

**THE SARASOTA**

No. 52 — September 13, 2013

# News Leader

*The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida*

**ECONOMIST ON BOARD**

**\$1 BILLION**

**JUST A BID AWARD BLIP**

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# A.K.A. HELP

# SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

*The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida*

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# Welcome

The completion of this week's issue marks an auspicious occasion for us. It is the 52nd issue since we began using our PDF-based, published version of *The Sarasota News Leader*. It is hard to believe we will begin our second year of publication next week.

When we started posting content on our website in April 2012, our goal was to design a standalone publication that would be "printed" in digital form, rather than on paper. We put out that first issue on Sept. 21, 2012.

A number of people made this milestone possible. Cooper Levey-Baker, Stan Zimmerman, Vicki Chatley, John Riley, Norman Schimmel, Fran Palmeri, Harriet Cuthbert, Elinor Rogosin and, of course, Cleve Posey, have been with us since the formal publication appeared. And we were fortunate to add Roger Drouin to the staff this summer.

But those most responsible for the success of our publication are you ... our readers. We launched the *News Leader* with a few hundred subscribers. Now we have about 6,000, and more subscribe each week. Your steadfast support and your desire for a more comprehensive accounting of the news in Sarasota County have inspired us and encouraged us.

Our vow is to continue to do all we can to provide complete and accurate coverage of Sarasota events, along with a mix of fascinating features, so you can be the best-informed residents of this community.

We hope you will continue to let us know what you like about the *News Leader* and how you think it can be improved. And please continue to recommend us to your friends and acquaintances.

***Rachel Brown Hackney***  
Editor and Publisher







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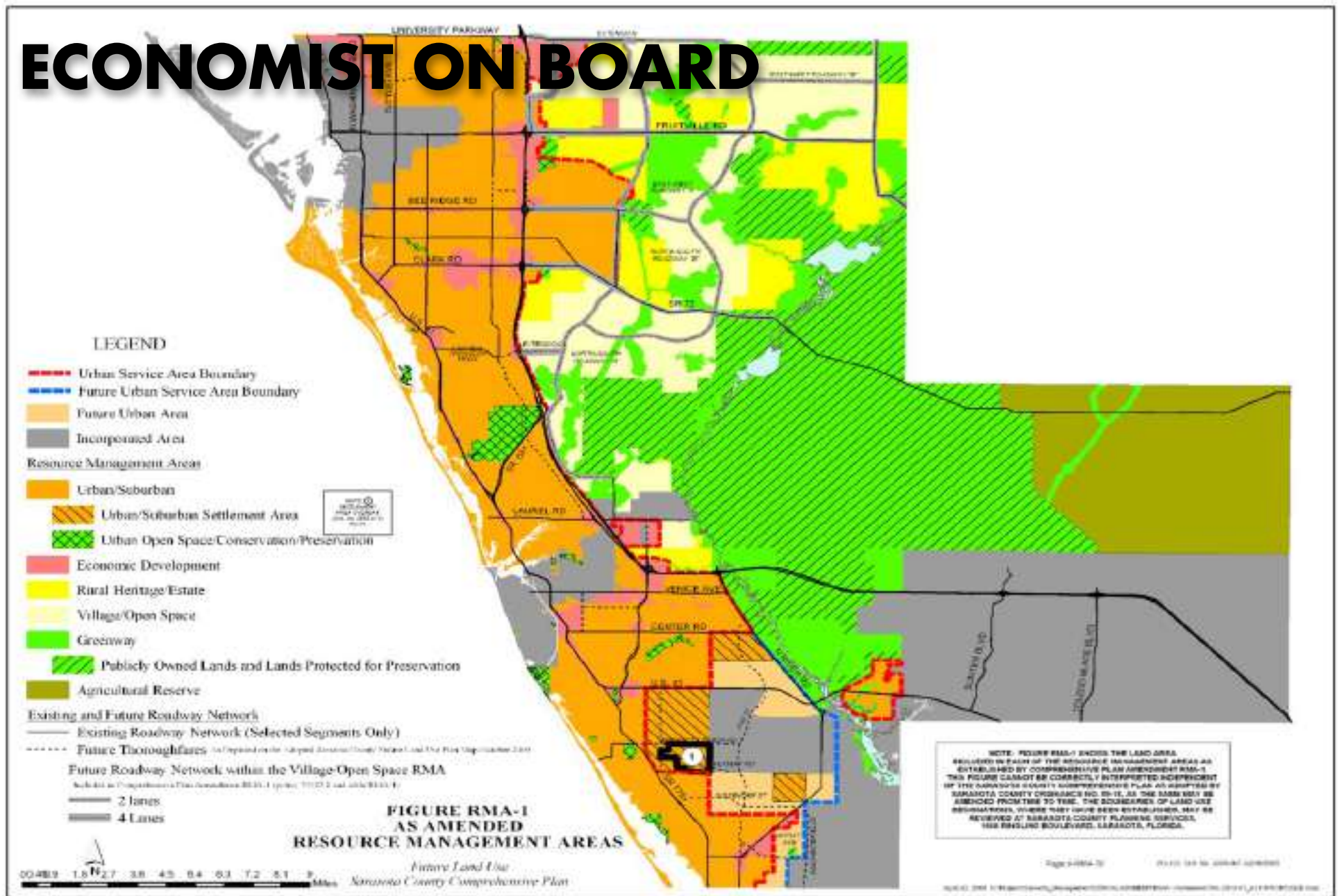
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# ECONOMIST ON BOARD



*Sarasota County's 2050 plan was designed to create walkable communities east of Interstate 75. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*

## COUNTY INKS DEAL FOR 2050 FISCAL NEUTRALITY REVIEW

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**  
*Associate Editor*

Sarasota County Administrator Randy Reid last week signed off on a \$90,000 deal that puts a Tennessee-based economic research and consulting firm with ties to the Reagan Administration in charge of reviewing Sarasota 2050's fiscal neutrality rules. The regulations have been one of the most controversial points in the debate over the coun-

ty's overhaul of 2050, a land-use plan approved a decade ago to encourage the construction of walkable, mixed-use communities.

Fiscal neutrality is simply the "requirement that any new growth pay its way," Allen Parsons, the county's long-range planning manager, told the County Commission in July. Under 2050, developers must show

**“We're 11 years into this thing and there's not a stick in the ground.”**

Joe Barbetta  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County



that a new project will generate enough revenue through elements such as impact fees and taxes to compensate for the increased demand on county resources and infrastructure.

Developers have long argued 2050's rules are too restrictive, and fiscal neutrality was at the top of their list of complaints when they met with county staff last year to begin the process of rewriting the plan. The staff report Parsons presented in July asked the commission for authorization to hire an academic team from Florida State University (FSU) to review fiscal neutrality.

The report argued that bringing in "an independent, non-biased, academic institution" would defuse accusations "that results are pushing any particular agenda." Environmental and controlled-growth groups have frequently charged that rather than simply modifying 2050, the County Commission is, in fact, gutting it at the behest of politically powerful developers.

The commission shot down the academic request in July. Commissioner Joe Barbetta criticized the \$85,000 price tag and argued that all the county needed was "a good, quality economist who has development project experience." He later [told](#) the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* that he had warned Reid not to put forward the academic team proposal, accusing Reid of acting like "a sixth commissioner."

Instead of the academics, Barbetta recommended three names. Among them: Donna Arduin, who worked with the county to analyze the economic impact of the new Nathan Benderson Park rowing facility.



*Donna Arduin. Photo courtesy of Virginia Institute for Public Policy*



*Commissioner Joe Barbetta. Photo by Norman Schimmel*




Arduin was also the architect of [Gov. Rick Scott's "7-7-7" plan](#), which he touted throughout his 2010 campaign, and she later served on Scott's budget advisory team. She co-founded a Tallahassee consulting firm with Arthur Laffer, identified on the company's website as "the father of supply-side economics" for his role in the Reagan Administration.

After weeks of negotiations, Reid finalized the scope of work with Laffer Associates — Laffer's Tennessee company — on Sept. 5. It calls for a "policy assessment" that will examine how the county should assess and monitor fiscal neutrality. Laffer Associates will first report back on its findings to the County Commission in early December, with two additional meetings scheduled for early 2014. A draft of the company's report is due within 60 days of the deal.

For its part, Laffer Associates promises to "provide a supply-side economic overview on the costs and benefits of New Urbanism/Smart Growth development," and pledges the participation of Arduin, Laffer and others. The contract is worth \$85,000, plus another \$5,000 set aside for travel and costs. Arduin did not respond to *Sarasota News Leader* emails and phone calls.

While Barbetta criticized the original proposed cost of the academic team, he tells the *News Leader* he's OK with Laffer Associates' \$90,000 bill. He says Tim Chapin, the FSU professor Reid originally wanted to bring in to review fiscal neutrality, doesn't have the right credentials.

"It's got to be an economist who can make predictions," Barbetta points out. "We're 11 years into this thing and there's not a stick in the ground." 

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# \$1 BILLION



*The County Commission holds a budget workshop on Aug. 20. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## THE SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES THE FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGET ON A FIRST READING, AFTER PARING ALMOST \$1 MILLION IN EXPENSES

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

With Commissioner Christine Robinson dissenting, the Sarasota County Commission on Sept. 9 approved the proposed \$1,077,919,038 Fiscal Year 2014 budget on a first reading, keeping the total millage rate the same at 3.3912.

Because property values rose 4.2 percent this year, a number of homeowners will see increases in their property tax bills.

The final public hearing and adoption of the spending plan will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Sept. 23 at the R.L. Anderson Administration Center, 4000 Tamiami Trail in Venice.

Robinson has expressed her displeasure numerous times over the past months with the county's dipping into its economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the budget.

Most recently, during the board's last budget workshop on Sept. 6 — which she requested — she pointed out, "We can't erase the fact that we're spending more than our growth rate ... What we're not doing is holding the rate on what we're consuming and spending."

“Going forward, I think our budgeting is going to have to be what's more realistic.”

Charles Hines  
Vice Chairman  
Sarasota County Commission

The FY 2014 budget is about 20 percent higher than the FY 2013 budget that went into effect on Oct. 1, 2012. However, commission decisions made during





*Chief Financial Planning Officer Steve Botelho listens to comments during the Sept. 6 budget workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

the current fiscal year have added to that \$897 million spending plan. Altogether, the board has approved the hiring of 67.8 new full-time employees (FTEs) since Nov. 2012. The majority of those — 24 — were to help keep up with county mowing demands, at a cost of \$663,000.

That Feb. 8 action was coupled with a decision to hire 18.8 FTEs to handle athletic field maintenance, at a cost of \$1,340,000.

The total budget impact of the mid-year decisions was \$3,670,682, according to a chart the county's Office of Financial Planning provided the commission during the Sept. 6 workshop.

On the other hand, staff was able to shave \$986,800 through funding shifts, deferred expenditures and level of service reductions. Additionally, a one-time revenue infusion of

about \$4.5 million could be reflected in the FY 2014 budget after the County Commission approves the individual transfers later this month. Among them will be a return of \$1.5 million from the risk fund to the general fund. The county's risk fund "had a good year," Steve Botelho, the county's chief financial planning officer, told the board on Sept. 6. "The claims were low."

Another \$2 million would be available from unspent money in the Sarasota County Area

**“It would be different if we were doing this strategically, but we’re not.”**

Christine Robinson  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County



*Commissioner Christine Robinson peruses budget documents on Sept. 6. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



Transit (SCAT) budget. However, Commissioner Nora Patterson pointed out that Glama Carter, the SCAT director, told the board earlier this year that about 20 buses “were falling apart.” Patterson conceded that characterization “was a little severe,” but some of that \$2 million might be better spent on new buses.

Botelho replied that Carter is working on another presentation to the board, which will include the status of equipment.

## OTHER POTENTIAL COST SAVINGS


Botelho also offered the board the option of retreating on a couple of decisions it made in June: an \$100,000 increase in funding for library collections and the purchase of a long-arm mower for tree trimming in county rights of ways, at a cost of \$246,950.

Another \$572,800 could be saved by reducing the level of mowing in the dry season, he said, and \$40,000 could be cut by reducing radar and LED signage across the county.

“I’m not willing to go along with that,” Patterson said of the proposed library line item reduction. “I’m assuming and trusting Sarabeth’s estimate that she needs it,” Patterson added, referring to Sarabeth Kalajian, the county’s director of libraries and historical resources.

The \$100,000 “is a need,” Kalajian told the board. “We’ve had numerous years of reductions in this specific part of our budget.”

Six or seven years ago, she continued, when county budgets reflected the booming economy, her allocation for new materials was as high as \$1.5 million. At the lowest level of the

<div>  <div> <h1>Cost Savings / Reductions</h1> <p>Approved by Board on 9/6</p> </div> </div>	
<b>Funding Shifts:</b>	<b>Reduction Approved by BCC on 9/6</b>
Natural Resources; Shift funding to Pollution Recovery Trust Fund	\$ 36,000
Field Services; Shift mowing costs proportionately to Enterprise Fund	\$ 110,000
Field Services; Shift funding of 2 FTE's to Environmental Utilities	\$ 87,000
Parks & Recreation; Shift 50% position to Special Recreation Fund	\$ 25,000
Planning & Development Services; Shift funding to the Land Development Fund	\$ 96,000
Communications; Shift maintenance of TV equipment to Access Sarasota Fund	\$ 20,000
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$ 374,000</b>
<b>Level of Service Reductions:</b>	
Transportation & Real Estate Svcs; Reduction of moveable bridge contract	\$ 40,000
Field Services; Mowing contract level of service reduction	\$ 572,800
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$ 612,800</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 986,800</b>

*A chart presented to the public on Sept. 9 shows a reduction in expenses the County Commission approved on Sept. 6. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



Great Recession, it was about \$300,000, Kalajian noted. The sharp decline had led to an erosion of the collection, she pointed out.

Without the extra funds the board approved in June, she said, her collections budget for FY 2014 would be slightly more than \$400,000 — the total amount of state funding assistance the library system will receive.

The system will be losing federal aid, too, Kalajian added.

And even though the library system is purchasing more e-books, she noted, “Electronic books are not cheaper.”

“This is a good example, to hear this debate,” Vice Chairman Charles Hines said. “No one is opposed to buying books, but we are spending more than we are taking in.”

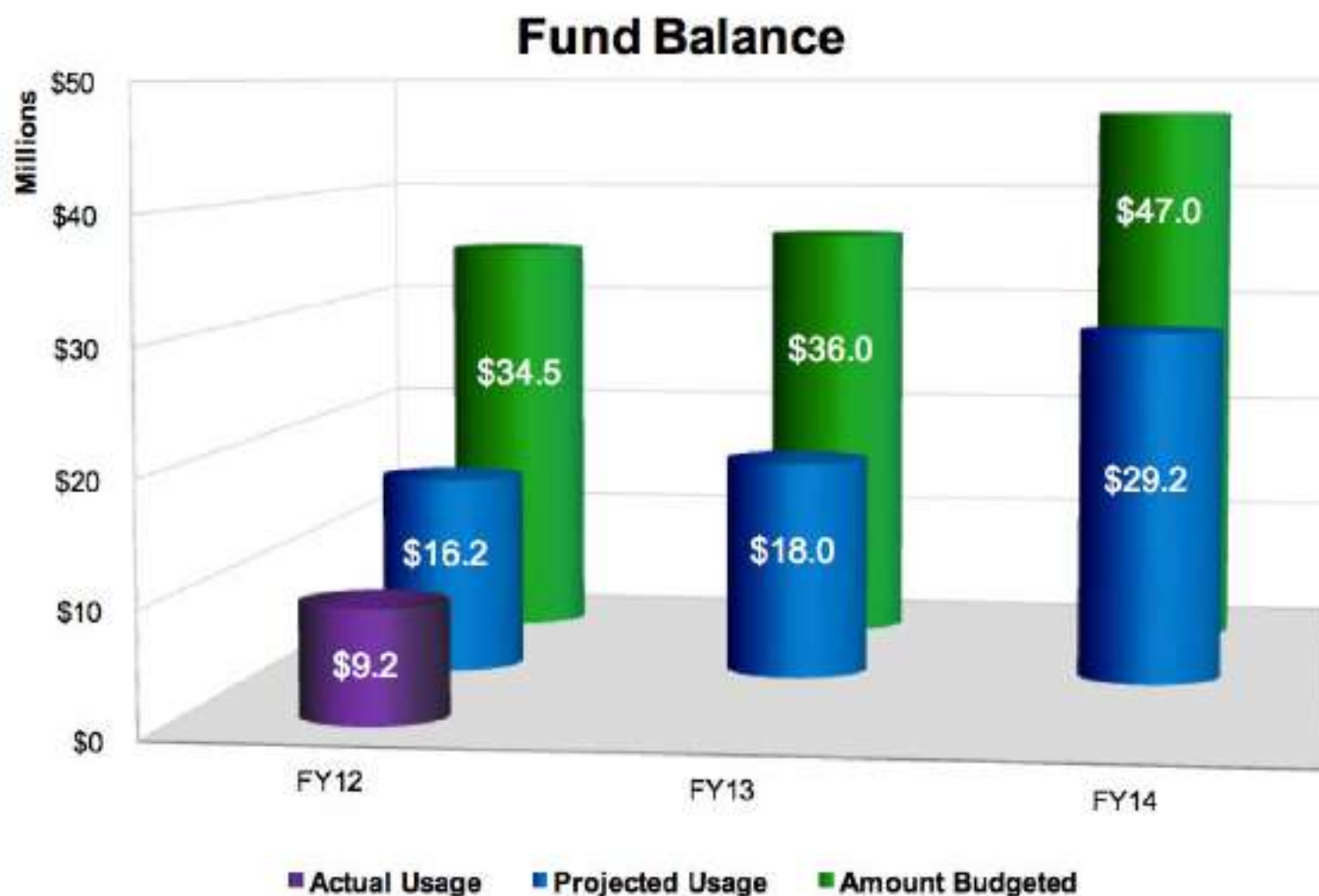
He added to Kalajian, “You [are] the poster child of what we’re trying to balance here.”

Chairwoman Carolyn Mason said she was convinced by Kalajian’s remarks — as well as those of former County Commissioner Shannon Staub, president of the Library Foundation of Sarasota County — that the funding is necessary.

“I feel the same way,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta said.

Because they had voted to approve the funding in June, Botelho said, no new vote was needed to keep the \$100,000 in the FY 2014 budget.

During a subsequent discussion about backtracking on the purchase of the long-arm mower and reducing the mowing level of ser-



*A chart shows projected use of the county’s economic uncertainty reserve funds (in blue) from Fiscal Year 2012 through FY 2014. The purple cylinder in FY 2012 reflects actual expenditures from the fund. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



vice, Patterson asked how the latter situation would compare “to before ‘Mowingate’ started, say three, four years ago?” She was referring to complaints and contract changes — with companies bowing out after being unable to keep up with the work — as the county has tried to maintain its right of way and median maintenance.

Jim Oppy of the Field Services Office — standing in for his boss, Spencer Anderson — told the commissioners he believed the reduction would have “minimal visual impact.”

Patterson made the motion, which was seconded by Robinson, to accept the staff proposals for the reduction of service in mowing and the radar and LED signage cutbacks, for a total of \$612,800. However, Patterson said she felt the county needed the long-arm mower.

“We need to do a lot more of this,” Robinson said of the budget cutting.


The motion passed unanimously.

## SPENDING AND SAVING

During the morning session of the Sept. 6 budget workshop, Botelho explained the county has seen a 3.5-percent increase in revenue collections through 11 months of the current fiscal year, which Barbetta noted translates into about \$7 million more for the general fund.

Therefore, the county might end up using \$11 million out of its economic uncertainty reserves to balance the current budget instead of the \$18 million projected, Barbetta added.

The final figure will not be known until December, Botelho replied while confirming Barbetta’s math.

<div>  <b>FY14 BCC Departmental Increases</b> </div>			
Department	Mid-Year Decisions	FY14 Budget Increases	June Workshop Decisions
<b><u>Transportation &amp; Field Services</u></b>			
Right of Way Maintenance Equipment	-	-	\$246,950
Street Sweeping Contract Increase	-	\$86,351	-
Moveable Bridges Contract Increase	-	\$80,000	-
Traffic Mgt. Center Hardware/Software Maint.	-	\$47,000	-
Cost Sharing of Regional Traffic Mgt. Center	-	\$150,761	-
ROW Mowing/Maintenance	\$3,250,682	-	-
	<b>\$3,250,682</b>	<b>\$364,112</b>	<b>\$246,950</b>
<b><u>Planning &amp; Development Services</u></b>			
1 Code Enf. Officer	-	\$79,889	-
2 Code Enf. Officers (Unpermitted/Unlicensed)	-	-	\$26,459
	-	<b>\$79,889</b>	<b>\$26,459</b>
<b><u>Public Safety Communications</u></b>			
Partial Year Salary	-	\$85,556	-
	-	<b>\$85,556</b>	-
<b><u>Natural Resources*</u></b>			
Coastal Project Manager	-	\$71,983	-
	-	<b>\$71,983</b>	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$3,670,682</b>	<b>\$822,383</b>	<b>\$373,409</b>
* This FTE was absorbed within their general fund budget			

*A chart shows some of the County Commission decisions that affect department expenses for the 2014 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



Botelho also said that at the end of FY 2012, when the board last certified its reserve policy, the county had about \$165 million in all its reserve funds.

Robinson reiterated that the county should not be dipping into its economic uncertainty reserve pot to balance the budget. Moreover, she said, staff should have made clear what type of future budget impact would result from each funding decision the board made after the start of the current fiscal year.

The commissioners should not have to ask for charts explaining the scenarios, she added.

“It would be different if we were doing this strategically,” Robinson said, “but we’re not.”

“I agree that we need to be conservative,” Patterson replied. Nonetheless, “This board got fed up with the reductions of maintenance of our sports fields, and this board asked for the staff to come back with a plan to increase the maintenance and, in fact, go beyond well-maintained fields to fields that are capable of holding tournaments,” Patterson continued. “That was this board’s decision, and this board decided it was logical to bring some staff back aboard to handle the mowing. ... I disagree completely that we have done this without responsible planning.”

She added, “And I think we’re going to end up just fine. I just think we need to be really cautious.”

