County Commission this week plunged ahead in its efforts to overhaul Sarasota 2050, the detailed land-use plan created to guide development over the next half-century.

The debate over 2050 has raged since the commission decided last September to have staff meet with area developers to register their complaints about the 2050 plan. Approved a decade ago, 2050 is a volun-

tary plan that requires developers to follow strict design rules in exchange for the right to increase density on undeveloped land. It was created to help the county avoid urban sprawl as its population grows over the decades.

“*I don't want an academic. I don't want a team of people coming in here who don't know anything about 2050. All we need is a good, quality economist who has development project experience.*”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

“The county wanted to hold this growth to a new, higher standard,” Allen Parsons, the county's long-range planning manager, told the commission Tuesday afternoon, July 9. That meant pushing three main priorities: preserving open space,

encouraging New Urbanism design principles such as walkability, and fiscal neutrality — the “requirement that any new growth pay its way” through impact fees and taxes.

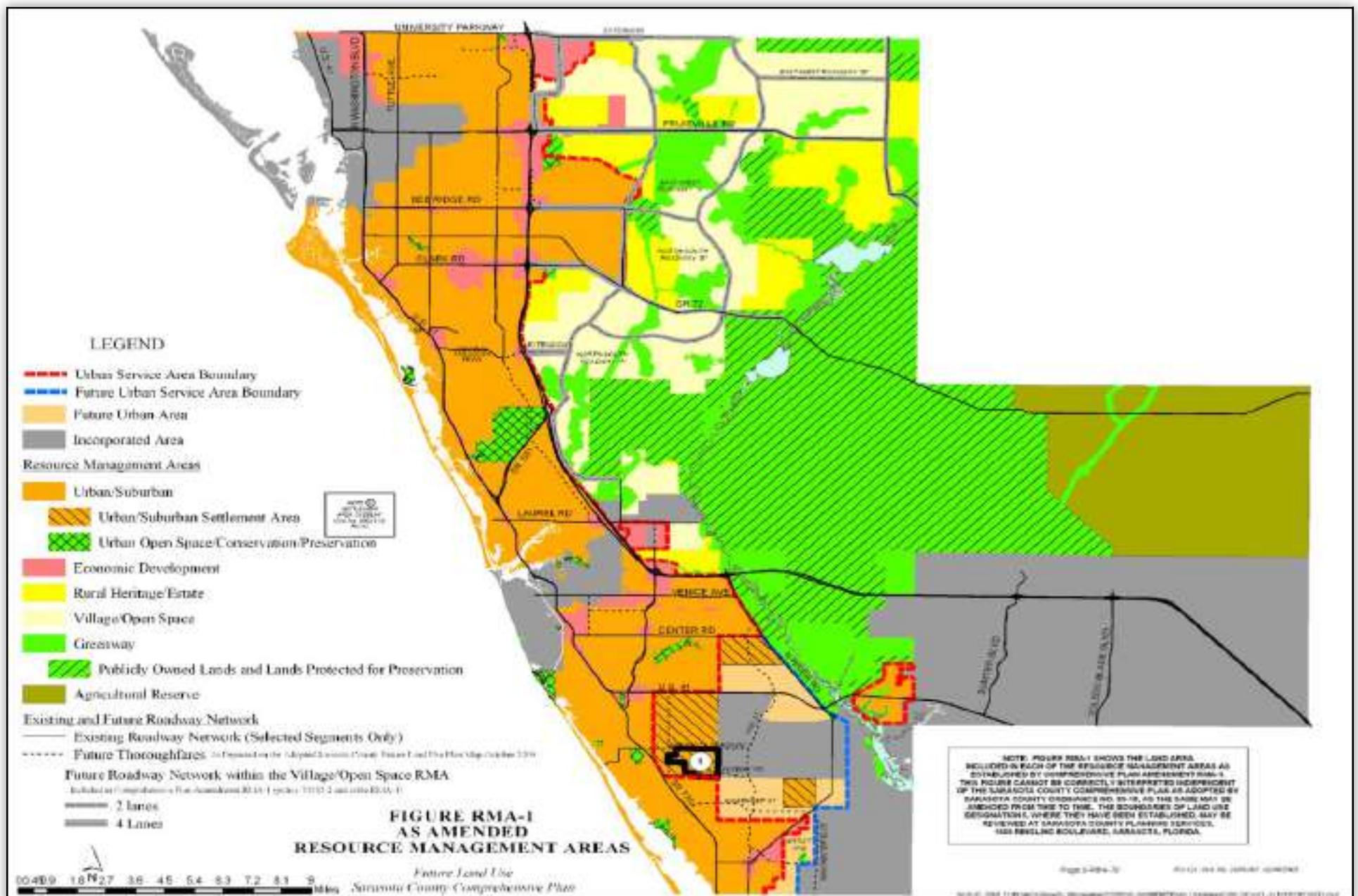
But developers charge that 2050 is unworkable — that its layers of regulations have stanchied growth. More than 7,000 units have been approved under 2050 guidelines, but only one project has broken ground: Neal Communities’ Grand Palm. Defenders of the plan, such as environmen-

“If we in our choice are going to hire somebody whose job is to sell the economics of a development, we might as well not do it.”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

tal groups and controlled-growth advocates, say the global recession is to blame for that inactivity, as well as the region’s ongoing housing crisis. The *Bradenton Herald* reported just this week that “the Bradenton-Sarasota-North Port metro area” is now ranked as “the third worst foreclosure market in the United States.”

The “intent” of 2050 remains “valid,” Parsons told the commission, but the specifics of its



A graphic shows designations of land applicable to development under the 2050 Plan. Image courtesy Sarasota County

rules may need to be reworked. “We’re not looking to tear down or defend 2050,” Parsons said, making the case that the county now has “the benefit of user experience” and that 2050 will “benefit from an objective and open-minded evaluation.”

Parsons then laid out the details of the staff’s proposed Scope of Work. One example: how to specifically define “evaluation parameters” for “alternative greenway configurations” that developers may propose when designing a new neighborhood.

Matt Osterhoudt, the county’s manager of conservation and environmental permitting, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* the goal is to recognize there’s not a “one-size-fits-all approach” to greenways and that the county should seek “to truly create meaningful corridors and environmental features rather than just saying, ‘550 feet.’”

According to Tuesday’s staff report, the county’s Environmental Technical Manual “currently provides a framework for evaluating alternative open space plans that include native habitats,” and Osterhoudt says staff will look there for ideas on how to frame 2050 alternative greenway guidelines.

“Those evaluation parameters are not numbers,” he adds. “They talk about context. They talk about: How well is an alternative proposal meeting the needs of connectivity? How well is the alternative proposal related to quality? Is it a manageable system that’s being created?”

Even a decade after the plan was approved, Osterhoudt says the county still has “limited experience in 2050 practice” because of the low number of applications it has seen, but he



adds the county has an opportunity to create “more effective and more meaningful” greenways.

THE BIGGEST DEBATE

The issue that generated the most debate among commissioners involved fiscal neutrality. The staff report called for outside help from “an independent, non-biased, academic institution,” which would analyze fiscal neutrality “to provide a more factual basis with which to potentially consider changes.” The goal of bringing in an academic outsider would be to “limit concerns or perceptions that results are pushing any particular agenda.”

Barbetta swiftly attacked that suggestion: “I don’t want an academic. I don’t want a team of people coming in here who don’t know anything about 2050.”

“All we need is a good, quality economist who has development project experience,” he said. Team him or her up with “a couple of lenders,

retired bankers,” and any problems with fiscal neutrality could be solved in 30 days.

“I think fiscal neutrality is a big deal,” argued Commissioner Nora Patterson, the only board member to have voted for 2050 in the first place. “2050 was designed in order to allow development east of I-75 in such a way that people did not feel that the burden of financing all the roads and the schools, etc., outside the urban service boundary would fall on their shoulders, and the trouble is it’s a rough concept to measure.”

County Administrator Randy Reid said the thinking behind bringing in an academic was

to give the county “a very high-level review” that would incorporate state-level trends. He added that it would help limit the “polarization” over the issue in the community.

Barbetta said the problem was the \$85,000-plus price tag. “We’ve got nine or 10 planners,” he added, pointing out that the commission just approved the hiring of a new planner to deal with 2050. Staff isn’t “super-busy,” he said. “I will in no way support staff’s recommendation.”

Planning and Development Services Director Tom Polk said the county lacked the expertise to analyze fiscal neutrality, while Barbetta



Control Growth Now President Dan Lobeck addresses the County Commission in April regarding proposed changes to the 2050 Plan. Photo by Norman Schimmel

argued the county could hire a non-academic economist to do the work for between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

Commissioner Christine Robinson suggested skipping the academic and hiring an economist who would be given access to a banker and “an expert in public finance.” Barbetta supported that idea, with the stipulation that the economist possess “private sector project development experience.”

But “that private sector experience is probably going to be working for a developer,” Patterson pointed out. She said she was “jaded” because of past experience with project economists whose results weren’t up to snuff. “If we in our choice are going to hire somebody whose job is to sell the economics of a development, we might as well not do it.”

“Your argument doesn’t make any sense,” Barbetta told her. One of the people he recommended for the job was Donna Arduin, a budget adviser to Gov. Rick Scott. “Nobody’s naming Hank Fishkind.”

Fishkind’s Orlando consulting firm, Fishkind & Associates, provided fiscal neutrality reports for Neal’s Grand Palm in 2010. In a contemporary review, county staff found that while the report was “adequate in its general approach, findings and conclusions,” there were questions about the “validity of the data” in a table showing “total impact fee revenues exactly equaling the capital expenditures for the respective services. From real-world experience of our capital budget, our impact fee revenues are generally lower than our corresponding capital expenditures, particularly when it comes to roads.” (Emphasis in the original.)

Barbetta continued his argument: “To sit here and say we don’t want to hire an economist who happened to work for a developer some time in his life —”

Patterson cut him off: “I didn’t say that.”

“The implication was pretty clear,” Barbetta said.

“Don’t put words in my mouth.”

Robinson then made her proposal official; it was quickly seconded by Barbetta, and approved with a 4-1 majority. Patterson was the only “No” vote.

NEXT STEPS

The conversation then moved on to the specifics of the hiring process and the timing of staff’s Scope of Work. The commission approved the overall plan of attack. Staff-proposed zoning changes should be back in front of the board by November.

Early in the meeting, Barbetta said there are “a lot of lies, a lot of misinformation” about the county’s intention in reopening 2050. “We’re doing the best we can up here,” he said. “We’re not in the pockets of developers.”

“I, too, think the acrimony is unfortunate, but actually it’s less than what I expected, having gone through the acrimony of approving 2050 in the first place,” Patterson added. “The discussion among developers was you’ve got to stop the 5-acre ‘ranchettes’ because it’s urban sprawl. ... But frankly, row after row of residential developments on quarter-acre lots with no walkability and no possibility that elderly people can live there who can no longer drive is classic urban sprawl, and we were trying to avoid that.” 

FLORIDA PLANNERS AND OBAMA, TOO



Landscaping improvements were visible this spring at Benderson Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES ENDORSES BENDERSON PARK'S BID FOR THE WORLD ROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS AS THE FACILITY WINS STATE ACCOLADES

Staff Reports

President Barack Obama has signed a letter supporting Sarasota County's bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park.

The letter will be part of the bid package Sarasota County officials will present this weekend to the [Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron](#) (in English, the International Federation of Rowing Associations, or FISA), the county has announced.

The presentation will take place in Switzerland.

"I am pleased to voice my support for Sarasota County's bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships," wrote President Obama in

the letter. "Sarasota County would be thrilled to share its beautiful and expansive beaches with the athletes, and would provide a wonderful, unique experience for each of the 42,000 attendees."

"Receiving the support of the President of the United States for this project provides a huge boost to our goal of establishing Sarasota County as destination for world class rowing events," said Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid in a news release. "We appreciate the President's support as well as that of all the people who have worked tirelessly on this project."

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

July 10, 2013

Mr. Matt Smith
Executive Director
FISA, International Rowing Federation
Maison du Sport International
Av. de Rhodanie 54
1007 Lausanne
Switzerland

Dear Mr. Smith:

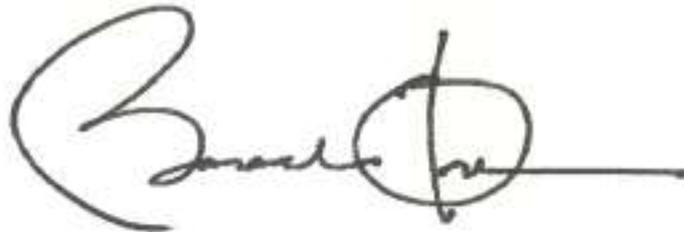
I am pleased to voice my support for Sarasota County's bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships.

The United States would be honored to host the World Rowing Championships for the first time in 23 years. Sarasota County would be thrilled to share its beautiful and expansive beaches with the athletes, and would provide a wonderful, unique experience for each of the 42,000 attendees.

During my tenure as President, my family and I have remained dedicated to physical fitness. The First Lady is working to improve children's health by encouraging young people to get active, and I have emphasized the importance of healthy living by appointing a Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. Selecting our Nation to host this important rowing event will promote physical fitness and bolster participation in the sport of rowing.

I strongly support Sarasota County's bid, and I urge the International Rowing Federation to approve it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be Barack Obama's signature, written in a cursive style.

In January, Paul Blacketter, chief operating officer of the SunCoast Aquatic Nature Center Association (SANCA) told the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council that US Rowing, the national governing body for the sport, and FISA “want to bring international rowing back to the United States.”

He pointed out, “The impression that we get is that this [bid] is basically ours to lose.”

SANCA is the nonprofit organization charged with overseeing events at Benderson Park and landing major corporate sponsors for the championships, if the park wins the bid.

According to estimates provided by Visit Sarasota County and SANCA, the 2017 World Rowing Championships could generate \$24 million in economic activity for the state and region,

with more than 42,000 visitors from 62 countries attending the two-week event. Additionally, approximately 130 million people from around the world would be expected to watch the championships on television and on the web, the county news release notes.

Blacketter began traveling the world several years ago — as Benderson Development Co.’s executive director of planning — to tour international rowing venues and become acquainted with FISA officials as work progressed on the park.

In recent months, Reid, representatives from Visit Sarasota County and commissioners from both Sarasota and Manatee counties have joined Blacketter on his trips as a sign of support for the Benderson bid.



A Sarasota County Sheriff's Office vehicle leads a procession across the North Cattlemen Road extension at Benderson Park on May 24. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Reid also was part of a delegation that traveled to Washington this spring to seek federal support for the effort. In an email exchange with county representatives on July 11, Reid gave major credit to the county's Washington-based lobbying firm, Holland & Knight, for its assistance in securing the President's endorsement.

According to that email exchange, the White House evidently made an error in the first letter it sent and had to provide a corrected version.

In sending the revised letter, Kellyn Blossom in the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, added, "[We] wish you the best of luck."

The Rowing and Aquatics Sports Center at Benderson Park is located at 2500 Honore Ave. in Sarasota. Over the past four years, competitive rowers from around North America have traveled to Sarasota County to practice and compete on the 2,000-meter course, the news release notes.

Earlier this year FISA representatives toured the park as well as a practice course at Fort Hamer Park in Manatee County. Sarasota County has committed \$20 million to the development of Benderson Park. "When complete, [it] will be one of the premiere facilities in the world," the news release adds.

MORE GOOD NEWS

Even before the big news broke about the President's letter, county commissioners were voicing excitement this week about the news that Benderson Park had won a 2013 American Planning Association (APA) Award of Excellence from the Florida chapter of the APA.



Paul Blacketter. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The honor came in the Planning Project category, a news release says. The award will be presented at the chapter's annual state conference in Orlando Sept. 10-13, the release adds.

During the conference, county representatives will be panelists at a moderated session about the park. The participants will be Sarasota County Planning and Development Services Director Tom Polk and Senior Planner Beth Rozansky; Tom Walsh, design architect on the project; community representative and rowing enthusiast John Krotec; and Blacketter, the release notes.

At the APA National Conference in April, Sarasota County was a co-winner of the 2013 APA's prestigious Hunter Award for Excellence in Economic Development, the release also points out. The award was for the design and development of Benderson Park and the project's economic development potential for sports tourism.

At the April conference, the county also received the 2013 Award of Merit from the APA

County Planning Division and the National Association of County Planners (NACP) for the park project. The Award of Merit is based on collaborative partnerships between Sarasota County and Benderson Development Co. that involved the coordinated planning of Benderson Park; the adjacent, large-scale mixed-use project by Benderson Development; and the construction of the North Cattlemen Road extension and improvements, the release explains.

Yet more recognition for the park has come in conjunction with the recently completed extension and improvement of North Cattlemen Road from Richardson to DeSoto roads. That Sarasota County project will be recognized at the annual convention of the Florida Transportation Builders Association Inc. (FTBA) Aug. 8-11 in Orlando.

The two-year road project, which was completed in May, won a 2013 FTBA statewide Best in Construction award in the Local Agency Program (LAP) category. Under the Florida LAP program, funds from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are administered by the Florida Department of Transportation through a grant to the local agency — in this case, Sarasota County government.

Accepting the award will be representatives of the county; the contractor, Prince Contracting LLC; and the company that provided construction, engineering and inspection services, CDM Smith.

The \$15.7 million Cattlemen Road project was largely funded by the nearly \$14 million LAP grant, the release says.

The approximately 2.75-mile-long extension of North Cattlemen Road provides improved access to Benderson Park. 

