

Vol. 2, No. 3 — October 4, 2013

**THE SARASOTA**

# News Leader

*The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida*

**STUDYING JOINT TRANSIT  
ROUND TWO  
SCC PREVIEW**

*Inside*

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# A.K.A. HELP

# SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

*The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida*

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# Welcome

After I “penned” my Sept. 27 letter, Production Manager Cleve Posey let me know that was our biggest issue ever. No wonder I felt like the guy in that old FedEx ad when I thought about all the headlines.

This week, I am sure Cleve — and Copy Editor Vicki Chatley — are relieved to be handling fewer stories. I know my eyes do not feel as blurred today as at this point last Thursday afternoon. Nonetheless, my reporting colleagues have not rested on their laurels, which is one reason I love them so much!

I dare not consider the hours County Editor Roger Drouin put into his two stories this week, because they are about complex but critical matters — the potential merger of the public bus systems in Sarasota and Manatee counties and an increase in healthcare expenses for county employees.

Among his articles, City Editor Stan Zimmerman not only provides a “postmortem” on the resignation of the chairman of the Community Redevelopment Agency Extension Study Committee, but he also previews a full City Commission agenda for Oct. 7. The latter includes a discussion about Chris Brown’s proposal to add those New Orleans-style galleries to the second floor of the Kress Building he owns at Five Points.

As for the Siesta Key beat: News keeps multiplying, it seems — from the impact the delay in the stormwater project may have on the public beach park improvements to a new effort to put a house on Beach Road property that has been beneath the Gulf of Mexico in years past.

Last, but not least, you will find a vast array of topics in the *News Briefs*.

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







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Sarasota Leisure: *The Tortoise and the Hare* - Norman Schimmel





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*A Sarasota County Area Transit bus moves through traffic. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County*

## THE SARASOTA COUNTY AND MANATEE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL REVIVE DISCUSSION OF A POSSIBLE BUS TRANSIT MERGER AND PRIVATIZATION WHEN THEY MEET AGAIN ON OCT. 15

**By Roger Drouin**  
*County Editor*

Instead of a SCAT bus, Sarasota residents and visitors could be riding a SMART bus in the future.

SMART is just one possible acronym residents might become accustomed to if Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) and Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) merge into one organization. The acronym stands for Sarasota Manatee Regional Transit.

“It would be a regional transit agency,” said Glama Carter, director of SCAT.

The merger is only a possibility at this point, but it is one the Sarasota County commissioners have been discussing over the past few months. The topic will be on the agenda for a joint meeting of the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions on Oct. 15.

In seeking efficiencies and lower operating costs, Sarasota and Manatee officials are considering the possible merger of the two transportation organizations.

“*We need to take a look at the comprehensive picture of everything; that includes the drivers and safety. There is a lot to consider.*”

Christine Robinson  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County





A large portion of SCAT's budget comes from the county's general fund: In 2011, SCAT had an operating budget of about \$19 million, with 73 percent of that allocated from the general fund. Another 18 percent came from grants, and 9 percent was from fares.

The possibility of a merger has been a county topic for several years, after it was first considered during a transportation planning study. Only recently has it gained attention at the County Commission dais. Sarasota County is conducting a survey to get public feedback on the proposal.

If the two boards vote to move ahead with the concept, the next step would be a cost analysis.

Commissioner Joe Barbetta has advocated for such a study as well as a closer look at the possibility of a merger between SCAT and MCAT.

"If you combine the two, there would be better headways," Barbetta said, referring to the period of time between passenger pickups on specific routes. "If we do [the merger], it has to be seamless."

If the two agencies are combined, three options have been put forth for how the regional organization would be operated.

One is to merge the two agencies under one authority, while keeping them under public local operation.

A second option would be to bring in a private vendor to operate the merged agencies.



*SCAT had more than 3 million passenger trips in 2011. Photo courtesy of Sarasota County*



Yet another option would be to keep SCAT and MCAT as separate entities and then bring in a private vendor to operate both.

While Barbetta favors a merger, he is not sold on the privatization proposal. “The merger is the stronger possibility of the two,” he said.

Yet Barbetta is interested in seeing the results of the cost analysis.

“There are other areas of the country that are starting to privatize, and they have better headways,” Barbetta said.

If the two agencies merge, the details have to be worked out on a funding agreement, since Sarasota County spends nearly three times

more on its larger transit system. SCAT had about 3 million unlinked passenger trips in 2011, compared with MCAT’s 1.6 million.

Commissioner Christine Robinson also wants to see Sarasota explore the possibility of a merger.

When it comes to privatizing the bus services, Robinson said she wants to review the results of the cost analysis and hear from residents.

“I see some benefits,” Robinson added, “and I see some drawbacks [of privatization].”

Carter said both possibilities — merger and privatization — are a “reflection of today’s economy.”



## Potential Timeline for Merger of MCAT/SCAT and Selection of Private Service Provider

- Finalize Inter-Local Agreement (30-60 days)
- Conduct Independent Cost Analysis (ICA) (30-60 days)
- Present ICA results and recommendation to the BCC (30 days)
- Gather and Integrate Public Input through Public Hearings (60 days)
  - Hearing must be publicly noticed
- Decide method of procurement
- Prepare Scope of Work for procurement (60-120 days)
- Procurement Advertisement and Selection Process (120-180 days)
- Contract Development and Negotiations (90-180 days)
- Present contract to both Manatee and Sarasota BCCs (30-60 days)
- Develop and implement vendor transition plan (60-120 days)

**This process could take from 10 months up to 2 years.**

1

*A chart shows the potential timeframe for taking steps should the two counties move forward with a transit merger. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*



“Would this yield significant savings — we are talking 20 percent or more — then the commissioners might be interested” in moving forward with discussions, Carter pointed out. “It may not come to fruition.”

The first big step is the cost analysis. The two boards of commissioners will likely decide at the Oct. 15 meeting whether they want to pursue it. “I am persistent on seeing that,” Carter said, before moving forward.

## PUBLIC INPUT

Residents may fill out an online survey about the potential merger at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SCATSurvey2013>.

The customer survey, which went online Sept. 24, will remain open until Oct. 15, said Jamie Carson, media relations specialist with Sarasota County. The period could possibly be extended, depending on the number of responses the county receives in the initial timeframe. The survey is also available in paper form on SCAT buses, and community members can take it over the phone by calling the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000. The results of the survey will be available once the information has been presented to the Sarasota County Commission.

Residents also are welcome to attend the Oct. 15 joint meeting of the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions at the Bradenton Area Convention Center in Palmetto.

## THE POSSIBILITY OF PRIVATIZATION

For Commissioner Nora Patterson, it would seem a merger of the bus systems would lead



*Commissioner Christine Robinson awaits the start of the July 10 board meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

to a stronger transportation link between the two counties. “There are thousands who live in Sarasota and work in Manatee, or live in Manatee and work in Sarasota,” Patterson pointed out.

But privatization remains “an open question” for Patterson.

She has heard mixed results about transit agencies that have switched to private vendor operation, she said. “Some work well and some don’t.”

Carter, the SCAT director, concurred with that sentiment.

If the counties decide to privatize the service, the operator chosen would make all the difference. If the counties select a good company, things can go smoothly, Carter noted, while



a contractor that is not up to the job can create problems. Carter pointed to the county's mowing fiascos as an example of what can go wrong.

In early 2012, the county fired a private firm that had undertaken the mowing of the county's roadsides for less than half the bid of other companies but was unable to complete the work. The contract ultimately led to the county's falling far behind in mowing last summer, prompting a multitude of complaints about overgrown medians and rights of way. The situation grew so bad that commissioners finally agreed in February to hire 24 new employees to ensure the county could keep up with the mowing.

Robinson told *The Sarasota News Leader* she was not worried about a bus system merger evolving into the equivalent of another mowing fiasco.

Vendors who would bid to run the bus systems would likely have significant experience operating transit agencies that formerly were public entities, she pointed out. Beyond that, the two counties would vet any firms that bid on the contract — including checking on their past projects to make sure the best contractor was selected, Robinson added.

"There has to be a demonstrated experience level there," Robinson said. "We will look at what they've done in other areas."

Robinson noted that Sarasota County has a multitude of other companies under contract that handle their work with neither controversy nor problems. "You can single out mowing," Robinson said, "but take a look at



*Commissioner Nora Patterson listens to a workshop discussion. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

all of the other vendors the county uses for all sorts of other services that are completely successful."

For Barbetta, privatization is not an option unless three things happen. First, the cost analysis must show significant savings will result. Then a vendor must prove it can operate the systems with the existing level of service or improved performance.

"And the third [requirement] is absorbing our employees," Barbetta told the *News Leader*. "Anyone who comes in and takes over our bus transit has to know they have existing SCAT and MCAT bus drivers."

Barbetta added, "Some bus drivers are worried they will lose their job. That was never the intent. This is an opportunity."



## CONCERNS

Some of SCAT's drivers are worried about more than their future employment.

"The operators are very anxious," Carter pointed out. "There are pros and cons to privatization, and one of the cons that operators are concerned about is losing their benefits."

Bus drivers earn an average wage of \$12.40 an hour, Carter said, and many cite the county's health insurance coverage, wellness program and enrollment in the Florida Retirement System as major components of their compensation packages.

"Operators work for the benefits," Carter said.

Bus drivers also fear the potential of a decreased focus on safety and training, Carter said, even though county officials would maintain oversight of those areas — as required by federal guidelines — while the independent contractor oversaw operations.

Carol Rutter, a county resident who spoke during the Public Comments portion of the Sept. 17 joint meeting between the Sarasota County Commission and Longboat Key Town Commission, also expressed concerns about safety. "The drivers for SCAT are just A-plus. Of 152 drivers, all but one or two, are A-plus," Rutter said.

The possibility of privatizing services could jeopardize the emphasis on safety and quality training, Rutter added.

"SCAT would be at great risk for serious preventable accidents," Rutter told the two commissions. "The county will probably

ignore everything I say because [the county] would be covered by contractual turnover of liabilities [to a vendor]."

## TIME AND CHANGES

Sarasota's bus system has seen some positive changes recently, according to one of its top officials.


In a Sept. 28 email to the county commissioners, Steve Zembala, SCAT operations manager, noted improvements since Carter took over as director a year ago. "Routes have not been closed down, there is regular communication of plans and goals within the organization and the facility has a fresh updated look," Zembala wrote in the email.

Robinson told the *News Leader* that over the next few months, she wants to hear what residents have to say about the merger and privatization and how they feel those changes would impact their local bus system.

Along with the potential cost savings, she said she would give much weight to those comments. "That's important to me," Robinson added.

The survey will be part of that public input.

"We need to take a look at the comprehensive picture of everything; that includes the drivers and safety," Robinson said. "There is a lot to consider."

She also wants to make sure South County is included in future plans if the two transit systems do merge, she pointed out. 



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# ROUND TWO



*Domestic partnership registries are open to all couples, regardless of sexual orientation. Photo via Wikimedia Commons*

## ON OCT. 9, THE COUNTY COMMISSION IS SCHEDULED TO CONSIDER TWO VERSIONS OF A REVISED DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP REGISTRY FOR COUNTY RESIDENTS

**By Rachel Brown Hackney**  
*Editor*

On Wednesday, Oct. 9, the Sarasota County Commission is expected to get a look at revised drafts of an ordinance establishing a domestic partnership registry in the county.

Leigh Sprimont, commission services manager, told *The Sarasota News Leader* this week that the agenda item tentatively was set for the morning segment of that meeting; the agenda was not finalized prior to the *News Leader's* deadline.

Ken Shelin, a former Sarasota city commissioner and a well-known advocate for the establishment of such registries across the state, presented a proposal for a county-wide ordinance in an appearance before the commission on June 5. After [almost an hour of discussion](#) that day, the board mem-

bers directed County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh to incorporate into revised drafts the suggestions they had made and bring the documents back to them for review.

“*I am hoping that they adopt the version providing for reciprocity.*”

Ken Shelin  
Advocate  
Domestic Partnership Registries





Commissioner Christine Robinson called for the two versions. One will have a provision allowing people coming into the county who have registered as domestic partners in another jurisdiction to have only those rights accorded to Sarasota County domestic partnership registrants. The other draft would leave out any mention of such reciprocity.

In a memo to the County Commission accompanying the draft ordinances, DeMarsh pointed out that if the board agreed to provide reciprocity, "Those rights [would] include notification of family members in the event of an emergency, preneed guardian designation,

visitation rights by partners to healthcare and correctional facilities, and authorization regarding healthcare and funeral/burial decisions."

The section regarding those rights says they would be "extended only for the time that such individuals are physically located within the geographical area of Sarasota County" and they would be limited to "those rights, privileges and benefits provided in [this ordinance]."

"I am hoping that they adopt the version providing for reciprocity," Shelin wrote in an Oct. 1 email to the *News Leader*.

## Rights Conferred by the DPR Certificate

- Health Care Facility Visitation
- Health Care Decisions
- Funeral/burial Decisions
- Correctional Facility Visitation Rights
- Emergency notification of Family Members
- Preneed Guardian Designation
- Participation in Education of a Dependent
- Rights conferred are not construed as recognizing the domestic partnership as a marriage

*A chart presented to the County Commission in June shows the types of rights that could be conferred through a domestic partnership registry. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



During their June 5 discussion, the county commissioners agreed they would settle on a final version of the proposed county ordinance before advertising it for a public hearing.

## PROCESS AND RESULTS

In his memo to the County Commission in advance of the Oct. 9 meeting, DeMarsh wrote that representatives from his office and those of the Sarasota County Clerk of Court and

Health and Human Services “had meetings to review and discuss the contents of the proposed ordinance.”

The registry would include an online searchable database, he added, and it would be maintained by the Office of the Sarasota County Clerk of Court through a fee schedule. “Enforcement is through a private judicial action in any court of competent jurisdiction,” he continued. “An effective date of 120 days after filing with the [Florida] Secretary

### **Sec. 62-340. Rights of Registered Domestic Partners.**

To the extent not superseded or pre-empted by federal laws, state laws, or other Sarasota County law or ordinance, or contrary to rights conferred by contract or separate legal instrument, Registered Domestic Partners shall have the following rights:

(a) *Healthcare Facility Visitation.* All Healthcare Facilities operating within Sarasota County or under the jurisdiction of Sarasota County shall honor the Registered Domestic Partnership documentation issued pursuant to this Article XII as evidence of the Registered Domestic Partnership and shall allow visitation rights as provided under federal law to the Registered Domestic Partner.

(b) *Healthcare Decisions.* This Subsection pertains to decisions concerning both physical and mental health. Registering as a Domestic Partner shall be considered to be written direction by each Registered Domestic Partner designating the other to make health care decisions for their incapacitated Registered Domestic Partner, and shall authorize each Registered Domestic Partner to act as the other's healthcare surrogate as provided in Chapter 765, Florida Statutes, and otherwise as provided by federal law. Further, no Individual designated as a health care surrogate shall be denied or otherwise defeated in serving as a health care surrogate based solely upon his or her status as the Registered Domestic Partner of his or her incapacitated Registered Domestic Partner on whose behalf health care decisions are to be made. If any health care surrogate designation forms are properly executed after the Domestic Partners' Affidavit of Domestic Partnership was recorded, and such forms contain conflicting designations, the later dated authorization and direction shall control.

of State will provide sufficient time to implement the Registry, including drafting required documents, systems updates, and staff training,” DeMarsh added.

One concern Shelin had, he wrote the *News Leader*, was that the drafts had dropped a provision enabling a partner to be involved in the education of a minor child living as a dependent within the partnership.

“In fact, they’ve dropped the definition of ‘dependent’ at Christine Robinson’s behest since she was unsatisfied with what the word meant,” Shelin added. “I’ve pointed out that the [Internal Revenue Service] uses a series of 9 definitions,” he continued, but in the end, the IRS has said that any person who receives 50 percent or more of his financial support from someone else is considered to be a dependent of the provider.

Another concern Shelin expressed in his email to the *News Leader* is that the drafts allow only county residents to register. “I don’t understand why you wouldn’t want anyone sharing a mutual residence, no matter where they lived, to be able to register and to enjoy the conferred rights while in Sarasota County,” he wrote. “Non-residents are registering in Tampa and Sarasota because they may need medical treatment while in those places and want those rights to healthcare visitation and decision-making.”

On a more minor point, he noted, the drafts also do not “provide for possible administrative collaboration between the county and cities within the county which have [domestic partnership registries].”

The Cities of Sarasota and Venice both have such registries, for which Shelin was an advocate.




*Ken Shelin/Contributed photo*

The City of Sarasota registry opened on Election Day — Nov. 6 — in 2012. As of Oct. 1, 188 couples had signed up, Jan Thornburg, the city’s public information officer, told the *News Leader* on Oct. 2.

In Venice, 19 couples had registered between April 15 and Aug. 1, according to that city’s website.

Advocates of the registry have pointed out that it would not be just for gay couples. As recently as April, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 48 percent of the women it had surveyed between the ages of 15 and 44 had lived with a male partner outside marriage between 2006 and 2010, compared to 43 percent in 2002 and 34 percent in 1995. The CDC report was based on interviews with 12,279 women in that age group.

In March 2012, the U.S. Census found that 47 percent of 15.3 million cohabiting couples in the nation were 35 and older and 13 percent were 55 and older. 



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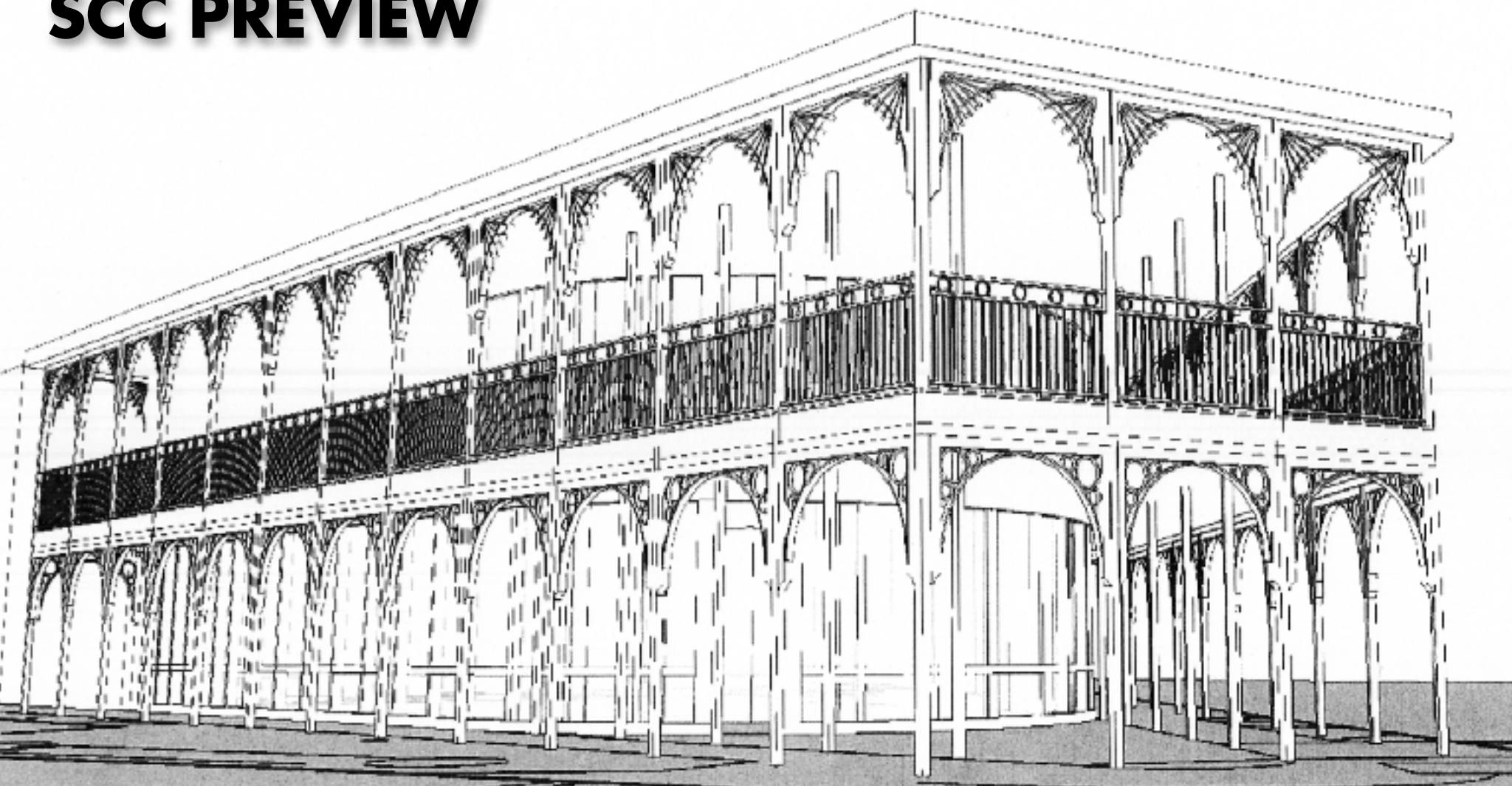
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# SCC PREVIEW



*Businessman Chris Brown would like to add New Orleans-style 'galleries' to the second floor of the Kress Building at 1400 Main St. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*

## **AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA LIES AHEAD FOR THE SARASOTA CITY COMMISSION ON OCT. 7, INCLUDING DISCUSSION OF THE PLANS FOR THE BUILDING AT 1400 MAIN ST.**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

There is a little something for everybody on the Monday, Oct. 7, Sarasota City Commission agenda: cleaning up Hudson Bayou, new development along Whitaker Bayou, more parking for Burns Square, a new Teamsters contract, updates on more roundabouts and news on the State Street garage design.