Hines agreed with Robinson that the commission needed to see models showing how future budget amendments and unexpected contract changes — such as those for mowing — would affect the timing for the depletion of

the economic uncertainty reserve fund. “This is good positive debate,” he said.

Robinson reiterated her point that county administration should have been showing the commissioners all along what the impact on reserves would be. “It should be inherent that we don’t have a budget in front of us that goes over the projected [revenue] growth.”

Patterson countered that such budget updates “would have come to us ... in one of our discussions. ... I don’t think we can cast blame on anything.”

County Administrator Randall Reid said he felt he and the Financial Planning staff had presented the budget material in a responsible manner. “I understand rhetoric, and I understand conversations also,” he said, adding that he earlier had suggested the commissioners start focusing on a two-year budget cycle to plan spending more effectively.

“Mr. Reid, did I just hear you call our decisions ‘rhetoric’?” Robinson asked.

“I deal in facts,” he replied. “I used the words ‘rhetoric’ and ‘discussion.’”

“That’s not appropriate for a healthy board discussion,” Robinson told him.

“Then I apologize,” Reid said, adding that because she had referred to the administration, that did not mean just him. He pointed out that staff from the Office of Financial Planning was present at the table with him.

After briefly turning again to a discussion of the reserve funds, Hines said, “Going forward, I think our budgeting is going to have to be what’s more realistic.” 



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# JUST A BID AWARD BLIP

*Warm Mineral Springs has been closed since June 30. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

## THE WARM MINERAL SPRINGS BID AWARD WILL NOT BE EXECUTED UNTIL MORE EXTENSIVE BACKGROUND CHECKS HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN ON THE FIRM RECOMMENDED AS THE SHORT-TERM OPERATOR

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

People eager to see the reopening of Warm Mineral Springs will have to wait just a bit longer, so more extensive background checks can be undertaken on the principals of the firm recommended to receive a one-year contract to operate the facility.

That was the decision of the Sarasota County Commission during its regular meeting in Venice on Sept. 10. Although the North Port City Commission on Sept. 9 approved

awarding the contract to WMS Sarasota Management LLC — one of just two bidders — county commissioners sought assurance that the firm's officers have clean criminal and business records.

“*The only reason I was looking at this aspect of this was because of the nature and value of the asset and the jewel that it is in the city of North Port.*”

Christine Robinson  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County

The City of North Port was open to more extensive background checks, Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Director Carolyn Brown told the county board in a brief presentation.



In fact, Vice Mayor James Blucher made that a part of his motion on Monday, which passed on a 3-1 vote. (Mayor Linda Yates was not present for the meeting. City Commissioner Cheryl Cook cast the “No” vote.)

That caveat, Blucher said, was to prevent the need for the City Commission to address the matter again if the county board wanted more extensive checks. According to the interlocal agreement the City and County commissions approved in June, any contract changes proposed by one commission would have to win the other commission’s approval before the agreement could be finalized.

Therefore, according to a motion put forward by County Commissioner Nora Patterson on Sept. 10, County Commission Chairwoman

Carolyn Mason will not execute the agreement with WMS Sarasota Management until after County Administrator Randall Reid and North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis have completed their research.

The motion passed unanimously.

“The only reason I was looking at this aspect of this was because of the nature and value of the asset and the jewel that it is in the city of North Port,” County Commissioner Christine Robinson said. “It wasn’t a reflection of this vendor or a reflection of the other one. I just was trying to make sure of that extra level of safety.”

“This community’s been burned too many times by people that move here,” Vice Chair-



*Prior to closing this summer, Warm Mineral Springs offered exercise classes for visitors. Photo courtesy of City of North Port*



man Charles Hines added. A thorough background check “needs to become more standard operating procedure,” he told staff.

County Commissioner Joe Barbetta said he anticipated the more extensive background check would take no longer than a week.

WMS Sarasota Management indicated it could reopen the Springs for swimming within five days of the execution of the agreement, County Parks and Recreation Director Carolyn Brown pointed out.

The resort has been closed since June 30, because the city and county commissions were unable to reach an agreement on short-term management in time to seek a new operator.

WMS Sarasota Management’s bid was signed by Dr. Grigory Pogrebinsky, who has been a licensed physician for more than 30 years, specializing in orthopedics and pain management, according to the bid material. Documentation the firm provided shows the company filed its incorporation papers with the state on Aug. 1.



*A vintage postcard shows a building at Warm Mineral Springs. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*

Alla Skipper, contracts specialist with the City of North Port’s Procurement Department, explained to the County Commission that the standard background review had been undertaken. It included checks of the records of the property appraiser and tax collector in both Sarasota and Charlotte counties; criminal and civil case checks were pursued through the offices of the Clerks of Court in both counties.

“And, of course, Google,” Skipper added.

In response to further questions, Ted Coyman, the county procurement official, said that because WMS Sarasota Management LLC “is only days old,” he felt a [Dun & Bradstreet](#) report should be sought. “You want to look for bankruptcy, foreclosure, liens and their credit score,” he added. “I think that makes sense.”

Coyman advised the board that his staff would ask the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office to undertake the extensive criminal background check on the principals of the firm. He pointed out that any discovery would be brought back to the commissions for their consideration.



*The sign at Warm Mineral Springs prior to its June 30 closing touted facilities on the site. Photo by Ebyabe via Wikimedia Commons*



North Port City Manager Lewis told the county commissioners the city already has a Dun & Bradstreet account, so city staff could seek an assessment from that firm. Generally, he said, such reports “come back fairly quickly, but I hate to make an estimate.”

“You know, it’s unusual,” Patterson said, “but [Warm Mineral Springs] is such a big asset.”

When the North Port Commission approved the WMS Sarasota Management bid on Sept. 9, Blucher said, “I think our ultimate goal is to reopen the Springs. I believe we have a player that can do that and enhance [the resort].”

Cook said she could not support his motion to award the bid to WMS Sarasota Management, because the request for bids called for documentation of successful prior experience in the management of “a publicly used natural spring or water attraction,” and the firm had been organized too recently to demonstrate that.

“I think our ultimate goal is to protect the Springs and I don’t see in these [bid] documents anywhere that the item I just read is accommodated ...”

## USE OF THE WATER

Earlier in the County Commission discussion, Patterson raised a concern about language in the proposed contract with WMS Sarasota Management that she feared could allow it to withdraw a large quantity of water from the Springs. That clause says, “LICENSEE shall not remove any water or minerals from the Springs, nor allow any individual or group to remove any water or minerals from the Springs, except that LICENSEE may remove



*County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh addresses a county commissioner during a recent budget workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

water for use in spa services provided on the Premises.”

“I know that part of the concept at one point — though it was not approved by the County Commission, she noted — “was installing essentially separate little hot tub facilities.”

Such structures had been constructed at other springs, changing those resorts’ character, she added.

His understanding, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh replied, “was there is a pretty significant limitation” on how much water can be removed.

Brown pointed out that that the agreement language reflected use of water from Warm Mineral Springs in aesthetician services such as facials and massages.

“And that’s not what I’m concerned about,” Patterson said.

She wanted to be certain, she said, that no one could pipe water to a new facility built on the site.

DeMarsh pointed to other language in the contract that “would control and limit [such activity].”

Brown added that removal of more than 100,000 gallons from the Springs would necessitate a permit from the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

“One hundred thousand gallons of water is a *lot*,” Patterson told her.

Brown also noted that a 400-foot buffer zone around the Springs would prevent the type of scenario Patterson envisioned. “There’s very strict limits as to what can be done,” Brown added.

Vice Chairman Charles Hines shared Patterson’s concern, he said, because of comments he has heard among members of the public. “I would rather make [the agreement] clear now.”

Barbetta and Hines both suggested inserting language to specify that no water removal could occur without the written permission of the county and the City of North Port.

However, Robinson reminded her colleagues that any modification of the agreement’s wording would necessitate the document’s return to the North Port City Commission for concurrence. “It will delay the opening of the Springs,” she pointed out.

In response to a question from Robinson, Brown confirmed the City of North Port would have to issue a permit for any piping of the water proposed by the new management firm.



*Jonathan Lewis is the manager of the City of North Port. Photo courtesy City of North Port*

DeMarsh said he believed the section of the contract he had cited earlier would prohibit such construction or the installation of hot tubs on the site without the city and county’s approval: “Any and all such alterations, repairs, replacements or additions, except those that would constitute an emergency, shall be made upon consultation with and prior written consent of [the city and county]. The LICENSEE must notify the LICENSOR of an emergency repair immediately and provide copies of all documentation related to the repair.”

“We do believe we would have the right to deny [a request such as Patterson indicated],” based on that provision, Lewis confirmed.

## **BID SPECIFICS**

Brown told the County Commission WMS Sarasota Management had agreed to pay 24 percent of its gross monthly revenue to the city and county as the short-term operator of Warm Mineral Springs.




In its bid, WMS Sarasota Management says it is a joint venture with A2Z Hospitality Management Co. LLC and WMS Sarasota Holdings LLC. "WMS Sarasota has plans to develop its sixteen acres of land immediately adjacent to Warm Mineral Springs in establishment of environmentally responsible health and wellness destination while A2Z Hospitality Management is a hospitality expert that operates five hotels and resorts in Southwest Florida," the bid says.

The latter firm's Four Points Punta Gorda "has an excellent rating with internet travel sites and consumer reviews," the bid material continues. "Specifically, it has a 92% approval rating from travelers on [Tripadvisor.com](http://Tripadvisor.com)." Further, it says, A2Z's "most recent venture involves remodeling and reopening of new Ramada Venice Resort in South Sarasota County

that has received positive media attention and is becoming a prominent hotel in the area."

According to its bid, WMS Sarasota Management also plans to extend the operating hours of Warm Mineral Springs and the resort's water fitness therapy programs to accommodate local residents who cannot come to the site during what had been the normal hours of operation. The firm further proposes to establish medical spa and wellness programs "under medical guidance and supervision" and offer shuttle bus service from local hotels.

The other firm that bid on the short-term contract was Cambridgeshire Investment LLC, based in Port Charlotte. Its principal, Michael Meagher, says in his bid that he spent 22 years in the motel and restaurant business before moving to Port Charlotte in 1979. 

In resolution of an Intergovernmental Conflict pursuant to Section 164.1057, Florida Statutes, Sarasota County and the City of North Port entered into an Interlocal Agreement, Contract 2013-427, regarding the use of Warm Mineral Springs. The Agreement provided that the County and City would conduct a competitive solicitation in satisfaction of Section 125.35, Florida Statutes, regarding the short term operation of Warm Mineral Springs. The Agreement provided the City would handle the solicitation process but that each body would independently evaluate the responsive proposals and that each body would retain final authority over the approval of the final agreement.

City and County staff jointly developed a solicitation, Request for Bid (RFB), for the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs based upon the Statement of Principles listed in Exhibit A to the Interlocal. The RFB was advertised by the City of North Port Purchasing Department on July 22, 2013. Approximately six potential respondents attended a non-mandatory pre-bid meeting that was held at Warm Mineral Springs on July 29, 2013.

On August 9, 2013 at 3:00 pm the City of North Port Purchasing Department staff opened bids received from the following two bidders:

- Cambridgeshire Investment, LLC
- WMS Sarasota Management, LLC



# This may take a while.

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## FOOT ROUTE

“ *Once it is all finished and we get into season and all the restaurants have their tables out, this is going to be a dynamite street.*

Georgia Court  
Owner  
Bookstore 1 Sarasota

”

*In one phase of the improvements, crews constructed wider brick sidewalk areas at the busier pedestrian stretches in front of the Gator Club (pictured above), Pastry Art and C'est La Vie on Main Street.  
Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## MAIN STREET'S SIDEWALK IMPROVEMENTS ARE MORE THAN HALFWAY COMPLETE, PROVIDING A LITTLE MORE WALKING SPACE IN DOWNTOWN SARASOTA, ALONG WITH HIGH HOPES FOR THIS TOURIST SEASON

By Roger Drouin  
*County Editor*

On Sept. 9, Chip Beeman marked a welcome sight for early September, one of the slower months for downtown Sarasota businesses: More than two-thirds of the outdoor café tables in front of Pastry Art were filled.

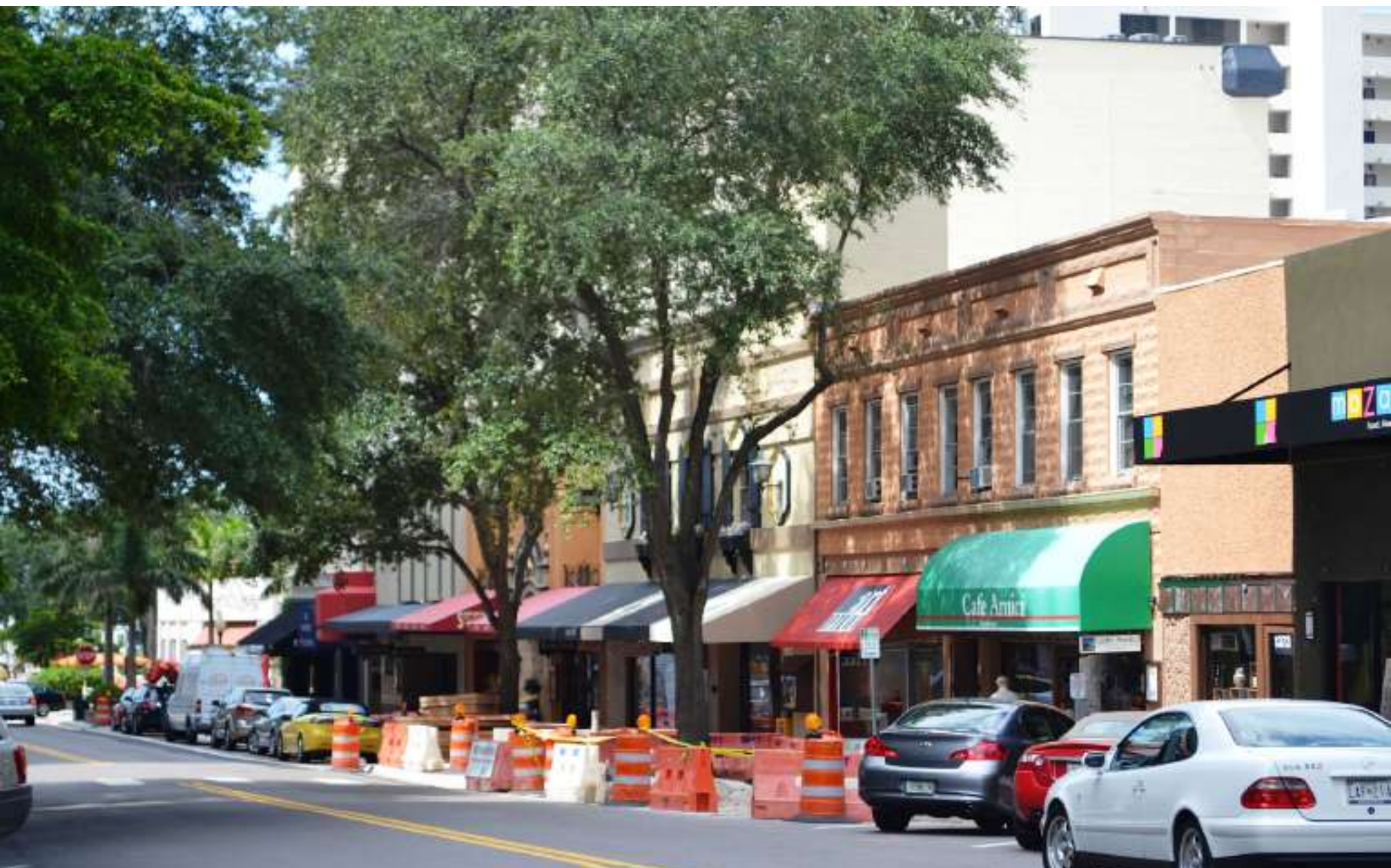
“There were a lot of lattes and newspapers out there,” said Beeman, who owns the cafe with his wife, Katie.

The sight gave Beeman high hopes for the upcoming tourist season, which kicks off this

month as vacationers and seasonal residents from states such as Ohio and Michigan begin to return.

As the weather cools, Pastry Art will be ready for the tourists. The restaurant has been able to put five more café tables outside, thanks to one phase of Main Street's recent facelift.

Crews are wrapping up three different segments of work that added stretches of wider brick sidewalks along the middle and lower



*On the north side of lower Main Street, crews are replacing diagonal parking with parallel parking, making space for eight additional feet of sidewalk. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



portions of Main Street. The total project cost of \$1.9 million was paid by the Downtown Improvement District.

In one phase, workers expanded the brick sidewalk at the busier pedestrian stretches in front of the Gator Club, Pastry Art and C'est La Vie on Main Street. That phase, from Lemon Avenue to Orange Avenue, is complete.

The wider sidewalk sections — or bulbouts — are designed to encompass additional outdoor café seating while making downtown more walkable. As crews constructed the bulbouts, lampposts also were repainted; brighter light bulbs also are in the works.

Beeman thinks the bulbouts will become a boon for all of Main Street.

“The more word gets out that we’ve got good outdoor dining, the more it will bring people to our downtown,” Beeman said.

The largest segment of work, currently under way, would replace diagonal parking spaces on the north side of lower Main Street — from Gulfstream Avenue to Five Points Park — with parallel spaces, which would free up more room for sidewalk expansion. The sidewalk in that area will gain eight feet.

The third segment of work will bring enhancements to the intersection of Main Street and Palm Avenue, one of the busiest and most visible downtown.

The Sarasota city commissioners voted in July to install brick pavers at the four crosswalks



*Construction continued along Main Street near Gulfstream Avenue last week. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



at that intersection. The intersection will be closed to traffic until Sept. 25.

Richard Winder, the city coordinator of capital improvement projects, estimates the entire initiative is more than halfway complete; he expects all three segments to be finished in November.

Because the construction is happening in such a bustling area with many businesses, crews built a temporary sidewalk on lower Main Street to provide access to shops and restaurants, and the city has worked to keep merchants [updated](#).

“We’ve been trying to go door-to-door to communicate,” Winder said.

## ‘A DYNAMITE STREET’

Bookstore1Sarasota, at 1359 Main St., fronts the new 8-foot wider sidewalk on lower Main.

While the project entailed removing some parking spaces to make the wider sidewalk possible, Georgia Court, owner of the bookstore, thinks the expanded footpath is worth it.

“We didn’t lose much [of the parking space],” Court said. “I think it’s a fabulous project.”

Court added that the bookstore plans to hold a poetry reading on the sidewalk this spring. More space will be available for people to gather and listen to the selections.



*Main Street work was under way on the south side in July. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



“Once it is all finished and we get into season and all the restaurants have their tables out, this is going to be a dynamite street,” Court said.

John Anderson, co-owner of Mozaic Restaurant and a proponent of the lower Main improvements, pointed out the sidewalk area was not accommodating for outdoor seating before the project began, because motorists would pull in to park right next to the sidewalk. Drivers’ quick movements often produced scary experiences for outdoor diners adjacent to the parking spaces.

The combination of the new sidewalk and parallel parking is more welcoming for patrons enjoying meals *al fresco* — and safer, he noted.

Anderson is designing an outdoor café area in front of his restaurant; he hopes to add six or eight tables in the space — a new feature for his restaurant.

The wider sidewalks will favor pedestrians, not cars, Anderson added.

“It will be a more desirable area for people to enjoy on foot,” he said, concurring with Court’s sentiment.

Some merchants were opposed to the sidewalk widening because of the loss of parking slots, but Anderson agrees with Court.

“The loss of some spaces is a small concession to make downtown more walkable,” Anderson said.

## OTHER NEEDS

Although the facelift is making downtown more pleasant for pedestrians, several mer-

chants say the wider sidewalks and bulbouts do not address downtown’s most pressing needs.

Brian O’Connell, owner of Hodgell Gallery on Palm Avenue, pointed out that the big problem is downtown does not have enough retail shops. Specifically, what it needs are areas zoned for retail merchandise, which would create blocks to entice shoppers, O’Connell said.

“They didn’t develop downtown properly for retail,” Hodgell noted. “That’s the story — not how wide our sidewalks are or how beautiful the trees are.”

The city and county also need to spend more on marketing downtown to tourists, O’Connell suggested.

“The other counties are spending much more on that,” he said.

Ron Kennedy, co-owner of Kennedy Studios at 1472 Main St., said that although the sidewalk facelift is an improvement, he has concerns about the city keeping up the maintenance.

The brick pavers disguise stains and dirt better, Kennedy said, but they still need to be pressure-cleaned regularly, and the city has had problems recently trying to retain a contractor to spruce up the sidewalks.

“I’ve been on a two-year mission to get the sidewalks cleaned,” Kennedy added. “The city goes with the low bidder, and [the contractor] can’t do it, and the city fires that contractor and tries someone else.”

Parking also remains one of the biggest issues downtown, especially during peak tourist season.



Beeman is opposed to paid parking downtown, but he thinks the city's initiative to set aside spaces for downtown employees for \$10 a month might help alleviate some of the parking shortages.

Anderson, the Mozaic co-owner, agrees that the city needs to work on parking, but he disagrees with Beeman on the approach. Anderson thinks meters on Main Street are a necessity.

Tiered parking fees are one option, he said.

Charging for parking only in the Palm Avenue garage is not the way to go, Anderson added.


"They are charging for less desirable parking," he pointed out. The city should first charge for the best parking on Main Street and make public garages more accessible, he said.

Anderson also sees the need for a comprehensive plan that supports and encourages retail so shops can coexist alongside restaurants and nightlife downtown.

The anticipated, and long-planned, Pineapple Square will give a boost to retail — if and when it is built, he added. "What we really need downtown is for Pineapple Square to open," Anderson said. "The few shops they've brought [such as Brooks Brothers and Sur La Table] are destination locations."

In the meantime, the new bricks on Main Street are a welcome sight to Jeanne Katz, assistant manager at Happy Feet Plus, located at 1453 Main St.

"We think everything looks great," said Katz.

"We are looking forward to staying open for extended business hours now that our snowbirds are coming back," she added. 

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# BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

*The State Street parking garage project was halted abruptly last month when City Attorney Bob Fournier voiced concerns about the selection process. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## THE CITY OF SARASOTA WILL RECONSIDER THE SELECTION GUIDELINES AND PROCESS FOR THE STATE STREET PUBLIC-PRIVATE PROJECT

By Roger Drouin  
*County Editor*

City commissioners envisioned a mix of uses — from a hotel to shops and cafes to condos on the State Street acre that is now a parking lot.