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Morgan Bentley
Attorney
Bentley & Bruning

”

A red circle in the lower right-hand corner shows the area where the vacated Columbus Boulevard begins adjacent to The Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County

THE COUNTY COMMISSION VOTES 3-1 TO VACATE A RIGHT OF WAY IN SETTLING A 2011 LAWSUIT FILED BY SIESTA VILLAGE PROPERTY OWNER CHRIS BROWN

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

It took less than 10 minutes on July 10 to wrap up six years of legal action Siesta Key property owner Chris Brown has filed against Sarasota County over parking issues related to his businesses in Siesta Village.

On a 3-1 vote — with Commissioner Nora Patterson, a Siesta resident, in the minority; and Vice Chairman Charles Hines recusing himself — the County Commission approved the vacation of a right of way along Columbus



An aerial map shows the vacated right of way. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Boulevard adjacent to The Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village.

Hines has recused himself from discussions of the lawsuit settlement since he was elected in November 2012. His law firm had represented Brown in the past.

Earlier this year, Patterson opposed settlement terms for this third lawsuit Brown had filed against the county since the fall of 2007. When the commissioners voted on April 24 to approve those terms — which necessitated a public hearing before they could be finalized — Patterson said of the right of way vacation, “It’s a little bit of a heartache that that is part of a lawsuit, just like [the right of way on the Ocean Boulevard side of The Hub] that we vacated. ... I do have a problem with somebody

settling a lawsuit and coming back for another bite at the apple.”

As part of the settlement of Brown’s first lawsuit, the County Commission agreed to pay \$35,000 and vacate a portion of its Ocean Boulevard right of way. (Brown had been accused of allowing outside tables at the restaurant to encroach on that county property.)

“I’m certainly glad it’s over,” Brown told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the board’s July 10 action.

His attorney, Morgan Bentley of Bentley & Bruning in Sarasota, drew laughter from commissioners when he addressed them during the meeting: “This will be the end of six years of our relationship, and I’ve never seen a relationship I’d like to end more.”



Parking space bumpers will keep vehicles from encroaching upon the right of way area transferred to Chris Brown. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

Although Bentley and Assistant County Attorney David Pearce had reached a mediated settlement in April, a public hearing was necessary before the County Commission could vote on vacating the 804.1 square feet of right of way near the intersection of Ocean Boulevard and Columbus Boulevard in Siesta Village.

Brown also will receive \$75,000 from the county.

This lawsuit was filed in October 2011 after Brown received his annual parking assessments for his Siesta Village properties; he saw three of the assessments had risen significantly. The tax bill for the Avenida Messina property where Blu Que Island Grill stands went up about 1,500 percent. However, Brown learned

that assessments for other Village properties went down — some as much as 30 percent.

That tax bill arrived about a month after the county reimbursed him \$2,500 for excessive parking assessments in 2009 — the crux of his second lawsuit.

Diane Kennedy, acquisition agent for real property in the Public Works Department, provided a number of photos for the County Commission at the outset of the public hearing on July 10, showing the right of way in question.

Patterson did ask a question to clarify the area to be vacated, which Kennedy showed her again in a PowerPoint presentation.

Prior History and Background:

1. **Civil Suit #1 - 5148 Beach Road of Sarasota, et al. v. Sarasota County**
 - a. Settlement Agreement – November 2009
 - b. SV 09-06 – Vacation of a portion of Ocean Boulevard
2. **Civil Suit #2 – 5148 Beach Road of Sarasota, et al. v. Sarasota County**
 - a. Settled and voluntarily dismissed
3. **Civil Suit #3 – 5148 Beach Road of Sarasota, et al. v. Sarasota County**
 - a. Settlement Agreement – April 2013
 - b. SV 13-03 – Vacation of a portion of Columbus Boulevard

Kennedy further noted that none of the abutting property owners had offered any objections to the right of way vacation.

Additionally, a July 10 memo she provided to the board said, the request was reviewed by all concerned county staff members and representatives of private utility companies with easements in the area. “Peoples Gas System, a division of Tampa Electric Company; Verizon Florida, LLC; and Sarasota County Utilities have requested utility easements over the area to be vacated in order to maintain existing facilities, which are currently held in escrow by [Brown’s firm],” the memo continued. “Florida Power & Light Company and Comcast Cablevision have no objections to the requested vacation,” it added.

Bentley told the board he and Brown accepted everything staff members had put into the report on the right of way vacation. “They did a really nice job holding our feet to the fire,” he noted.

A BOON TO THE COUNTY

Bentley then explained one important benefit to the county in vacating the right of way — something that had not been pointed out already.

Referring to a slide Kennedy had shown with a child and adults standing near the entrance to The Hub Baja Grill (See the accompanying photo), Bentley said, “This is a classic problem.”

Because patrons cannot access The Hub by exiting their cars on the Ocean Boulevard side of the restaurant, Bentley continued, they get out of vehicles on the Avenida Messina side

“and stand right there,” waiting to be seated at a table. That sidewalk next to the restaurant, he explained, was county property, and the fact that people were waiting on it regularly — potentially obstructing those walking along the sidewalk — was what had started the conversation about making the right of way vacation part of the settlement.

As long as that segment of property belonged to the county, he pointed out, “We couldn’t get insurance on it.” Therefore, if any accident had occurred, he said, the county would have been the liable party.

Bentley was quick to note he was unaware of any lawsuits having been filed because of that situation.

Nonetheless, he said, “[The vacation is] probably music to your ears,” because Brown’s insurance will immediately cover the sidewalk upon transfer of the property to his company.

After Bentley concluded his remarks, Chairwoman Carolyn Mason said no member of the public had signed up to speak during the hearing. Commissioner Joe Barbetta then made the motion to approve the vacation of the right of way.

“Staff did a great job,” Barbetta said. “The staff report is real clear. I’m glad it’s over with,” he added of the lawsuit.

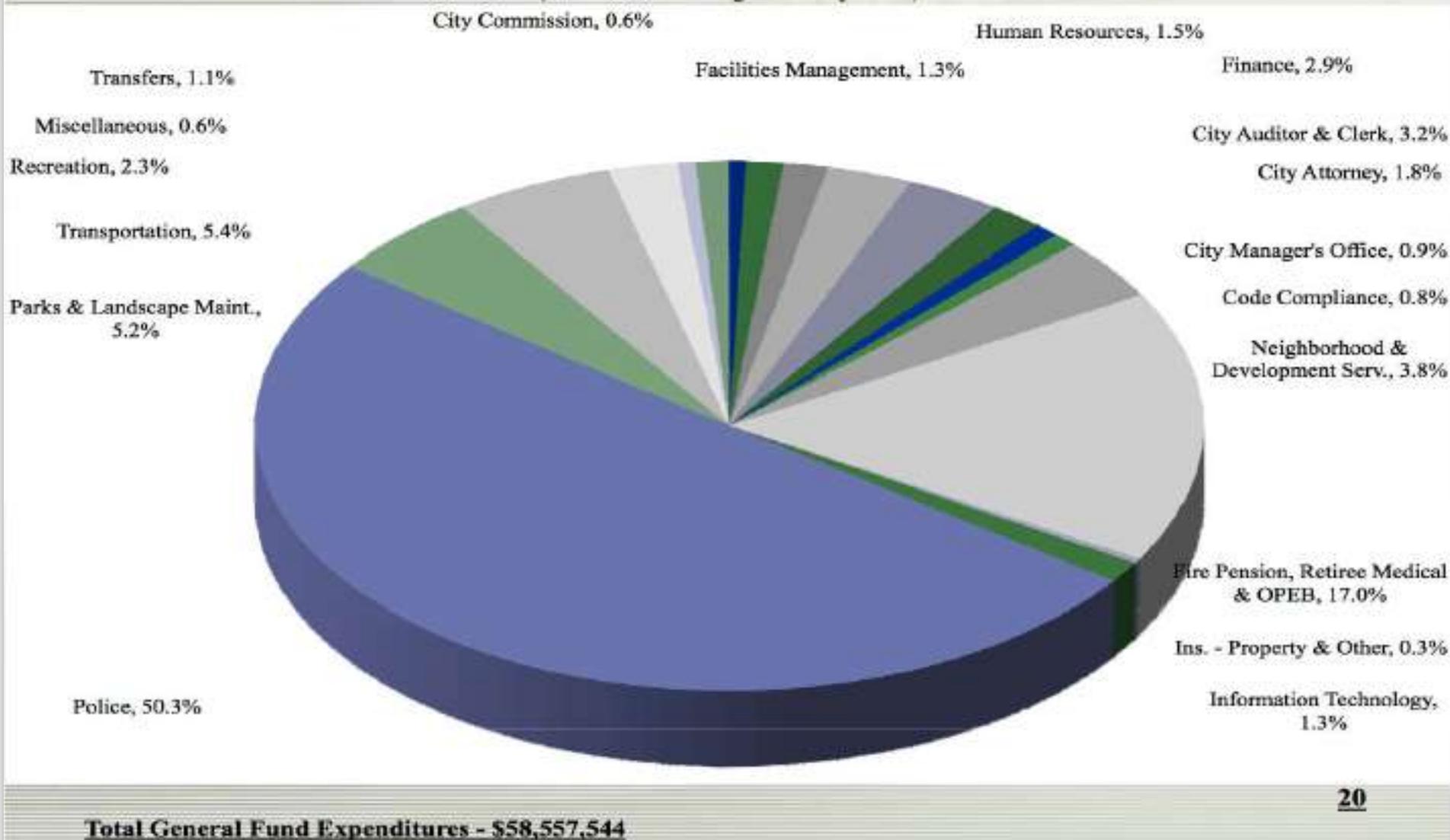
Referring to Brown, Bentley told the *News Leader*, “I think this is a really good resolution from his standpoint.”

“This was a settlement based on common sense and the end of negativity,” Brown said. 

TRYING TO PLUG THE HOLE

Major General Fund Expenditures

(without FY14 Strategic Plan Objectives)



A City of Sarasota pie chart shows projected expenses from the general fund for the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

THE CITY COMMISSION HAS NO COMMENTS THIS WEEK ON A PROPOSED 2014 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET STARTING OUT AT \$5.7 MILLION IN THE HOLE, WITH A LOSS OF 17 POLICE OFFICERS AND 80 PERCENT OF PAYROLL COSTS PROJECTED TO COVER PENSION OBLIGATIONS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

On Monday, July 8, Sarasota city staffers presented their spending plan for the next fiscal year, which kicks off Oct. 1. City commissioners sat in silence as the numbers were presented. The numbers will change over

“Cleanup after a hurricane could clean [the budget stabilization fund] out in a heartbeat.”

John Lege
Finance Director
City of Sarasota



the coming months, but the Monday presentation represented the starting point for discussion.

City Manager Tom Barwin led off the workshop. “The budget continues the recessionary discipline

of living within our means.” He noted that 11 more jobs will be cut through attrition, and he said pension obligations now equal 80 percent of the payroll.

“For every dollar of pay, we must kick in 80 cents,” he pointed out. “All totaled, that’s \$3 million more than last year.”

Barwin touted a couple of initiatives. “Our goal is to have 40 hours of training every year for every city employee,” he said. Training fell by the wayside for several years to save money, as was noted by former Sarasota Police Chief John Lewis’ review of city police practices, released earlier this year.

A second initiative requires \$100,000 for a “street response team” to supplement the Police Department’s involvement with the city’s

homeless and vagrants. “We have to deal with the chronic revolving-door problem of homelessness,” Barwin said.

The entire budget is on the city’s website, Barwin noted, and a new feature is a page for citizen comments and questions. Get your fingers ready: <http://www.sarasotagov.com/InsideCityGovernment/Content/Budget/Finance/Finance2013-2014proposedBudget.html>

FILLING THE HOLE

Property taxes make up only about 30 percent of the city’s total revenue. A variety of other taxes “hidden” in other bills — for electricity, communications, gasoline, sales taxes, water service and more — provide additional city income. About \$13.5 million comes from “other financing sources” and “all other revenue

Comparative Analysis of 15 Florida Municipal Police Department Budgets

	2012 POPULATION	LAND AREA IN SQ. MILES	CITY DENSITY (1,000 Citizens per Sq. Mile)	FY 2013 SWORN OFFICERS PER 1,000 CITIZENS	FY 2013 TOTAL POLICE STAFF PER 1,000 CITIZENS (Sworn and Civilian)	FY 2013 SWORN OFFICERS PER SQ. MILE	CY 2012 CRIME RATE PER 1,000 CITIZENS
Bradenton	50,389	14	3.6	2.3	2.9	8.3	47
Clearwater	107,905	26	4.2	2.1	2.8	8.9	46
Delray Beach	61,495	16	3.9	2.6	3.3	10.0	55
Ft. Myers	66,835	40	1.7	2.5	3.2	4.1	46
Kissimmee	62,322	21	2.9	2.1	2.6	6.1	59
Lauderhill	67,037	9	7.9	1.7	2.2	13.6	53
Margate	55,116	9	6.2	1.9	2.4	12.0	23
Naples	19,584	12	1.6	3.6	4.2	5.7	29
North Miami	60,313	8	7.2	2.0	2.4	14.3	58
North Port	58,674	100	0.6	1.7	1.9	1.0	21
Ocala	57,041	45	1.3	2.7	3.6	3.5	61
Pensacola	52,022	23	2.3	2.8	3.3	6.4	67
Port Orange	56,386	27	2.1	1.5	1.8	3.3	26
Sarasota	52,517	15	3.6	3.3	4.2	11.9	63
Tamarac (Sheriff contract)	61,102	12	5.3	1.3	1.6	6.8	29
AVERAGE OF ABOVE:	59,249	25	3.6	2.3	2.8	7.7	46
AVERAGE for Cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999 for FY 2012 as reported in the ICMA Municipal Yearbook 2013				1.65	2.18		

A city budget chart compares the Sarasota Police Department to other Florida municipal police forces. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

sources.” Every bit of it goes into the “general fund,” which this year totals \$53.2 million.

The budget City Finance Director John Lege presented for next year is up almost \$3 million, to \$56.2 million. Two-thirds of that will pay for “public safety,” including the Sarasota Police Department and pensions for former city firefighters. In all, the general fund starts about \$5.7 million in the red.

A variety of solutions were presented to reduce the deficit. The increase in the tax roll valuation of property is worth \$741,515. And transfers from other funds, such as those for self-insurance and solid waste — which are normally independent — will kick in another half a million dollars. A “refinement” in police pension calculations is worth another half-million. And the county School Board is kicking in \$312,248 to fund school resource officer positions dropped by the county sheriff.

With all these “adjustments” and more, the general fund is still \$2.5 million in the hole.

Since the City Commission pulled parking meters out of downtown Sarasota, the Parking Department now needs an annual \$500,000 subsidy to enforce regulations and maintain parking garages. An unspecified “increase [in] parking revenues” would cut the subsidy in half.

Parking is not the only city effort requiring a subsidy because it makes less than it costs. The poster child for this used to be the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, which required a \$1.3 million subsidy six years ago. Today, it operates at a profit. But the Municipal Auditorium does not; it needs an estimated \$41,280 in the next fiscal year to stay in the black.

And the Payne Park Auditorium poses a decision point for the City Commission: Spend \$110,981 to keep it open next year or close it.

The city could dip into its reserves — in bureaucratic speak, the “revenue stabilization fund” — for \$1 million to help plug the budget gap. But even after all of that, “the hole” is still \$1.2 million. While the budget stabilization



The City Commission listens to a Parking Advisory Committee presentation on June 3. Photo by Norman Schimmel

fund holds \$2.9 million, that is also the city's emergency money. "Cleanup after a hurricane could clean it out in a heartbeat," said Lege after the meeting.

THE POLICE DEBATE

As is true of all municipal and county budget workshops, every City of Sarasota department head was in the audience July 8 to answer any question should one arise. The Sarasota Police were represented by the chief, the deputy chief and a third officer in uniform.

Lege presented another table showing 15 Florida municipalities with populations similar in size to Sarasota. The table examined city density (citizens per square mile), total police staff divided by the number of citizens, the number of officers per square mile and the crime rate per 1,000 citizens.

Sarasota scored on the high end of most of those criteria. Of the 15 cities, it has the second highest number of sworn officers per 1,000 citizens, at 3.3. Naples has 3.6. The average of the 15 cities was 2.3.

Sarasota ties with Naples for the highest number of sworn police officers and civilians per 1,000 citizens — 4.2.

The shocker is an analysis of crime rates in the 15 cities per 1,000 residents. The average was 46 crimes. Sarasota was the second highest on the table with 53 crimes per 1,000 people. Only Pensacola was higher, at 67.

The budget proposes a reduction in the number of sworn Sarasota officers, dropping the force to 158 from the current level of 175. The reductions would cut the ratio of sworn officers per 1,000 residents to 3.0. The force reductions would come from position elimination and attrition. 



The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall used to require a city subsidy. Now it operates in the black. Photo by Norman Schimmel



FLEXIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Many of those who park in the lot at 20 N. Washington Blvd. head to the historic courthouse across the street or to other buildings in the county's downtown Sarasota judicial complex. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN A NEW COUNTY ORDINANCE GOVERNING SURPLUS LAND SALES DELETES THE REQUIREMENT THAT THE COUNTY CAN ONLY SELL ITS SURPLUS PROPERTY TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

A revised Sarasota County ordinance that changes how the county sells its surplus lands now gives the county commissioners more liberty when deciding to whom to sell property.

In the most significant change, the new ordinance unanimously approved by the County Commission Tuesday, July 9, deletes the requirement that the county can only sell its property to the highest bidder.

The previous ordinance states the county would negotiate “a purchase agreement with the highest bidder.” The new measure, however, strikes out “highest bidder” and replaces the phrase with “selected respondent.”