The two big issues will come up late in the evening session. One concerns plans for so-called galleries on the second floor of the former Patrick's restaurant at Five Points. The other is a discussion of where to put another facility for vagrants and the homeless.

### **IN THE AFTERNOON**

The consent agenda includes a new agreement between the city and Teamsters Local Union No. 173. The three-year contract gives a 3-percent raise to the employees it will cover. It includes a healthcare plan with a high deductible and an option for a health reimbursement account.

General city employees not covered by a union are also in line to receive a 3 percent boost in pay. Included in that deal are two charter officials, the city manager and the city auditor and clerk. Money for all this was

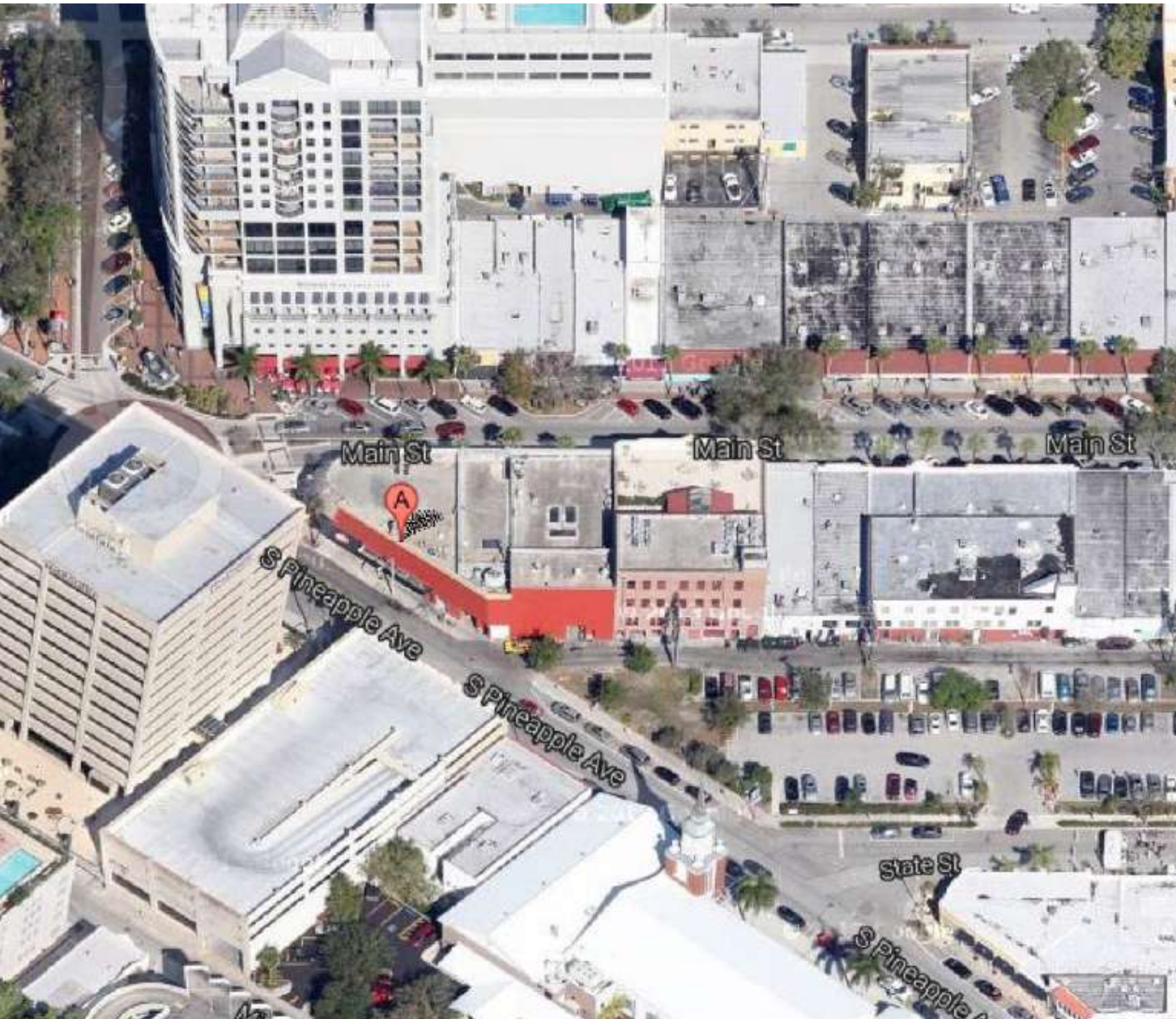


included in the 2014 fiscal year budget that took effect Oct. 1.

After those items, the commissioners will be asked to approve a \$49,000 parking study for St. Armands Circle. The area has been identified as the part of the city in greatest need of extra parking spaces. The St. Armands Business Improvement District has identified

a couple of sites for parking garages. The study will be conducted by Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc.

Also on the consent agenda is a change order by Jon F. Swift Inc., the contractor putting in the improvements along Main Street. The firm is asking for \$83,000 to pay for changes in the design and construction.



*The 1400 Main St. location in downtown Sarasota used to be home to the popular Patrick's Restaurant. Image from Google Maps*



Seven items of interest show up under “Unfinished Business” in the afternoon. Five of them are new roundabouts on major local roads. City Engineer Alex DavisShaw will provide a status report.

Next, the commissioners will be asked to pay \$18,000 to display the sculpture *Bharata* in Five Points Park.

And Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown will brief the commissioners on his talks with real estate firm Michael Saunders and Co. about leasing a parking lot at South Orange Avenue and Laurel Street. The city lease for that lot cost \$1,000 per month, but the fee has gone up to \$1,800 for the 60-space area. Burns Square merchants have been crying for additional

parking since the city let the agreement lapse in late July.

## INTO THE EVENING

After taking a break for an early dinner, the commissioners will return at 6 p.m. to hear a proposal that could change the face of the city. It would be a hiking, jogging and bicycle path from Payne Park to Venice and beyond.

Of course, half of that is already built. It is called the Legacy Trail, and it extends through a large part of Palmer Ranch before terminating south of Clark Road in Sarasota. A group of volunteers is raising awareness to build eight more miles of non-motorized recreational trail alongside the unused CSX/Seminole Gulf



*Burns Square merchants are pleading with the city to provide more parking spaces for their customers.  
Photo by Norman Schimmel*



Railroad right of way. It would connect the 21-mile Legacy Trail to downtown Sarasota.

While the Legacy Trail in South County is mostly a recreational path, a northern leg would make bicycle commuting a possibility. It certainly would help knit together the southeastern side of the city with a non-motorized corridor.

There are two public hearings scheduled in the evening. The first concerns adding a new financial instrument to the Sarasota Police Department pension portfolio. The second is a petition to create three single-family homes on Sylvan Drive, on the north side of Whitaker Bayou west of the Tamiami Trail. A previous plan allowed four condominiums, a clubhouse and six boat slips, but the new owner is seeking to “down-zone” without changing the official zoning.

“New Business” is where the meat of the agenda lies. The first item is a report on the Hudson Bayou Water Quality Project. If there is a “most-abused” body of water in the city, Hudson Bayou is the hands-down winner. Not only does its water contain serious concentrations of lead, but Lift Station Number Seven periodically has erupted to dump uncounted gallons of sewage into the bayou. The water body also has dealt with the usual urban runoff and dumping issues.

But the highlight of the evening will be how the commissioners handle downtown and Siesta Key business owner Chris Brown’s bid to build New Orleans-style balconies in the 1400 Main St. structure at Five Points. He has already promised not to create a nightclub; his plan is for a new restaurant only. But nearby condo residents are concerned and organizing against whatever he calls it.




*The city commissioners will be asked again on Oct. 7 to decide exactly what they want on the site of the planned State Street parking garage. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



In “zoning-speak,” these kinds of second-floor balconies are called “galleries,” and this is the first time anybody has requested a “major encroachment” in the city to build “galleries.” Once again, quality of life runs up against economics, and this time the focal point is smack in the heart of downtown. The “encroachment” must entail a “public purpose” to allow for the City Commission’s approval of the design, according to city code. Testimony on both sides is certain to focus on that issue, among others.

Moving on to the “Kick-the-Can-Down-the-Road Department,” the city commissioners will be asked to decide — once again — what they want built at the site of the planned State

Street parking garage. Four stories? Six stories? Ten stories? How many parking spaces? Until the commission makes a decision — any decision — the Realtor trying to sell the development rights has no idea what to offer. Will the can get kicked again?

The last item on the agenda is what one may liken to the initial sputter of a fuse on a time bomb: “Site Placement for Homeless Facility.” Vice Mayor Willie Shaw asked that this be included on the agenda. There is no backup material, and unless Shaw or somebody else offers any substantial guidance, it could be a freewheeling discussion of where commissioners do not want “a homeless facility.” 



*The Pineapple Avenue roundabout was the most recent to open in the city — in late spring 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel*





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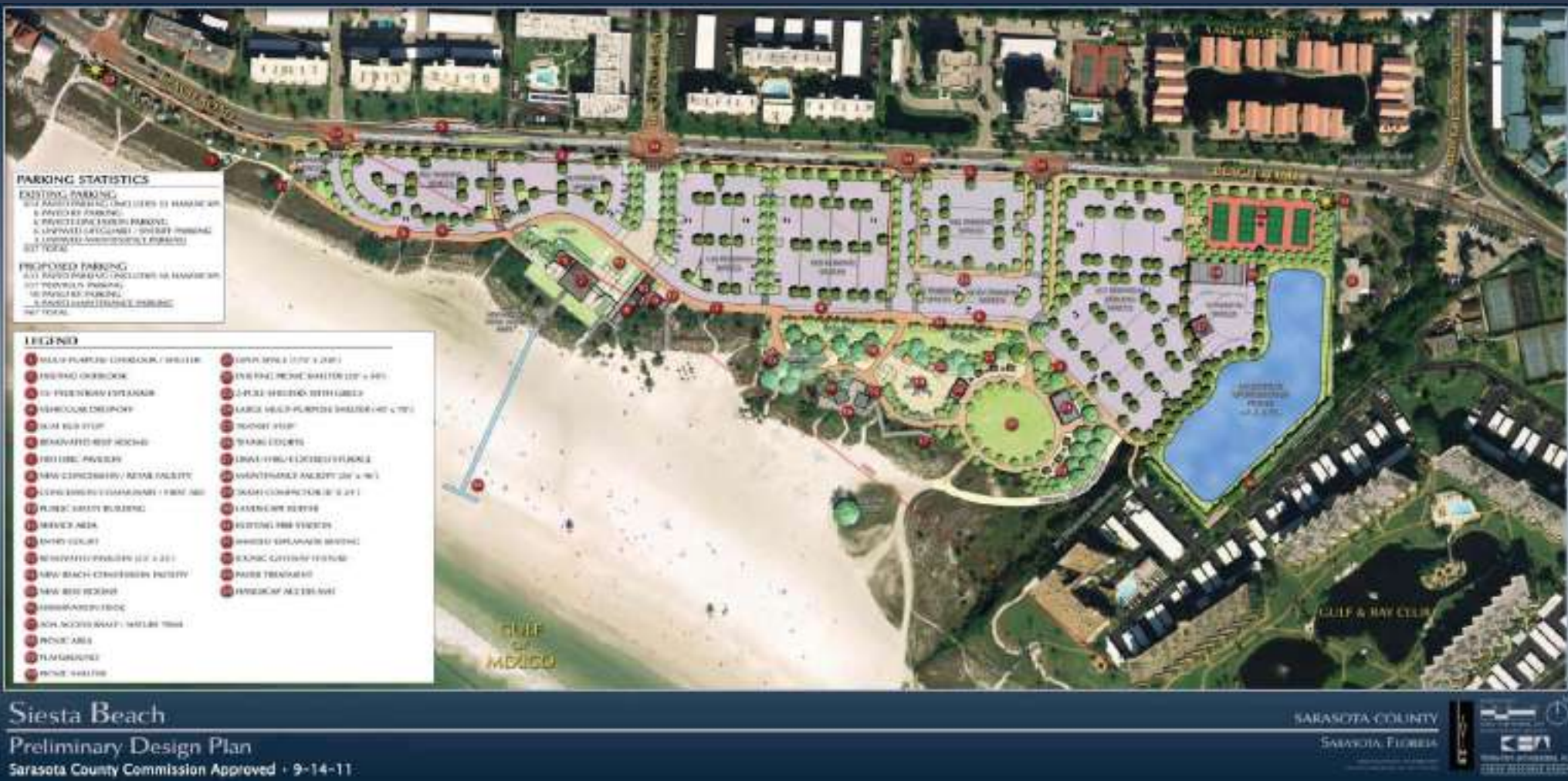
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# WAITING ON THE WEATHER



An artist's rendering shows Siesta Public Beach Park after improvements have been completed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

## A DELAY IN THE COMPLETION OF THE NEW STORMWATER PROJECT ON SIESTA KEY COULD HAVE A RIPPLE EFFECT ON THE START OF IMPROVEMENTS AT THE PUBLIC BEACH

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
Editor

The actual start of the improvements at Siesta Public Beach could be delayed by the inability of the contractor to complete the adjacent [Beach Road Drainage Project](#) on schedule, a Sarasota County project manager explained to members of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) on Oct. 1.

“We’ve got a nice pond out there where we’re supposed to have dry dirt,” Brad Gaubatz said during the SKVA’s monthly meeting at the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar. Multiple meetings

already have been held among county staff members “trying to figure out a solution to get that water out,” so the new 1-acre stormwater retention pond can be built, he added.

“Hopefully, that won’t delay the beach project itself,” Gaubatz continued, “but it has the potential to.”

“We’ve got a nice pond out there where we’re supposed to have dry dirt.”

Brad Gaubatz  
Project Manager  
Siesta Public Beach Improvements

The heavy downpours last week following an abundance of rain earlier in the summer have slowed progress on the stormwater project, county staff





*An aerial shot of Siesta Public Beach shows parking long has been an issue at one of the county's primary tourist attractions. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



*A photo shows the Siesta Beach pavilion — which was built in 1960 — and cars parked at the public beach decades ago. Image courtesy of Sarasota County*



has pointed out. Alex Boudreau, the county project manager overseeing the stormwater work, told *The Sarasota News Leader* in mid-September that the contractor had given him a new proposed timeline showing completion in January; the original schedule called for November. However, Boudreau pointed out that county staff had not approved the newly submitted timeline.

Boudreau was expected to provide an update on Thursday, Oct. 3, to members of the Siesta Key Association during their monthly

meeting, SKA Vice President Michael Shay told the SKVA members.

The current schedule for the beach project, Gaubatz said on Oct. 1, calls for the Sarasota County Commission to approve the construction contract during its Oct. 22 regular meeting. A Notice to Proceed for the contractor, Jon F. Swift Inc. of Sarasota, is set to be issued around the middle of November, Gaubatz added, "if all goes according to plan."

It is possible, he noted, that workers under the supervision of Ross Russo of Jon F. Swift



Yellow lines mark the area of Phase I of the beach improvements. Photo by Rachel Hackney



— the firm’s manager for the beach park project — might be allowed on the park site before the drainage project is finished.

Once the beach improvements get under way, Gaubatz added, the work should take 24 months; it will be done in four phases.

In response to a question, Gaubatz said the drainage project is intended to alleviate flooding on Beach Road — a point not previously made clear in presentations to the County Commission.

SKVA Vice President Kay Kouvatsos asked for confirmation that she had understood

him correctly, that water, even in heavy rain events, would be “off the road.”

“Off the road,” Gaubatz replied. “I can give you the engineer of record’s personal phone number,” he added, prompting laughter among the 30 people present.

Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. is the firm that has designed that aspect of the project, Gaubatz pointed out.

The total cost of the beach improvements will be held at \$21.5 million, Gaubatz continued, with \$16.7 million allotted to construction expenses. When the County Commission last



*Phase II is outlined in yellow. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



saw a presentation on the project, on Aug. 28, he noted, indications were that the total might come in at \$375,303 below the \$21.5 million figure. However, a shifting of contingency funding for the project could alter the numbers, he said. As of Aug. 28, the contingency amount was \$826,036, according to a chart he presented.

The numbers could not move much, he joked, “or else I get to go look for work somewhere else.”

Once the beach project does get under way, he continued, a consultant working with county

staff will have a website go live to provide up-to-date information on the work, including which parking areas are open. That plan calls for maps to be available “that you can even read on a [cellphone] app,” he noted.

The [SKVA website](#) would be able to offer a link to that new county website, he added.

During Phase I of the project, Gaubatz continued, the new east concession area, which will have a finished floor 16 feet above grade to protect it from flooding, will be built, along with a new parking section next to the storm-water retention pond and new tennis courts.



*Phase III of the beach project is outlined in yellow. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



The completed improvements will increase the number of parking spaces from 837 to 980, Brown noted.

While Phase III is under way, Russo said, 20 fewer spaces would be available than the park offers at present.

“And that’s season,” Kouvatsos pointed out.

“Yes,” Russo replied.

Gaubatz reminded everyone that the project would take two years, so visitors would have to deal with changes during two periods at the height of season.

Kouvatsos said she preferred to be optimistic about the county’s planned Siesta Key trolley service being operational in time to alleviate some of the need for parking spots at the beach. Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)

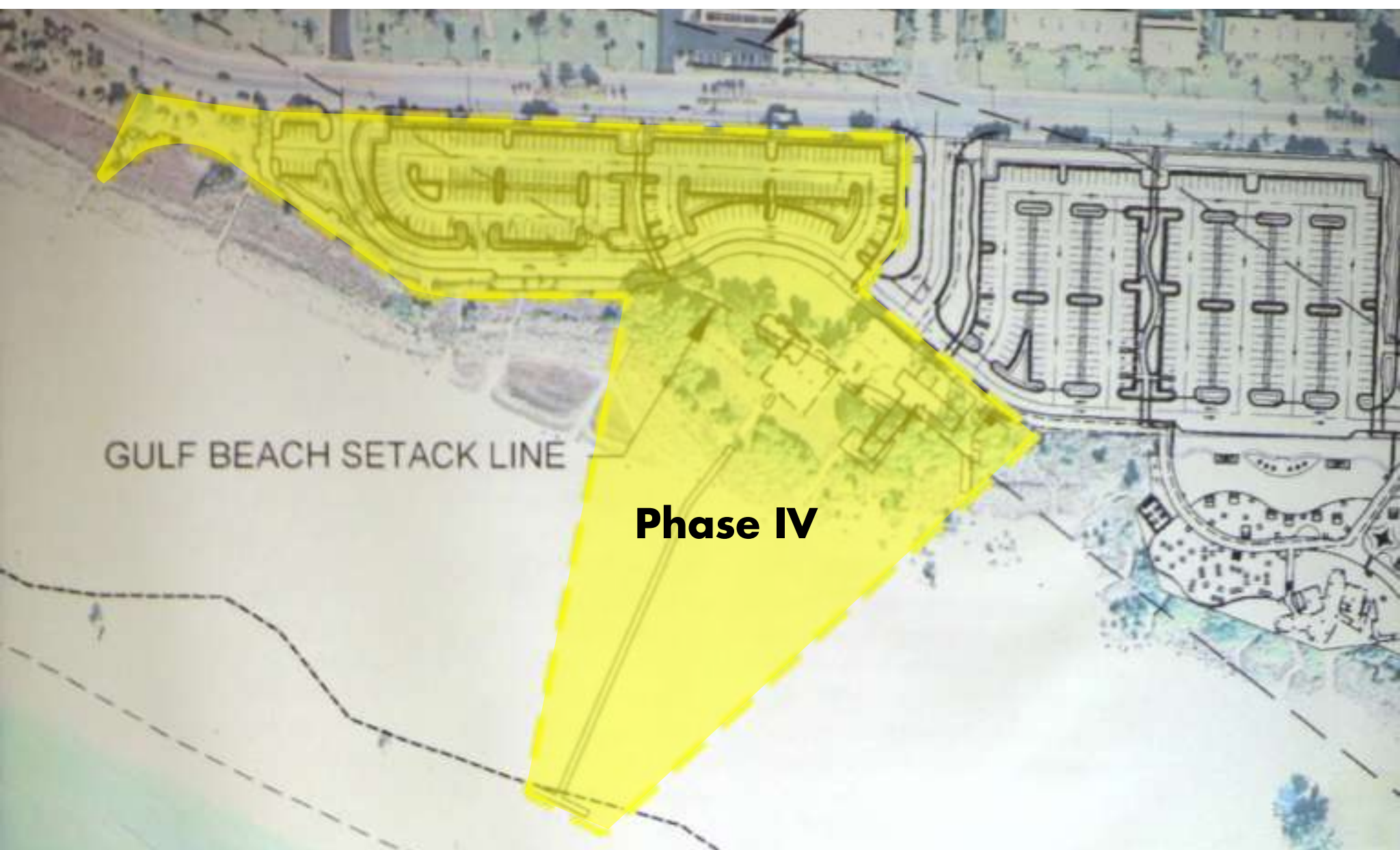
staff told the County Commission on Aug. 27 that funding should be available for the trolley to start running after July 2014.

