

THE SARASOTA

February 22, 2013

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



MEET THE CANDIDATES

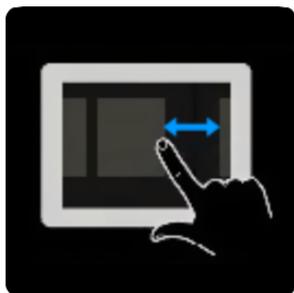
HALFWAY POINT

BATTERS UP!

Inside

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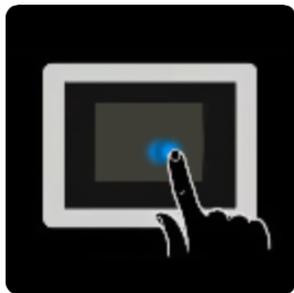
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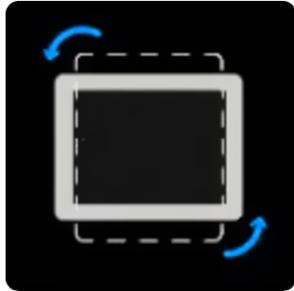
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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher
Rachel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor
Cooper@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Stan Zimmerman

City Editor
Stan@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Norman Schimmel

Staff Photographer
NSchimmel@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

David Staats

Columnist
DStaats@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Fran Palmeri

Contributing Writer
FPalmeri@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Harriet Cuthbert

Contributing Writer
HCuthbert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Elinor Rogosin

A&E Writer
ERogosin@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Scott Proffitt

Staff Writer
SProffitt@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Tyler Whitson

Staff Writer
TWhitson@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

John Riley

Editorial Cartoonist
Riley@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Vicki Chatley

Copy Editor
Vicki@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Cleve Posey

Production Manager / Graphic Designer
Cleve@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Robert S. Hackney

General Manager
Robert@SarasotaNewsLeader.com

Advertising Sales

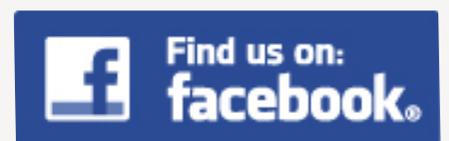
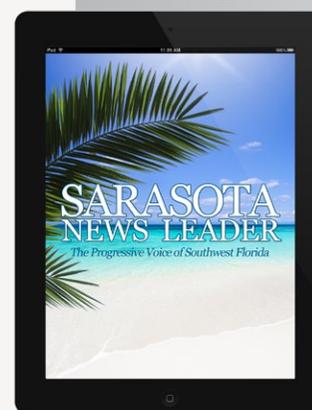
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Welcome

This week, we begin our own countdown to the March 12 election for two at-large seats on the Sarasota City Commission.

City Editor Stan Zimmerman consulted with the other members of our Editorial Board in developing a list of questions before he sat down for extensive interviews with all six candidates for those seats.

And I do mean extensive. These are not the quick-read, “hit just the highlights” types of profiles you will find in the average publication.

I have had the privilege in years past of watching Stan in action during candidate interviews. He is a master at putting people at ease and drawing them out on their answers.

Our production manager, Cleve Posey, did just as masterful job of putting together the layout as Stan did with the interviews — which, I should add, Stan transcribed from hours of notes.

This week, we offer the questions and answers posed of Richard Dorfman, Kelvin Lumpkin and Pete Theisen. Next week, we will feature Stan’s interviews with the three women in the race — Suzanne Atwell, Susan Chapman and Linda Holland.

Although we tout our publication for its very “green” factor of being available digitally instead of in print, Copy Editor Vicki Chatley offers an excellent suggestion: If you use a computer to read the *News Leader* instead of an iPad, you might want to print out the interviews to study them at length in a comfortable setting (this will require downloading the PDF version). There is quite a lot to take in; trust me.

Yet, we believe the time all of us have invested in this process — and the time you will spend reading the results — will serve you very well. Those of you registered to vote in the city should end up being the most informed people possible when you cast your ballots.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



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MEET THE CANDIDATES

Candidates prepare to address members of the Arlington Park Neighborhood Association on the evening of Feb. 19: (From left) Pete Theisen, Linda Holland, Kelvin Lumpkin and Richard Dorfman. Photo by Robert Hackney

CITY COMMISSION CANDIDATES RICHARD DORFMAN, KELVIN LUMPKIN AND PETE THEISEN ANSWER QUESTIONS POSED BY THE SARASOTA NEWS LEADER IN ADVANCE OF THE MARCH 12 ELECTION

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The basics: Top education?

Richard Dorfman: Bachelor of Arts in business and communications, American University.

Kelvin Lumpkin: Bachelor of Arts in accounting; working on an MBA at the University of Florida.

Pete Theisen: (Pre-interview note: Mr. Theisen asked to make a video recording of our conversation. I did not object.)

Doctor of Oriental Medicine.

Marital status?

Dorfman: Single but in a committed relationship.

Lumpkin: Married.

Theisen: Single

Children?

Dorfman: One-third of the committed relationship's child.

Lumpkin: Two beautiful girls.

Theisen: None.



Years in the community?

Dorfman: Full-time, four years. Part-time, eight years.

Lumpkin: 39 (born in Sarasota).

Theisen: About 30.

***How many times have you run for office?***

Dorfman: Two: first time, two years ago.

Lumpkin: First time.

Theisen: This is the third.

***Do you have a website? Is there a telephone number people can call you?***

Dorfman: ElectDorfman.com; 320-5937, my personal cell phone.

Lumpkin: Electkelvin.com; 266-2072.

Theisen: Website: <http://elect-pete-Theisen.com>; 365-9439



Some of these are “yes” or “no” questions; there is a lot of territory to cover, so ...

Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor and city manager?

Dorfman: I would not say I was satisfied with all three as I am with any one in particular. It varies by individual. I don't know if I want to go into a rating. Tom [Barwin, city manager] has only been here a little while. I wouldn't even begin to rate him.



Richard Dorfman/Photo by Norman Schimmel

I'm very satisfied with Pamela Nadalini [auditor and clerk]. In terms of Bob Fournier [city attorney], I'm satisfied with Bob. I'm not sure if the current system of the way we get our legal advice is the best way for the city to be doing it.

Care to elaborate?

Dorfman: I won't elaborate at this time, but I do have something else in mind.

***Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor, city manager?***

Lumpkin: Yes I am. If I was a commissioner, I would be better able to evaluate their performance. But from the outside looking in, I see no problems. I think with the city manager, it

may be too early, but I've heard nothing but good things so far. But he's fairly new.



Are you satisfied with the performance of the three city charter officials: city attorney, clerk and auditor, city manager?

Theisen: Mr. Barwin is a little too new. I have only one impression of him. He didn't like the Sunshine idea [of open meetings with an *ad hoc* committee on the city's homelessness situation]. He has a reputation. People are starting to know he doesn't like Sunshine. Of course, that's kind of dangerous because we have a law firm making their whole living out of Sunshine suits.

We might just as well avoid the appearance of any closure. Specifically, I went to a meeting with him and asked, "Are we in the Sunshine?" I was holding up the video camera, and he said, "I'd rather you didn't." So I didn't. But I think that's dangerous.

I understand the five commissioners and the manager once a week have a closed-door meeting.

Yes, one-on-one.

Theisen It's not all five?

No.

Theisen: Then I was misinformed. I wonder what the justification is of keeping that secret. OK, so the minutes of that are posted?

I don't think they take minutes.

Theisen: So somebody could come in and sit on those?

No more than I could come in and sit in when you go talk to a professional.

Theisen: So they're secret or they're not.

Those meetings are not subject to the Sunshine Law.

Theisen: So they'll never get sued over it.

If it were the five commissioners together, that would be an official meeting, noticed, with people able to attend and minutes being taken. But one-on-one meetings are not subject to the Sunshine Law.

Theisen: I was a little bit raised eyebrows he didn't want it videotaped. But, well, all right.

And the other city charter officials?

Theisen: I can't evaluate Mr. whatever-his-name is — the lawyer.

Bob Fournier.

Theisen: Yeah.

But as a city commissioner you would evaluate him.

Theisen: I think I would judge him on whether or not he was forthcoming with answers to legal questions. I'd say my impression of him is neutral at this point.

And the city auditor and clerk?

Theisen: I'd say she's right there. She's on top of everything. You know, I go over there and ask for a public information request, and they never say, "No." Sometimes they take an embarrassingly long time and always the explanation is they have trouble getting the information, which isn't surprising when you

consider they don't have a unified database. They have a bunch of little databases, and they are distributed; every department has its own database. So it's sort of an anachronism of systems — using different software in different departments.

But as far as the auditor and clerk, I'd say she's a worthy successor to Mr. [Billy] Robinson [the previous auditor and clerk].



Your preference: city manager or elected mayor with management responsibilities?

Dorfman: My preference would be an elected mayor with five commissioners and a city manager to assist him. That's five single-district commissioners.

Lumpkin: I would definitely lean towards an elected mayor. Having said that, I do believe that our present form of government can be effective if we have commissioners who are committed to working for the people and working together.

I don't have a problem with people disagreeing with me. I do have a problem with people being disrespectful. I'm not thinking of any particular instance, but as long as we can go in with a mind to serve people and not be condescending to other people's views. Some of the tone I hear I don't like. But I think we can work together. I don't think we need to belittle others' views with sarcasm or a sarcastic tone. But it could work if we got the right blend of commissioners who are selfless and willing to listen. Stop me if I'm going on too far.



Pete Theisen/Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Please, go ahead.

Lumpkin: If a commissioner goes to a meeting and has already decided what they are going to do before a public hearing, I don't think that's good. I think you should hear everything. Obviously, you can come in with some preconceived ideas, but I think our responsibilities are to be flexible enough to hear everybody out and be slow to judgment.

If you can't process it fast enough — some people can think fast on their feet — but if you can't, you can say, "Let's decide this next month." It's better to do that than make a hasty decision. If I can't think fast on my feet on a particular issue, I say we postpone it. It's better to get it right than be forced into a decision, even by your own supporters. Your supporters will get you there, but you have to serve your non-supporters once you get in there.

There is a big difference between running for office and governing.

Lumpkin: I'll try to be very measured and sober in my views, because I know should I get elected, the game is going to change.



Your preference: a city manager or an elected mayor with management responsibilities?

Theisen: I think that the city manager system is my preference, in light of the fact that all attempts at the electoral level have failed to change it. Like, you don't push something down people's throats.

You've run for election twice and failed twice. The elected mayor thing has run for approval and failed three times. Does that mean you shouldn't be running now?

Theisen: I run at my own expense. This elected mayor business costs thousands and thousands of dollars. Unless there's a groundswell of support [for me], this will be my last.

We're going to miss you.

Theisen: There's a value in my running.



Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage?

Dorfman: I don't think you go into elected office as a moneymaking proposition. You go into elected office because you want to serve. So it wouldn't make any difference to me. It's a more-than-full-time job, in my opinion. But again, the wage has nothing to do with it, as far as I'm concerned.

If not, how will the city attract commissioners who are not retired people?

Dorfman: I don't know that should be a criteria for the job. Ostensibly, you would want people who could work full-time in the position, which is obviously why you get a lot of retired folks going after the position. I don't see whether you're retired or not retired makes any difference. What is the person's experience? What is his depth of experience in various disciplines? What do they know of the world? What can they bring from their experiences that could translate well to Sarasota?

I personally would rather ... have someone with experience in the outside world, who has business experience, who knows how other communities and other countries work. I don't think that being retired has anything to do with it, quite frankly.

If you get good candidates, retired or not, you have good candidates.

But they do have to eat and feed their family.

Dorfman: Again, it depends on the person. If the question is, if we paid a living wage would we get a broader spectrum of candidates? Possibly. But I don't know that is an absolute.

Look at the people running now. [Candidate] Susan Chapman: I assume she's working full-time. She sits on numerous boards. She's found time to give back to the community. Look at [Candidate] Linda Holland: She's working full-time and found time to give back to the community. Again, I guess it depends on the person.



Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage? If not how will the city attract commissioners who are not retired people?

Lumpkin: A living wage as in more than what they are currently making? I wrestle with that. Part of me says commissioners should be paid more because that is not a part-time job, no matter what anybody tells you. And if you're not retired, or, like me, have the flexibility of being [an executive] pastor, where I have a great assistant ... and make my own schedule, then how can someone like me run? I think that's why Kelly [Kirschner, former city commissioner and mayor] left.

I think the only thing that would make me caution against that is the city's financial problems. But then again, if we had a living wage, you might be able to attract some of the talent that could actually pay off in the long run. I think I would lean toward a living wage because [the current salary] eliminates so many qualified people from the board who could bring so much.

There is no other way. You eliminate a whole segment of our community who have great ideas and great perspective. I think we need diversity on the commission. I don't mean racial diversity. I mean age diversity. I don't mean to get super-deep or spiritual, but the Bible says, "He calls the old because they know the way. He calls the young because they are strong." You need both those who have been there in life — the wisdom of their hindsight becomes our foresight. But you need the energy [of younger people]. It's a full-time job. It may have been a part-time job, but those days are long gone and probably never coming back.

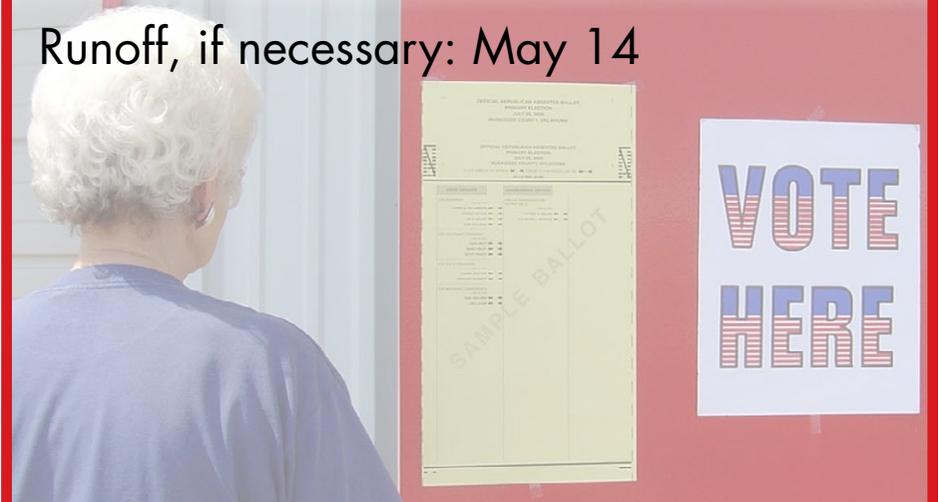


City Commission Election

March 12: Polls open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Early voting begins March 2 and runs through March 9, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Supervisor of Elections Office, The Terrace Building, 101 S. Washington Blvd. (U.S. 301), Sarasota.

Runoff, if necessary: May 14



**For more information
visit www.sarasotavotes.com.**

Today four of the five city commissioners are retired. Should city commissioners be paid a living wage?

Theisen: The city can't afford another cent. We're \$459 million behind on pensions [*SNL* fact check: not true] depending on who is counting.

If not, how will the city attract commission candidates who are not retired?

Theisen: I think they'll attract people with good incomes from businesses who want to have an influence in their business environment.

Can you give an example?

Theisen: [City Commissioner] Paul Caragiulo. He's the one guy who's not retired. He's got an ax to grind. It's not a bad ax. I wouldn't

say he should not be concerned with the business environment downtown. I wouldn't say that at all. I think he's sort of turning a deaf ear to the cries of the condo people who are trying to sleep at night. But they will have a voice too.



Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels?

Dorfman: I do not.

Have you attended any of their meetings?

Dorfman: I have read the transcripts, but I have not attended meetings.



Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels?

Lumpkin: In their present form, I don't know they are being effective, and I serve on one of them. I think Peter Graham [staff coordinator] is a great mind, but I think we need to give some serious thought to what their role is going to be. Maybe we can be the eyes and ears of the chief and say this is what's going on in the community. But if it was knee-jerk reaction to an incident, I don't know if it was best reason to have them.

Don't get me wrong: I believe everyone needs to be accountable, from the City Commission to police officers. Maybe we need to re-think the role, or clearly define it, or maybe they've outlived their purpose. It took us some time to win the cops over. Talk about a cold reception. But if I were in their shoes, I'd understand why, because they feel persecuted, and there are a lot of great cops.

Just like with anything, you have good apples and bad apples. I'm a preacher and there are some preachers who just want the gold and the girls, but for every one who chased the gold and the girls you have five who are sincere and want to help people.

I think [the police] believe it was a witch-hunt, and our group was able to hopefully bridge some of that. I was very purposeful in trying to ride with these guys, to show them my motive for serving. I see what they are doing, and I know how many young people I've buried. I was able to win some guys over, and I think they sense I understand where they're coming from.



Do you support the continued operation of the two civilian police review panels? Have you attended any of their meetings?

Theisen: No. I haven't attended their meetings, but I've read all the accounts.



The Sarasota Police Department (SPD) consumes the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself? If so, where and how?

Dorfman: I think there is probably room for improvement for any industry, in any business and any person on the planet. Specifically the police department: I think the police need to be given clear direction in some of their duties. They need clear rules of engagement.

They need leadership. And hopefully Chief Bernadette [DiPino] will be able to provide that.

In any industry you will find some people who are better than other people. Hopefully, there's a weeding-out process that allows you to separate the wheat from the chaff.

There's always room for improvement, and I think — from what I've read about Chief Bernie — she's on the way to doing some of those things. I think our SPD is fantastic. I really do. I know many of the officers. They're very, very dedicated officers. They love doing what they are doing.

I think to some extent they've had a rudderless ship for the last few years. With leadership comes direction, and you get a better police force because of it.



The Sarasota Police Department (SPD) consumes the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself? If so, where and how?

Lumpkin: I'm sure [there is room for improvement]. Obviously the Police Department needs to run as efficiently as possible. I believe we have the right chief who is going to look for ways to run the department efficiently. Some have suggested to me, and I'm looking into it, that parts of the budget are inflated anyway. When a police officer goes to get an oil change, it's going to cost quadruple the amount and the money is sent somewhere else. The budget may be a bit bloated.



Kelvin Lumpkin/Photo by Robert Hackney

Then we've got to find a solution to the pension issue.

We'll talk about that a bit later.

Lumpkin: OK. The first thing the chief of police has to do is to make sure that the department runs as efficiently as possible. There can be many ways to do that, to do the best we can. I think it would be a good idea to give some incentive to have officers live in the city. I know there was, at one point, but I thought it was a very small amount.

It might be cheaper in the long run if it was a yearly bonus, \$5,000 for living in the city. Because I've heard of SPD cars in Tampa and Port Charlotte.

And North Port.

Lumpkin: The oil change, the tires, the gas, has to add up to be pretty big over time. I'm careful because I haven't verified this myself, but I've heard it could run up to \$600,000 a year. If they lived in the city and we gave them a bonus, it would still be a lot cheaper.

If we do let them drive their cars, and they live in the neighborhood, I would like to live next door to a cop and have that deterrent [to crime].



Police consume the largest fraction of the city's budget, using more than the sum of all property taxes collected annually. Is there room for improvement in how Sarasota polices itself? If yes, where and how?

Theisen: There's more spent on them than is collected in taxes?

Property taxes. There is other revenue too.

Theisen: There's room for improvement in all human endeavors, of course. I think the High Point [N.C.] initiative [regarding more effective community policing efforts] has been a good start. It sounds like a good idea. We'll know more about it in a year or so. That's one thing.

Anything else is firmly resisted by the police union, but I have suggested that they use a little less expensive cruiser. Those things cost \$50,000. I don't know if we have to spend \$50,000 on each one.



Would you consider merging the SPD and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office?

Dorfman: No, I wouldn't.

Lumpkin: No, I don't think so. The SPD for the most part gives the TLC the city needs. Having ridden with them, I've seen how the relationships they've built up over a lifetime are valuable. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I don't live in Newtown, but I was born and raised there. I even had a stigma against the police at one point. When I was a young man, in high school and college, I was getting stopped all the time.

My breakthrough came from my mother. She said, "Listen, don't judge a whole race of people based on the acts of a few. There are good, and there are bad. So don't have a complex." Some of these guys have built relationships over years that are invaluable in helping them solve crimes.

A lot of people in Newtown don't cooperate, and when there's a shooting, somebody knows. I can go to the barbershop and say, "Who did it?" and I can get an answer. Will they tell the investigator? Probably not.

As I understand it, the ratio in the city is greater for cops to citizens, and I think that's a good thing. If we don't find some solutions, it's going to be hard to stop that cry for merger.

Theisen: The office duplication. I see no reason to have duplication in office functions, such as maintaining a property room. You must make the property room a little bit bigger and you know, you can merge those departments. I've been in those property rooms and there doesn't seem to be a hell of a lot

in there. Seems like there's a lot of room and a lot of desks with people sitting there. Of course this was years ago. They may not have had computers then. They may not have as many people sitting at desks anymore.

For street officers, the county and the city are different skill sets as far as working the street. You might have noticed the last two shootings have been Sheriff's deputies rather than city police, and that stuck out in my mind. I can't imagine Sarasota City Police reacting in the same way because they have a different skill set. It's a different population. City people, they've got their own idiosyncrasies. And county people have a little different idiosyncrasies.

I don't think I want to merge the street officers. I don't think we have enough street officers



Should we merge some special teams such as Marine Patrol, Bomb Squad, SWAT and others?

Dorfman: I think it's a misnomer when you look at that. You would achieve no savings by merging those special groups. The officers who man those groups are patrol officers. They don't sit around waiting for a bomb call or a K-9 call. As needed they come together as a group and do whatever service it is.

They train on company time.

Dorfman: All cops are supposed to train. I'm all for training, it's part of the job. One unfortunate thing is the cops are not getting enough training. I believe the training budget has been cut back. I'd like to see more training. I don't think you achieve any cost savings whatsoever by merging those outfits.



Should we merge some special teams such as Marine Patrol, Bomb Squad, SWAT and others?

Lumpkin: I think there should be a combined SWAT team. In areas like that, we should strongly consider merging those. I don't know there is great benefit from having two SWAT teams or bomb squads.

Theisen: For instance if there's a bomb scare, I'd hope both teams would respond. Especially K-9. I'd like to see more use of K-9 because the dogs can run way faster than the officers can. It's unlikely someone running away from an officer would outrun [the officer's] dog.



The city continues to run a deficit in its annual budget, making up the difference from reserves. Will you raise taxes, cut services or continue tapping into savings?

Dorfman: I think input from staff is like gold dust, and we should continue to get input from staff. They are there on the ground dealing with things every day. If they have ideas where you can cut, where you can improve, we need to listen to them.

I am not an advocate of raising taxes. I think you will be hard-pressed to find any politician who says, "I want to raise taxes."

I would like to see the city become more friendly to other sources of commercial revenue.

Commercial revenue?

Dorfman: Commercial revenue meaning business. Development. If you find other sources

of revenue, you create more money going into your budget.

That's normally considered a tax.

Dorfman: Yes, but it goes into the budget. Property taxes. Business taxes. Penny sales tax — that and everything else. I'm an advocate of bringing more business in and growth into the city to generate more tax income.

We're in a budget cycle right now. If you are elected, you will participate in establishing the budget for next year. What can you do between now and Oct. 1, when the new fiscal year starts, that would generate sufficient commercial income to cover the deficit?

Dorfman: I don't see anything happening between now and the first of October, other than going through the line items. The budget is established; there's nothing I can do about it. I cannot cut the budget. I cannot eliminate things in this year's budget.

Not this year's budget. You're right: It's fixed. But budget workshops are going to begin probably very soon after elections. You will be privy to the development of the budget that begins Oct. 1. These are the kinds of decisions you will have to make: Do we cut services? Cut staff? Raise taxes? Dip into reserves? Turn it over to staff to let them figure it out?

It's one thing to say we want more business, and grow our way out of this, but you have to build the buildings that will pay the taxes, and that's a long-term process. We're in a short-term, today, crisis.

Dorfman: And I don't think the crisis will be solved this year or next year. There are certain items in the budget, things we've spoken about, that I would eliminate. I don't think that will make massive cost savings. But there are items. You mentioned the police review boards, I don't see much of a need for them. There's \$60,000 to pay the man who's running it.

Without an absolute encyclopedic knowledge of the budget, I couldn't tell you what else to cut. There are things I see that I would look at. Again, I'm not an advocate of raising taxes.



The city continues to run a deficit in its annual budget, making up the difference from reserves. Will you raise taxes, cut services or continue tapping into savings?

Lumpkin: Those are all tough options. The accountant in me has a problem passing a budget that's in the red and dipping into reserves. I don't believe we can tax our way out, but we may have to consider, among other things, a modest increase in the millage rate. I don't see that as something forever, but in my mind, for a season, that may be something we can't throw off the table.

If we continue cutting services, you are talking about the quality of our living, and how many more people can we cut? I stand in the line to pay my water bill, and staff is overwhelmed. I know years ago you had more [people]. I know we have fewer people doing the work. I don't know if that's a good option.

I don't believe in raising taxes. God knows I don't. But we have some hard realities. Obvi-

ously, we have some hard realities, and the commission will have to rely on staff for recommendations. Ultimately, we have to lead it and make the decisions. I haven't spoken to one current or former commissioner who hasn't said, "There's a big learning curve. You can say things and talk in platitudes on the campaign trail, but when you get in the seat and speak with city staff, you'll see some harsh realities."

We have to work hard to meet that learning curve, so when city staff advises us, if we don't know anything, we'll have to learn and accept their advice. We'll listen, but ultimately we have to lead. That's what we were elected to do: to lead the way.

The city manager won't be our boss. We'll be his boss.



The city continues to run a deficit in its annual budget, making up the difference from reserves. Will you raise taxes, cut services or continue tapping into savings?

Theisen: I don't think they're going to be able to do that much longer without something. My take on it — and I've researched this — there's a lot of things in the budget that are not core government services.

Can you give an example?

Theisen: They do an awful lot of landscaping. I'll look at it one day, and it will be changed the next day. They were both fine, nice little flowerbeds, but completely changed. It's going from beautiful to beautiful, and so what? That is really an obvious example. But there are others too.

So you would cut services?

Theisen: If you want to call that a service, I suppose so. You could call it a service but it's a little bit of a distraction. I guess you could say I would cut services.



The past six years, taxes went down because assessments went down. We have had six successive years of tax cuts. Why would I not want to stabilize my taxes?

Dorfman: I think we're going to get a tax increase anyway, because I think the [property] values are going to go up; the economy's starting to turn around. As the natural growth of the economy starts to shift into an up-mode instead of this retraction, retreat, it's going to go the other way. That will come naturally.

There are things we could do right now that would save us significant amounts of money.

Lumpkin: You're right. Somehow we have to stop the bleeding. Put it this way: I'll be slow to raising taxes, but the reality is, this might be the least painful time to raise taxes for the reasons you stated, because for all of us, our tax bill has gone down significantly. If our property values were where we'd want them to be, we would be paying higher taxes. I'm not saying bring them up to where our highest property values were, even if we came up part of the way, it would slow the bleeding.

We're in a tough spot. We may have to do what we may have to do.



Pensions: did we over-promise and under-deliver?

Dorfman: I understand the over-promise is [what happened], but in terms of the under-deliver, we continue to be in the process of delivery. So I don't think we can talk about under-delivery yet.

I think there were a lot of decisions made in the go-go years that may have come back to bite us in the bottom. But that's the deal we have, and now we have to figure out how to work with that deal.

I think there's a recognition on the part of the Police Department and the union that a lot of things are just not supportable and we're going to have to figure out a way to meet in the middle and achieve some cost savings. I think there's recognition on the part of the PD that we have to keep talking.

I don't think the year-and-a-half of intransigence in the last negotiations helped either party. I think there was a better way to do that. It's a discussion that will have to continue to evolve.

Have you ever attended any of the three pension board meetings?