The goal was to bring 300-plus public garage parking spaces and a vibrant mix of uses to the city-owned land, commissioners said at a June meeting.

They also focused on a 2015 completion date.

The city collected proposals from six interested developers, and the city, working with downtown real estate broker Ian Black, selected developer Jim Bridge's concept for a 100-room hotel and 30 condos — in the \$250,000 price-range

— above a parking deck. Jim Bridges' Jebco Ventures Inc. would have also purchased 18,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor and filled that area with tenants.

The City Commission was slated to vote Aug. 29 on the public-private partnership. Several downtown advocates had even emailed commissioners in support of Bridge's proposal.

But after a big step back, the project was returned to the drawing board: It was abruptly halted when City Attorney Bob Fournier voiced concerns about the selection process.

Fournier said the procedure violated the state's Government in the Sunshine laws and

“ *We worked very hard to get our proposal together. We still have a desire to do something nice within the city.* ”

Jim Bridges  
CEO  
Jebco Ventures Inc.



**Comparative Analysis - User Proposals for the State Street Parking Garage - Option C (Pad Site)**

Categories	Finergy - local	York	Githler & Assoc - local
Number of Residential units	36-42 rentals	32-42 condos	34 condos
Price Point of Units	\$1.67 PSF 800-1,600 SF Rentals	\$400,000-\$750,000 average \$475,000	\$350,000-\$650,000
Number of Developer floors	10 (pad site)	10 (pad site)	10 (pad site)
Office SF	none	none	8000 SF
Retail SF	13,125 (garage) + 8,240 (pad) SF = 21,365 SF	13,125 + 8240 SF = 21,365 SF	21,125 SF
Jobs (FTE)	43 Retail	43 Retail	32 Office, 40 Retail
Project Value (supplied by proposer)	\$15,500,000	Not provide	\$20-21 million
Parking spaces Indicated	59 Private Required*, 371 Public, (430) 6 Levels Total	59 Private Required*, 371 Public, (430) 6 Levels Total	32 Private*, 398 Public (430) 6 Levels Total
Purchase price - retail	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,600,000	\$1,100,000 - \$1,350,000
Option purchase price - pad liner	\$ 1,318,400	\$ 1,200,000	Included above
Funding time line	Cash - residential close soon as possible - retail 30 days following completion of garage	Cash - residential close immediately - retail 30 days following completion of garage	Requires bank financing and will need to have "cooperation of City to achieve this"
Construction Sequence	Simultaneous	Simultaneous	Start construction within 18 month of signing P&S
Other items		*Included Streetscape on North side of State St. *Incomplete information *No demonstrated experience	Reverted clause - City purchase back same price minus \$25,000 after 18 months

4 - 1 job per 500 SF retail (International Council of Shopping Centers) and 1 job per 250 SF office (ICSC)

7 - \*provided and paid for by developer

**Comparative Analysis - User Proposals for the State Street Parking Garage - Base Plan Option A/B**

Categories	Crown Holdings- owners of PNC building	City of Sarasota	Jebco Ventures, Inc. - local
Number of Residential units	64 Rentals 36 condo	none	30 condos / 100 room Hampton Inn
Price Point of Units	Not Provided	none	\$200,000 - \$250,000
Number of Developer floors	Not provided - two liner buildings	1	4 floors
Office SF	Not specific	none	none
Retail SF	25,000 - 35,000 SF	17,977 SF	17,977 +/- SF
Jobs (FTE)	50-70 Retail	34 Retail	30FT & 15PT Hotel, 34 Retail
Project Value (supplied by proposer)	Not provided	4,000,000	\$27,500,000 +/-
Parking spaces Indicated	Required to replace their ground level parking plus the needs of whatever occupied construction development	407 Public, 4 Levels	78 Private*, 400 Public (478) 5 Levels Total
Purchase price - retail	Exchange for use of their air space	subject to offer	\$1,887,585 +/- \$105 PSF
Option purchase price - pad liner	Incl above		N/A
Funding time line	N/A	Cash Close 30 days after completion of garage	Cash Close 30 days after completion of garage
Construction Sequence	Simultaneous	N/A	Simultaneous
Other items	*Would like a liner building at each end of the development *Incomplete information		They will pay all cost associated with the additional structure requirements plus the cost of their four floors

4 - 1 job per 500 SF retail (International Council of Shopping Centers) and 1 job per 250 SF office (ICSC)

7 - \*provided and paid for by developer

*Six developers submitted proposals for the public-private partnership. Now it is unclear whether any of them will even be considered. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*



there were no clear parameters for prospective developers.

“That left the city open to a legal challenge,” Fournier pointed out, which would have caused a lengthy delay in the schedule.

Now it is unclear whether any of the six proposals will even be considered.

Fournier will lead a discussion of the issues at the City Commission meeting Monday, Sept. 16. That is the first step to getting the mixed-use project back on track.

“This will be a beginning,” Fournier noted.

He is hopeful that the delay will not be a lingering one.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The city remains under pressure to build 300 public spaces in the parking deck.

That is because of the 2010 agreement the city reached with [Pineapple Square](#) when the city acquired the 43,700-square-foot lot; the city

was to build a parking garage with at least 300 spaces within four years; that means a deadline of February 2015. The city’s parking master plan in 2005 also identified the State Street lot as a priority designation for a garage. The site is home to a 139 parking space surface lot.

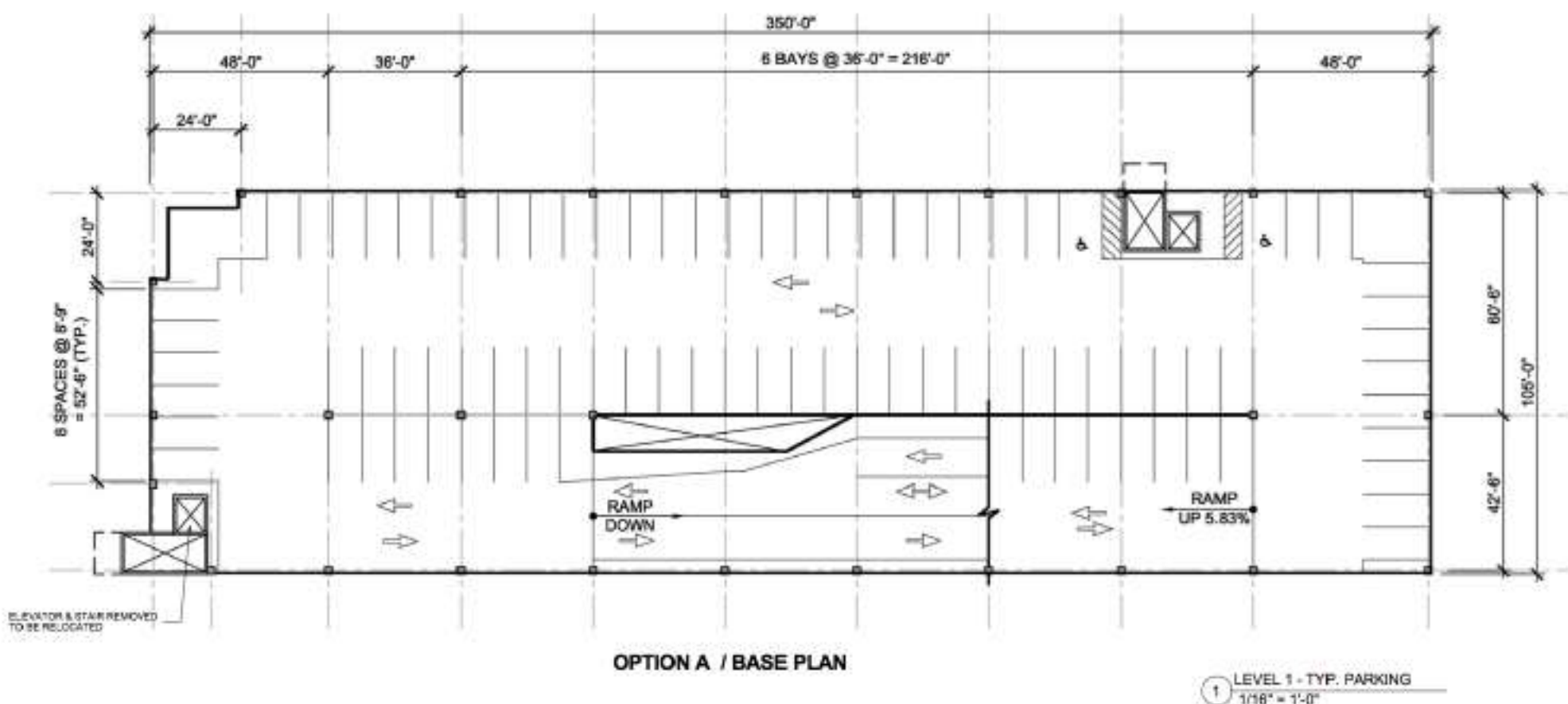
The city has set aside \$7.29 million in tax-increment financing for the project.

“We’re looking ahead right now,” said Senior Planner Steve Stancel. “We are trying to see what processes will work best.”

The city has three options for the State Street land, Fournier wrote in a memo he sent to the city commissioners on Sept. 9.

The first option is to build a garage with a first floor of retail space. That structure would look similar to the Palm Avenue garage that opened in 2010. The city would then market the first floor shell to prospective buyers.

The second option is to sell the “air rights” above the parking levels in addition to the ground floor. The developer chosen would



*Jebco Ventures Inc. proposed a 100-room Hampton Inn and Suites and 30 condos above the parking deck. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*



handle the additional use and also pay any costs of reinforcing the structure to handle the extra floors.

The third option is to sell a smaller parcel fronting Lemon Avenue. A developer could then build condos or a hotel on the so-called “pad parcel.”

## A CLEAR PROCEDURE

Whichever option it chooses, the city has to set a clear procedure for accepting development plans, Fournier pointed out.

The larger challenge is for the city commissioners to specify what kind of project they would like to see. Once the parameters are set, the city can call for proposals that meet those guidelines, Fournier added.

That was not how the procedure was handled previously. In June, the city commissioners said they were open to all three concepts presented to them.

Fournier said he believes flaws in that process were inadvertent, but he does not want to see a repeat of what transpired then.

The lack of project expectations and guidelines could have left some potential developers in the dark.

“People who are interested should know what is expected by commissioners so people don’t waste their time,” Fournier said.

For instance, it was unclear that the city would have allowed a project as high as 10 stories — which is what Jebco Ventures proposed.

The other problem was that the selection process did not take place during public meetings, a fact that could have been challenged as a violation of the Sunshine law, Fournier pointed out.

A public process will allow all developers who submit a proposal to see why the eventual “winner” is chosen.

## CRITICAL OF THE PROCESS

Downtown advocate Diana Hamilton said she thought some creative proposals had been submitted to the city. However, she was critical of the selection process.

“Had they just did that in the Sunshine, it would have been a good thing,” Hamilton said.

Hamilton believes the entire process lacked clarity, and she wants to see more City Hall focus on creating development on the city-owned land.

“It’s the biggest project going on in the city,” Hamilton said. “It’s huge. Where was the city manager?”

Hamilton added that she hopes “everybody who brought ideas to the table” stays in and resubmits their plans.

“A lot of work went into those proposals, and a lot of that work is still viable,” Hamilton said. “That is the most important thing. I don’t want to lose any ground we made. I don’t want these people’s hard work and creative ideas to be tainted because the process was flawed.”

Bridges said he was “in a holding pattern.”

“We worked very hard to get our proposal together,” Bridges said. “We still have a desire to do something nice within the city.”

Bridges said he thinks there is a market for a hotel on the site. And he had proposed keeping the costs of the condo units at around \$250,000.

“We believe a lot of people would have interest in moving into the building,” Bridges added. 



# THINKING AHEAD



*The modern Florida legislative building rises behind the historic capitol. Photo from iStockphoto*

## NONPROFITS, COUNTY GOVERNMENT LAY OUT 2014 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

**By Cooper Levey-Baker**

*Associate Editor*

A week before a public hearing with our local legislative delegation, representatives from the Community Alliance of Sarasota County gathered on Sept. 12 to discuss what they want to see happen in Tallahassee next spring. The coalition of health and human services nonprofits generated tons of ideas, touching on issues from aging to homelessness to healthcare and beyond.

The Alliance's Second Annual Legislative Summit was intended to generate a rundown of priority issues for Alliance members to present to the region's

legislative delegation at its Oct. 17 breakfast. The president and CEO of The Florida Center for Early Childhood and the chairwoman of the Alliance's legislative advocacy committee, Kathryn Shea, says last year's event was a success, evidenced by the local delegation's support for Alliance priorities.

Work groups that were organized around topics such as behavioral health and criminal justice broke out from the main meeting Thursday to identify pressing issues and potential solutions. Speakers called for re-

“*We've got to create those relationships.*”

Ted Granger  
President  
United Way of Florida





storing budgets that were slashed during the recession and for blocking laws that might restrict the county's ability to strictly regulate pill mills, among many other recommendations.

The healthcare working group named the expansion of Medicaid through ObamaCare as its top priority, a request that was also a major feature of last fall's legislative breakfast. Thirty-five thousand Sarasota residents could lose out on healthcare coverage if the Legislature doesn't act, one participant noted. Despite advocacy on the issue from a variety of healthcare groups, the Legislature this spring rejected roughly \$50 billion in federal money to fund the Medicaid expansion over the next 10 years.

But the issue may not be dead. Gov. Rick Scott, who launched his political career opposing ObamaCare, has done a 180-degree turn on the issue, coming out in favor of the Medicaid expansion. And state Rep. Jim Boyd, R-Bradenton, told the Sarasota County Commission in August that he thought the expansion debate would return at legislative committee meetings this fall, [according to the Sarasota Herald-Tribune](#).

Shea and other nonprofit leaders will address the legislative delegation directly at a public hearing next Wednesday morning, Sept. 18, when lawmakers are scheduled to meet with county and city officials. Shea is going to drive home the importance of working with ObamaCare and accepting federal funding.



*Ted Granger, president of the United Way of Florida, addresses a group. Image via Flickr*



The Alliance isn't the only local organization gearing up for 2014. Rob Lewis, Sarasota County's director of community and intergovernmental relations, presented the county's list of legislative priorities to the County Commission Wednesday. That board's top priority is to be left alone.

Lewis tells the *Sarasota News Leader* that one of the most pressing concerns each year is any legislation that might override local initiatives such as pain clinic and fertilizer rules. The county would also like its authority expanded, to be able to, for example, restrict smoking on county-owned properties. Additionally, it supports expanding Medicaid through ObamaCare.


Lewis' outline of priorities was generated through meetings with and input from several county departments. "At the staff level, each of our major subject matter disciplines keep an eye on what's being proposed," Lewis says.

The Legislature doesn't officially bang the gavel on its 2014 session till next March, but bills are already being filed, and committee

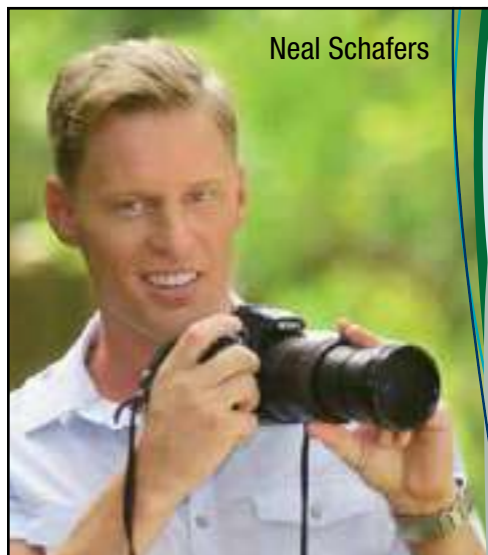
meetings begin in just 10 days. Lewis says anywhere between 2,000 and 3,000 bills will be filed — with maybe 400 of them potentially affecting local government. "We have our radar on all year 'round."

The County Commission quickly approved Lewis' report, with little feedback.

The county works through the Florida Association of Counties to push some of its agenda in Tallahassee. That coalition will meet over the next few months to hammer out priority issues that affect local governments around the state. "Ninety-nine-point-nine percent, if not 100 percent of the time, we are in absolute consistency with the state association position," says Lewis.

The Community Alliance will be lobbying in Tallahassee directly. Ted Granger, president of the United Way of Florida, told Legislative Summit attendees this week that, far and away, the best means of having an impact on the legislative process is in-person visits. "We gotta do it — life is about relationships," he said. "We've got to create those relationships." 

"A man is not finished when he's defeated; he's finished when he quits." — *Richard M. Nixon*



Neal Schafers

*Find joy in a picture-perfect smile.*

My interest in photography reminded me about how my smile made me unhappy. A childhood accident caused my permanent teeth to come in askew. I had seen how Dr. Koval restored the smile of a friend's father. With Dr. Koval, we discovered I also had cracked fillings and a shifted jaw — all which she corrected.

I am 100% satisfied with Dr. Koval's meticulous work and sincere care to make my smile look natural and picture-perfect.

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## A NEW AND UGLY TRICK

*New wrinkles in the foreclosure issue are plaguing homeowners. Photo by respres via Wikimedia Commons*

### FORECLOSURE 'MESS' NOT EVEN CLOSE TO BEING OVER

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

You would never know the financial crisis is alive and well, unless you listened to April Charney on Monday, Sept. 9. Home prices are rising again, foreclosures are no longer front-page news and employment is up — all the indicators are positive.

Charney made a repeat visit to a meeting of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA). Last year, a packed house heard Charney's remarks; this year, she still drew a crowd. Charney is an attorney specializing in foreclosure law, and through

activism and her educational efforts focused on her fellow lawyers, she is a nationally recognized expert on the subject.

She no longer accepts personal clients, concentrating instead on helping a new generation of attorneys learn the perils of "greed-gone-mad" financial institutions.

**“ I have no interest in making money. I only want space to provide this very sophisticated education. ”**

April Charney  
Foreclosure Expert

“Since last year, things are worse,” said Charney at the CONA meeting this week. “Nothing is better. From the 30,000-foot view to the view from the courtroom and the view



from the communities and neighborhood organizations, everybody has foreclosure fatigue.”

She and an associate were responsible for courts across the nation throwing out thousands of foreclosure cases because of what they called “robo-signing,” when banks produced fraudulent documents in attempts to seize property. No bank officers were ever prosecuted for trying to hoodwink the courts, though.

Instead, the infection of bogus financial instruments is spreading. The latest wrinkle: “forced placement of insurance.” Follow along on this trail of bad corporate behavior: A bank gives you a loan to buy a house, even though it knows you are not qualified. Then the bank gets rid of your mortgage by selling it to an aggregator, who bundles up the bad paper like a bale of rags (called “securitization”) and sells that product to investors around the world.

Pension funds loved those bundles — an investment literally “safe as houses,” or at least that was what the aggregators said. Today many municipal and state worker pension funds are backed by “securitized mortgages.”

Meanwhile, your home loan is “serviced” by a company that cashes your mortgage payment checks and keeps an eye on your escrow for insurance. Now here is the new wrinkle, called “forced placement.”

If you miss a payment, the servicing company can say part of the money was for escrow to pay for insurance. And since you missed the payment, your insurance is no good, but the firm will provide you another policy — for a much steeper rate, and with a savage catch: It no longer will be an insurance policy for fire,



*April Charney/Contributed photo*

theft and other losses. This new and expensive policy will cover no more than a default on your mortgage.

“Forced placement covers only the public amount of the debt,” said Charney. “The lender secures this single-interest product, what I would call a toxic product, from a collusion of entities, including the banks. This is not property insurance.”

The problem affects more than the homebuyer falling one month behind on the mortgage.

“Why does it matter?” asked Charney. “If this is an insurance product sold at a 600-percent markup, this affects my insurance, too. And these debts are becoming part of our pension plans and trusts. Meanwhile, property values over the past five years have drifted down. Almost everybody is underwater.”


Inaction or slow action by the federal government allows the financial shenanigans to flourish. “Loans that were sub-prime were not




supposed to be securitized. These are nothing-backed securities and do not meet the requirements of the IRS for pensions to invest in them," she pointed out.


But sophisticated bankers and financiers outpaced and outfoxed federal regulations. It is, as she put it, "Full employment for lawyers time."

All except Charney, that is. She has retired to Venice. "It's my give-back to the community that helped raise my children," she told the audience.

"I'm begging the city and county to provide homeowner and consumer education," she added. "I have no interest in making money. I only want space to provide this very sophisticated education." 



## Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Assns. (CONA)



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Contact us at:  
[conasarasota@hotmail.com](mailto:conasarasota@hotmail.com)  
 or send us a note at  
**CONA**  
 PO Box 15788  
 Sarasota, FL 34277.

### Welcome!

CONA is a coalition of over 70 neighborhoods, condo, homeowner and civic associations plus individuals dedicated to working to protect neighborhood interests and providing a voice for all neighborhoods in Sarasota County.

CONA exists to leverage the power of neighborhoods and to make Sarasota County more neighborhood friendly.

## CONA Blog

### Sarasota 2050 developments and Fiscal Neutrality explained

*Sarasota 2050 impacts - Fiscally neutrality explained*

We were asked recently by someone in the development community to explain CONA's concerns in regards to Fiscal Neutrality. We focused our meeting last Monday, June 10, on the very topic of fiscal neutrality and the Sarasota 2050 plan. From these discussions, we put together the following explanation with an example of a possible Sarasota 2050 development and fiscal neutrality to further explain our concerns.

#### *What is Fiscal Neutrality?*

Fiscal Neutrality is defined in Sarasota 2050 (Policy VOS2.9) as

*'Each Village and each Hamlet development within the Village/Open Space PMA shall provide adequate infrastructure that*





# ENTICING MORE TOURISTS

*The Biltmore Estate is the primary tourist attraction in the city of Asheville, NC. Photo from Wikimedia Commons*

## THE COUNTY COMMISSION AGREES TO HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING ON A NEW PROGRAM DESIGNED TO INCREASE VISITORS' OVERNIGHT STAYS IN SARASOTA COUNTY

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

The majority of the Sarasota County commissioners voiced approval this week for designating a revenue stream to fund capital projects and new destination events to bring even more visitors to the area.