## THE JULY FOURTH QUESTION

Dave Magee, owner of The UPS Store on Beach Road, asked about the impact the construction will have on parking for the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce’s annual July Fourth VIP picnic and fireworks show.

Kevin Cooper, executive director of the chamber, said he had discussed that with county staff. Parking arrangements for special events “will be the tough part for us over the course of the project,” Cooper added. “Everything’s fluid.”

“We’re going to have to be creative over the next couple of years,” Kouvatsos pointed out.



*Phase IV includes the last parking lot segment. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



Additional regular parking spaces should be completed before the next July Fourth, Gaubatz said, adding that the worst-case scenario he foresaw would leave the site with the same number of spots it has now.

However, Magee pointed out that the area where the Chamber has staged its July Fourth festivities in the past would not be available, based on the diagrams Gaubatz had shown. That staging area is an open field near the picnic shelter and restrooms on the east side of the park.

“[Russo] is committed to doing everything he can to coordinate [with groups holding special events],” Gaubatz pointed out.

## THE INFORMAL BEACH PATH

Among questions staff has fielded about the project, Gaubatz continued, one that has generated “a lot of discussion” has been the disappearance of the trail that wound to the park through a wooded area next to the Beach Road fire station. Once the stormwater project has been completed, he said, staff anticipates the 20-foot-wide easement adjacent to the retention pond will provide ample room for people to create a new, similar path to the park.

“We’re not broadcasting this as the actual path ... [but] people, being people, will probably make that a trail ...”

## THE PARKING LOT SIGNS

Paul Parr, owner of [Siesta Sunset Royale](#) — who lived across from the public beach until just recently — had a question about the signs put up to warn people when the beach parking lots are full.

Even when the lots clear out at the end of a busy day, he pointed out, the signs stay up, so




*Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Department Director Carolyn Brown explains aspects of the planned Siesta Public Beach improvements. Photo by Rachel Hackney*

people have learned to ignore them and drive on into the park.

Brown said she would investigate who was responsible for putting the signs in place.

Sgt. Steve Leavitt of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office told the SKVA group that his deputies do not handle that assignment.

“It seems pretty sensible to put sensors in,” Parr continued, noting that such equipment is used in many large public parking lots to transmit information to electronic signs indicating how many spaces are open.

Gaubatz responded that conduit would be run to all the park entrances. While use of sensors is not part of the current planning, he added, “we’ll have that capability in the future.” 



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# OFFSETTING COSTS



*Sarasota County staff is working on plans to mitigate a 15-percent increase in employee healthcare premiums. Photo from the National Cancer Institute via Wikimedia Commons*

## **IN AN EFFORT TO REDUCE A PROJECTED 15-PERCENT HIKE IN EMPLOYEE HEALTHCARE COSTS, THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WILL CONSIDER CHANGING THE COUNTY'S MEDICAL FUND RESERVE POLICY**

**By Roger Drouin**  
*County Editor*

Current estimates forecast a 15-percent increase in Sarasota County employees' medical insurance premiums starting in January, but county officials are trying to alleviate the impact of such a hike.

"That is a lot for some employees," Steve Botelho, chief financial planning officer with the county, told *The Sarasota News Leader*. "We're trying to see how we can offset some of those costs."

The county has already set aside an extra \$1,000 per employee for health insurance for the upcoming year. In addition, county finance staff will present options to the County Commission in November for transferring money from the Medical Benefit Reserve Fund to reduce the employees' premium increases.

**“Insurance is a confusing thing. We want our employees to be covered.”**

Joe Barbetta  
Commissioner  
Sarasota County

The rising expense for the medical fund, an insurance program self-funded by the county, is largely attributed to an



increase in claims. In fact, about 10 recent claims cost close to \$250,000 each, all resulting from employees diagnosed with serious illnesses such as cancer, county staff told the *News Leader*.

“We’re self-insured, so as claim costs go up, those costs need to be addressed,” Botelho said.

Many larger counties — and the City of Sarasota — pay for their employees’ insurance coverage.

The county is also trying to rein in claim expenses through programs that provide incentives to employees who undergo annual physicals and pursue preventive healthcare measures, such as using the county’s fitness facilities. Among those programs is one called “Compass,” which matches employees with a health counselor who will assist them in getting prompt medical attention when they need it. The counselor will also help employees “navigate the health system” and find doctors.

“You can pay \$2,000 for an MRI or \$500 right down the street,” said Steve Olmstead,

director of risk management and safety for the county. “The purpose is to help employees find the best provider at the most-reasonable costs.”

Additionally, the Compass counselor will guide employees as they schedule annual screenings and exams. “It is just really support for employees,” Olmstead pointed out.

But even with such programs, the county must find a way to handle the rising insurance costs resulting from more expensive claims.

Last year, Sarasota County employees’ insurance premiums rose by only 3 percent.

In some instances, the projected 15-percent increase for the upcoming year would negate a merit-based pay increase for non-union employees approved by the county commissioners in August. An employee can earn a raise of up to 3 percent after an evaluation.

“It would be hard for a lot of lower-pay employees to absorb a 15-percent medical rate increase,” said Joanie Whitley, general manager of human resources for the county.



*The County Commission sits in session in January. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



One option is to lower the level in the Medical Benefit Reserve Fund from 20 percent to 15 percent, freeing up approximately \$500,000 to offset the employee increases.

The \$500,000 transfer, which would require County Commission approval, would decrease the employee rate hike from 15 percent to 10 percent.

Transferring money from the reserve would still leave a healthy level in the fund, said Botelho.

During the Sept. 25 County Commission meeting, Commissioner Nora Patterson asked what level of reserves other counties had.

Neither Manatee nor Pinellas County has a reserve, Botelho replied.

## RESERVE DISCUSSION

Several years ago, the County Commission — with different members — voted to keep at least a 20-percent reserve in the Medical Fund.

In November, county staff will present options for changing that policy. At that time, staff is expected to have the latest data available regarding the insurance premiums, as well as updated numbers for the Medical Fund.

If the board chooses to modify its reserve policy, the county's Office of Financial Planning will work with the Office of the County Clerk of Court and Comptroller to withdraw a specified amount from the reserve to mitigate the employee increase, Botelho said.



*Commissioner Nora Patterson and County Administrator Randall Reid review material during a meeting. File photo*



The topic triggered frustration from one board member during the Sept. 25 meeting. Commissioner Christine Robinson said she was upset because the commissioners were not told earlier about the projected premium hike. Robinson was also upset that notice of the increase was posted online before the rate was even finalized and before the County Commission was notified about the situation. That posting was inadvertently uploaded to the web prematurely, county staff responded. It was online for only 24 hours before it was taken down.

“I am very troubled,” Robinson told County Administrator Randall Reid. “I am concerned about what else we are not seeing.”

Commissioner Joe Barbetta agreed about the early posting: “The train left the station too early.”

Robinson added that if she had known about the projected increase, she might have been more inclined to vote for the recent salary boosts.

In addition to the merit pay raises for this fiscal year, the commissioners approved a \$1,000 lump-sum payment for each non-union employee during the 2013 fiscal year. Robinson was the lone commissioner to vote against both actions, linking her decision to continued use of the county’s economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the budget.

“This might have affected my vote on raises if I had know employees had to cover some of that [healthcare] cost,” Robinson said. “I am concerned we are not getting information we need to make decisions.”




*Steve Botelho/File photo*

Barbetta asked if county staff had sought quotes from other insurance companies to see whether lower rates could be secured.

Aetna manages the medical coverage, but since the county self-funds its program, the bulk of the cost comes from claims, which can vary from year to year, staff replied.

“Insurance is a confusing thing,” Barbetta said. “We want our employees to be covered.”

Commissioner Nora Patterson pointed out during that Sept. 25 discussion what staff told the *News Leader* this week — that the projected premium increase would hit some employees hard and that it would negate the recently approved pay increase.

“Some of these employees with a spouse and children — about half of our staff — the raise will be totally eaten up,” Patterson said. 





# RADIO REPLACEMENT RFP

*New emergency radio system towers are needed in Sarasota County, according to staff. Photo by Rjcastillo via Wikimedia Commons*

## THE SARASOTA COUNTY PROCUREMENT DEPARTMENT IS REVIEWING BIDS FROM FIRMS VYING TO ASSIST THE COUNTY IN DEVELOPING SPECIFICATIONS FOR A NEW EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

A Sarasota County Procurement Department analyst says a recommendation is expected to be made within two weeks regarding the awarding of a bid for a consultant to work with staff from both Sarasota and Manatee counties on the specifications for a new emergency communications system *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned.

The analyst, Tara McMahon, told the *News Leader* on Sept. 30 that the recommendation possibly could be made by Oct. 11. However, she said it would take a while to review all the

responses to a Request for Proposals (RFP) the county issued on Aug. 7 in the effort to hire the consultant.

The bids were opened on Sept. 11, according



*We will be within the budget we provided for the [County] Commission.*

Mike Tobias  
Fire Chief  
Sarasota County





to a posting on the county's solicitation website, [eProcure](#).

Referencing county policy, McMahon added that she was not allowed to make any further comment on the process.

Fire Chief Mike Tobias reported to the County Commission and members of the Longboat Town Commission during a joint meeting on Sept. 17 that staff planned a Sept. 26 session to review the nine responses to the RFP that the Procurement Department had received. Tobias said then that it was possible the Sept. 26 meeting could conclude with a recommendation on the awarding of the bid, "depending on how the qualifications stacked up." However, he indicated it would be more likely to conclude with the shortlisting of two

to four firms, followed by requests for their representatives to come in for interviews.

"We will be within the budget we provided for the [County] Commission," he added.

During a September 2012 County Commission meeting, Robert Stuckey, the county's general manager of public safety communications, estimated the cost of a consultant's services between \$250,000 and \$300,000. Tobias pointed out to the County and Longboat commissions that Manatee County will be paying 50 percent of that expense.

The County Commission agreed to the hiring of the consultant in a 3-2 vote on Sept. 12, 2012. Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson were in the minority, criticizing Sarasota County staff for not checking



*Jim Brown, the mayor of Longboat Key, and County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason listen to discussion during a joint meeting of their boards on Sept. 17. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



with public safety personnel in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties to learn about their replacement of radio equipment before the Republican National Convention was held in Tampa the previous month.

During an April commission discussion about Sarasota County's outdated 800MHz radio system, staff estimated the total cost of obtaining and installing new equipment at \$18.5 million.

Once the consultant is hired, Tobias told the two boards on Sept. 17, it should take about 90 days for the firm to "come back with a package ready for us to put out to bid for the vendor" for the replacement system.

A clause in the contract says the consultant also will work with staffs from Sarasota and Manatee counties to select the vendor for the new system, Tobias noted, to make certain that firm can comply with the specifications the consultant draws up.

Tobias explained to the County Commission in April that the Motorola SmartZone 800 MHz Digital Trunked Radio system Sarasota County began using in 1996 was the first of its kind in the nation, providing radio communications to all the fire and EMS departments in the county — except the Longboat Key Fire Department — as well as to all the law enforcement agencies except for those on Longboat Key. It also serves non-public safety agencies such as the Sarasota County School Board, Sarasota County Area Transit and public works agencies throughout the county.

Altogether, the system has 5,000 field radios, he pointed out.

However, because of the age of the system, replacement parts are available only on the market for used equipment. In a memo he provided the County Commission in advance of that meeting, Tobias noted the system had



*Emergency services staff says it is critical for first responders in Sarasota and Manatee counties to be able to communicate easily with each other by radio. Photo courtesy Sarasota County*



suffered two “major component failures” since November 2012. The memo added, “Each time we have a failure and have to restart [the master site controller], we run the risk of it not restarting. That would be a catastrophic failure and potentially lead to a communications blackout throughout Sarasota County.”

During the joint County Commission/Longboat Town Commission meeting, Tobias explained that the key goal with the new radio system is interoperability. The 800MHz system cannot communicate with the Manatee County system, he pointed out, “without a lot of whistles and bells and handshakes and wizardry and things like that ...”

Charlotte County staff also is working with his staff and Manatee County representatives, he continued, with the hope that its new emergency communications system will be compatible with those in Sarasota and Manatee counties. DeSoto County leaders are interested in participating in the process as well, Tobias added.

“We’re looking at being able to expand this [new system] as we need to, to incorporate other counties as well,” he said. “Our goal is to have regional blanket coverage with a unified system.”

## BID DETAILS

The RFP for the Sarasota County consultant required that it be able to demonstrate “experience providing professional public safety ... Project-25 radio consulting services and be an independent third party consulting firm that is not affiliated with any communications equipment manufacturer, distributor, or supplier.”


“Project 25 is a public communications standard dedicated to ensuring interoperability



*Sarasota County Fire Chief Mike Tobias (center) addresses the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions in April as County Administrator Randall Reid (left) listens. File photo*

in communications ... [among] local, state and federal agencies when protecting the public’s welfare,” according to the website [www.p25.com](http://www.p25.com). The organization working on P25 standards comprises the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO), the National Association of State Telecommunications Directors (NASTD) and the federal government, the website says.

Firms responding to the Sarasota County RFP had to provide a minimum of five references from public sector agencies (federal, state or local) for which they had acted as the primary consultant for a P25 system within the past eight years.

All respondents also had to provide answers to 21 questions regarding details of their experience relative to a wide array of technical matters, as well as with issues such as site development and room design. 





# THE AMBUSH

*The CRA Extension Study Committee discusses issues at a meeting last month. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*

## **ANALYSIS: THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CRA EXTENSION STUDY COMMITTEE RESIGNS AS THE BATTLE CONTINUES OVER THE FUTURE OF THE DISTRICT**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

I included a metaphor in last week's story about the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area Extension Study Committee. It was about David (Merrill, chairman of the committee) and Goliath (the Sarasota County Commission).

The day the story was published, Merrill resigned. He told *The Sarasota News Leader*, "The county doesn't want to hear some of the things I'm raising."

Three days earlier, County Commissioner Joe Barbetta called for Merrill's resignation. At least two other county commissioners were critical of Merrill's leadership of the committee.

His departure creates a second vacancy on the board. Picking a new chairman will be the first order of business at the board's next meeting, on Oct. 8, at 5:30 p.m. in the City Commission's Chambers.

### **THE NOT-SO-ANCIENT HISTORY**

In 1986, the City and County of Sarasota cut a 30-year deal. They would freeze the amount of revenue from property tax collections in downtown Sarasota. In subsequent years anything over that 1986 "baseline" would accrue to something called the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA).



The CRA was run by the City Commission, which promised to spend the money to fight slum and blight. It was believed at that time downtown was a bit blighted and slummy. The County Commission did not have a word to say about where the money went. And it still does not. That was the deal.

Fast forward to today when the CRA is awash in cash. The downtown condominiums are the most valuable structures — from a property tax point of view — in all of Sarasota County. While commercial real estate in the defined CRA district has appreciated, the condos are the real gold mines.

Between the city and county tax rolls, the CRA is now worth more than \$6 million each and every year in revenue. And in the pre-2007 times, the amount was even higher. It is

a redistribution of wealth, with \$3.5 million in county tax revenue this year plowed back into a defined downtown district in the City of Sarasota. The city's share is \$3.1 million into the district coffers.

In other words, the game is worth the candle (to use a Revolutionary War phrase) because millions of dollars are at stake. And the deal goes dead in 2016.

Merrill's committee was assigned the job (by both the city and county) to determine if the CRA should continue — and if so — in what form? Should the city commissioners continue to be the arbiters of \$6 million or more in combined city and county property tax revenue spent in the narrow district? Should the financial equation be refigured? Should the area of the CRA be expanded?



*Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown (center left) offers remarks during a July CRA Extension Study Committee meeting. Photo by Stan Zimmerman*



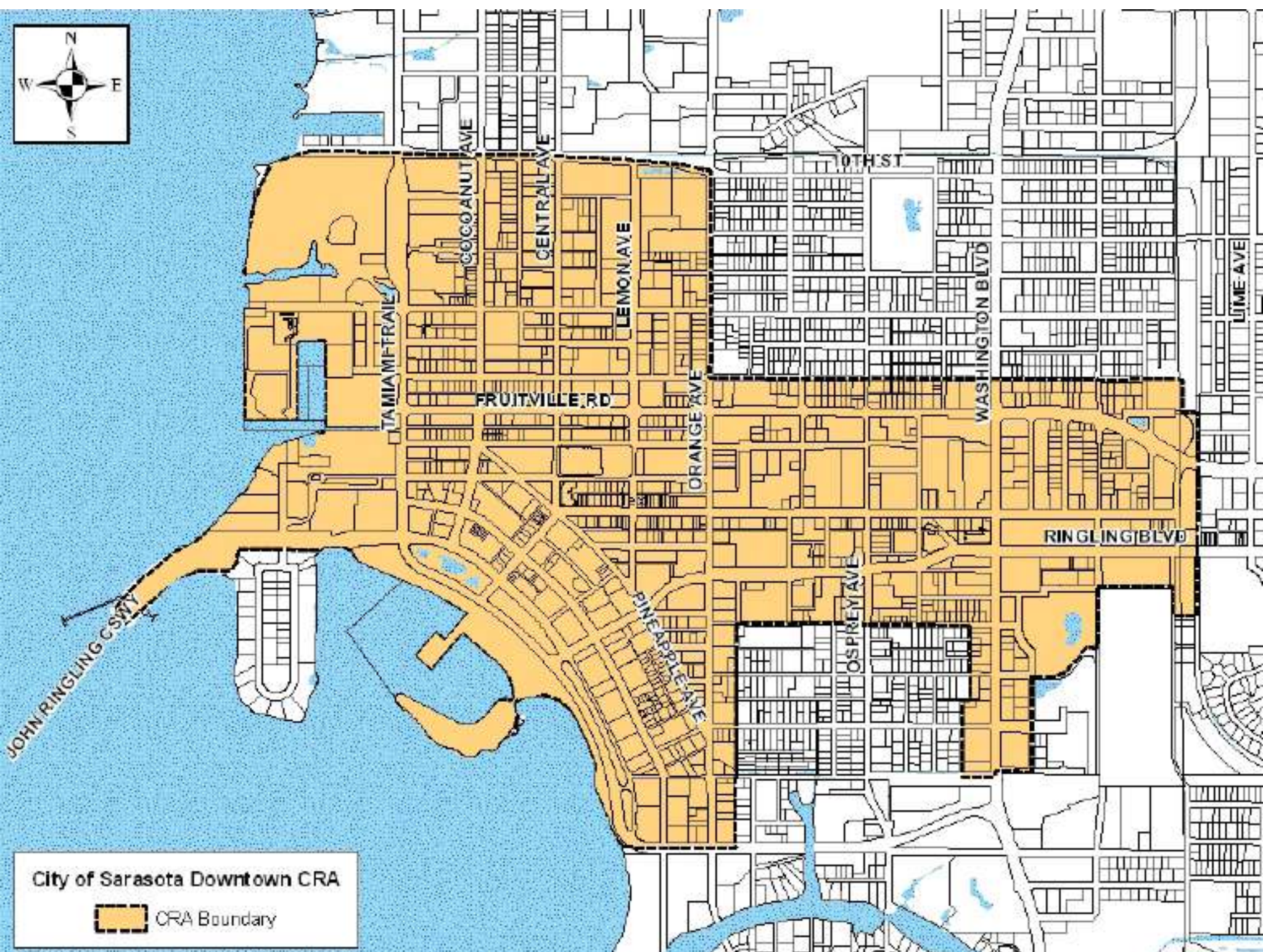
Merrill's committee members twice agreed by consensus — but not by vote — to the continuation of the downtown Sarasota CRA. They could change their minds, but their inclination is clear. At their last meeting, on Sept. 25 (two days before Merrill's resignation), the committee began marshaling reasons to extend the CRA and its financing scheme.

## THE PRESENT PERIL

We live today in the era of the insurgent: the unconventional warrior; a naked David with a sling opposing a giant Goliath in armor with

a honed sword. Barbetta's sword was sure, but the stone from Merrill's sling is still in the air. Its message: Why can't other communities enjoy a CRA? It is a blow aimed directly at the County Commission's fiscal future. And it is not a stone. It is a grenade.