“*This is something that will help us accomplish a land-use vision and allow us to do public-private partnerships and achieve the best economic use for property.*”

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County



Florida law requires local governments to sell real property to the highest bidder — unless a local ordinance specifies an alternative approach, according to county officials.

Commissioners say the new ordinance would allow the county to attempt to jumpstart economic redevelopment at or near a surplus site, and focus on how a project blends into a neighborhood — instead of just selling land to the highest bidder.

“This allows us the discretion to see what is best for the community as a whole,” said Commissioner Charles Hines.

Opponents of the modified proposal say it would be a boon to developers and property investors, but it would not protect the interests of taxpayers.

On Tuesday, Dan Lobeck, president of Control Growth Now, called the proposed changes an “affront to taxpayers.”

Lobeck predicted the modified ordinance would open the doors to a repeat of the city’s criticized 2012 deal to sell a highly visible parcel along Fruitville Road directly to Benderson Development Co. for half the price of another developer’s offer.

“Frankly, this is one of the most startling proposals I’ve seen, and I’ve seen some startling proposals in my 25 years here,” Lobeck said to the commissioners.

The change impacts the possible sale of up to 10 surplus parcels, including prospective deals in the near future regarding two sites: an acre at the northeast corner of U.S. 301 and Main Street in downtown Sarasota and 42 acres on Coburn Road, east of Interstate 75.



The lot at 20 N. Washington Blvd. has a view of both the Synovus Bank and the Seaside National Bank and Trust buildings on Main Street. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Over the past year, Commissioner Joe Barbetta has advocated for selling county-owned land declared surplus by the county, getting the property back on the tax rolls, while shedding costs.

He said Lobeck's charges mischaracterize the purpose of the new ordinance.

"This is something that will help us accomplish a land-use vision and allow us to do public-private partnerships and achieve the best economic use for property," Barbetta said.

Modifying the ordinance is something the County Commission "should have done a while ago," Barbetta added.

The new ordinance gives the county the discretion to find the best deal as it tries to sell surplus land, resident Larry Grossman told the

commissioners Tuesday. It allows the county to consider a prospective development that would best bolster the economy of an area, even if the developers do not offer the highest bid, Grossman noted.

"There may be some public perception that special deals are being cooked up that might not be very popular," said Grossman, a 2013 challenger for Longboat Key Town Commission. "With that discretion, there is additional responsibility to say there are certain needs that are being met."

Commissioners Hines and Christine Robinson agreed with Grossman.

Robinson said the new ordinance should help homeowners in situations when surplus county-owned land borders residential communities.



The historic courthouse — which is experiencing roof repairs — and the North County Jail are visible across the street from the North Washington Boulevard parking lot. Photo by Norman Schimmel

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Randall Reid, County Administrator
Tom Harmer, Assistant County Administrator
Board of Sarasota County Commissioners
1660 Ringling Blvd
2nd Floor
Sarasota, Florida 34236

Re: Land Parcel on Northeast Corner of 301 and Main Street, Sarasota Florida.

Dear Commissioners,

The purpose of this correspondence is to communicate our interest in developing the parcel of land located on the Northeast Corner of 301 and Main Street, Sarasota Florida (the "301 Main Street Property").

Our interest in developing this prominent corner of Sarasota's business district stems from our principal's recent success in re-developing and enhancing The Gateway to Sarasota on the adjacent corner of Fruitville and 301. This recent re-development included construction of two national, Class A tenants, Staples and Bank of America.

Development of the 301 Main Street Property requires a thorough understanding of the complexities of urban infill development and the ability to facilitate County and City partnerships. Our company possesses the unique and unparalleled expertise to develop the 301 Main Street Property in the same manner as our principal has developed several hundreds of properties in his 30 + years of development experience.

We currently have a commitment from a publicly traded company interested in signing a long-term lease with our company in connection with our proposed re-development of the 301 Main Street Property.

Our company's proposal would be a cash payment for the 301 Main Street Property and the opportunity to explore replacement of the site's existing parking.

*Revd
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TH*

“This will actually help protect neighborhoods, because instead of always going to the highest bidder who will build the most intense use, we can actually pick someone who will build something that fits in the character of the neighborhood,” Robinson pointed out.

The new ordinance provides “more flexibility in returning the property to tax rolls,” said Lin Kurant, real property manager for Sarasota County.

U.S. 301 AND MAIN STREET

The commissioners on July 9 also approved a resolution declaring two parcels as “surplus property,” the first step in a process to sell or transfer ownership of the land.

One resolution classified the 42 acres at Coburn Road and Fruitville Road, east of Interstate 75, as surplus. The commissioners also deemed a highly visible, .95-acre parcel at U.S. 301 and Main Street in downtown Sarasota as surplus property and approved a timetable for an Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) aimed at bringing development to the site, which serves as a parking lot.

The Invitation to Negotiate will be advertised for 45 days, starting at the end of July.

Rod Connelly, president and founder of Civix Inc., a Sarasota-based real estate development company, wants to trade with the county so he can build a hotel on the U.S. 301 property. He has met with county officials.

Within the past three weeks, a second developer also has pitched a plan to the county.

“We have two letters of interest in the Main Street parcel,” said Tom Harmer, deputy county administrator.

Both developers plan to include public parking spaces to replace those currently used while people are conducting county business, said County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh.

Hines said the U.S. 301 parcel is “too good” for use as a parking garage because of its prime location downtown.

Commissioners disagreed about the timeframe to advertise the property. Barbetta and Robinson pushed for the 45-day period, while Hines and Commissioner Nora Patterson argued for at least 60 days. Hines said the longer period would give prospective national developers time to get information about the initiation to negotiate and submit a bid and preliminary plans. Hines wanted to see the process opened “to a wide variety of people who might not be sitting here today.”

Barbetta voiced concern that advertising the property for even 15 days longer, combined with a lengthy negotiating period, could cause the county to “end up missing” an upswing in the real estate market.

“Forty five days is plenty of time for people to express interest,” Barbetta noted.

Robinson said she did not want to jeopardize the efforts of the two current prospective developers by delaying the process.

“We know there are folks out there interested now,” Robinson said.

As the county advertises the U.S. 301 parcel, it will also get current appraisals for the value of the land. 



SPARRING OVER EMS COSTS

The County Commission sits in session in Venice in June. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE COUNTY COMMISSION TAKES ISSUE WITH VENICE'S REQUEST FOR COUNTY REIMBURSEMENT EVERY TIME A CITY FIRE TRUCK RESPONDS TO A CALL WITH COUNTY EMTS

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

Sarasota County commissioners have fired back in an ongoing dispute with Venice city officials over the cost of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) in the city.

The County Commission voted 4-1 Tuesday, July 9, to have County Administrator Randall Reid send a stern reply to Venice officials who want the county to pay the city every time a city fire truck responds to an emergency call along with county EMTs.

The letter, dated July 9, highlights the fact that the county spends in excess of \$100,000 each year on EMS services in the city of Venice, and points out that the Englewood Fire Department provides the same exact response assistance and does not receive a subsidy.

Reid writes in the letter: "I am very concerned about the city's request as the current system is based on a cooperative approach."

The letter goes on to note that the county provides other emergency services in Venice, such as a Hazardous Materials Team and 911 call taking and dispatch for the Fire Department. Reid writes: "As opposed to jeopardizing our current collaborative effort to provide emergency service to the citizens of Venice, it may be in the city's best interest to assume responsibility for providing Fire and EMS service to your citizens."

“If they would like Venice EMS, they can take it. Otherwise, we need to end this conversation.”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



The political wrangle is yet another sign of lean budget years and rising expenses. The debate intensified in May when the Venice City Council members discussed a proposal

to ask the county to reimburse the city part of a \$600 ambulance fee the county charges.

When a Sarasota County rescue squad crew responds to an emergency in Venice, the city often sends backup in the form of a fire truck with two firefighters trained as emergency medical technicians.

Fifty to 60 percent of all emergency calls in Venice — such as a traffic accident with injuries — require a fire truck's response, said Venice Mayor John Holic. The types of situations that necessitate rolling a fire truck are spelled out by an interlocal agreement between the city and county.

Holic said he wanted to see whether the city could get reimbursed for some of its expenses on those calls. He reasoned the request

was justified because in unincorporated parts of the county, the county charges the same \$600 fee, but it provides both EMS and fire response.

“We are not getting any reimbursement,” Holic pointed out.

“I didn't expect the county to say, ‘Sure we'll pay you,’” Holic added. “Would it have been the right thing? Yes.”

“*I didn't expect the county to say, ‘Sure we'll pay you.’ Would it have been the right thing? Yes.*”

John Holic
Mayor
Venice

After the county commissioners on July 9 directed Reid to draft his letter, *The Sarasota News Leader* spoke with Holic. “The county is going to hold onto the revenue it has,” the

mayor said. “And I'm going to look into more ways to make it fair for our residents.”

Holic is concerned Venice residents will soon end up paying ballooning taxes to both the



EMTs respond to the scene of an accident in the county. Photo courtesy Sarasota County



Mayor John Holic of Venice. Photo courtesy City of Venice

city and the county, when in some cases they are receiving only city services.

The mayor also cited Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight's decision to stop having deputies work as student resource officers in schools within the city limits of Venice, North Port and Sarasota. That is an example, Holic said, of city residents paying taxes for a county department when service has been cut. As a result of Knight's action, a Venice Police Department officer has been reassigned to the position of school resource officer.

Knight has said he made the change because he felt municipal law enforcement officers should work in schools in their jurisdictions.

COMMISSION VIEWS

The county commissioners Tuesday spent some time discussing their rejection of the city's request for any kind of repayment for emergency medical calls.

County Commissioner Christine Robinson, who represents a portion of Venice as part of her district, said Venice officials can take over emergency medical service operations in the city if they are dissatisfied with the way the system is working.

"If they would like Venice EMS, they can take it. Otherwise, we need to end this conversation," Robinson said. "We are getting into tit for tat with them."

Commissioner Joe Barbetta agreed with Robinson. He was in favor of sending a forthright reply to Venice officials.



County Fire Chief Mike Tobias. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

"This has been going on for too long, and it has been a game for some people," Barbetta said of the debate. "If they can do it better, more power to them. Let them take it over."

Commissioner Charles Hines agreed with the message but opted for a more measured approach. Hines wanted to make sure the financial data about the cost of operating EMS in Venice was included in the letter to city officials.

The letter that was drafted included five separate notations of expenses for emergency

services the county provides in Venice — including \$110,000 a year for EMS and \$110,000 a year for 911 Fire Department dispatch.

The commissioners, though, did mull over one concern if Venice officials assume responsibility for EMS in the city: The county has about 27 EMTs who work primarily in Venice.

Mike Tobias, the county's fire chief and director of emergency services, pointed out that some of those positions could be absorbed into the agency as other emergency officials retire. On average, about 40 county firefighter/EMTs retire every year, he noted.

WEIGHING THE FACTORS

Holic remains interested in finding out more about the possibility of the city providing EMS service to its residents.

He said he actually had been trying for weeks to get data from county officials so he could determine whether it would be advantageous for the city to make the change.

“We have not received the information we requested,” Holic said.

Taking over the service is still an option, the mayor pointed out.

“We are not looking to make money on it,” Holic said. “We are looking to see if we can take it over and not lose money.” 

“Men always want to be a woman's first love. Women like to be a man's last romance.” — *Oscar Wilde*

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SORRY, NO SWIMMING

County and North Port officials are working to get Warm Mineral Springs reopened as quickly as possible. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

SARASOTA COUNTY AND THE CITY OF NORTH PORT WILL SEEK AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF FACILITIES AT WARM MINERAL SPRINGS WHILE THE RESORT REMAINS CLOSED

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Temporary restroom facilities are not an option to enable a short-term reopening of Warm Mineral Springs just for swimmers, Sarasota County Commissioner Christine Robinson reported to her fellow board members this week.

That was the news she had received from the county Health Department, she said on July 10.

Because of state health regulations, she pointed out, portable

toilets could not be allowed on the site for more than 120 consecutive days. It made no sense to try to open the resort for that space of time, she added, if the county and the City of North Port had to close it again immediately afterward because a short-term operator was not in place.

“ [The roof] is an area of immediate concern.”

Ed Gable
Director
General Services
Sarasota County



Robinson offered the information to her fellow commissioners as they were wrapping up their final discussions before starting their summer recess.

Earlier that day, Jennifer Graham, former assistant general manager of Warm Mineral Springs, appealed to the board to go ahead and reopen the resort to swimmers. It would take only a small staff to handle that, Graham said, and the expense could be covered by ticket revenue.

People do not go to the Springs for the spa or the café, she pointed out. “They go for the water.”

Graham added, “I urge you to address the situation today and vote on it.”

Just a day earlier, the County Commission voted unanimously to authorize County Administrator Randall Reid to work with the staff of the City of North Port — which co-owns Warm Mineral Springs with the county — to pursue

a third-party, independent assessment of the state of the facilities at the resort “as quickly as possible,” according to an amendment offered by Commissioner Joe Barbetta.

The city would take the lead on getting quotes, Reid indicated, because its pro-

“ I wouldn’t be replacing an entire roof or doing mold [remediation] without coming back to the board. ... I’m smarter than that.

Randall Reid
Administrator
Sarasota County



The main structures at Warm Mineral Springs are connected by an open arbor system. Photo courtesy City of North Port

curement process is not as complicated or time-consuming as the county's.

The board also gave its consensus to allow Reid to use his authority under the new county Procurement Code approved this year to proceed with reasonable expenditures for any repairs deemed necessary. The code allows the county administrator to obtain goods or services at a cost up to \$100,000 without commission approval.

Before the vote, Commissioner Nora Patterson said, "I would be happy to let [the City of] North Port, with assistance of [county] staff, get somebody in there really fast to assess the financial bill that's attached to this," referring to the inspection process. "But I'm not willing to come back from break and find out that the staff felt like they were given the leeway to address a couple of million dollars worth of things that I think should be the responsibility of a long-term operator."

"I have an expenditure limit that you have set," Reid told the board. "I wouldn't be replacing an entire roof or doing mold [remediation] without coming back to the board. ... I'm smarter than that."

"Thank goodness," Patterson told him with a chuckle.

Reid pointed out that he already had been working with Jonathan Lewis, the North Port city manager, about the need for repairs at the resort.

County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh told the board the Procurement Code also gives Reid authority to take appropriate action to rectify issues posing danger to health or safety.



Jennifer Graham, the former assistant general manager of Warm Mineral Springs, addresses the County Commission on July 10. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Robinson's motion authorizing the independent facilities assessment followed a board discussion with Ed Gable, the county's director of general services, who had conducted several walk-throughs of Warm Mineral Springs since it closed on June 30.

In response to a question from Robinson, Gable said he expected it would take three weeks to a month to hire a firm to do the inspection.

When Robinson questioned why it would take so long to get the work done, Gable said, "We can certainly expedite that if we need to."

"Our decisions going forward are going to be based on the structural integrity of Warm Mineral Springs," Robinson replied. If the inspector's report indicates the buildings needed to be torn down, she continued, "then our long-

term planning for Warm Mineral Springs will shift at that particular point. Our options will be much more limited.”

A LONG PROCESS

Following the November 2012 election of two new North Port city commissioners — Cheryl Cook and Rhonda DiFranco — a majority on the city board took issue with an agreement the County Commission had secured with the previous North Port City Commission. During a joint meeting in July 2012, the commissions voted to pursue an Invitation to Negotiate to obtain proposals regarding development of the resort. After the November elections, Cook, DiFranco and Mayor Linda Yates said the Springs should be maintained as a park.

Because of the divergence of those views, the County and City commissions could not even reach an agreement on the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs beyond the June 30 lease termination the boards had with the operator, Cypress Lending. The county and city had bought the resort from Cypress Lending in December 2010.

Since the Springs closed, as Robinson pointed out on July 10, county commissioners have received numerous emails asking when the resort will reopen.

According to an interlocal agreement the North Port Commission finally approved with the county on June 24, the city has 60 days to act in good faith to advertise and settle on a short-term management lease for the resort for a period no longer than 12 months; that recommendation must go to the County Commission for approval within 30 days of the North Port Commission's vote.



*North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis.
Photo courtesy City of North Port*

North Port Manager Lewis notified the City Commission in a July 8 memo, “The bid and its associated documents have been drafted by staff and currently are in our legal department for review.” Once that was completed, he continued, the documents would be sent to the county for its review.

In the meantime, the county and city are splitting the cost of security measures on the site.

STAFF FINDINGS

In a July 8 memo to the County Commission, Gable, the General Services Office director, wrote that he and his staff had made another site visit to Warm Mineral Springs to assess the condition of the facilities. Of the seven structures on the property, he wrote, four make up the main building and are connected by an open arbor system. Two structures

are used for maintenance; one, as a storage shed. One of the maintenance buildings and the shed “are in disrepair and should be demolished,” Gable added.

All the structures date from the mid-1950s, he pointed out. At that time, he noted, the state building code had no provisions for hurricane hardening, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements did not exist.

The roof, he wrote, “is an area of immediate concern.” Its “configuration contains multiple valleys,” the memo says, many of which “have been leaking for some time.”

Gable also noted that the existing restrooms do not comply with ADA standards and are not large enough to bring them into compliance.

Moreover, he wrote, the condition and location of a number of septic tanks on the property are unknown, and upgrades to the electrical and plumbing systems “have been completed through the years without the benefit of permitting or inspections.”

LOOKING AHEAD

During the County Commission discussions on July 9, Robinson told her colleagues, “We have to repair the buildings. We have to open those buildings.”

She had toured the site, she added, and had noticed water and electrical problems.