Dorfman: I have not. Wait, that's not true. I was actually at the last one very briefly. About two weeks ago. I sat down and listened for about 10 minutes. It was quite arcane.

Is a tax increase the answer to our promises? If not, would you support a bond issue to cover the shortfall (as Fort Lauderdale did last November)?

Dorfman: At this time, no.



Pensions: did we over-promise and under-deliver?

Lumpkin: I'm going to take the long way around. Commissioners are elected, and we have to develop the art of the long view. We have to do our best to see into the future and the impact and the best- and worst-case scenarios. It's easy to do the expedient thing for now, to please people, [but that] could create a conundrum for future commissions.

One of the things I'm looking at, Lord help me to see down the road so that I'm not making life difficult for commissioners after me, or take the wrong path.

We've obviously been able to draw great [police] officers because we have a great [benefits] package. There are some days I think I should have become a police officer right out of college. I'd be sitting good right now. I believe law enforcement officers should be compensated well for the risk they take.

Every night I ride [along], something crazy happens. It's scary. These guys and girls are risking their lives every day, and we should compensate them reasonably and give them some security.

Maybe we didn't have the long view in mind. Maybe we assumed our property prices would keep going up, but you always have to prepare for famine. There is a saying: "Whoever does not sow in the spring will beg in the winter." We're going through a wintertime where maybe we didn't make preparations in the spring, thinking spring would last and it hasn't.

There's things you can't anticipate in life or the economy. My hope is the economy will get better for the country and everywhere and we

can start growing our way out of this, because I want to be able to attract good officers, and I'm sure we've been able to attract some experienced guys from other departments because of our competitive package. I've heard that. But maybe we went too far. I don't know. Maybe we did.

But we have the challenge now. Going forward we have to do something.

Would you support a bond issue to cover the shortfall (as Fort Lauderdale did last November)?

Lumpkin: That might create more challenges than it solves. We've got to be out-of-the-box. But that's something I would have to ponder and study.



Pensions: did we over-promise and under-deliver?

Theisen: You think? That was discussed when Kelly Kirschner was mayor, and Mr. [Kurt] Hoverter [then city personnel director] said about the pre-1993 health care, if it was a promise, you've got to deliver. It's an IOU. Maybe it's not on paper, but it's on paper now because he said that. I was waiting for the pre-'93s to sue, but they didn't.

It was like taking candy away from a baby. They lost their free healthcare. There was something like 700 of them, which is equivalent to the whole staff today.

Is a tax increase the answer to our promises?

Theisen: It would be a last resort. I asked [City Finance Director] Christopher Lyons, "Is

there enough non-essentials in the budget to cover all of this," and he said, "Yes, there is." I think he's probably in a position to know.

Did he give you an example?

Theisen: No. I didn't ask him for them.

Where are we going to find those dollars?

Theisen: I would put it to Mr. Barwin. I would like to know what the core functions of government are, and once we know this, the next question is, How much do we need? I am not going to make that determination myself. There are four or five other people in this, maybe more.

Would you support a bond issue to cover the shortfall (as Fort Lauderdale did last November)?

Theisen: If you do issue bonds you have to have a dedicated source of revenue for it. And all our sources of revenue are already dedicated. You'd have to put another item on the TRIM notice. The public would vote on it. Would I support it?

First we try the budget cut. Then if that doesn't do it, then yes, of course. Particularly if there's an outcry. "You've cut the program that I just love." Well, yes, we did and would you like a bond issue for that? We need other people's money to do this. Well, OK, put it on the ballot and let other people decide if they want to fund it.

Have you ever attended any of the three pension board meetings?

Theisen: I have not.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to re-evaluate the noise ordinance?

Dorfman: Yes I do.

Attended any of the meetings?

Dorfman: All of them.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to reevaluate the noise ordinance?

Lumpkin: I do, yes. That's a balancing act. You have some who want a more vibrant downtown, which I do as well. Part of that [is] re-evaluating the sound ordinance to allow for live music, maybe a little louder or for a longer time. Maybe an entertainment overlay district is the answer.

But then I think you have people who live downtown. Some say, if you're going to live there you should have known that. But we have to consider those who live there and pay taxes there. We don't want to run them out of downtown because we want them to live there and work there and eat there.

And then we want to draw not just restaurants to Main Street. We want retail as well. Now we have a Brooks Brothers, a great place like that. But if you have a loud bar across the street, would they want to remain there? I believe there's a middle ground that is going to help everybody.

I like seeing downtown alive. I remember, and you do as well, when Main Street was a ghost town. Now me and my wife are doing our best to get down to Main Street at least once a week, and not just for the Farmers' Market. I like a lively downtown. I'm not a clubber

myself, but I do want to see people go there and do that, God bless 'em.

It's a juggling act. I listened to Commissioner Caragiulo and I went to one of his meetings, and it appeared to me he tried to consider everybody's point of view. Finding that middle ground is going to be tough, but I think clearly we have to re-evaluate it.



Do you support Paul Caragiulo's efforts to re-evaluate the noise ordinance?

Theisen: You can re-evaluate it if you like, but I can't imagine any other determination than saying you are going to have to cut it back at 10 o'clock.

So you support the current noise ordinance?

Theisen: Well it's 65 decibels, and if they hold it at 65 decibels outside, in some of these discussions I've offered a compromise. If people just can't hear it for some reason, look at the Van Wezel [Performing Arts Hall] with the Sennheizer [headphone] sound system. Let them have individual earphones and let them have 130 decibels, if that pleases them, as long as it doesn't spill out to the other people. You should see the outcry: "You can't do that!"



Expand the Domestic Partnership Registry?

Dorfman: Would I support Sarasota or city government lobbying other cities? I don't see where it is appropriate. I'm not sure that's the city's job.

Lumpkin: I don't think it's our city's responsibility to go and expand it. That's for other communities to decide.

Theisen: I think it's a sideshow. People who want to take advantage of it could move to Sarasota. It's like half the price of a marriage license.



Eliminate it?

Dorfman: I support the registry of partners. I'm a freedom person.

Lumpkin: I've heard former Commissioner [Ken] Shelin talk about it. I don't fully understand it; it's not something I've really studied.

Theisen: I don't think it's causing any problems. The people who are using it are just tickled with it.



Do you have an opinion of Agenda 21 and how do you think it impacts the City of Sarasota?

Dorfman: I've had discussions about Agenda 21 so often now. I think there is a real possibility it is going to impact the county. And if it impacts the county, it's going to impact the city. And it does give me cause for concern.

I don't think anyone is aware, as they should be, relative to Agenda 21.

What do you think the change is?

Dorfman: I'm no expert on Agenda 21, but it seems to be a catalyst through the United Nations. The United Nations is the one pushing it the hardest, but then it filters out into a lot of different lobbying groups as well.



Do you have an opinion of Agenda 21 and how do you think it impacts the City of Sarasota?

Lumpkin: That's something up until a week ago I had not heard of. But somebody asked me about it, and I'm still studying it. The UN initiative. I have to absorb it. I was meeting with some supporters and they asked what I thought about Agenda 21, so I've been reading up on it.



Do you have an opinion on something called Agenda 21?

Theisen: I do. They keep using the language from it. Smart growth, which is ordinary growth dressed up with a new adjective. So you're supposed to approve this and let us have more density.

Agenda 21 is putting the growth all in one spot. They want to practically eliminate human use of many, many properties outside the city. In general I'm not a fan of the United Nations. They kind of want to dictate our laws, and I think that's a sovereignty issue.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Dorfman: Define development.

You name it: commercial, residential.

Dorfman: I think there is some opportunity for nonprofits to make some good use of

those barrier islands and the particular things nonprofits do. Mote [Marine Laboratory], for example.

I would not be an advocate of housing on the barrier islands, for example. I certainly wouldn't want a Walmart on a barrier island.

If you can take a barrier island and make it a living laboratory, I would be an advocate of that if it was appropriate. I wouldn't use them for commercial use, I don't think.

Or residential?

Dorfman: No.

Renourish beaches?

Dorfman: Absolutely. And there's a lot more we can do to renourish the beaches. I wonder if there is a way for the city to work with other cities to build an economy of scale to work together in beach renourishment.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Lumpkin: I don't know the answer to that. I would have to consider the benefits of current development. Does the city take in significantly more revenue by having people build houses and pay taxes than it is costing us to deal with these issues?

And is there a way to find a long-term solution to the problem? If there is no way to find a long-term solution to that flooding problem, then maybe we shouldn't; maybe that would be irresponsible.

If there is a solution or a way to mitigate it, maybe we should allow people to build there.

Renourish beaches?

Lumpkin: Adding more sand? Obviously our beaches are our crown jewel of things that attract people. I think investment should be made in our biggest tourist attraction. You see on TV or read in magazines, "Best beaches; whitest sand."

On the surface, I'd say yes, but I'd have to study the environmental impact of that. Clearly there should be an effort to invest in our biggest draws.



Parts of Sarasota — including St. Armands Circle — are prone to flooding when high tides or storms create a rise in sea level. Should the city continue to encourage development on its barrier islands?

Theisen: No. If somebody wants to develop there, they need to understand their first floor is going to get washed out every few years. Or every 100. I also think the insurance companies need to put their surcharges right there instead of spread them out over the whole community, which they do.

Renourish beaches?

Theisen: [The city] shouldn't be taxing the local people for that. They are mostly getting the money from grants for that purpose. But some of it is local. They say, "You really profit from this," and we do. There was one year we renourished the beach and a storm came through and took it all out.

I would think it depends on who's paying, where the money comes from. If they're getting the money from the ordinary Joe and Jane anyway, living from paycheck to paycheck and they tack this on, it's an iffy situation. I wouldn't push it. If it came up for a City Commission vote, depending on the funding source, I probably would vote no on it.



The following are planning questions, dealing with land-use issues. A century ago the villages of Sarasota and Fort Lauderdale were virtually identical. Why doesn't Sarasota have the skyline or the canals of a Fort Lauderdale?

Dorfman: Do we want the skyline and canals of Fort Lauderdale? I'm not sure we do.

What makes us different in our historical development?

Dorfman: The easier answer is, Sarasota didn't want it. I don't have enough knowledge to answer that question. Back in that period, my understanding is there were massive landowners in Sarasota. The Palmers and the Ringlings. I think they held herd over the kind of development that might have happened in Sarasota.

I don't want to say they prevented it, but they had a vision of what they wanted Sarasota to be and held to that vision. I'm not sure Sarasota was on everybody's radar the way Miami and Fort Lauderdale were.



The following are planning questions, dealing with land-use issues. A century ago the villages of Sarasota and Fort

Lauderdale were virtually identical. Why doesn't Sarasota have the skyline or the canals of a Fort Lauderdale?

Lumpkin: That's a tough one. I get the sense, I think there are many in this town who want it to stay cozy and small. Obviously, we've had the wealth and resources to be that and could be that. And some have a vision where we could be like that.

I think what draws people to Sarasota is they don't want Sarasota to be that. They like it the way it is. They want to closely monitor its growth. It's a small town. I think people want it to be small, and as big as it is, I think it makes some people feel uncomfortable. I've spoken with people who've lived here for years and who long for it to be that sleepy fishing village again.



The following are some questions on planning and land use. The first is a philosophical/historical question. In 1910 the cities of Sarasota and Fort Lauderdale looked a lot alike. Today the Fort Lauderdale waterfront is all high-rises, and there are deep canals throughout the entire city. Why doesn't Sarasota have a skyline like Fort Lauderdale?

Theisen: Probably people don't want a skyline exactly like that. The county commissioners do want it. They completely eliminated height limits. [*SNL* fact check: untrue.] Theoretically, you could build the tallest building in the world. It doesn't apply within the city.

Up to now the people haven't wanted it, or they have elected people who voted against it. Just the other day they talked about 200 units

per acre, but how are you going to handle the traffic? And it turns out we have a problem with sewers, too — all these sewer problems we've been having.

We've got a number of infrastructure problems we have to grapple with the next time something comes before the board. With 800 projects already approved and 12 large buildings, that's a lot of building to be done. But they're not being built because it is not economical.

I called up [Sarasota County Area Transit], and they said they had a 10-year improvement plan. It costs \$700 million. But they won't be able to keep up with what the developers want to do. We have to do something different about transportation and look at sewers and other infrastructure if we go with a Fort Lauderdale skyline.



Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Dorfman: Yes I would.

Citywide?

Dorfman: No.

So this is case-by-case, neighborhood-by-neighborhood?

Dorfman: Even node by node. When I ran the last time, and this time, the North Trail is my bug-a-boo. That is one of the two or three causes I have if I sit on the City Commission.

When you go in as a commissioner, you should not go in completely reactive. You should go in to be proactive. You have to have a few items

on your list you actually want to accomplish and you work to accomplish them. The North Trail is way high on my list.

I've spoken to a lot of people about it — spoken to builders, spoken to developers, spoken to neighborhood people. You have a plethora of different zoning up there, and a lot of it is outmoded, outdated. It doesn't work; it doesn't allow you to optimize what we have.

Even on a node-by-node basis, I would like to see changes. I don't think an 11-acre plot should be treated the same as a half-acre plot. And vice versa. So with administrative review — everything is within code and ready to go, boom, boom, boom — yes, let's do it. Let's try to streamline this process.

When we have issues that require zoning changes, code changes, land-use changes, then we have to look at it on a case-by-case basis. But I am an advocate of changing the zoning, but not on a wholesale basis. Really, it comes down to almost a beyond node-by-node, but almost parcel-by-parcel in a lot of cases.



Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Lumpkin: I would certainly consider that. I lean to supporting that. Supporting administrative approval is not tantamount to muting the voice of the people. Some would suggest — if you support administrative approval — that's how you feel.

For me, that's not the case. How do we have an efficient process and give potential inves-

tors some certainty? I see great value, and I've listened to some Laurel Park residents and some of the Alta Vista residents and they bring good points. You know, Alta Vista and Walmart.

If I lived there, I'd have some of those concerns as well. But how do you not run people away who want to invest in our town — who can add to the tax base or bring jobs. Everything isn't good for our city, I understand that. How do you find that middle ground? It's something I wrestle with every day as a candidate.

If somebody's building something on the edge of Laurel Park and the [residents] don't hear [about it] and don't understand, well I understand some of [the neighborhood's] concerns. I really do. Or maybe [the developers are] not sensitive to the neighborhood with their site plan, even if it's moving a generator or a light or something. Those are reasonable things.

How do you find a process that doesn't slow down the process? I try not to listen to just one side. I try to consider both views. It's a conversation we should have.

Citywide?

Lumpkin: I would definitely want to have that conversation.



Would you favor expanding administrative site plan approval to the North Trail?

Theisen: No. People can have meetings. It's sort of with the Sunshine idea. No backroom deals.



You say you want to grow the tax base. Would you consider high-rise development north of 10th Street?

Dorfman: That's not the density I'm advocating right now. I'm advocating the kind of density required to provide housing that is more affordable for young professionals. I'm for density that allows us to build rental housing, from 650 square feet to 1,500 square feet.

I like DROD [the Downtown Residential Overlay District]. It's been sunsetted. But I see that density as allowing us — and I've had a lot of meetings on this — to start to move areas of the North Trail forward. I think the North Trail is the place to look at that kind of density.

I'm not a wholesale proponent of putting up more luxury condos. I think our need right now is rental units. I'm a proponent of [rental property] downtown; I'm a proponent of it along the North Trail, possibly in the Rosemary District. That's the kind of density I'd be advocating.

You know the equation: To build an acre you have to sell X-number of units at \$1.2 million. They become 3,000-square-foot-units, and that's not what we need in Sarasota.

I've had four meetings now, with two separate groups, and I've seen the numbers. I've seen the plans. I've seen how it can work and it actually doesn't require that big a tweak to our density. It requires a tweak on height — not much, but a little bit. But it's doable.

For \$1,000 per month?

Dorfman: Even less. You can go from roughly \$750 per month up to \$2,000 if you're going for a two-bedroom [unit]. And this is rental housing, not condominiums. And it does work.

And the return on investment?

Dorfman: They wouldn't be doing it if they didn't think they weren't going to make money. Plus you bring in your retail on the bottom, on the ground floor, which boosts your income.

I think you would have a difficult time making the numbers work without a mixed-use retail component on the ground floor. The people I'm talking to are a number of different groups, but all thinking the same way.

But take the North Trail. If you build it, will they come? Once you've got the rooftops and people there, you're going to attract retail. That's part of the equation. But you will attract even more retail to service the people who are living in those units. In other interviews, I've said it's a domino effect.

It broadens the tax base; it creates a housing level we desperately need in Sarasota. It's infill and moves crime out. Hopefully, it will provide jobs for residents in northern Sarasota. You kill a lot of birds with one stone, and it won't take that big a tweak to do it.

That's why we have to look at the possibilities on these parcels of land on a node-by-node basis. Can we do it here? Obviously, you can't do it everywhere. But there are places you can. If we could make the environment legislatively welcoming to do it, I think we'll have a market for it.

Do you think the legislative environment is adverse to development?

Dorfman: From what I've seen, yes.

Can you give an example?

Dorfman: All I know is we sit in Planning Board meetings and it's just, "No, no, no" every time. Laurel Park overlay, "No, no, no." When one person's property rights are allegedly more valuable than another person's property rights, I don't think that's a terribly good thing.

The [proposed] doctor's office at Tahiti Park: What is so objectionable to that? What I find amazing is, people will buy homes that abut major highways and expect nothing to go in there and fight against anything to go in there.

I remember the hell they put poor Marietta [through] and her Museum of Whimsy, which is a nonprofit good deed, like no good deed goes unpunished. That's the attitude: It's "No" at any cost. I don't think it's good for the city.

I talk to a lot of young families up and down the North Trail. They would love to have more amenities on the North Trail; they would love to have the crime pushed in, but we continue to have a very vocal minority group of people who, that's their job; they say, "No." They have the time to come to City Hall and the time to do the protests and write the articles and make the speeches, while the young folks are out trying to raise their families and their jobs.

That's sort of my soapbox, and probably not what I should be saying in this interview, but we need to look to the future, not the past.



One refrain we hear is the need to "grow the city." If you are talking about increasing the tax base, then you are talking about density and height. Down-

town is built out. Would you consider high-rise development north of 10th Street?

Lumpkin: I live in the Indian Beach-Sapphire Shores neighborhood, and I couldn't imagine a high-rise fitting in that area. It would be totally out of place and change the charm of that neighborhood.

I'm one of the ones in favor of increasing the tax base, but that doesn't mean a blank check. We love living in that neighborhood. No, I can't see that right now.

Theisen: There is one already, a retirement center. Again you have to have the traffic capacity to serve it. They are trying to reduce traffic on U.S. 41 and reduce the speed. They certainly aren't going to add lanes.



Would you consider development south of Hudson Bayou?

Dorfman: I guess we'd have to look at the parcel, look at compatibility, look at how it would affect the surrounding neighborhoods. I don't want to say I would not consider it. We have to take it on a case-by-case basis.

Lumpkin: It's hard to picture anywhere where a high-rise would work. If it was limited to five stories, possibly. But as I go through those neighborhoods, in my mind, it's hard for me to imagine anywhere that wouldn't be disruptive to those neighborhoods. And those are both charming neighborhoods.

If not, then where? With all this talk of increasing the tax base and increasing density and increasing population, where?

Lumpkin: I think we can increase density without going higher, but that's a good point. But going that high, I don't see that happening.



In Newtown, virtually all streets have sidewalks (many on both sides of the street), curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in town have none of that. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention to other neighborhoods?

Dorfman: Don't single Newtown out. As I'm door-knocking the Shade Street corridor and the streets [named for flowers] on the east side of U.S. 41, you have no idea how many people have said that: "How come we don't have sidewalks? How come nobody is listening to us?"

Yes, the answer is yes, absolutely. They get treated — what was the expression — as the silent majority. Yes, we have to look at them. It's not a Newtown-versus-the-rest-of-the-neighborhoods equation. It's, "Yes, we need to look at these neighborhoods."

One lady on one of the flower streets, they're flooding every single time we get a rainfall. What curbs they have are broken and cracked; no sidewalks whatsoever. We're doing this canvassing, and one block you do have sidewalks, and the next block you have nothing.

I don't know how that happened. Developers? City ordinances?

Does everybody deserve a sidewalk? A curb?

Dorfman: Easy answer: Yes. Does everybody want a sidewalk? I can't answer that question,

but I've spoke to a lot of people who sure would like to have one.



In Newtown virtually all streets have sidewalks (many on both sides of the street), curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in town have none of that. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention to other neighborhoods?

Lumpkin: I don't think any neighborhood should be neglected. I think every neighborhood adds some charm to the city. I can't answer why the city is paying more attention to Newtown. I didn't know that and I don't know why.

As far as sidewalks and things, I don't think Newtown needs any more attention than any other neighborhood. There are some problems in Newtown that are more acute: crime and shooting. And the city should give attention to that, whatever neighborhood it's in, because it affects the whole city.



In Newtown virtually all of the streets have sidewalks, most on both sides. And the streets have curbs and gutters. A majority of the streets elsewhere in the city have neither. Is it time for the city to pay the same attention to other neighborhoods?

Theisen: It's past time, but they don't have the money.

Does everybody deserve a sidewalk?

Theisen: Whether they deserve it or not, the money isn't there. It's one of the beauties of

Newtown. You can walk wherever you want to go. I think it would help the walking, particularly people my age or older.



On a 1-10 scale, with 1 being of highest importance, how would you rate them?

Concurrency:

Dorfman: Five.

Lumpkin: Two.

Theisen: I'd say one.



Impact Fees:

Dorfman: Five.

Lumpkin: Two.

Theisen: Two.



Growth Management:

Dorfman: Four.

Lumpkin: One.

Theisen: One.



Final question: Should you succeed and win a seat on the Sarasota City Commission, is there a tangible goal you want to achieve?

Dorfman: It's changing the face of the North Trail.

Lumpkin: Two tangible things. I would like to help steward the High Point [policing] strate-

gy and reduce the violence in the whole city and maybe [more so] in Newtown — just like High Point, North Carolina did: They saw a clear drop in the incidents of violent crime. I would love that to be part of my legacy.

And I would love to help find a solution to the homeless population in Sarasota — to help be a part of the team to help people transition their lives. Jesus said the poor you'll always have with you. There are some who are mentally ill, and that's a challenge. But I think there are enough in our homeless population who can get their lives turned around.

If I could help accomplish those things, provide leadership on those things, then I'll feel I have done my city well.

Theisen: I started with an intangible — the spitting decision. Anybody can spit; it's color-blind. Somebody said the spitting ordinance is racist and there was a stampede to repeal it. It's things like that where you look and say, What? That's intangible.

I suppose I don't have a tangible.



What do you want to accomplish?

Dorfman: I would definitely like to change, redo our zoning. I think there are a lot of city

ordinances that I would like to redo that are very grossly outdated. I think I would like to find a way to make Sarasota more attractive to young people and lower our age demographics. We're still the No. 1 county for 85-plus, and No. 3 for 65-plus.

Lumpkin: I would love to clear up some of the toxicity in our city, to be a bridge between neighborhood and business and maybe even [the] races. I'm running at large for a reason.

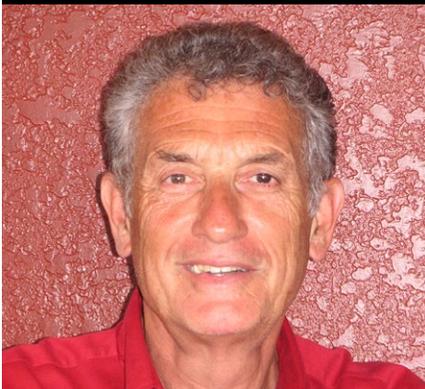
There's the automatic assumption we live in District One. We don't. I really believe — I'm confident an African-America can win city-wide. I think there are some who don't give the white citizens of this community enough credit. I'm not crazy to say there's no racism here in this city.

One of the things a commissioner has to do is lead by example and be above the fray. When we start getting down and dirty, the city doesn't have a chance. We have to serve everybody.

I'm not saying it's not a fight. It's pressure, even now [even though] I haven't gotten elected, I've got people — maybe they're counting on my having not run for election before: "We can use you; you can be our ventriloquist's dummy." Whatever. They'll be in for a surprise.

Theisen: That would be concurrency. 

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HALFWAY POINT

A new Walmart opened on the North Tamiami Trail in September. Photo by Norman Schimmel

WALMART HEARING PUTS RESIDENTS EYEBALL TO EYEBALL WITH CORPORATE HEAVYWEIGHT

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

There are few joys finer for a student of law than watching a good lawyer salt the record for an appeal. Just as uncommon is the subtle use of political muscle in a quasi-judicial process.

Tuesday, Feb. 19, saw both types of exercises, as Walmart's attorneys tried to counter an appeal by the Alta Vista Neighborhood Association that would stop the company from opening a 98,000-square-foot store at the former Ringling Boulevard Publix site.

The ground rules called for the applicant and city to start from scratch to explain the petition for site plan approval. Walmart is not asking for a rezoning or approval of any special exceptions or other conditions. At issue is a straightforward site plan approval process.

The second ground rule called for a quasi-judicial hearing during which decisions can be

made only on the basis of evidence and sworn testimony entered into the record. That was the record Walmart's attorney Jim Porter salted with particular

“*My role was not to review site plans or interpret the code.*”

Mike Taylor
Former Planning Chief
City of Sarasota

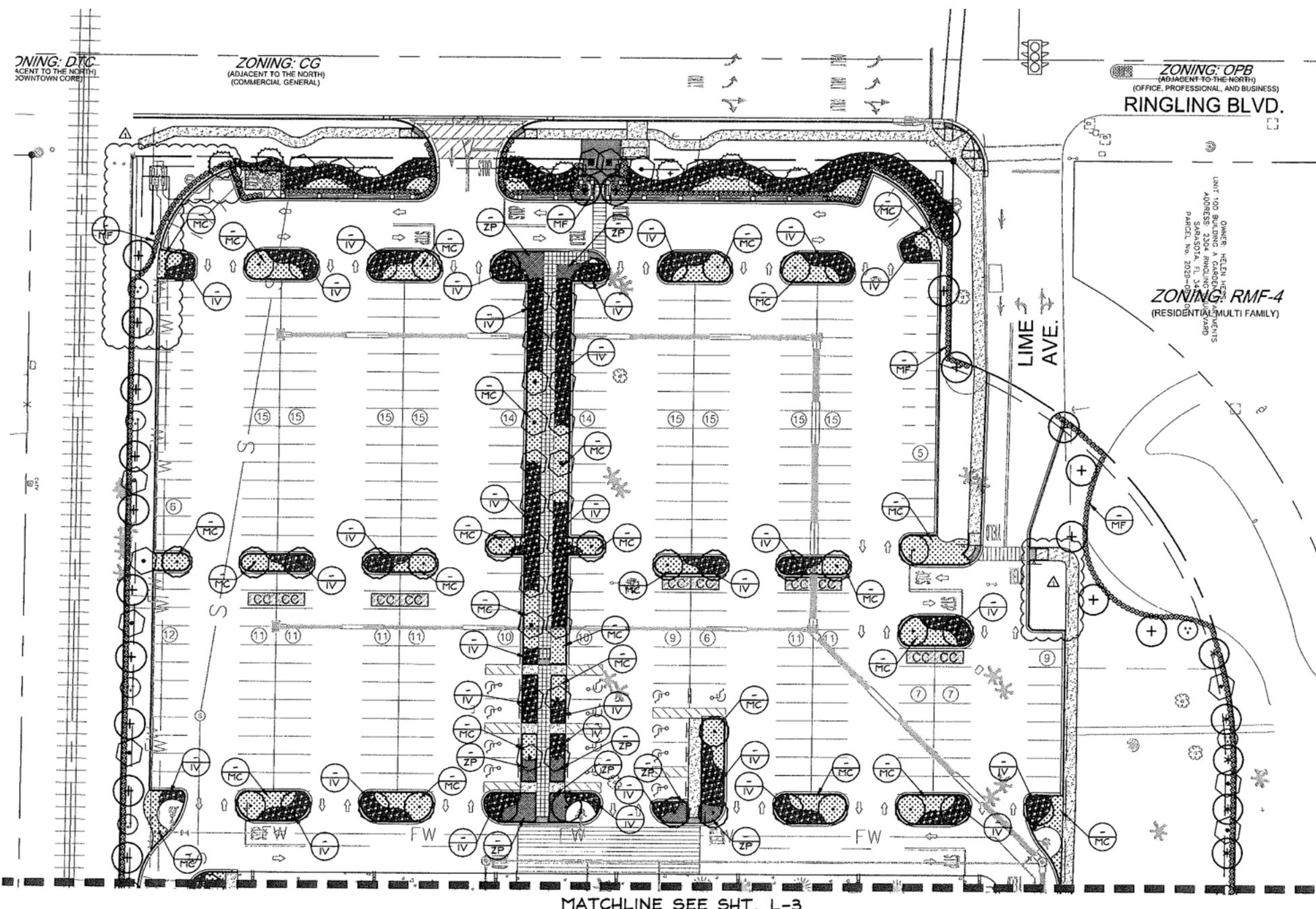
items throughout the proceedings, apparently anticipating the case would end up in court.