This is why county commissioners are challenged by Merrill. He has contacted mayors in the southern portion of the county, asking if they have any interest in a CRA. And he asked his committee to draft a "model CRA ordinance" that could be used not only for



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



downtown Sarasota, but also in North Port, Venice and Nokomis.

Every CRA represents a subtraction from the county's property tax revenue. The County Commission fears a proliferation of CRAs would become a huge drain on county revenues. That is why Merrill took heat from commissioners and resigned.

The question he raised remains valid and explosive. If the CRA was good for Sarasota, why should it not be good for Venice and North Port and Nokomis and other areas? With that question, Merrill set a political ambush. And as they say with raffles, you need not be present to win.

## PLAYING IT OUT

Merrill's departure does not put the pin back in the grenade he has thrown. The committee is about halfway through its deliberations. Its report and recommendations are due in January. By consensus, the members have already agreed to recommend perpetuation of downtown Sarasota's CRA for some undefined term.

The committee's deliberations have been ignored by the other cities in the county. Only Sarasota city commissioners have shown up at meetings to observe and occasionally testify during the "open to the public" slots on the agendas. But the cities all are watching, and weighing their chances.

Complicating the resolution of the CRA issue is the imposition of term limits. County Commissioners Nora Patterson and Barbetta are banned from running again next year. Two new people with presumably new ideas will take their places. So if the current commission



*County Commissioner Joe Barbetta awaits the start of a recent county meeting. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

wants to resolve the CRA issue, it has to take action in 2014. With Patterson and Barbetta — both city residents — as lame ducks in their final year of service, they can act without political repercussion.

However, somebody will have to pick up the very expensive pieces. The committee's report in January will be of an advisory nature only. Both the Sarasota City and County commissions can embrace the recommendations or utterly ignore them.

The stakes are at the multi-million-dollar level. If the Sarasota CRA continues for another 30 years — assuming a 3 percent annual growth rate in the tax base downtown — that is a total of \$160 million from the county flowing into downtown.



Merrill's "Want a CRA?" solicitation to South County communities puts the County Commission on the twin horns of dilemma. One option is to let the downtown CRA expire three years from now, even though downtown is an economic and employment hub for the county.

The other option is to approve some form of downtown CRA extension without offering any type of concessions to South County. With two county commissioners espousing "South County causes" at nearly every breath, it is difficult to see how one city could keep all the marbles for itself.

Arching over these options is the indication county commissioners feel the city has not been the best custodian of the county's revenue contribution. The city has used CRA monies for purposes ostensibly outside the

CRA's approved orbit. Each year, the city skims \$2.5 million to pay for police and maintenance downtown. Taking that from the CRA pot frees up general fund monies for other purposes. There is not a thing the county can do about it, even though the money is meant for capital projects and not routine operations.

The City and County commissions are scheduled to hold a joint meeting on the afternoon of Tuesday, Oct. 22, starting at 2 p.m. A draft agenda is already circulating. It calls for a "status report" by the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area Extension Study Committee.

So in less than three weeks, the committee has to find another chairman and scrounge up something to report — and report it in a charged atmosphere. 

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# OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE

*The Federal Building is located in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **THE CITY'S NEW FORM-BASED CODE, THE COUNTY'S FRUITVILLE INITIATIVE AND 2050 PLAN AND THE CITY'S LIFT STATION 87 PROJECT WILL BE FOCUSES OF UPCOMING PUBLIC SESSIONS**

**By Stan Zimmerman**  
*City Editor*

In coming days, community residents will have a number of opportunities to become more actively engaged in local government efforts that will affect their future.

When you undertake to rewrite essentially what is the DNA of a city, there are bound to be questions. In this case, Sarasota's DNA is its zoning code. What can be built where and how tall and where is the parking and literally thousands of other niggling details must be answered before the OK stamp goes on the plans.

It drives developers to madness, because a mistake with a small detail can derail an

entire project. And parts of the current code drive neighbors to madness because so much can change as a project evolves.

Several months ago, the city hired Karin Murphy and Andrew Georgiadis to charge into the zoning thicket and hack away in search of more equity and predictability for business and community leaders alike.

On Friday, Oct. 4, Murphy and Georgiadis will hold an open house at their Urban Design Studio on the first floor of the Federal Building at the intersection of Ringling Boulevard and Orange Avenue in Sarasota. They will display



an array of flowcharts, planning guides, architectural renderings and other visual tools they are using to create a new zoning code for the city.

Part of their technique involves picking “catalyst projects,” Murphy indicated. One of those is North Water Tower Park. But what should be a first-class urban amenity has become a center of criminal activity, because it is almost impossible to see what is actually happening in the park. While increased police patrols might be the conventional answer, planning and zoning issues could also help.

Other catalyst projects may include the Marian Anderson Brownfield site at U.S. 301 and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way, along

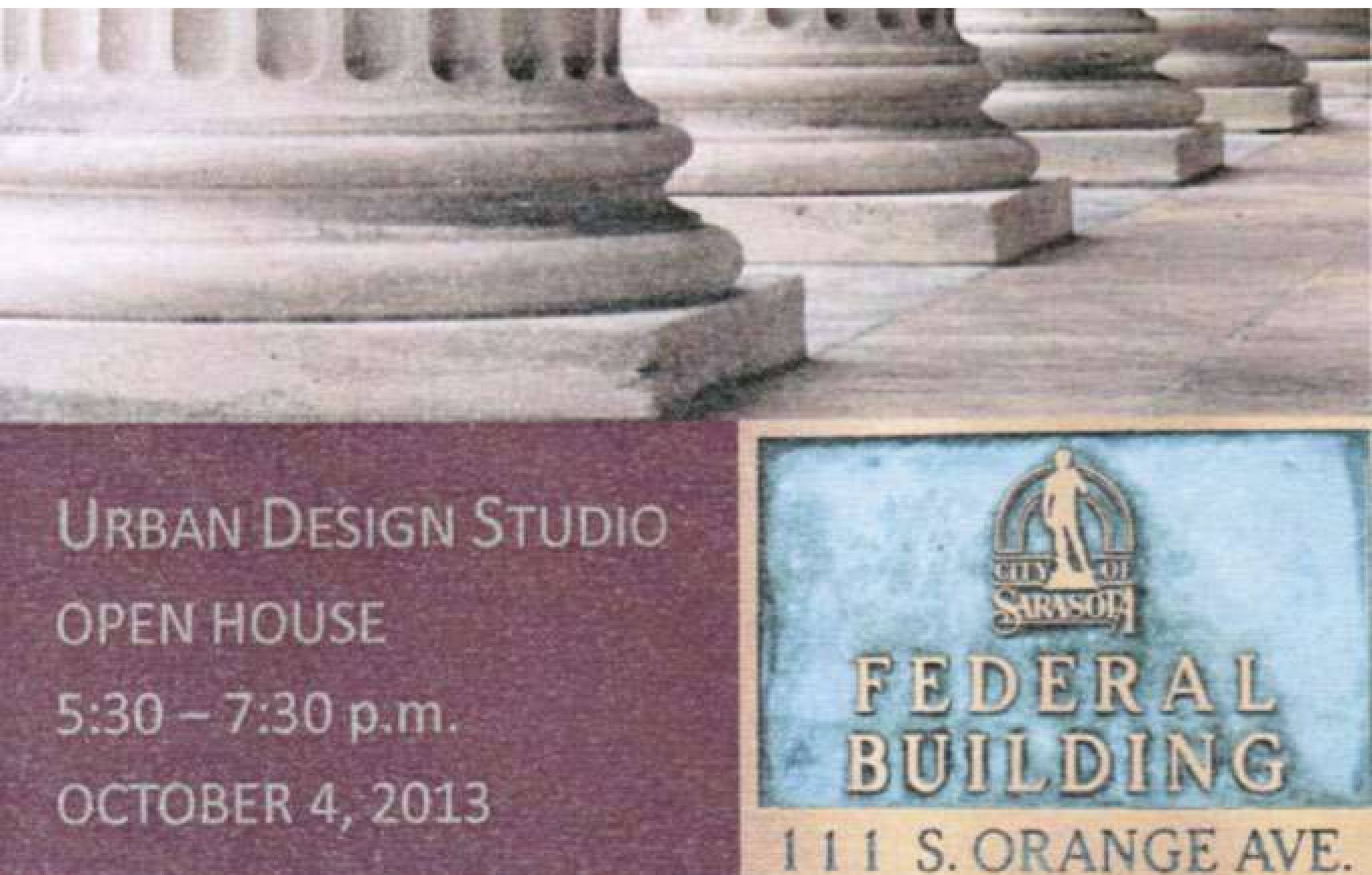
with the area around Ringling Boulevard and Payne Park.

Murphy is a Sarasota veteran, serving as a member of the city’s Planning Department before establishing her consulting firm. She and Georgiadis participated in creating a form-based code for the downtown area of Bradenton. She says community involvement is critical to the success of the current project.

People with questions about form-based codes, or suggestions, are invited to attend the open house from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

## CCNA MEETS SATURDAY

The Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA) will meet at 9 a.m. on



*A formal invitation has been issued to the Design Studio Open House. Image courtesy City of Sarasota*



Saturday, Oct. 5, at the Waldemere Fire Station across the street from Sarasota Memorial Hospital. The organization is composed of representatives of 28 Sarasota neighborhoods; they meet monthly.

After a round-robin update on activities or concerns from each of the neighborhoods, two presentations are planned. Representatives of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) will give an update on the county's efforts to modify the long-range [2050 Plan](#).

Next, the CCNA reps will hear of the latest efforts to restart work on Lift Station 87 in Sarasota's Luke Wood Park. The new project manager, Robert Garland with the engineering firm McKim & Creed, will be on hand to talk about work getting under way next week and lasting well into next year.



*For now, parking remains free in the Palm Avenue garage in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



*The county's 2050 Plan for development east of Interstate 75 will be on the CCNA agenda Saturday. File photo*



The CCNA has served for years as an unofficial “leadership academy,” with several of its members and officers running for, and sometimes winning, elective office.

## FRUITVILLE INITIATIVE

Sarasota County will hold a public meeting on the Fruitville Initiative on Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 6 p.m. at the Sarasota County Operations Center, 1001 Sarasota Center Blvd. in Sarasota.

During that session, staff will talk about the history and the status of the project and how the public can participate in future planning efforts.

The Fruitville Initiative is a public-private partnership seeking to form a development strategy for 300 acres of vacant property located east of Interstate 75 on and near Fruitville Road.

County commissioners have pushed for the effort to get under way in earnest, citing Fruitville Road’s import as a gateway to the community.

## FISCAL YEAR CHANGES

While area residents have the aforementioned opportunities to influence upcoming initiatives, they will have to deal with changes that have taken place concurrent with the start of the new fiscal year, Oct. 1.


At least two fee modifications face Sarasota city residents. The first is a 4-percent jump in their bills for water, sewer and garbage service. That will help fund \$16 million in capital improvements, including water main upgrades.



*A county meeting on Oct. 8 will invite public comments on development of 300 acres on or near Fruitville Road on the outskirts of Sarasota. Photo by Roger Drouin*

The second change involves parking. After the City Commission’s on-again, off-again “romance” with parking meters soured for good and the offending machines were plucked out of local sidewalks, a half-million-dollar hole was left in the parking budget.

The City Commission decided to help plug that hole by charging people to park in the city’s public garages. The exact plan has not been worked out yet, so for now, the parking is still free.

And if you have not heard, Florida law now bans texting while driving, becoming the 41st state to outlaw the practice. The new law is not the strongest by far. In Florida, it remains legal to text while at a stoplight. (For more details, see the *News Briefs*.) 





*An aerial view shows the Ellis Building at 1605 Main St. in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps*

## THE DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT REBUFFS A FORMER BOARD MEMBER'S REQUEST TO CEASE PUTTING NEW LANDSCAPING IN FRONT OF A BUILDING FOR WHICH HE IS SEEKING NEW TENANTS

By Stan Zimmerman  
*City Editor*

A former member of the Downtown Improvement District board returned this week to lobby his former colleagues to stop putting landscaping next to his building.

Larry Fineberg with Benderson Development Co. railed against the DID board, saying time and again he did not know the design for downtown improvements called for plantings up against the Ellis

Building at the northeast corner of Main Street and Orange Avenue.

Until a few months ago, the building was partially occupied by Bank of America.

Since the bank branch has relocated, Fineberg has been preparing the structure for new tenants. “We’ve renovated — redone the common areas, the entrances — and we’ll be redoing the front of the building once we know who

“ *It doesn’t seem right to me that we should pay \$8,000 because Larry [Fineberg] didn’t understand.*

Eileen Hampshire  
Board Member  
Downtown Improvement District





the [new] tenants are,” said Fineberg. “You are adding about 30 feet of landscaping that will interfere. It just doesn’t work. It’s not the way to present a retail space.”

Instead, Fineberg wants no adornment. “Just put in concrete and we’ll do whatever we want at our expense later,” he told the DID board. “We know what is best for our building.”

The problem was money. “The city’s willing to work with Larry, but there is no money,” said City of Sarasota Chief Planner Steve Stancel. “The contractor’s contingency has already been spent.” He noted the area in question belongs to the city, not Benderson Development.

Stancel estimated the change would cost about \$8,500 and that it would be necessary to

seek City Commission approval for a change order. The earliest meeting when the item could appear on the agenda would be Oct. 22, he added.

“I don’t want my building in that condition for that long,” responded Fineberg. “There’s barricades out there. How can we move forward immediately?”

Stancel replied, “If Larry fronts the money, the commission could refund it at a later date.”

Fineberg was cool to that idea. “I don’t trust the commission,” he said.

A motion was proposed for the DID to front the money, but it died for lack of a second. Vice Chairman William Pettey said, “No offense, Larry, but I don’t like being dictated to.”



*The Ellis Building (center) stands tall in the background as the Sarasota Farmers Market bustles on a Saturday. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



DID Operations Manager John Moran added that he delivered a copy of “100 percent design drawings” to Fineberg in June. “He took those plans with him, and we heard nothing,” said Moran.

Board member Eileen Hampshire told her colleagues, “It doesn’t seem right to me that

we should pay \$8,000 because Larry didn’t understand.”

What Fineberg understands all too well is the amount of money the high-rise office building is assessed in taxes for the DID every year. Chairman Ernie Ritz calculated the figure, saying the building has a taxable value of



*Residents of the Plaza at Five Points have expressed an interest in joining the Downtown Improvement District. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



\$12 million, so the 2-mill DID levy would be \$24,000.

When it was clear the DID board was not going to offer up \$8,000 to demolish the landscaping around the Ellis Building and fill in the space with concrete, Fineberg said he had another meeting to attend and left the room.

One possible reason for Fineberg's fury is the nature of the clientele that might be interested in the building's ground floor. A restaurant could apply for a city permit and cover any available concrete with tables.

## CONDO MEMBERSHIP IN DID PUT ON HOLD

A plan was proposed two weeks ago to allow downtown condominium complexes to join the DID. The idea was presented by Ron Rayevich, chairman of the residents' association at the Plaza at Five Points. Chairman Ritz was absent from that meeting.

Ritz was present this week, though, and he challenged the idea. One aspect of the change would put a resident on the DID board, which is composed of commercial property owners. "We already have two downtown residents on this board," said Ritz. "Me and Tom Mannausa live downtown."


Rayevich proposed that condo residents pay one-half mill in taxes to the DID, with the money promised for downtown safety, security and cleanliness. That figure is one-quarter of the 2-mill levy paid by commercial property owners.



*Ernie Ritz is chairman of the Downtown Improvement District (DID). Photo courtesy of DID*

Ritz raised a number of other questions. Would this residential member vote on all DID issues or only those pertaining to safety, security and cleanliness? How would this person be chosen?

DID board member Dr. Mark Kaufman was a major advocate of the condo membership proposal two weeks ago, but this week he was absent from the meeting, as was Peter Fanning, president of the Downtown Sarasota Condominium Association. DID board members indicated their views on the matter would be welcome.

Rather than continue the dialogue this week then, Ritz said, "We're going to postpone this." 





## VARIANCE SOUGHT AGAIN

*A county illustration shows the location of 162 Beach Road (property record 0080-24-0028) and 168 Beach Road (0080-24-0027) close to the Terrace condominium complex on Siesta Key. Image courtesy Sarasota County*

### OWNERS OF PROPERTY ON BEACH ROAD THAT HAS BEEN SUBMERGED IN THE GULF OF MEXICO IN PAST DECADES HAVE SUBMITTED A NEW PLAN TO CONSTRUCT A HOUSE ON THE SITE

By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

A new effort has begun to obtain a Sarasota County variance for construction on Beach Road property that long-time Siesta Key residents say has a history of being under water, *The Sarasota News Leader* has learned.

On July 10, the owners of the parcel at 162 Beach Road — Ronald and Sonia Allen — filed a new application for a Coastal Setback Variance. The design has been revised since the County Commission on Jan. 9 turned down their request to build a three-story home on the lot, Howard Berna,

environmental supervisor for the county, told the *News Leader*.

“Please note that our office sent a request for additional information on August 16 ... so these plans are likely to be modified prior to any board hearing,” Berna wrote the *News Leader* in an email.

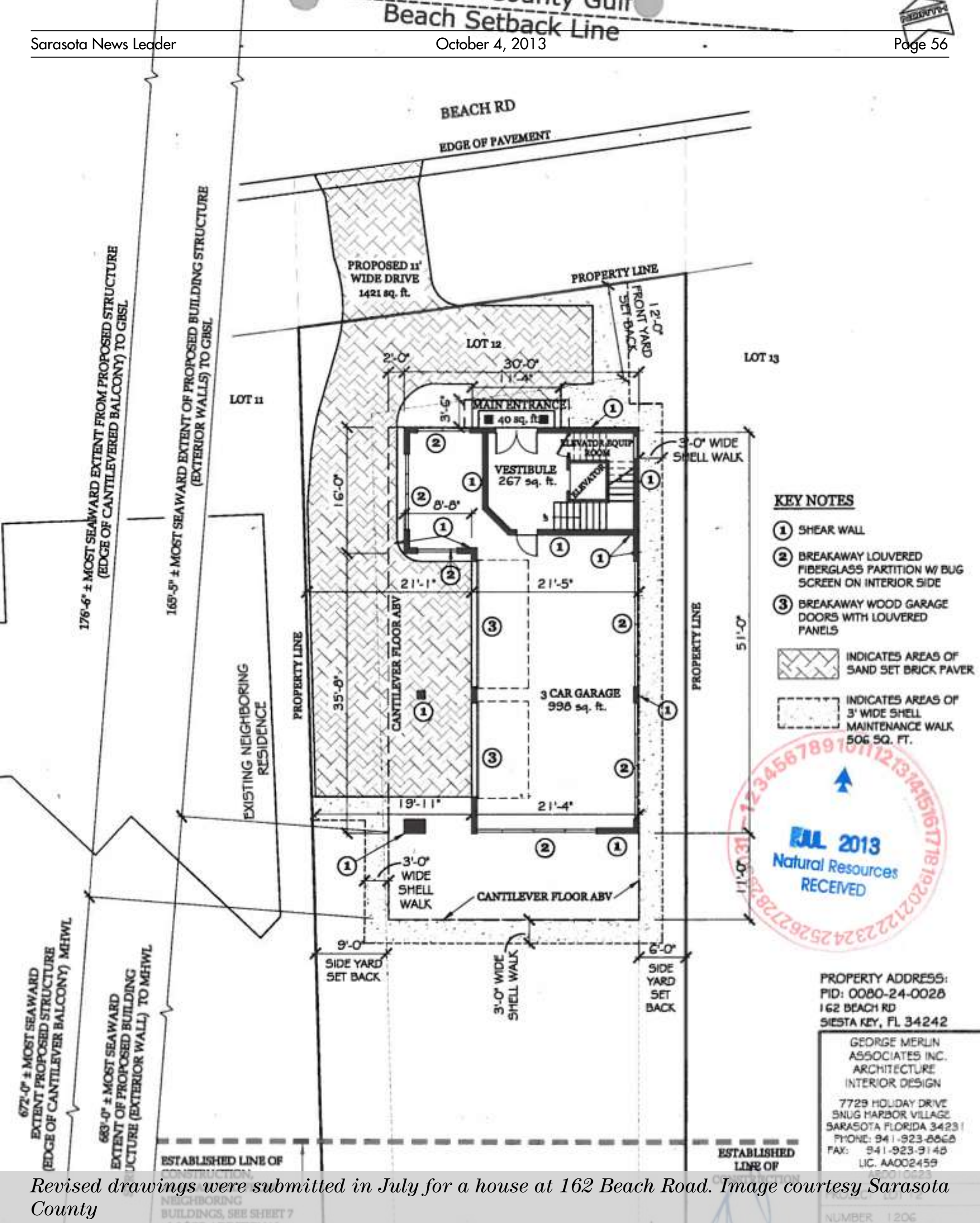
“Please note that our office sent a request for additional information on August 16 ... so these plans are likely to be modified prior to any board hearing.”