“I think we’re talking about a big ticket,” Patterson said, referring the expense of repairs.

Robinson replied, “I think we’re talking about a big ticket, too,” and the county commission-



County Administrator Randall Reid. Photo by Norman Schimmel

ers a year ago had envisioned a long-term management firm handling that. “Now it’s going to fall on taxpayers’ shoulders,” Robinson said.

“I believe that we should authorize the minimum repairs needed for health and safety to get it done,” Robinson continued.

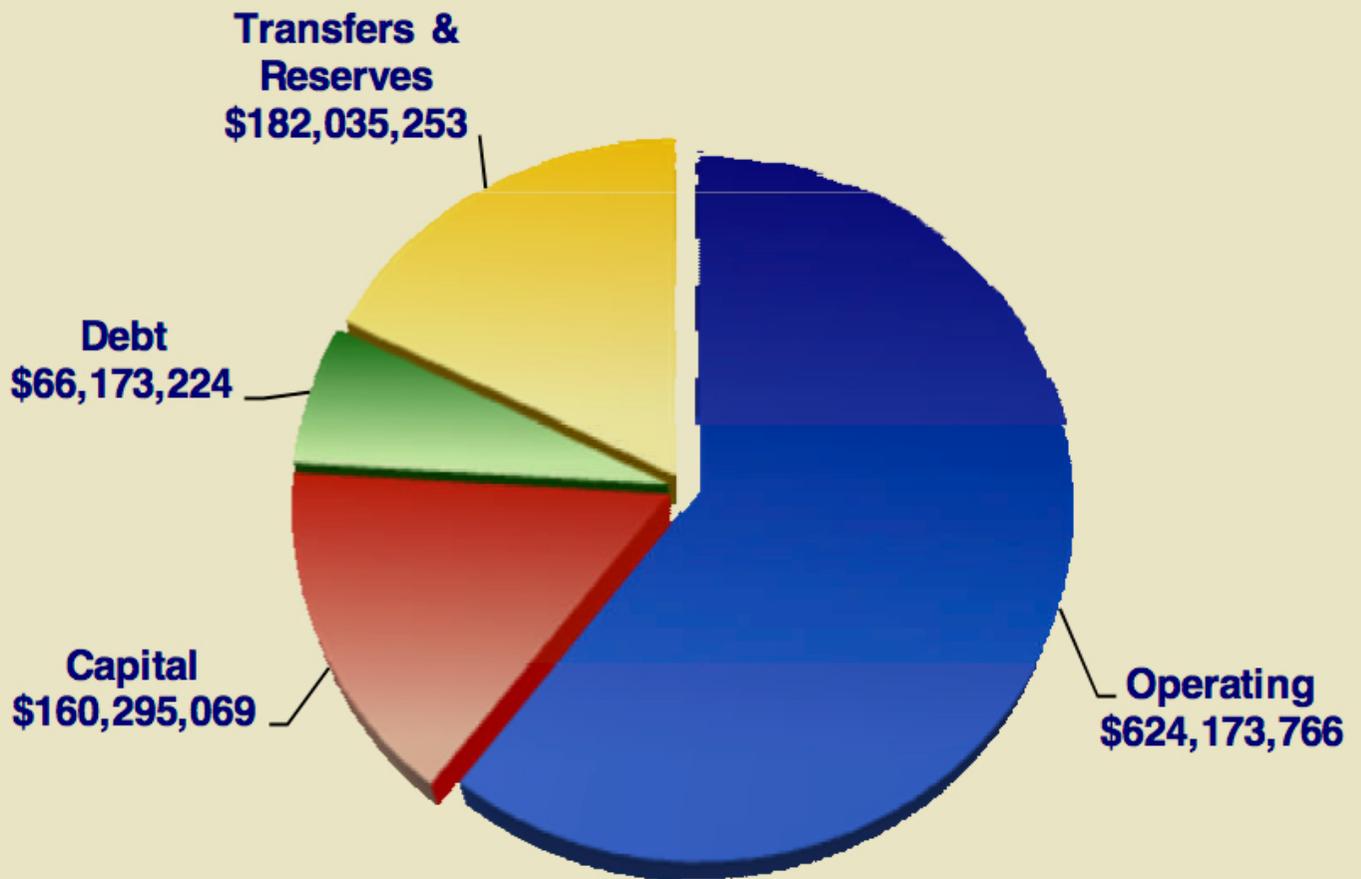
“I’m fine with that,” Patterson told her.

The goal, Robinson reiterated, is to get the resort reopened as soon as possible under short-term management. Referring to the interlocal agreement, Robinson added, “As long as [the city commissioners] hold up their end of the bargain, I intend to hold up ours.” 

A NUMBER OF UNRESOLVED ISSUES

FY14 Tentative = \$1,032,677,312

3,402 FTE's



A pie chart shows tentative, estimated Sarasota county expenses for the 2014 fiscal year. All the Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE) positions have not been approved yet. Image courtesy Sarasota County

ALTHOUGH THE COUNTY COMMISSION THIS WEEK APPROVED A FLAT TOTAL MILLAGE RATE FOR THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR, IT WILL NOT ADDRESS EMPLOYEE RAISES UNTIL AUGUST

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Leaving big questions unanswered — including employee pay raises — until their final budget workshop on Aug. 20, the Sarasota County commissioners this week unanimously adopted the tentative millage rates for the 2014 fiscal year, leaving them flat from the current year at a total of 3.93.

By law, the board cannot raise the millage rates above that point when it votes on the final budget in September.

The total of the proposed 2014 fiscal year budget is \$1,032,677,312. That compares to the \$897 million spending plan adopted for the current fiscal year and \$870 million in FY 2012. The last time the county budget exceeded \$1 billion was in FY 2010, when it was \$1.003 million, according to documents provided by the county's Office of Financial Planning.

According to materials made available before the July 10 regular County Commis-

“ We have not approved compensation increases yet, nor have we finished approving the budget. ”

Christine Robinson
Commissioner
Sarasota County



FY13 to FY14 Budget Reconciliation
By Department

	FY13 Adopted	FY14 Preliminary	Variance
Health & Human Services	\$24,139,471	\$24,226,009	\$86,538
		Replacement Mosquito Management VCMS Database	\$150,000
		Reduction in Medicaid Costs	-\$200,000
		Shift of (1) FTE from another department	\$85,259
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$51,279
		Total Variance	\$86,538
Libraries & Historical Resources	\$10,847,825	\$11,102,022	\$254,197
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$254,197
		Total Variance	\$254,197
Natural Resources	\$9,509,643	\$9,573,870	\$64,227
		1 FTE (Coastal Project Manager)	\$71,983
		Other Operating Adjustments	-\$7,756
		Total Variance	\$64,227
Parks & Recreation	\$20,762,801	\$21,651,458	\$888,657
		Athletics Field Maintenance	\$420,000
		Benderson Park Regattas	\$54,000
		Operating cost for new parks and amenities	\$138,594
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$276,063
		Total Variance	\$888,657
UF/IFAS Extension	\$972,822	\$1,058,020	\$85,198
		Education Program Materials	\$53,040
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$32,158
		Total Variance	\$85,198
Planning & Development Services	\$22,695,893	\$22,536,432	-\$159,461
		1 Code Enforcement FTE	\$79,889
		2 Planning FTEs & 1 OPS	\$215,162
		7 Permitting/Inspections FTEs	\$570,424
		Permitting/Inspections Code Books and Software	\$129,370
		Grants: CDBG, NSP3, Disaster Recovery	-\$1,977,000
		Building Fund Reserves	\$773,034
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$49,660
		Total Variance	-\$159,461
Sarasota County Area Transit	\$25,699,787	\$27,469,825	\$1,770,038
		Increase to transparency of Central & Internal Service Charges allocation	\$1,231,171
		Increase to ATU Contract due contractual obligations	\$373,547
		Increase in improvements for bus shelters	\$255,119
		Other Operating Adjustments	-\$89,799
		Total Variance	\$1,770,038
Economic Development	\$12,681,785	\$12,294,578	-\$387,207
		Economic Development Incentives - FY13 \$11,177,216; FY14 \$10,749,639 (FY14 Reserves \$6,680,929)	-\$427,577
		Economic Development Corporation - FY13 \$1,010,781; FY14 \$967,000 + Tax Collector Fees incr \$1,017	-\$22,764
		Economic Development Team - +.5 FTE from County Adm, 1st year Internal Service Chgs, Benefits incr	\$63,134
		Total Variance	-\$387,207
Neighborhood Services	\$433,352	\$358,450	-\$74,902
		Realignment of 1.2 FTE's	-\$74,902
		Total Variance	-\$74,902
Community Redevelopment Area	\$1,002,732	\$1,062,047	\$59,315
		Maintenance Increase	\$23,733
		Realignment of .2 FTE	\$20,371
		Other Operating Adjustments	\$15,211
		Total Variance	\$59,315
Public Utilities	\$151,529,862	\$173,469,359	\$21,939,497
		Aqua Utilities Acquisition	\$6,026,061
		Stormwater GIS Data Collection	\$450,000
		Solid Waste Contractual Increases	\$2,130,781
		Transfer from operating to capital	\$13,332,655
		Total Variance	\$21,939,497

A chart compares 2013 fiscal year budget expenses to those projected for county departments in FY 2014. Image courtesy Sarasota County

sion meeting, the proposed budget includes not only a 3 percent merit pay raise for non-union employees but also an increase of 105 full-time positions. The pay hike means an extra expenditure of \$927,000 in general fund money along with \$973,000 from other county funds, County Administrator Randall Reid pointed out in brief comments.

The proposed budget also includes \$2.3 million allocated to raises for employees of the county’s constitutional officers, including the Sheriff’s Office and the Office of the Clerk of the 12th Circuit Judicial Court.

However, Commissioner Christine Robinson clarified certain points in an exchange with Chief Financial Planning Officer Steve Botelho: “We have not approved compensation increases yet, nor have we finished approving the budget. ... That will be happening at the end of August — officially approving what money goes where at that point, correct?”

“Correct,” Botelho replied.

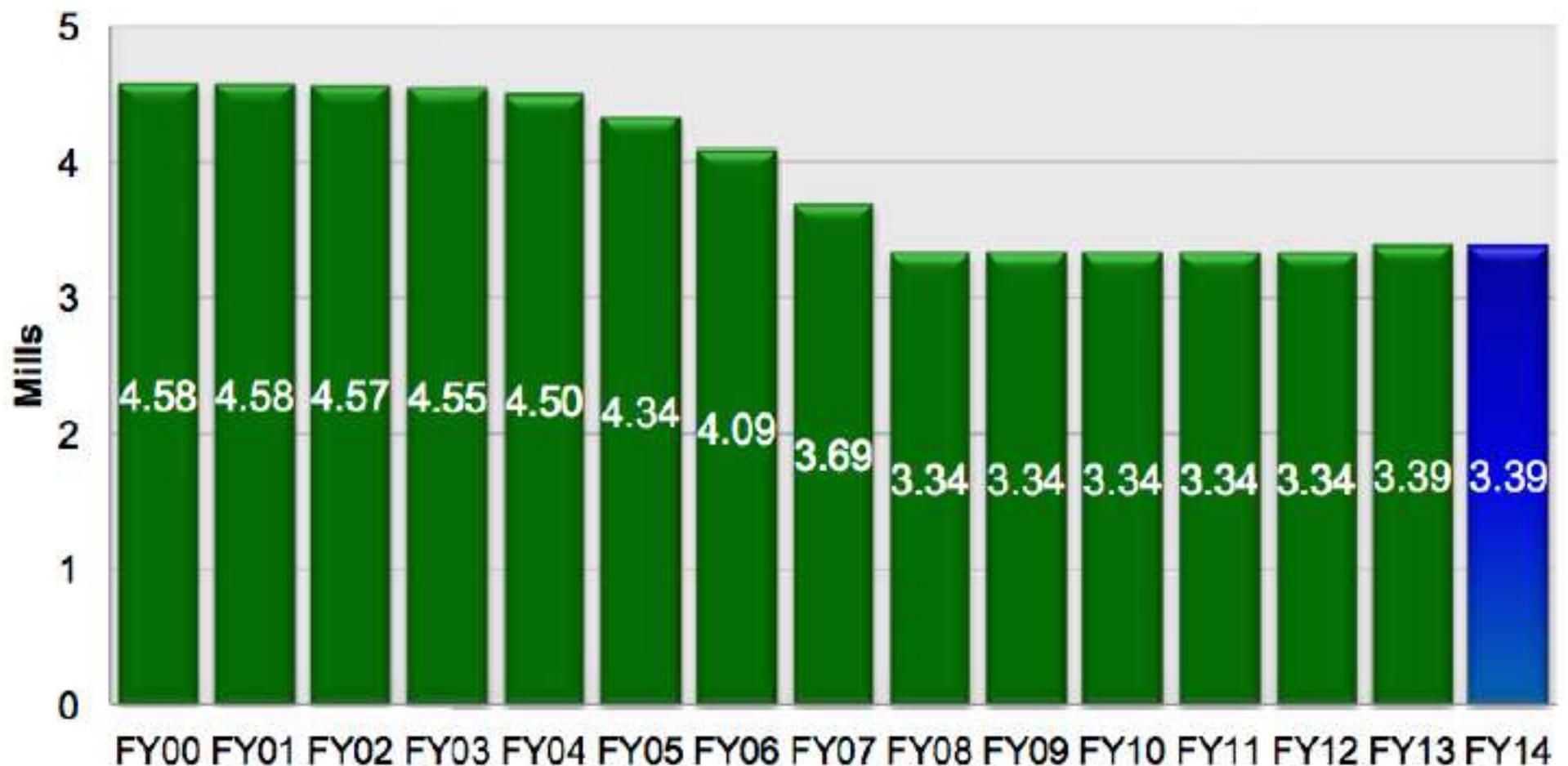
The budget will not become final until the board approves it after a second public hearing in Venice on Sept. 23, he added.

“It’s easily interpreted otherwise,” Robinson told Botelho, “just with the way it’s worded in [the agenda material].”

Reid said he hoped the board would complete all its spending decisions by the conclusion of the Aug. 20 budget workshop, prior to the first public hearing, which has been set for 5:30 p.m. on Sept. 9 in Sarasota.

Following those comments, Commissioner Joe Barbetta made a motion to certify the tentative ad valorem millage rates and non-ad valorem assessments for the 2014 fiscal year, so they can be advertised.

“As always, Mr. Botelho and his staff did a great job — under tougher circumstances this



A chart compares the total county millage rates from the 2000 fiscal year through FY 2014. Image courtesy Sarasota County



year, with a lot of changes that occurred,” Barbetta said.

Robinson was the most vocal of the five commissioners during a June 21 budget workshop, raising points about the confusion produced by changes in the proposed department budgets. Because of an administrative decision to change the allocation of staff responsible for operations and maintenance work in the county, one department was eliminated, two new offices were created in the Public Works Department and a number of positions were returned to other departments.

Botelho and his staff said at the time that the action necessitated about 5,000 line item changes in budget documentation for the 2014 fiscal year.

Commissioner Nora Patterson concurred with Barbetta in complimenting Botelho on July 10, adding that information he recently had emailed the board had “answered a lot of questions as well.”

BUDGET DETAILS

Among the changes already reflected in the FY 2014 budget is the inclusion of 67.8 full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions the County Commission has approved during the current fiscal year. Twenty-four of those were allocated to the new Field Services Office

Commissioner Christine Robinson. Photo by Norman Schimmel

to handle mowing. Commissioners have said numerous times over the past year that they found it highly embarrassing to see grass grow so high along roadsides and in medians because of problems encountered with contracted mowing services. The county fielded a significant number of complaints about the situation last summer.

Another 18.8 FTEs were approved to maintain parks and athletic fields.

Additionally, the board agreed several weeks ago to hire nine new staff members in the Planning and Development Services Department to handle the increased workload emanating from growth linked to the improving economy. Seven of those positions will be paid for through fees collected by the department.

The FY 2014 budget requests from departments included requests for 36.9 new FTEs. Among them would be six new employees in the Sheriff's Office, one new Code Enforcement officer and one new employee in the Natural Resources Department to assist with a backlog of work as well as the completion of the Post Disaster Response Plan (PDRP). Barbetta recently has complained about the delay in finalizing the PDRP.

If the County Commission approves all the requested new positions, the FTE count will rise from 3,297 in the current fiscal year to 3,402 in the 2014 fiscal year.

During their June 21 budget workshop, the commissioners did approve the hiring of two additional Code Enforcement officers to focus on stopping the work of unlicensed contractors in the county. Robinson cast the sole "No" vote on that decision, citing concern about how much of its reserves the county will have to spend to balance the FY 2014 budget.

Thanks to a 4.2 percent increase in property values this year, the new budget will have an extra \$4.4 million in general fund revenue compared to what was available for the current fiscal year.

However, the material provided to the board in advance of its June 12 budget workshop showed a projected draw of \$27.7 million from reserves to cover expenses for FY 2014. The county used \$9.2 million in reserves during the 2012 fiscal year, a chart shows. Botelho told the board he estimated at least that much would be used again for the current fiscal year, though the projected amount shown on a chart was \$15.9 million. 

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AN EARFUL



Downtown Sarasota no longer has areas of blight, partly as a result of projects funded by the CRA. Photo by Norman Schimmel

REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER CRAS OFFER A LOCAL STUDY GROUP PLENTY OF FODDER AS IT CONTEMPLATES THE FUTURE OF THE SARASOTA CRA

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The group studying the fate of Sarasota's Community Redevelopment Agency took testimony Tuesday, July 9, from a serious professional, a gifted amateur and a man who was there at the beginning. All three suggested Sarasota's CRA had lost its way.