As for the muscle, Porter brought it out in his very first sentence: "Bill Galvano, our litigation counsel, is sitting next to me."

Galvano is a Florida state senator from Bradenton. By calling him "our litigation counsel," Porter put the City Commission on notice

that if it fails to approve Walmart's request, the company is ready and able to take the issue to Circuit Court.

While "evidence and testimony" are supposedly the only things commissioners can consider in making their decision, staring across the table for hours at a state senator ready to sue them surely cast a psychological pall over the proceedings.



PLANT LIST

SYM.	COMMON NAME
TREES	
UA	HINGED ELM
TD	BALD CYPRESS
TC	SILVER TRUMPET TREE
IA	EAST PALATKA HOLLY
LI	CRAPE MYRTLE
QV	LIVE OAK
MC	WAX MYRTLE
JS	SOUTHERN RED CEDAR
HEDGES & ACCENT	
MF	SIMPSON STOPPER

Site plan material provided by Walmart to the City of Sarasota shows landscaping plans for the parking lot. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

Porter called upon the land-use planner hired by Walmart to work with city staff to shepherd its case. Susan Finch was brief: "It is my professional opinion this meets the city's requirements," she said. "Walmart has gone out of its way to be sensitive to the neighborhood."

Porter addressed one specific complaint heard repeatedly from the time when the one and only neighborhood meeting was held on the store proposal through the Planning Board's 3-2 vote in October to approve the site plan. Traditionally, people cut through the southern end of the property to access Payne Park. It is common to see bicyclists, dog-walkers, mothers with strollers and others use that route.

Walmart representatives said repeatedly that would be unsafe, and they would not accommodate the continued use. But Tuesday Porter said company representatives had changed their minds. Joshua Bryant, project engineer, added, "We propose an additional sidewalk connection. It allows pedestrians to get from the east side of the site to the west side of the site."

He achieved that by moving the site of the building nine feet to the north. "The path is not intended to be used after dark," he noted.

It was Walmart's sole concession in the appeal.

City staff was up next, defending its consistent support for Walmart's plan. Tim Litchet, head of building, zoning and neighborhoods, was blunt. "This is considered consistent with the Sarasota City Plan."

The general manager of planning and development was just as terse. "The project meets the comprehensive plan, including the use question. The project meets compatibility with the planned enhancements. The Planning Board approved it 3-2," said Gretchen Schneider.

Then it was the challenger's turn. Alta Vista's lawyer, Bob Turff, told the commission, "We believe this is a simple decision. Does this conform to your zoning code? No. Other zones could have this store, but it's not permitted; it is not allowed. This is not about aesthetics, design details or a class-warfare issue. It's about issues raised by citizens who want the city to live by its own regulations."

Former city planning chief Mike Taylor said, "Compatibility with the Sarasota City Plan does not exist."

Galvano took over at that point for the cross-examination of Taylor.

"You never prepared a memo outlining these concerns, never an email expressing concerns?" he asked Taylor. "Why didn't you have any input into Walmart?"

"My role was not to review site plans or interpret the code," said Taylor. "I don't recall [when] the application came in."

The hour had grown late, and Galvano's cross-examination ended one phase of the proceedings.

The public will get to weigh in on Tuesday, Feb. 26, starting at 6 p.m., followed by rebuttal from all parties. Only then will the commissioners be able to discuss the issues and make their finding. 



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BATTERS UP!

Orioles Manager Buck Showalter's 'words of inspiration' line the team's locker room in the Baseball Operations Center at Ed Smith Stadium. All photos by Norman Schimmel

WELCOME TO BIRDLAND AS THE ORIOLES PREPARE FOR ANOTHER SEASON IN SARASOTA

Staff Reports

With the Baltimore Orioles kicking off spring training at 1:05 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23, against the Minnesota Twins, the Ed Smith Stadium complex in Sarasota has been a sea of orange.

Fans are welcome to watch the team work out from approximately 9:15 a.m. to noon each day, the Orioles have announced, leading up to opening day.

The Orioles' [website](#) notes that this is “the fourth consecutive Spring Training for the Orioles in Sarasota, and the third in the renovated Ed Smith Stadium. With its modern

amenities mixed with historical Florida architecture, Ed Smith Stadium has truly become ‘Birdland South.’”

Visit Sarasota County representatives last year pointed to the team’s draw as a significant contributor to rising tourism revenue for the county.

Tickets for the Orioles’ home games are available at www.orioles.com and at the stadium box office each day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The stadium is located at the intersection of 12th Street and Tuttle Avenue. 



The Orioles weathervane overlooks the Orioles' matchup with the Philadelphia Phillies in March 2012.



ORIOLES

WATCH ORIOLES PRACTICE
FREE ADMISSION 9 AM DAILY
USE BACK FIELD ENTRANCE

ED SMITH STADIUM

Fans are welcome to watch practices this week.



Stadium renovations were completed before the start of the team's second season in Sarasota.



Bird, the Orioles' mascot, stands in the 'chandelier' of the stadium, where championship banners fly.



Not surprisingly, orange is the primary color in the BOC.



An Orioles player signs autographs for fans of many ages in Sarasota.



Manager Buck Showalter (in black jacket, left center) talks with team members before the start of practice on a recent day.



Equipment on the field signals a game soon to begin.



The Baseball Operations Center (BOC) includes an expansive fitness area.



It all starts here — Manager Buck Showalter's office in Sarasota.

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 lettuce, tomato, onion, and a dark meat patty. The background is a plain, light color.

This may take a while.

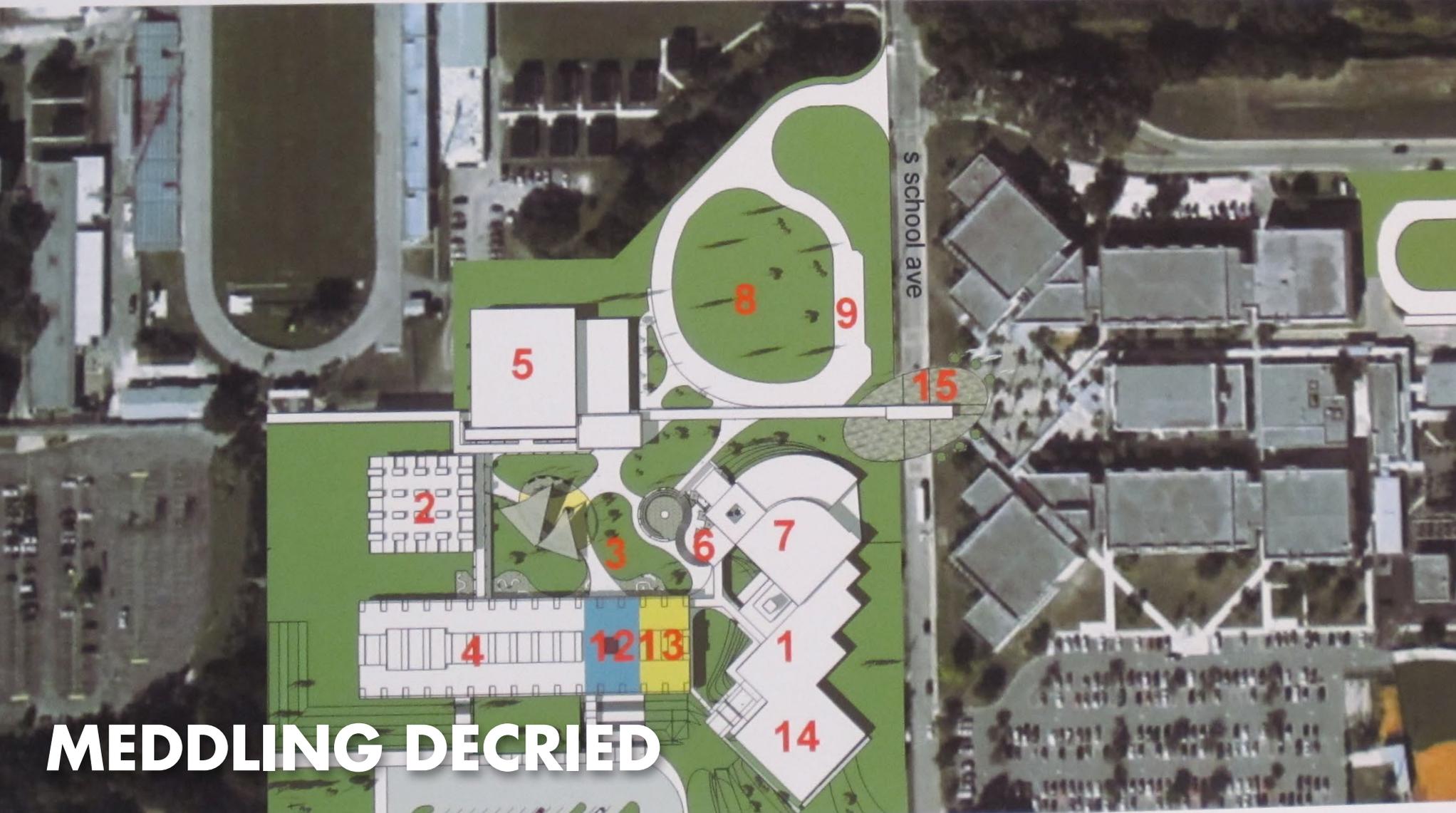
Some things are just hard to resist. Like *The Sarasota News Leader*. It's a feast of in-depth local news, delightful and entertaining features, and — thanks to its partnership with *This Week In Sarasota* — access to the best community calendar available.

The first impulse is just to gobble it all up.

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MEDDLING DECRIED

A diagram of the Sarasota High campus shows 'Option 5,' which participants in a June charrette agreed was the best plan for the rebuilt campus. The Paul Rudolph building is labeled '4.' File photo

THE SCHOOL BOARD VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO MOVE FORWARD WITH PLANS TO SAVE THE EXTERIOR BUT NOT THE INTERIOR OF A RUDOLPH BUILDING AT SARASOTA HIGH

By Scott Proffitt
Staff Writer

Expressing ire at last-ditch efforts by the Sarasota County Commission and the Sarasota Architectural Foundation (SAF) to halt the process, the Sarasota County School Board voted unanimously Feb. 19 to proceed with restoring most of the exterior features of an historic structure on the Sarasota High campus but to demolish several key elements of the interior.

The School Board will send a “spot survey” of its plans for the structure to state education officials, district officials said. That survey documents the planned square footage, the number of student stations and other details, according to Communications Specialist Scott Ferguson.

With the School Board’s Feb. 19 agenda calling for an update on the campus

“It was incredibly disrespectful to us as a School Board and incredibly inappropriate for one governmental agency to tell another governmental agency how to in any way conduct their business.”

Caroline Zucker
Member
Sarasota County School Board



rebuilding project at Sarasota High, the SAF — which also fought unsuccessfully to save the original, historic Riverview High building Rudolph designed — made one more attempt to sway the School Board through a letter.

The communication, dated Feb. 18, says the SAF members readily admit the School Board's prior decision to renovate the interior of Building 4 appeared "irreversible."

However, the letter pointed out, "If distortions, deception, misinformation, disregard for agreements and process, arrogance and closed minds are examples of acting in good faith, then the district has indeed succeeded."

During Convocation of Governments on Jan. 18, during which the School Board hosted the County Commission and representatives of all the county's municipalities, SAF members used public comment time to criticize Sarasota County Schools administrative staff for putting off meetings requested by SAF members to discuss the plans for Building 4.

During their Feb. 19 discussion, School Board members were indignant.

"Incredibly rude" was how School Board member Carol Todd described the SAF members.

"I am appalled," added School Board member Caroline Zucker.

"They weren't making any friends," said board member Shirley Brown.

It was "the most demeaning, arrogant, condescending communication I've ever gotten in all my years on the board," said School Board member Frank Kovach of the SAF letter.



A Harvard Jolly artist's rendering shows an early proposal for glassing in the front of Building 4. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools



Scott Lempe, chief operating officer of the Sarasota County Schools, (standing) discusses the Sarasota High School plans during the Jan. 18 Convocation of Governments, held at the Sarasota County Technical Institute. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Those comments came during the board's morning workshop, which preceded the vote on Building 4 during the regular board meeting that afternoon.

A Feb. 13 letter from the County Commission irked the board members as well, as evidenced by further comments.

On a 4-1 vote, the County Commission approved a letter to the School Board that said, "To insure that the unique architectural features of this nationally designated historic structure are preserved, we request that the School Board direct Harvard Jolly Architects to revise their plans [for the interior]."

Commissioner Carolyn Mason signed the letter in her capacity as chairwoman, but she voted against sending it, telling *The Sarasota News Leader* she worried about the School Board being asked to shoulder higher costs for the campus renovations. Moreover, as a mentor at Sarasota High, Mason said she understood the need to do what was best for the students.

The interior features on which the county letter focused are a "floating" walkway, linear light wells and steel doorframes.

Referring to the County Commission, Kovach said, "Though they can't get their own house in order, [they] want to stick their nose in our business. And they can't even seem to run a purchasing department. As you can see, I'm just a little aggravated over this."

Kovach was referring to the 2011 scandal involving employees in the county's Procurement Department.

"It was incredibly disrespectful to us as a School Board and incredibly inappropriate for one governmental agency to tell another governmental agency how to in any way conduct their business," added Zucker.

Preservation efforts at Southside Elementary School and Bay Haven School for Basics Plus — both in Sarasota — show the School Board's willingness to save historic structures, added Todd.



Building 4 on the Sarasota High School campus is an example of Paul Rudolph's designs in the Sarasota School of Architecture. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CHARRETTE

The planning for the rebuilding of the Sarasota High campus has been going on for a number of years. A charrette the district administrative staff hosted in June 2012 about how best to incorporate the historic buildings into a 21st century learning environment drew numerous members of the SAF as well as parents and students. All the participants signed off on the plans at the conclusion of the two-day event.

On Tuesday, when Brown queried Scott Lempe, the district's chief operating officer, about whether the Building 4 interior was discussed at the charrette, he conceded the focus was on the exterior issues.

"In terms of the architecture, we only talked about the outside, and ... only the specific items that drove the need for the charrette," he said, noting the primary concern was "over the [proposed] glassing in of the breezeway and the demolition of the west gym. Most of the charrette focused on the appropriate rehabilitation of the west side of the campus," Lempe pointed out.

Building 4 is showing evidence of significant settling, a point School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin mentioned during the Convocation of Governments and a fact brought up again Feb. 19.

"Is it structurally sound?" Brown asked. "Are we still going to have sinking hallways?"

"I hope this goes without saying," Lempe replied, "but we are not going to move kids into a building that is not safe and does not comply with building codes. The west side is settling and the plan is to go down with micro-pilings and support the structure," he noted.

Changes to the Harvard Jolly design for the new interior, which would make it possible to preserve the Rudolph architectural features, would severely limit the amount of space available for a variety of uses, Lempe pointed out.

"It would have a domino effect," he said. "If we were to leave the interior as it is, we would have to leave Administration where it is. Then we leave Media where it is. Then where does Food Service go?"

"I think [moving forward with the interior renovations] will make the majority of the people of this community happy," Brown said.

Kovach was more direct. "I do know the ramifications are about \$6.5 million more, and significantly less usable square footage," with changes at this point to save the interior features of import to the preservationists.

Kovach continued, "If the SAF has issues, then we should sell this building to the [county commissioners], because they never have enough space, and they can work with [the SAF] and properly rehabilitate the building."

Building 4 is directly east of the original Sarasota High School, which is situated on U.S. 41. The 1928 high school structure is being transformed into the Sarasota Museum of Art.

Rudolph served as dean of the Yale School of Architecture for six years, beginning in 1958. With landmark buildings in Hong Kong, Singapore and the Northeast as well as Florida, he is an architect with worldwide following. He is known as a principal in what is called the Sarasota School of Architecture because of its design features. 

THE '800-POUND GORILLA'



Although residents of the high-rise condominiums complain about amplified music at restaurants, the City Commission has backed away from enforcing a ban on that type of entertainment. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CITY COMMISSION BOWS TO ACLU, ALLOWING AMPLIFIED MUSIC

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The chairman of the Sarasota chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union said during the organization's Feb. 7 board meeting, "We never threaten to sue."

But when Sarasota ACLU legal representative Michael Barfield spoke during the public comment section of the Feb. 19 Sarasota City Commission meeting, he not-so-softly suggested the commission direct staff to reconsider enforcement of a certain restriction on music.

"The [zoning] code bans amplified music," he said. "We believe that is unconstitutional on its face."

History was on his side. The ACLU several years ago challenged a city ordinance banning loud music from vehicles. The city defended the ordinance in Circuit Court, the District

Court of Appeal and the Florida Supreme Court — and lost at every step in the process.

So when Barfield suggested backing off the amplified music ban,

“The [zoning] code bans amplified music. We believe that is unconstitutional on its face.”

Michael Barfield
ACLU Chapter
Sarasota



city commissioners were hasty in complying. "I think it's something we need to look at sooner rather than later," said Commissioner Paul Caragiulo.

City Attorney Bob Fournier has been battling Barfield and the ACLU in court without much success. "The commission could suspend it right now and take the safe road," he said.

Commissioner Shannon Snyder said, "He came down here and told us we had a problem. I don't want to be writing another check."

The commissioners agreed unanimously to suspend enforcement of the zoning code banning amplified music. "Make sure staff gets the information within the hour," said Snyder.

He was referring to another case when the commission was repealing an ordinance on

solicitation through use of a sign. Although police officers were instructed not to enforce the ordinance, one did not get that word and sent a man to jail for a violation. The judge, who was not pleased, handed down an injunction.

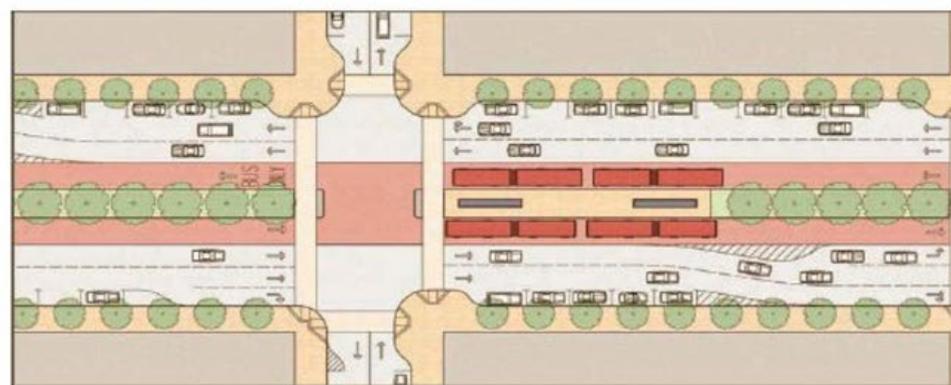
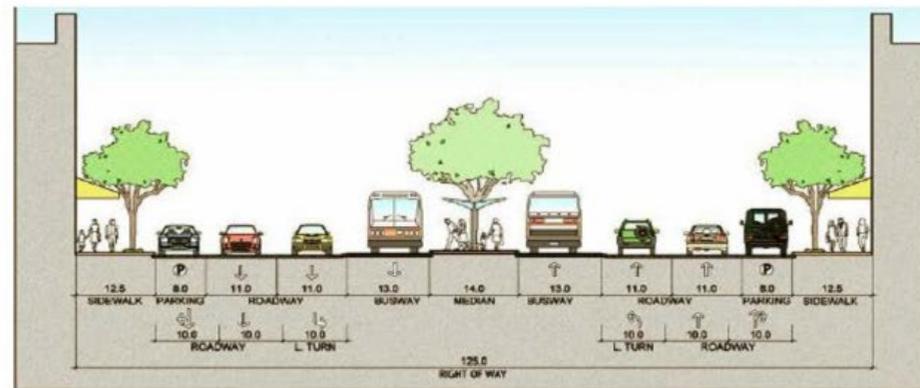
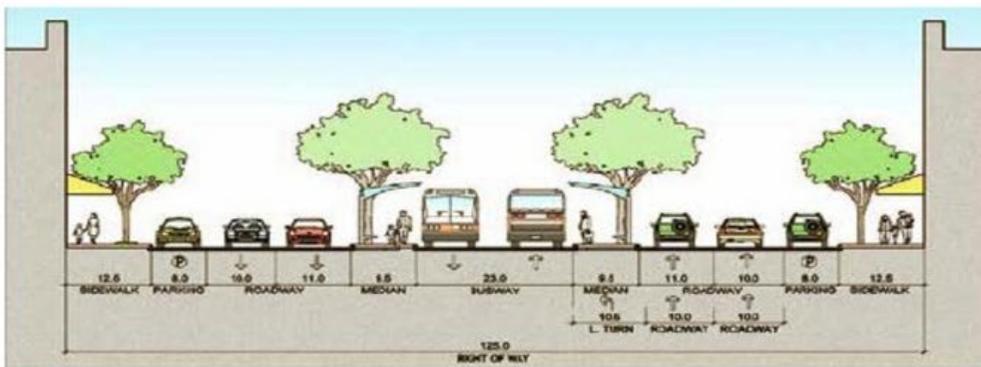
The move on Feb. 19 is a victory for downtown restaurants that repeatedly have violated the zoning code to pipe live or recorded music to their patrons.

However, the move does not touch the city's so-called "Noise Ordinance," which sets limits on the volume of sound generated primarily by musical entertainment and when that entertainment can be allowed.

Despite that, musicians cheered the move during the commission's evening session. 



City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo (right) listen as City Attorney Bob Fournier addresses the City Commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel



WHOLE LOTTA PLANNIN'

Diagrams show how a bus rapid transit system could operate along a highway median. Image courtesy Sarasota County

ANALYSIS: IT IS ULTIMATELY UP TO THE VOTERS TO DECIDE WHETHER THE CITY OF SARASOTA CAN REALIZE GENUINE GROWTH OUT OF THE 'ACRONYM SOUP'

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

A substantial amount of political gas is being expended on conceptual planning in Sarasota. Some ideas are further along than others. While efforts are now focused on the North Tamiami Trail and downtown, there could be a spillover into other areas.

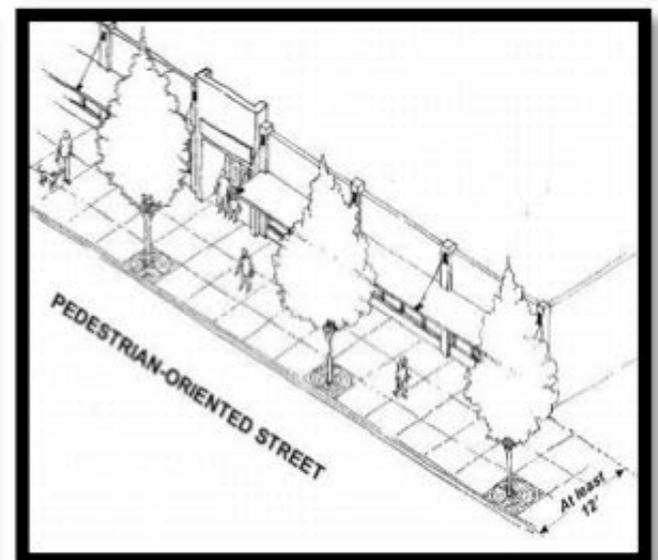
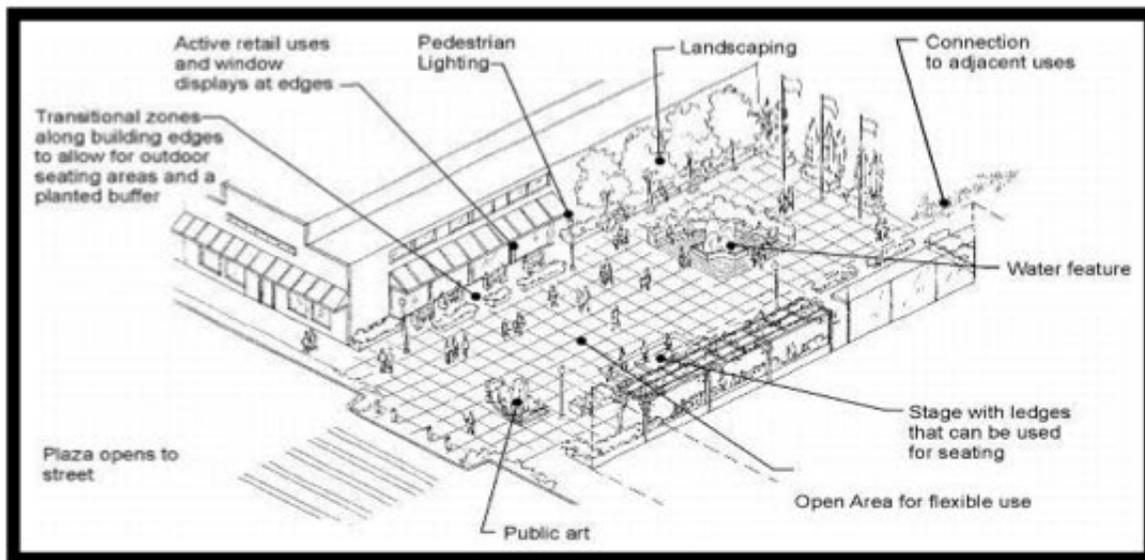
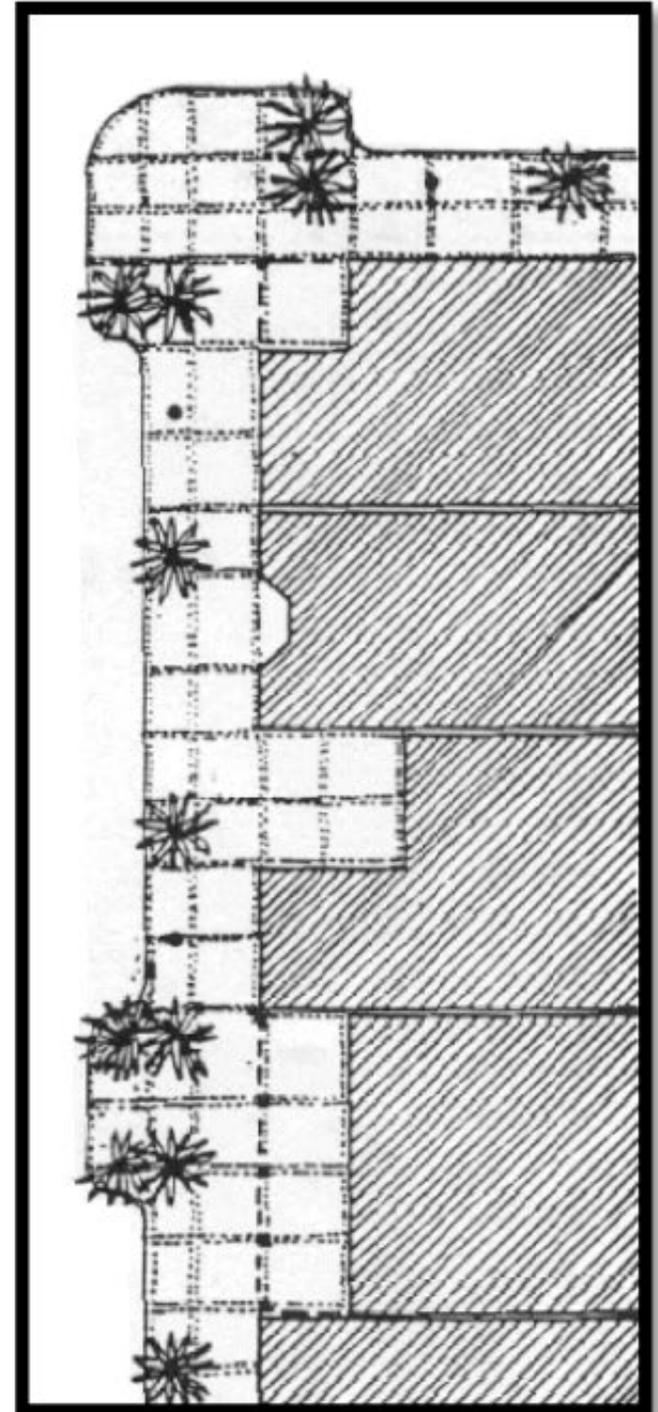
DROD, DID, BRT, TOD, EEZ and NTOD — these are acronyms that pepper conversations about the city's future. Toss in "complete streets" and "a mobility study" and you will need a scorecard to keep your TOD away from your DROD.