Howard Berna  
Environmental Supervisor  
Sarasota County

As of Oct. 2, he said, the application remained incomplete and a public hearing date had not been scheduled.

In fact, Berna told the *News Leader*, “They are plans that are

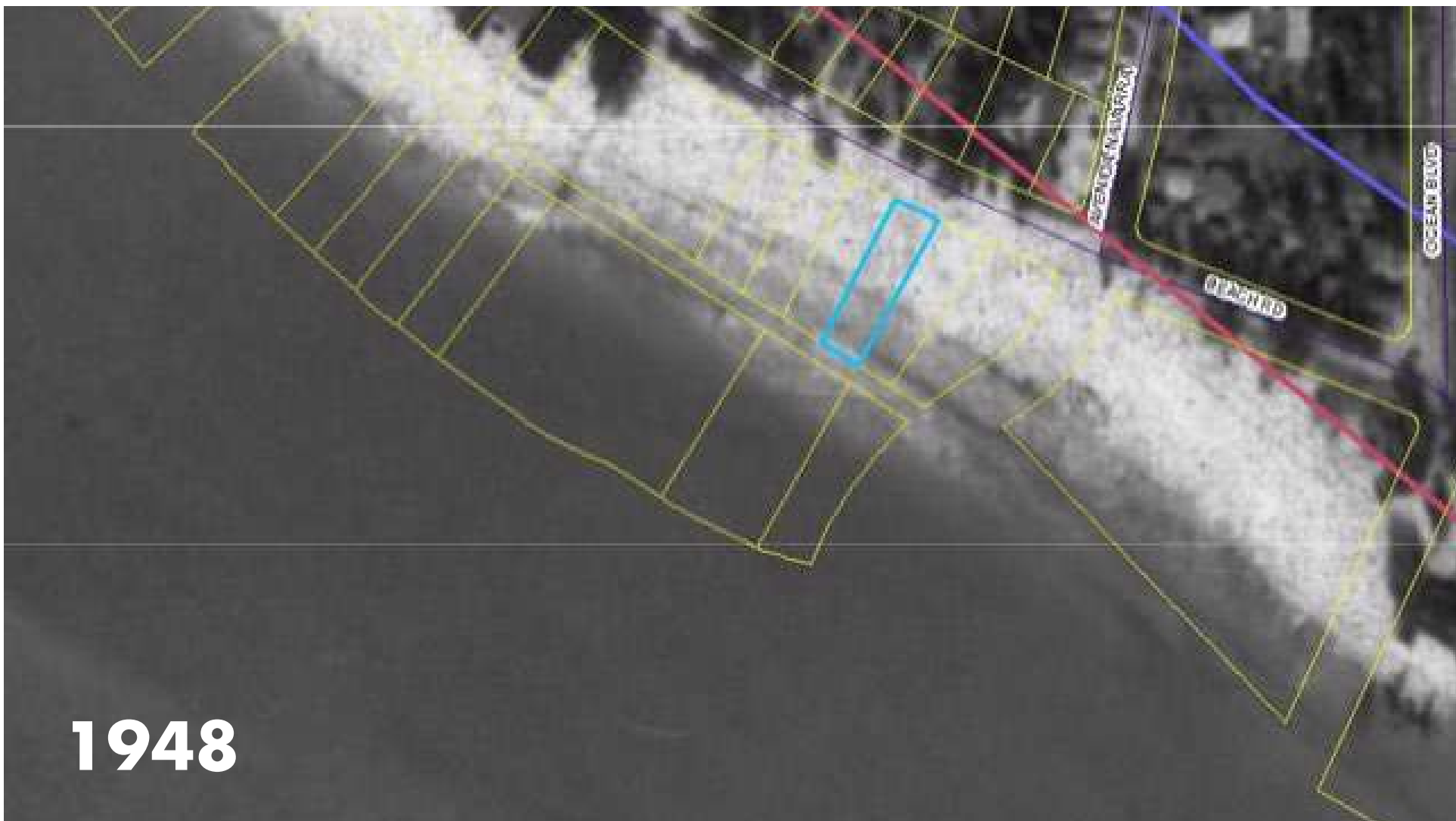












# 1948

*An aerial view shows the location of 162 Beach Road in 1948. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



# 1998

*An aerial view shows the location of 162 Beach Road in 1998. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



- A first-floor balcony: 352.
- Elevator and stairs for the first floor: 120.
- A second-floor balcony: 352.
- Elevator and stairs for the second floor: 120.

The GBSL was established in Sarasota County Ordinance 2004-010 to protect property from flooding. Coastal parcels seaward of that line “are hazard areas where development would be subjected to erosion and storm wind, wave and surge,” the ordinance says. The GBSL and a Barrier Island Pass Twenty-Year Hazard Line were designed not only to protect public health, safety and welfare, the ordinance notes, but also to “[m]inimize future public expenditures for flood and erosion control measures” and “[m]inimize future public expenditures for relief and/or restoration of

projects following natural disasters or gradual erosion.”

The ordinance says those lines also were designed to protect beaches as well as beachfront dunes, bluffs and vegetation “necessary for maintaining shoreline stability ....”

During the Jan. 9 County Commission meeting, Commissioner Nora Patterson, who lives on Siesta Key, said she had seen the parcels where the Allens wanted to build the houses under water at various times over the past decades. County staff provided photos to illustrate that.

Because of the circumstances regarding the history of the lots and that part of Siesta Key — with continuing erosion problems on a nearby section of North Beach Road — Patterson continued, “It’s really rough for me



*An aerial view shows the location of 162 Beach Road in 2008. Image courtesy Sarasota County*



to even envision somebody wanting to build on those properties.”

In making the motions to deny the Allens’ requests for the variances, Patterson added, “If I could roll the clock back, a *long* ways, a lot of the development that I think is in harm’s way ... probably wouldn’t have been approved today ...”

During the September Siesta Key Association meeting, President Catherine Luckner said the organization was keeping an eye on the new application process. The SKA opposed the previous plan because it called for construction seaward of the GBSL. “We have really nice accretion [of sand in that area of the beach],” she added. The dunes are a means of protection for homes already there, she pointed out.

Regarding the new application, Luckner said, “We’ll see what happens.”


## PROPERTY HISTORY

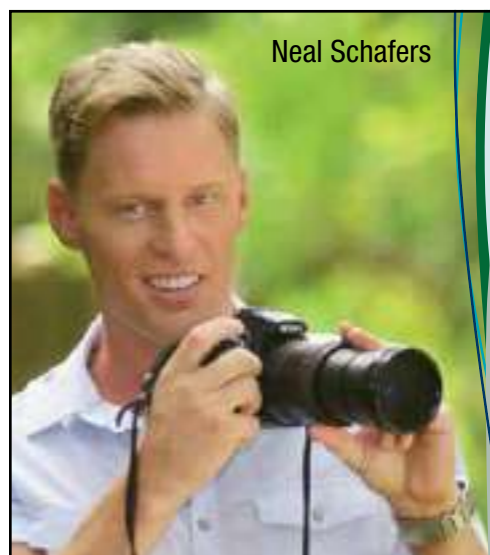
Subsequent to their failure to obtain the variances in January, the Allens sold the

lot at 168 Beach Road, Berna told the *News Leader*. A *News Leader* check of records in the Sarasota County Property Appraiser’s database showed that property was transferred on May 7 to Wendy B. Cooper, trustee of the Burton M. Cooper Credit Shelter Trust No. 1 for \$400,000. The total land area of that parcel is 7,679 square feet, the record says. It has a just market value of \$1,041,500 this year, down slightly from the 2012 value of \$1,093,500.

That parcel was transferred from Brent R. Cooper to Ronald G. Allen on Feb. 21, 2012, for \$100, the Property Appraiser Office’s records show.

The Allens bought the 162 Beach Road parcel for \$5.4 million in May 2009. The Property Appraiser’s Office record shows it has 7,429 square feet.

The 2013 just market value of that parcel is \$1,047,500, according to the Property Appraiser’s Office, also down slightly from the 2012 value of \$1,161,200. 



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### LAW BANNING TEXTING WHILE DRIVING GOES INTO EFFECT

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and AAA are partnering to reduce distracted driving on Florida's roadways by working to educate the public about the new Florida law banning texting while driving.

The Texting While Driving Law went into effect on Oct. 1, an AAA news release notes.

“Sending or receiving a text takes a driver's eyes from the road for an average of 4.6 seconds, the equivalent of driving, at 55 mph, the length of an entire football field, blind,” the release points out. “With more than 6 billion text messages sent each day in the United

States,” the release says, “it is important to remind drivers to *Put It Down*” — the slogan for AAA's anti-texting campaign.

The law states that a person may not operate a motor vehicle while manually typing into a wireless communications device — an act known as texting. Sending email and instant non-voice messages also are against the law, the release points out.

Texting while a motorist is stopped at a red light is considered acceptable under the law, according to a news release from the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office.

*A teen girl sends a text message, an act now illegal for drivers operating motor vehicles in Florida. Photo by Summer Skyes via Wikimedia Commons*



The ban on texting while driving “is a secondary offense and a non-moving violation, so drivers would have to be stopped for another infraction first,” the Sheriff’s Office news release notes.

“There will be some difficulties enforcing the law at first, but it will certainly improve safety,” said Sheriff Knight. “Just like the seat belt law in 1987, we can fine-tune it as we go forward.”

“AAA applauds Florida for taking steps to save lives,” said Amy Stracke, managing director

of AAA traffic safety advocacy for The Auto Club Group, in her organization’s release. “Too many needless deaths are occurring because of vehicle crashes caused by distracted driving.”

Representatives of groups interested in helping promote the new law may visit their local AAA office for information on how to do that, the release adds.

The *Put It Down* campaign is part of a comprehensive approach that includes law enforcement and education.

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## VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY WINS TRAVEL WEEKLY MAGELLAN AWARD

Visit Sarasota County has learned it is the recipient of a Travel Weekly 2013 Silver Magellan Award for its *Sarasota In Shorts* campaign, the office has announced.

The award honors the best in travel as determined by a panel of judges from the travel industry, a news release says.

“It is exciting to be recognized by industry leaders,” said Erin Duggan, director of brand for Visit Sarasota County, in the release. “The campaign was the result of teamwork across the board, from working with JetBlue to the team at Sarasota Opera who performed at JFK airport.”

VSC launched the *Sarasota In Shorts* campaign to showcase the destination’s warm

climate, relaxed lifestyle and variety of activities, all of which can be enjoyed in shorts, the release points out. The campaign included a marketing alliance with JetBlue Getaways; advertising in broadcast, print, digital and transit media in New York City and Boston; a Facebook contest; a media and consumer event in New York City; and the John F. Kennedy Airport performance.

The Magellan Awards honor a broad range of industry segments, including hotels and resorts, travel destinations, cruise lines, online travel services, airlines and airports, travel agents and agencies, tour operators and car rental companies, the release points out. The judging panel comprises top travel industry representatives, the release adds.

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## FIRE DEPARTMENT OPEN HOUSE TO OFFER FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Family members of all ages will be able to enjoy activities during the annual Fire Prevention Week Open House on Saturday, Oct. 5, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at Fire Station No. 5, located at 400 N. Beneva Road in Sarasota, the county has announced.

This year's theme, *Prevent Kitchen Fires*, was chosen by the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) because statistics show two of every five residential fires begin in the kitchen during meal preparation, making such incidents the leading cause of home fires and home fire-related injuries, a county news release says.

"When fire strikes, a home could be engulfed in smoke and flames in just a few minutes,"

said Sarasota County Fire Chief Mike Tobias in the release. "Food cooking on a stove should never be left unattended for even a few minutes, and that is one of the key messages we want people to hear during the open house."

The annual event will also showcase Sarasota County's 911 center and will celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Sarasota County Fire Department, the release notes.

Admission to the Open House is free. Complimentary beverages and refreshments will be available.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 861-5000 or visit [www.scgov.net](http://www.scgov.net).



*Recent graduates of the county's firefighter training program pose with a vintage engine during the 2012 Fire Prevention Week Open House. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



## FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY CHAPTER SPONSORING PLANT SALE

Want to attract butterflies to your yard? Pick up some Florida wildflowers at a native plant sale on Saturday, Oct. 12, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Sweetbay Nursery in Parrish.

Plant them and “in no time you’ll have butterflies, birds and dragonflies stopping by to enjoy the fruits of your labor!” a news release says.

A large selection of native flowers, shrubs, trees, grasses and vines will be available at the sale, which is sponsored by the local chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, the release notes. “Experts will be available to answer your questions about what to plant where,” the release adds, “and volunteers will be on hand to help you load plants” — as well as Flori Mulch, which will also be for sale — into your vehicle.



*Photo by Fran Palmeri*



*A butterfly savors a Florida wildflower. Photo by Fran Palmeri*



Representatives from the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and the Butterfly Club also will be present with information about their activities, the release continues.

Sweetbay Nursery is located at 10824 Erie Road in Parrish. From Interstate 75, take Exit 224, then go east on U.S. 301, turn left onto Erie Road and travel 4 miles to the nursery. Visit [www.SweetbayNursery.com](http://www.SweetbayNursery.com) for more information.

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## OSPREY COMMUNITY CLEANUP IS SCHEDULED FOR OCT. 5

Sarasota County Planning and Development Services and Code Enforcement staff members will hold their annual free community cleanup for Osprey area residents on Saturday, Oct. 5, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., the county has announced.

Dumpsters will be provided at two locations for residents to dispose of discarded household items, yard waste, tree trimmings, junk and other refuse, a news release says.

The dumpsters will be located on Church Street at the intersection of U.S. 41 (east of

the Tamiami Trail) and on West Oak Street at the intersection of U.S. 41 (west of the Tamiami Trail).

Hazardous materials, paint, auto parts, electronics, televisions and computers will not be accepted at either location, the release points out. Hazardous waste may be taken to a county facility at 8750 Bee Ridge Road in Sarasota from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday of every week.

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## FIELD WORK TO BEGIN ON LIFT STATION 87 PROJECT

Field work is scheduled to begin on Oct. 7 for the City of Sarasota's Lift Station 87 Project, the city has announced.

McKim & Creed, the new engineer of record on the project, will have crews in the field performing supplemental surveys and soil borings, a news release says.

"There may be partial lane closures as crews work along Pomelo Avenue, Alta Vista Street and South Osprey Avenue," the release adds. "Crews will also be working in Luke Wood Park. Residents are advised to use caution when driving, bicycling or walking in these areas."

Initial field work is expected to be completed by Oct. 25, the release notes.

Once completed, the LS 87 Project is expected to improve wastewater service and reliability for City of Sarasota customers and protect the environment, the release points out. The new LS 87 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 adds.

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



## CONVERSATIONS AT THE CROCKER BEGIN AGAIN ON OCT. 8

Anyone interested in historic preservation, nature, the culture of Florida or “beautiful and forgotten parts of the state” is encouraged to attend the first of this season’s Conversations at the Crocker, the Historical Society of Sarasota County (HSOSC) has announced.

The new season will begin on Oct. 8 with *Florida in Context*, an art photography show, sale and in-depth conversation among award-winning photographers Virginia Hoffman and Matt Allison and historian and naturalist John McCarthy, a news release says.

All Conversations at The Crocker begin at 7 p.m. and are held in the historic Crocker Memorial Church, located at 1260 12th St. (Pioneer Park) in Sarasota. HSOSC members may attend for free, while admission for guests is \$10. Photography for sale at this

upcoming Conversation will be exhibited in Crocker Memorial Church, the release adds.

Hoffman has worked as a sculptor, furniture designer and expert in architectural glass works, but “photography is nothing new for Virginia,” the release points out: She set up her first darkroom in the family bathroom when she was 14. Hoffman employs various methods in her photography, ranging from classic black-and-white work to alternative processing techniques and mixed media using mostly the process of encaustic (painting with wax), the release continues. “A lover of nature, hiking and camping, Virginia began to explore hidden places in Florida a few years ago and started documenting buildings, landscapes [and] even deserted communities,” the release says.

“Perhaps I can stimulate an interest in preserving Florida places that now sit quietly in



*John McCarthy (center) accepts plaudits from then County Commission Chairwoman Christine Robinson (far left) and Commissioners Carolyn Mason and Jon Thaxton upon his retirement from county government in August 2012. With him is his wife, Michelle. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



the dust by revealing their essential beauty,” she adds in the release.

“Allison is a life-long lover of photography, beginning with his boyhood Fisher Price toy camera,” the release notes. He is the founder of f8 Photo and Design and the cofounder of f8 Photography Workshops. As a professional fine art photographer, photographic art instructor and curator, “Matt has mastered High Dynamic Range, Infra Red and both digital and analog photography,” the release notes. “His work, much like his personality, is understated but profound.”

From his first official stint with Sarasota County in the Historical Archives office to managing the Parks and Recreation Department to overseeing county initiatives in sports tourism and ecotourism, McCarthy “is a man who understands all the ins and outs of Southwest Florida,” the release adds. A native of Fort Myers, he moved to Sarasota with his family when he was 7; he began working for the county after he graduated from high school.

“For several years, John has been the immensely popular tour guide of the Historical Society’s annual history boat cruise,” the release notes. “He will be performing that duty again next month for the HSOSC,” it continues, when the Le Barge Cruise floating history lesson gets under way on Nov. 3.

McCarthy is the interim director of SCOPE.

Conversations at The Crocker is a series of monthly interactive panel discussions that highlight aspects of Sarasota’s history, looking at events and the people “who have influenced today’s Sarasota,” the release continues.

For more information, visit [www.HSOSC.com](http://www.HSOSC.com).



*Virginia Hoffman/Contributed photo*



*Matt Allison/Contributed photo*



## TURTLE BEACH CAMPGROUND TO HOST FAMILY FALL FEST WEEKEND

Wondering where to take your little goblins and ghouls for family-friendly fun this fall?

“Turtle Beach Campground’s Family Fall Fest offers families a fun weekend under the stars, on the beach with Halloween-themed activities for kids of all ages,” says Tricia Wisner, Sarasota County Parks and Recreation business development coordinator, in a county news release.

The campground, located at 8862 Midnight Pass Road on Siesta Key, is accepting reservations for Fall Fest Weekend, Oct. 25-27, at a reduced rate of \$32 per night for two campers; the cost is \$2 for each additional camper, with a maximum of six, the release adds. To make reservations, call the Turtle Beach Campground at 349-3839.

Among the planned Fest events are campsite trick-or-treating; Halloween-themed arts and crafts; a Halloween campsite decorating

contest; professional storytelling by the campfire; games and prizes; potato sack races and cornhole contests; free s’mores for children; and free coffee, donuts and bagels for parents.

Additionally, free three-hour stand-up paddleboard lessons will be available Saturday, Oct. 26, provided by SUP Boards with instruction by SUP Sarasota, the release notes.

Amenities at the campground include tent and recreational vehicle camping sites, full hookups, newly remodeled bathrooms, full laundry facilities, Wi-Fi, grills, swimming and fishing. Check-in for Fall Fest will be after 2 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 25; checkout must be by 11 a.m. on Sunday, Oct. 27.

For more information about Turtle Beach Campground and other Sarasota County Parks and Recreation sites, visit [www.scgov.net/parks](http://www.scgov.net/parks).



People who stay at Turtle Beach Campground have easy access to the adjacent beach. Photo by Rachel Hackney



## SUNSET EXTENSIONS PLANNED FOR NOISE AND SOUND AND AIR POLLUTION ORDINANCES

The Sarasota County Commission will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, Nov. 5, regarding another extension of the sunset dates for its Noise Ordinance and its Air and Sound Pollution Ordinance.

During a Sept. 24 presentation to the County Commission, Donna Thompson, the county's assistant zoning administrator, pointed out that the board granted extensions of the ordinances' sunset dates last year. Without another extension, she said, they will expire on Nov. 18, while staff is continuing to work on both of them.

County staff has been meeting with representatives of the Fire Department and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office on new language for the Air and Sound Pollution ordinance, Thompson noted. Further, staff with the Zoning and Code Enforcement offices have been working with members of the community on revisions to the Noise Ordinance, she said.

In a Sept. 24 memo to the County Commission, staff members — including Thompson, Natural Resources Department Director Amy Meese and Tom Polk, the county's Planning and Development Services director — sought the extensions of the sunset dates. They pointed out that meetings with various civic organizations in regard to the Noise Ordinance “have not revealed any substantial concern with the regulations,” except on Siesta Key.

They also wrote that when the commission approved the first extensions — on Sept. 25, 2012 — staff was trying to amend the Sound and Air Pollution Ordinance to reflect



*A band plays outside at Siesta Village's Blasé Café in March 2012. Some residents on Siesta Key maintain the county needs stricter measures in its Noise Ordinance. File photo*

“recent state legislative action preempting local authority to regulate broadcast burning, agricultural pile burning, or silvicultural pile burning and requiring delegation from the Florida Forest Service to authorize land clearing burns.”