The man who was there from the beginning is former Mayor Kerry Kirschner, who was on the City Commission in 1986 when the 30-year deal was

hammered out with Sarasota County to inject county tax money into downtown redevelopment projects. The agreement expires in 2016.

In the mid-1980s, downtown was not a place for an evening out unless you were looking for bar fights and drunks.

It was then the city and county agreed to freeze property taxes at the 1986 base level and devote all city and county property taxes above the base to a

“ *The plan is the key to the whole thing.* ”

Sherod Halliburton
President
Manatee Community Federal Credit Union

community redevelopment agency. Today this “tax increment financing” scheme produces about \$6.6 million a year.

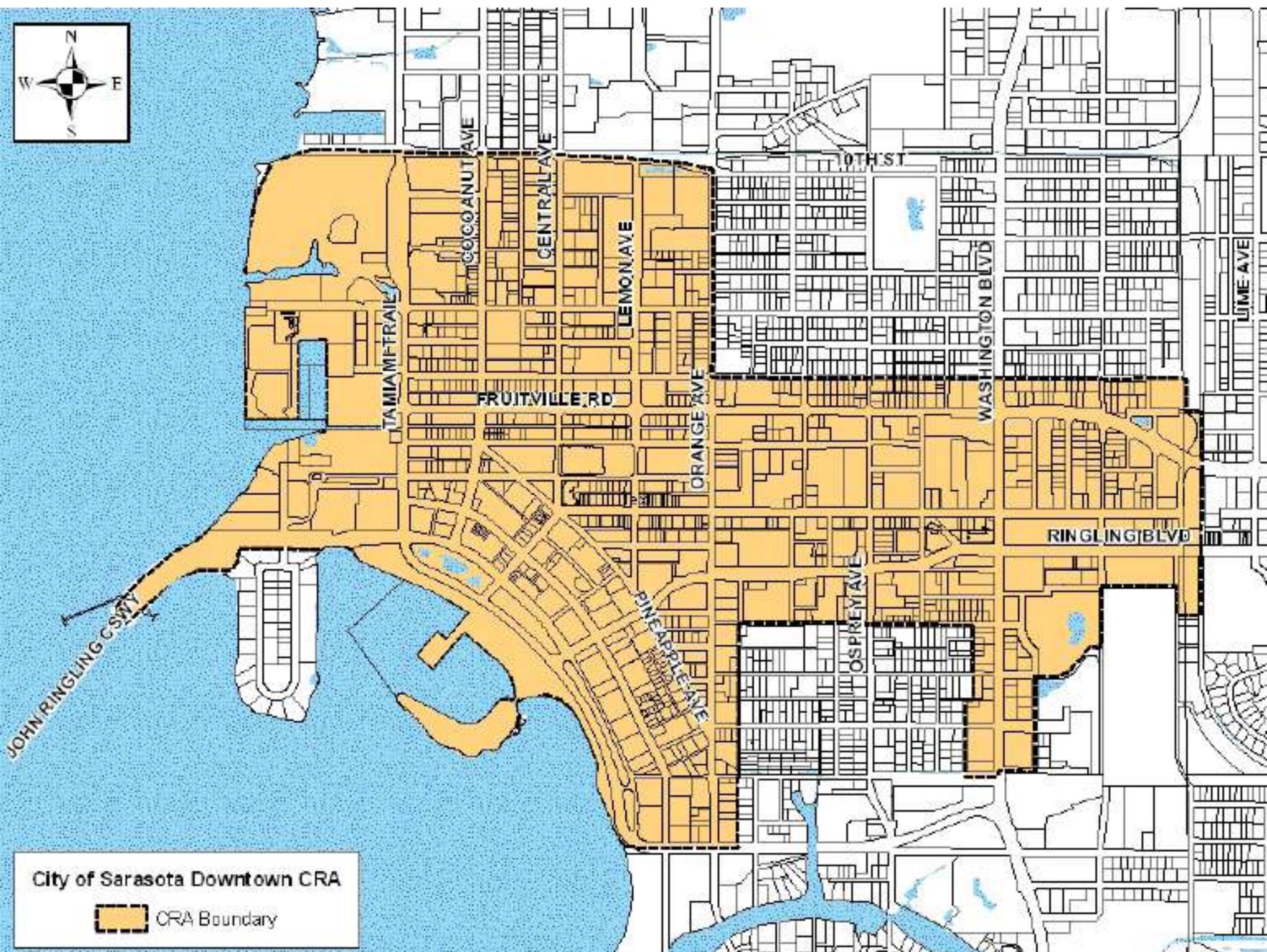
The CRA was able to invest the tax money in a variety of ways to fight “slum and blight conditions.” Initially, some 95 percent of the revenue was spent on tangible projects. But the fraction going toward such work now represents slightly more than half of the total, and that is a problem for Kirschner.

“We stopped updating the plan. We stopped issuing the annual report,” he said. “Now 40

percent of the money is used for annual operating expenses.”

For example the CRA contributes more than \$1 million to the city police. But the diversion is actually much greater.

“Some commissioners tell us [the city] put in \$3.1 million and takes back \$2.6 million for the general fund,” said David Merrill, the group’s chairman. Kirschner replied, “It’s a short-term fix that doesn’t solve the long-term problem. Because we don’t have a vision, we’re totally dependent on other people telling us what they want.”



A map shows the boundaries of the Sarasota CRA. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

THE PRO FROM DELRAY

Chris Brown was blunt. “CRA’s need to be around forever,” he said. He ran Delray Beach’s CRA for almost that long.

Brown then formed a company that specializes in community redevelopment agencies. He and his team write the plans, do the legal research and administer CRAs in Pompano Beach and West Palm Beach. One problem with Sarasota’s CRA is its governing board, he noted. Today the five Sarasota city commissioners also act as the board of directors of the CRA. So when money is tight, it is tempt-

ing to siphon off CRA money for the city’s general fund and keep the overall tax rate low.

Brown says that is dangerous. “I would rather see an independent five- or seven-member board,” he added. “[A CRA] should be administratively independent of its governing body, like the city or county, in order to focus on its purpose.”

That purpose — once slum and blight have been pushed back — is economic development, he pointed out, not replenishing the general fund. “You need public input and a new CRA plan and a five-year funding plan,” said Brown.



Part of the city of Bradenton has realized the economic development benefits of CRA funds. Photo by Ebyabe via Wikimedia Common

He suggested a much greater focus on the Newtown portion of the city's CRA, and he urged an expansion of the area to include north U.S. 41. "You need to put the North Trail in your CRA for redevelopment," he said.

As the advisory group searches for a future for the CRA, Brown noted a great opportunity beckons. "Counties traditionally in the past 20 years have hated CRAs because they have to write a big check every year," he said. "But the county has as much interest in economic development as you do. I think you are on the cusp of convincing the county to do something different."

BRADENTON'S MIRACLE MAN

Sherod Halliburton did not aspire to run a CRA. His expertise is in finance, not redevelopment. But when the City of Bradenton and Manatee County created a CRA in the eastern part of Bradenton, Halliburton ended up running it for seven years before returning to banking.

The "Central CRA" was created specifically to fight slum and blight in a primarily lower-income, African-American neighborhood. Instead of charging ahead with the usual "bricks and mortar," Halliburton focused on human



The city of Delray Beach has its own Ocean Boulevard. Photo by Ebyabe via Wikimedia Commons



Residents of downtown Sarasota high-rise condominium complexes have access to a Whole Foods grocery store, thanks to CRA funds. Photo by Norman Schimmel

resources. He used his CRA as a tool to attract outside investment from foundations that could provide grants.

“We helped fund [CareerEdge](#) with a \$200,000 investment. To date it is a \$5 million operation, with \$2 million invested from outside the Sarasota-Manatee area. It is only there because we had a tool, the CRA that attracted outside investment,” he told the CRA committee members.

He also helped start Suncoast Community Capitol to assist with the financing of small businesses, again by teaming up with other partners.

Because the CRA financial model works on the difference between the tax base at the start, compared to the tax base in later years, the early times for a CRA are hard. Halliburton is proud of the fact his CRA bumped up the tax base by \$2 million during his seven years in an almost exclusively residential area. “It takes a long time for that money to accumulate,” he noted.

“The long-term plan was to create an environment for investment. CRAs create an incentive; [they provide] money to subsidize developments that won’t make sense without that public investment,” said Halliburton. “You have to bring other players to the table.”

Sarasota’s CRA did that with a \$5 million subsidy to bring a Whole Foods supermarket to downtown Sarasota. And Halliburton did it with a lot less to bring a Save-A-Lot grocery store to his East Bradenton community. In both cases, the stores make the surrounding areas much more livable.

“The plan is the key to the whole thing,” said Halliburton.

THE REAL ISSUE

Merrill’s panel asked about how current CRAs are governed. In the case of Delray Beach and Bradenton, the city commissions appointed the members of the board. Those boards, in turn, could hire a professional to direct the operation — if they chose to do so.

Halliburton was paid by the CRA, not the city. When he resigned to return to banking, he was replaced by Bradenton’s planning director. In Delray Beach, Brown was hired by the CRA, not the city.

Additionally in Delray Beach, the board has total latitude over spending. The city cannot veto or otherwise influence decision-making except by appointment to the CRA board. In Bradenton, the City Commission has 30 days to veto any spending move. Brown said Bradenton’s veto power was unusual in the world of CRAs.

One of the thorny issues facing the Sarasota study group is whether it should recommend the establishment of a new governing board if the CRA is renewed. Should the Sarasota City Commission remain the board? Should the Sarasota County Commission have a say, since it pays \$3.5 million per year into the CRA? Should the board be appointed and independent?

Merrill and his group will learn more about how CRAs are governed at their next meeting — July 24 — when Carol Westmoreland will brief them. She is the executive director of the Florida Redevelopment Association. She will be joined on the agenda by Bob Fournier, the Sarasota city attorney.

The public meeting will start at 5:30 p.m. in City Hall. 



SEEKING ASSOCIATION CONSENSUS

Martha Smith, owner of Le Grand Bisou Caribbean Boutique, is among those seeking a code provision for outdoor displays in Siesta Village. File photo

THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AGREE THAT THE ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING BOTH SIESTA KEY RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES SHOULD CONCUR ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUTDOOR BUSINESS DISPLAYS BEFORE THE COUNTY ACTS ON A PROPOSAL

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Siesta Key Village business owner Martha Smith took it as a positive sign this week when the Sarasota County commissioners agreed that any request for changes to the zoning code governing Siesta Key should come from the island's residential and merchant associations, not individual business owners.

Smith is among those Village proprietors leading an initiative to amend the Siesta Key Overlay District (SKOD) to allow merchants

“*There was a time when we would not allow somebody to put a pot of flowers outside a Publix.*”

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

to display wares outside their shops without having to apply for temporary use permits. During the June meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA), Smith

raised the issue, saying she had seen sales at her Siesta Village shop, [Le Grand Bisou Caribbean Boutique](#), drop from \$1,600 a day to \$195 a day in one week after a Sarasota County Code Enforcement officer notified her it was a violation of the local zoning code to place clothes on racks outside the shop.

She told *The Sarasota News Leader* on July 9 that she would contact Siesta Key Association (SKA) President Catherine Luckner to request an appearance before the SKA board and members during the next meeting, Aug. 1.

“It’s on the table,” she said after the *News Leader* conveyed to her the gist of the commissioners’ discussion about the proposed SKOD change. “That makes me happy.”

As she had promised Smith and two other business owners who had talked with her recently, Commissioner Nora Patterson brought up the matter during the County Commission meeting on July 9 in Venice.

Patterson told her colleagues the three proprietors all said they had seen their sales drop after a Code Enforcement officer advised them that the zoning code prevented their outdoor displays. They had come up with a proposal, she continued, that would designate “quite a bit of footage” on their property for such displays while their shops are open, though the merchandise would not be on the right of way.

Among the items they want to display, she said, are golf carts and recreational vehicles, “and I think that starts making the area look pretty honky tonk.”

However, Patterson said she had told them she would seek the board’s approval to allow county staff to work on the proposed zoning changes.

“The only concern I have,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta replied, “is when restaurants put up sandwich boards [in the past], they got beat up pretty bad [by Code Enforcement officers]. And I don’t see how that differs from outdoor displays.”

Unless the SKOD changes had “pretty much unanimous support” from both the merchants’ and residents’ associations, Barbetta added, “and a healthy discussion here by the board,” he would not support county staff work on the project.

“In my heart of hearts ... if I had the unilateral vote on it,” Patterson said, “I probably wouldn’t go for this [zoning change]. But I don’t have that unilateral ability, obviously.”

She continued, “I think it gets pretty messy looking and pretty abused and very, very hard to enforce once you start putting parameters in place [for outdoor displays].”

Nonetheless, she told her colleagues, “I have a hard time saying, ‘No, I won’t support the discussion.’”

Barbetta responded that he would defer to the board majority on the matter.

“I’m supportive of it,” Commissioner Christine Robinson said. “I just don’t want to turn this into a giant issue that sucks time away from some ... other important countywide issues.”

“And I don’t want to turn it into something where somebody can set up golf cart displays in front of their business,” Patterson replied. In years past, she added, commissioners and staff had “gone back and forth” during similar discussions. “There was a time when we would not allow somebody to put a pot of flowers outside a Publix.”

Regarding the Siesta Village business owners’ request, she continued, “It’s a struggle between trying to keep the quality of the community” but allowing some types of outdoor displays.

Finally, Patterson made a motion authorizing staff to use discretion in allocating time to



Siesta Village Outfitters has kayaks, bicycles, paddleboards and even ‘mini cars’ available for rent. File photo

- b) Additional signage, beyond those normally permitted in compliance with the special district sign regulations, shall not be provided as a result of the of the outdoor display area.
- c) Outdoor display shall only include incidental outdoor display items, consisting of a small sample of merchandise, placed outdoors adjacent to the responsible business, which represent or compliment the goods and services sold or provided by the responsible business. Vendors operating independently from the indoor business shall not be permitted.
- d) Display merchandise shall, at all times, be maintained in a safe, sound, and visually attractive condition. The business owner shall be responsible for continuously supervising the safe, sound, and visually attractive condition as well as the appropriate placement of the display items.
- e) Display items shall not obstruct any entries, exits, permitted signs, mailboxes, utilities, public seating, public safety measures, or interfere with ADA compliance.
- f) Display items shall not be located in or obstruct any required setback, parking space, vehicular use area, fire lane, landscape buffer, ADA accessibility route, or public right-of-way.
- g) Outdoor display is specifically prohibited in connection with any outdoor sale unless specifically allowed for through the issuance of a temporary use permit.
- h) County staff shall have the authority to request that item(s) be removed from outdoor display areas if it is felt that the item(s) constitute a potentially hazardous distraction to vehicular or pedestrian traffic; constitute a potential health or safety hazard; are not appropriately maintained or located; are excessive in size or quantity; or compromise the public peace, morals or welfare. If County staff requests that item(s) be removed, the business owner shall cause the item(s) to be removed immediately.

leading discussions with the residential and merchant associations on Siesta Key regarding prohibitions on outdoor merchandise displays and sandwich boards used to advertise restaurant specials.

Robinson seconded it.

However, if her fellow commissioners did not want to do that, Patterson said, “that would be fine with me. I am responding to a request.”

Robinson reiterated her concern that she did not want the staff discussions to include multiple public meetings.

“I’m not going to support the motion,” Barbetta said, “only because I haven’t seen any groundswell [of] requests.” He added that he would prefer the commission acted on the basis of formal requests from the SKA and SKVA, “after having their board meetings and properly vetting [the request].”

“That’s a great suggestion,” Robinson told him.

Patterson then said she would make sure to provide all her colleagues with copies of a draft amendment to the SKOD regarding the outdoor displays as well as a letter she had received from the owner of Comfort Shoes in Siesta Village, requesting outdoor displays.

“Tell those [business owners] to go through the usual channels,” Barbetta said again: Approach the associations for support.

“I’ll be happy to do that,” Patterson replied, then asked Chairwoman Carolyn Mason to rule her motion out of order.

DRAFTING THE ORDINANCE CHANGES

During the July 2 meeting of the Siesta Key Village Association, President Cheryl Gaddie reprised the June discussion Martha Smith had initiated, noting the topic had arisen during a May 21 zoning meeting with county staff. That May session, which the SKVA had organized, was designed to educate new business owners about the provisions of the Siesta Key Overlay District.

“People were not really clear on outdoor displays and what the code said,” Gaddie pointed out.

Following the June SKVA meeting, Gaddie continued, Kevin Cooper, executive director of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, began talking with business owners and working on a solution regarding outdoor displays.

Cooper told the members present on July 2 that he had learned outdoor merchandise displays are not allowed anywhere in the county except under a temporary use permit or a special exception granted by the County Commission.

Statewide, Cooper added, ordinances vary widely in regard to such displays. Based on his research, he drafted the proposed amendment to the SKOD that would permit business owners to have wares outside under specific circumstances. The county’s zoning administrator, Brad Bailey, “seemed to be receptive to the concept,” Cooper noted, when Smith and Rick Lizotte, owner of [Comfort Shoes](#) — located at 5128 Ocean Blvd. — talked with Bailey about it.

Among other specifications, Cooper's proposed SKOD amendment says no outdoor display would exceed 6 feet "above finished grade unless a greater height is permitted through the special exception process." Further, the display area would be located only adjacent to and/or against a single building wall, or storefront, of the responsible business," and it could not extend further than 6 feet from that wall or storefront except by virtue of the special exception process.

No tents or canopies would be allowed over the display area.