With that in mind, here is a play-by-play of the actors and ideas that are flitting across the city stage.

THE DROD

The Downtown Residential Overlay District is a planning device that could quadruple density wherever the overlay is put. About 10 years ago, a DROD settled over the downtown area, allowing a developer to bump density up to 200 units per acre from the normal downtown limit of 50 units per acre. Hello, Tokyo.

The bump was linked to the creation of affordable/attainable/cheaper downtown housing. Three developers studied the idea, but only one tried to take advantage of it. Jeff Brown at 1350 Main signed up for 170 units per acre, but he found that was not economical.



The city's draft North Trail Overlay District plan shows examples of desirable urban frontage construction. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

“It was kind of a bad example,” said Downtown Improvement District Chairman Ernie Ritz. “Why would I build \$1,000 rentals when I could sell \$800,000 condos?”

The first DROD died after two years, expiring from lack of interest and application. There was a short-lived attempt to revive it called “Son of DROD.”

Ritz and his DID board members are inviting the author of *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America One Step at a Time* (Jeff Speck) to speak in March as a prelude to holding workshops or even a charrette to push another DROD. Call it “Grandson of DROD.”

Last year the City Commission set a strategic goal to “grow the city.” Because the city is effectively built out, increasing density of new construction is one answer. Density pays off in several ways, including more units to sell and higher taxable values per acre.

The current political campaign for two at-large City Commission seats opens up a wide range

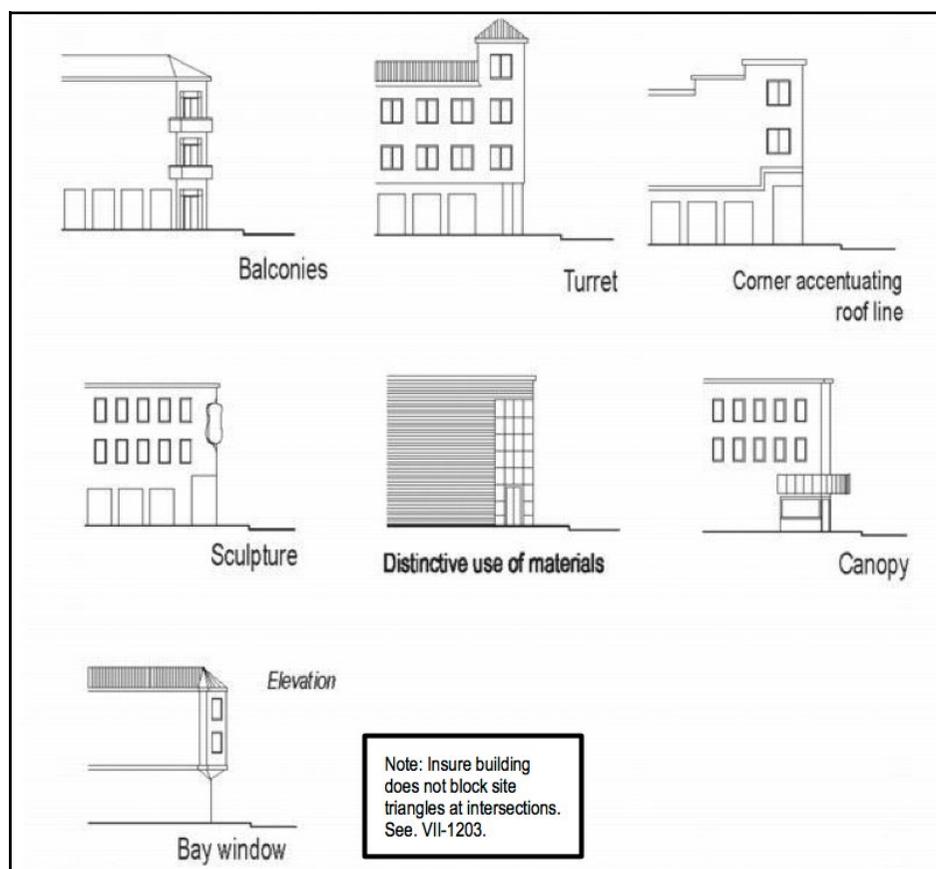
of opinions on the density question. Many candidates are ready to board the DROD train. “I’m willing to look at the DROD,” said Mayor Suzanne Atwell. “I like the DROD,” said Candidate Richard Dorfman.

Candidate Susan Chapman, who sits on the Planning Board, says the DROD puts the cart before the horse: “We talk a lot about creating supply without analyzing whether there is demand.”

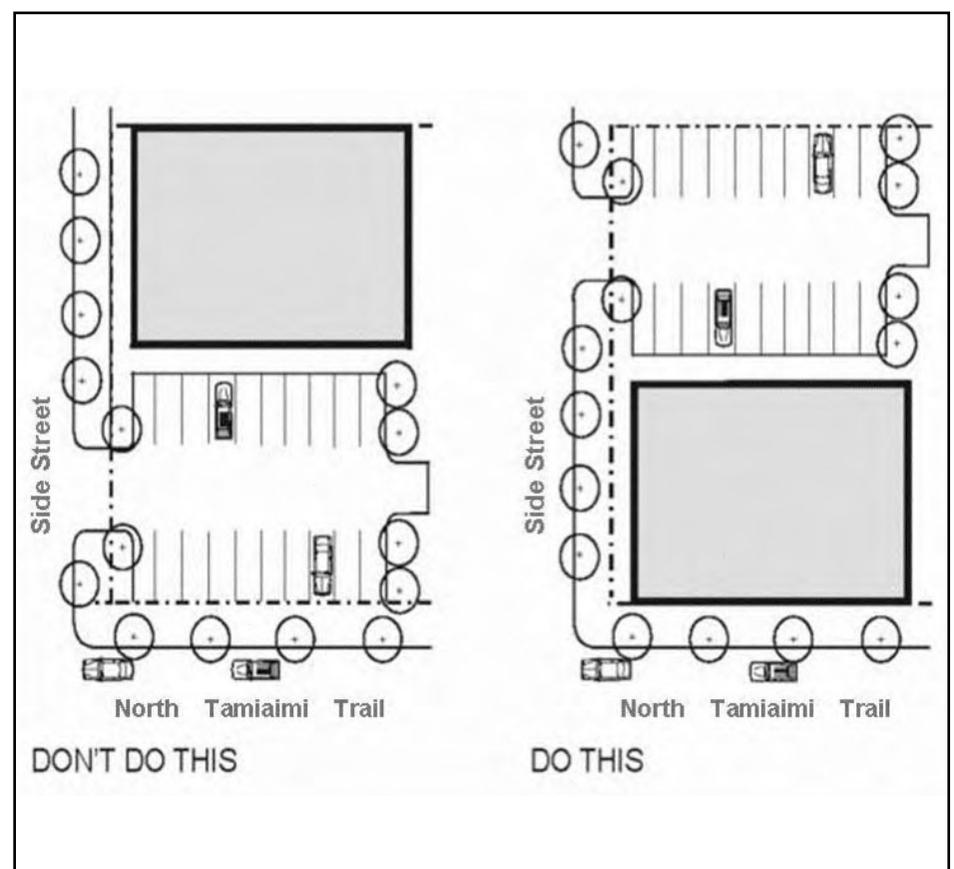
THE NTOD

The North Trail Overlay District is another planning scheme, and it, too, is a work in progress.

Late last month, the Planning Board took its first official look at the NTOD. The plan is the fruit of three years of labor by dedicated volunteers called the North Trail Redevelopment Partnership. That group is composed of businessmen, professionals, landowners and neighborhood residents eager to do something to improve Sarasota’s seedy front doorstep.



The draft NTOD plan features examples of attractive options for buildings that will be located on corners. Image courtesy City of Sarasota



The draft NTOD plan shows good and bad examples of parking layouts. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

After a long evening of staff presentations and public comments, staff hoped the Planning Board would keep to the schedule, stamp “OK” on the plan and send it to the City Commission for consideration in March. It does not look as though it is going to work out that way.

“Can we go off schedule and take six months?” asked Planning Board Member Chris Gallagher. He turned to his colleagues and asked, “How many comments do you have?”

“At least 50,” said Vald Svekis. “Me too,” said Jennifer Ahearn-Koch.

“We should go off schedule,” said Chapman. “And I hope the North Trail Redevelopment

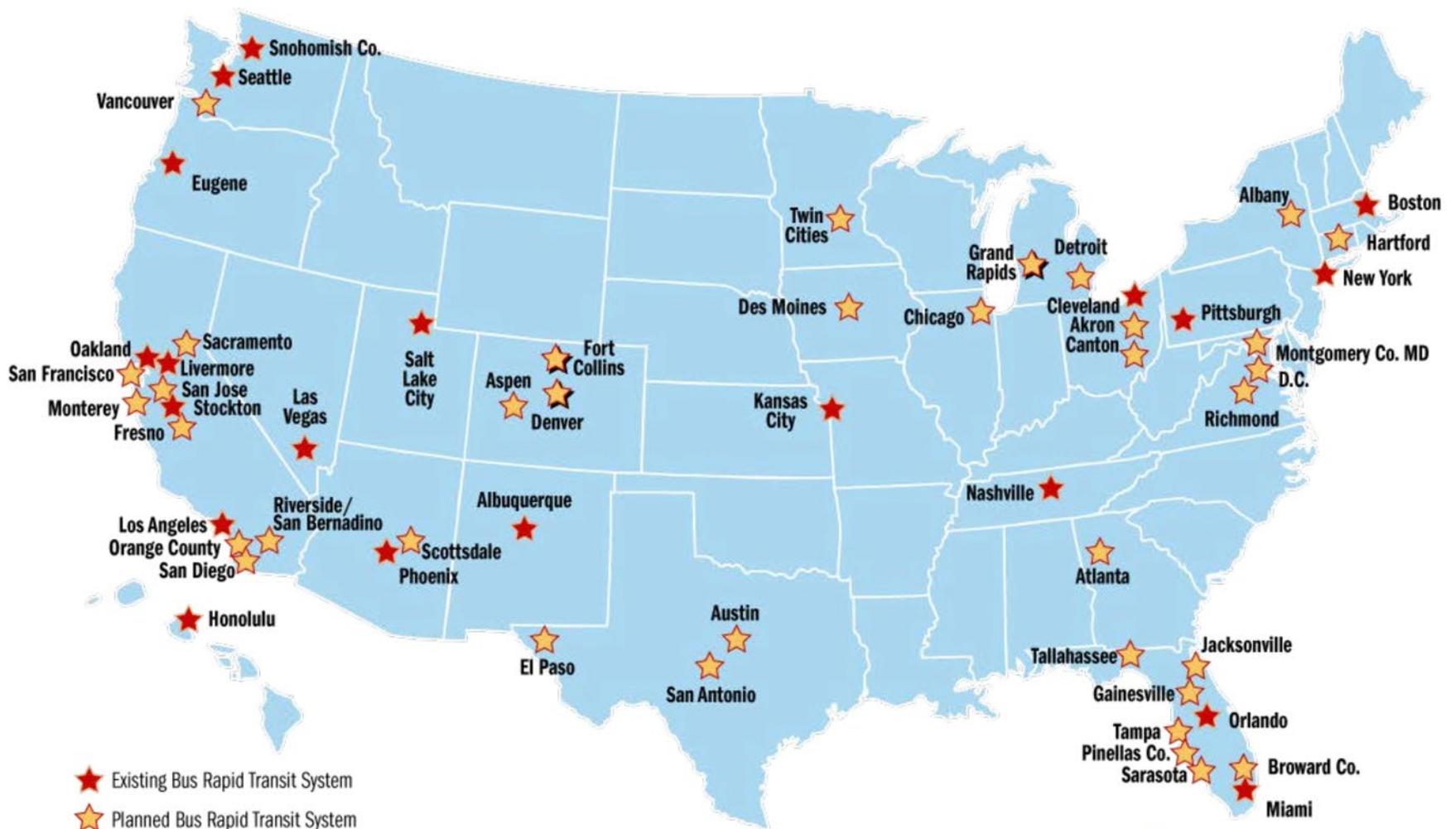
Partnership will meet and consider some of our comments.”

In fact there is already an overlay district in place for the North Tamiami Trail. So the new one could be called “Son of NTOD,” and it uses administrative site plan approval. That is a sticking point with neighbors and at least one Planning Board member.

“The administrative approval is worrisome,” said Ahearn-Koch. “Not one neighborhood has signed on to this, and that’s an issue. You have to have buy-in from the neighborhoods.”

The current NTOD gives builders flexibility. Someone constructing a project could utilize

Existing / Planned BRT



NBRTI Survey (2011)



A federal map from 2011 shows planned and existing bus rapid transit systems in the U.S. Map courtesy Sarasota County

existing zoning regulations for part of the work as well as some of those in the existing NTOD. But if the “Son of NTOD” were adopted, the developer would have to opt in or out of it; the flexibility would be gone.

Further complicating North Trail development is the Economic Enterprise Zone (the EEZ), which was expanded to include that area. It gives incentives for in-zone employment, allows sales tax breaks on equipment purchases and proffers other carrots to businesses that land in the zone.

The recently retired city planner who drafted the NTOD — Mike Taylor — told the Planning Board, “This standard will really jump-start development. If you don’t want to change the North Trail, don’t do this. If you do want change, take the time to work with the staff. It will set the stage for the next century, with transit-oriented development.”

TOD AND BRT

Transit-Oriented Development is needed if the city and county want to install a bus rapid transit system, or BRT, which is like an above-ground subway, with frequent buses and dedicated travel lanes.

The thinking goes like this: When mass transit becomes easy to use, not only will more people want to use it, but they will want to live near it. As any big-city dweller will tell you, life is easier when you live one block from dependable, reliable and frequent mass transit. Thus, a BRT corridor would become a desirable place to live. That is where TOD kicks in.

After spending \$850,000 in federal money, the City and County commissions decided the BRT route would follow the old CSX railroad right of way from the airport to near downtown. It would go straight through some of the least desirable property in the city. Parallel-

ing Central and Lemon Avenues, the corridor would have been a developer’s dream.

Flanked by inexpensive, blighted properties that would sell for a song, the BRT would be an urban pioneer’s fantasy — and it would totally transform the face of northeast Sarasota. That is TOD in action.

Alas that will not be. At a joint City-County commission meeting Feb. 5, the boards decided to scrap the CSX route, jump west and run the BRT down Tamiami Trail. Instead of an exclusive and unobstructed route, the “above-ground subway” would share U.S. 41 with every tourist in a car that visits town — plus residents.

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta urged the city commissioners to begin thinking about land-use changes along the North Trail and get on the TOD bandwagon. The shift was so abrupt, nobody paid a single thought to the consequences to the NTOD.

Meanwhile, if the City Commission agrees to go along with the latest BRT idea, the county will have to pony up about \$850,000 for a new study justifying the route switch from CSX to U.S. 41, because the whole BRT idea is impossible without major federal funding. The feds paid for the first study, which picked the CSX route. But they will not pay for a second one. Such is the cost of the changing mind of government.

CAN YOUR BRT GET TO THE DID THROUGH THE DROD AND THE NTOD?

The costs of making a mistake can run much higher than paying another consultant’s fee. These kinds of plans get promoted by — well — promoters. And that means winners and losers.

The stars at this moment are aligning around the NTOD, the BRT and TOD. The feasibility

of bus rapid transit down U.S. 41 seems a bit oxymoronic. More buses with priority would appear likely to further snarl traffic.

One of the objectives of the NTOD is to slow traffic, so maybe there is serendipity between BRT and NTOD. Traffic could be such a mess, it would be forced to slow down — which would send smart local drivers rushing through the neighborhoods.

The only winners in that circumstance would be the owners of the larger parcels along the North Trail — properties with enough room for parking to support a mid-rise construction — say five stories, enough to see the water. Should NTOD and BRT become a reality, it will be a big payday for the owners of the problematic motels along the North Trail. Yes, the same ones we read about in the police reports.

All of this is happening across the spectrum of civic discourse. From a partnership of stakeholders along the North Trail, downtown property owners at the DID, the volunteers at the Planning Board, the elected politicians on the City and County commissions — all like the blind men in the fable — are holding a piece of the proverbial elephant.

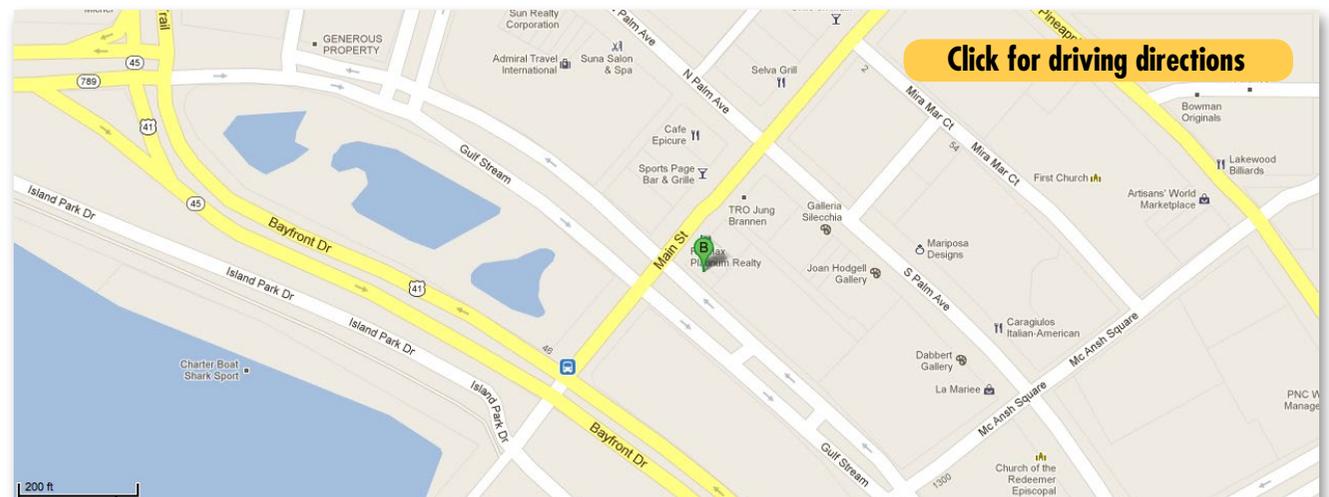
“Density” cries one. “Transit” cries another. “Tax base” shouts a third. If we believe we must grow our way out of the current budget problems, how big do we need to be? Will 10,000 more people solve our current troubles?

DROD, DID, BRT, TOD, EEZ and NTOD — each and every one of these acronyms is promoted to encourage growth. Ultimately, the future of the community is in the hands of voters. Now when you hear these acronyms, you know what they mean. 

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THAT BENDERSON DEAL ...

The parkland on part of the property Benderson Development Co. wants to purchase from the city is at the intersection of Beneva and Fruitville roads. Photo by Robert Hackney

PARKS ADVISORY BOARD OH-SO-GENTLY SLAPS CITY COMMISSION

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

Imagine you are on a parks advisory board and the City Commission cuts a deal to sell 11 acres of parkland but does not tell you. Steamed yet?

The park in question is at the northeast corner of Fruitville and Beneva roads. After conducting secret negotiations with Benderson Development Co. for

more than a year, the city agreed to sell the property to the firm for \$1 million.

When word got out, there was a big hullaballoo. Another buyer surfaced and offered twice

as much. Right now the deal is in embarrassing limbo.

Throughout it all, city staff never once asked — or even informed — the Parks Recre-

“ *The PREP board will review any future sales of parkland.* ”

Marlon Brown
Deputy Manager
City of Sarasota



ation and Environmental Protection Advisory Board members about the initiative to determine whether they had an opinion on it. Well, they do and they let it fly at the Feb. 19 City Commission meeting.

Elsie Souza, chairwoman of the PREP board, was quite polite about the affair, reading the minutes of her group's Jan. 17 meeting: "All expressed concern about not being involved from the beginning. We recommend any future sale of parkland come to the PREP board," she said. "We fully understand the Sarasota

City Commission has the final say. All we ask is the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations before your decisions."

The controversial sale — over the objection of neighbors and others — has become a hot issue on the campaign trail. Mayor Suzanne Atwell voted for the sale, but she is finding it hard to defend the decision in public forums.

The commissioners were mute after Souza's report. Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown promised her, "The PREP board will review any future sales of parkland." 



The site the City of Sarasota is considering selling to Benderson Development Co. has a pond that the company would have to fill in before starting construction. Photo by Robert Hackney



ABOUT THOSE BIDS ...

The Siesta Key Beach stormwater project has been planned to prevent future closures of the beach to swimming. File photo

COUNTY STAFF RECOMMENDS THE COUNTY COMMISSION PROCEED WITH AWARDING THE SIESTA BEACH STORMWATER PROJECT ONCE THE CONTRACT IS READY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Although all three bids came in about three times higher than expected, Sarasota County staff is recommending the County Commission proceed with awarding a contract to the “lowest responsive and responsible bidder” for the Siesta Beach stormwater project.

That recommendation came in a Feb. 13 memo from Jody

C. Kirkman, director of Environmental Utilities; Warren Davis, surface water manager for Environmental Utilities; and Curtis Smith, project manager in the Capital Assets Group.

Smith is the manager of the stormwater project.

County commissioners expressed concern when they learned that of the three bids for

“*Staff is currently awaiting receipt of an additional amendment to the [Southwest Florida Water Management District] Agreement that will extend the ‘Complete Construction’ milestone to Dec. 31, 2013 and the agreement expiration date to March 31, 2014.*”

County Staff Memo
Feb. 13, 2013



the project that were opened on Jan. 23, the lowest was \$4,251,633.30. The highest was \$4,788,622.70.

Staff and consultants had estimated the total cost of the work — which includes constructing a pipeline into the Gulf of Mexico to discharge ultraviolet light-treated stormwater runoff — would be \$1.5 million.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) agreed in March 2008 to give the county a grant of up to \$975,000 for the project, with the funds to be paid when the work is completed.

Commissioners also have voiced concern about losing that grant as a result of continuing delays in starting the work.

The Feb. 13 memo says, “Staff is currently awaiting receipt of an additional amendment to the SWFWMD Agreement that will extend the ‘Complete Construction’ milestone to Dec. 31, 2013 and the agreement expiration date to March 31, 2014. It is [staff’s] understanding that this amendment has been drafted, and it is undergoing internal review at SWFWMD.”

In response to a question this week from *The Sarasota News Leader*, county spokesman Curt Preisser said he was not able to determine a timeline for when a bid award recommendation will come before the County Commission for approval. However, Preisser said Program Manager Carolyn Eastwood, who is supervising the stormwater project, is scheduled to make a presentation to the commis-



A Sarasota County consultant’s graphic illustration shows the area planned for construction of the stormwater project. Image courtesy Sarasota County

sion on March 19 regarding the disposition of spoils from the stormwater project.

During an Aug. 20, 2012 budget workshop, Eastwood explained that stockpiling on-site the material excavated for the stormwater project could save the county about \$250,000 and prove less disruptive for Siesta Key residents. About 10,000 cubic yards of that material could be used for the planned Siesta Beach Park improvements, she pointed out.

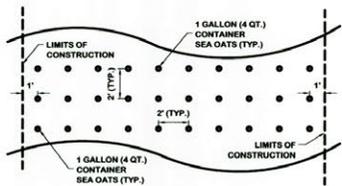
Without use of that fill, she said, the county probably would have to figure on about 1,500 dump-truck loads coming onto the island.

Commissioners expressed reservations, saying the stockpiled material would prove an eyesore. Eastwood replied that staff could look into ways to screen it from public view.

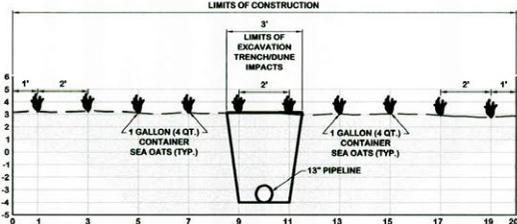
Preisser told the *News Leader* Feb. 19 that while Eastwood specifically will be providing an update on that matter on March 19, he expects commissioners will ask about other aspects of the stormwater project.

During the commissioners' Feb. 8 budget workshop, Commissioner Nora Patterson — who lives on Siesta Key — voiced worries about any further delays in the start of the

VEGETATIVE MITIGATION TYPICAL LAYOUT



PLAN VIEW SCALE: 1"=2'



SECTION VIEW SCALE: 1"=2'

- NOTES:
1. PLANT SPACING @ 24" ON CENTER.
 2. PLANTS TO BE INSTALLED MANUALLY FROM PRE-FERTILIZED CONTAINERS.
 3. APPROXIMATELY 10,775 S.F. OF SEA OATS WILL BE IMPACTED AND REPLANTED.
 4. PROTECTION MEASURES WILL BE TAKEN TO PRESERVE ALL VEGETATION OUTSIDE THE LIMITS OF CONSTRUCTION.
 5. ALL VEGETATION TO BE PRESERVED WILL BE STAKED OUT AND FENCED PRIOR TO AND DURING CONSTRUCTION.
 6. ALL EXOTICS (AUSTRALIAN PINE) WITHIN THE LIMITS OF CONSTRUCTION SHALL BE REMOVED.



A graphic illustration shows plans for vegetation mitigation related to the stormwater project. Image courtesy Sarasota County

project, which had been scheduled to begin after Easter, which is March 31. The work is supposed to take about 270 days, she pointed out, which already meant it could hamper seasonal beach visitors in December.

THE BIDS

The Feb. 13 memo also provides analysis about why the bids came in higher than expected.

The design and permitting of the project was divided among three engineers of record (EOR), the memo notes, “with the division of responsibility based upon both specialty and proximity to elements of the Siesta Beach Park Improvements.”

The geographic sections of the stormwater project, it continues, are the outfall pipe into the Gulf of Mexico, the treatment area on the east end of the park and the stormwater collection system north of Beach Road.

Erickson Consulting Engineers, which worked on “the installation cost for the most challenging portion of the pipeline,” estimated the cost at \$681,475, the memo says. The corresponding portion in the lowest bid was \$2,291,200, the memo adds.