Although she joined her colleagues in unanimously agreeing to advertise a public hearing on amending the county ordinance governing Tourist Development Tax (TDT)

revenue allocations, Commissioner Christine Robinson expressed concerns that more established organizations with experienced executive directors would have greater success

snaring the funding — just as she says they do each year when the county divvies up its arts and cultural Grant Awards.

The public hearing has been set for the afternoon of Sept. 25 at the Sarasota County Ad-

“*This process is remarkably similar to the arts grants funds, and I’m concerned about putting a similar process in place when we don’t quite have it right with [those] yet.*”

Christine Robinson  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County





ministration Center on Ringling Boulevard in downtown Sarasota. The worst-case scenario, Chief Financial Planning Officer Steve Botelho told the County Commission, would be the opening and immediate closing of the hearing and advertisement of another public hearing if tweaks the board and the county's Tourism Development Council (TDC) recommended in the ordinance language were too significant to enable the proceeding to go forward.

However, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh said he felt the changes commissioners suggested during their Sept. 10 discussion would not hamper holding the public hearing.

Although the TDC already discussed the proposed ordinance changes during its June 20 regular meeting, that board will consider them again on Sept. 19 during a session from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Commission Chambers in Sarasota.

## THE DETAILS

During her Sept. 10 presentation to the County Commission, Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County — the county's tourism office — explained that the funds generated by 12.5 percent of one penny of the TDT revenue is expected to generate about \$400,000 a year. (See related story in this issue.) Her board's idea, she said, was to use that money primarily for projects that would entice more visitors to stay overnight in Sarasota County, with the emphasis on "new or increased tourism."

A portion of the revenue could be allocated to a major destination event, she pointed out.



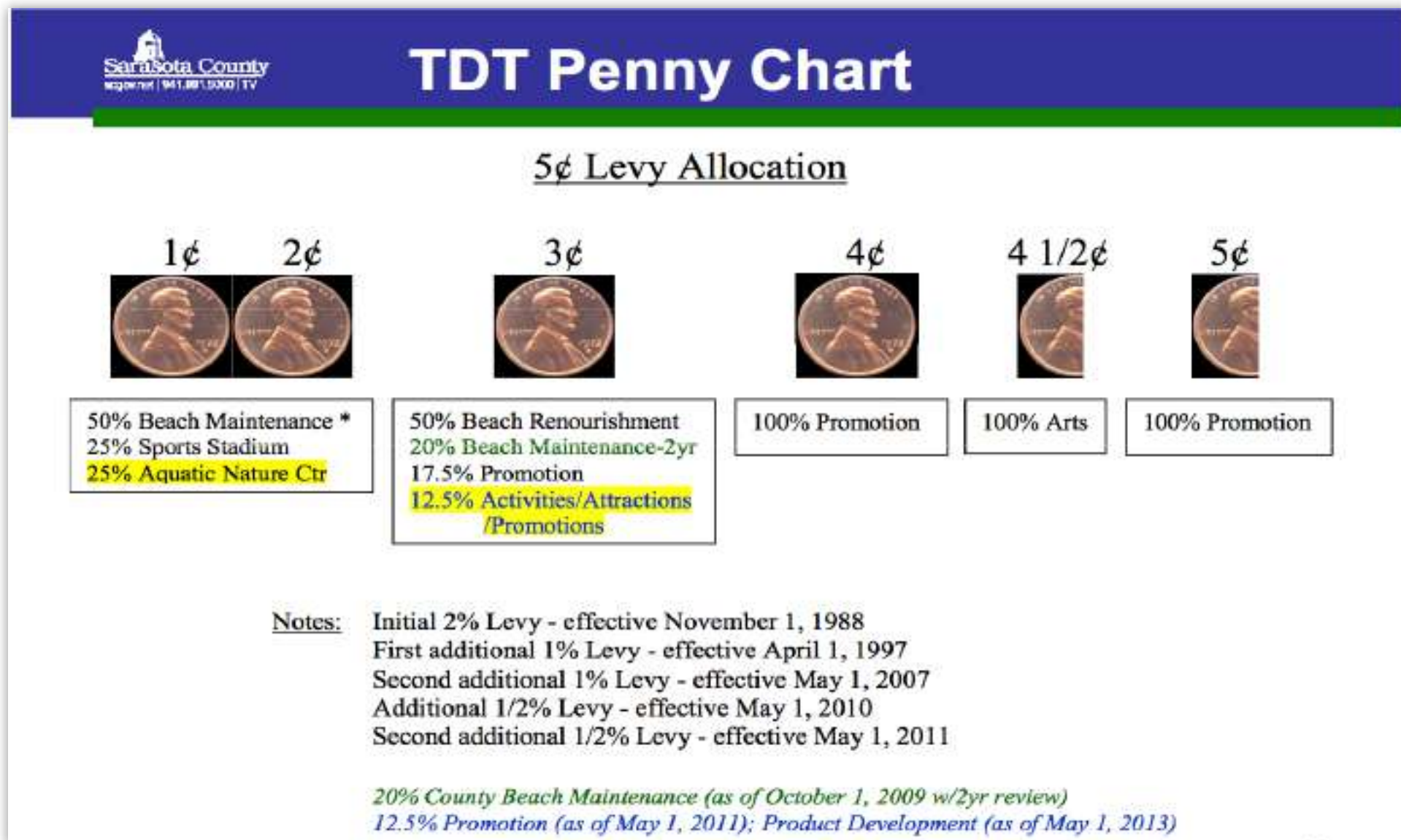
According to the guidelines her board envisioned, she continued, the funding pool would not pay for more than 50 percent of any project. An organization could apply for up to \$350,000 per year or \$700,000 spread over two years.

The funding cycle would be two years, Haley noted.

To be eligible, the resulting capital project would have to be open to the public and located in Sarasota County. It would also have to be publicly owned and operated and fall into one of the following categories: convention center, sports stadium, sports arena, coliseum or auditorium. It also could be an aquarium or museum, zoological park or fishing pier or nature center that was either publicly owned and operated or operated by a nonprofit or



*Visit Sarasota County President Virginia Haley addresses the County Commission in July. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*A chart shows how funds from each of the five pennies of the county's Tourist Development Tax are allocated. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*



ganization. Those are state stipulations that would apply, Haley explained.

The first funding cycle would be in the 2016 fiscal year, she noted.

## 'HEARTBURN'

"This process is remarkably similar to the arts grants funds," Robinson told Haley, "and I'm concerned about putting a similar process in place when we don't quite have it right with [those] yet."

Although she has argued that arts organizations in South County have had difficulty winning the arts grants awarded each year, Robinson continued, entities in the more northern part of the county also have encountered problems with the application process.

This new program would not provide money to "a multitude of projects" in each cycle, as the arts grants program does, Haley responded. Therefore, Visit Sarasota County staff would have greater flexibility in assisting potential applicants, she added. "You're not working with 30 groups like you are with the arts."

Then Robinson asked how an entity applying for one of the grants would show it could create more tourist room nights.

Haley explained that the concept for the capital projects funding came from a model she and Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Nora Patterson had learned about several years ago in Asheville, NC. The example tourism leaders in that city provided, Haley continued, involved expanding the city's children's

## TCEDP Process-Events

- Applicants must show new room nights generated and tracking process.
- Present economic impact potential.
- Event must occur in a "need" period of the year as determined by the VSC's TCEDP Review Committee.
- Demonstrate the other funding and partnerships in the project.
- Marketing plan to reach visitors outside of Sarasota County.



*A chart explains facets of a new capital project program for tourist development in Sarasota County. Image courtesy of Visit Sarasota County*



museum. Museum staff undertook marketing research to show they could entice families to stay an extra day in Asheville to tour the improved facility.

Before the children's museum was expanded, Haley said, research showed most visitors came to Asheville for one day, to see the [Biltmore Estate](#). Then they headed on to other nearby destinations. Both the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) and the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#) are in the vicinity of Asheville.

The backers of the children's museum "had to have a rigorous marketing program outside the area to attract visitors," Haley also pointed out.

County Administrator Randall Reid, who was the Alachua County manager before he came to Sarasota in January 2012, noted that research in that community showed people typically came to that county on day-long trips. County officials worked to develop new tourist attractions there to encourage people to stay overnight, he added.

Patterson told Haley she wanted to make sure the emphasis was put on capital projects in Sarasota County, not destination events.

"It was very much the intention of my board and the TDC," Haley said, that that would be the program's emphasis. However, her board felt flexibility should be allowed to fund "a very special event if something came along."

"I tend to agree with Nora," Barbetta said.

Assistance for existing events should come out of the increasing TDT revenue, Barbetta

pointed out, adding that he felt the commission should set a base for TDT money allocated for specific purposes. Then, any funds generated above that base could be used for other tourism-related activities.

Botelho clarified for Barbetta that any extra money generated by the 5-percent TDT tax automatically goes into the funds to which the five pennies are apportioned.

"That's troublesome to me," Barbetta said. "That's a windfall to each of those recipients."


In fact, Barbetta argued — as he had in earlier discussions — the percentage of the TDT penny going into the capital project pool Haley was addressing should be raised to 25 percent or even 50 percent, instead of staying at 12.5 percent.

"For me, it depends on what the needs are," Patterson told him.

Finally, Patterson agreed to a later discussion of Barbetta's proposal.

One other amendment to the ordinance would allow TDT revenue to be used for the operations of regattas at aquatic nature centers.

Nathan Benderson Park, off University Parkway, has been hosting regattas since 2009. Last week, it won the bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships.

Robinson agreed to vote to advertise the public hearing on the amendments to the ordinance, but she reiterated her concerns that some eligible entities would not end up with funding. "I've got some heartburn over this whole process." 





# JARGON AND REALITIES

*New city zoning regulations include an overlay district for Laurel Park. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **ANALYSIS: SARASOTA'S URBAN DESIGN STUDIO TEAM IS ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLIC AS IT WORKS TO RESHAPE THE CITY'S ZONING CODE**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

On Saturday, Sept. 6, a pair of planners brought the newest thinking in urban rule making to the Sarasota City Neighborhood Association (CCNA) meeting and pitched it way over audience members' heads.

Karin Murphy and Andrew Georgiadis have been hired by the city to establish an "Urban Design Studio" in the Federal Building at Orange Avenue and Ringling Boulevard. Inside, they will begin to fabricate new zoning regulations for the city based on something called "form-based codes."

"We want to use an incremental and phased approach," said Murphy. "Community comfort is a critical component." But when she added, "We don't care about the style of building, we care about the form," and struggled to explain some of the planning jargon, audience members grew restive.

"It is unfortunate we had representatives at the meeting who had no experience in land use or zoning regulations," said CCNA regular attendee Kafi Benz. "I think Karin was talking to the choir, to people who already had some basis of understanding."



“The 1974 zoning code is now just a pile of stuff,” added Avondale Representative and former Mayor Mollie Cardamone. “In my opinion, we’re asking this group to write a new zoning code for the entire city.”

Depending on your point of view, the effort to introduce a form-based code to the city comes at an auspicious — or awful — time.

## ONE MORE BALL TO JUGGLE

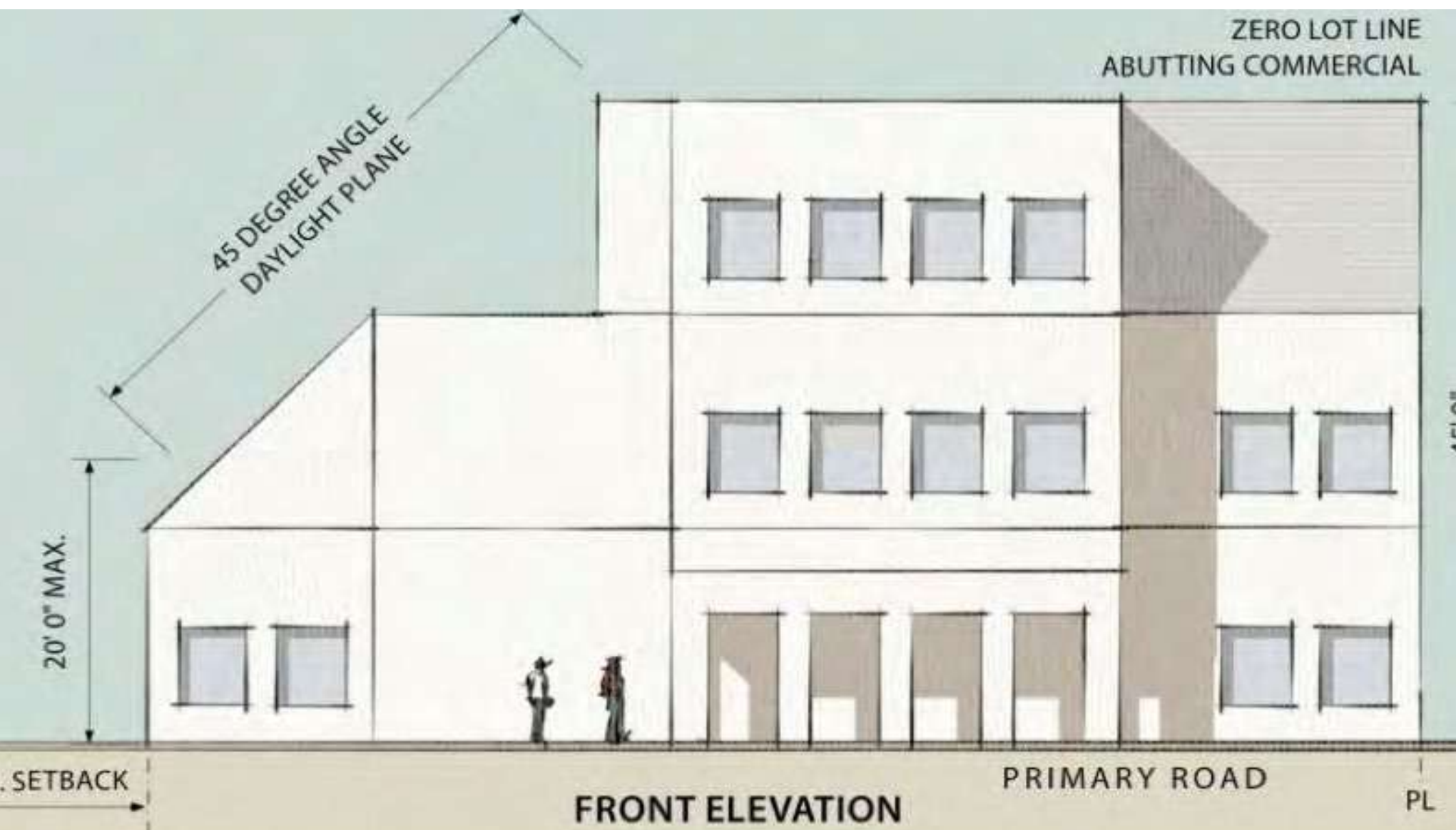
Ultimately, staff and the City Commission must monitor and guide Murphy’s efforts. But she is not alone in needing guidance.

The city and county wanted a Bus Rapid Transit route from the airport to downtown. The actual path is now in question after the county declined last month to conduct an alternative

route study. Success of such a route is linked to zoning along the line because density is a major determinant of its success.

Two new “overlay districts” have been approved in the city, one for Laurel Park and one for the North Tamiami Trail. They have different aims. Laurel Park is a historic district adjacent to intense downtown zoning; its overlay gives the neighborhood residents the right to undertake additional scrutiny of development plans proposed along their border.

The North Trail overlay is designed to encourage revitalization and rebuilding of Sarasota’s northern gateway. Despite the existence of three colleges and a regional-class art museum, the “gateway” continues to evidence decades-long problems with drug sales and prostitution. Old motels proliferate, and while



*Sarasota’s North Trail Overlay District was planned to provide design incentives to encourage developers to propose projects for the city’s ‘gateway.’ Image courtesy of City of Sarasota*



pressure for change is high, non-criminal activity is low.

As recent rains show, stormwater remains an unsolved problem in many parts of the city. Can form-based codes encourage the use of low impact design (LID) solutions to stormwater removal and treatment?

Student housing along the North Trail and affordable housing for working families in the downtown area are two more unsolved problems that could be addressed with a new zoning code. Meanwhile, developers are waking from a long slumber to begin new projects.

In other words, Murphy and Georgiadis are not working in a vacuum. Their form-based code must address existing and emerging

problems without fundamentally changing long-established relationships.

“We’re trying to break this down into manageable bites,” Murphy told the CCNA. “We need to get in front of this. It’s ramping up.”

## THE WAY AHEAD

The Urban Design Studio is located in the southwest corner of the Federal Building. Murphy says the team has an open-door policy on Friday afternoons, making time for questions and even presentations.

Just as Murphy has made overtures to the city’s neighborhoods — suggesting brown-bag lunchtime chats, for example — the city’s developers are making suggestions, too.



*The city’s Urban Design Studio is in the Federal Building at the corner of Orange Avenue and Ringling Boulevard. Photo by Norman Schimmel*





Ringling College of Art and Design is one of three institutions of higher learning in the north part of Sarasota. Image courtesy of Ringling College of Art and Design [homepage](#)




Georgiadis said he and Murphy are already helping guide existing development projects “to meet the spirit of form-based codes even before they are adopted.” Both neighbors and developers can look to Bradenton, where Murphy and Georgiadis created a form-based code system last year for the central part of the city.

Both neighbors and developers want the same thing — certainty. Neighborhoods are tired of “bait-and-switch” plans, while developers fear slowdown or turndown of their approvals over picayune rules.

One incentive that could be dangled to encourage residential development in areas that need it — student housing on the North Trail, for example — is a density bonus. “It would keep the [building] height the same, but in-

crease the number of units per acre,” noted Murphy.

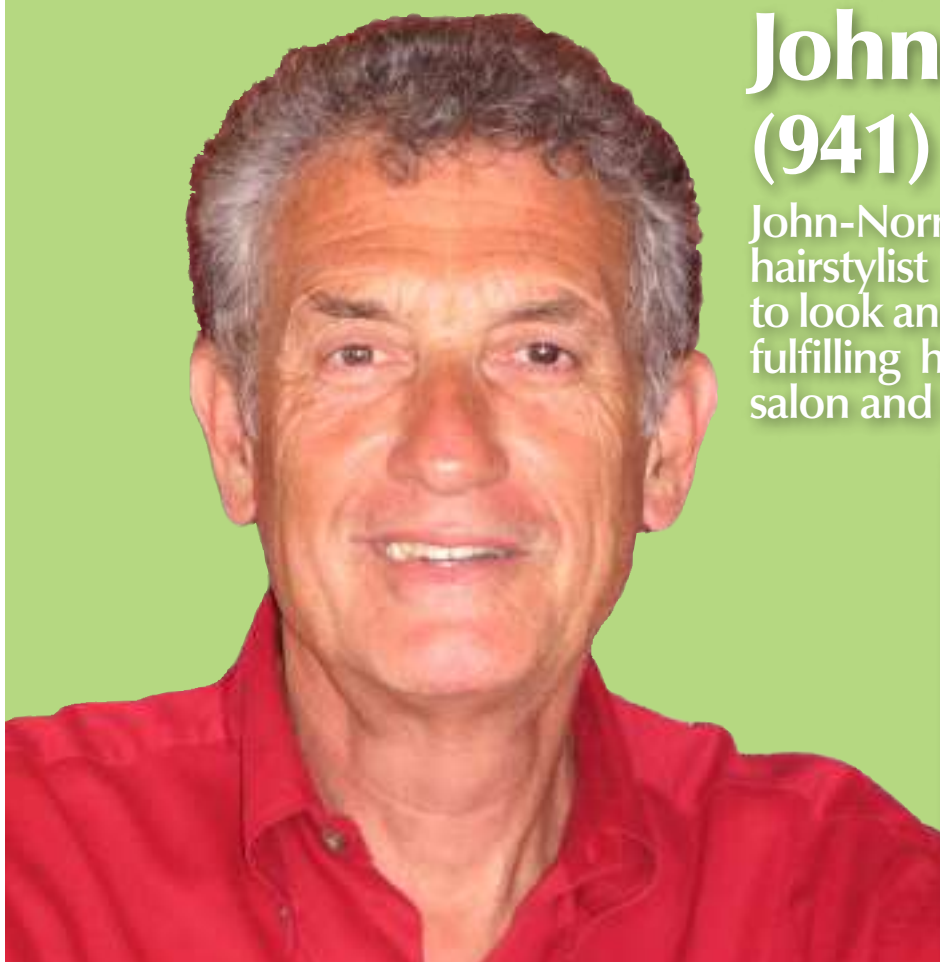
She has singled out five specific “catalyst projects” to demonstrate how form-based codes can get results that old “Euclidian zoning” could not. She mentioned the Marian Anderson brownfield site at U.S. 301 and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way; North Watertower Park, now a hotbed of criminal activity day and night; the section of U.S. 41 south to Webber Street; the area of Ringling Boulevard to Payne Park; and sprawl along Beneva Road north of Ringling Boulevard.

The Urban Design Studio plans an open house from 5:30 until 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 4. The team will use the patio surrounding the Federal Building, and perhaps the small pocket park to the north, when it welcomes guests. 

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# SCC PREVIEW



*Boats moored at the Sarasota Sailing Squadron create a white-dot vista for motorists driving over the Ringling Bridge. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **A SAILING SQUADRON REQUEST, EXPANSION OF THE BAYFRONT MOORING FIELD AND MORE DISCUSSION OF A HOMELESS SHELTER ARE ON THE AGENDA FOR SEPT. 16**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

Monday, Sept. 16, will be a watery one for the Sarasota city commissioners. Three major water-related items are on their agenda. Two concern volunteer efforts, and one marks progress in a decade-long journey to create a managed mooring field downtown.

A Sarasota Sailing Squadron issue — on the consent agenda — is a request for approval of a lease modification allowing the Squadron to spend \$250,828 to upgrade three docks. The organization rents its site in Ken Thompson Park from the city, and it is responsible for all upgrades.

Members are proud they have never asked the city for a dime in the past 65 years to maintain and improve their facility, considered among the finest volunteer sailing clubs in the world. This stands in contrast with the \$20 million in county funds used to create a rowing facility from a gravel pit near the interstate, members point out.

The second group of nautical volunteers to appear will brief the commission on the financial results of the 2013 Suncoast Super Boat Grand Prix Festival. Lucy Nicandri, festival director, will report the effort raised almost \$71,000 for children's charities.