Cooper told the SKVA members he was hopeful Patterson would direct staff to work with the business owners, which would save "thou-



Siesta Key Association President Catherine Luckner. File photo



People commonly ride bicycles on the sidewalks in Siesta Village. File photo

sands of dollars in fees” the businesses otherwise would have to pay if they pursued the special exception process.

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

Although he, like Smith, had not heard the County Commission discussion on July 9, Cooper told the *News Leader* he and Gaddie already had talked about the proposed SKOD change with Luckner, the SKA president. “We were waiting to see what happened [during the commission session],” he continued, and that action meant the associations needed to proceed with seeking the best solution for everyone.

“Ideally,” he said, “we would have a unified voice” in approaching the County Commission with a proposal.

Cooper continued, “I understand the compelling business reason ... for outdoor displays.” However, he added, “We don’t want [the Village] to be a place that is uninviting. ... We have to maintain the character of Siesta Key as it stands.”

Still, Cooper said, he had visited other communities that had “found ways to [provide outdoor displays] tastefully.”

He added, “We want to do our due diligence,” so no one would find unwelcome surprises in the future, if the SKOD was amended. “I think there needs to be a lot of explanation and discussion about it.”

Luckner told the *News Leader* the most important focus of the discussions should be a resolve that any change to the SKOD “does not increase the intensity or density of use” in Siesta Village. “It’s about being good neighbors.”

Safety also is a key concern, she noted, because, for example, pedestrians are not the only ones who use the Village sidewalks; bicyclists are common, too, and they have to steer around people on foot. People with disabilities who use the sidewalks are yet another consideration, she added.

Further, the discussions need to produce clear answers about what the business owners believe would be most helpful to them, Luckner said. The property owners also have to be involved; many proprietors do not own their storefronts, she pointed out.

Additionally, Luckner said, business owners as well as County Code Enforcement staff should easily understand any changes.

During the July 2 SKVA meeting, board member Jeff Madden, owner of Beach Bites, raised the point that a Code Enforcement staff member already had weighed in, wondering whether the business owners even could find consensus to proceed with proposed changes to the SKOD.

“I have not heard any objection from anybody at all,” Gaddie told Madden.

Past SKVA President Russell Matthes emphasized that the island associations would work together on the project. “That’s what we’ve always done,” he said. The objective, Matthes added, was not to let outdoor displays spoil the Village atmosphere. Nonetheless, he pointed out, “We’re supporting the businesses. We want you guys to be successful.”

As co-owner of the Daiquiri Deck and the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar, Matthes added, “I’d love to be able to display stuff outside.” 



NEWS BRIEFS

The Sarasota County commissioners stand with Sheriff Tom Knight as he is presented with the 2013 County Partner Award from Lisa Hurley of the Florida Association of Counties. Knight recognized the board for the collaborative working relationship that led to the development of pain clinic ordinances that have served as a model for other communities throughout the state. Photo contributed by the Sheriff's Office

SHERIFF KNIGHT PRESENTED AWARD FROM STATE ASSOCIATION

Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight on July 9 received the 2013 County Partner Award from the Florida Association of Counties (FAC).

The award is presented to a local leader who demonstrates support and understanding of county issues during the legislative session and advocates for home rule, a news release points out.

In making this selection, FAC commended Knight for all of his work to defeat pain management bills introduced in the Florida House and Senate this year that would have taken precedence over county ordinances, the release adds. It also noted his willingness to travel to Tallahassee to provide support for the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, educate policymakers about the law enforce-

ment perspective and ensure existing county pain clinic ordinances were not preempted by proposed legislation, the release says.

“Sheriff Knight was a great county partner in helping to increase public safety as counties try to stop prescription drug abuse,” said FAC Executive Director Chris Holley in the release. “Prescription drug abuse is a life and death issue, and Sheriff Knight stood up to protect local authority and help our communities save lives.”

Because the Sarasota County ordinances passed by the Board of County Commissioners in 2011 were used as a model by other Florida counties, Knight wanted the commissioners to share in the award, the release notes. He asked that the presentation be made during the County Commission meeting in Venice on July 9.

In remarks during the presentation, Knight pointed out, “The [County] Commission gives us what we need ... through ordinances to keep Sarasota County safe.”

He added that the county’s legislative affairs team worked with him in Tallahassee, emphasizing the partnership in that effort.

The news release notes, “For more than 80 years, FAC has represented the diverse inter-

ests of Florida’s counties, emphasizing the importance of protecting home rule” — the concept that local leaders and residents of communities should make the decisions that impact those communities.

“The Florida Association of Counties helps counties effectively serve and represent Floridians by strengthening and preserving county home rule through advocacy, education and collaboration,” it adds.

JEWISH FEDERATION RECEIVES MAJOR BEQUEST FROM COUPLE

The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee (JFSM) recently received a \$250,000 bequest from Herb and Rita Gold, long-time friends and supporters of the organization, the Federation has announced.

The Golds established The Herb and Rita Gold PACE Fund before Rita died in 2008, a news release notes. “They created the endowment to ‘celebrate Rita’s legacy as a teacher and their mutual love for Israel,’ says Rich Bergman, the Federation’s major gifts officer,” the release adds.

“Mr. Gold died last year at the age of 97, but his and Rita’s memory lives on,” Bergman continued in the release. “Over the past 10 years, I was privileged to become close to Herb and Rita. They were intelligent, kind and loving people who were dedicated to creating ways for the less fortunate, particularly children, to receive superior opportunities. Israel was their top priority.”

Bergman adds in the release that, “Herb and Rita were proud of the progressive changes — in science, space, agriculture and medicine — Israel accomplished over the stretch of only a few decades. Up until their final days, they remained fiercely passionate about offering every Jewish child the opportunity to visit Israel, learn about their history and strengthen their Jewish identity.”



Herb Gold/Contributed photo

Bergman notes in the release that the \$250,000 recently received for The Herb and Rita Gold PACE Fund will help the Federation, “support Jewish people who are at risk or in need here in Sarasota-Manatee, in Israel and around the world. Herb and Rita created a legacy, and their name and good works will continue to live on forever.”

For more information about The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee, call 371-4546 or visit www.TheJewishFederation.org.

NEW COLLEGE GETS STRONG MARKS IN MORE COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS

New College of Florida got off to a hot start in July with high marks from the Fiske Guide to Colleges 2014, Colleges of Distinction and BestColleges.com, publications that advise students and families on the best choices for a college education, the college has announced.

The Fiske Guide, founded 30 years ago by former New York Times education Editor Edward B. Fiske, named New College a “Best Buy” — one of just 41 colleges in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to earn that distinction, a news release says.

The review called New College a “fast-rising star” with academics that are “very intense” but in a non-competitive atmosphere, the release adds. Teaching is “outstanding” and professors “care about their students,” the Fiske Guide said.

The Fiske “Best Buy” colleges must meet the guide’s criteria for a top four- or five-star academic rating, and they must be in its moderate- or low-price groupings, the news release notes. The rating places New College in the company of noted institutions such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Texas at Austin and Trinity

College Dublin in Ireland, the news release points out.

Colleges of Distinction put New College on its list of nearly 300 institutions, noting that “as the state’s independent honors college, New College of Florida retains its distinctive academic program and high standards which make it a college of choice for students who can manage the freedom and responsibility of designing their own education.”

That guide, based on interviews with high school counselors, college officials, alumni and students, praised the college’s teaching, saying, “NCF takes the life of the mind seriously, and its high standards demand rigorous student involvement and motivation. Its students develop a sense of personal responsibility and habits of mind that enable them to excel as lifelong learners in any vocation,” the news release continues.

BestColleges.com named New College one of its 27 “Best Colleges for Non-Traditional Students,” a list including Brown University, Beloit College and Goucher College, the release points out.



New College is north of the city of Sarasota, with numerous buildings close to Sarasota Bay. Photo courtesy New College

FREE SECURE BICYCLE STORAGE AVAILABLE AT PALM AVENUE GARAGE

Secured bicycle storage has been made available at the Palm Avenue garage at no cost, the City of Sarasota has announced.

Located near the garage entrance, the locker will provide bicyclists with an added level of safekeeping, a news release says. Approximately 28 bikes can be stored within the locker. An additional 38 can be accommodated at the garage, the release notes

A private key code will be issued to a person upon his or her completion of an individual usage agreement, the release adds. Forms may be obtained at the parking attendant office on the first level in the Palm Avenue garage or at the Parking Operations Division (POD) at City Hall, 1565 First St.

The Palm Avenue garage is located on North Palm Avenue just north of Main Street in downtown Sarasota.



A bicycle storage area has been provided free to the public in the Palm Avenue garage. Photo courtesy City of Sarasota



The Palm Avenue garage is located in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

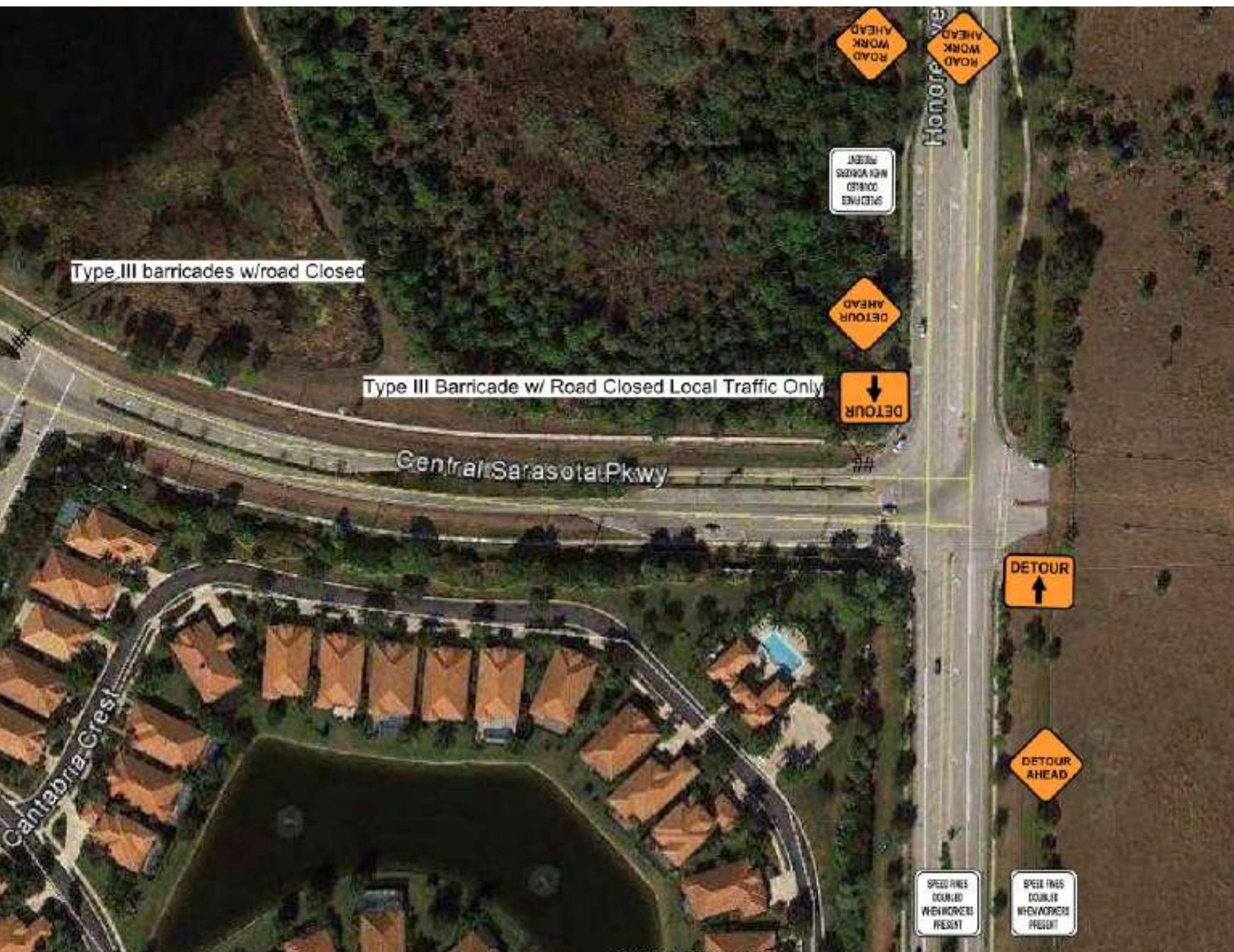
PORTION OF CENTRAL SARASOTA PARKWAY CLOSED FOR SEWER PROJECT

Sarasota County Utilities staff closed a portion of Central Sarasota Parkway at 9 a.m. Monday, July 8, to replace a failing 18-inch sewer main, the county reported.

Utilities staff closed the road across all lanes of Central Sarasota Parkway at Stoneybrook Boulevard, near the entrance of Stoneybrook Golf and Country Club, a news release says. Repairs were expected to take no longer than two weeks, the release notes.

Traffic message boards have been placed on the corner of Honore Avenue and McIntosh Road at Central Sarasota Parkway to alert motorists of the road closure, the release adds. Access to all local residences will be maintained.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 (TTY: 711) or visit www.scgov.net. 



Central Sarasota Parkway is expected to be closed for another week for the replacement of a failing sewer main. Image from Google Earth courtesy of Sarasota County

Click to watch
the video

CRIME BLOTTER



Surveillance video shows suspects using allegedly stolen credit cards in Walmart. Video courtesy of the Sheriff's Office

SOUTH FLORIDA CRIME RING MEMBERS ARRESTED

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested five members of a south Florida crime ring who allegedly committed several smash-and-grab vehicle burglaries in Sarasota July 9 and then used the victims' credit cards at area stores, the office has reported.

The investigation into the crime spree began around 7 p.m. July 9, when two women noticed their vehicle windows were smashed and purses stolen outside Funtastics Gymnastics & Cheerleading on Ashton Road, a report says. Deputies investigating that crime received notice of three additional vehicle burglaries at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road, the report adds.

Within the hour, deputies were able to alert members of the Tactical Unit to locations where the stolen credit cards were being used. TAC deputies located two suspicious vehicles

at the Cattlemen Road Walmart and stopped them as they left the parking lot, the report continues. Most of the stolen property has been recovered.

Detectives viewed store surveillance video, which showed the suspects using the credit cards that had been reported stolen, according to the Sheriff's Office. Some of the suspects had existing warrants or committed other offenses during this investigation, the report adds.

As of July 10, the suspects were facing about 49 charges altogether, including multiple counts of Vehicle Burglary, Criminal Use of Personal Information, Fleeing to Elude and Providing False Names to Law Enforcement while Legally Detained. The investigation is continuing, and additional charges are pending.

Arrested in this crime spree were Fort Lauderdale residents Marcus Thomas, 27, of 3231 NW 18th Place; Christopher Pierre, 24, of 2851 NW 23rd St.; Jackie McBurrows, 25, of 711 SE 15th Ave., Apt. 2; Lionel Bain Jr., 29, of 4231 NW 19th St., No. 250; and Nick Arline, 29, of 2615 NW 17th St., the report says.

The suspects drove a silver 2012 Chrysler 200 and a silver 2004 Cadillac SUV, both of which were impounded.

Detectives are trying to locate additional suspects, including a woman seen using one of the victim's credit cards at the CVS in the 5200 block of Clark Road, the report points out.



Nick Arline/Contributed photo



Marcus Thomas/Contributed photo



Jackie Mcburrows/Contributed photo



Lionel Bain/Contributed photo

Anyone with information about these suspects is encouraged to call Criminal Investigations at 861-4900, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477), go online at www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com or send a text message by texting TIP109 plus a message to CRIMES (274637).

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office once again is reminding the public not to leave valuables or purses in their vehicles, to help prevent crimes of opportunity.



Christopher Pierre/Contributed photo

10 STORE CLERKS CITED FOR UNDERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Ten local convenience store clerks were cited for selling alcohol to a minor during an undercover operation conducted by the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Juvenile Alcohol Task Force (JATF) last week, the Sheriff's Office reported.

The following businesses were found to be in violation of selling alcohol to a person under age 21, and the clerks were given a misdemeanor Notice to Appear:

- 7-11, 5232 Ocean Blvd., Sarasota.
- Circle K, 5651 Clark Road, Sarasota.
- Citgo, 2201 Bee Ridge Road, Sarasota.
- BP, 2791 Bee Ridge Road, Sarasota.
- 7-11, 1721 Honore Ave., Sarasota.
- Chevron, 6895 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.
- Shell, 6991 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.
- Discount Tobacco, 2240 N. Tamiami Trail, Nokomis.
- Quick Mart, 700 N. Tamiami Trail, Nokomis.

The clerk at the Sunoco located at 3951 Clark Road, Sarasota — Andrij Joseph — was arrested for the same crime, a news release notes. He did not have legal identification, the release says, so deputies could not issue him a Notice to Appear.

Another 35 businesses were found to be in compliance, and each was sent a letter to commend owners and employees for helping reduce the sale of alcohol to minors, the release adds.



Andrij Joseph/Contributed photo

TWO WOMEN SOUGHT IN CELLPHONE THEFT CASE

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has asked for the public's help in identifying and locating two female suspects wanted in connection with a grand theft case, the office has announced.

On July 8, Sheriff's Office deputies responded between 3 and 5 p.m. to the Verizon, T-Mobile and AT&T shops — located respectively at 4215 S. Tamiami Trail, 4132 S. Tamiami Trail and 2300 Bee Ridge Road — to investigate three separate incidents of stolen cellphones, according to the report.

The two suspects allegedly were able to disconnect the cellphones from alarm cords

without activating the alarms, the report adds. A total of eight cellphones were stolen, the report continues.