Kimley-Horn and Associates worked on the treatment system, but the firm did not include an estimated cost for one facet of the work, the memo adds, “resulting in a \$335,000 shortfall ...”

The WilsonMiller/Stantee estimate for engineering costs was \$24,000, compared to \$30,800 in the relevant portion of the lowest bid, the memo continues. Apparently that

number was carried forward from a 2008 estimate, the memo notes.

Additionally, the memo says the project is “the first in Florida” of its kind.

THE SHORTFALL

Because the bids came in higher than expected, the memo points out, the project has a funding shortfall of about \$2.7 million. However, that amount is available through the Surtax II fund balance from projects completed in the 2012 fiscal year, the memo says.

“As a high priority project” related to water quality at the beach, the memo continues, staff suggested that the Surtax fund balance be used for the stormwater project — a point staff made during the Feb. 8 budget workshop.

The memo says all the necessary federal and state permits have been obtained for the project.

Therefore, a budget amendment will be prepared and presented to the County Commission for review at the same time the construction contract comes before the board, the memo concludes.

Patterson has emphasized recently to two groups on Siesta that the stormwater project is vital to preventing future closures of Siesta Public Beach to swimming. The memo notes that the stormwater project was initiated in 2005 “when high levels of bacteria were detected within the Beach Road stormwater conveyance system. It was determined the bacteria were of animal nature and introduced at Siesta Beach by stormwater runoff from Beach Road and the Siesta Beach parking lot.” 

LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTION



The cleanliness of Siesta Public Beach has helped it remain a major tourist draw, county officials say. Photo by Rachel Hackney

THE COUNTY COMMISSION URGES ITS TALLAHASSEE DELEGATION TO SUPPORT BILLS THAT WOULD GIVE IT CONTROL OVER SMOKING ON COUNTY PROPERTY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The Sarasota County Commission has sent a letter to state Sen. Nancy Detert of Venice and the other members of the county's legislative delegation, urging them to support two bills introduced in the 2013 session that would allow the county once again to restrict smoking on certain public properties.

Detert is the chairwoman of the Sarasota County Legislative Delegation.

The Feb. 12 letter, signed by commission

Chairwoman Carolyn Mason, points out, "The ability to restrict smoking in Sarasota County parks and properties is an issue of importance to our community."

It notes that while the county adopted an ordinance in 2007 to restrict smoking in county parks, on county property where youth activities are in progress and on public beaches, a 12th Judicial Circuit judge's ruling in December on a

“ We do not believe it was the intent of the Legislature in 2003 to prevent counties from regulating activity on county-owned outdoor properties. ”

Sarasota County Commission
Feb. 12, 2013 letter



SMOKE-FREE ZONE

Help Sarasota County beach parks remain clean.
Please smoke only in designated parking lot
and picnic shelters. Thank you!

Ch. 90 S.C.C.O

*Keep
Sarasota County
Beautiful*


Sarasota County



Although smoking restriction signs remain up on Siesta Key Public Beach, law enforcement officials are not enforcing them, based on a judicial ruling in December. Photo by Norman Schimmel

City of Sarasota ordinance held that any local government effort to restrict smoking was a violation of the state's Clean Indoor Air Act.

“We do not believe it was the intent of the Legislature in 2003 to prevent counties from regulating activity on county-owned outdoor properties,” the letter continues. “This is inconsistent with county responsibility for management of its properties and its ability to regulate such factors as hours of operation, alcohol use, and littering on its properties and parks.”

Senate Bill 258, introduced on Jan. 11 by Sen. Rob Bradley, a Republican from Orange Park, was scheduled to be heard in the Senate's Regulated Industries Committee at 11 a.m. on Feb. 21, with action not expected to be posted on the Legislature's website until after *The Sarasota News Leader's* deadline this week.

The bill was referred to the Senate's Health Policy and Community Affairs Committees as well.

House Bill 439, which was filed on Jan. 22 by Republican state Rep. Bill Hager of Delray Beach, remains in the Health Quality Subcommittee, where it was referred on Jan. 30, according to a check of the bill's status on Feb. 20.

Additionally, that bill is scheduled to be heard by the Local and Federal Affairs Committee and the Health & Human Services Committee in the House.

The two bills are almost identical, with just slight variations in their language. Senate Bill 258 says, for example, “Counties may further

restrict outdoor smoking on county property,” while House Bill 439 states, “A county may impose additional smoking restrictions on outdoor county property with designated smoking areas.”

The language in the bills is also comparable regarding delegation of smoking-restriction authority to municipalities.

Mason's letter from the County Commission cites several reasons for the legislative delegation to support the bills. Among them:

- “The limited smoking restrictions on Sarasota County property enhance a healthy environment at our beaches and our public recreation areas for the safe enjoyment by all individuals, especially children and others most vulnerable to the effects of secondhand smoke.”
- “The county smoking restriction on its public beaches was a critical component to Siesta Key's beach being named Number 1 in the nation by Steve Leatherman, aka Dr. Beach, in 2011.”
- “Allowing smoking on public beaches would incur additional costs for cleanup at taxpayer expense.”
- The Sarasota County smoking ordinance has been in effect for five years without problems — these bills allow continuation of its implementation, so this would not be a new level of regulation.”

If approved by the Legislature, the change in the Clean Indoor Air Act would go into effect on July 1. 



A Sarasota County illustration shows the location of snowy plover nests on Siesta Key last winter and the proposed areas for a pilot program to eradicate fire ant nests. Image courtesy Sarasota County

VOLUNTEERS WILL SEEK PRIVATE HOMEOWNERS' PERMISSION TO TRY TO KILL RED ANT COLONIES ENDANGERING BIRD AND TURTLE EGGS ON SIESTA KEY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

To fight an invasive species of fire ant on Siesta Key's beach that is threatening bird and turtle nests, two members of the Siesta Key Association soon will begin seeking property owners' permission to kill the ants with an environmentally friendly poison.

On Feb. 7, Bob Luckner, a chemical engineer, and Allan Worms, a wildlife biologist,

told about 22 members of the Siesta Key Association about their plans to try to eradicate as many of the fire ants as possible by treating the ants' nests a couple of times a year, starting this spring.

Both Sarasota Audubon volunteers, Luckner and Worms became involved in the initiative because of their efforts over the past several years to



A photo taken by staff at Texas A&M University shows an imported red fire ant mound. Photo by Drees/Texas A&M

track the nesting of the endangered snowy plovers on Siesta Key, they said.

“We are starting to lose a fair number of [snowy plover nests] to fire ants” each year, Luckner explained. The ants will bite into the eggs with their saw-like jaws and suck the eggs dry.

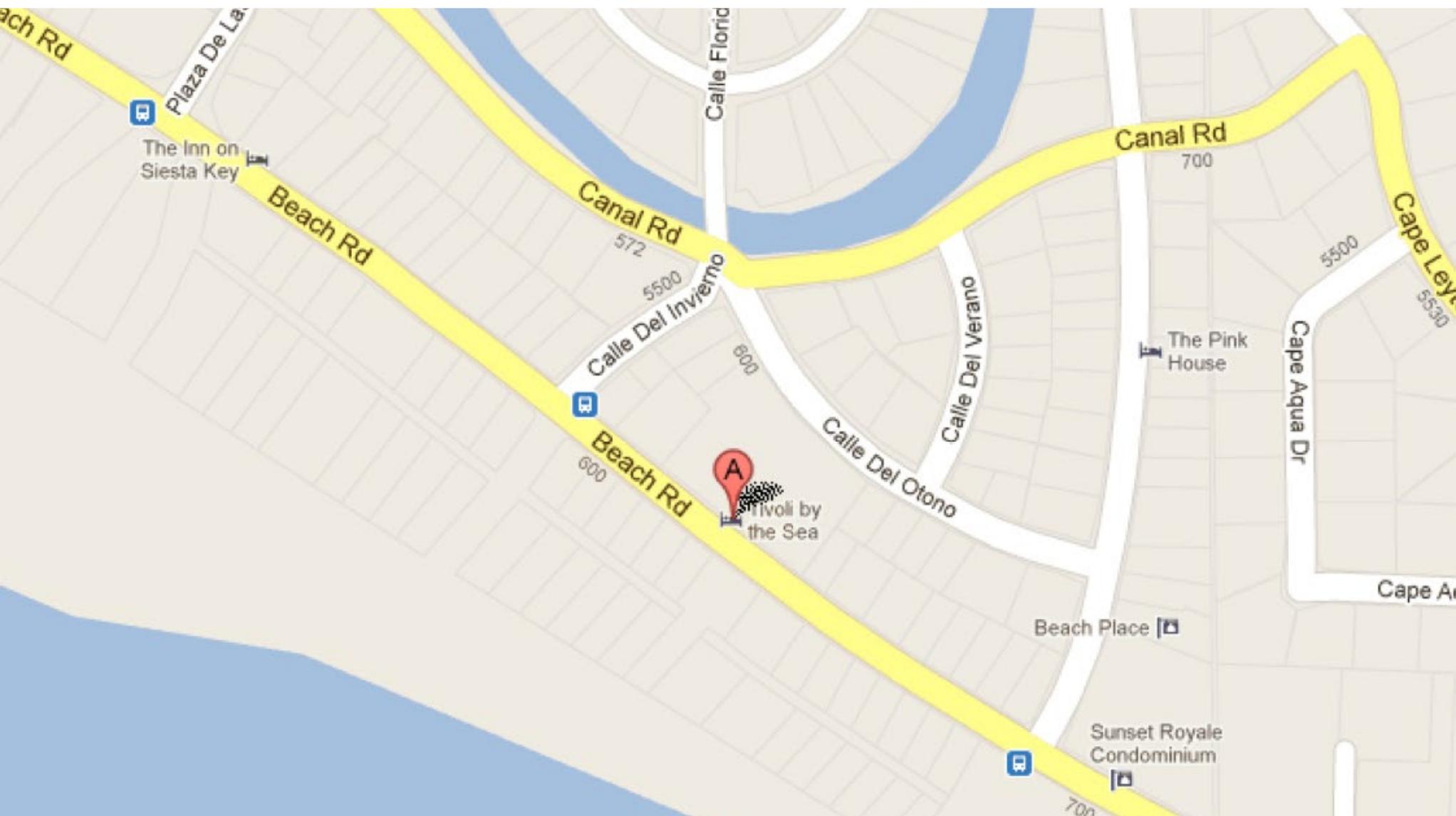
Moreover, Luckner pointed out, the fire ants will attack a chick that is lying in a nest, drying out after it has hatched, “and it’s an ugly death.”

“We’re losing at least 10 percent of the nests every year to this kind of thing,” Luckner added.

Mote Marine Laboratory has recorded the loss of some turtle eggs to fire ants, Luckner said.



Allan Worms/Photo by Rachel Hackney



The red marker shows the location of Tivoli by the Sea in relation to the Gulf of Mexico on Siesta Key. Map courtesy Google Maps

The ants also are harmful to other wildlife, Worms noted, including mice and rabbits.

They bite people, too, Worms cautioned, leaving a circle of small incisions that forms a pustule. "Don't scratch it!" he admonished the audience members, "because that can cause infection."

The fire ant species on Siesta Key has no known natural predator in the United States, Worms explained. The first of these ants, according to researchers, may have come to the country in soil used as ballast for ships. Reports of the species go back to 1953 in Biloxi, Miss., Worms said, though other reports say the species first was seen in the U.S. in 1944.

The ant species has been documented in the Southeastern states, from Tennessee and Georgia to Texas, Worms noted, calling it "a nasty little bugger."

The ant nests appear to be concentrated between Beach Accesses 9 and 11, Luckner said, with about 22 nests per acre. The snowy plovers generally nest between Siesta Village and Siesta Public Beach, he added, with most of their nests discovered annually between Access 8 and the public beach.

The area he and Worms propose to treat, Luckner continued, encompasses 10 to 15 acres, from the property on the beach owned by the Tivoli by the Sea condominium complex, which is located at 625 Beach Road, to the public beach.

The area has land belonging to 21 homeowners and seven condominium complexes, he added.

When he and Worms approached the Tivoli association board, he continued, they were told, "Well, no, thank you."



Bob Luckner explains Siesta Key's fire ant problem during the Feb. 7 meeting of the Siesta Key Association. Photo by Rachel Hackney

However, the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, which manages a conservation easement on the beach, gave its go-ahead for the treatment, Luckner said.

Nonetheless, Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid noted in a discussion with the county commissioners on Feb. 12 that the county would have to change the terms of the county's conservation easement agreement to allow the treatment.

County staff wanted to see the results of the initiative before committing to that action, Reid added.

Additionally, a Feb. 6 memo to the County commission from Amy Meese, director of the county's Natural Resources Department, and Rachel A. Herman, a project scientist in that department, says "Natural Resources will continue to work with volunteers to monitor

[snowy plover] nesting on County beaches and further assess the impact, if any, of red imported fire ants on the nesting success.”

It continues, “Since there does not appear to be a problem on County beaches, we do not recommend [use of the pesticides] on public beach and dune systems at this time.”

“We’ll treat where we get permission,” Luckner told the SKA members. “We’re going to start ringing doorbells in the next month.”

Luckner and Worms said they will use a combination of the poisons Amdro and Extinguish; the latter makes the queen in each colony sterile.

The mix looks like cornmeal, Luckner added.

Asked about the toxicity of the mix, Luckner responded of Extinguish, “It’s 60 times less toxic than salt to a human being.” Amdro, he noted, is about five times less toxic.

If a person were to eat approximately 6.8 pounds of the combination, he continued, that would be harmful.

Mote personnel use Amdro if they find fire ants attacking a sea turtle nest, Luckner pointed out.

The poison’s potency has a 24-hour lifetime, Worms said. Moreover, for it to be effective, he added, the temperature must be no lower than 60 degrees at night “and the warmer the better in the daytime.”

“Who’s going to apply it?” Luckner asked. “Well, you’re looking at it,” he said, pointing to himself and Worms.

The men plan to conduct another survey of the fire ant nests — which look like mounds on the surface near the dune area — before they begin the treatment, they noted.

Each red ant nest is about the size of a basketball, Worms told the SKA audience.

THE PRINGLES TEST

At the prompting of SKA President Catherine Luckner — Bob’s wife — Worms explained that the ants are attracted to various types of oils and juices. To be sure he and Bob Luckner have located a fire ant mound, Worms continued, they will sprinkle bits of Pringles potato chips in the area and leave for about 15 minutes.

When they return, he said, the area will be “covered black with ants” if, indeed, the mound represents a fire ant nest.

“Not even 15 minutes,” Catherine Luckner, interjected, pointing out how fast the ants pick up the Pringles pieces.

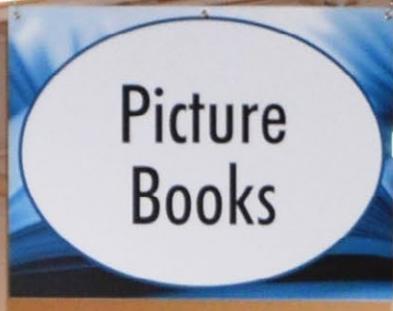
“And they will carry that substance back into the nest,” Worms said, cautioning, “This is not an avocation of a particular brand [of chips].”

It is just easy to work with Pringles because they come in cans, he noted, drawing chuckles among the audience members.

Because the pesticide mix they plan to use has a soybean oil taste to the ants, Luckner said, the ants will “clean this stuff up in a matter of a few hours.”

He pointed out, “It’s not going to wash into the water table or out into the Gulf.”

“This has been a year in coming,” Catherine Luckner told the SKA members, adding that she wanted to compliment staff in the county’s Natural Resources Department as well as Florida Department of Agriculture personnel for their assistance. 



A HAPPY NEW HOME

GULF GATE LIBRARY WELCOMES PATRONS IN ITS TEMPORARY QUARTERS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

As the crowd began gathering outside the temporary quarters of Gulf Gate Library in Westfield Sarasota Square Mall on Feb. 20, Katrina Verzosa of Bradenton was eager to start browsing the stacks.

An employee at LensCrafters in the mall, she told *The Sarasota News Leader* she never has had time to get to a library, “so I’m really excited about this.”

Verzosa added, “It’s a little more accessible now.”

While the 40-year-old Gulf Gate Library on Curtiss Avenue is torn down and replaced by a new, two-story structure, library patrons will call the 18,000-square-foot mall storefront “home.”

Just after 10 a.m. on Feb. 20, Sarabeth Kalajian, general manager of the Sarasota County

The children’s area has constant ‘patrons’ in the form of stuffed animals seated atop a shelf as well as a dollhouse (right front).

Library System, stepped to a podium in front of the temporary quarters to welcome everyone. "This is a beautiful site," she told the crowd, which had grown to about 60 people.

Carolyn Mason, chairwoman of the County Commission, pointed out, "A library is more than just a building ... It is a catalyst for creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and well being."

She added, "The temporary library offers virtually everything the old Gulf Gate Library did ... and I doubt there will be parking issues."

The latter comment drew laughter from the crowd members, many of them regular library patrons who have struggled with the cramped parking at the Curtiss Avenue location.



County Commissioner Nora Patterson addresses the crowd in Westfield Sarasota Square Mall.



(From left) Sarasota County Commissioners Nora Patterson, Charles Hines and Carolyn Mason are joined by Gulf Gate Library Manager Jim Mitchell and Deanie Erb, president of the Friends of Gulf Gate Library, for the ribbon cutting. Photos by Norman Schimmel



A library employee helps a customer at the front desk.

“ *A library is more than just a building ... It is a catalyst for creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and well being.*

Carolyn Mason
Chairwoman
County Commission



The stacks feature an array of materials to check out — from large-print books to DVDs.

Mason encouraged all those present to “shop till you drop” at the mall “and make sure when you do drop, it’s in a chair at the Gulf Gate Library.”

Kalajian then introduced Commissioner Nora Patterson, calling her the champion of the effort to build a new library.

“I have certainly heard for years, ‘When are we going to get a new facility for the busiest library in the Sarasota County Library System?’” Patterson pointed out.

That new library is set to open in late 2014. In the meantime, Patterson said, “Our staff and all the volunteers have pulled off this *incredible* miracle.”

The library is near the entrance to JC Penney in the mall, which is located at 8201 S. Tami-

ami Trail. It is only 1.5 miles from the Curtiss Avenue library site.

Kalajian also introduced the library manager, Jim Mitchell, and Deanie Erb, president of the Friends of Gulf Gate Library, calling Erb “the heart and the soul of the library.”

Erb pointed out that it costs only \$15 in annual dues to be a member of the Friends organization, but “if you want to go up to a million [dollars], we have no problem with that. ... So I encourage you to be friendly and to become a Friend of Gulf Gate Library or any other library.”

The organization, which has about 380 members, raises funds for resources beyond those the county can afford, Kalajian noted, adding



Patrons are quick to start roaming the stacks and using the library's other services.

that the group has more space in the temporary facility for its used book sales.

Kalajian commended the library staff, members of the Friends group and county employees. “It was amazing to see, when those folks got together,” she said, “how much care they took” in transforming the storefront into a library.

As Commissioners Charles Hines and Patterson watched, Mason then cut the big blue ribbon at the doorway, prompting whoops, cheers and whistles.

Inside, patrons took aim at computer terminals and the stacks.

“It’s wonderful,” Erb told the *News Leader* with a big smile as people bustled around her.

Conni Wheeler, a member of the Friends board of directors, took this reporter on a tour, pointing out that younger library patrons already are asking for beanbag chairs for the teen section, while children will find a much more expansive area than they had in the old facility.

At the back of the single meeting room, a line of changing rooms is the most notable sign the space once housed a clothing store.

Through swinging doors on one side, in the area that used to stock the latest fashion arrivals before they went out on racks, library staff has carved out offices and room to mend books.

“I love the children’s area,” said former Commissioner Shannon Staub, now president of the Library Foundation for Sarasota County.



The seats at the computer terminals are mostly occupied.

Surveying the whole public part of the facility, Staub added, “This is big. We could have a ballroom dance here. We might!”

The foundation is a nonprofit organization established last year to raise private funds to supplement county support of the library system.

Back near the circulation desk, Ginger Dvorak, who has been a library volunteer since 2004, was checking out books for her daughter. “I think it’s great,” she told the *News Leader*. “Lots of room. I like that.”

Sarasota County Library Advisory Board member William Kegel congratulated Mitchell near the front. “It’s superior. It really is.”

“We are prepared to be a good mall neighbor,” Mitchell told the *News Leader*. 



A NEW NEIGHBOR

Under cloudy skies, Goodwill opened its North Tamiami Trail store on Feb. 19. Photos by Stan Zimmerman

GOODWILL MANASOTA OPENS ITS STORE ON THE NORTH TAMIAMI TRAIL

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Florida is a rag-pickers delight. Transplants bring too much stuff, and they unburden themselves. People age and no longer fit into their tuxedos (if they need them at all). Condominiums do not allow yard sales. And, alas, people die.

All of which makes for a cornucopia of goods going to charitable organizations for resale.

One of these services opened a new facility on the North Tamiami Trail Feb. 19, and the line waiting for the doors to be unlocked at 9 a.m. the next day was more than 200 people long.

The store is a departure for Goodwill Manasota, the first time the organization has a brand new and purpose-built facility. This store replaces the one at Trail Plaza at the intersection of Myrtle Street and U.S. 41. This one is located at 5150 N. Tamiami Trail.

The 30,000-square-foot facility also hosts a community center that will hold free classes for the public on a variety of topics — from arts and crafts to computer tutorials.

Goodwill sells donated items, using the proceeds for job training and rehabilitation. People can also search for jobs online and get personal help to look for employment.

The City of Sarasota's decision to allow the store to be constructed is still under legal challenge. Neighbors took the city and developer to court, and the case is now with the Second District Court of Appeal.

None of that deterred shoppers on a cloudy Wednesday morning. The crowd ranged from socialites to down-and-outers, all waiting patiently for the doors to open and the treasures to be revealed. 



Shoppers dashed into the new Goodwill store to be among the first to examine the inventory.

Row upon row of clean and pressed clothing greeted the inaugural crowd.



Bargain hunters stood in a line that reached around the back of the store and into the parking lot, waiting for the doors to open at 9 a.m.



Butterflies will not be the only visitors drawn to Selby Gardens this weekend. Photo by Norman Schimmel

SELBY GARDENS OFFERING REDUCED ADMISSION FOR FESTIVAL

This year, Selby Gardens' annual Plant and Garden Festival, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Feb. 23-24, will include a diverse array of live music and theatrical performances, demonstrations and art exhibitions "in addition to stunning plants, gardening tools and supplies offered by some of Florida's premier retailers," the Gardens has announced.

A complete lineup of programming activities is available at www.selby.org.

The two-day horticultural extravaganza represents a limited-time opportunity to visit multiple exhibits, enjoy the Plant and Garden Festival, and access the Gardens for a discounted

price. Adults may visit for \$12, while member guests will be admitted for \$5; free admission is offered to all members and children age 11 and under.

This special event will benefit Selby Gardens' education, horticulture and research efforts, a news release says. Guest passes, coupons and reciprocal offers, therefore, will not be accepted during Plant & Garden Festival.

A grant from The Woman's Exchange enabled Selby Gardens to produce the visual and performing arts selections for this year's festival, which are being presented as *The Art of Plants*, the release adds.

30 ARRESTED IN SHERIFF'S OFFICE'S ONLINE PREDATOR STING

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested 30 people in Operation Intercept II, the second such sting designed to protect Sarasota County's children from online predators, the office announced Feb. 20.

"The suspects responded to Internet-based ads or social media posts and engaged in sexually explicit written and verbal conversations, ultimately traveling to a location in Sarasota County with the intent to have sex with a child or children," a news release says. When the suspects arrived, detectives placed them under arrest, it adds.

"This was our second operation to see what criminals prowled the Internet for the purpose of sexually exploiting children," said Sheriff Tom Knight in the release. "We saw some frightening things that parents need to be aware of to properly protect their kids."

In one case, the alleged predator met a person he thought was a child on a GPS-based online dating platform that tells people who is in their area and allows them to chat with the persons and send photos, the release notes. In another, the suspect posted an ad on a website known for prostitution and indicated in the ad that his interest was in young girls only, the release adds. The sting was structured to make him think he had met a 14-year-old girl recently placed with new foster parents; he planned to pay her \$60 for her services, according to the report.

The Sheriff's Office conducted this manpower-intensive operation in cooperation with the State Attorney's Office and members of



Sheriff Tom Knight/Contributed photo

the Central Florida Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, including the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Osceola County Sheriff's Office, Polk County Sheriff's Office, Winter Haven Police Department, Citrus County Sheriff's Office, Seminole County Sheriff's Office, Bradenton Police Department, Manatee County Sheriff's Office, Orange County Sheriff's Office and Lake County Sheriff's Office, the release points out.

Assistance was also provided by members of the FBI Innocent Images Task Force, Clewiston Police Department, Lee County Sheriff's Office and Charlotte County Sheriff's Office.

OSPREY TO BE CLOSED AGAIN TO NORTHBOUND TRAFFIC

Osprey Avenue from Mound Street to Brother Geenen Way is scheduled to be closed to northbound traffic for one week beginning Friday, Feb. 22, at 7 a.m., the City of Sarasota has announced.

The road is to be reopened to through traffic by Friday, March 1, at 5 p.m., a city news release says.

Southbound traffic will be maintained through this section of Osprey Avenue, the release adds.

Construction crews will be working on the Lift Station 87 force main installation during this period, the release notes.



Once again, northbound Osprey Avenue will be closed to traffic at Mound Street. Photo by Norman Schimmel

LIBRARY LOVERS MONTH FEATURES 'DESIGN-A-CARD' CONTEST

During February, Sarasota County libraries are celebrating Library Lovers Month by inviting community members to design the next generation of Sarasota County library cards.

“Sarasota County is such a creative community that we thought, why not ask our customers what they would like to see on their library card,” says Fruitville Library Manager Ann Ivey in a news release. “The library card is basically a person’s passport to unlimited possibilities. By accessing the library system’s rich collection of resources, using computers and attending programs, an individual can choose from a variety of educational, entertainment and enrichment experiences,” she adds in the release.

Applications for the “Design-A-Card” contest are available from any Sarasota County library or on the library website at www.sclibs.net. The theme for all designs is “What my library means to me,” the release points out. Entries may be submitted at any Sarasota County li-

brary. The deadline is 5 p.m. Saturday, April 20, the release notes.

The top 10 entries will be chosen by a panel of judges, including representatives from the Sarasota County Commission, Ringling College of Art and Design, Sarasota County schools and the Sarasota County Library System, the release adds.

The public will be invited to visit the Sarasota County Library website during the month of May to select the top two designs, the release says. The two winning designs will be unveiled in September during National Library Card sign-up month, it adds.

Library cards featuring the two new designs and a key chain version will be available to the public later this year, the release notes.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000, or visit www.sclibs.net.

MUNICIPAL VOTERS MAY TRACK ABSENTEE BALLOTS ONLINE

Voters in the upcoming City of Sarasota and Town of Longboat Key elections who choose absentee voting may track their ballots online from the time they request the ballots until the voted ballots have safely reached the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office, the office has announced.

The online service also allows voters to check their registration status, party affiliation and local polling place information, as well as to request an absentee ballot, a news release says. Voters may go to the Supervisor of Elections website at www.SarasotaVotes.com. Select the "Vote by Mail" icon at the top of the home page, then choose "Track your Absentee Ballot" from the menu and enter the requested information to track your absentee ballot and access other voter information.

Requests for absentee ballots to be mailed to voters for the March 12 City of Sarasota and Town of Longboat Key elections must be received by the office no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 6, the release points out.

Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent reminds absentee voters that, to be counted, their voted ballots must be received in her office no later than 7 p.m. on Election Day. Marked absentee ballots may not be turned in at a polling place on Election Day.