The multiple events generated more than a quarter of a million dollars in state sales tax and local resort taxes. The total estimated financial impact on the community was \$17 million, an 18.8 percent increase from last year. More than 40,000 people witnessed the races in person, either from Lido Beach or in boats on the water, according to the agenda material.

As an aside, one of Nicandri's prepared slides indicates not a single person from Sarasota attended any of the Grand Prix events. It says 65 percent of the participants were from other parts of Florida, 23 percent were from other states and 12 percent were from foreign countries.

With luck, the numbers on the third aquatic presentation do reflect reality. It is Phase Two of the city's effort to create a 109-slip mooring facility in the old downtown anchorage. The commission will be asked to approve the selection of Dock and Marine Construction to install 64 moorings and test additional ones in the bay bottom for \$336,400.

Phase Two calls for adding 35 anchors, but the funding from the West Coast Inland Nav-

igation District (which is paying for the vast majority of the work) will allow the contractor to go ahead and put in place 29 of the 39 anchors that were proposed for Phase Three of the project.

The plan calls for the Phase Three installation to be finished next year, with a \$200,000 grant coming from the navigation district.

## LOOKING TO PINELLAS FOR HOPE

The issue of homelessness continues to percolate for the City Commission. After finishing a discussion of the State Street parking garage, the commissioners will share their thoughts and observations after visiting a full-service homeless shelter run by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.

It is being held up as a regional model by Dr. Robert Marbut, an expert hired by Sarasota County and its municipalities. The shelter is called Pinellas Safe Harbor, and it relocates the homeless far away from downtown St. Petersburg.

City Commissioner Susan Chapman wrote up "field notes" after her tour of the facility on Sept. 6. She concluded, "Pinellas Safe Har-



*The city has been making steady progress with its bayfront mooring field. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



bor is more than a homeless shelter. It is a regional behavior modification facility serving the most difficult population of homeless individuals in which individual case management safety, security and structure are paramount. This facility has assisted many chronic homeless people in receiving the services they need and in substantially eliminating feeding in parks and public spaces and other enabling behaviors.”

There are separate sections for women, veterans and chronic misfits. The unit is a jail diversion facility with a capacity for 470 residents. When Chapman visited, it held “about 387,” she wrote.

It is significantly cheaper than incarceration, with a cost of about \$13 per day, compared to \$106 per day for a stay in the Pinellas County jail. The annual operating budget for Pinellas Safe Harbor is \$1.6 million, with five cities contributing \$50,000 each and the county providing \$200,000 per year.

## A SHORT EVENING, MAYBE

While the commission’s afternoon session looks busy, the evening meeting, starting at 6 p.m., looks light. A couple of certificate presentations, recognition of the Sarasota Orchestra’s new maestro plus a resolution recognizing the life and work of former Sarasota Fire Department Chief Harold Stinchcomb will open the meeting.

What could have been a tumultuous public hearing on the Hampton Road project to put a medical spa in the Tahiti Park neighborhood will not happen. Instead, the owners are offering to “reboot” their initiative.


Staff has approved the project, but the Planning Board has turned it down. Neighbors



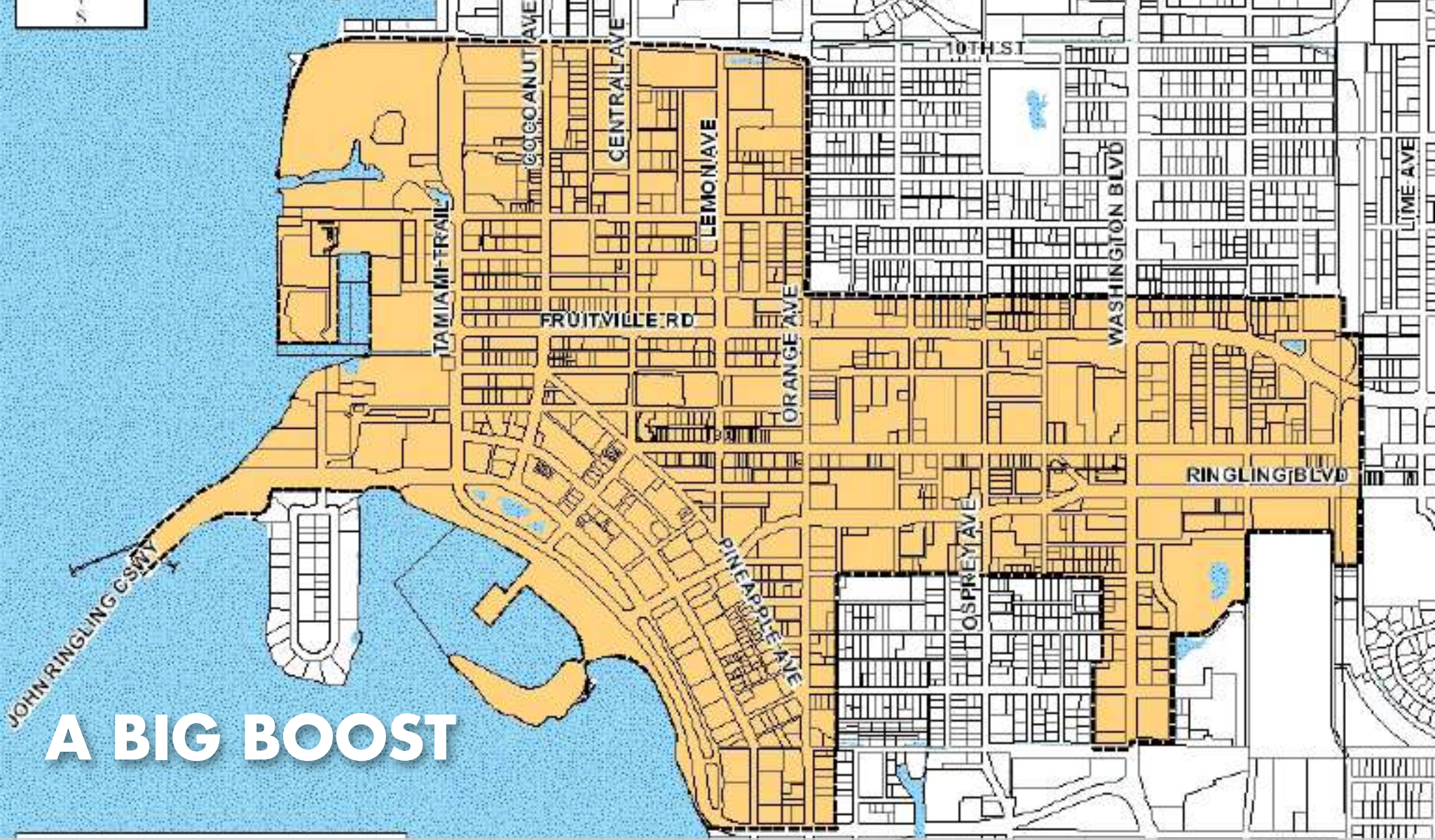
*City Commissioner Susan Chapman. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

are furious about a land-use change that happened under what some of them call “mysterious circumstances.”

In a letter to the commissioners dated Sept. 11, property owner Dr. Steve Bedi said he would voluntarily offer a site plan. “We are aware this decision will essentially require that we ‘reboot’ the process by once again undergoing review by the Development Review Committee and by participating in another public hearing before the planning board. We are eager to do this if it achieves our ultimate goal of securing the rezoning,” he wrote.

The commissioners could rebuff Bedi’s offer and proceed to make a decision on his request without a site plan. Hours of public hearings have been held, so there is no lack of evidence and testimony on the issue. All that remains in the process to date is rebuttal, commission discussion and a motion. 





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

## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE WEIGHING THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN DOWNTOWN SARASOTA SAY IT SHOULD GO ON BEYOND 2016

By Stan Zimmerman  
City Editor

Barring some great upset, there will be a future for Sarasota's Downtown Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). At least members of the committee charged with giving their opinion think so.

On Tuesday, Sept. 10, the CRA Extension Study Committee was of the unanimous opinion that the life of the taxing district should be extended beyond 2016.

"I think I heard everybody say they are in favor of extending the CRA," said Chairman David Merrill. None of the seven members attending dissented.

**“My fear is if we don't put a tool in place that will give us a clear vision of where we're going and provide a means, downtown will become an area you pass when you go from Lakewood Ranch to Siesta Key.**

Ernie DuBose  
Member  
CRA Extension Study Committee

The nine-member group got off to a slow start with work this week, as only three members were present at 5:30 p.m. Merrill decided to move forward in the guise of a discussion group, not requiring a quorum. As



the evening wore on, four more members appeared. Katie Leonard sent word she was quitting because she was moving away from the area, while member Michael Beaumier failed to attend.

The agenda was a bit odd. The members were meeting to decide what should be decided. Should the CRA be extended? If so, for how long? Should its boundaries be changed? Should it be governed in a different way? Those questions were reserved for later. But the big issue of survival was answered.

At stake is about \$7 million dollars every year that is now spent — mostly — on downtown Sarasota. The CRA uses a “tax-increment financing” scheme that skims city and county property tax revenue from downtown prop-

erty owners’ payments to be used only in that confined area to fight “slum and blight.”

When the district was established for a 30-year term in 1986, you could argue downtown had sections of slum and blight. To argue the same today would raise an eyebrow or two, among the brick pavers and fancy streetlights and rejuvenated building façades.

Because the taxing scheme depends on compounding, the amount it raises has grown substantially. The district froze at the 1986 level the amount of property tax revenue the city and county collect in the defined area. Any revenue coming in above that amount in subsequent years has been used to fund the CRA. As property values rose, so did the tax roll. This year the CRA pulled in roughly \$7 million.



*Members of the CRA extension committee meet in the City Commission Chambers in July. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*





*Most people would argue that the image downtown Sarasota presents these days is not one of 'slum and blight.' Photo by Norman Schimmel*



The money can be used for almost anything, the committee has been told. The group has met since January; it began by taking evidence and testimony about Sarasota's CRA and CRAs in other areas, and it heard from CRA experts. Now it is trying to formulate recommendations.

The first and most critical decision was made Tuesday, with the committee proposing the CRA continue into the future. That recommendation will be presented to both the Sarasota City and County commissions, which must both agree to the terms for a new interlocal agreement concerning any CRA in the future.

County commissioners suspect their nearly \$4 million annual share of the tax revenue could be better spent elsewhere. They shot off a rather testy letter to the committee — dated Sept. 6 — after it asked for input from other areas in the county that might want a CRA of their own. "Soliciting input regarding establishment of future CRAs is within the purview of the Board of County Commissioners," wrote Chairwoman Carolyn Mason.

The city is in a bind as well. It uses much of its \$3 million annual contribution to pay for police and landscaping, not to invest in the downtown's improvement. The use of CRA money for regular operations has drawn the concern of the committee, and that could result in a recommendation to both commissions as well.

Several committee members suggested the city should produce another plan to show the county commissioners where the money would go if the CRA were extended. The

current "plan" is actually the city's downtown master plan, adopted in 2001. In 2004, the City Commission modified it to allow spending on police and public works.

At one point in the Tuesday discussion, Merrill suggested, "Let's declare success. The Downtown CRA did its job. The new tool is the Downtown Improvement District. This is not slum and blight anymore. Just put the additional taxes in the general fund."


But in the end, nobody else was willing to support the idea of termination.

"My fear is if we don't put a tool in place that will give us a clear vision of where we're going and provide a means, downtown will become an area you pass when you go from Lakewood Ranch to Siesta Key," said member Ernie DuBose.

The committee is not afraid of big thinking. "We do need to extend the CRA as long as possible, with different boundaries for sure," said member Joel Freedman. "Carve out some of the downtown areas that are done. But east and north really need more work."

"The significance of downtown as an economic engine should be important to our deliberations," said member Mark Huey. "The future development of Sarasota County will go as downtown goes."

His is more than a lay viewpoint as he is the president and CEO of the county's Economic Development Corp.

The committee resumes its decision-making on Wednesday, Sept. 25, at 5:30 p.m. in Sarasota City Hall. 





## AN UNTAPPED \$8 MILLION

*A child competes in a BMX Strider event at the Sarasota complex. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*

### THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CONCLUDED THEIR FINAL BUDGET WORKSHOP WITHOUT UTILIZING FUNDS FREED UP BY A CHANGE IN THEIR DISASTER RESERVE POLICY

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

By the time they concluded their final, three-hour budget workshop on Sept. 6, the Sarasota County commissioners still had not committed one pot of money to any expenses — the \$8 million they officially freed up by changing their disaster reserve policy in an Aug. 27 vote.

“Is this \$8 million a sacred cow?” Commissioner Joe Barbetta asked with a chuckle. “Because it sounds like every time I try to

use some of it for the reasons we brought it out, we push it aside.”

He added, “It sounds like we’re going to leave today and still have the \$8 million intact.”

“We have differing opinions [on that money],” Commissioner Nora Patterson reminded him.

During their May 14 budget workshop, the commissioners split on a 3-2 vote to

“*It sounds like we’re going to leave today and still have the \$8 million intact.*”

Joe Barbetta  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County





approve a reduction in the county's disaster reserve to reflect 75 days of operations instead of 90. That action freed up about \$8.1 million that could be used on capital projects with an anticipated significant return on investment, Barbetta pointed out at the time.

Patterson and Commissioner Christine Robinson were in the minority on that vote, as they were again on Aug. 27.

One of the projects Barbetta pointed to during the May discussion involved the addition of a 5-meter ramp and the reconfiguration of the track at the county's BMX facility to make it the only one of its kind on the U.S. East Coast — and only the second in the nation.

However, when the commissioners voted unanimously on Aug. 27 to approve funding for that project, they agreed to have staff research whether the expense could come from

Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue instead of that \$8 million pool.

On Sept. 6, Patterson told her colleagues she had consulted with Deputy County Attorney Kathleen Schneider about the TDT money. Schneider had confirmed, Patterson said, that if the board designated the BMX project "a tourist development agent," then the TDT revenue could cover the \$1 million needed for the improvements at the county's [17th Street complex](#).

The money could come out of a TDT revenue pool allocated for capital expenses or improving existing facilities, Patterson pointed out, based on her discussion with Schneider. That portion generates about \$400,000 per year, Patterson added.

Therefore, the commission could allocate the money generated by that portion of a



*Vice Chairman Charles Hines and Commissioner Nora Patterson review budget material during a Sept. 6 workshop. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



TDT penny for two years and possibly take the remaining \$200,000 from another fund set up to pay back the bond issue it used to fund improvements at Ed Smith Stadium as part of the deal to bring the Baltimore Orioles to Sarasota for spring training.

Patterson said she also had discussed the situation with Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County (VSC), who indicated the VSC board would be agreeable to the commission's using the TDT money for the BMX facility.

Because of the need to move forward quickly with the BMX project, Patterson continued — with another Florida city interested in building a track with the features proposed for Sarasota — Schneider said the commission could borrow the money now from the beach renourishment fund toward which another portion of TDT revenue goes. That loan could be paid back from the other TDT revenue pot, Patterson added.

The beach renourishment money would not be needed in the next two years, Patterson pointed out.

That would leave the \$8 million “for some later discussions,” she said.

When Barbetta asked County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh to weigh in on Patterson's proposal, DeMarsh replied, “It is doable. It will require a minor amendment to the [TDT] ordinance ...”

Patterson made a motion to direct County Administrator Randall Reid to work with the Office of the County Attorney and other staff to prepare a plan “as quickly as possible” that would encumber the aforementioned portion



*Commissioner Joe Barbetta contemplates budget material during a June workshop. File photo*

of the TDT revenue to pay for as much of the BMX project as possible.

Robinson seconded the motion. Both she and Barbetta thanked Patterson for the effort she put into the research.

At some future point, Barbetta said, he would like for the board to discuss increasing the amount of TDT revenue that can be used for capital projects — possibly raising it from 12.5 percent to as much as 25 percent. (See the related article in this issue.) He pointed out that TDT revenue is up about 11 percent year-to-date, so the board should utilize more of it on other projects that could generate a good return on investment, such as new soccer and lacrosse fields in the county.

If the board had that discussion, Robinson told him, she would prefer it came after Haley and her board, as well as the county's Tourism Development Council, had opportunities to weigh in first.

Barbetta was agreeable to that. 



# 'RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY'



*The stormwater project adjacent to Siesta Public Beach has been designed to keep the Gulf of Mexico clean enough to prevent future 'no swimming' advisories. File photo*

## THE PROJECT MANAGER FOR A NEW STORMWATER SYSTEM NEXT TO SIESTA PUBLIC BEACH IS HOPING FOR DRIER WEATHER SO WORK CAN GET UNDER WAY AGAIN

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

Although the Beach Road Drainage Project on Siesta Key — adjacent to the public beach — has been on hold for about two weeks because of almost incessant rain, county staff planned to collect water samples on Sept. 11 that could lead soon to the resumption of work, the project manager told *The Sarasota News Leader* this week.

Original plans called for a November completion date, but the rain has led the contractor to push that back to Feb-

ruary 2014, Alex Boudreau said on Sept. 11. "We've not accepted that schedule," he pointed out. Referring to contractors, he continued, "You ask big and see what happens."

Still, Boudreau said, the project should be substantially completed by Jan. 20, 2014, barring any further extended delays.

On April 23, the County Commission approved the award of

**“We plan for how to handle water, but you plan for what you can reasonably expect.”**

Curtis Smith  
Project Manager  
Sarasota County





a \$4,550,683.28 bid to Forsberg Construction Inc. of Punta Gorda to undertake the stormwater work that is designed to prevent future “No swimming” advisories at Siesta Public Beach because of unhealthful bacterial counts.

The innovative 3,000-foot pipeline into the Gulf of Mexico — one of the project’s primary elements — has been completed, Boudreau told the *News Leader*. However, high bacterial counts in rainwater pooled at the site where a new one-acre retention pond will be built have held up the rest of the work, he pointed out.

Results of water samples collected on Sept. 11 should be back in about 24 hours, he noted. Then, Boudreau continued, staff would work with the contractor to determine the next steps.

If the bacterial counts are low enough, the water either could be pumped into the Gulf of

Mexico through the new pipeline or pumped into the existing ditch that runs across the beach, through which the water would flow into the gulf, he explained. Staff is working on obtaining permits to pump the water through the pipeline, Boudreau added, in the event that appears to be the better option.

He was hopeful that a combination of the bacteria’s exposure to sunlight — with less rain this week — and natural evaporation have produced desirable enough results to enable the contractor to get back to work.

Forsberg Construction did create a number of settling ponds on the site when it began the project, Boudreau pointed out, to allow sediment to settle out so the water could be allowed to flow through that existing ditch across the beach. However, no one anticipated the amount of rainfall the region would see this summer, he added.



*The Gulf and Bay Club condos tower over the site where clearing was under way in August for the stormwater project. File photo*



Siesta Key Association President Catherine Luckner said during that organization's Sept. 5 meeting that representatives of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) told her the island has had 30 inches of rain since late June.

"We have had an exorbitant amount of rain this season," Boudreau agreed.

"Way out of the ordinary," is how Curtis Smith, another manager of the stormwater project, characterized it during an interview with the *News Leader* on Sept. 11. "We plan for how to handle water," Smith said, "but you plan for what you can reasonably expect."

## CONDO RESIDENTS' COMPLAINTS

The site of the new retention pond is at the end point of the upstream drainage system on that part of Siesta Key, Boudreau explained, which has exacerbated the rainwater pooling effect.

Residents and the manager of the [Gulf & Bay Club](#) condominium complex, adjacent to the stormwater project site, [complained to Commissioner Nora Patterson](#) about the pumping of water from the site before the work stopped.

Smith said county staff have strived to determine the best way to handle those complaints.



A graphic shows plans for vegetation mitigation after the Beach Road Drainage Project has been completed on Siesta Key. Image courtesy Sarasota County



Luckner noted during the SKA meeting that she and her directors also had heard complaints from Gulf & Bay Club residents. "They have been very concerned about runoff from the project."

However, one factor apparently linked to the condominium complex's worries was the brown tint of that runoff, Luckner noted. Mangroves in a freshwater area tend to produce high amounts of tannic acid, she explained, which can make water appear brown without creating any type of harmful effect.

Still, Luckner said, "It's kind of frightening" to see that shade of water on the beach.

Luckner also pointed out that Patterson provided her with a copy of a recent report from the county Health Department that reassured her no significant mosquito problems had been detected at the site.

On Aug. 31, Matthew Smith, the county's mosquito control manager, sent an email to Assistant County Administrator Lee Ann Lowery, saying, he had visited the stormwater project site and found most of the areas with standing water did not have breeding mosquito populations. He did treat areas where he discovered low-level breeding, he continued. "No adult mosquitoes were found in landing rate surveys," he added, noting, "The site will be under regular surveillance until the project is finished."

Smith added that he was unable to reach Tom Fastiggi, manager of the Gulf & Bay Club, when he was at the site, but he would try again on Sept. 3. Smith was hopeful he could gain access to space under the complex's F building, because a dry well or retention-type area under that building was flooded, "although [that] does not appear to be a result of the county construction site [issues]."




*(From left) Siesta Key Association Director Deet Jonker, President Catherine Luckner and Directors Beverly Arias and Ron Flynn prepare for the start of their Sept. 5 meeting. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

Patterson subsequently emailed Fastiggi to let him know Smith wanted to assist with the situation.

## EXTRA GRANT AID

On one other positive note, Curtis Smith told the *News Leader* the county was able to obtain about \$22,000 more in grant funds from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to help pay for the project.

The district's board originally approved a grant up to \$975,000 when the project was estimated to cost \$1.5 million.

Before the County Commission approved the bid award on March 19, commissioners complained about project consultants being far off the mark of the final cost. When Patterson asked whether SWFWMD would consider increasing its grant amount, Program Manager Carolyn Eastwood explained that staff already was corresponding with district representatives on that point. 



# AN 80-PERCENT SUCCESS RATE



## FOUR OF FIVE SNOWY PLOVER CHICKS THAT HATCHED SURVIVED THIS SUMMER ON SIESTA KEY, SARASOTA AUDUBON VOLUNTEERS REPORT

By Rachel Brown Hackney

*Editor*

The good news is that Sarasota Audubon volunteers realized an 80-percent success rate this season with the number of endangered snowy plovers on Siesta Public Beach that reached the fledging stage after hatching — meaning they could fly on their own.