The second round of sunset date extensions would allow staff to conduct one last community outreach effort, Thompson told the commission, “to include a majority of the seasonal residents who will return in the fall, so we will have a well-rounded opinion of what is being proposed.”

The commission voted unanimously to authorize advertisement of the Nov. 5 public hearing.

*Rachel Brown Hackney*



## FOUNDATION PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County recently hosted a two-day retreat to launch the sixth cohort of the Sarasota County School District's Leadership Academy, and it also granted \$5,000 to the program, the foundation has announced.

The Leadership Academy is a two-year intensive program for aspiring school- and district-based administrators who have completed an advanced degree in educational leadership or a related field, a news release explains. This year's cohort includes 38 participants who serve in such positions as countywide curriculum specialists, classroom teachers, behavioral specialists and special education liaisons. Some also are interns working as assistant principals.

The Community Foundation grant will support the mentoring of Leadership Academy fellows by assistant principals and retired administrators; pay for substitute teachers so Leadership Academy fellows can have the opportunity to shadow principals and assistant principals and attend the two-day retreat; and cover the purchase of books and additional resources, the release notes.

"The program emphasizes the application of learning in a real-world context," the release says. The focus is on three types of leadership: instructional, operational and global/situational. "The engaging curriculum is problem-based and interactive and involves action research," the release adds. "There is a heavy coaching emphasis, required attendance at



*The participants and facilitators of the Sarasota County School District's Leadership Academy gather at the Community Foundation offices in Sarasota. Contributed photo*



monthly seminars and a school-based action research project.” Throughout the Academy experience, aspiring leaders have four opportunities to shadow other school or district administrators while on the job.

In Florida the Sarasota County district was ranked fourth highest in 2012 in student achievement, out of 67 school districts, the release points out. It was one of five districts in the state to receive an “A” rating this year. A national study has confirmed that the school districts demonstrating the greatest progress in student achievement “are those that had the foresight to identify the skills and knowledge they wanted in their leaders and developed their own internal career pathways for these jobs,” the release adds.

“We are fortunate that we have a wonderful resource in the Leadership Academy,” said Superintendent Lori White in the release.

“Administrators who are graduates of the Academy have proven to be excellent leaders of our schools and departments, understanding our culture and our dedication to serving our students and families.”

Successful completion of the Leadership Academy entitles participants to priority consideration for administrative internships, as well as the opportunity to interview for assistant principal vacancies. Formal application to the program is required. A principal or other district administrator must submit a recommendation and be willing to sponsor the applicant, the release notes.

In the past five years, between 75 and 100 percent of all Sarasota County School District leadership hires were graduates of the Leadership Academy, the release says. Wendy Katz and Cydelle Quinn, two retired school district administrators, are serving as executive coaches and facilitators for the program.



*Sarasota County Schools Superintendent Lori White addresses Leadership Academy participants. Contributed photo*



## SARASOTA WINS HEALTHY SCHOOL DISTRICT GOLD AWARD

The Sarasota County School District was recognized at the Sept. 17 School Board meeting by Florida Action for Healthy Kids (FAHK) as a Gold Achievement Level Healthy School District.

Since 2009 FAHK, the Florida Coordinated School Health Partnership and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents have recognized 26 districts as Florida Healthy School Districts, but only eight have been accorded Gold Level status, a news release points out.

FAHK executive team member Dan Coccamo presented the award, in the form of a Florida Healthy School District flag, to School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin, a district news release says.

Action for Healthy Kids is a national non-profit organization working with schools to fight childhood obesity and poor health, the release adds.

To qualify as a Healthy School District, a school system must provide FAHK with a



*Florida Action for Healthy Kids executive team member Dan Coccamo (right) presents the Healthy School District Gold Level flag to Sarasota County School District leaders during the Sept. 17 School Board meeting. Accepting on behalf of the district are (from left) Bob Hagemann, chairman of the School Health Advisory Committee; School Board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin; Student School Board Member James 'J.T.' Truitt; Superintendent Lori White; and Student Services Supervisor Sherri Reynolds. Contributed photo*



detailed self-assessment of its activities in eight categories: health education, physical education, health services, nutrition services, counseling, psychological and social services, healthful school environment, health promotion for staff, and parent and community involvement, the release continues. The assessments are evaluated on a scale of 1 to 100. A score higher than 86 percent is required to earn the Gold Level.

Sherri Reynolds, the Student Services supervisor who prepared the application, said she was particularly proud of the effort that made possible the district score for parent and community involvement. It improved from 83 percent in 2012 to 100 percent this year, the release notes. It also was the best in the state in that category, she said. The increase

was primarily a result of improvements in the district volunteer program, Reynolds added.

The district's score in physical education, at 94 percent, also was the highest in the state. Among the district's other high-scoring categories were health services at 97 percent, nutrition services and education at 97 percent, employee wellness at 92 percent, healthy school environment at 86 percent, health education at 86 percent, and counseling, psychological and social services at 83 percent.

Bob Hagemann, chairman of the Sarasota County School Health Advisory Committee, congratulated Reynolds for promoting healthful living in the district and in the community "with passion and purpose," the release continues. "She is on a mission," he said in the release.

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## **IMPROVED ONLINE PERMITTING FOR LOCAL CONTRACTORS BEGINS OCT. 7**

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Beginning Oct. 7, local contractors will be able to save time and money by applying for building permits through the Sarasota County Planning and Development Services Department's updated online system at [www.building.scgov.net](http://www.building.scgov.net), the county has announced.

Current registered users will have full access to the new site; however, each contractor agent will need to create a new, one-time-only free registration, a news release says.

By cutting down the time it takes to apply for and receive a building permit, county staff is helping contractors expand their businesses and create jobs, the release notes.

"Requests for building permits are up, so the demand is out there, and we want to make sure we have the proper resources to serve our customers," said Tom Polk, director of the Planning and Development Services Department, in the release. "This upgrade

will make it easier for local contractors to get back to building homes and businesses, which is good for them and good for our economy."

During the upgrade to the new and improved service, the current online permitting system and the Integrated Voice Response System (IVR) will be unavailable from Friday, Oct. 4, until Monday, Oct. 7, the release points out. The Permit Centers, located at 1001 Sarasota Center Blvd., Sarasota, and 4000 S. Tamiami Trail, Venice, will be open for business on Oct. 4 during normal business hours, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., with limited capabilities, the release says.

New features will allow electronic online permitting for all types of building permits 24 hours a day, along with payment of fees, the scheduling of inspections and other upgrades, the release continues.

For more information, contact the Permit Centers at 861-3029 or 861-6678.



## NEW SARASOTA COUNTY LIBRARY CARD DESIGNS UNVEILED

It can take a lifetime for an artist to develop a fan base. For 15-year-old Venice High School sophomore Martin Pohlmann, that wait is about 60 seconds, the approximate time it takes for a community member to get a new Sarasota County library card, a county news release says.

Pohlmann, who wants to study graphic design in college, according to the release, is one of the winners of the Sarasota County Library System's *Design-a-Card* contest, whose results were unveiled during the Sept. 24 Sarasota County Commission meeting in Sarasota.

Eleven-year-old Woodland Middle School student Kerry MacLean is the other youth

artist whose winning drawing, *I Love My Library*, is available on county library cards, the release notes.

Both Martin and Kerry, accompanied by their families, were present for the unveiling.

"We're overwhelmed, and I know he's in awe," said Susan Pohlmann, Martin's mother, in the release. Susan and Martin Pohlmann learned about the contest, which began in February, while volunteering at the Venice Public Library, the release points out.

"Winning was exciting for [Martin], but knowing that his design is now going to be in the hands of community members adds a whole new dimension," his mother commented to county leaders, according to the release.



Selby Public Library is in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel




The contest, which was available online and at every county library, asked young artists to design a card based on the theme, *What my library means to me*.

The contest drew 183 entries, which were reviewed by a panel of judges, including representatives from the Sarasota County Commission, Ringling College of Art and Design, Sarasota County Library System and Sarasota County Schools. The panel narrowed the field to 10, and from there, community members had a month to cast their votes on the designs, the release continues.

More than 1,600 votes were tallied in the contest.

“Martin and Kerry did an amazing job designing our new library cards,” said Ann Ivey, the Fruitville Library manager who headed the countywide contest, in the release. “They and their families should be very proud. Hopefully, their artwork will help inspire community members to think about the ‘endless possibilities’ of libraries.”

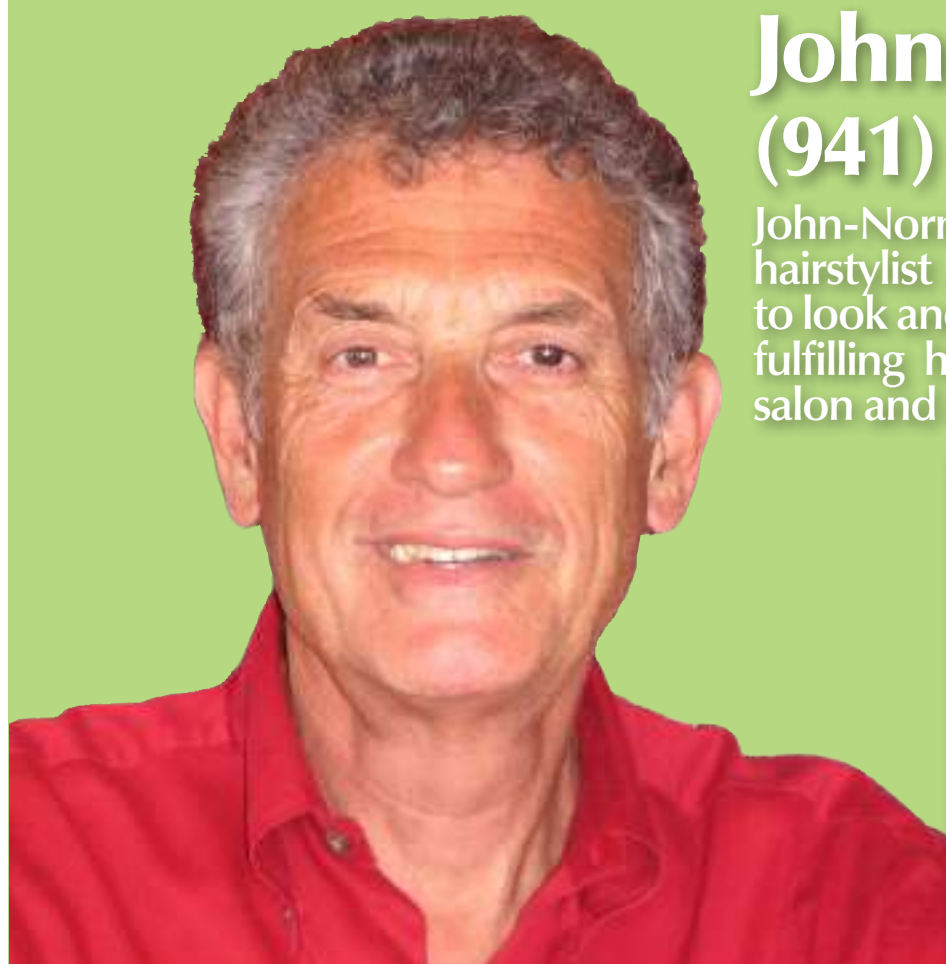
The newly designed library cards are available at county libraries for a patron signing up for the first time for a library card or cardholders needing replacements, the release adds. 

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.” — *Helen Keller*

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### Prolific Offender



Terri Meyer

DOB 3/16/1964

Arrest\_Date 9/18/2013

Charge\_1 Cocaine- Possession

Charge\_2 Marijuana- Possession

Charge\_3 Destroying Evidence

### Criminal History

Felony Charges 22

Felony Convictions 7

Misd Charges 23

Misd Convictions 8

Incarcerations 0



Trequille Rodreguez

DOB 5/21/1993

Arrest\_Date 9/19/2013

Charge\_1 Pass Counterfeited Credit Card

Charge\_2 Fraud-Impersonation (x3)

Charge\_3

### Criminal History

Felony Charges 4

Felony Convictions 0

Misd Charges 0

Misd Convictions 0

Incarcerations 0



Jill Bouziane

DOB 9/22/1992

Arrest\_Date 9/19/2013

Charge\_1 Larceny: Petit Theft

Charge\_2

Charge\_3

### Criminal History

Felony Charges 0

Felony Convictions 0

Misd Charges 1

Misd Convictions 0

Incarcerations 0

## CRIME BLOTTER

*Among those arrested during Operation Booster Buster II were Terri Meyer, Trequille Rodreguez and Jill Bouziane. Image courtesy of the Sheriff's Office*



## SHERIFF'S OFFICE ARRESTS 30 IN SECOND RETAIL THEFT CRACKDOWN

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office this week released the results of its second operation in three months designed to crack down on retail theft.

Operation Booster Buster II focused on the north end of the county, including the retail corridor near Fruitville Road and Interstate 75, North Cattlemen Road at University Parkway and Central Sarasota Parkway at U.S. 41, an Oct. 2 news release says.

The Sheriff's Office "formed a unique public-private partnership with major local retailers for the first operation in July, which has continued with efforts to enhance theft detection methods and expanded opportunities to collaborate on reducing retail theft," the release points out.

This second operation resulted in 30 arrests with 30 felony charges and 27 misdemeanor counts; additional charges are pending. The offenders had 179 prior felony charges and 34 prior felony convictions, along with 189 prior misdemeanor charges and 51 misdemeanor convictions, the release notes.

Five of the 30 people arrested have been "locally identified as Prolific Offenders, or repeat criminals well known to Sarasota County law enforcement," the release adds. "Many of the suspects violated probation by committing the retail crime or were in possession of drugs at the time of their arrest."

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office worked in conjunction with the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, as several stores involved were on the county line, the release says.

The following people were arrested in Operation Booster Buster II:

- Benjamin Smith, 26 of, 5073 Bell Meade Drive, Sarasota.
- Jeremy Prescott, 21, of 930 N. Beneva Road, Sarasota.
- Jadie Hawkins, 31, of 2919 Seasons Blvd., Sarasota.
- Terri Meyer, 49, of 690 Annie Laurie Lane, Sarasota.
- Trequille Rodreguez, 20, of 2736 Lemon St., Fort Myers.
- Jill Bouziane, 21, of 16314 Hidden Horse Way, Myakka.
- Summar Gladhill, 18, of 5446 Dorsay St., Sarasota.
- Taylor Cohen, 19, of 4808 Palm Air Drive, Sarasota.
- Vernon Liles, 33, of 20 Whispering Sands Drive, Sarasota.
- Robert Smith, 27, of 2636 Guava St., Sarasota.
- Melissa Johnston, 26, of 2110 58th Ave. W., Bradenton.
- Elizabeth Rosnack, 25, of 2916 71st Avenue Drive E., Bradenton.
- Nicholas Scialdone, 23, of 2129 Linwood Drive, Sarasota.
- Steve Staub, 66, of 7801 Bassett Drive, Huber Heights, OH.
- Darrington Abner, 39, of 1817 Eighth Ave. E., Bradenton.



- Mario Corona, 24, of 1510 33rd Ave. E., Bradenton.
- Jonathan Simonell, 26, of 2843 Bay St., Sarasota.
- Jason Davis, 20, of 3721 Stokes Drive, Sarasota.
- Brian Frost, 20, of 4912 Las Vegas Drive, Sarasota.
- Sarah Welch, 36, of 3039 Woodpine Lane, Sarasota.
- Henry Sutcheckzdenek, 25, of Englewood.
- Thomas Songer, 23, of 354 Patterson Ave., Osprey.
- Ethan White, 22, of 1126 Lake Point Drive, Lakeland.
- Stephen Ultsch, 21, of 2080 Pinehurst St., Sarasota.
- Michael Maggio, 28, of 2129 Cork Oak St., Sarasota.
- Stacey Griffith, 31, of 1790 Coconut Drive, Venice.
- Marc Deprossimo, 36, of 1790 Coconut Drive, Venice.
- Tyler Williams, 22, of 3016 17th St., Sarasota.
- Hannah Treiber, 24, of Rotonda West.

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## MAN CHARGED WITH UNLAWFUL SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH A MINOR

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a married 27-year-old man "who pretended to be a teen and traveled to Sarasota to have sex with a minor," the office has reported.

Sarasota County detectives learned that Andrew Michael Brandt of 12100 Park Blvd., Apt. 1307, Seminole, created a Facebook account as "Mike Berns" and "communicated with young girls," a news release says. He met a Sarasota teen on [Tagged.com](http://Tagged.com) and told her he was 17, the release continues. In March, he drove to Sarasota and began a sexual relationship with the girl, who was 15 at the time, the release says.

Detectives obtained a warrant for Brandt's arrest, and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office took him into custody on Thursday, Sept. 26, the release adds. He is charged with three counts of Lewd or Lascivious Battery on a Victim Over 12 and Under 16, as well as three counts of Unlawful Sexual Activity with a Minor. Brandt was held in the Pinellas

County Jail on \$60,000 bond until he could be transferred to the Sarasota County Jail, the release continues.

"Detectives in both counties are concerned there are additional victims who know Brandt as 'Mike Berns' or 'Andy Berns,'" the release points out. Anyone with information about him should contact the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Section at 861-4900.

The release notes, "Parents: Please use this case as the impetus to speak with your children about meeting people online and explain to them that there is no way to know that person's true identity. Teach and continually reinforce the importance of being safe online. Ask them to show you the websites they visit and have them log in to their accounts at various social media platforms and instant messenger services. Point out safety concerns as they arise. Explain to them that you are not trying to invade their privacy. You are just trying to make sure they are safe."



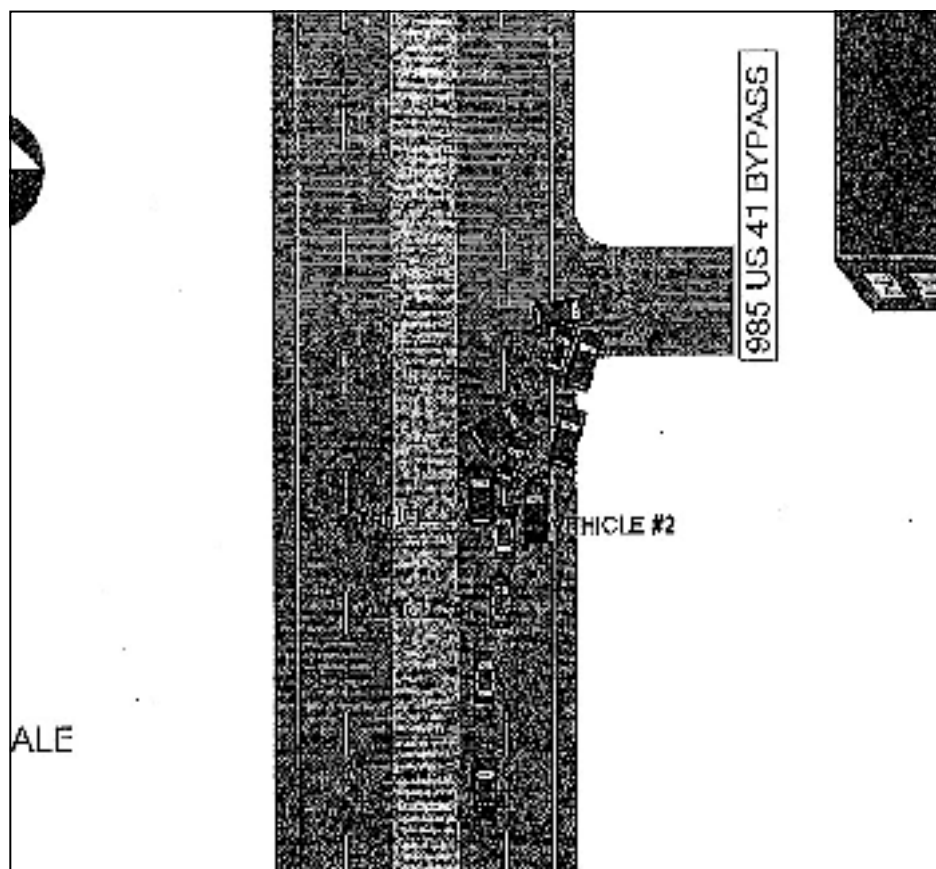
## MAN ARRESTED FOLLOWING MULTI-CAR CRASH AND ATTEMPT TO FLEE

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested a Wauchula man who fled the scene of a multi-car crash in Venice on Friday night, Sept. 27, the office has announced.

Around 6:45 p.m., Christopher Delatorre, 38, was driving north on U.S. 41 "and weaving in and out of traffic when he crashed into two other vehicles in front of Cramer Honda," a news release says. As Delatorre fled on foot, witnesses chased him until he ran into the woods near the bowling alley, the release continues. While deputies were setting up a perimeter, the release adds, a motorist told them a suspicious looking man had just run into the nearby Walgreens and asked the motorist for a ride.