Dent also reminds voters whose signatures may have changed since they last voted that signature updates must be made on a Florida Voter Registration Application and presented to the Supervisor of Elections Office prior to the start of the absentee ballot canvass, which is at noon on Monday, March 11, the release notes

POUND THE GROUND 5K CHALLENGE SET FOR MARCH 9

Sarasota's newest extreme fitness event will put athletes to the test and give runners of all skill levels a chance to experience the fun and fatigue of a 21st century foot race, organizers of the first Pound the Ground Sarasota event have announced.

"In the tradition of Tough Mudder and Muddy Buddy adventure races, Pound the Ground Sarasota is a homegrown 5K obstacle challenge inviting athletes to get dirty, get sweaty, and have fun doing it," a news release says.

Pound the Ground Sarasota will take place March 9 at the Celery Fields (6893 Palmer Blvd., Sarasota), with subsequent monthly challenges planned, the release says. "The

course was designed by a Sarasota fitness instructor to challenge and reward adventurous fitness buffs and to raise money for local charities," the release adds.

Runners will climb walls, crawl through pipes and face a number of other obstacles and "mystery event" challenges throughout the 3.37-mile course, the release notes. There will be no time limit.

The event is for ages 14 and up. Gym teams will be welcome, the release says.

The cost will be \$40 before March 3; \$50 on the day of the event. Information and registration are available at poundthegroundsarasota.com.

NONPROFIT COMMUNITY PREPARING FOR 36-HOUR GIVING CHALLENGE

Starting at 7 a.m. on March 5 and running through 7 p.m. on March 6, local residents will donate through computers and smartphones to help raise funds for local nonprofits as part of the second annual 36-Hour Giving Challenge.

Last year's event resulted in a total of \$2.4 million raised through 10,700 gifts to benefit the 109 participating nonprofits; this year's event includes 285 organizations, according to a news release from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

The participating nonprofits all have profiles in [The Giving Partner](#), an online tool that enables informed philanthropy, the release points out. They also can earn their share of \$645,000 in grant incentives and 1:1 matching support for new and increased gifts over the last Challenge, the release adds.

The 36-Hour Giving Challenge is presented by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County in partnership with The Patterson Foundation, with support from Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Manatee Community Foundation, Charlotte Community Foundation and the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation. The Herald-Tribune Media Group, ClearChannel Radio and SNN6 have joined in the effort to promote the power of giving during this event, the release notes.

"This community-wide giving event is an excellent opportunity for everyone to be a philanthropist, supporting the causes they are passionate about while providing needed support for local nonprofits," says Roxie Jerde, president and CEO of the Community Foundation, in the release. "It also provides an opportunity for participating nonprofits to increase fundraising and communications capacity, resulting in new donors and more revenue to support their missions. During the Giving Challenge, everyone wins and has fun giving!"

"We support the smart use of technology to help our region's philanthropists make more informed decisions and, in turn, help strengthen the role of philanthropy in our community," says Debra Jacobs, president and CEO of The Patterson Foundation, in the release. "We heartily believe everyone can be a philanthropist and are excited to support the 36-Hour Giving Challenge with a \$430,000 dollar-for-dollar match for new or increased gifts up to \$1,000 per donor."

Last year, all of the participating organizations received donations, and approximately 40 percent of all gifts were \$25, "driving home just how valuable individuals can be when looking at the collective impact of their generosity," the release points out.

36-HOUR GIVING CHALLENGE

Unleash your inner generosity

**MARCH 5 AT 7AM -
MARCH 6 AT 7PM**

BENEFITING HUNDREDS OF AREA NONPROFITS



The
Giving
Partner

New wrinkles this year are \$5,000 prizes for Best Partnership with a Local Business and Best Overall Campaign, the release notes. Area professionals will judge these categories, which will showcase nonprofit creativity and the ability to engage community partners, it adds. A repeat feature this year will be the awarding of hourly prizes to random donors, to keep the excitement going throughout the Challenge, the release says.

Donations are 100 percent tax-deductible. Anyone who wishes to give during the challenge may make a secure donation (minimum

gift is \$25) by debit or credit card at www.givingpartnerchallenge.org.

Jerde explains in the release that the 36-Hour Giving Challenge is designed to ensure the community utilizes the information-rich Giving Partner profiles to inform their contributions. "The Giving Partner allows local nonprofits to broadly share their needs and the vital services they provide in Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto and Charlotte counties," says Jerde. "Our goal has been to make philanthropy accessible, fun and easy for the entire community."

SARASOTA REPUBLICAN CLUB TO MEET ON MARCH 6

Former state Sen. Lisa Carlton will moderate a panel discussion among the six candidates contending for City Commission during the Sarasota Republican Club's monthly dinner Wednesday, March 6, at the Sarasota Yacht Club, 1100 John Ringling Blvd., Sarasota, the club has announced.

As a finale, each candidate will ask a question of the others in a "sixty-second challenge round," a club news release says.

The social hour will begin at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members.

For additional information and reservations, visit www.SarasotaRepublicanClub.com or contact Donna Arenschiold at 312-5279.

The event is open to the public, the release says.

The candidates scheduled to participate are Suzanne Atwell (current mayor of Sarasota), Susan Chapman, Richard Dorfman, Linda Holland, Kelvin Lumpkin and Pete Theisen. Current issues and the long-term future of Sarasota will be among topics to be discussed, the release adds.

CORRECTION

An article in the Feb. 15 issue of *The Sarasota News Leader* titled, *Split Views*, did not make it clear that Sarasota County had no local preference stipulation regarding company employee residency until the County Commission voted on a requirement during its Feb. 12 meeting.

During its Nov. 13, 2012 discussion of how companies could gain local vendor preference, the commission tentatively voted to

establish a residency requirement of one full-time employee or one corporate officer or managing partner or principal owner residing in Sarasota, Charlotte or Manatee counties. However, that vote was put on hold while county staff assessed views of more area firms on a variety of measures.

The relevant requirement the commission settled on during its Feb. 12 meeting was five full-time employees or one corporate officer residing in Sarasota, Charlotte or Manatee counties.

NEW PRINCIPAL NAMED FOR PINE VIEW SCHOOL

Sarasota County Schools Superintendent Lori White has named a Virginia educator as the next principal of Pine View School in Osprey.

Stephen Covert, 41, who currently serves as executive director of human resources for the Spotsylvania County Schools in Virginia, is scheduled to begin July 1 as principal of Pine View, pending School Board approval, a district news release says. He will succeed Steve Largo, who has been principal of Pine View since 1988. The school serves intellectually gifted students in grades two through 12.

“I am being entrusted with a unique gift,” said Covert in the release. “Pine View is one of the most widely recognized and acclaimed schools for gifted students in the nation. I also know I have some big shoes to fill as Steve Largo retires, but I couldn’t be more excited to build on the school’s reputation and success.”

The principal search began with a site analysis at the school in November, the release notes. Pine View students, parents, staff and community members were invited to attend two meetings to offer their ideas about the qualities they would like to see in their next principal. A panel of interviewers, including Steve Cantees, executive director of high schools for Sarasota County Schools; Sonia Figaredo-Alberts, executive director of the Pupil Support Services Office; other district and school administrators; Pine View teachers; a parent and a student met with six finalists for the position, the release adds. Cantees and Figaredo-Alberts considered the input from those sessions and narrowed the field. After another round of interviews with the remaining candidates, including meetings with White, the release says, Covert emerged as the top contender.



Stephen Covert/Contributed photo

“Dr. Covert is an excellent choice as the next principal of Pine View,” said Cantees in the release. “It was no easy task to find someone who will fit that school community as well as Steve Largo has for 25 years, but with help from parents, students, staff and administrators, I believe we’ve accomplished it.”

Covert began his career in 1993 as a Spanish teacher at Spotsylvania High School. For the Spotsylvania district, he also served as assistant principal and as principal of high schools and middle schools and as director of human resources and assistant superintendent before being named executive director of human resources in July 2012, the news release points out.

Covert has served as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA, and a collateral faculty member at the Central Virginia Leadership Academy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA, the release adds. He also was a member of the Gifted Advisory Board for the Spotsylvania district.

Covert and his wife, Amy, have two sons: Benjamin, 9, and Barrett, 4, the release notes.

COUNTY COMMISSION AWARDS ALMOST \$3.9 MILLION FOR PROJECTS

The Sarasota County Commission awarded four construction contracts totaling about \$3.9 million for capital improvement projects at its meeting Tuesday, Feb. 12.

The projects are as follows:

- New restroom and concession facility with related improvements at North Jetty Beach Park at the south end of Casey Key: The existing 30-year-old restroom building will be replaced with a new facility that will almost double the restroom fixtures, including two family restrooms, combined with a family-friendly food concession, a county news release says. Zirkelbach Construction Inc. of Palmetto was awarded the \$1.4 million project, which will be funded by the infrastructure surtax (1-cent sales tax). Construction is expected to begin this month, with completion targeted in January 2014.
- Gun Range expansion at Knight Trail Park: The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office leases and operates the Gun Range at Knight Trail Park, 3445 Rustic Road, Nokomis. Operations there include a Criminal Justice Firing Range, mounted patrol, K-9 Unit and an obstacle course, the release points out. The Shooting Range Pavilion was completed in September 2010. The new contract provides for the addition of a 2,400-square-foot metal building for training of Sheriff's Office staff members in live, scenario-based situations such as building searches, search/arrest warrant services, victim rescue drills, hostage rescue and family disturbances. This will be the first facility of its kind in Sarasota County. Southern Cross Construction Inc. of Sarasota was awarded the approximately

\$175,000 contract, which will be paid for through the Capital Improvements fund. Construction is slated to begin in March, with completion in August, the release says.

- Road resurfacing for the Plantation community and various roads in Venice and south Sarasota County: This project involves the milling and resurfacing, along with restoration work, of approximately 16.5 lane miles of roads. Sections of the following roads will be repaved: Rockley Boulevard, Wexford Boulevard, Woodbridge Drive, Gulf Coast Boulevard, Myrtle Avenue, Pineland Avenue, Second Street, Groveland Avenue and First Street. Ajax Paving Industries of Florida LLC in Nokomis was selected as the contractor for the \$1.25 million project funded by the Environmental Land Management Study (ELMS) gas tax, the release adds. The project is expected to begin in March, with substantial completion in June.
- Replacement of the clay tile roof of the historic Courthouse, 2000 Main St., in downtown Sarasota. Currently housing the operations of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the courthouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, the release notes. The roof is nearly 50 years old and is leaking in several areas, the release adds. Willis A. Smith Construction Inc. of Sarasota will perform the \$1.06 million project, which is being funded in part by the Court Fund for Capital Outlay. Construction will start in March with an estimated completion in November.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000.



The County Commission has awarded a contract for the replacement of the clay tile roof on the Historic Courthouse in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

MOTE'S MAHADEVAN ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Dr. Kumar Mahadevan, president and CEO of Mote Marine Laboratory, will move to president emeritus status in May after 27 years of leadership, Mote has announced.

Mahadevan will continue to work for Mote “as a strong advocate and ambassador in the role of President Emeritus for at least the next two years to enable a smooth transition to new leadership,” a news release says. “He will assist the new CEO in promoting and developing support for Mote’s world-class research and education programs,” the release adds.

At the strong recommendation of Mahadevan, Mote’s Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Michael Crosby, the Lab’s senior vice president for research, to president and CEO, the release notes. These changes will become official May 16, following Mote’s annual board of trustees meeting, it adds.

Mahadevan said assuming non-operational duties will allow him to spend more time with his family, the release notes. “I’ve been thinking about slowing down for several years now,” he says in the release. “My wife and I would like to travel. We have grandchildren that we want to spend time with — it’s time.”

Mahadevan joined Mote in 1978 as a senior scientist; he has served as CEO since 1986. He has been the longest-serving leader in the organization’s 58-year history, the release points out.

“Kumar’s tenure at Mote has been transformative,” says Bob Carter, chairman of the board of trustees, in the release. “Under his leadership, Mote has grown from a small research group to a full-fledged scientific laboratory with a reputation for excellence — not just here locally or in Florida, but nationally and internationally as well,” he adds in the release.

“Mote has also gained a public aquarium that today is one of the region’s most popular attractions,” Carter continues in the release. “We are deeply appreciative of his contributions and excited that he will continue to support Mote as the national scientific treasure that it has become.”

Crosby joined Mote in 2010, when he was appointed to lead the Lab’s scientific endeavors, the release notes. He previously was associate vice president for research and economic development at George Mason University and vice chancellor for research at the University of Hawai’i-Hilo, the release points out.

In his three years at Mote, Crosby has helped develop the Lab’s current guiding document — the 2020 Vision and Strategic Plan [view it online at www.mote.org/aboutus]; developed the Mote Marine Laboratory Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, which provides support and mentorship for recent doctoral graduates; and is working on several international initiatives expanding Mote’s marine science leadership worldwide, the release says.

Press Releases & News Tips

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OBITUARY

BRUCE L. MANILLA

Bruce L. Manilla, 83, of Williamsburg, VA, and formerly of Sarasota, passed away on Feb. 13, 2013. He was preceded in death by his wife, Betty Manilla.

An entrepreneur, Bruce was a professional artist and art show promoter. Loving nature and spending time outdoors, he was a master gardener who particularly enjoyed flowers. He was a member of Selby Gardens in Sarasota.

He is survived by his children: Bruce L. Manilla and partner, Andy; David W. Manilla and wife, Gail; Michael T. Manilla and wife, Pam; Mary L. Manilla-Smith and husband, Dave; and Margaret "Meg" Murto and husband, Craig;

nine grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and two great-grandchildren on the way.

The family received friends on Monday, Feb. 18, at Nelsen Funeral Home, 3785 Strawberry Plains Road, Williamsburg, VA. A Mass of Christian Burial was held on Tuesday, Feb. 19, at 2 p.m. at St. Bede Catholic Church, 3686 Ironbound Road, Williamsburg, VA, with interment in the St. Bede Gardens.

To honor Bruce's lifelong love of gardening, please plant a tree in his memory. Online condolences may be expressed at www.nelsen-cares.com.

Nelson Funeral Home of Williamsburg, VA, is serving the Manilla family. 



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OPINION



THE CITY COMMISSIONERS NEED TO BECOME CHAMPIONS OF THE BRT'S POTENTIAL

EDITORIAL

No one truthfully knows at this point whether a bus rapid transit (BRT) system can be a phenomenal success in Sarasota County, but what has been woefully clear has been the lack of leadership on the part of the City Commission in working toward such a goal — and adding vitality to the city in the process.

In fact, it was left to a county commissioner — Joe Barbetta — to call for action when his board held a joint discussion with the City Commission on Feb. 5 to talk about BRT and a host of other issues.

Of the city commissioners, only Terry Turner seemed to project optimism that Sarasota residents can be sold on the need for land-use changes to spur the type of infill development

essential to the success of a BRT along the Tamiami Trail from New College to the Westfield Southgate Mall.

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo at least made an offer to meet with constituents to ascertain their view of the possibilities, but Barbetta's call for leadership on the part of the City Commission seemed to spark more than a little resentment.

It is no secret the city government has hefty bills to keep paying, thanks to its pension plans and the cost of its Police Department. It also is no secret that the North Tamiami Trail has been the proverbial redheaded stepchild in terms of development. City Editor Stan Zimmerman recently provided thorough and thoughtful analysis in past issues of

OPINION

The Sarasota News Leader regarding past plans to energize the North Trail and the latest initiative for a new overlay district.

During a County Commission meeting prior to the joint board discussions, Jonathan B. Paul, the county's interim transportation planning director, utilized video, graphics and a wide array of photos and diagrams to illustrate the use of BRT systems in cities as diverse as Portland, OR, and Orlando. The key to these systems' success is that middle word in the acronym — "rapid." If people can expect to wait no more than 10 to 15 minutes for an attractive, comfortable bus that will travel a corridor with lots of popular stops, the bus becomes a particularly attractive alternative to the automobile.

Although the City and County commissions not quite a year ago remained focused on using the CRX railroad corridor for a large part of a proposed BRT system, Barbetta made it plain during his board's late-January discussion that U.S. 41 is the only corridor that makes sense. Students from New College and the Ringling College of Art and Design would love the ease of getting to and from downtown — and the mall, we suspect. Given the location of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall and other destinations along the Trail, Barbetta is correct: That is the only corridor that has genuine potential.

Why cannot all the city commissioners see the same picture and relish the opportunity of convincing the public of its value?

City Commissioner Shannon Snyder talked during the joint meeting about "democracy"

and how his board has to deal with the will of the people. Fortunately, Barbetta was having none of it. "We get elected to make tough decisions," Barbetta said.

The BRT is not inexpensive by any means. County Commissioner Christine Robinson, for one, made it clear that finding the funds to pay for ongoing operations would be a serious concern.

For that matter, just winning enough federal and other grant funds to build the system is not going to be an easy quest, we gather from the two presentations we have seen Paul and Sarasota County Area Transit General Manager Glama Carter make.

Yet, the payoff does have huge potential.

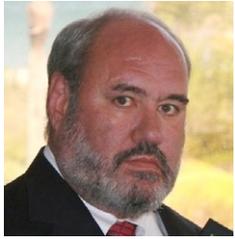
Barbetta rightfully characterized the pursuit of BRT — and the land-use changes that would be critical to its success — as a way to save the city from fiscal collapse. We wholeheartedly agree with him. In the process, we believe the city also, at long last, would realize a vibrant North Trail, able to relegate to its past the sordid tales of prostitution and drug deals that have been synonymous with that section of U.S. 41 for decades.

We urge all the city commissioners to seize this opportunity, to make it clear to their constituents the rewards that can come of this process.

It is time for them to stop their handwringing and become champions of a project with numerous benefits that could prove the end to the city's fiscal woes. 

OPINION

SEXUAL HEALING



By David Staats
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY The Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, KS, is a single-message ministry: God hates! According to church leader Fred Phelps, God hates “fags, Jews, Catholics, Hindus, America, the Antichrist Obama, and Vassar College,” to name but a few.

A former civil rights lawyer and activist on behalf of Al Gore’s 1988 presidential bid, Phelps believes that the U.S. government is responsible for the spread of homosexuality. For this reason the church’s 40-some-odd members have disrupted military funerals around the country, cheering the fallen soldiers’ deaths.

“Thank God for IED’s [roadside bombs]!” church members shout at mourners. Even the Ku Klux Klan finds Westboro’s disruptions of military funerals reprehensible.

Westboro plans to demonstrate at the funeral of U.S. Army Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf at West Point on the morning of Feb. 28.

After lunch that same day, the Westboro protesters plan a 45-minute whistle-stop in Poughkeepsie, NY, to picket Vassar College. Why Vassar? “God Hates Vassar College for following the satanic Zeitgeist by professing the soul-damning lie that it is ‘OK to be gay.’ That is what the men of Sodom and Gomorrah professed and we see how well that worked out for them. WBC will kindly warn everyone affiliated with Vassar College that the Lord that destroyed those ancient cities on the plain yet reigns. Repent or Perish!”

More on the protest can be found on the church’s [website](#).

On Feb. 12, Jon Chenette, acting president of Vassar College, sent an email message to the extended college community. In part, his message read:

“Yesterday I sent an email to the campus community about plans announced by the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas, to picket Vassar on February 28 in protest of our open support of LGBTQ students, employees, and alums. As I said in that message, we look forward as a college to any opportunity to counter messages of hate and bigotry and to underscore our values. Since the campus and alumnae/i became aware of Westboro’s plan, we have received an outpouring of support for reaffirming our commitment to inclusion. Many of you have posted similar sentiments on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. The responses from members of our community, while not surprising, have been remarkable and have made all of us who have read them proud to be part of Vassar.

“In the face of Westboro’s statements, we want to celebrate the inclusiveness of our community and the multitude of backgrounds, interests, and preferences that enrich our experiences. In an effort to coordinate activities that members of the campus and alumnae/i communities are planning, the senior staff of the college has organized a group representative of students, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i to serve as a clearinghouse and sounding board.

OPINION

I know they will foster an array of events that will speak powerfully to our values.”

Just to be clear, LGBTQ means those persons who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning their sexuality.

Members of the Sarasota Vassar Club were invited to comment on the Westboro protest. A sampling of opinions follows:

- Sallie van Arsdale: “As reported, the Westboro Baptist Church’s protest against Vassar’s support for equal citizenship rights for lesbians and gays appears to be far outside mainstream attitudes in the 21st century. The church is, of course, entitled to its beliefs no matter how ridiculous its statement and offensive those beliefs are to others.”
- Virginia Lange: “I do feel strongly that in order to show our ‘Political Correctness,’ at Vassar, and indeed North America, we lose sight of what I believe are still the silent majority. It is reverse discrimination in its own way. Just as I said in my email to the college and the local group, ‘What about H for heterosexual? Or don’t we count anymore?’ I believe that sexual orientation is mostly NOT a choice, but a gene, and therefore, those who have it, in whatever degree, should not be discriminated for it. But neither should we who do not have that gene be ignored/discriminated against. Westboro Baptists have a right to believe what they like, but also have no right to force their beliefs on others.”
- Tatiana Staats: “I am appalled at the sharp decline in academic standards at Vassar College. The English alphabet has 26 letters, yet students have only mastered 5, and not in their proper order. Until Vassar requires

students to master the entire alphabet; that is, from Aphrodisiomania (abnormal sexual desire) to Zoonosis (disease stemming from Zoophilia, i.e. bestiality), I will not consider making further donations to the college.”

Although sexual orientation is not a protected characteristic under current civil rights laws, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights reminds us that progress toward the protection of gays and lesbians from discrimination in employment and housing has nevertheless been made. It also reminds us that progress has been slow.

Only 17 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation prohibiting discrimination in the private sector workplace on the basis of sexual orientation. Federal law only prevents the federal government itself from engaging in such discrimination. If the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which was first introduced in Congress in 1994, ever does become federal law, then any civilian, non-religious employer with at least 15 employees would be required to end all anti-gay discrimination in its hiring and employment practices.

Vassar seems determined to respond to Westboro’s provocation. How it plans to respond is not clear. Whatever the college’s response, its very act will likely serve only to amplify Westboro’s message. Publicity is what it wants.

On the other hand, ignoring the pickets relegates the protest to a non-event, which in fact it is. *Aquila non captat muscas* (an eagle doesn’t snap at flies). In other words, do not sweat the small stuff. And there is nothing smaller than the amoebic life forms occupying Westboro’s pews. 

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REVISITING THE 2050 PLAN IS A BURDEN ON TAXPAYERS

To the editor:

How much is it costing to “revisit” the 2050 Growth Management Comprehensive Plan? Staff time. Planning Commission time. Board of County Commissioners’ time. We Sarasota County taxpayers are funding the “your plan isn’t workable” meetings between the development community and County staff. There have been 10 meetings so far.

We are also paying for staff outreach efforts to “seek community input” on how “unworkable” the 2050 Plan is. I got a personal call on our taxpayer dollars. Did you?

We know what follows: more staff time to do an analysis and put together statistics showing the 2050 Plan’s unworkability followed by Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners meetings to verify and codify what’s unworkable, culminating perhaps in a unanimous vote to rework the 2050 Plan AT OUR EXPENSE. It appears we are paying a lot to find out what developers want.

What do we taxpayers want for the county? “Preserve open space, agriculture and environmentally sensitive land and build new, compact, mixed use, walkable developments

in appropriate areas.” (Sarasota County Planning Department Summary of the 2050 Plan) Are these goals still applicable? Throwing them out will be costly to the environment and to future generations.

*Laurel Schiller
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*.

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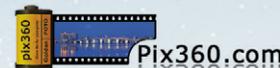
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WINTER SLIDES AWAY

SIGNS OF SPRING DAPPLE THE LANDSCAPE

Story and Photos By Fran Palmeri
Contributing Writer

From deep within Oscar Scherer State Park, the call comes soft and tentative, as if the vocalist is rehearsing his song. Just one note, but it is in the right key so I wait a moment and then there he is — “Bob White, Bob White” — announcing spring this cool winter day.

Like a querulous child, I am always asking, “Is it spring yet?” In reply, Mother Nature sends another icy blast down the peninsula. Cold fronts descend but usually retreat in a day or two. Though fewer now, the average in south Florida is eight cold fronts in December, nine in both January and February.

Winter/spring; winter/spring: The seasons swing back and forth like a pendulum, sometimes within the space of hours.

On cold winter mornings, I hurry to capture tiny diamonds of ice coating the saw palmetto. Minutes later I am catapulted into spring by fetterbush putting forth delicate pink blossoms weeks ahead of schedule. Red maples are in a hurry, too. Like bea-

cons in the landscape, they wear different colors — one, fine claret; another, burnt orange.

The new green of oaks floats like mist in the tree-tops. On warm afternoons, fog drifts in from the Gulf of Mexico.

Grateful for the sun’s advance, like some Midas, I tote up the minutes added to each day. By May, my accounting is put aside. Sunlight is so plentiful it is almost expendable.

Winter does have much to commend itself. Mosquitoes are gone. Warblers, swallows and robins have arrived to congregate in parks and gardens. Sandhill cranes dance at the Celery Fields. Flocks of cedar waxwings pass through downtown Sarasota, stripping trees and shrubs of berries, a small price for their company.

Sometimes when winter overstays its welcome, a longing as ancient as our species overtakes me. Invoking spring, I dance to the full moon. The great horned owl in a nearby pine looks sternly down at me. 

Sandhill cranes cavort in the Celery Fields.



Red Maple shows off its spring 'attire.'



Oaks put on their 'spring green.'



Fog tiptoes ashore.



A Great Horned Owl holds court in a pine.



Fetterbush already is putting forth delicate blossoms.



The Bobwhite has announced the arrival of spring.



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SARASOTA MAGAZINE



BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS



NEW COLLEGE GRADUATE ERICA GRESSMAN COMBINES VARIOUS ART FORMS IN HER PIECE, *WALL OF SKIN*, AT THE LATEST INSTALLMENT OF NEW MUSIC NEW COLLEGE

By Tyler Whitson
Staff Writer

Performance artist Erica Gressman is not afraid to challenge herself when it comes to preparing and performing her pieces. In fact, she sees great artistic value in developing complex processes to produce a desired result when others might have taken an easier route.

“I’m a big fan of making elaborate ways to just press a simple button,” Gressman said during an audience Q-and-A session following her performance of *Wall of Skin* for a packed

house at New Music New College (NMNC) in New College of Florida’s Black Box Theater on the evening of Friday, Feb. 8.

The piece consists of numerous art forms — including performance, sculpture and drawing — that fuse to create the intricate process Gressman had described. That process pushes the metaphorical button that determines the characteristics of the music filling the room during her performance.