One of the businesses was able to provide a surveillance photo of the suspects while the women were inside. They possibly were driving a new black, four-door sedan, perhaps a Chevrolet, according to the report.

Anyone with information about the suspects is encouraged to call the Criminal Investigations Section at 861-4900, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or go online at www.sarasotacrime-toppers.com.



The Sheriff's Office is seeking help in identifying these two suspects in a grand theft case. Image courtesy of the Sheriff's Office

SUSPECT SOUGHT IN INDECENT EXPOSURE CASE ON LIDO

The Sarasota Police Department is seeking a man who allegedly exposed himself to two juvenile girls on Sunday afternoon at a Lido Beach hotel.

The department received a call about an incident involving indecent exposure in the presence of children that occurred on Sunday, July 7, about 4:15 p.m. at the Limetree Beach Resort, 1050 Benjamin Franklin Drive, Sarasota, according to the report.

Officers responded to the hotel lobby to meet with management in reference to the complaint, the report says. There, the officers spoke to the grandmother of the two juvenile girls who were guests at the hotel. The grandmother told the officers the girls were playing ping pong in the game room when a man approached them while he was masturbating and said he was going to “f--- them,” according to the report.

The victims described the suspect as a white male in his late 20s or early 30s, about 5 feet 9 inches in height with a thin build and facial hair. The man was wearing a black baseball cap and swim trunks with a flowery design in shades of black, blue and white, the girls said;

he did not have on a shirt and his feet were bare, the report notes.

A hotel manager said no video surveillance is used on the property, the report adds, so officers had no assistance in that respect in terms of developing a better description.

About 5:40 p.m., the Police Department received another call from the hotel, this time saying several people were chasing the suspect east towards Ted Sperling Park, the report continues. “A perimeter was set up with negative results,” the report notes. At that time, the suspect was described as wearing black swim trunks or long pants and carrying a dirty white shirt and flip-flops. Officers ran the tags for several vehicles in the lot at the park, but they found no owner matching the suspect’s description, the report says.

Anyone with information is encouraged to call the Sarasota Police Department Bureau of Criminal Investigations at 954-7070, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477), go online at <http://www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com/> or send a text message by texting TIP109 plus a message to CRIMES (274637).

POLICE SEEKING INFORMATION ABOUT GUN FOUND IN HOTEL TRASH

The Sarasota Police Department is investigating circumstances regarding a loaded handgun that was found in a hotel garbage can on July 5, the department has reported.

Officers responded to the Regency Inn, 4200 North Tamiami Trail, at approximately 10:44 p.m. that day in reference to a handgun one of the maids had discovered in a garbage can located on one of the hallways in the hotel, a news release says.

The handgun had a round in the chamber and a magazine with 16 other rounds, the report

says. It was reported stolen in Manatee County on July 1, the report adds.

Anyone with information about the weapon is encouraged to call the Sarasota Police Department Bureau of Criminal Investigations at 954-7070, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477), go online at <http://www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com/> or send a text message by texting TIP109 with a message to CRIMES (274637). 

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OPINION



MONEY FOR NOTHING

EDITORIAL

Gov. Rick Scott and his Republican cohorts in the Legislature like to crow often and loudly about what good guardians they are of the taxpayers' pocketbooks. Yet they duplicitously use political sleight-of-hand to pick the taxpayers' other pockets.

There is no better example than their requirement, passed in 2011 and signed into law by Scott, that all county tax collectors take over complete responsibility for all driver's license testing and issuance no later than June 2015.

Of course, the state will continue to receive the funds it always did for providing this service to Florida

drivers ... only it will not be doing anything to earn that money. Instead, it forces county tax collectors — and the county taxpayers they serve — to pick up the tab for any extra capital investment and personnel expenses, so state drivers essentially will end up paying double.

In a recent appearance before the County Commission, Sarasota County Tax Collector Barbara Ford-Coates estimated it will cost her office millions of dollars over the next several

years as she prepares to take on the extra duties.

In addition to extensive renovations of her existing offices in the Terrace Building in downtown Sarasota,

“Sarasota County Tax Collector Barbara Ford-Coates estimated it will cost her office millions of dollars over the next several years as she prepares to take on the extra licensing duties.”

OPINION

she also will need to acquire more centrally located quarters where she can offer examinations and license issuance for county drivers.

A new, centrally located facility could cost as much as \$3.5 million, she estimated.

Once the transition is complete, she expects an additional 45,000 customers to visit her offices just for driver's license-related matters. But most concerning for her are the estimated 5,000 road tests her employees will need to administer each year.

Of course, her office already has been providing driver's license services for a number of years, as have other tax collectors across Florida. The accessibility of the tax collectors' offices has been an attractive option for drivers, who are willing to pay a small additional fee for the privilege.

The state legitimately could see how transferring all responsibility for license examination and issuance to the county tax collectors was a reasonable evolution in the delivery of those services. However, the state's legitimate desire for efficiency is betrayed by its craven desire for money it no longer will deserve once it abandons licensing.

Propriety never has stayed the state's hand in the past, though, so one should not be surprised it does not now. By legislative fiat, the state forces the counties to assume a duty it ultimately has been responsible for, yet requires them to continue to send on to Tallahassee the fees each county tax collector receives. All the counties are able to do is continue to collect the small fee they always have been allowed for providing licensing services, which

covers only a fraction of the funds needed to fully finance the transition.

Ford-Coates did inform the County Commission that the Florida Tax Collectors Association has made convincing the Legislature to correct this inequity its No. 1 legislative priority.

The commissioners, meanwhile, said they hoped the tax collectors were working with the Florida Association of Counties as well to achieve that legislative goal. But Ford-Coates reminded the commissioners she previously had asked the County Commission to make the matter one of its top legislative priorities, apparently to no avail.

Now, it would appear, the commissioners finally are listening.

The oily entreaties regularly made by candidates for the Legislature and statewide office, offering to reduce the size of state government and reduce the burden of individual taxpayers, continues to have a seductive appeal. Yet logic dictates that much that is proposed by these political hacks is not feasible, or worse, only shifting the costs from one agency to another ... essentially "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

It is a distasteful game of governmental "Three-card Monte" and an undeniable disservice to citizens. Regrettably, it will continue as long as voters succumb to the allure of these hollow promises of fiscal prudence and lower taxes.

Good government costs money, and all voters should acknowledge that reality, because bad government — at least in this instance — costs twice as much. 

OPINION

SUMMER IMPROVEMENTS COMING TO DOWNTOWN AND NORTH SARASOTA



By **Bill Nichols**
and **Richard Winder**
Contributing Writers

COMMENTARY

As members of a community, we are on the lookout for ways to improve our beautiful city, whether it is a small tweak in a neighborhood or something more large-scale, impacting the greater population.

The City of Sarasota is embarking on two significant improvement projects this summer, which we expect will improve walkability downtown, improve landscaping and create a more user-friendly travel experience for visitors. One project will occur downtown; the other, in north Sarasota in the Bayou Oaks neighborhood. Both projects started this week, and both are expected to temporarily impact motorists and pedestrians during the construction periods. Upon completion, though, we anticipate these tandem projects will improve the overall quality of life in Sarasota.

DOWNTOWN ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancements needed in downtown Sarasota were originally identified more than a decade ago in the city's Downtown Master Plan 2020. Then, in 2011, creating a more vibrant downtown became a high priority as a result of a conference and review of the 2020 Plan. So we are excited to collaborate with the Downtown Improvement District to make these long-awaited improvements a reality.

Main Street is the primary focus of the project, with \$1.8 million in improvements planned at

various locations stretching from Gulfstream Avenue to Five Points and up to Goodrich Avenue. The enhancements will be the installation of brick paver sidewalks from Gulfstream Avenue to the Five Points roundabout, the creation of wider sidewalks with parallel parking on the north side of Main Street from Gulfstream Avenue to Five Points (angled parking will remain on the south side of the street), the planting of additional landscaping, the replacement of light poles to improve visibility for pedestrians, the installation of brick pavers at select crosswalks and the addition of trash receptacles and benches. When we are finished, our urban commercial district will be even more attractive.

(On July 15, the City Commission will consider an additional enhancement for the project: the installation of brick pavers at the four crosswalks at the Main-Palm intersection. If that is approved, the intersection will be temporarily closed for approximately three weeks.)

As directed by the City Commission, a majority of the work will be completed during the summer, with substantial completion expected by Veterans Day. We are asking for your patience throughout the summer and early fall, as we endure these public improvements. In the end, the slight inconvenience will be worth it as we create a more livable, visitor-friendly city.

OPINION

To ensure minimal impact to merchants, shoppers and the general public, city staff and the contractor are coordinating very closely. Our many restaurants, cafés and shops will remain open during this time, so please continue to patronize them.

OLD BRADENTON ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

For years, the city and residents in the Bayou Oaks neighborhood in north Sarasota have wanted to calm traffic along Old Bradenton Road, the main arterial road bisecting their neighborhood from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way to University Parkway. Now, it is about to happen, but it will be a complex project.

Not only will Old Bradenton Road be reconfigured into a two-lane divided roadway with a 5-foot raised median with landscaping and drip irrigation, roundabouts will be constructed at Myrtle Avenue as well as 47th Street. The project will make the area pedestrian- and bike-friendly, with sidewalks and bicycle lanes added on both sides of the road. (The bike lanes will be painted green, a new concept in bicycle safety and the first of its kind in Sarasota.)

Mitigation of tree loss is planned along the right of way and will adhere to the city's tree ordinance. Also, four Sarasota County Area Transit bus shelters will be added along Old Bradenton Road, which is a major route for SCAT.

The complex nature of this project revolves around the relocation of a multitude of utilities along the entire path. City of Sarasota water and sewage lines will be moved as well as Verizon, Comcast and TECO Peoples Gas lines. City staff has met with all the parties involved, and the expectation is for each util-

ity company to have a coordinated plan and work closely with the other utilities to ensure the successful relocation of all these service lines. Timing and communication will be essential. Even with the best coordination efforts, though, unexpected events can occur. We ask residents to be patient during this project, which is expected to be completed in January 2014.

While Old Bradenton Road will remain open during construction, we strongly encourage non-local drivers to use alternate routes.

City staff continues to work with the neighborhood association regarding its desire to officially rename the entire length of the roadway "Old Bradenton Road." The association has completed the signature requirements; the request will be presented to the City Commission this month. After successful completion of the entire process, the new name will appear on all street name signs as part of the project.

Enduring construction can be a challenge. That is why we are coordinating with numerous groups in advance to ensure any disruptions are kept to a minimum. We plan to provide the public with regular updates on both projects via the city's website, direct emails, traditional news media and social media. Please sign up to receive email updates by visiting www.SarasotaGov.com, and follow the progress on Twitter [@CityofSarasota](https://twitter.com/CityofSarasota) as we move forward, making Sarasota an even more desirable and livable community.

Bill Nichols is the Old Bradenton Road project manager.

Richard Winder is the downtown improvements project manager. 

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CITY NEEDS TO ADDRESS REBUTTALS AFTER CLOSING OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

To the editor:

Thanks for your detailed coverage of the denied request to open up a new channel through the flourishing seagrass beds of our shallow bay (*Definitions skewer dredge dream, July 4*). I would add only one salient fact to the article.

The site plan chart showing the proposed dredge follows the straight path of a 1920s dredge that was perpendicular to the basin along the shore. After several of us participated in the public input at the hearing, the attorney for the applicant presented several photographs to “confirm” a continued presence of “the channel” over many years. On these photographs, she repeatedly pointed out completely different “paths” that zigzagged obliquely from the basin in southwesterly directions through the seagrass below the 1920s channel, in an attempt to convince the staff and the commissioners that an open channel had persisted since the last aerial evidence of it disappeared in the 1950s.

Dredged channels do not move about. Seagrass often appears in patches that change over time, however, and light conditions may make it appear as if there were paths through it, but the shifting “paths” being pointed out were never part of a channel dredged in the 1920s. Few would be familiar enough with the issue to notice the discrepancy.

Public input was denied after the hearing was closed. When the attorney’s new information was presented in rebuttal, we were unable to point out this blatant misinformation to the Sarasota city commissioners. We were very concerned that they would be persuaded by the misinformation. Luckily, a decision against the dredge pivoted on the “maintenance” aspect of the application that was just as far-fetched.

This application could have been approved, however, because of persuasive misinformation that could not be rebutted. This needs to be noted in case of appeal and to demonstrate that the City Commission needs to suppress new information after it has closed a public hearing; otherwise, the commission needs to allow the public to address that new information.

*Kafi Benz, president
Friends of Seagate Inc., Sarasota*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sarasota News Leader welcomes letters to the editor from its readers. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length, and include the name, street address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be emailed to Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com, with “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line. Letters actually printed will be selected based on space available, subject matter and other factors. We reserve the right to edit any letters submitted for length, grammar, spelling, etc. All letters submitted become the property of *The Sarasota News Leader*.

Sarasota Leisure

SUPERSTARS

SIESTA SEEN

Inside

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SUPERSTARS

Grand Marshal Nik Wallenda waves to the crowds lining the streets of downtown Sarasota.

SARASOTA SKYWALKER NIK WALLEDA HEADS UP THE PARADE OF OFFSHORE RACING BOATS

Staff Reports

The superstar from the air joined forces with superstars from the waves on July 5 in downtown Sarasota, bringing out hundreds of cheering fans in spite of intermittent downpours.

After Nik Wallenda, the Circus Sarasota hometown star, successfully negotiated a walk above the Grand Canyon on June 23, he was invited to be a grand marshal for Suncoast Charities' Festival Parade of Boats. One of numerous events over a nine-day period, the parade was part of the Suncoast Super Boat Grand Prix Festival, which culminated in the 30th running of boat races on July 7 off Lido Beach.

Wallenda led the parade, followed by a representation of his fellow Circus Sarasota performers.

Then it was the boats' and racing teams' turn down Main Street and Gulfstream Avenue.

Festival proceeds support the work of [Suncoast Charities for Children](#). This spring, the Sarasota County Commission provided a \$79,200 grant and \$3,500 in in-kind services to make the festival possible after the organizers voiced concerns about having to cancel the events because of a lag in private contributions.

The Sarasota City Commission approved \$36,582 in in-kind services for the festival, a \$5,175 increase over its 2012 contribution. Additionally, the Sarasota County Sports Commission gave Suncoast Charities \$15,000 as a sports marketing grant.

All photos are by Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel. 



Performers with Circus Sarasota pay homage to Nik Wallenda's aerialist feats.







The Baltimore Orioles' mascot, Bird, greets young fans along the boat parade route.



Boat parade entries line up near the intersection of U.S. 301 and Main Street in downtown Sarasota before the event begins.





Not only were the powerful vessels on view in the parade through downtown Sarasota, they also were on display for the public at Centennial Park during the Powerboats by the Bay events on July 5 and 6.



I like to take my time.

Sure, it's a temptation to rush. Each issue of *The Sarasota News Leader* is brimfull of in-depth coverage of all the news and goings-on in Sarasota County. And it has delightful and informative feature stories. Thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota*, I always know what the most exciting happenings are each week. Plus, it is simply so beautiful, with photography that takes my breath away.

There is so much there, I don't know where to begin. So it is hard to resist the urge to read it all at once. But I know better. Take your time and indulge in all that it has to offer.

You have a whole week.

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Siesta Seen

COUNTY COMMISSIONER SEEKS TO SPEED UP THE SIESTA TROLLEY TIMETABLE; THE TURTLE BEACH RENOURISHMENT PROJECT MOVES FORWARD; THE SIESTA CHAMBER SELLS ENOUGH VIP PICNIC TICKETS TO COVER THE JULY FOURTH FIREWORKS EXPENSE



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

No trolley service to Siesta Key until 2016? That is too long!

The assertion came from Commissioner Nora Patterson in a recent email exchange with Glama Carter, general manager of Sarasota County Area Transit.

As a result of their “conversation,” Patterson raised the issue on July 10 — during the final minutes of the County Commission’s final meeting before its summer recess begins.

Patterson pointed out to her colleagues that trolley service on the key had been envisioned for a number of years as a means of alleviating some of the parking concerns for visitors and residents.

A couple of years ago, she continued, the County Commission was asked whether it wanted to advance funding for the match of a state grant to bring the trolley service online sooner. “We were in a particular financial crunch,” Patterson told her fellow commissioners, “and we decided not to do that.”

However, Carter had explained in one of those recent emails, Patterson continued, that because of the timing of the grant and the average 18-month lag between the county’s placing an order for new buses and the buses’ delivery, Siesta trolley service appeared to be impossible before the beginning of 2016.

In response to a June 25 email from Patterson, Carter wrote the following on June 27:

“In order to operate the proposed Siesta Trolley route, two vehicles are needed.” The route, as planned, would operate every 30 minutes, Carter noted, including a stop at Turtle Beach every 60 minutes. “With the addition of the new Trolley route,” she pointed out, “SCAT [also] would expand the current Route 11 on Sunday to connect downtown Sarasota with Siesta Key.”

The Siesta Trolley would be funded with a 50/50 three-year “service development operating grant” from the Florida Department of Transportation, Carter continued. That grant,

Siesta Seen

available in the 2015 fiscal year, would be in the amount of \$1.087 million.

“SCAT intends to pursue funding for the required vehicles and operators in 2014 during the FY 2015 budget preparation,” Carter added. That would make it possible for the Siesta service to start in January 2016, she noted.

On June 29, Patterson replied, “I am sorry but this seems entirely too long for a service that was needed a while ago. I did not feel that we could advance the grant funding for this year as was suggested before you came, but waiting until 2016 for service is another matter entirely. If the funding is available in 2014/15 from FDOT I would hope that we would have the [trolleys] in time for the fall of 2014 when the operating funds are available. That is almost a year and a half away. What you suggest carries it out still an additional year plus to [January] 2016. We have been talking about this for years!”