The bad news is that even an adult plover has succumbed to what appears to be a type of neurotoxin that has attacked all types of birds on Siesta's beach, volunteers reported during the Sept. 5 Siesta Key Association (SKA) meeting.

Bob Luckner of Siesta Key, who coordinated the work of the volunteers — or “chick checkers” — during the snowy plover nesting season, told about 20 people at the monthly SKA session that not only did four of the five snowy plover hatchlings survive, but Sarasota Audubon also recorded four fledglings from

Least Tern nests in the area of Beach Access 4 this year.

“We were really happy about that,” Luckner added.

Last year, only one snowy plover chick



*We know the population we have on the [Siesta] beach is running from about 16 to 22 birds.*

Dr. Allan Worms  
Wildlife Biologist



*(Above) A snowy plover chick explores its home on Sanibel Island. Photo by Hans Hillewaert via Wikimedia Commons*



made it to the fledging stage, which takes about 40 days, according to statistics Luckner provided.

Sarasota Audubon representatives who attended a recent Florida Shorebird Alliance meeting in Clearwater learned that Siesta had the most successful snowy plover nesting season of all communities this year on the west coast of Florida, Luckner pointed out.

He offered the other following details:

- 13 snowy plover nests were discovered on Siesta Public Beach, with two producing chicks.
- Seventy-four percent of the nest failures were attributed to human disturbances of the seven established buffers.
- Twenty-seven percent of the failures were a result of predation by snakes, crows and fire ants.
- Nine percent of the failures were attributed to the beach flooding that resulted from Tropical Storm Andrea's passage offshore in June.
- Volunteers checked the nesting areas twice a day, putting in 1,200 hours.

After incidents earlier this year during which people violated buffers set up to protect the plovers, Luckner continued, representatives of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office stepped up patrols. Additionally, he said, on two occasions, a deputy and an FWC officer "with guns and badges" spoke



*The Siesta Key Association on Sept. 5 recognized Sarasota Audubon volunteers who kept a close watch on snowy plovers during the past nesting season. Volunteer coordinator Bob Luckner (right) gives SKA T-shirts to (from left) Joy Turner, Pat Sharp and Dick Miles. Not pictured is Allan Worms. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



to people who had been identified as perpetrating the vandalism and told them to cease disturbing the buffers. “And, you know what,” Luckner said. “They did! ... It seems to make a difference when a guy with a gun shows up.”

When SKA Director Joe Volpe asked whether it would be better for the Sarasota Audubon group to keep up permanent buffers for the plovers, Luckner said the volunteers were not inclined to do that. “We like the people in the winter to enjoy the beach,” he added.

Sgt. Scott Osborne, leader of the Sheriff’s Office’s Community Policing Station in Siesta Village, has told *The Sarasota News Leader* in the past that some people who live along the beach have been resentful of the buffers, claiming the roped-off areas impede their access to the shore.

“We’ll be back in April,” Luckner told the SKA audience, adding, with a chuckle, that putting

up the buffers made him think of the film *Field of Dreams*: “Build it and they’ll come.” The snowy plovers seem to show up after the buffers are erected, he pointed out. Moreover, the birds tend to come back to the areas where they hatch.

Retired wildlife biologist Worms, who is also a Sarasota Audubon volunteer, told SKA members during their August meeting that a number of snowy plovers live on Siesta Key. The birds may leave occasionally to visit Lido Beach, he noted, and sometimes in the fall and winter they fly to the Bahamas for warmer weather, but they return.

Moreover, he pointed out, “We know the population we have on the [Siesta] beach is running from about 16 to 22 birds.”

Altogether, Worms told *The Sarasota News Leader* in July, only about 220 snowy plovers remain in Florida, according to well-known FWC wildlife biologist Nancy Douglass.



*An adult snowy plover makes its home on Siesta Key. Photo courtesy of Catherine Luckner*





A sign at Beach Access 7 on Siesta Key is designed to educate the public about snowy plovers. File photo



[An Aug. 22 article by Gyorgy Szimuly of World Waders](#) notes that snowy plovers are on the “Yellow” list of the US Watchlist, a joint project of the American Bird Conservancy and the National Audubon Society. That designation means the species is in decline but at a much slower rate than species in the “Red” category. However, the article notes, evidence shows the snowy plover population is suffering “from ... increasing human and pet disturbance,” and “Beaches intensively used by humans will keep [the species] vulnerable to further population declines.”

These factors indicate the bird could be moved to the “Red” list at some point, the article adds.

FWC has issued a plan of action to try to encourage expansion of the snowy plover population or, at least, preservation of the current level on Florida beaches, the article reports.

## DYING BIRDS

On the negative side of the report during the SKA meeting, Catherine Luckner — Bob’s wife and the SKA president — said that during the previous eight to 10 days, a number of birds had died because of paralysis of their legs and subsequent inability to obtain food.

Those birds had been located in areas where rainwater pooling occurred, near the dunes, she pointed out. One school of thought was that the birds had been exposed to a chemical produced by decaying vegetative material in the water.

“We have had all bird species impacted,” she noted. One adult snowy plover found in dis-

tress on Labor Day, Luckner continued, died on Sept. 3


Phone numbers for the Venice Wildlife Center and Save Our Seabirds, located on Longboat Key, are available on the [SKA’s homepage](#), she added. (For Save Our Seabirds, the number is 388-3010. For the Venice Wildlife Center, the regular number is 484-9657; the after-hours emergency number is 416-4967.)

Anyone seeing a suffering bird should call one of those numbers; each of the centers has personnel available to come pick up the bird and try to treat it, Luckner said. “Don’t try to [transport a bird] yourself.”

When SKA Director Beverly B. Arias asked whether this incidence of illness is unusual, Catherine Luckner responded that FWC representatives told her that 30 inches of rain had been recorded on the island since late June, with showers “almost every day.”

According to statistics provided by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, actual rainfall in the South Region of the state — which includes Sarasota County — was 40.94 inches from January through August, compared to a historical average of 38.12 inches.

Bob Luckner added that the effect on the birds resembled the type of adverse neurological impact produced by red tide, though red tide does not appear to be the culprit. Large numbers of migrating birds sharing territory can spread disease, he pointed out, so it is possible the problem is avian botulism.

Both Save Our Seabirds and FWC are doing necropsies on the deceased birds, he continued, with the hope of determining the cause of the illness. 




# REMEMBERING A TRAGIC DAY



## THE SARASOTA POLICE DEPARTMENT HOSTS A 12TH ANNIVERSARY OBSERVANCE OF 9/11

*Staff Reports*

The Sarasota Police Department on Adams Lane was the setting for the somber observance this week of the 12th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Police officers gathered with representatives of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and Fire Department as well as city leaders to pay respects to the 2,996 people who died on 9/11 in New York City and Washington, D.C. and in the crash of Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. 



*Sarasota Military Academy student Houston Scott plays the bagpipes. Photo by Kelly French*





*Among the audience members are County Fire Chief Mike Tobias (second from right), City Commissioners Suzanne Atwell and Susan Chapman (third and fourth from right), Mayor Shannon Snyder (fifth from right) and Vice Mayor Willie Shaw (fourth from left). Photo by Kelly French*



*Members of the Sarasota Police Department gather at the ceremony. Photo by Kelly French*





*The American flag waves from the snorkel of a county fire truck. Photo by Kelly French*





# SARASOTA POLICE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS



*Wreaths stand in the Police Department lobby. Photo by Norman Schimmel*





*The city's 9/11 memorial is inside the Police Department. Photo by Kelly French*





*Mayor Shannon Snyder addresses those gathered for the observance. Photo by Kelly French*





*Shelter dogs and cats needing good homes will be among those available for adoption Sept. 13-15 at PetSmart in The Landings. Photo by Arantz via Wikimedia Commons*

## ANIMAL SERVICES TO BE PART OF NATIONAL ADOPTION EVENT

Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Animal Services division will participate in PetSmart Charities® National Adoption Weekend this Friday through Sunday, Sept. 13-15, the office has announced.

Volunteers from [People-4-Paws](#) will bring adoptable dogs and cats from the shelter to PetSmart in The Landings shopping plaza, located at 4942 South Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, a news release says.

The PetSmart Charities' adoption center inside PetSmart will be open from 9 a.m. to 9

p.m. Friday and Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

"More than 2,000 animal adoption partners are participating in this special event throughout the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico," the release notes. PetSmart will also post updates and photos to its social media accounts throughout the weekend.

To learn more about the event visit <http://pets.petSMART.com/adoptions>.



## SCHOOL BOARD REACHES CONTRACT AGREEMENT WITH UNION

The negotiating teams for the Sarasota County School Board and the Sarasota Classified/Teachers Association reached an agreement Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 11, on a contract for the 2013-14 school year, the school district has announced.

“The agreement provides that all bargaining unit employees, including teachers and support staff such as classroom aides, bus drivers and cafeteria workers, will receive a 3.25-percent raise for the 2013-14 school year,” a news release says. “It is the first across-the-board increase in the salary schedules in five years.”

That increase will be funded primarily by \$6.3 million that the Florida Legislature mandated for the specific purpose of employee raises, the release notes. “The School Board will add \$1.5 million to that amount to allow all bar-

gaining unit employees to receive a 3.25-percent raise,” the release continues. “The parties agreed that, in the event the Legislature does not continue the special salary appropriation, the salary schedules will be reduced by 3.25 percent in the future.”

The parties also agreed to restore life insurance coverage for employees to the level of \$50,000; it had been reduced to \$25,000. The increase was negotiated with a new insurance provider at no additional cost to the School Board, the release points out.

The final agreement must be approved by the School Board and ratified by the employees before it can take effect. It is anticipated the approvals will occur in mid-October, the release adds. All salary increases will be retroactive to July 1.



*Sarasota County Schools Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner (right) discusses the budget with the School Board earlier this year. Photo by Scott Proffitt*



## RESIDENTS INVITED TO LIFT STATION 87 MEETINGS

The City of Sarasota will hold two meetings this month to provide updates to the public on the Lift Station 87 (LS 87) Project: a project team session that will be open to the public and a community meeting, the city has announced.

The LS 87 Project team session has been set for Wednesday, Sept. 18, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the SRQ Media Room in the City Hall Annex, 1565 First St., Sarasota.

The community meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 19, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall, 1565 First St.

“We are committed to an open and transparent process as we move forward with this project,” said Sarasota Utility Director Mitt Tidwell in a news release.

Both meetings will include a discussion of the first phase of project work as well as the work schedule, the release notes.

The meetings will be conducted by city staff and the city’s new engineer of record for the project, McKim & Creed, the release adds

“Once completed, the LS 87 Project will improve wastewater service and reliability for the City of Sarasota customers and protect the environment,” the release says. The new lift station will replace existing Lift Station 7, located at 935 Pomelo Ave. Wastewater flow will be redirected from LS 7 to LS 87, located in Luke Wood Park, via a new gravity sewer pipeline that will need to be constructed under Hudson Bayou, the release points out.

A project website will be developed to keep residents informed about the project’s schedule. For more information about the LS 87 Project, visit [www.sarasotagov.com/OALP\\_Utility\\_Project/](http://www.sarasotagov.com/OALP_Utility_Project/). Interested parties also may subscribe to email updates at [www.egovlink.com/sarasota/subscriptions/subscribe.asp](http://www.egovlink.com/sarasota/subscriptions/subscribe.asp).



*Before the city halted the project late last year, the sign for the Lift Station 87 project was highly visible near downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## ORIOLES TO HOST WALK FOR THE KIDS ON SEPT. 14

The Baltimore Orioles will host the annual Walk for the Kids to support the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota County on Sept. 14 at Ed Smith Stadium, the team has announced.

“The Oriole Bird will lead hundreds of walkers in a one-mile circuit around the Orioles’ year-round sports and entertainment facility to raise funds for the four local clubs, which are located in Newtown, central Sarasota, Venice and North Port,” a news release says.

“We are thrilled that the Orioles are once again a lead partner in Walk for the Kids, which is the major annual fundraiser for our clubs [through which] we strive to provide a world-class experience that assures success is within reach of every young person who walks through our doors,” said Bill Sadlo, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota County, in the release. “Our goal is to have all members on track to graduate from high school with a plan for the future, demonstrating good character and citizenship and living a healthy lifestyle.”

The clubs provide afterschool and summer programs for more than 5,500 children and youth ages 6 to 18 throughout Sarasota County, the release notes.

“The Boys & Girls Clubs and Major League Baseball share a special, national partnership, and the Orioles are strong supporters of the local organization,” said David Rovine, vice president for the Orioles in Sarasota in the release. “Following last year’s successful Walk for the Kids at Ed Smith Stadium, we are pleased to again host the event and donate our celebrity mascot, the Oriole Bird, to promote the major annual fundraiser for our local

clubs in Sarasota County. The Orioles strongly encourage Sarasota County residents to join a Walk team or pledge online to support the Boys & Girls Clubs, an organization that is helping to shape the future of our community by influencing youth in a positive way,” Rovine added in the release.

The Walk is \$25 for adults and free for children under 18, the release notes. Participants will complete a one-mile circuit around the outside of the stadium and then enter the stadium “for lots of fun, free activities,” the release concludes.



*The Oriole Bird poses on the pitcher's mound at Ed Smith Stadium. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## STUDENTS TO BE HONORED FOR 'STOP THE VIOLENCE' ESSAYS

The Sarasota City Commission next week will honor students “who wrote thought-provoking and heartfelt essays during summer vacation about how to ‘Stop the Violence’ in Sarasota,” the city has announced.

The recognition will take place Monday, Sept. 16, at 6 p.m. during the regular City Commission meeting at City Hall, 1565 First St. Each of the top essay winners will receive a certificate of appreciation from Mayor Shannon Snyder and the commission, a news release says.

A total of 81 students attending summer programs at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, Roy McBean Boys and Girls Club and Newtown Estates volunteered to pen essays on the theme, “What Can I Do (Or What Am I Doing) To Stop The Violence In My Community,” the release notes. The participants ranged in age from 7 to 19.

One 12-year-old boy wrote, “The robberies and drugs I see and hear about are a wound to my heart ... One thing I can do to stop the violence in my community is by speaking up and setting examples for the many other people around me.”

[Click here to see a video of the top winners reading their essays.](#)

“The essays were eye-opening and demonstrated just how aware our youth really are of the violence and crime that is going on around them,” said Jerry Fogle, Robert L. Taylor Community Complex manager, who interacts with many of the young writers regularly. “It breaks my heart to know that our youth are dealing with things that would be difficult for adults. I was truly inspired by the amazing ideas of our youth to decrease violence and crime and the bravery and courage to stand up to the bad guy, which is a valuable lesson for adults.”

Youth are an integral aspect of the newly re-established community policing effort by the Sarasota Police Department, the release points out. “With the recent violence in the region, a *Stop the Violence* campaign was launched in partnership with the Police Department and the FOCUS Ministerial Alliance,” the release continues.

Shortly after a deadly shooting at a community event in neighboring Manatee County, Sarasota police officers and Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office deputies talked with children at the Taylor Complex, Roy McBean Boys and Girls Club and Newtown Estates “about violence and the right and wrong ways to solve disputes,” the release notes.

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## NOVA REPUBLICAN CLUB TO MEET THE MEDIA

On Tuesday, Sept. 17, **NOVA** — the Nokomis Osprey Venice Area Republican Club — will host a frontline panel of experts to *Meet the Media* from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Nokomis Community Center, 234 Nippino Trail, Nokomis.

The panelists who have been invited to participate are Eric Ernst, a columnist for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*; Kat Hughes, editor of the *Business Observer*; and Bill Church,

executive editor of the *Herald-Tribune*. The panel will be moderated by Rochelle Dudley, co-founder of *PoliticallyPersonal.com* and president of OnMessage Strategic Communications.

The event is free. Non-members and guests are welcome. For additional information, contact Frank Patti at 408-7423 or visit [www.novagop.com](http://www.novagop.com).



## NEW COLLEGE RANKED NO. 5 AMONG PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

*U.S. News & World Report* has ranked New College of Florida the nation's No. 5 public liberal arts college in the magazine's 2014 "Best Colleges" edition, New College has announced.

The rankings were released Sept. 10 on the magazine's [website](#).

New College ranked 89th among all national liberal arts colleges, public and private, the ninth consecutive year the school has placed in the top 100, a news release notes. "It is also the ninth consecutive year that New College has placed in the top six public liberal arts colleges," the release adds.

New College is the only Florida liberal arts college to be listed among the magazine's top 100.

*U.S. News & World Report* cited several statistics behind New College's strong showing:

- One-quarter of students have SAT scores of 1410 or higher.

- Thirty-five percent of New College freshmen were in the top 10 percent of their high school classes.
- Seventy-three percent of New College classes have fewer than 20 students.
- Only 1 percent of New College classes have 50 or more students.

*U.S. News & World Report* also ranked New College No. 21 for colleges whose students graduate with the least amount of debt, averaging \$18,276. The magazine reported that only 39 percent of the New College graduates had any debt at all at graduation, the fifth-lowest percentage among the listed colleges, the release points out.

In January, *U.S. News & World Report* released supplemental data showing that New College ranks sixth in the country for the percentage of students who go on to graduate school within a year of graduation, the release continues.

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## RIVER ROAD/US. 41 INTERSECTION TO CLOSE TEMPORARILY

The intersection of River Road and U.S. 41 will be closed from 10 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 15, through Monday, Sept. 16, for the installation of a signal truss over the roadway, Sarasota County has announced.

The timing of the installation is planned to minimize traffic delays for motorists, a news release says. The county will have message boards located at nearby major intersections and on Interstate 75 to remind motorists of the pending temporary closure.

Sarasota County Sheriff's deputies will be posted at the intersection's entrances to control traffic the release notes. Motorists are encouraged to seek alternate routes during this time frame.

For more information, visit [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net) or contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 and ask about the River Road and U.S. 41 Intersection Improvements Project.

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## ORIOLES TO HOST GAMES SEPT. 16 THROUGH OCT. 8

The Baltimore Orioles will host the team's Fall Instructional League at Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota with games that will be free and open to the public from Sept. 16 through Oct. 8, the team has announced.

"The Instructional League program focuses on specific individual development while providing additional playing time to accelerate a player's progress through the minor league system," an Orioles news release says.

Games will be played on the main field, with parking available in the East Lot at no charge. Spectators may enter the ballpark through the East Gate. The full Instructional League season schedule is available online at

[www.orioles.com/sarasota](http://www.orioles.com/sarasota). The 2013 home schedule is below:

- Monday, Sept. 16: 1 p.m. versus the Rays.
- Thursday, Sept. 19: 1 p.m. versus the Rays.
- Friday, Sept. 20: noon versus the Twins.
- Saturday, Sept. 21: 10 a.m. versus St. Petersburg College.
- Monday, Sept. 23: 1 p.m. versus the Red Sox.
- Monday, Sept. 30 noon versus the Twins.
- Tuesday, Oct. 1: 1 p.m. versus the Red Sox.
- Saturday, Oct. 5: 10 a.m. versus the Phillies.
- Tuesday, Oct. 8: 10 a.m. versus the Pirates.



*Fall Instructional League games will be played in Ed Smith Stadium starting next week. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## FLORIDA HOUSE COMPLETES PAVER PROJECT WITH GRANT AID

The Florida House Institute recently installed a pervious pavement system featuring 1,800 square feet of pavers with support from a Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) Bay Partners Grant, SBEP has announced.

Other project supporters were Sarasota County, Oldcastle Coastal, Mullett Brothers, MasterRock, Rand Carter and Todd Foster Landscape Design, a news release says. "The installed system features pavers that meet low impact development (LID) standards," the release points out. "They offer homeowners a great way to make a useful hardscape patio or drive while reducing stormwater runoff into the bay."

Two ERIC Infiltrometers were installed in the pavement to provide ongoing monitoring of

storage performance and the infiltration of water, the release continues. "Florida House Institute is committed to demonstrating LID strategies that help homeowners reduce the impact of stormwater pollution to enhance water quality," it adds.

Florida House expects to reopen in the fall.

Since 2003, the SBEP has awarded nearly \$232,000 in Bay Partners Grants to support 113 organizations. A subcommittee with the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) selects the recipients. The next deadline for submitting grant applications is March 1, 2014. Visit [SarasotaBay.org](http://SarasotaBay.org) to learn more about the Bay Partners Grant Program.



*The Florida House is on Beneva Road in Sarasota. Contributed photo*



## MAIN STREET/PALM AVENUE INTERSECTION CLOSED TEMPORARILY

The intersection of Main Street and Palm Avenue in Sarasota has been closed temporarily through Sept. 25 while crews install brick paver crosswalks as part of a downtown improvement project, the city has announced.


The City Commission directed staff to complete the work prior to the return of seasonal residents and tourists to the area, a news release notes. [Click here to view a map of the suggested detour route.](#)

“We understand this will be an inconvenience,” said Richard Winder, downtown improvement projects manager, in the release. “We’re striving to keep it to a minimum by doing the improvements all at once and out of season. Once the brick crosswalks are installed, in

addition to the other new pavers in the area, downtown Sarasota will be that much more attractive and inviting for visitors.”

City staff notified nearby business owners and residents about the pending closure, the release adds.

The city is collaborating with the Downtown Improvement District to make \$1.8 million in improvements at various locations stretching from Gulfstream Avenue to Five Points and up to Goodrich Avenue. (See the related article in this issue.)

To receive email updates about the project, register online at [www.SarasotaGov.com](http://www.SarasotaGov.com). Also, follow the progress on [Twitter @City-ofSarasota](#). 

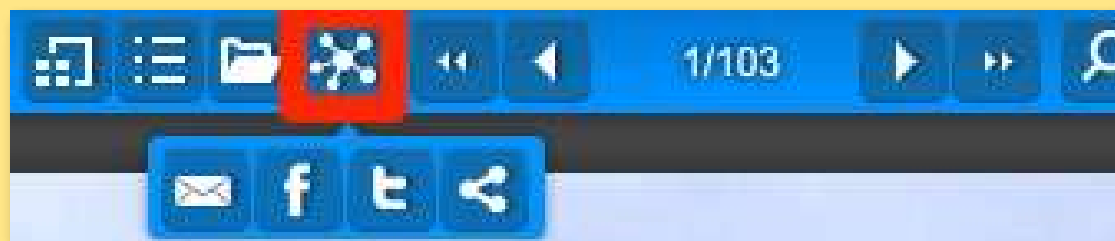
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*Loaded concealed weapons were recovered during a Sheriff's Office traffic stop early on the morning of Sept. 11. Contributed photo*

## TRAFFIC STOP LEADS TO CONFISCATION OF LOADED WEAPONS

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested two men following a traffic stop and search of their vehicle, which revealed concealed, loaded weapons, the office has announced.