Erica Gressman begins the performance of Wall of Skin in New College of Florida’s Black Box Theater on the evening of Feb. 8. In an interview with The Sarasota News Leader, Gressman referred to her character in the performance as a ‘cyborg’ or ‘avatar’ with an ambiguous identity. ‘I do like making technology as volatile as, say, a female body,’ she said in regard to her portrayal. All photos by Arielle Scherr

EXPERIENCING WALL OF SKIN

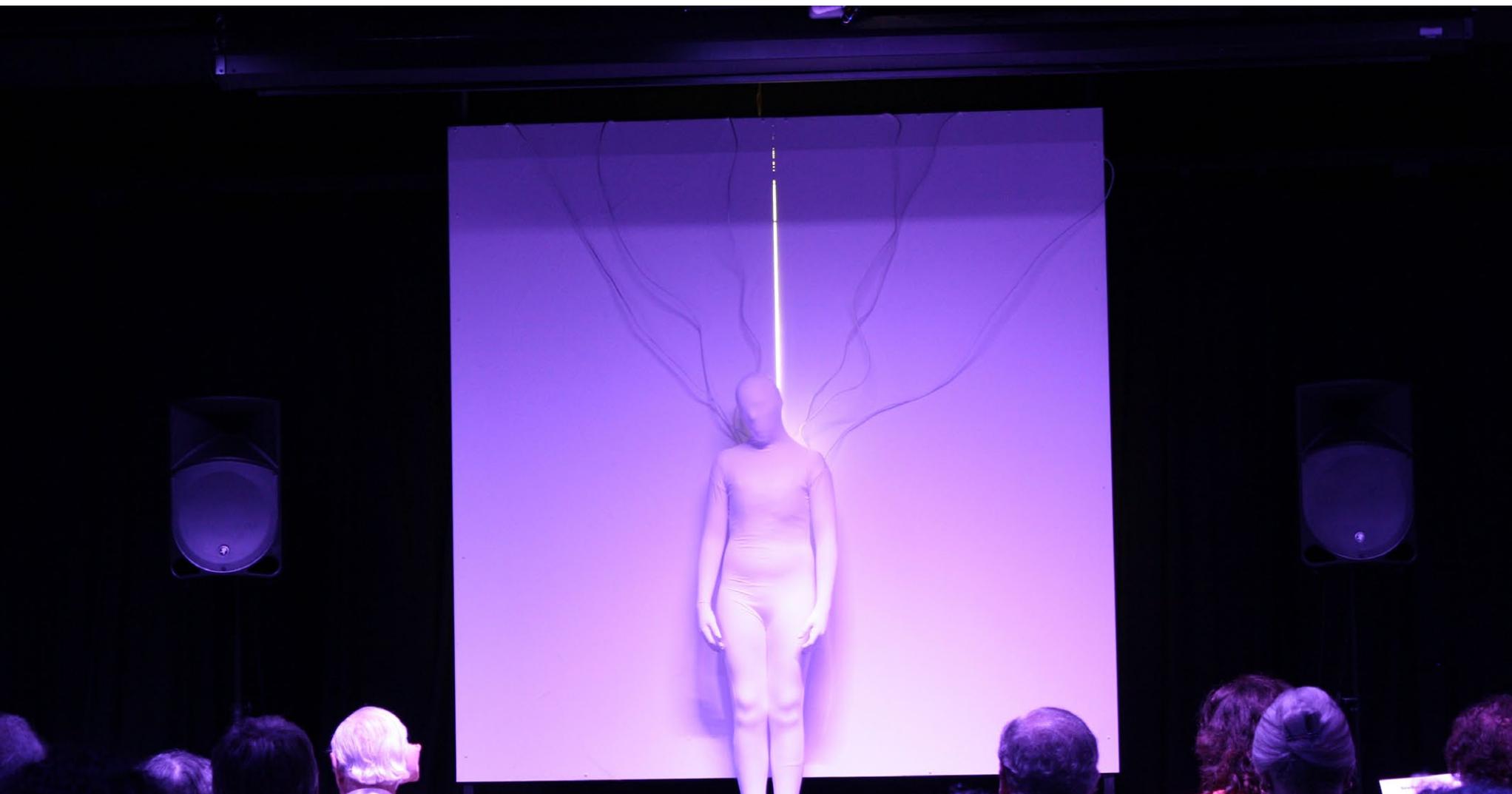
Wall of Skin began in almost complete darkness, with the exception of a small stage suffused with a muted, purple glow. Gressman, dressed in a white bodysuit that covered her from head to toe, stood motionless in front of a large, square sculpture of white drywall. She was bound to it by thin, white wires that appeared to be attached to her back. A faint, white light radiated from a thin aperture between the panels while a hushed, low frequency electronic drone emanated from the speakers on either side of the sculpture.

The volume and pitch wavered slightly with each motion she made. The changes intensified as Gressman began to perform more elaborate movements that eventually led to

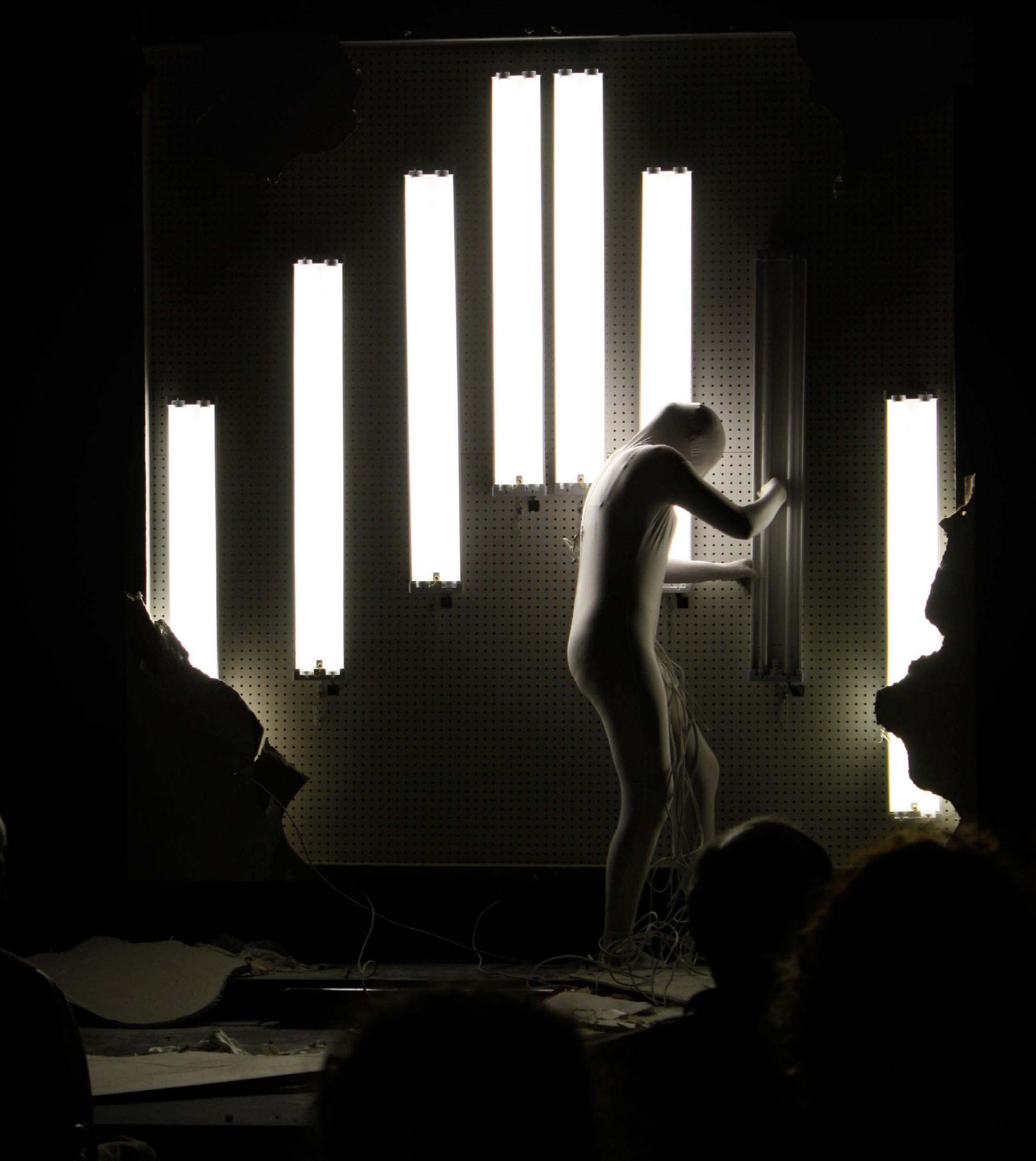
her peeling off the bodysuit to reveal another underneath it.

Gressman then slowly began to struggle with the wires attached to her back, tearing through the drywall behind her and creating a light drawing by revealing lines of the brilliant white glow trapped within the sculpture. The more light that shone through, the higher the volume and pitch of the sound. Eventually, Gressman began to violently tear out large pieces of drywall, demolishing the facade of the sculpture and revealing the fixtures of fluorescent bulbs behind it. The whole space became bathed in radiant white light and intense noise.

After all the light had been revealed and Gressman had shed a few more layers of her bodysuit — though never to the point of revealing



Erica Gressman prior to the start of Wall of Skin. The performance was the most recent installment of New Music New College, which is known for live performances that frequently blur the lines between music and other forms of artistic expression. The series challenges audience members to re-think their conceptions of what can be considered music.



Erica Gressman performs improvisational movements prior to the finale of Wall of Skin. In an interview with the News Leader, Gressman said her piece confronts modern society's sometimes overzealous attitude toward adopting new technology and many people's tendency to idealize it. 'The human cyborg, I think, is an interesting critique,' she added, 'because technology is advancing so much and I feel like feminism is struggling so much and that kind of represents society.'

more than another layer — she moved around the stage in a manner that could have expressed triumph, lamentation or both, before dropping to the floor in a fetal position. After a few moments, all light and sound abruptly ceased, and the room was enveloped in darkness and silence. This lasted for a short period, following which the house lights came up and Gressman bowed to enthusiastic applause from the audience.

BEHIND WALL OF SKIN

After *Wall of Skin* had concluded, NMNC Director Stephen Miles took to the microphone to commend the work and acknowledge others who had helped with the event, including NMNC Technical Producer R.L. Silver and NMNC event sponsors Art and Marcella Levin.

Once she had changed into her street clothes, Gressman returned to the floor to take questions from the audience about her inspiration for the piece, its technical design and performance and some of her own personal experiences as a performance artist.

Gressman explained she had developed *Wall of Skin* as part of her master's thesis project at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she received a Master of Fine Arts in Performance Art in 2012. However, she clarified, certain aspects of the piece traced back to her undergraduate work at New College, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities in 2009.

In the latter case, Gressman was referring to the technology that produces the sound and the way that it interacts with light.



Erica Gressman prepares to tear the first piece of drywall from the sculpture in Wall of Skin. In the Q-&-A session following the piece, Gressman explained that part of the reason she chose to use drywall was because of its associations. 'I think it's a very intimate and personal object that many youths use as a way to let out anger,' she noted.

“It’s a very simple oscillator machine, which creates a series of click noises, and the more light that hits this machine, the faster the clicks and the higher the pitch becomes. It’s a lot like a theremin,” she explained. “For my thesis in my undergrad, I was creating these instruments and studying and researching how sound and light interact in a musical and compositional context,” she continued.

Wall of Skin operates with three light-activated sensors that are strategically placed on the stage, Gressman said. Obscured by the shadows of her movement, they create the variations in sound. She went on to describe this as “a very large scale version” of the work she had been doing at New College.

Gressman then revealed more about technical and performative aspects of the piece, which she had performed six times previously. Her movements, for example, are improvisational, though she said that performing the piece so many times has led to her developing certain strategies and ideas that she utilizes at her discretion.

There is far more to *Wall of Skin* than initially meets the eye,

Gressman explained further. The lines torn by the cables in the drywall are not random, for example; in fact, they represent a predetermined drawing. Gressman said that, in constructing the sculpture, she sketches the lines on the back of the drywall in the way she wants it to tear during the performance, then uses a tool to gouge grooves into which the cables are embedded.

WITHIN WALL OF SKIN

Aside from revealing some of the practical aspects of *Wall of Skin*, Gressman has been very



Erica Gressman answers a question from an audience member after performing Wall of Skin. Asked why she decided to attend New College, she said there is a ‘magic’ to the school, along with ‘a sense of freedom and hard work ethic.’

open about its underlying theoretical concepts as well as the outside factors that influenced her when she conceived the piece. On the evening of Feb. 7, she sat down with *The Sarasota News Leader* to offer more details.

Gressman explained that the performative aspect of *Wall of Skin* has been heavily influenced by her studies at New College, particularly in the fields of sound art, experimental music and kinetic sculpture. In addition, it has been impacted by some of the aesthetic aspects of the underground music scene, particularly in Florida, in which she has participated for several years.

“Those were definitely performative musical acts that I slowly started to incorporate into my music and my art,” Gressman explained. “I saw, as well, a lot of flaws or things that were missing in music and things that were missing

in performance art, so I decided to fuse it," she continued. "And fusion is a big part of it. In my work, I always am trying to fuse ideas, mediums and bodies."

Gressman pointed out that the process of fusion often begins with an instrument. In the case of *Wall of Skin*, that instrument was the light-sensitive oscillator she had constructed. In other pieces, she has used live drums — which she has been playing since she was 10 years old — or other instruments, sometimes in conjunction with each other.

In terms of conceptual influences, Gressman explained that her academic studies, including those at New College, have played a significant role. Feminism and sociological perspectives on the pervasiveness of technology in modern society are two major factors in *Wall of Skin*.

"I guess I see myself as a cyborg or some kind of person that struggles with identity immersed in this land of technology and how we value its perfection," Gressman said of her character in the piece. "Also, I think technology and female bodies — there's something monstrous about it. It seems like technology corrupts the female image," she continued. "So, I like attaching technology to my body in some way, or depending on it, or even dominating it somehow as a female artist."

An important part of *Wall of Skin*, Gressman added, is the idea of looking at technology through a new perspective. "We put so much emphasis on finding ways to make life easier with technology and we fetishize its perfection. I think we don't value basic human needs

and human equality enough, and that's kind of regressing as technology advances," she said.

Gressman's character in the piece, she explained, symbolizes this conflict. "It's a way to poke fun at how much I feel people suffer with their outer skin, because of the media or because of societal issues that are currently happening," she said. "I think technology should be shown as just as imperfect, volatile or vulnerable as a human is and not shown as this perfect, desirable, fetishized object."

BEYOND WALL OF SKIN

Asked by an audience member after the performance what she plans for her art in the future, Gressman commented on the difficult tasks artists face in expressing themselves in modern society. "It's a strange road to go down as an artist here in the U.S.," she said. "It's a very lonely road at times," she continued. "But what's next for me is a big question mark and that's what I like the most about it."

Gressman said, in an email follow-up with the *News Leader* that she plans to do more collaborative work in the future, which includes adapting *Wall of Skin* into a piece for two performers. She has upcoming performances comprising different pieces, and she is looking into artist residencies in Germany and Iceland.

However, Gressman explained, pursuing a career as an artist is not always glorious and is often challenging.

"So far," she said, "it's been enduring the recession and waiting tables and waiting for another show." 



ASK OTUS

RED TIDE HAS A LONG HISTORY IN FLORIDA, THOUGH PEOPLE STILL SEEM FAR TOO IGNORANT OF ITS CAPACITY TO HARM THEM

Dear Readers,

Last month an outbreak of red tide made its way onto the beaches of Siesta Key, leaving a carpet of dead fish in its wake. Thankfully, this disturbance was mild and brief.

Red tide is of concern to public health officials, scientists and business people. Siesta Key's economic well-being depends on tourism during high season. Tourists are likely to

go elsewhere, however, if red tide conditions exist. For this reason, the very mention of red tide is *pas comme il faut*, if not outright taboo. It was even reported that some unscrupulous rental agents will advise prospective tourists of a red tide disturbance only if the tourist specifically enquires about it. Hard to believe, is it not?

So, as long as no one wants to talk about it, here goes!

When red tide overwhelms our fair isle, many people (and I shan't name names) advise emulating the ostrich by burying one's head in the sand and ignoring the problem. Unfortunately, rotting fish will have washed up on the beach first, blanketing the sand and leaving no patch of ground into which red tide Pollyannas can dig themselves.



Turkey vultures dine alfresco on Turtle Beach during the recent red tide outbreak. File photo

No one on our key can escape the debilitating effects of a red tide. Its pervasive noxious odor is as bad as Tabu, the forbidden fragrance, unless, of course, you are partial to the concentrated scent of patchouli and musky glandular secretions. The toxins it releases into the water are spread by spume and winds and cause respiratory distress. Florida public health officials warn that people inhaling these brevetoxins can suffer dry coughing fits, sneezing and teary eyes. Skin irritation can be another effect. Usually these symptoms are short-lived.

On the bright side, Floridians should take pride in the following: First, Florida has its very own variety of red tide (*Karenia brevis*), which exists only in the Gulf of Mexico. *K. brevis* outbreaks occur sporadically and unpredictably when a dinoflagellate (Greek for “whirling scourge”), a tiny, fragile organism, breaks open and spews its toxins into the Gulf’s waters. Essentially, it is plankton in algal form, which explains the term “algal bloom.”

Second, not a single case of Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning has ever been reported in Florida by people who have eaten commercially harvested shellfish. The instant an outbreak of red tide that has formed far offshore has been detected, government agencies and private research institutes immediately take draconian measures to monitor the fishing industry closely so people can shop at Siesta Key’s Big Water Fish Market for their bouillabaisse ingredients or dine on ceviche at Javier’s Restaurant, for example.

There are two basic facts that people should know about red tide disturbances. First, this

algal bloom occurs sporadically. In some years no outbreaks occur; then a massive outbreak unexpectedly erupts, such as that of 2005, or this year’s, which came seemingly out of the blue — no pun intended. Second, the bloom begins miles out to sea, far away from our shoreline; but depending on tide and wind activity, it usually will impact our coastline at some point.

Why does red tide occur? It may be Mother Nature’s way of restoring the balance to the Gulf, which might have become overpopulated by a single species of fish, or of eliminating weakened or parasite-infested organisms starting with coral reefs and moving right on up the food chain. It is a leveler, a natural scourge that can create “dead zones” in which nothing survives. However, unlike the man-made “dead zones” in our seas, life returns after red tide and repopulates the waters it devastated.

The law of nature is not “eat *or* be eaten.” It is “prey *and* be preyed upon.” Somewhere along our shores, in our bays and estuaries, is red tide’s natural enemy, one capable of slowing its spread and eventually eliminating it. Two likely predators come to my mind — a xenophobic microbe, a bacterium, defending its territory that could attach itself to this flagellate and eventually destroy it. Or, let us think in bigger terms and imagine the Gulf menhaden (a type of herring). It is a forage fish that filters and clarifies ocean waters. Menhaden swim in tightly compressed schools, and a single adult menhaden can filter and clarify up to four gallons of water a minute. This fish lays its eggs out in the open seas, but those eggs, numbering in the millions, are borne by currents, tides and winds into coastal estuaries,

where they hatch and instantly start munching on plankton and filtering.

Over the past couple of decades it has become routine for some “environmental activists” to assign responsibility for any form of ecocide to human bad practices. Man cannot claim credit for red tide, but he may be responsible for aiding or abetting it. I would even say molycoddling it!

What worries scientists is the fact that when red tide finally does reach our shores and inland waterways, monitoring studies show that it is intensifying and lingering longer than normal. This suggests that man-made coastal runoff and pollutants are exacerbating and prolonging the bloom. Let us examine this on a very small scale.

Some 30 years ago, a few rich and influential homeowners on south Siesta Key caused Midnight Pass to be closed. Dolphins and manatees could no longer transit between the Gulf and the bay and currents stopped flowing between the bay and Gulf.

As a result, the ecology of Little Sarasota Bay changed dramatically. The bay began to mimic the characteristics of a pond and silted up. Once-familiar species of fish left its waters, as did the flocks of egrets and herons that ate them.

Simply put, man’s poorly considered intervention in the natural order of things compromised the bay’s immune system. When rain washes herbicides and fertilizers into the bay, there is no flow into the Gulf that would dissipate and eventually eradicate them. Bacteria that might have latched onto the red tide flagellates are trapped in the bay, or perhaps they had even been eradicated; and menhaden roe

are washed onto the Gulf beaches along with the dead fish and never get a chance to enter our Bay, hatch and start filtering.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Current research on red tide reaches into the past to retrieve descriptions and establish patterns. Beginning more than 350 years ago, records written by European New World explorers and settlers described massive “fish kills” along the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. The earliest account of red tide is incorrectly attributed to Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, a Spanish explorer shipwrecked in 1527 in the Tampa Bay area. He spent eight years as a slave of, and a trade emissary to, various American Indian tribes. In 1536, he was reunited with Spanish colonial authorities in Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca’s written account of fish kills in the Gulf was within the context of his admiration of an Indian tribe with no lunar or solar calendar and which, therefore, divided the seasons according to the position of the stars, the ripening of berries and the fish kills brought about by the annual cold front.

The fish kills recorded by Cabeza de Vaca had nothing to do with red tide because red tide is not an annually occurring event. If it were, scientists would be able to forewarn people: “Expect red tide at 9:17 a.m. on Jan. 22 on Turtle Beach!” And everyone could get to the beach and bury their heads in the sand before the dead fish washed ashore!

Why mention Cabeza de Vaca if he was not the first to have documented red tide? Because he is the first one credited with a report of natural fish kills in our Gulf and it is important to know that these events are the consequence of annual temperature fluctuations, not red

tide. Also, it is fun to contradict a “competent authority” who states that “Cabeza de Vaca was the first person to document red tide in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1530s.” “Did not!” “Did too!” “Did not!” The topic can stimulate and enliven dinner table conversations.

For those interested in early Florida history, Cabeza de Vaca was the first true “anthropologist” (although not by choice!) to have studied and written intelligently about Native Americans in the 16th century. Readers interested in this subject may enjoy this book by Paul Schneider, a part-time resident of Bradenton, *Brutal Journey: Cabeza de Vaca and the Epic First Crossing of North America*. It is available used in paperback from Amazon, starting at \$4.26.

In November 1792, a government official in Veracruz, Mexico, wrote of red tide in terms consistent with today’s reporting. He described masses of dead fish washing onto the beaches, human deaths associated with the consumption of those fish and a government ban on the sale of river and sea fish until they had been inspected by proper authorities and declared safe to eat.

Records of red tide disturbances along Florida’s west coast date to 1844. For a complete listing, please click on this [link](#).

But my absolute favorite historical account is the following: By 1879, there were several mentions in the Veracruz official records of huge fish kills and associated human respiratory problems. Subsequent reports of fish kills in Veracruz, Mexico, come from Nuñez Ortega, who traveled in 1879 to Veracruz, Mexico, to investigate an outbreak of respiratory irritation among the population and reported the following:

“In the last days of October 1875, the inhabitants of the city of Veracruz were repeatedly bothered by a dry cough caused by an irritation of the throat. This malady also affected horses, dogs, and other animals. The north wind blew with major intensity, and the authorities took notice that all along the entire coast of Barlovento an enormous quantity of dead fish had washed ashore along the beach”.

I love that description because it brings me to my favorite subject — animals. You see, even pets can suffer from a red tide lingering on our shoreline. It is important that pet owners safeguard dogs from an outbreak and keep them away from affected waters.

THE HUMAN FACTORS

Now, in fairness to my readers (and if anyone is still awake), I should address the issue of red tide’s effect on people, rather than on dolphins, cormorants and our beloved manatees.

Let us examine the case of the dedicated and determined beachgoers. After all, it is high season ...

The outcry from people over the reversal of the smoking ban on public beaches reinforced in me the knowledge that humans were endowed with common sense: “Secondhand smoke stinks and violates my right to the clean sea air by polluting my respiratory system. Cigarette butts in the pristine sands are an eyesore to me and a threat to birds and fish.”

Such words make people sound normal and rational, do they not? But come red tide, something strange happens to people.

Beachgoers arrive at the beach. They see and smell the piles of dead, rotting fish lining it.

The only signs of life are a few other beach worshippers and a kettle of turkey vultures circling above them and a venue of turkey vultures tugging and squabbling over a dead fish, as though they did not have a million other putrid fish from which to choose. Oh, sometimes they will see a discombobulated Brown Pelican purposelessly waddling the dunes, a tired look in its eyes. So, what do these people do? They find a spot upwind of the rotting fish carcasses, raise their umbrellas, plunk themselves down in their beach chairs, sit and read and sunbathe for hours, sometimes walking along the shore for exercise. And they do all this in their bare feet!

Whatever are they thinking? Obviously, they are not. Could it be that red tide's brevetoxins have circumvented all human immunological defenses to detoxify harmful substances before they reach the brain? Secondhand cigarette smoke on the beach does not produce miles-long piles of dead fish or itchy eyes and dry coughing spells. And stepping on a half-buried cigarette butt cannot give a bare foot a puncture wound that a fish barb infested with staph bacteria can.

The study of chronic effects of *Karenia brevis* on people may still be in its infancy, but people have recourse to a vast amount of free and easily accessible information provided by government and private institutions. Beachgoers must learn to take advantage of that information, just as fisherfolk do. To me, that also means that the tourism industry in Florida needs to take a far more proactive role in disseminating information on red tide to the public. To date, it has erred too far on the side of discretion or dissembling.

“If you believe you are suffering from red tide poisoning, call the Aquatic Toxins toll-free hotline: 1-888-232-8635. The hotline is staffed by medical professionals 24/7.” See how easy it is to post useful information?

Mote Marine Laboratory, in conjunction with NOAA, updates red tide information on Sarasota County beach conditions at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. each day. For more information, click on the [link](#). During a red tide disturbance, Mote's website and Florida toll-free telephone number (1-866-300-9399) or local number (941-BEACHES) should be posted where every seasonal renter can find it. If Turtle Beach is plagued by red tide, beachgoers should be told which beaches are not. It is rather like the Macy's Santa sending shoppers to Gimbels in the classic 1947 film *Miracle on 34th Street*. That goodwill gesture worked nicely because it instilled a sense of faith and trust in people. There is no point in downplaying (and in some cases, downright obfuscating) the effects of red tide when it splashes over our beaches.

THE SENSE OF BIRDS

People should be more aware of their natural surroundings. We birds are the canaries in the coal mine. When we fall silent, take warning!

Now, back to the salient point in this discourse ...

The origin of the phrase “to bury one's head in the sand,” meaning to ignore or hide from danger, arose from Pliny the Elder's (A.D. 23 to A.D. 79) description of an ostrich hiding its head in a bush, confident that no one could see it. Pliny the Elder was a naturalist and an astute observer of human nature. However, birds were not his forte. On avian topics, I be-

lieve he actually borrowed heavily from Herodotus' works of some five centuries earlier. In fact, in my *Ask Otus* column, *The Prescient Ibis*, I went so far as to suggest that Pliny deliberately cribbed, not innocently borrowed, from Herodotus.

Herodotus wrote of the Ibis in rather glowing terms; so did Pliny. Herodotus' only mention of the ostrich is the ostrich skins worn by African tribal dignitaries; nothing about the live bird. Not having much to go on (or crib from), Pliny decided to portray the ostrich as a creature so stupid that it would believe its very large self invisible to all once its head was hidden.

Well, I have been observing nature and birds on our key for some time now and must disagree with Pliny and conclude the opposite.

The proof of its invisibility lies in the fact that you can check out every bush and stretch of sand on all of Siesta Key and you will not see a single ostrich.

Take it from me: The ostrich is one clever bird!

Otus

ABOUT OTUS

Otus Rufous, an Eastern Screech-Owl, was born on Siesta Key and is a full-time resident there. An avid hunter, accomplished vocalist and genuine night owl, Otus is a keen observer of our local wildlife and knows many of nature's secrets. Otus will answer your questions about our amazing wildlife, but only if you Ask Otus. So please send your questions and photos to askotus@sarasotaneewsleader.com. Thank you.

Make plans to join the conversation 6pm February 28, 2013

FOCUS ON FLORIDA: PREVENTING VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

Join WSLR, the Sarasota Branch of the NAACP, the Sarasota News Leader and the ACLU of Sarasota/Manatee for a **Community Conversation on Preventing Violence in our Schools and Community.**



Featured guests include:

Monica Cherry, Licensed Mental Health Counselor
Bernadette DiPino, Sarasota Chief of Police
Dr. Laura Kingsley, Principal, Fruitville Elementary School
Heart Phoenix, President, River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding

The first hour of the conversation at 6pm will be broadcast live on WSLR-LP 96.5fm locally (also available via live stream at www.wslr.org). At 7pm the audience will be invited to share their insights and join the conversation with our featured guests.