Witnesses at Walgreens said the man went into the bathroom to try on a white shirt, the release says. Deputies located Delatorre and ordered him to put his hands behind his back. "He complied, but as deputies approached, he spun around, punched the sergeant in the chin and ran out of the store," the release notes. "Delatorre tried to enter two locked patrol cars and continued running. Deputies captured him in the median at Center Road," the release says.

"Delatorre, who has a significant arrest history" outside Sarasota County, including being sent to prison twice, was charged with Hit and Run, Driving with a Suspended License, Battery on a Law Enforcement Officer, two counts of Attempted Vehicle Theft, two counts of Obstruction by Disguise and Petit Theft, the release says. An administrative hold was placed on him for an outstanding warrant for meth in Hardee County, it adds.



*A diagram in a Florida Highway Patrol report shows details from a multi-car crash in Venice on Sept. 27. Image courtesy Sarasota County Sheriff's Office*



*Christopher Delatorre/Contributed photo*



## TWO ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH A HOME BURGLARY

A man and a woman have been charged in connection with a home burglary attempt on Sept. 27, the Sarasota Police Department has reported.

Officers from the Police Department responded about 9 p.m. on Sept. 27 to a call from a resident at 3721 Flores St. about a possible residential burglary, a news release says. The complainant told the officers she had observed her neighbor's son breaking into the neighbor's home, the release adds. Officers attempted to contact the male in the house, "but he locked himself inside and would not come to the door," the release continues.

A Sarasota County Sheriff's Office deputy volunteered to pick up the homeowner at her place of work and bring her to the scene, the report says. Once there, the homeowner

spent about an hour on the phone, trying to convince her son to come to the front door, the report continues. Finally, he and his girlfriend both came to the door, the report adds. The mother said she wanted to press charges, adding that she had "kicked [the son and girlfriend] out of the residence" about four months earlier "because they had stolen her vehicle and crashed it," according to the report.

She also told the officers she did not know where the couple had been living, the news release notes. John Levi, 29, and 28-year-old Katherine Jean Byerly were arrested for Unarmed Burglary of an Unoccupied Dwelling, a felony. Neither Levi nor Byerly could provide an address to officers, the release says.



*Johnathan Peter Levi/Contributed photo*



*Katherine Jean Byerly/Contributed photo*



## NARCOTICS AND CURRENCY RECOVERED DURING ARREST

The Sarasota Police Department Narcotics Unit, with the assistance of the Sarasota Police Department Street Crimes Unit, arrested a Sarasota man on Sept. 26 after executing a search warrant at the man's house, the Police Department has reported.

Shelton G. Williams, 38, of 1865 20th St., Sarasota, reportedly had made repeated sales of marijuana at that address, a news release says. When Narcotics Unit detectives searched the house, the release continues, they found five of the larger type of plastic sandwich bags full of marijuana. The bags were in the kitchen next to the defendant's Florida Identification card, a digital scale with marijuana residue, a marijuana grinder and U.S. currency "that was in denominations consistent with street-level sales of narcotics," the release points out.

Williams was charged with a felony count of Possession of Marijuana With Intent To Sell and Distribute Within 1,000 Feet of Public Housing and a misdemeanor count of Possession of Paraphernalia.



*Shelton Williams/Contributed photo*



*Marijuana and U.S. currency recovered during a Sept. 26 arrest are spread out on a table. Contributed photo*



## TWO SUSPECTS ARRESTED IN RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY CASE

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has arrested the residential burglary suspects whose silver vehicle was captured on camera by a neighbor on Sunday, Sept. 22, the department has announced.

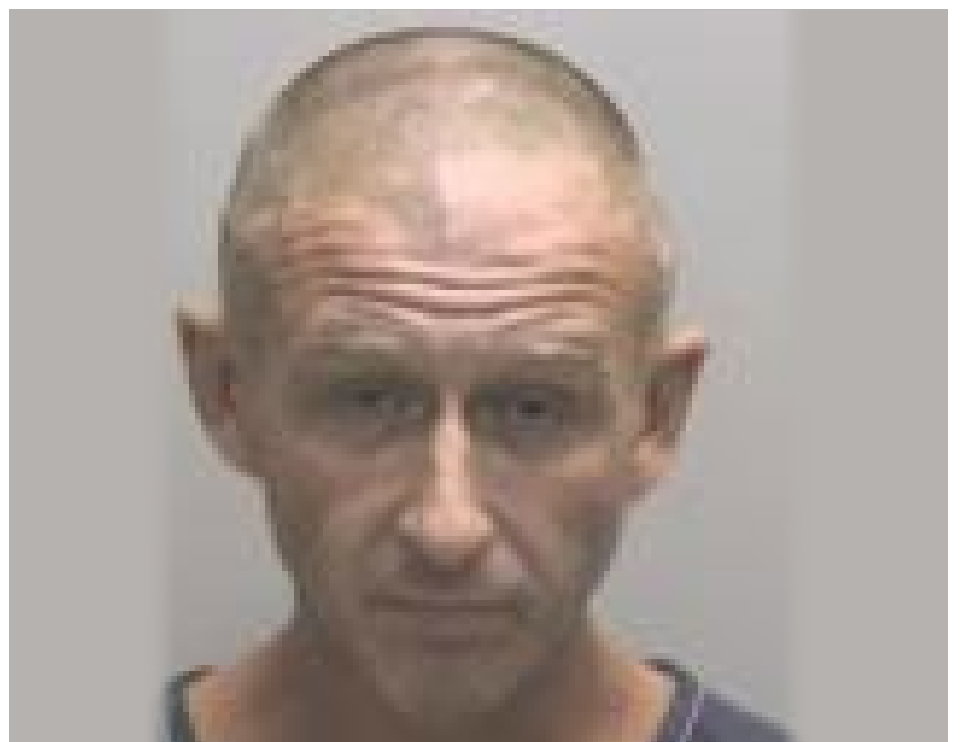
During the investigation, the Intelligence Unit identified the suspects as Ronald Greenwald II, 40, and Kristine Hochadel, 20, both of 3618 115th Court West, Bradenton, a news release says. During surveillance on Wednesday, Sept. 25, the Tactical Unit "caught the suspects committing another burglary in Manatee County," the release adds. "The Manatee County Sheriff's Office stopped the vehicle, recovered evidence and took the pair into custody."

Sarasota County detectives spoke with Hochadel, who admitted driving the car and telling Greenwald what to do, the release continues. Greenwald and Hochadel are charged with two counts each of Residential Burglary for breaking into a home on Murdock Avenue and two counts each of Attempted Residential Burglary for trying to break into a home on Foremere Place.

The investigation is ongoing, the release notes, with additional charges pending in both counties. Greenwald and Hochadel are being held without bond in the Manatee County Jail.



*Kristine Hochadel/Contributed photo*



*Ronald Greenwald/Contributed photo*



*A resident shot this photo of a male suspect getting ready to enter the car. Contributed photo*




## ARMED ROBBERY REPORTED AT ROADWAY INN IN SARASOTA

Sarasota Police detectives are searching for suspects in an armed robbery that was reported just before 11 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 27, at the Roadway Inn, located at 5000 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota, the department has announced.

Two men entered the motel and confronted the clerk with a handgun, a news release says. They shoved the clerk to the ground; then, one of the men jumped over the counter and grabbed an undisclosed amount of money from the cash drawer, the release adds. The clerk sustained only minor injuries, it continues.

The two men, who remain unidentified, fled the area, the release says. "It is unknown if they left by foot or by car."

Both perpetrators were described as black males in their 20s, between 5 feet 8 inches and 5 feet 10 inches tall, the release notes. One was reported to be wearing a green shirt and blue jeans, while the other was described as wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. "They wore towels over their heads and faces to conceal their identities," the release says.

Anyone with information is encouraged to call Det. M. Jackson at 954-7070, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or going online at [www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com](http://www.sarasotacrimestoppers.com). 

Simply put, Crime Stoppers relies upon the cooperation between the police the media and the community to provide a flow of information about crime and criminals.

**Call:** (941) 366-TIPS (8477)

**Click:** [SarasotaCrimeStoppers.com](http://SarasotaCrimeStoppers.com)

**Text:** Text "TIP109" plus your message to CRIMES (274637)

*All submitted tips are secure and anonymous*

941-366-TIPS (8477)

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# OPINION



## VERN IS EMBLEMATIC OF ALL THAT IS WRONG WITH CONGRESS

### EDITORIAL

Based on almost every public opinion poll, the

overwhelming majority of Americans views Congress unfavorably. And earlier this week, they were given yet another reason for their loathing: Obstructionist Republicans, failing in their efforts to subvert the proper functioning of our constitutional government, refused to pass a budget resolution necessary to fund the nation's continued operations. As a result, the government began a shutdown of functions and services on Oct. 1, including the furloughing of almost a million federal workers.

And, to the delight of some and the vexation of many, Congressman Vern Buchanan, who represents Sarasota County and part of Manatee County, cast his votes to support the

Tea Party insurgents determined to stage a legislative *coup d'état*.

Buchanan's backing of this reckless action is even less defensible because he does not fully agree with his Tea Party-affiliated colleagues. Instead, like House Speaker John Boehner, he "goes along to get along" — in other words, to quote Gov. William J. LePetomane of *Blazing Saddles* fame, Buchanan and Boehner first and foremost seek "... to protect [their] phony baloney jobs."

This crisis in our government, therefore, has been instigated by a radical minority in Congress and exacerbated by craven politicians less interested in their constituents than in the preservation of their middling power and sycophant-infused aerie in Washington.



# OPINION

The epicenter of that crisis is the mindless opposition by these radicals and their toadies to what they derisively refer to as Obamacare, and they have determined that they will obstruct the implementation of the law even if that destroys the country in the process.

The United States Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2009. It was immediately challenged in the courts by members of Congress who were in the minority when it passed, along with those states governed by Republicans who wanted to harry and hinder the adoption of the Obama Administration's signature legislation.

After years of litigation, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the ACA last year.

So the ACA was debated in Congress and ultimately passed by a majority of its members, signed into law by the president, challenged in court by opponents on constitutional grounds and ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. In other words, the ACA was completely and thoroughly vetted by the very process the Founding Fathers established more than two centuries ago, demonstrating how truly functional our Constitution is in actual practice.

Yet Buchanan and his Republican colleagues, most of whom purport to love our Constitution (a document each and every one swore a solemn oath "to protect and defend"), appear oblivious to how contradictory their actions are to the proper protection and defense of our constitutional way of life.

Buchanan was quoted recently, "An open dialogue is critical to any negotiation, and I'm hopeful that [meeting with the president] will put us on the path to restoring government services." It was a parroting of his party's mantra in this crisis: The Republicans would be happy to compromise, if only the Democrats would agree to negotiate.

*Buchanan and his Republican colleagues, most of whom purport to love our Constitution (a document each and every one swore a solemn oath "to protect and defend"), appear oblivious to how contradictory their actions are to the proper protection and defense of our constitutional way of life.*

Except that this is not a negotiation. It is a hijacking. The Republicans do not fully control even one branch of the federal government. The ACA is the law of the land. It is in the process of being implemented. Demanding that a law properly debated and passed by Congress be abandoned as a condition to the Republicans' fulfillment of their constitutional duties is a usurpation of treasonous proportions.

Buchanan, ever the unctuous used-car salesman, has been busily using sleight-of-hand to deceive his constituents of his betrayal.



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# OPINION

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He noisily announced that he was forgoing his congressional salary during the government shutdown, and he urged his colleagues to do likewise. Apparently he believes we should be impressed by his “magnanimous” act — an empty gesture by someone who is independently wealthy — and ignore his central role in the precipitation of this crisis that is hurting millions of Americans, the repercussions of which could be felt for years to come.


Buchanan is precisely what is wrong with the Congress in general and the Republican contingent in particular: He is rich and white.

He and his Republican colleagues have no interest in helping those who are in need. They are disproportionately part of the wealthy elite and disdain what Mitt Romney described as “the 47 percent” — almost half the

people in this country who struggle to make ends meet.

Buchanan and his Republican cohorts do not have any interest in furthering a heterogeneous society in America. They prey upon the fears of other whites to polarize society. At its core, their opposition to the ACA is less about government overreach than about their bigoted opposition to a black president.

Buchanan was elected to serve the interests of those in his Congressional district, but he has failed in that duty. He has put his own self-interests first, joining forces with those who seek to marginalize America as a place of a few “haves” and many, many “have-nots.”

He is entitled to his wealth and his beliefs. But he should not be entitled, in our name, to imperil our government and our way of life. 

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## THE BEST TIME OF DAY AT THE BEACH



**By Harriet Cuthbert**  
*Contributing Writer*

**COMMENTARY** The best part of the early morning hours at Siesta Beach is ... everything.

Watch the sun rise and the moon disappear, signaling the dawn of another spectacular day. Gaze along the sparsely crowded beach for what seems like miles. Observe the joggers and coin catchers — or metal detectors, if you will — all looking so intent in their pursuit of pleasure on the sand.

The birds are just settling in too, knowing that later, when the crowds appear, they will be approaching the visitors and hoping for quick snacks.

See the beach walkers still in silhouette; then, watch in wonder as the sun rises, when they are transformed from faceless shadows into real people.



# OPINION


Watch the marshmallow clouds disperse and almost disappear to make room for that perfect, azure sky.

Because the sun is not at its full intensity yet, the light breeze that caresses my face adds to a most pleasurable feeling.

Gentle waves are waiting for children, who will splash and scream with joy at how warm and welcoming the water is. The low tide adds to the fun when the youngsters do race

into the gulf and try as well to outrun a bird or two.

See the families slowly trekking to the shore's edge, burdened with kids, carriages and coolers, but knowing they are finally here, at Siesta Beach, and ready for a most memorable day. There is still plenty of space for them to pick their favorite spots and unload their beach toys.

The best part of the early morning at Siesta Beach is ... it is perfect. 



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CITY USES BEST PRACTICES TO REGULATE PARKING

To the Editor:

In response to *The Sarasota News Leader's* Sept. 20 editorial, I would like to share a few notes.

Although there is no charge for public parking on properties owned by the City of Sarasota, regulating the public's use of this resource is supported by industry best practices. A significant portion of the City of Sarasota Parking Division workload is dedicated to enforcement of regulated timed parking, handling unsafe parking behavior — including blocking sidewalks, parking in the opposite direction of traffic and other actions that impede pedestrian and vehicle movements — as well as other violations of city parking ordinances.



### 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*.



# OPINION

The city incurs many fixed expenses as a result of offering public parking, whether it charges for parking or not. Since there are no other substantive forms of revenue produced with the current parking program, the cost of maintaining the parking system, support staff and facilities such as the Palm Avenue garage result in a budget deficit. (The costs of electricity, maintaining elevators and cleaning add up.)

Although it may seem counterintuitive, staffing our parking enforcement positions does *not* create a negative expense burden. But cutting staff would result in decreased revenue, increased unregulated parking, less parking turnover for visitors and a widening effect on the division's budget deficit.

Staffing levels have varied over the past several years based on parking initiatives decided at specific times. However, upon repeal of the paid parking system, the City Commission approved five parking enforcement positions to monitor compliance within all the business districts in the city.

Back-in parking is permitted within the city of Sarasota. Those areas where it is not permitted have signs making that clear.

Whether public parking is free or a paid system is used, necessary turnover in spaces and expenses are inextricably tied to enforcing regulations and operating clean, safe, functioning garages and other facilities. Parking availability is vital to the future success of our business and cultural districts, and managing it requires an appropriate level of funding.

The goal of the parking program is smart, safe and sustainable parking. That means we must enforce existing parking regulations to meet public safety requirements while balancing the needs of business owners and residents, and, ultimately, to work incrementally toward being subsidy-free.

*Mark Lyons*  
*Parking Manager*  
*City of Sarasota*

*Editor's note: Our normal limit on length of letters was waived to allow a full response.*

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## WORK CONTINUES ON NORTH SHELL ROAD PARKING PLAN; THE SIESTA VILLAGE RECYCLING AND OUTDOOR BUSINESS DISPLAY INITIATIVES ARE MOVING FORWARD; AND THE VILLAGE IS PREPARING FOR ANNUAL HOLIDAY EVENTS



By Rachel Brown Hackney  
*Editor*

The North Shell Road parking saga continues.

On Sept. 23, the county's chief engineer, James K. Harriott Jr., sent a memo to the county commissioners with an update on efforts to designate more public parking spaces for

Beach Access 1, which is North Shell Road on the north end of Siesta Key.

Although his initial project estimate ranged between \$20,000 and \$50,000, depending on how much shell fill was used or needed



*Foliage hangs over the north side of North Shell Road, the entry to Beach Access 1. File photo*



# Siesta Seen

to create 18 parking spaces along the road's shoulder, a revised conceptual plan has a \$21,000 estimate, he pointed out, "based on current unit prices for the materials."

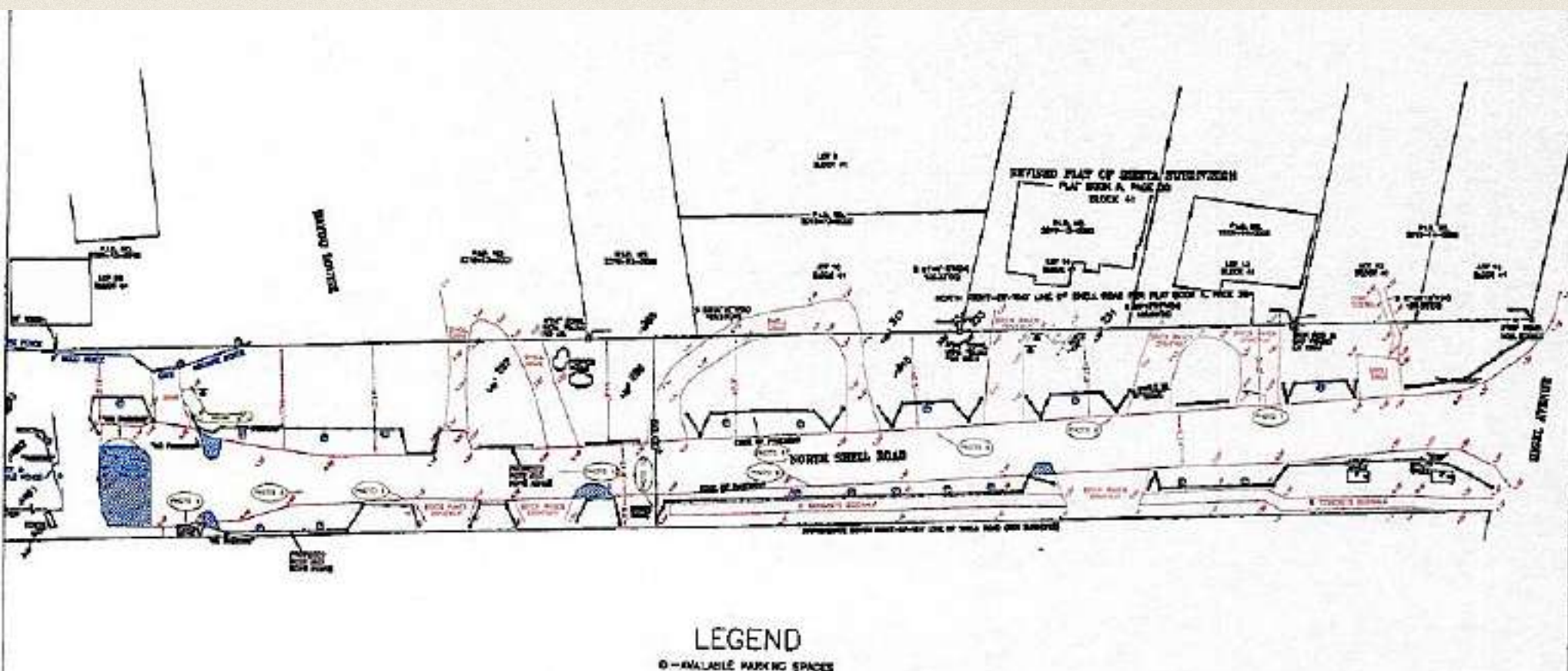
Most of the spaces would be completely off the pavement, Harriott wrote. The parking areas would be delineated with a post-and-rope system and, where possible, with pavement markings, he added.

"The spaces may be filled with shell ... to delineate the parking and provide a stable base," he noted.

The goal is to alleviate concerns about vehicles on the road blocking homeowner driveways, leaving insufficient space for passage of emergency vehicles, parking in front of the fire hydrant and making it difficult for drivers to maneuver and turn around at the end of the street.

Staff planned to meet with the adjacent property owners to review the latest plan with them, Harriott added in his memo. Additionally, he was going to proceed with obtaining any permits needed for the work as well as work on the procurement process for materials. Most important, perhaps, he also planned to present the conceptual plan to the County Commission for its approval and agreement to the expense.