During the July 10 County Commission meeting, Patterson pointed out that the Siesta Public Beach improvements will be getting under way in the not-too-distant future, which will exacerbate the parking situation on the island.

Referring to the January 2016 timeline Carter had mentioned, Patterson asked, “Could we try to do better than that?”

She added, “If there’s any way to expedite the ordering of the buses to match the availability of the operating monies we’re going to get from the state, that would make much more sense.”

Commissioner Joe Barbetta asked that county staff have a report ready for the board when it returns from its summer break.

County Administrator Randall Reid told the commissioners that report would be ready “as soon as you get back.”

According to the calendar on the county website, the next meeting will be on Aug. 20.

TURTLE BEACH RENOURISHMENT

One piece of Siesta business that won easy approval this week involves the Turtle Beach renourishment project.

During its regular meeting on July 9, the County Commission voted unanimously to pay \$725,237 to Humiston & Moore Engineers of Naples for design and construction phase services for that initiative.

An April 22 memo to the County Commission from the county’s coastal resources manager, Laird Wreford, pointed out that \$5 million from a Tourist Development Tax fund designated for renourishment would pay for the Turtle Beach project.

A July 9 staff memo from Amy Meese, director of the county’s Natural Resources Department; Isaac R. Brownman, director of capital projects; and Curtis R. Smith, the project manager, notes the previous South Siesta Key Beach Restoration Project — which began in December 2006 and ended in March 2007 — “consisted of the placement of approximately 922,300 cubic yards of dredged sand along approximately 2 miles of open shoreline front-

Siesta Seen

ing the Gulf of Mexico, from just north of the former Midnight Pass, to about 300 feet south of Point of Rocks.”

That sand came from four borrow areas located in the Gulf, 6.5 to 8 miles west of the project, the memo adds. “This material was emplaced to create a widened and elevated beach and dune system to protect property and infrastructure threatened by severe shoreline erosion with an overall goal of providing storm protection ...”

Since the work was completed, the memo continues, the area “has been monitored and evaluated regularly both for permit compli-

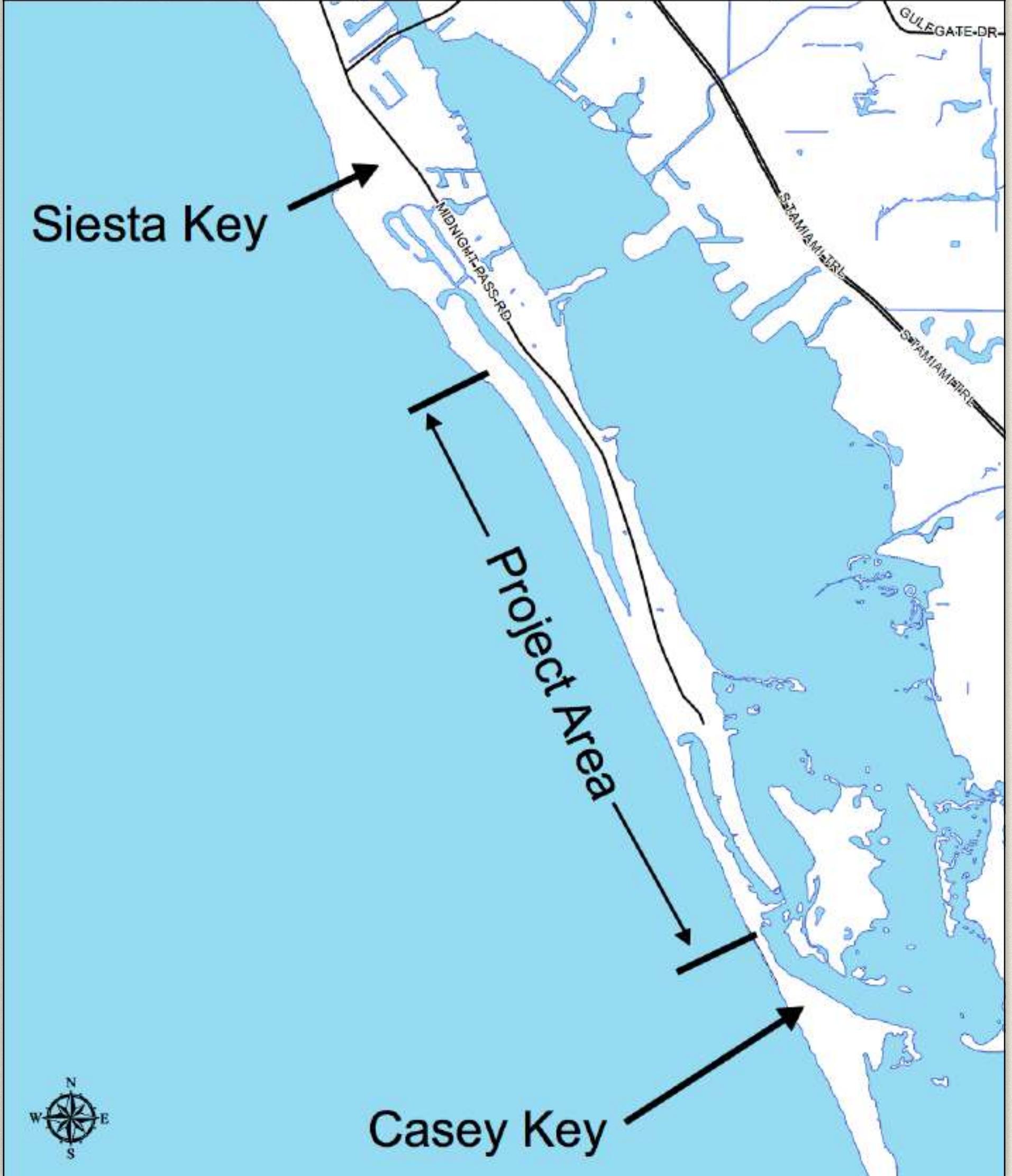
ance, and to provide information for planning maintenance nourishment events ... These routine evaluations indicate that while the project generally is performing as expected, it likely will require maintenance nourishment by the winter of 2015.”

In September 2012, the County Commission approved submittal of a funding application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for the renourishment, the memo points out. Almost exactly six months earlier — on April 13, 2011 — the commission had “authorized staff to initiate the design and permitting of the first maintenance nourishment of the project,” the memo adds.



A photo taken in late November 2012 by Siesta Key Association board member Ron Flynn shows the erosion that has occurred on Turtle Beach. Photo courtesy of Ron Flynn

South Siesta Key Beach Restoration Project Area



A map shows the area of the planned renourishment for Turtle Beach. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

During the procurement process that led to the July 9 vote, the memo notes, seven firms responded to a Call for Professional Services. The bid period closed on Oct. 19, 2012. Humiston & Moore Engineers was the top-ranked firm after staff completed its evaluations of the responses, the memo says.

FIRE IN THE SKY

The Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce did meet its fundraising goal for the July Fourth fireworks show at the beach, Executive Director Kevin Cooper told me this week.

He was breathing a sigh of relief. Just a day before the big event, the chamber sent out another email blast, saying it was about \$5,000 short of its goal for the approximately \$35,000 expense of the fireworks.

No public money goes toward the event, though tens of thousands of people relish the spectacular each summer.

Cooper said it was a bit of a soggy day for the VIP picnic that helped cover the cost of the fireworks. "A substantial amount of rain"



Fireworks boom into the sky over Siesta Public Beach on July 4. Photo contributed by Peter van Roekens



Photo contributed by Peter van Roekens



Photo contributed by Peter van Roekens

Siesta Seen

fell, as he put it, during four “pretty lengthy periods.” The ground already was significantly soggy, too, from downpours earlier in the week. But the show went on — a little earlier, though, for the fireworks themselves.

The person in charge of the pyrotechnics saw a window of opportunity before the rains began again and went ahead and launched the rockets, Cooper pointed out.

And, based on the lovely photos Siesta Key Association Secretary Peter van Roekens generously provided us this week, it appears everyone watching had plenty of opportunity to “Ooooh” and “Aaaah.”

CHANCE MEETING IN PARIS

2005 Booker High School Visual Performing Arts graduate — and Siesta Key native — Bruce Merkle was in Europe in June when he decided to revisit Notre Dame. As he walked by the world-famous cathedral, he felt a hand on his shoulder. To his surprise, it was 2006 VPA graduate Charlie Barnett.

That was the story Bruce’s mom, Marlene Merkle, told me recently.

Bruce, who now lives in Los Angeles, has been seen singing on several TV shows, among them performances in comedy skits on *The Tonight Show*. Charlie, who lives in Chicago, stars as Peter Mills on the hit show *Chicago Fire*. 



Charlie Barnett (left) and Bruce Merkle pose in front of Notre Dame in Paris. Contributed photo



*Don Walker is Gardner Church and Jenny Aldrich is Fanny Church in *Painting Churches*. Photo by Gary Sweetman*

BANYAN THEATER COMPANY'S 12TH SEASON UNDER WAY

The Banyan Theater Company is presenting its 12th season of summer entertainment through Aug. 25, with *Painting Churches* by Tina Howe — the first show — continuing through July 14.

Heroes by Gerald Sibleyras with a translation by Tom Stoppard will run from July 18 to Aug. 4. *Time Stands Still* by Donald Margulies will take the stage from Aug. 8 -25, a news release notes.

Painting Churches focuses on Gardner and Fanny Church, who are preparing to relocate from their Beacon Hill house to their summer cottage on Cape Cod. Gardner, once a famous poet, has retired, the release adds. He slips in and out of senility as his wife, Fanny, “valiant-

ly tries to keep them both afloat,” the release continues.

“They have asked their daughter, Mags, to come home and help them move,” it adds. “Mags agrees, for she hopes as well to finally paint their portrait. She is on the verge of artistic celebrity herself and aspires, by painting her parents, to come to terms with them and for them to do the same with her.”

In *Heroes*, three World War I veterans — Henri, Gustave and Phillippe — pass their monotonous-filled days in a military hospital by engaging in verbal battles of long-forgotten military campaigns, grumblings about the staff and reflections of their lives, the release says. “Their cantankerous camaraderie becomes strained

when Gustave conjures up an escape plan. Looking over the cemetery to the poplars beyond, they dream of freedom. Will today be the day they finally make it to Indochina or only as far as the top of the hill?"

Time Stands Still puts the spotlight on Sarah and James, a photojournalist and a foreign correspondent "trying to find happiness in a world that seems to have gone crazy," the release continues. "Theirs is a partnership based on telling the toughest stories and to-

gether making a difference. But when their own story takes a sudden turn, the adventurous couple confronts the prospect of a more conventional life."

The Banyan Theater Company performs in the Jane B. Cook Theatre at the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. A three-show subscription costs \$70, a two-show package is \$52 and single tickets are \$28.50. To purchase tickets, visit www.banyantheatercompany.com.



(From left) Alan Kitty, Joseph Parra and Peter Thomasson star in Banyan Theater Company's production of *Heroes*. Photo by Gary Sweetman

HERSHBERGER LANDSCAPES TO BE ON DISPLAY AT CENTER

Sky Water Blues: A Series of Works Inspired by Three Geographic Locations will be on display at The Women's Resource Center, 340 S. Tuttle Ave., Sarasota, from July 18 through Sept. 26, the center has announced.

The show features abstract and representational personal landscapes in oil, pastel and acrylic by Sarasota artist Carol Hershberger, a news release notes. Hershberger's paintings are inspired by her memories, the release adds. "They reveal themselves in symbolic forms" and are composed of multiple layers of color, composition and materials, the release continues.

Hershberger grew up on a dairy farm in Holmes County, OH, the release says: "Steeped in Mennonite tradition and ritual, she was deeply influenced by a sense of place." Hershberger notes in the release that her work em-

bodies a sentiment from author Lucy Lippard in the book, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-Centered Society*: "If space is where culture is lived, then place is the result of their union."

In 1997, Hershberger moved to Sarasota to attend the Ringling College of Art and Design. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2003 and has exhibited her work locally at Selby Gallery, Crossley Gallery, Sarasota Art Center and Selby Library. Visit carolannmiller.com to see examples of her art.

The opening will take place July 18 from 5-7 p.m. in the Selby Room. The public is invited. Refreshments will be served, and Tyler Plaster of 3D Burn will perform bluesy New Age and folk music on the guitar.

For more information, call the Women's Resource Center at 366-1700.



Beulah's Hill by Carol Hershberger is acrylic, oil stain and oil pastel on canvas. Contributed image

CARREÑO DANCE FESTIVAL TO RETURN FOR A THIRD YEAR

Since its founding in 2010, international ballet star José Carreño has served as artistic director of the Sarasota annual dance festival bearing his name. Now, in addition to his duties at the Carreño Dance Festival, he has been named artistic director for the well-respected Ballet San Jose in California, the company has announced.

In Silicon Valley, Carreño is working on plans for the Ballet San Jose's 2013-2014 season, a news release notes. However, he will return to Sarasota in time for the opening of the third annual Summer Master Class Series at the Sarasota Opera House and the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School from July 29 through Aug. 17, culminating in the traditional Festival of Stars performance, the release adds.

“My expectations for another successful summer program in Sarasota are extremely high,” Carreño says in the release. “We have an impressive roster of pre-professional students” from across the United States, as well as Canada and the United Kingdom, he notes, “and we are welcoming another incredible international faculty.”

Among the faculty members assembled by Carreño and Robert de Warren, president of the Sarasota International Dance Festival, are Loipa Araujo, co-director of the English National Ballet; Yuri Fateev, director of the Mariinsky Ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia; Rinat Imaev, company teacher for American Ballet Theatre; Carlos dos Santos, modern Brazilian choreographer and master teacher; Magaly Suarez, master teacher and artistic director of Florida Classical Ballet; and Julie Kent, principal dancer from American Ballet Theatre.



José Carreño and Julie Kent perform a pas de deux in The Merry Widow. Photo courtesy of ABT-Gene Schiavone

Highlighting the Festival of Stars program at 5 p.m. on Aug. 17 at the Sarasota Opera House will be a performance of the pas de deux from *The Merry Widow* with Kent and Carreño, the release continues. The program also will feature *The Sleeping Beauty Suite* as well as *A Contemporary Mood*, especially created for the Festival of Stars by Carlos dos Santos with original music by David Goldstein.

Appearing in the *Rose Adagio* from *Sleeping Beauty* will be Shelby Elsbree from the Boston Ballet, a Sarasota native who danced with the Royal Danish Ballet for four years, the release adds. Other guest artists will be Jordan Elizabeth Long from the Royal Swedish Ballet and Nathan Chaney of Ballet Zurich.

Tickets are on sale at the Sarasota Opera box office: Call 328-1300 or visit www.sarasotaopera.org/carrenofestival.aspx. 



The second-grade students created a puppet show about kindness. Contributed photo

TEMPLE SINAI STUDENTS ACT ON LESSONS ABOUT KINDNESS

Throughout the past school year, Temple Sinai students engaged in many discussions about *mitzvot* (their Jewish obligations) and *g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness).

In the fall, in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, youngsters in the entire school dedicated their weekly *tzedakah* (money collected for others) — which totaled more than \$300 — to the American Red Cross, a news release says. In the spring, second-graders created a puppet show that contrasted a day in the life of a child their age who went through a day not being kind and thoughtful with a day in which the same child showed respect to parents and teachers, helped out a friend and cared for animals, the release adds.

The fifth/sixth-grade class was charged with researching non-profit organizations and

choosing the ones that would receive the additional \$448 that had been collected for *tzedakah*. Under the guidance of their teacher, Joni Mandel, the students decided to support several projects, the release continues. Learning about the critical shortage of safe drinking water in many parts of the world, the students decided to give half of the *tzedakah* to Clean Water Action, the release adds.

After the youth heard about lobbying efforts to pressure supermarkets and restaurant chains to support farmworkers, the decision was made to contribute the other half of the *tzedakah* to the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#).

Inspired to do something more hands-on as well, the class organized a used book drive for Oasis Elementary and was able to collect



five boxes of children’s books and classroom learning materials, the release notes.

“Indeed, this year Temple Sinai students both learned about *and* acted on important Jewish values,” the release says. 

Fifth- and sixth-graders learned about the importance of clean water. Contributed photo

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

12
JULY

Golden Gates: Traditional Song and Dance of Russia and Ukraine
July 12, 7 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 104 S. Pineapple Ave. Admission: Donation. Information: 955-0935 or firstsrq.com.

12+
JULY

Florida Studio Theatre presents *The Underpants*
Through Aug. 3 (times vary), Keating Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$18 to \$42. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

12+
JULY

FST Summer Improv
Through Aug. 24, 8:30 p.m., John C. Court Cabaret, 1241 N. Palm Ave. Tickets: \$12. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

12+
JULY

Dabbert Gallery presents *Summer Showcase*
Through Sept. 30, 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Admission: free. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

17+
JULY

WBTT presents *The Best of Stevie Wonder*
July 17- 28 (times vary), Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, 1626 10th Way. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or online at WBTTSRQ.org.

19
JULY

Friday Fest at the Van Wezel, featuring Kettle of Fish
July 19, 5 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail. Admission: Free. Information: 953-3368 or VanWezel.org.

20
JULY

WSLR presents *The Couple Conundrum* – a staged reading
July 20, 8:30 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at door. Information: 894-6469 or SarasotaPeacenter.org.

THE CATCHES OF THE DAY



SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



Each week, Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel searches Sarasota County for iconic shots that underscore why the community is a favorite with residents and tourists alike.