The FOCUS ON FLORIDA Conversation Series is FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

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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

CODE ENFORCEMENT SEMINAR PLANNED; INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNTY'S NOISE ORDINANCE TO BE PROVIDED DURING THE MARCH SKA MEETING



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

At the request of Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) members, Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson — who lives on the island — has been working with county staff to arrange a seminar on what Code Enforcement allows and does not allow in the Village's overlay district.

Staff was scheduled to meet with the SKVA Board of Directors during its meeting on Feb. 19 to ascertain some of the key topics for the seminar, according to county email.

Assistant County Administrator Mark Cunningham wrote County Commissioner Nora Patterson in a Feb. 14 email that after that session, "we will organize a team of appropriate staff who will attend the [seminar]." He also planned to attend, he added.

The idea of the educational session was raised during the SKVA's regular meeting on Feb. 5.

Kay Kouvatsos, co-owner of Village Café, pointed out, "Forget noise. There are *dozens* of violations going on" in the Village.

Since the overlay district was implemented about 14 years ago, she added, many new businesses had opened in the Village, and owners and managers are unaware of Code Enforcement rules.

For example, Kouvatsos said, dumpsters sit uncovered and business is illegally conducted off-premises.

A guest at the meeting, Patterson responded that she felt sure she could arrange for such a seminar.

"In conjunction, we really need more staff in Code Enforcement," Peter van Roekens, vice president of the Siesta Key Association, added.

"I think it's important that we let people know what is and isn't allowed," Kouvatsos responded, before businesses are visited by Code Enforcement officers who will write them citations.

Still, Patterson noted, "There is a Code Enforcement issue ... Peter's got a point."

Siesta Seen

Patterson reminded the SKVA members that although pleas were made last summer for new full-time Code Enforcement staff, “the commission didn’t want to pay for that.”

The result, she continued, was that the commission approved funding for 15 hours of overtime for an officer each week to deal with violations that occur after normal working hours. “That’s probably not going to do it,” Patterson said of the part-time help. “It’s not just the Key” where complaints are registered, she added. Violations occur all over the county, she noted.

“You don’t want the Gestapo,” Patterson continued. On the other hand, she added, the code should be enforced fairly.

“We do want to keep our Village nice,” SKVA President Russell Matthes said.

With Code Enforcement Officer John Lally having been out of work over recent weeks because of health problems, Matthes said, problems in the Village have multiplied.

“When the cat’s away, the mice will play,” Matthes pointed out.

Sarasota County Sheriff’s Deputy Chris McGregor told the SKVA members he tries to educate new business owners about the county code when he sees violations in the Village.

“The last thing I want to do is write a business a citation,” McGregor said. The idea of holding a seminar, he added, is “a great idea,” noting

that Sheriff’s deputies should be present as well as business owners and Code Enforcement staff.

Deputies have to deal with illegal soliciting for business and transactions conducted on rights of way, he noted.

Referring to the code, Matthes said, “It’s quite complex. There are so many different rules and regulations in the overlay district.”

Speaking to Patterson, he continued, “If you come out here at 6 o’clock at night, you’ll be amazed at the violations.”

When Patterson expressed concern about whether the seminar would draw a significant number of business owners, Matthes replied, “I think you would certainly be surprised at how many people will come.”

Patterson suggested the SKVA members also think about whether aspects of the code for the overlay district should be simplified. “If there are some things in there that are really unnecessarily complex, that could be brought out in your own meetings,” Patterson said, then the SKVA members could raise those points with county staff.

Patterson added, “As a body, you all are more effective than just one commissioner.”

Matthes responded that SKVA board members might be able to come up with some proposed changes before the seminar is held.

Siesta Seen

Mark Smith, immediate past chairman of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, noted that other suggestions probably would come out of the seminar itself.

“We’re obviously not going to be able to micro-manage all the little things,” Kouvatsos said, but “some of the big things just need blanket educating.”

When Matthes asked Patterson to let him know who will conduct the seminar, she told him she hoped to have the chief of Code Enforcement handle that responsibility, because

that person should be the one most informed about the code.

THE NOISE AND THE SOUND

On a related note, during its regular meeting on March 7, the Siesta Key Association will host county staff members for a discussion of the current noise and sound ordinance, President Catherine Luckner told me this week.

That presentation will include information about the science involved in measuring sound, Luckner said.



Blasé Café in Siesta Village continues to be a focal point for noise complaints. A Jan. 24 email to the County Commission from a Siesta condominium resident says the music at Blasé regularly exceeds the allowable level on the bass, or ‘C,’ scale in the county’s Noise Ordinance. ‘Gilligan’s, the Hub and the Daiquiri Deck are saints and responsible,’ the resident adds.

Siesta Seen

“It’s not specifically about music and it’s not specifically about bands,” she added of the concern about noise on the island. “It’s a larger issue.”

Sound pollution is a matter of great focus in neighborhoods, Luckner pointed out — a fact underscored by comments a resident made during the Feb. 7 SKA meeting.

Katherine Zimmerman pointed out that she hardly can find a time to go outside and relax, with all the lawn service personnel working at homes around her house, using blowers to get rid of yard debris.

On Sept. 25, 2012, the County Commission voted to extend the sunset date for the Air and Sound Pollution Ordinance for one year — until Nov. 18, 2013, Tom Polk, director of the planning and development services for the county, noted in a Dec. 14, 2012 memo to County Administrator Randall Reid. Polk pointed out that the extension was requested “to afford staff the opportunity to engage citizens for input with regards to noise levels, enforcement and penalties.”

Since September, Polk continued, Zoning and Code Enforcement staff members “have engaged the assistance of Neighborhood Services staff for community outreach and coordination efforts relating to possible changes to the ordinance and consideration of removing the enforcement of Noise and Sound from the County Code and including it in the Zoning Ordinance.”

Polk added that he anticipated those outreach efforts to include business owners of entertainment establishments and business groups “in geographically targeted areas such as Gulf Gate and Siesta Key, the Chambers of Commerce, as well as County neighborhood groups. The anticipated outcomes from these efforts are to find a common ground for differing opinions on the Noise Ordinance [and] establish standards that are amicable to all and enforceable.”

During the Feb. 5 SKVA meeting, President Russell Matthes said that as a business owner (co-owner of the Daiquiri Deck and the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar), “I like to push the envelope as [much] as anyone else, but our goal is to get customers in our front door with music, signs or whatever.”

Nonetheless, he added, “We do have guidelines for a reason, because we like to keep our Village a quaint Village. Ugly signs are not going to bring tourists. Band noise is not going to bring tourists”

TURTLE BEACH IMPROVEMENTS

During the County Commission’s Feb. 8 budget workshop, Carolyn Brown, general manager of the Parks and Recreation Department, reported that design and permitting are expected to be completed in November for the latest improvements to Turtle Beach Park on the southern part of Siesta Key.

Those new amenities are as follows:

- A 30-foot gazebo.

Siesta Seen

- Additional covered picnic areas
- About two dozen new parking spaces plus about six more spaces to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Pedestrian connections to the new gazebo.
- A relocated playground.
- An upgrade of the existing kayak launch at Blind Pass.

The design contract cost is \$149,996, according to a PowerPoint presentation to the County Commission.

Once the design work and permitting are completed, Brown said, a public information meeting will be scheduled.

The amenities have been in the works for a number of years. 



A Sarasota County map shows the area of Turtle Beach Park on Siesta Key. Map courtesy Sarasota County



Over the past several years, Sarasota County staff has been working to improve the amenities at Turtle Beach Park on Siesta Key, including walkways and boat ramps. Photo courtesy Sarasota County



ARTS BRIEFS

(From left) The cast members of *Soul Crooners 2* are Leon Pitts II, Chris Eisenberg, Nate Jacobs and Michael Mendez. (Not pictured: Barry Byrd.) Contributed photo

SOUL CROONERS 2 OPENS FEB. 22 AT WBTT'S THEATER

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe (WBTT) has announced that *Soul Crooners 2*, a companion piece to its previously sold-out *Soul Crooners*, will open on Friday, Feb. 22, in the Troupe's theater at 1646 10th Way in Sarasota.

Highlighting the soul music of the 1970s, the all-male cast will offer up a revue of some of that era's classic hits, a news release says. "Nate Jacobs, founding artistic director of WBTT, has written and adapted the show, much like the first, but with an entire new group of musical favorites and smooth dance routines," the release adds.

"We ran the original *Soul Crooners* as a short-run, summer show and the response was so

tremendous that we included it again in the following regular season," says Jacobs in the release. "The audiences just loved the music and many came back more than once. One fan even flew the cast and musicians to Germany to perform the piece for his birthday celebration," Jacobs continues in the release.

"The selection of African American music that transformed the '70s seems sometimes endless," he adds. "Can't wait for the audiences to experience another strong dose of soul from the Troupe."

According to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, soul is "music that arose out of the black experience in America through the trans-

mutation of gospel and rhythm & blues into a form of funky, secular, testifying lyrics,” the release points out. Among its characteristics are catchy rhythms, hand claps and extemporaneous body moves, along with calls and responses between the soloists and the choruses, the release notes. Performers such as Marvin Gaye, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, James Brown and Smokey Robinson “were all a part of the movement that continued for

more than a decade until disco and funk began to dominate the charts,” the release points out.

The shows will be performed Tuesday through Saturday at 8 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets, which are \$29.50, may be purchased online at wbttstrq.org or by calling the box office at 366-1505. The show runs through March 24.

SARASOTA BRASS QUINTET TO PERFORM IN SANCTUARY CONCERT

The Sarasota Brass Quintet will bring its unique brand of winds to the *Sanctuary Concerts* series on February 24 at 2:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 3975 Fruitville Road, Sarasota, the church has announced.

Founded in 1986, the Sarasota Brass Quintet (formerly the Florida Brass Quintet) “is one of the most popular ensembles of the Sarasota Orchestra,” a news release says. It performs chamber music as part of the orchestra’s *Chamber Soiree* series. Additionally, the group has performed throughout Florida and performs for and works with students at schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties, the release adds.

The group includes Michael Dobrinski (trumpet), Greg Knudsen (trumpet), Laurence Solowey (horn), Brad Williams (trombone) and Jay Hunsberger (tuba).

“Sarasota Brass Quintet concerts offer a delightful mix of diverse programming, including

the great classics of the standard repertoire to refreshingly entertaining pops selections,” says Don DeMaio, concert coordinator, in the release.

Among selections for this concert will be Claudio Monteverdi’s *Suite from L’Orfeo*, Alan Civil’s *Dance Suite*, music of J.S. Bach, and selections from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein, the release notes.

The performance is the part of the six-concert 2012-2013 *Sanctuary Concerts* series, “which gives audiences opportunities to experience great music in an old European style, performed in a church sanctuary and followed by courtyard reception with the artists,” the release adds.

Tickets, which are \$15, include the complimentary wine and cheese reception. For more information, call 371-4974 or visit www.uusarasota.org/concerts.

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SARASOTA BALLET TO SHOWCASE DIVERSITY OF BALLET

Sarasota Ballet Director Iain Webb “is reprising three unique and beautiful pieces” from the past for the company’s fifth performance of the 2012-2013 season, the Ballet has announced.

This program — *Ashton, Tudor, Walsh* — will offer audience members three different styles of ballet, a news release notes. Highlighting classical ballet through Sir Frederick Ashton’s *Les Rendezvous*, storytelling ballet with Antony Tudor’s *Lilac Garden* and a contemporary ballet with Dominic Walsh’s *I Napoletani*, Program Five “is sure to have something for everyone,” the release adds.

Presented at the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts, *Ashton, Tudor, Walsh* will open on March 1 and run until March 3.

Originally performed by The Sarasota Ballet in 2010, *Les Rendezvous* will be the first ballet danced during Program Five, the release says. “A light-hearted suite of dances in which

young people meet, flirt and part, this classic was intended to showcase the chemistry and technical virtuosity of those who dance within the solos and pas de deux, the release notes. Staged by Margaret Barbieri, *Les Rendezvous* is set to the interlude of a popular French opera, *L’Enfant Prodigue*.

Following the cheery choreography of *Les Rendezvous* will be Tudor’s *Lilac Garden*. “With a straightforward but emotionally potent plot, this ballet follows the story of a young woman who attends a lilac-scented party on the evening before her marriage of convenience,” the release continues. With her betrothed, her lover and a mystery woman also at the social gathering, the quartet of crossed lovers passes among the guests “in a series of brief encounters of passion and frustration that are displayed in dramatic lines and lifts,” it points out.

“Tudor’s works always favor a deeply felt human and psychological truth,” says Webb in



The Sarasota Ballet will perform *Les Rendezvous* as part of its *Ashton, Tudor, Walsh* performances March 1-3. Photo by Frank Atura

the release. “This dance is elegant and powerful and I’m pleased to be bringing it back.”

The Sarasota Ballet first performed it in October 2008, the release notes.

Concluding the diversified program will be Walsh’s smash hit *I Napoletani*. “Inspired by the vitality of Naples, this contemporary ballet is light-hearted and set to popular Neapolitan music from the late 1800s,” the release adds. First presented by The Sarasota Ballet in 2009, “this charming display of optimistic viewpoints is uplifting and fun for all ages,” the release says.

“Life brings an assortment of situations and emotions — flirtatious first encounters, tearful farewells — and through it all we must have an optimistic vigor for life,” says Webb in the release. “This program, while displaying three very different ballets, is really all about

remaining positive and making the best out of every situation.”

In addition to the traditional five performances, on March 4 an extra performance of Walsh’s *I Napoletani* will be offered, along with a demonstration of dance by Barbieri and the Margaret Barbieri Conservatory of Dance students, the release notes. This special event will be hosted by The Sarasota Ballet to benefit All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg. With 100 premium seats donated to All Children’s staff, the rest of the house will be sold to the public at a discounted rate of \$25 a seat. All proceeds from that performance will be donated to the not-for-profit hospital.

The FSU Center for the Performing Arts is located at 5555 N. Tamiami Trail. For more information, visit www.sarasotaballet.org or call 359-0099.

TROUPE TO COMMEMORATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe (WBTT) has created an original piece combining song, dance and drama to pay “tribute to important people who contributed to black history in America,” the Troupe has announced.

We Are Because They Were will be presented on Saturday, Feb. 23, at 2 p.m. in the WBTT theater, 1646 10th Way, Sarasota, a news release says.

“As Black History Month comes to a close, we wanted to bring home the message by making history come alive,” says Nate Jacobs, WBTT artistic director, in the release. “We decided to commission ... a piece that could energize the community around the many important stories that changed not only our world but our country’s culture. With our network of dynamic and talented performers, we hope to captivate and educate the audience about

the many historic voices that contributed to our rich African-American culture and experience.”

We Are Because They Were will explore the concepts, ideas, and artistic realms “of the black diaspora through creative performance,” the release adds. It will celebrate “many famous, inspiring and amazing African Americans who have paved the way for today,” the release continues. The show will feature works from Langston Hughes, August Wilson, Maya Angelou and Mahalia Jackson. Important voices such as those of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X “will be heard among the many great African Americans,” the release notes.

Tickets, which are \$20, may be bought by calling the box office at 366-1505 or going online at wbttstrq.org.

ART UPTOWN TO FEATURE WATERCOLORS BY RITA RUST

Around Here, a one-woman exhibition of recent watercolor paintings by Sarasota artist Rita Rust, opens Feb. 23 and runs to March 30 at Art Uptown, 1367 Main St., Sarasota.

An artist's reception is scheduled for Friday, March 22, from 6 to 9 p.m., the gallery has announced. The public is invited.

Rust has twice served as president of Art Uptown, where she exhibits her paintings on a regular basis, a news release notes. She is a signature member and past president of the Florida Suncoast Watercolor Society and has exhibited and won numerous awards throughout Florida, the release adds.

A graduate of Georgetown University, she spent 11 years working in New York City in

graphic arts, primarily in publishing, the release notes. Her work is widely held in corporate and private collections, and she often is invited to serve as a juror for juried art exhibitions, it adds.

Watercolor is her passion, she says in the release, "for its translucence, spontaneity and proclivity to create unintended results." Her subjects can be "anything interestingly illuminated, because it's all about the quality of light," she notes. "I try to capture the beauty that surrounds us but is so often overlooked in our fast-paced lives."

Scenes of Sarasota will be featured in her exhibition. Even after living in the community for more than 20 years, Rust continues in the



Bayside Morning by Rita Rust/Contributed photo

release, “Sarasota’s beauty continues to amaze me. My paintings, whether done in plein air or in the studio, are meant to convey a sense of the ‘glorious moment’ which inspired them,” she adds.

Art Uptown, owned by its member artists, is Sarasota’s oldest continuously operated cooperative fine art gallery. “The works of a highly talented group of local artists and craftspeople have been exhibited in the same Main Street location for more than 30 years,” the release points out.

The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. During the monthly First Friday Gallery Walks on Palm and Main streets, the evening hours are 6-9. For more information, call 955-5409 or visit www.artuptown.com.



One Selby Palm by Rita Rust/Contributed photo



Best Beach by Rita Rust/Contributed photo

EMMA BOOKER SCHOOL STUDENTS' ARTWORK TO BE DISPLAYED

Faculty and staff of the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee College of Education worked with students in Susan Ambrosio's fifth-grade art class at Emma E. Booker Elementary School to create original works of art titled, *What I Can Be With a College Degree*, which will be displayed at the college beginning Feb. 22.

A reception introducing the works will be held in the USF Sarasota-Manatee College of Education from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. on Feb. 22, the college has announced.

What I Can Be with a College Degree is an effort to promote the value of higher education among students who are "culturally, linguistically, racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse," a USF news release says. It grew out of the College of Education's Partnerships for Arts Integrated Teaching (PAInT) Center, "which infuses the arts into all teacher preparation," the release adds.

Booker Elementary School serves as a host for USFSM's teacher candidates completing their internships, the release points out. The Educator's Alliance at USFSM encourages future educators to work with diverse students and encourage their growth and success through professional development and community service, it continues.

To prepare for the display, students were given a homework assignment to research various state universities to learn what college degrees are offered and which would interest them, the release adds. They looked into how long it would take to acquire specific degrees, what clothes they would wear in their chosen professions, what tools they would use and what salary ranges they would earn once they were working in those fields, the release notes.



Colorful self-portraits of fifth-graders expressing What I Can Be With a College Degree will be displayed in the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee College of Education beginning Feb. 22.

"Each student had a photo of his or her face taken, which was converted into a computerized line drawing that personalizes each work of art and helped the young artists focus on the professions rather than their drawing skills," the release says.

The students "came upon the realization that college was a possibility rather something that was out of their grasp and it wasn't that far in the future," Ambrosio notes in the release. "They also figured out that some professions require a college degree and some need a special training route instead."

"This was a special initiative because it gave us the opportunity to see the potential these students have and to encourage their dreams," USFSM College of Education student Bailey Leonard, a student teacher at Tatum Ridge Elementary, points out in the release. "As educators, one of our goals is to help every child reach their potential in life and to help them succeed. We really got to see that connection being made!"

JAZZ AT TWO CONCERT TO PRESENT AL HIXON ON MARCH 1

The Jazz Club of Sarasota's *Jazz at Two* 2012-2013 concert series will continue in March with Al Hixon (March 1); Heffner and Hefner (March 15); and Metro Connection (March 22), the club has announced.

On Friday, March 1, from 2 to 4 p.m., jazz drummer Hixon will be joined by vocalist June Garber "and a roster of other talented local musicians dubbed the Underheard Herd," a news release says.

"They're not my usual band," notes Hixon in the release, "but they're all great, undiscovered players who I guarantee the audience will love!"

Hixon, who has been playing drums and performing since age 7, is a retired urban planner

"who has been a crowd-pleaser on Sarasota's jazz scene for more than 22 years," the release points out.

The series continues on Friday, March 15, from 2 to 4 p.m., with Heffner and Hefner, featuring Katt Heffner and her brother, Stan Hefner.

Known for her "compelling voice that ranks in the top echelons of respected female jazz singers," Katt Heffner has worked in off-Broadway musicals, television and movies, the release points out. "She has shared the stage with the likes of Patti LaBelle, The Temptations, Luther Vandross and the renowned bassist John Lamb," it adds.



Al Hixon/Contributed photo

Her brother, Stan “the Man” Hefner, multi-tasks as a keyboardist, producer, arranger and songwriter, the release notes. “As a duo, this brother and sister are known for their skillful delivery of music from the heart and soul,” the release says.

The March series concludes with Metro Connection on Friday, March 22, from 2 to 4 p.m. The group was founded in 2006 by Greg Lecewicz; the lineup for the concert will consist of Lecewicz on trombone, Kevin Celebri on trumpet, David Pruyn on drums, Rodney Rojas on sax and Bruce Wallace on bass, the release says.

According to Lecewicz in the release, the group has “a very distinct sound, making it immediately recognizable among any number of similar sextets. This particular quality has kept us going strong through the years.”

The ensemble plays “smooth renditions of beloved jazz standards,” the release adds.

The Jazz Club of Sarasota also will present the 33rd annual Sarasota Jazz Festival March 3-10. This year’s lineup includes JB Scott and his Swinging Allstars (March 5, 7:30 p.m.); Giacomo Gates (March 7, 7:30 p.m.); a Benny Goodman Tribute by the Terry Myers Orchestra (March 8, 7:30 p.m.) and The Four Freshmen (March 9, 7:30 p.m.).

Those four concerts will be at The Players Theatre, 838 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.

For more information about *Jazz at Two*, the Sarasota Jazz Festival, and the Jazz Club of Sarasota, call 366-1552 or visit www.jazz-clubsarasota.org. 



Katt Hefner and Stan Hefner/Contributed photo



The Unitarian Universalist Church is located on Fruitville Road in Sarasota. Photo by Rachel Hackney

LOCAL CHURCH BUCKS NATIONAL TREND IN GROWING BY 8 PERCENT

At a time when many people have been turning away from organized religion, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota (UUCS), already the largest of its kind in Florida, saw its membership grow 8 percent in 2012, the church has announced.

Members cite the open-minded, inclusive nature of the faith, a new minister, an invigorated religious education program and stronger marketing among the reasons for the uptick, according to a news release.

A 2012 Pew Charitable Center survey found that 16 percent of American adults claim no religious affiliation — up from 2 percent in 1950, the release points out. This group — dubbed the “nones” because they say, “None,” when asked to state their religion — is overwhelmingly socially liberal and includes atheists and agnostics as well many who say that they are spiritual or pray every day, the release adds.

“The inclusive nature of our congregation makes us a perfect fit for ‘nones’ and others

who are looking for a spiritual home without dogma,” says the Rev. Roger Fritts, the UUCS minister since August 2011, in the release. “We welcome people of all religious backgrounds, including theists, atheists and agnostics. Our members represent a variety of racial, socio-economic, ethnic and sexual orientations, [and they] come here to be part of a friendly, caring, socially conscious community that helps each person find meaning in their lives,” he adds in the release.

The UUCS has also attracted families through its revitalized religious education program. In addition to overseeing the childcare and Sunday School programs offered weekly, the congregation’s new director of religious education, John Irvin, has started a *Coming of Age* program geared toward middle school-age children, and he has supervised the renovations of the religious education classrooms, the release notes. From January through March, the church also offers a family-friendly, contemporary service on Sundays at 9 a.m.

Members of the Sarasota-Manatee community may have heard about the religious education program, Sunday sermons and other UUUCS events, such as the Freethinkers discussions and weekly forums, through the church's increased marketing and public relations efforts, the release adds. To broaden its reach, the church has revamped its website, started advertising on Facebook and Google and strengthened its relationships with local media through consistent releases and event postings, the release points out.

The Unitarian Universalist denomination has roots going back to the founding of the United States. Four Presidents — John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Millard Fillmore and William Howard Taft — were Unitarian, the release says. The church in Sarasota was founded in 1952.

For more information, visit [the website](#) or call 371-4974.

TOP JEWISH TOURING MUSICIAN RECHT TO PERFORM MARCH 9

Rick Recht — the world's top-touring artist in Jewish music and a leading composer of sacred and pop Jewish tunes — will give a concert at Temple Emanu-El, 151 McIntosh Road in Sarasota, on Saturday, March 9, at 7 p.m., the Temple has announced.

The performance is being co-sponsored by Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth Sholom, a news release says, with net proceeds of the show benefiting All Faiths Food Bank, Everyday Blessings and Jewish Family & Children's Service.

As he performs his acclaimed songs — such as hits *The Hope*, *Tear Down the Walls* and *Good Thing* — Recht will be joined onstage by local talent, including Jeff Weber, the cantor at Temple Beth Sholom; Hannah Beatt, a seventh-grader at Temple Emanu-El Religious School who has sung on Broadway and who most recently starred in *Annie* at The Players Theatre; and Sam Silverberg, a graduate of Temple Emanu-El Religious School who has performed extensively with Sarasota's youth opera and who recently sang the national anthem at a University of Florida basketball game, the release notes.



Internationally known Jewish musician Rick Recht will perform at Temple Emanu-El next month. Contributed photo



Rick Recht/Contributed photo

Concert tickets are available during business hours at Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth Sholom. Call 371-2788 or 955-8121 for more information.

TEMPLE SINAI TO HOST *SHUSHAN 1928*, A PURIM PROGRAM

Temple Sinai will return to the Roaring Twenties for a music and comedy adaptation of the traditional Purim story on Saturday, Feb. 23, the Temple has announced.

Members of the public are welcome to join Temple members at 5 p.m. Feb. 23 for the original program *The Queen said, 'No!'* featuring The Bruno Trio with Rabbi Geoffrey Hunting and Chazzan Cliff Abramson.

Other stars of the show will be adult and youth congregants, a news release says. A dinner will be served after the service, with beer

and wine available. Carnival games and other festivities will be on the program as well, the release notes.

Dinner reservations are required. The cost for adult guests is \$15; for guest families, \$30. People are welcome to come in formal dinner attire or their Purim finest, the release adds.

Temple Sinai is located at 4631 S. Lockwood Ridge Road, Sarasota. (Enter the grounds from Proctor Road.)

For more information, visit Templesinai-sarasota.org or call 924-1802. 

“Most people would rather be certain they’re miserable, than risk being happy.” — *Robert Anthony*

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING WEEK

22+
FEB

WBTT presents *Soul Crooners 2*

Feb. 22 to March 24, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50; 366-1505 or wbttstrq.org.

23
FEB

WSLR presents Jack Williams and Gove Scrivenor

Feb. 23, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance; \$12 at door; WSLR.org.

23+
FEB

2013 Plant & Garden Festival

Feb. 23-24, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Selby Gardens, 900 S. Palm Ave. Special admission: \$12 for non-members; members' adult guests, \$5; children 11 & under and members, admitted free. For details, visit Selby.org.

23+
FEB

Art Uptown presents *Around Here*, a one-woman exhibition by artist Rita Rust

Feb. 23 to March 30, 1367 Main St., Sarasota.
Free admission; 955-5409 or ArtUptown.com.

24
FEB

Wenonah Hauter to discuss book, *Foodopoly*,

Feb. 24, 3 p.m., at WSLR Radio Station, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota.
Hauter is the author of *Foodopoly*, "the shocking and revealing account of the business behind the meat, vegetables, grains and milk that most Americans eat every day, including some customers' favorite and most respected organic and health-conscious brands," according to a news release. *Foodopoly* is available for pre-order at BookStore1Sarasota, 1359 Main St., or by calling the store at 365-7900. More event info at www.bookstore1sarasota.com.

26
FEB

PMP/Suncoast presents the Ariel Quartet

Feb. 26, 7 p.m., Beatrice Freidman Theater,
580 McIntosh Road, Sarasota. Admission free with registration: 371-4546 or
www.jfedsrq.org/events.aspx.

To get all the details on these and other great activities — food, nightlife, music, art, theater, children's events, learning opportunities and more — go to Sarasota's No. 1 source for local events, hot spots, fun activities and hidden gems:



thisweekin
SARASOTA.com
SARASOTA'S MASTER CALENDAR

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'PELICAN'T'?



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.