Just after 1 a.m. on Sept. 11, near U.S. 301 and Northgate Boulevard in Sarasota, a patrol deputy pulled over a blue four-door Chevrolet for several traffic violations, a news release says. When the deputy approached the car, "both occupants were acting nervously, the release adds.

When the deputy approached the car, the report says, he could smell alcohol, and he saw a red plastic cup had been dumped over on the floorboard of the passenger side of the vehicle.

After the deputy asked the driver whether anything illegal was in the car, the report notes, the driver "hesitated, looked at the passenger, and looked back at me and said no."

When the deputy went back to his patrol car to check background on the driver, the report continues, the deputy learned the driver was on inmate release. Then the deputy called a Sarasota Police Department K9 unit to the scene. The dog "alerted [deputies] to the smell of marijuana," the news release notes.

A search of the vehicle turned up a small amount of marijuana as well as two firearms in the pocket on the back of the front passenger seat, the release continues. "Both were fully loaded with chambered rounds and both



were accessible by the driver and passenger.” The Ruger 9mm contained 18 rounds, four of which were hollow point bullets, the release continues. The 9mm Smith and Wesson also contained 18 rounds; it was found to have been stolen in Palmetto, the release adds.

James Wiggs, 49, of 1282 42nd St., Sarasota, who has 15 prior felony convictions and is on inmate release status for the sale, manufacture and delivery of cocaine, was charged with Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon, Possession of Ammunition by a Convicted Felon, and Possession of a Concealed Weapon, the release says.

Talvick Morton, 24, of 3107 Noble Ave., Sarasota, who is on felony probation for Grand Theft, was charged with Possession of a Concealed Weapon and Violation of Probation, the release continues.



*The weapons recovered in the traffic stop were found in the pocket on the back of the sedan's front passenger seat, officers say. Contributed photo*



*Morton Talvick/Contributed photo*



*James Wiggs/Contributed photo*



## SHERIFF'S OFFICE ANNOUNCES LATEST 'SATURATION PATROL' RESULTS

During August "saturation patrols" to remove dangerous, uninsured or impaired drivers from local roads, the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office made 24 DUI arrests and issued 197 citations for other traffic offenses, the office has announced.

"Because of Sheriff Tom Knight's commitment to keep the public aware of these ongoing education and enforcement efforts, results are provided at the end of each month and dates for the following month's activities are announced," a news release says.

In August, deputies conducted saturation patrols on seven different days, the release

adds. In addition, deputies participated in the national Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over campaign from Aug. 16 to Sept. 2, the release notes, resulting in 32 DUI arrests agency-wide.

"These numbers do not include DUI arrests made during the month outside these specific initiatives," the release points out.

This month's saturation patrols are scheduled for Sept. 7, 13, 14, 21, 27 and 28.

"Saturation patrols are mobile by design," the release adds, "so they take place in different parts of the county."

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## SHERIFF'S OFFICE TO BE INCLUDED IN SEASON PREMIERE OF *COPS*

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office will be included in the premiere of *Cops* when the series' 26th season debuts on its new home, Spike TV, this Saturday night, the Sheriff's Office has announced.

A crew from *Cops* that rode along with deputies in May and June created nearly a dozen segments that will air during different episodes of *Cops* this season, beginning at 8 p.m. on Sept. 14.

"It was an honor to have an American documentary television series of this caliber ask to follow our deputies throughout Sarasota County," said Sheriff Tom Knight in a news release. "I'm also glad that our citizens will

get to see some of what deputies have to deal with on a daily basis in a format that is true, unscripted reality television."

*Cops* is produced by Langley Productions. It premiered in 1989, making it one of the longest-running shows on television. Visit [www.cops.com](http://www.cops.com) for programming information and "web extras" that will be posted, offering extended versions of some of the encounters that have been edited for television, the release points out.

To view a behind-the-scenes video of *Cops* filming in Sarasota County visit the [Sheriff's Office YouTube channel](#).

---

## SEVEN ARRESTED AT CASPERSEN BEACH PARK

Sarasota County Sheriff's Office detectives working in an undercover capacity at Caspersen Beach Park arrested seven men during a three-day operation last week, the office has announced.

In each incident, "the men discussed having sex and exposed themselves to undercover detectives who were monitoring activity along the trails and near the waterway," a news release says.





*Gerald Clark/Contributed photo*



*Richard Smithson/Contributed photo*




*Brian Pound/Contributed photo*



*Eric Jacoby/Contributed photo*



Jay Aiello, 67, of 825 Riviera St., Venice; Brian Pound, 56, of 1300 North River Road, Venice; Richard Smithson, 77, of 34 Pebble Rock Drive, Venice; Gerald Clark, 49, of 308 Gardenia Road, Venice; Eric Jacoby, 45, of 4160 Fruitville Road, Sarasota; Daniel McAvoy, 61, of 6966 Roslyn Court, North Port; and Donald Myrberg, 63, of 4898 Escalante Drive, North Port, were charged with one count each of Exposure of Sexual Organs, a misdemeanor.

The Sheriff's Office "routinely conducts this type of operation in response to citizen complaints and will continue to do so to ensure residents and visitors can enjoy the venue without encountering illegal activity at the public park," the release adds. 



*Daniel McAvoy/Contributed photo*



*Donald Myrberg/Contributed photo*



*Jay Aiello/Contributed photo*



# OPINION



## A FEW BAD APPLES THREATEN THE BARREL

### EDITORIAL

In our Jan. 4 issue, we took exception to

downtown residents seeking to turn the center of Sarasota into a place devoid of sound, a joyless place where going to bed at 8 p.m. would be the most exciting entertainment option.

As we pointed out, the urban center of a city is an odd place to come for sepulchral stillness.

We felt then — and still do — that the city must be more accommodating of entertainment venues that cater to those who do not want to, well ... go to bed at eight o'clock.

But the cause of any such accommodation is helped by courteous understanding of and respect for each viewpoint, as both sides work toward a reasonable compromise that pre-

serves the vitality of downtown without ruining the quality of life for the area's residents.

At the time, we felt many of those living in the high-rise condos were being intransigent, insisting on a virtual “cone of silence” that would descend over the city at sunset.

Still, we have shared the hope of restaurants downtown that the city eventually would recognize the necessity of an active nightlife and come up with more reasonable sound limits and operating hours for establishments offering musical entertainment to their patrons.

It is for that reason that we also share the chagrin of those establishments at the actions of a few bars downtown whose managers have decided their response to the existing noise ordinance is to ignore it.



# OPINION

Last week we reported on the city's ongoing game of "cat and mouse" with these bar owners. These particular establishments will open their doors — with the music playing loudly — and station a monitor out front. At the first sight of a uniformed police officer, the monitor will close the doors and drop the music level so it is within compliance of the city's Noise Ordinance. Then, as soon as the officer has left the area, the doors will reopen and the music level will rocket back to its former loud level.

This is the worst possible course of action if a compromise over noise levels and operating hours is to be achieved. Nothing will galvanize the downtown condo residents as much as excessive noise that flouts existing regulations, ensuring that the proverbial "pitchforks and torches" show up at every City Commission meeting.

Every reasonable request for some moderation of the existing regulations will be beaten back by this inflexible opposition, and rightfully so.

But apparently these scofflaw bar owners care little about the atmosphere of downtown or reasonable coexistence. They have decided that their selfish interests trump all others, and their actions make a mockery of both existing regulations and the honest efforts of

other establishments to find a middle ground on the noise issue.

Fortunately, the city appears to have reached the end of its patience with these renegade bars. Staff and the City Commission have begun to look into ways to curtail this lawless response to the regulations.

While we do not often agree with Mayor Shannon Snyder's proposals, we think his suggestion that service of alcoholic beverages could be cut off at 11 p.m. has merit. That would rob the bars of the "fuel" that drives their business

late at night, which also gives rise to their thoughtless defiance of the noise ordinance.

Most establishments would not be unduly penalized by such a move, but those that serve primarily alcoholic beverages essen-

tially would be forced to close by 11 p.m. if sales had to cease at that hour. And if they are not open, they are not playing loud music that disturbs others.

Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino also suggested revoking the liquor licenses of businesses continually in violation of the Noise Ordinance. The problem we see with that proposal is that the police are having difficulty citing these errant bar owners for violations, because of the game of "cat and mouse."

*“These scofflaw bar owners have decided that their selfish interests trump all others, and their actions make a mockery of both existing regulations and the honest efforts of other establishments to find a middle ground on the noise issue.”*




# OPINION

Even if citations are issued, they must be adjudicated in court. If a business were looking at complete ruin upon conviction, assuming that would result in the loss of the establishment's liquor license, the owner would hire capable attorneys to present a defense in court. Moreover, judges would be more reluctant to summarily convict a business owner if they knew a single offense would result in the closure of the establishment. And that says nothing of costly appeals if the businesses are convicted.

No, we think it will be much simpler to curtail the hours when alcohol is served downtown. Making 11 p.m. the cutoff might be somewhat arbitrary, but it might be necessary to get a

handle on the problem. Then the city could consider extending hours once the cooperation of all establishments had been secured.

There is no reason for downtown to become a deserted landscape bereft of those wishing to enjoy some late-night revelry. There also is no reason for downtown residents to endure such revelry into the wee hours of the morning. A compromise is needed, but that will not happen until the offending bar owners are brought into compliance.

Their inconsiderate actions hurt everyone, residents and entertainment establishments alike. They must be reined in. 

## WRITER QUESTIONS CRITICISM OF RESTAURANT DESIGN

To the editor:

I'm amazed that someone who lives in a tower fashioned from a blob of concrete that looms over Sarasota like a dark, threatening cloud would complain about the proposed Kress Plaza design (*Taking shape*, Aug. 30).

*Charles Clifton  
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](mailto: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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# Sarasota Leisure

A full-page background image showing a sunset over a body of water. The sun is a large, bright white circle in the center of the upper half, casting a warm orange glow across the sky. Below the horizon, several sailboats are visible on the water, and a city skyline with a prominent high-rise building is silhouetted against the sunset.

**GROWING NATIVE**

**SIESTA SEEN**

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

*Inside*

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# GROWING NATIVE



*A yard with Florida native plants also features a mix of modern and classic statuary. All photos by Fran Palmeri*

## REASONS ABOUND FOR GIVING A HOME TO PLANTS NATIVE TO THE STATE

**By Fran Palmeri and and Laurel Schiller**

*Contributing Writers*

There is no day in Florida when nothing is blooming. More than 2,800 native plants grow in this state, which has the third greatest diversity among flora of all the states in the union.

Some wildflowers — blanket flower, duck potato and coreopsis, our state wildflower — bloom all year. Many others are around from spring through the heat of summer to year's end.

Is spring or fall the most beautiful time of year? Spring holds a slight edge because it starts early. Sky-blue lupine, blue-eyed grass

and pawpaw arrive soon after the new year rolls in. But fall is a winner, too, with blazing star, golden aster, paintbrush and its “ace in the hole” — the bright red pine lily.

You are not in Kansas anymore! You can enjoy Florida wildflowers, grasses, vines, shrubs and trees right at home. Pick a spot in your yard — in sun or shade — where you would like to see a bit of color and put in some native plants. They will thrive in our sandy soil and rainfall. Once established, they will tolerate drought, wet summers and cold blasts in winter.



Birds, butterflies and other beneficial critters will soon arrive. Firebush is a mecca for the zebra longwing butterfly, for example. Ruby-throated hummingbirds love coral bean. Cardinals, blue jays and mockingbirds will feast on beautyberry. You will not just be putting in plants — your yard will become part of nature's amazing web of life. Gardening will be twice as enjoyable!

The following are 10 reasons to “plant native”:

1. Year-round color in the garden.
2. Less work. Aside from weeding, the garden can pretty much take care of itself if you plan it right. Put in native trees and shrubs that need little if any pruning.
3. Savings. No mowing. No fertilizers. No expenses aside from buying plants. Once you convert your neighbors to the idea, you can always trade plants over the fence.
4. Less watering. Native plants rarely need supplemental watering the way non-natives do because natives are adapted to local conditions. Water new plants every day for a week, every other day for the second week and every third day for the third week. Then let Mother Nature do the job. In droughts, water plants that show signs of stress.
5. No pest control. Native plants attract local insects, which keep harmful ones at bay. The “beneficials” are a gardener's best



*A child is fascinated by a zebra longwing butterfly.*







friend because they eat pests. No need for poisons. Ever.

6. It is good for the planet. You will keep our natives going and provide a home for local wildlife and a respite for migrants.
7. Sustainability. You can compost food scraps and install rain barrels.
8. Natural air conditioning. Gardens diminish the “heat island effect.” Plants absorb heat and give off oxygen. Concrete increases heat.
9. Previous experience is not necessary. Your county University of Florida Extension Service office, local chapter of the [Florida Native Plant Society](#), the Florida Associ-

ation of Native Nurseries and books and magazines can provide gardening information for your area. (See *Resources* below).

10. It is balm for the body and soul. A garden cleans the air and cuts down on noise pollution. It calms the mind. Nature becomes not just a place to visit but also a place to live. You will enjoy birds and butterflies year-round. From inside your house, you will look out on trees, shrubs and flowers instead of a lawn, streets and other houses.

Start today. Plant a native wildflower. See how it does. Soon you will learn what to plant where.

Growing native grows on you.









## RESOURCES

**Florida Association of Native Nurseries** (FANN) publishes a free *Guide for Real Florida Gardeners* and lists native plant nurseries throughout the state.

Among the native plant nurseries in our area are the following: **Hawthorn Hill**, St. Petersburg; **Twigs and Leaves**, St. Petersburg; **Wilcox Nursery and Landscape**, Largo; **Sweet Bay Nursery**, Parrish; **Florida Native Plants Nursery & Landscaping**, Sarasota; **All Native Garden Center & Plant Center**, Punta Gorda and Fort Myers; **Bayshore Garden Center**, Fort Myers.

A number of organizations can offer help as well. **The Florida Native Plant Society** has 37 chapters statewide. The **Serenoa Chapter**, which includes Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto and Hardee counties, meets the third Monday of the month, September through May, at 7 p.m. at Marie Selby Gardens in Sarasota.

Meetings and field trips are free and open to the public.

Books also offer good advice: *Native Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife and Native Wildflowers and Other Ground Covers for Florida Landscapes* by Craig N. Huegel; *Florida's Best Native Landscape Plants* by Gil Nelson; *A Gardener's Guide to Florida's Native Plants* by Rufino Osorio; *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy; *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers* by Walter Kingsley Taylor; *Natural Florida Landscaping* by Dan Walton and Laurel Schiller.

Additionally, most Florida counties have an office of the University of Florida Extension Service, which offers information and multiple programs, including daylong workshops. Access it on the web ([www.sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.sarasota.ifas.ufl.edu) or [www.manatee.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.manatee.ifas.ufl.edu)) or visit your local office.

Further, the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program is offered through the Extension Service. Find out how your yard can qualify. **SNL**







# 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 community calendar, 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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## THE LOW-SPEED VEHICLE DEBATE RAGES ON; THE INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP IS COMING UP; AND THE COUNTY MOVES AHEAD WITH PLANNING FOR THE TURTLE BEACH RENOURISHMENT PROJECT



By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

At the request of Sarasota County Commissioner Nora Patterson, county staff has put back online a [survey regarding low-speed vehicles on Siesta Key](#).

That survey will stay up until another presentation for the County Commission is scheduled about the issue, Paula Wiggins, the county's transportation planning manager, told me on Sept. 10.

Wiggins added that she does not know yet when the item will appear on a board agenda.

Although she did not have the exact figure, Wiggins estimated the number of survey responses between 300 and 400 during the initial month the survey was posted.

In a recent report to the County Commission, Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott wrote that of the survey responses received



*Pedicabs and other low-speed vehicles are a common sight in Siesta Village. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



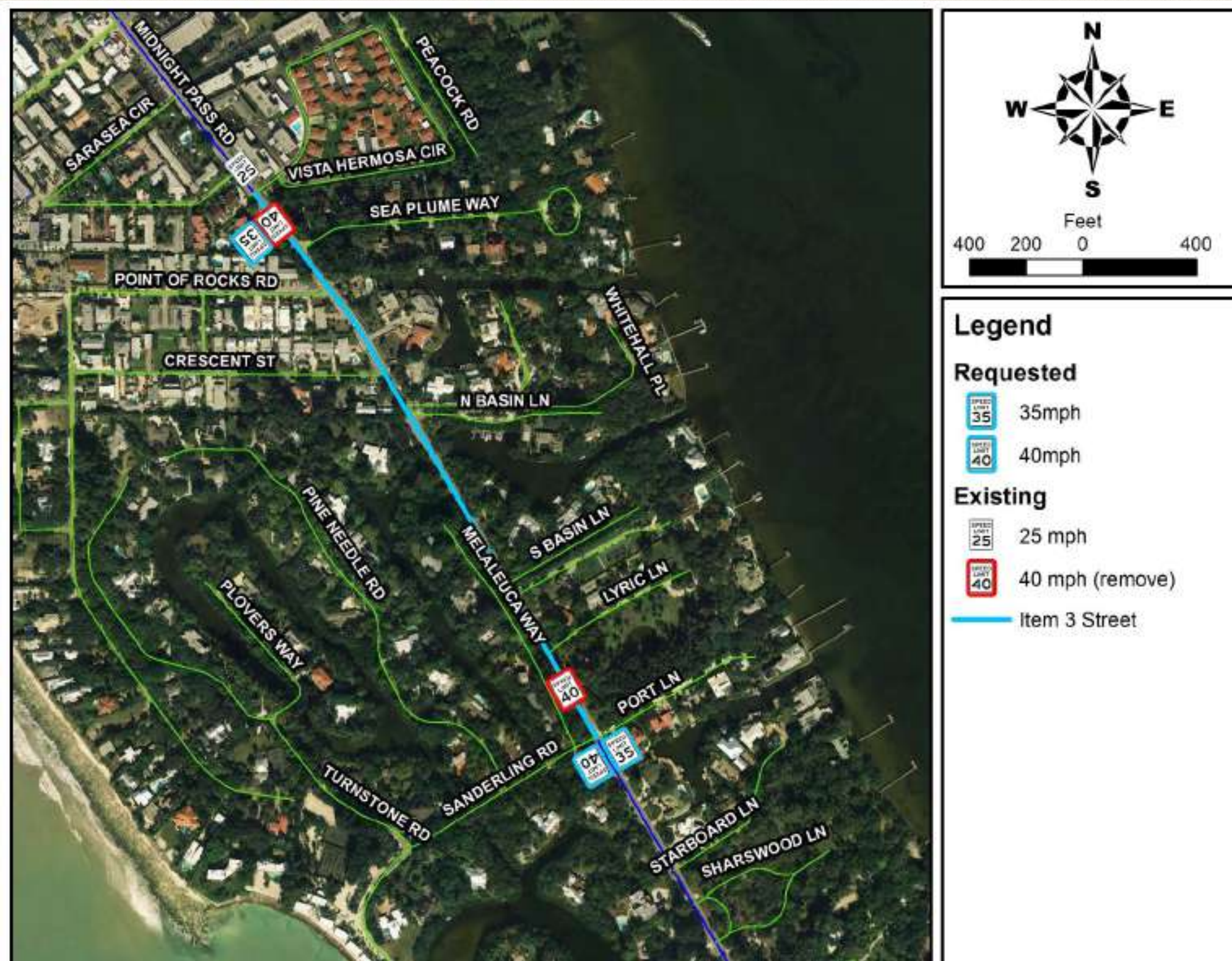
# Siesta Seen

by Aug. 31, "Approximately 70% of the respondents support lowering the speed limit on Midnight Pass between Vista Hermosa Circle and Sanderling Road from 40 to 35 mph ..."

Further, about 74 percent would be against the operation of low-speed vehicles on Midnight Pass Road if the speed limit were reduced to 35 mph, Harriott added, and 89 percent op-

posed the use of such vehicles on all public roadways on Siesta Key where the speed limit is 35 mph or less.

Harriott also wrote, "It should be [noted] that on August 22nd, we received 193 responses, all with the same results, typically in groups of 10+, within a few seconds of each other."



*A map shows the area where a speed limit reduction has been requested for South Midnight Pass Road. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*



# ***Siesta Seen***

Discussions about low-speed vehicles on the island ensued last week at the monthly meetings of the Siesta Key Association (SKA) and the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA), with some misunderstanding evident.

After hearing a petition in early May from a resident of The Sanderling Club who wants to drive a golf cart on the portion of South Midnight Pass Road from Sanderling Road to Vista Hermosa Circle, the County Commission directed staff to hold at least one public meeting on Siesta to determine views about use of low-speed vehicles all over the island.

In response to that, staff put up the online survey and held a public session on Aug. 20 at Siesta Key Chapel.

“It was very interesting at the public meeting,” Wiggins told me diplomatically on Sept. 10.

Low-speed vehicles are classified as those that can travel between 20 mph and 25 mph, Wiggins explained to the County Commission on May 8.

On April 10, the county’s Traffic Advisory Council (TAC) first heard the petition about the request to lower the speed limit from 40



*Families enjoy an afternoon on Turtle Beach in July. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



# *Siesta Seen*

mph to 35 mph on Midnight Pass Road from Vista Hermosa Circle to Sanderling Road. The TAC recommended the change, but Wiggins explained that a low-speed vehicle may operate on any road with a posted speed limit of 35 mph or less. Such a vehicle does have to be registered with the state and it must have a windshield, tail and front lights and efficient brakes.

However, Wiggins said at the time, a county commission could prohibit the use of low-speed vehicles on any road “in the interest of safety.”

During the Sept. 5 SKA meeting, President Catherine Luckner pointed out that the stretch of Midnight Pass Road at the center of the discussion is only about an eighth of a mile long. “It’s a very short distance,” she said. “There’s no forgiveness in that section of the road,” she added, as it does not have much sidewalk space and the bike lane is narrow, posing potential hazards to people walking or biking, if vehicles try to pass golf carts in that area.

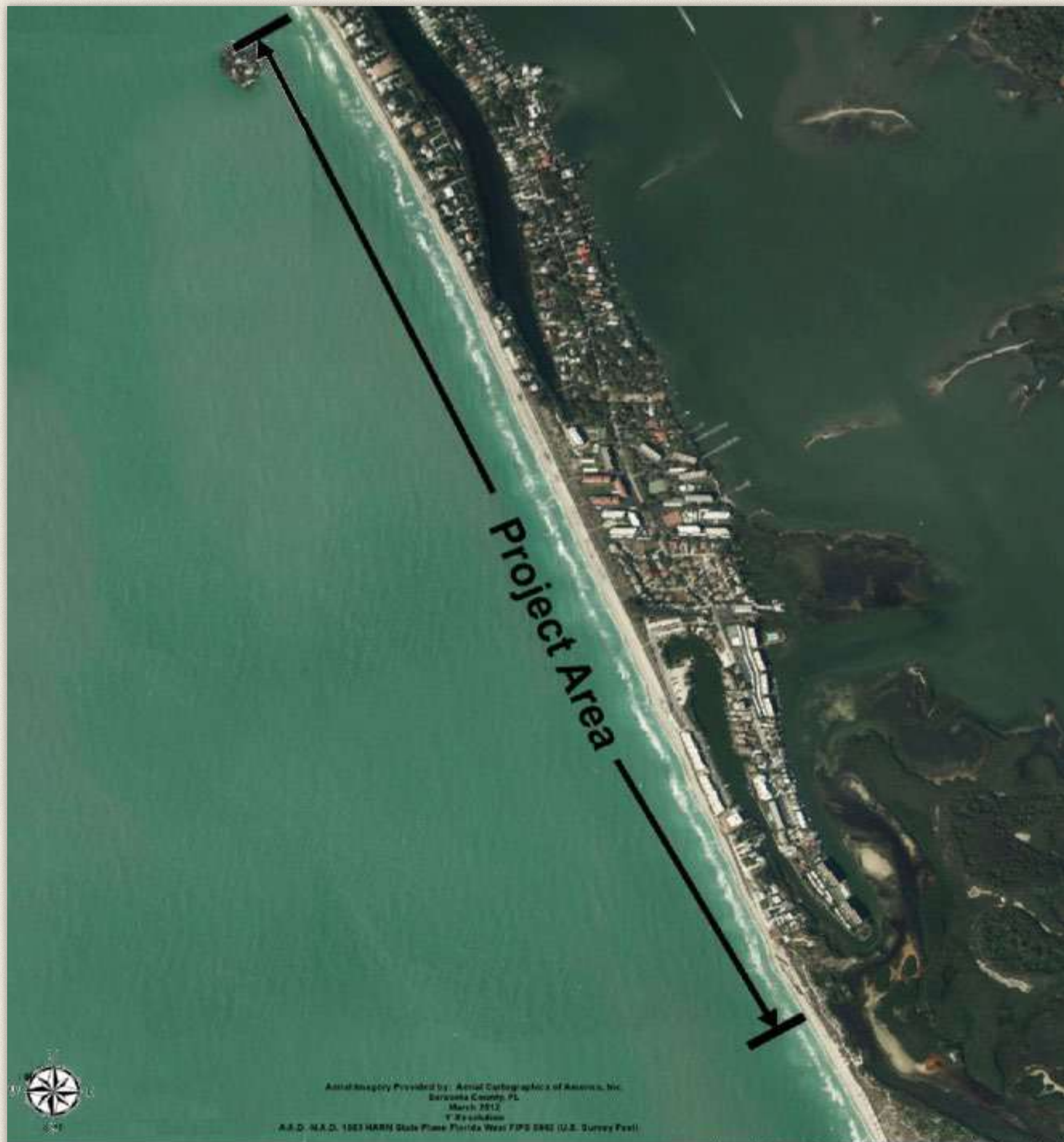
Luckner also referenced a point Commissioner Nora Patterson herself made during



*Even though Siesta Public Beach is not as crowded in the summer as it is during season, volunteers expect to find plenty of trash during the International Coastal Cleanup on Sept. 21. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



# ***Siesta Seen***



*An aerial map shows the area where the southern part of Siesta Key's beach will be renourished in a couple of years. Graphic courtesy of Sarasota County*



# *Siesta Seen*

the County Commission's May discussion: A lot of Siesta residents drive back and forth to work. The island, Luckner said, "[is] not just a resort."

"My concern is that people are going to want to pass," said Patterson, who was present for the SKA meeting.

"That is happening," SKA Vice President Michael Shay weighed in, referring to low-speed vehicles already operating on the island.

Tourists not infrequently have difficulty determining where they need to go on the key, Luckner also pointed out — a situation that poses additional traffic hazards.

Patterson told the SKA members present that the County Commission had not committed either to lowering the speed limit or prohibiting low-speed vehicles on any portion of the island.

"I would hesitate to predict" the position the majority of board members would take, Patterson said.

She stressed the importance of people weighing in with their views, as the commissioners take public comments into consideration.

When Patterson asked whether the SKA had taken a position on the issue, Luckner said it had not. However, she told Patterson, the organization has received a lot of information from the public. The SKA board does plan to discuss the matter, Luckner added.

It might be a good idea for the County Commission to ask staff to talk with representa-

tives of businesses that serve customers on the island, SKA Director Joe Volpe said, to determine how they would feel about their commercial vehicles operating in the midst of more low-speed vehicles.

He also pointed out that the small three-wheel vehicles Siesta businesses rent to tourists travel illegally on Higel Avenue, which has a speed limit of 40 mph. Those "trikes," he said, irritate residents who live on the island and have to drive onto the mainland for work.

"To be frank with you," SKA Director Deet Jonker noted, "I've sat behind a number of those vehicles, being held up."

He added, "I think they're a dangerous thing."

Patterson emphasized that those vehicles are legal only on neighborhood streets, which have lower speed limits, and on Ocean Boulevard, which has a 20 mph speed limit.

"I personally feel like no harm, no foul on that," Patterson said, referring to the "trikes."

Speaking about the issue in general, she continued, "I welcome the feedback from people."

## **KEEPING THE COAST CLEAN**

During the Sept. 5 SKA meeting, Vice President Michael Shay reminded audience members that the next [International Coastal Clean-up](#) has been scheduled for Sept. 21.

Volunteers will work under the aegis of [Keep Sarasota County Beautiful](#) (KSCB) to pick up trash and debris on Siesta Public Beach, he added.



# ***Siesta Seen***

This year, participants are being asked to meet at 8 a.m. at the picnic tables at the pavilion. Then, they will split into two groups, working in one direction down to Access 3 and in the other, to Point of Rocks.

Already, Shay said, he had 15 volunteers lined up as of Sept. 5. SKA Director Beverly Arias had another 11, he noted.

More details about the countywide initiative are available on the KSCB website (above).

## **TURTLE BEACH RENOURISHMENT**

The County Commission took another step this week in preparation for its next renourishment of Turtle Beach.

On Sept. 10, as part of its consent agenda, the board authorized County Administrator Randall Reid or his designee to submit an application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for grant funds in the 2014-15 fiscal year to help cover the cost of the project.

The earlier renourishment of Turtle Beach was completed on April 30, 2007, a memo to the board notes. On April 13, 2011, the board directed staff to move forward with the second effort to replenish the sand.

The latest memo points out that current state law provides for an annual allotment of \$30 million into the Florida Ecosystem Management and Restoration Trust Fund to provide money for 50 percent of eligible costs of beach erosion control projects.

An April 22 memo to the County Commission from Laird Wreford, the county's coastal resources manager, indicated that \$5 million in the Tourist Development Tax revenue pool dedicated to beach maintenance would be allocated to the Turtle Beach project in the 2015 fiscal year.

## **PROJECT UPDATES**

Sarasota County Chief Engineer Harriott has provided the County Commission a couple of updates over the past two weeks on issues regarding Siesta Key.

First, in his report for the week of Aug. 26, Harriott wrote that staff has completed the design and analysis of the parking layout for North Shell Road. The estimate for the materials is slightly more than \$20,000, he added. "A report is being finalized and will be provided to the Board."

In his report for the week of Aug. 19, Harriott noted that regular inspections had identified washed-out areas behind the "wing walls" adjacent to the abutments at several of the island's bridges. The wing walls act as retaining structures. The repair work is being added to the list in the county's Bridge Improvement Program, he added.

## **ABOUT THAT WRECK**

Regular readers will recall the item in this column last week about a Labor Day car crash near The Banyan Club on Siesta Key.

Sgt. Scott Osborne, leader of the Sheriff's Office Community Policing Station on Siesta,



# Siesta Seen

had some interesting comments on that incident when he appeared before the SKA last week.

The man arrested in the case — Jason Allen Robey, 30 — was identified in the initial arrest report as a server at Café Gabbiano in Siesta Village. The formal Sheriff's Office report says Robey is homeless, which Osborne confirmed.

Robey allegedly stole the 2014 Infinity sedan from a 45-year-old man who had rented it at Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. The theft was reported on Sept. 2 at 139 Beach Road.

At 3:06 p.m. on Sept. 2, the Sheriff's Office received a call about a man sitting in a vehicle that matched the description of the Infinity.

When a deputy arrived, he found Robey in the vehicle and arrested him for Grand Theft Auto and Resisting Without Violence. The latter charge, the report notes, was "due to other actions during the course of the arrest."

The sedan had damage on the right side, including a broken mirror, the report continues. When the deputy arrived, the car was out of gas, "stopped in front of a concrete wall on Sand Dollar [Lane]."


The damage estimate was \$10,000.

Osborne told the SKA audience that Robey apparently lay down on the front seat and went to sleep after he collided with the wall. "He tried to kick the window out of the car" when the deputy showed up, Osborne added.



*Sgt. Scott Osborne addresses the audience at the Sept. 5 Siesta Key Association meeting. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

Robey was put in jail under no bond, Osborne said.

On a side note, Osborne pointed out that another homeless person was arrested recently on charges unrelated to thefts this summer of people's bags left unattended on the beach. However, deputies had been keeping an eye out for homeless suspects in those cases. Since that other homeless person and Robey both had been arrested, Osborne continued, the beach thefts had stopped. 





## WRITE A PLAY SEASON TO KICK OFF WITH CHILDREN'S PRODUCTION

Florida Studio Theatre's *Write a Play* season will kick off on Sept. 24 in the Keating Theatre with *Androcles and the Lion* by Aurand Harris and Glenn Mack, the theater has announced.

Directed by Associate Artist Jason Cannon, performances will continue through November and be presented to more than 11,000

students from Sarasota and Manatee county schools, a news release says.

"Autumn mornings at Florida Studio Theatre begin with the arrival of bright yellow school buses on the FST Campus," the release notes. "The sound of hundreds of young children's excited chatter echoes throughout the lobby and into the theatre. This [latest] production

(Above) Cast members participate in a Florida Studio Theatre children's production during the 2012-13 season. Contributed photo



lights the path for young writers of the future,” the release notes, inspiring them to create their own works for submission to FST’s annual Young Playwright’s Festival in the spring.

*Androcles and the Lion*, the story of a slave who befriends a lion, “is a refreshingly antic, irreverent treatment of Aesop’s fable, written in the style of Italian *Commedia Dell’Arte*,” the release adds. A group of players sets up the stage and gives a performance capturing many of the *Commedia*’s stock characters: “the miserly Pantalone, the bragging Captain, the romantic Lovers, the trickster and the endearing Lion,” the release says. “This centuries-old tale is one of the most popular children’s plays ever written, with its enduring themes of freedom and friendship.”

The production will mark the debut of members of the FST 13-14 Acting Apprentice Company, the release notes. This includes Patrick A. Jackson in the role of Androcles, Zach Shotwell as The Lion, Matt Ebling as Lelio, Maggie Langlais as Isabella, Dean Bowden as Capitano and Dan Higgs as Pantalone. The creative team includes set and costume designer April Soroko.

Performances of *Androcles and the Lion* will be held Monday through Friday at 9:45 and 11 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. Tickets for the public, which are \$6, may be purchased through FST’s *Write a Play* manager, Jennie Cole, at 366-9797.

Florida Studio Theatre is located at 1241 N. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

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## FSU/ASOLO CONSERVATORY ANNOUNCES 42ND SEASON PRODUCTIONS

The Florida State University/Asolo Conservatory’s 42nd season, under the leadership of Director Greg Leaming, will include a “translation” of Molière’s *The Misanthrope*; a farce by one of the 20th century’s most anarchic playwrights; a Pulitzer Prize-winning play about disturbing family relationships; and a retelling of a famous Greek tragedy about the collision between the state and personal responsibility, the company has announced.

“According to Leaming, the 2013-2014 season will be a continuation of the Conservatory’s tradition of edgy, progressive and innovative theatrical productions,” a news release notes.

“We’re delighted to present four one-of-a-kind plays,” he says in the release. “We’ll start with some twisted time travel in the form of David Ives’ rousing take on *The Misanthrope*, Molière’s milestone of classical theater. We’ll

follow that with Joe Orton’s most acclaimed play, *Loot*, a work of darkly comic perfection,” Leaming adds. “Our third production, Paula Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive*, has been praised for its haunting lyric tone. Finally, we’ll be treated to Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone* — a tragedy inspired by Greek mythology and the play of the same name.”

“Leaming notes that this season’s creative blend of styles, epochs and playwrights reflects the FSU/Asolo Conservatory’s dual mission of training acting students and engaging audiences,” the release continues. Students in their second year will perform the roles.

Leaming adds that this season the Conservatory will continue to feature a special \$100 subscription price for all four plays. “While we’re eager to raise much-needed funds for the Conservatory, we also want to make sure that our



ticket prices stay affordable,” he points out in the release.

The dates for the productions are as follows: *The School for Lies* (Oct. 29 to Nov. 17); *Loot* (Dec. 31 to Jan. 19); *How I learned to Drive* (Feb. 18 to March 9); and *Antigone* (April 8-27).

Tickets are \$27 for preview nights; \$28 for matinees; and \$29 for evening shows. Single

tickets for subscribers went on sale Sept. 11; single tickets for the general public will be available [online](#) beginning Sept. 29; and at the FSU/Asolo Center for Performing Arts box office on Sept. 30.

All productions are in the Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, at the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. The box office may be reached at 351-8000.



*Florida State University/Asolo Conservatory productions are held in the Asolo Theatre on North Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. Photo by Ebyabe via Wikimedia Commons*



## **BLIND PASS TO BE SHOWN DURING WOODSTOCK FILM FESTIVAL**

Sarasota-based independent film production company Midnight Pass Entertainment has announced that its feature-length film *Blind Pass* will be shown at the prestigious Woodstock Film Festival in Woodstock, NY, on Friday, Oct. 4.

The movie has enjoyed a Florida film festival run, beginning with its world premiere at Tampa's highly regarded Gasparilla Film Festival earlier this year and back-to-back wins as Best Feature Film at the Fort Myers Beach Film Festival and Best Florida Feature at Orlando's Central Florida Film Festival, a news release notes. *Blind Pass* Writer/Producer/Director Steve Tatone announced his indie drama/thriller will have two screenings at the 14th Annual Woodstock Film Festival: Oct. 4 and 6.

"It's really quite an honor to be embraced by such an amazing world-class film festival like Woodstock," Tatone said in the release. "*Blind Pass* continues to gain attention on the indie circuit this year," he added.

*Blind Pass* features an ensemble cast led by Emmy Award winner and international film and television star Armand Assante and Suncoast resident Danielle White. Co-starring are Los Angeles-based actor Chris L. McKenna; critically acclaimed veteran Hollywood character actors Michael McGlone and Ed Lauter; Tampa-based actress Mary Rachel Dudley; "and up-and-coming child star Sydney Rouviere," the release notes.



*Blind Pass* had its debut at Burns Court Cinema in Sarasota in January. Photo by Arielle Scherr



## HYMN FOR HER AND COME BACK ALICE SLATED FOR BAY FESTIVAL

The bands Hymn for Her and Come Back Alice will perform at the Sarasota Bay Water Festival on Saturday, Nov. 2, at Ken Thompson Park in Sarasota, festival organizers have announced.

They will join popular guitarist Ben Hammond, who will be back again as the performing master of ceremony on the music stage, a news release notes. The festival hours will be 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the live music running from noon until 7 p.m.

The band members of Hymn for Her have been touring the U.S. for three months in their vintage 1961 Bambi Airstream trailer, the release adds. Their home base is Philadelphia. "The band's music style has been described as juiced-up backwoods country blues with a dose of desert rock psychedelia or Hells Angels meets the Amish," the release notes.

"Come Back Alice is a funky eclectic rock band" featuring Tony Tyler on lead guitar, harmonica and vocals; Dani Faye on fiddle, guitar and vocals; and Big Bad John Werner on bass, the release continues.


"Hammond has shared his unique brand of live-looped acoustic soul-pop with audiences at hundreds of venues and festivals, including the Montreal Jazz Festival," the release points out.

One more band and two solo performers will be added to the music lineup over the coming weeks, the release says. The final perfor-



*Come Back Alice is a 'funky eclectic rock band.'*  
Contributed photo

mance schedule will be posted on the festival [website](#) later this month.

The purpose of the water festival is to celebrate the importance of Sarasota Bay to the region's environment and economy, the release notes. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program is the presenting sponsor, and HDR Inc. is the host sponsor, the release says. Along with the musical performances, festival highlights will include dragon boat races, artists selling gift items, boat displays, panel discussions on bay-friendly living, the winning submissions in the *I Love Sarasota Bay Photo Contest*, dip netting and nature walks for children and exhibits on boating, fishing, kayaking, paddleboard sports, scuba and cycling, the release adds. 



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*Lucy & Wayne*  
and  
**THE AMERICAN STREAM**



*Hymn for Her will perform at the Sarasota Bay Water Festival. Contributed photo*





*Cutline: Temple Emanu-El members and guests symbolically cast away their sins by throwing pieces of bread into the water at Twin Lakes Park. Contributed photo*

## TEMPLE MEMBERS MARK A BEAUTIFUL *TASHLICH* EVENING

Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled in the distance, but the rain stayed away as 80 Temple Emanu-El members and friends gathered Saturday evening, Sept. 7, “for a beautiful *Tashlich* service at Twin Lakes Park,” a news release says.

Rabbi Brenner Glickman explained the significance of *Tashlich*. Based on the prophet Micah’s promise that God will “hurl our sins into the depths of the sea,” the High Holy Day ceremony allows participants to symbolically cast away their wrongdoings of the past year by throwing bread crumbs into the water, the release notes. Glickman led a brief *Tashlich* service; attendees then enjoyed apples and

honey and a picnic dinner, the release adds, “with delicious desserts provided by the Ritual Committee.”

The evening concluded with a special blessing for Lisa Thomas and David Abolafia, who had celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary the night before — as well as friendly socializing and a *havdalah* service separating the Sabbath from the week ahead, the release says.

Temple Emanu-El Ritual Committee Chairwoman Marian Raupp coordinated the *Tashlich* event. For more information about holiday observances at Temple Emanu-El, call 371-2788.





*Temple Emanu-El members Fred and Michelle Davis and Barry and Barbara Gerber enjoyed the picnic dinner together at the Tashlich service at Twin Lakes Park. Contributed photo*

## **FIRST CHURCH TO OFFER GROUP STUDY OF JAMES: MERCY TRIUMPHS**


Members of First United Methodist Church, located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota, are inviting women to join an eight-week group study of *James: Mercy Triumphs*, presented by Beth Moore, the church has announced.

The group will meet Wednesdays from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. beginning Oct. 2, a news release says. Among the topics covered will be joy, hardship, reversal of fortunes for the rich and poor, wisdom, gifts from above, single-mind-

edness, dangers of having too much humility and prayer, the release adds.

The class will include a DVD presentation and facilitated group discussion. The church is asking participants to donate \$20 for materials.

Attendees will be welcome to bring brown-bag lunches if they wish, the release notes.

Call the church office at 955-0935 for additional information or to register. 





# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**13+**  
SEPTEMBER

**Dabbert Gallery presents *Summer Showcase***

Through Sept. 30, 76 S. Palm Ave. Admission: free. Information: 955-1315 or [DabbertGallery.com](http://DabbertGallery.com).

**13+**  
SEPTEMBER

**Allyn Gallup Gallery presents *Some Wonderful Abstractions***

Through Oct. 5, 1288 N. Palm Ave. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or [AllynGallup.com](http://AllynGallup.com).

**14**  
SEPTEMBER

**WSLR presents *Passerine CD Release Party***

Sept. 14, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media & Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court. Tickets: \$5 in advance; \$7 at the door. Information: 894-6469 or [WSLR.org](http://WSLR.org).

**14**  
SEPTEMBER

**Venice Theatre presents *Yesterdayze in concert***

Sept. 14, 8 p.m., 140 W. Tampa Ave. Tickets: \$20. Information: 488-1115 or [VeniceStage.com](http://VeniceStage.com).

**20**  
SEPTEMBER

***Rocking through the Ages – Gatsby Soirée (benefiting Make-A-Wish Central & Northern Florida)***

Sept. 20, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., Michael's On East, 1212 S. East Ave. Tickets: \$75 in advance; \$100 at the door. Information: 952-WISH or [RockingThroughTheAges](http://RockingThroughTheAges) page.

**03**  
OCTOBER

**Halloween Bash Pre-party: Second Annual Safe Sex Kiki**

Oct. 3, 8:30 to 11 p.m., Darwin's on 4th, 1525 Fourth St., Sarasota. Admission: Free. Information at [Safe Sex Kiki](http://SafeSexKiki) page.

**04**  
OCTOBER

**Jazz Club of Sarasota presents *Jazz at Two*, featuring Betty Comora's Happy Jazz Band**

Oct. 4, 2 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 3975 Fruitville Road, Sarasota. Tickets: \$7 (\$12 for non-members). Information: 366-1552 or [JazzClubSarasota.org](http://JazzClubSarasota.org).

**YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST**



# A BRIDGE NOT TOO FAR

**PRESS**



**Norman Schimmel**  
Photographer

**The Sarasota News Leader**  
Issue 04/2018 04 Date 10/15/2000

## SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



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