During final budget discussions this year, Commissioner Christine Robinson and Vice Chairman Charles Hines, especially, voiced concern that staff make certain the board understands overall budget impacts of any extra spending proposed after the start of the new fiscal year, which was Oct. 1. That is part of an effort Robinson has called for to help control costs and rein in use of money from the county's economic uncertainty fund.



A Sarasota County diagram shows how parking spaces can be created on North Shell Road. Image courtesy of Sarasota County



# Siesta Seen

## RECYCLING

Siesta Key Association (SKA) Vice President Michael Shay reported to members of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) on Oct. 1 that he felt Waste Management would be the logical company to handle recycling in Siesta Village.

Waste Management already collects the garbage, he pointed out, and “if we go ahead with the recycling, your garbage pickup is going to be lessened.”

Shay has been the person in charge of the recycling initiative for Siesta Village, at SKVA President Cheryl Gaddie’s request.

He did point out one problem he has had trying to communicate with Waste Management,

however: “When you call the number that the county provides for [the company], you get the call center, and unless you’ve got an account number [for the specific area about which you are inquiring], you can’t get too much information.”

Once armed with the account number for the Village, he continued, “I can have a meaningful discussion [with Waste Management representatives].”

Mark Smith, who supervises the Siesta Village upkeep on behalf of the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp., told Shay he was meeting the next day with the firm that handles the upkeep and would get that account number for him.

Shay added that he hoped to have more information before the November SKVA meeting.



*Dave Magee, Siesta Key Village Association Vice President Kay Kouvatsos and President Cheryl Gaddie listen to a presentation on Oct. 1. Photo by Rachel Hackney*



# Siesta Seen

## OUTDOOR DISPLAYS

Yet another months-long initiative remains under way, Gaddie reported during the regular SKVA meeting this week.

“I know that we have quite a few businesses interested in pursuing something within the [Siesta Key Overlay District, or SKOD] to allow outdoor display,” she told the approximately 30 members present.

She is working with representatives of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, she continued, to prepare a letter about that issue, which will be sent to all businesses on Siesta Key. Then the Chamber and the SKVA plan to

host a meeting for business owners to determine whether they can reach an agreement on revising the zoning code to allow some types of outdoor displays.

During the summer, a number of business owners became upset after county Code Enforcement Officer John Lally wrote them citations for violating the SKOD by displaying clothing and numerous other items outside their shops. The displays had gone up while Lally was on medical leave.

If an amended SKOD ordinance can be developed, Gaddie continued, it would be presented to the SKA, so that organization’s members can weigh in on it.



*The owners of Siesta Key Outfitters and Le Grand Bisou in Siesta Village both have voiced support for some lenience in the zoning code regarding outdoor displays. File photo*



# *Siesta Seen*

Finally, if residents and business owners reach consensus on a revised ordinance, she said, “they can take it, I think, in great confidence to the [County] Commission and have it approved.”

The SKVA is working only as a liaison in this process, she pointed out; it is encouraging business participation in the effort.

## **COMING SOON ...**

If it is October, that means Safe Treats is right around the corner — at least for us “older folks,” for whom time seems to fly. Children, I

am sure, still think Halloween and Christmas will *never* get here.

During the Oct. 1 SKVA meeting, past President Russell Matthes reminded his fellow Siesta Village business owners that Safe Treats is observed from 3 to 6 p.m. on Halloween. Any business that wishes to participate may pick up an orange and black balloon at the [Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar](#) at 1 p.m. on Oct. 31. The balloon flying outside a storefront or restaurant lets parents and youngsters know they can find “safe treats” — aka candy — at that location, he pointed out. He also has flyers that



*People of all ages line Ocean Boulevard to watch the 2012 Light Up the Village holiday parade. Photo courtesy of Peter van Roekens*



# Siesta Seen

businesses can post in their windows, he noted.

Information about the event is provided to county schools each year, Matthes said.

Another big event coming up is Sandfest, which is a major fundraiser for the [Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce](#)'s annual July Fourth fireworks show. It will be held on Friday, Nov. 1, from 6 to 10 p.m. at the Siesta Public Beach pavilion, Matthes pointed out.

And, not least of all, Light Up the Village — Siesta Village's holiday season kickoff — is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 30 from 6 to 9 p.m.

After Matthes referred to the "mini parade" that escorts Santa Claus to Siesta Center

during Light Up the Village, Gaddie chided him. "It's not a 'mini parade,'" she said. "It's not. It's major."

"It's growing," chimed in Anne Johnson of Fresh PR & Marketing.

"As long as the Sheriff's Department representative is in the room, it's 'mini,'" Matthes maintained, referring to Sgt. Steve Leavitt of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office. (The SKVA has sought the Sheriff's Office's assistance with managing traffic around the parade the past couple of years.)

As laughter bubbled in the room, Gaddie proceeded to ask for help in the effort to sign up at least one marching band for the event. "We want to make our mini parade go from mini to small," she added.



*The Beach Bazaar float makes its way down Ocean Boulevard during the 2012 Light Up the Village parade. Photo courtesy of Peter van Roekens*



# Siesta Seen

Because he worked as a school resource officer prior to his Siesta assignment, Leavitt told the group he would try to help with securing a marching band. However, he cautioned, "Some of 'em, I believe, are going up for Macy's [Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York]." Still, he added, "I will do some checking."

"It's tough to compete with Macy's," Gaddie conceded.

"But this is comparable," Leavitt replied, deadpan, referring to the Light Up the Village parade.

SKVA Secretary Helene Hyland said, "It has grown from miniscule to mini already the last few years and has become quite a successful event."

In fact, she said, a number of regular visitors to the island plan their trips to include Light Up the Village.

Yet one other upcoming Siesta event is the 13th annual fundraiser for Sarasota in Defense of Animals, *Because of You*, set for Oct. 17. An SDA flyer asks "compassionate and generous individuals and businesses" in the community to donate an auction item and/or to sponsor the event, "to enable SDA to help the hundreds of animals that will have a better life at our sanctuary."


Over the past 24 years, the flyer points out, SDA has provided high-quality lifetime care for more than 350 formerly homeless creatures, found homes for more than 4,500 stray

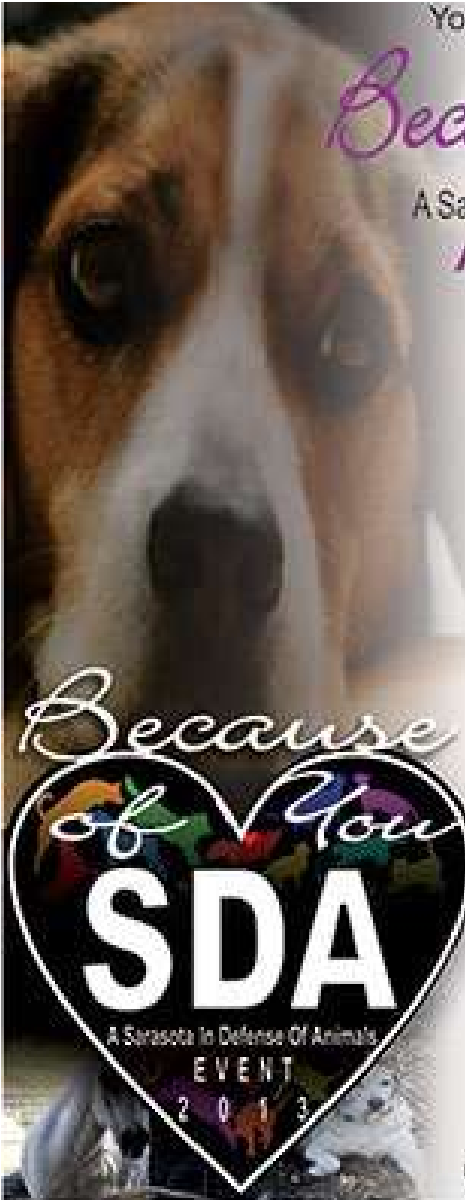
dogs and cats and sponsored spay/neuter clinics for feral and free-roaming cats, to prevent "thousands of unwanted kitten births."

For more information on SDA, visit [www.sdasarasota.com](http://www.sdasarasota.com).

The fundraiser will be held from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. at the Daiquiri Deck, located at 5250 Ocean Blvd. in Siesta Village.

Tickets, which are \$100, include an open bar, dinner and live and silent auctions.

Russell Matthes is a co-chairman of that event. 



You are cordially invited to

## Because of You

A Sarasota in Defense of Animals  
**Annual Benefit**

Thursday  
**October 17, 2013**  
6:30pm - 10:30pm

**Daiquiri Deck**  
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**Because of You SDA**  
A Sarasota in Defense of Animals  
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# I like to take my time.

Sure, it's a temptation to rush. Each issue of *The Sarasota News Leader* is brimfull of in-depth coverage of all the news and goings-on in Sarasota County. And it has delightful and informative feature stories. Thanks to its 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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**A&E BRIEFS**



## ARTISTS TO PRESENT WORK AT HERMITAGE RETREAT

On Friday, Oct. 4, Florida artists who teach drama, dance, music, writing and the visual arts will culminate a four-day conference with beach readings and open studio tours at the Hermitage Artist Retreat, 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood, the Hermitage has announced.

Tours will begin at 5:15 p.m., while the readings will commence on the beach in front of the Hermitage campus at 6:15 p.m. sharp, followed by sunset about 7:15 p.m., a news release says. "Visitors are encouraged to bring their beach chairs and refreshments to enjoy" during the readings, the release notes.

The events are free and open to the public.

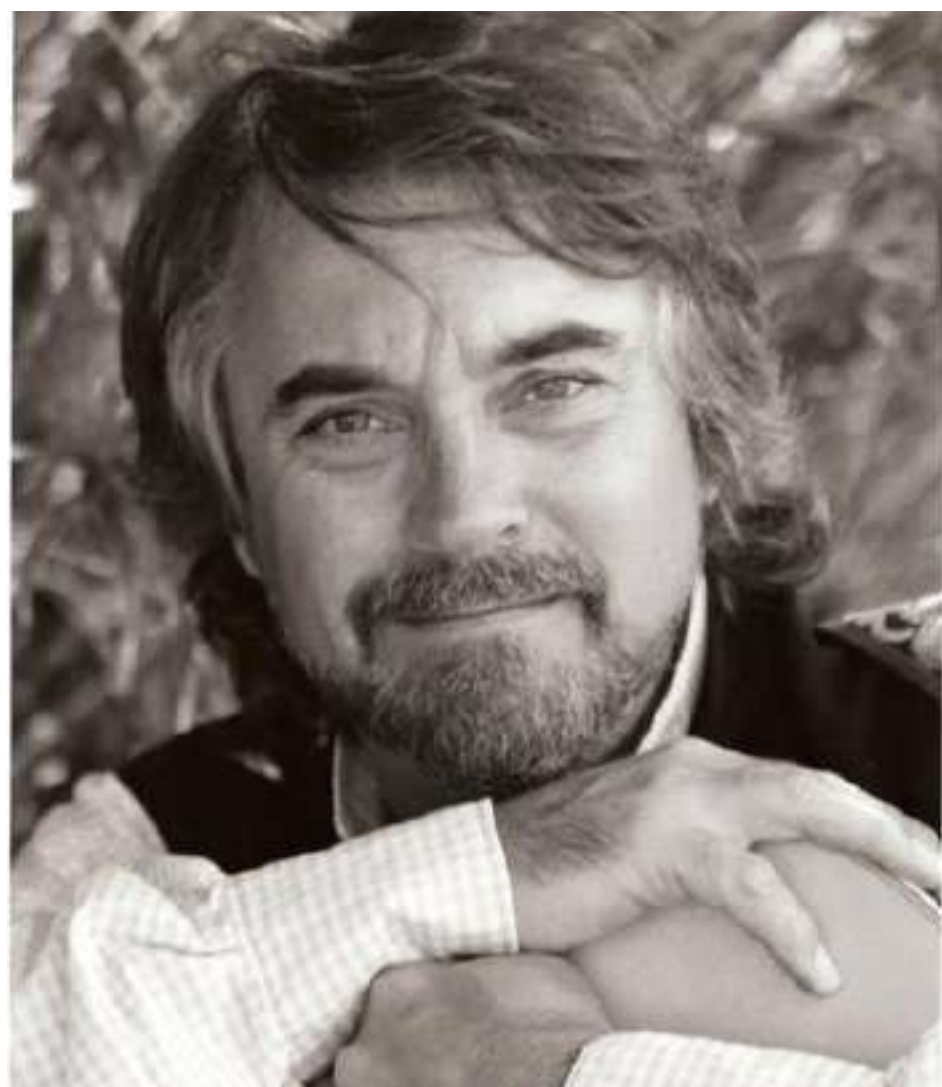
"We are thrilled to be able to host the Association of Florida Teaching Artists," said Bruce E. Rodgers, Hermitage executive director, in the release.

A unique group of artists, with varying backgrounds, will participate in the event, the release continues:

- Gabrielle Lennon focuses on analysis, interpretation and performance of prose, poetry and drama. Additionally, she writes professionally for magazines, newspapers, newsletters, journals and the theater.
- Mary J. Kelly has 25 years of experience as a professional storyteller/actress, teaching artist and creativity consultant. "She makes use of expressive vocalizations and visually exciting physical movements to create a cavalcade of characters" who reflect historical and contemporary attitudes, the release adds.



*Mary Kelly/Contributed photo*



*Bill Schustik/Contributed photo*

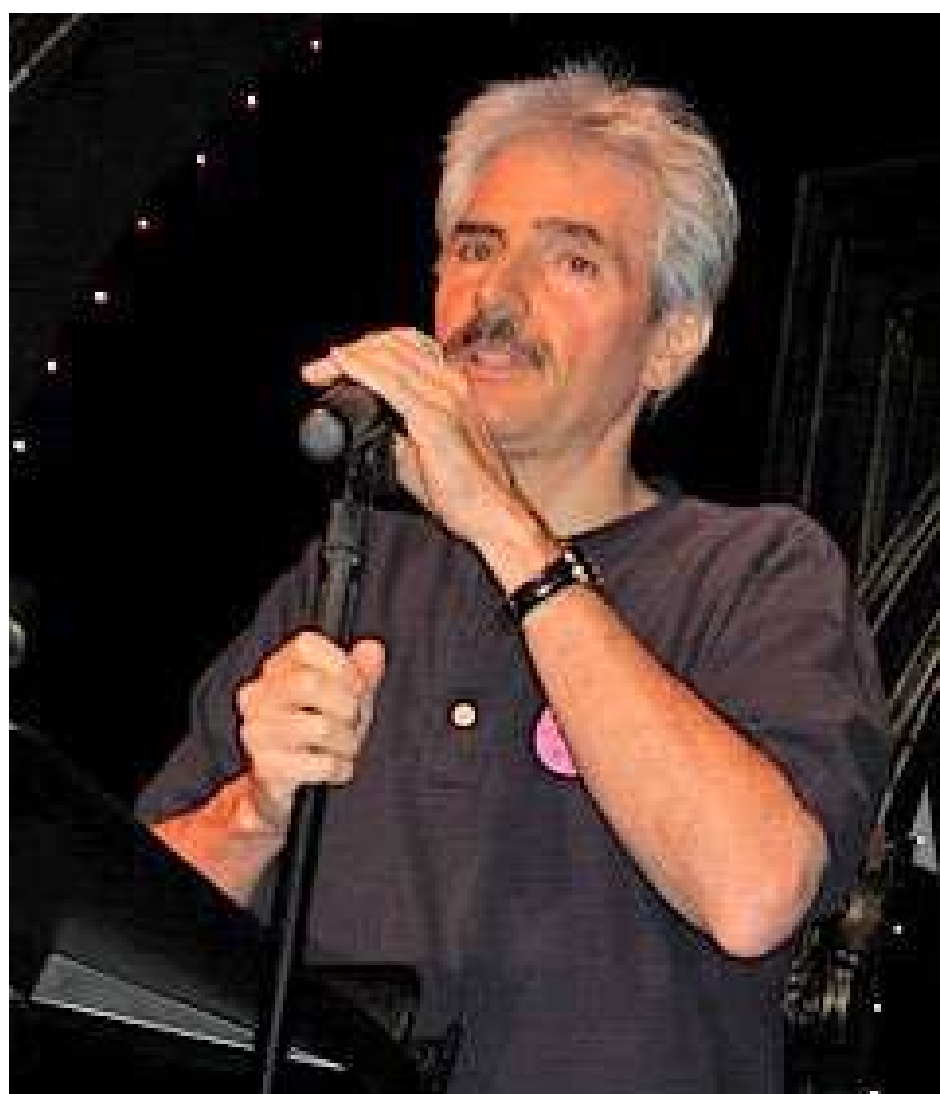


- “Kuniko Yamamoto uses origami, music and audience participation to provide a magical entry into Japanese culture,” the release says. In her show, *Origami Tales*, masks representing mythological characters, puppets, flowers and a dragon — all made from origami — set the stage “while Kuniko shares heartfelt stories from ancient Japan,” the release notes.
- Neal Schleifer is a Hermitage Fellow and Ringling Towers Award recipient in literature. He wrote *Practicing Imperfection* and edited two poetry anthologies. His poetry and essays have appeared in numerous journals, and he has conducted teaching artist residencies in Sarasota and Manatee counties.
- “Surapsari is an accomplished performing artist specializing in traditional dances and theaters from Bali, Java and India,” the release notes. She is also a certified teaching artist in Sarasota County, offering unique arts-integrated lessons for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Bill Schustik travels all over America, “gathering songs and sowing legends,” the release adds. Among the tools of his trade are “his magnificent baritone voice, a keen sense of drama, a colorful array of folk instruments and a deep abiding love for traditional American lore,” the release notes. As an American troubadour, he has performed for three U.S. presidents, appeared both on and off Broadway and written two full-length ballets — with Edward Villella and Edward Verso.

The outdoor event will be held weather permitting, the release points out. To confirm the schedule 90 minutes before the program begins, call 475-2098 or visit the [Hermitage Artist Retreat Facebook page](#).



Gabrielle Lennon/Contributed photo



Neal Schleifer/Contributed photo



## SEASON OF COLOR OPENS OCT. 4 AT DABBERT GALLERY

Dabbert Gallery, located at 76 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, will present *Season of Color* from Oct. 4 through Nov. 29, the gallery has announced.

An opening reception will be held on Friday, Oct. 4, from 6 to 9 p.m.

During the show, nine of the gallery's premier artists "explore the power of color as a compelling emotional force," a news release notes:

- "Barbara Krupp's exhilarating chorus of vibrant colors sing with joy."
- William Jerdon's "authentic nudes" and sensuous still life paintings "are always compelling."
- Robert Baxter presents a milieu of rich color patterns that mingle with "masterfully rendered figures."
- "Craig Rubadoux's magnificent color and lyrical line create enchanted expressionism."



*St. Armands by Robert Baxter. Contributed photo*



*Sunday Morning by James Griffin. Contributed photo*



- “James Griffin’s superb interpretive realism is infused with glowing light and color.”
- “Beatrice del Perugia’s offbeat way of seeing things makes you wonder and smile.”
- “Nancy Turner’s eloquent women’s narratives are revealed with soft color harmonies.”
- Tom Swimm “captures the energy and exceptions” in use of light and rich color.
- “Jeff Cornell’s soft pastel pigments are meticulously blended to create superb figurative realism.”

For more information, call the gallery at 955-1315 or visit [www.dabbertgallery.com](http://www.dabbertgallery.com).



*Separation by Nancy Turner. Contributed photo*



*The Obverse World by Barbara Krupp. Contributed photo*



## TRUMPET AND ORGAN RECITAL PLANNED AT REDEEMER

The Church of the Redeemer, located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota, invites members of the community to a special trumpet and organ recital at 5:15 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 6, featuring former Sydney Symphony Orchestra principal trumpet Daniel Mendelow.

Redeemer's choirmaster, Ann Stephenson-Moe, will accompany Mendelow on organ, a news release says.

Mendelow, who played with the Sydney orchestra for 34 years, serves as trumpeter

in residence at Redeemer, the release continues. He takes part in many chamber music performances and recitals in the area, and he participated as a soloist and panel judge at the 2012 International Trumpet Guild Conference, the release adds.

He recently held Bach clinics at Vandercook and Northwestern universities.

Tickets for the recital are \$10. They may be purchased online at [redeemersarasota.org](http://redeemersarasota.org) or by calling the parish office at 955-4263.



*Daniel Mendelow/Contributed photo*



## THE BOOK OF MATT AUTHOR TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Stephen Jimenez, author of *The Book of Matt*, will participate in a free community discussion at 7 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 14, at the Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota.

His appearance is being sponsored by Bookstore1Sarasota in partnership with WSLR radio.

Late on the night of Oct. 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student, left a bar in Laramie, WY, with two alleged “strangers,” a news release explains. “Eighteen hours later, Matthew was found tied to a log fence on the outskirts of town, unconscious and barely alive,” the release adds. “By the time Matthew died a few days later, his name was synonymous with anti-gay hate.”

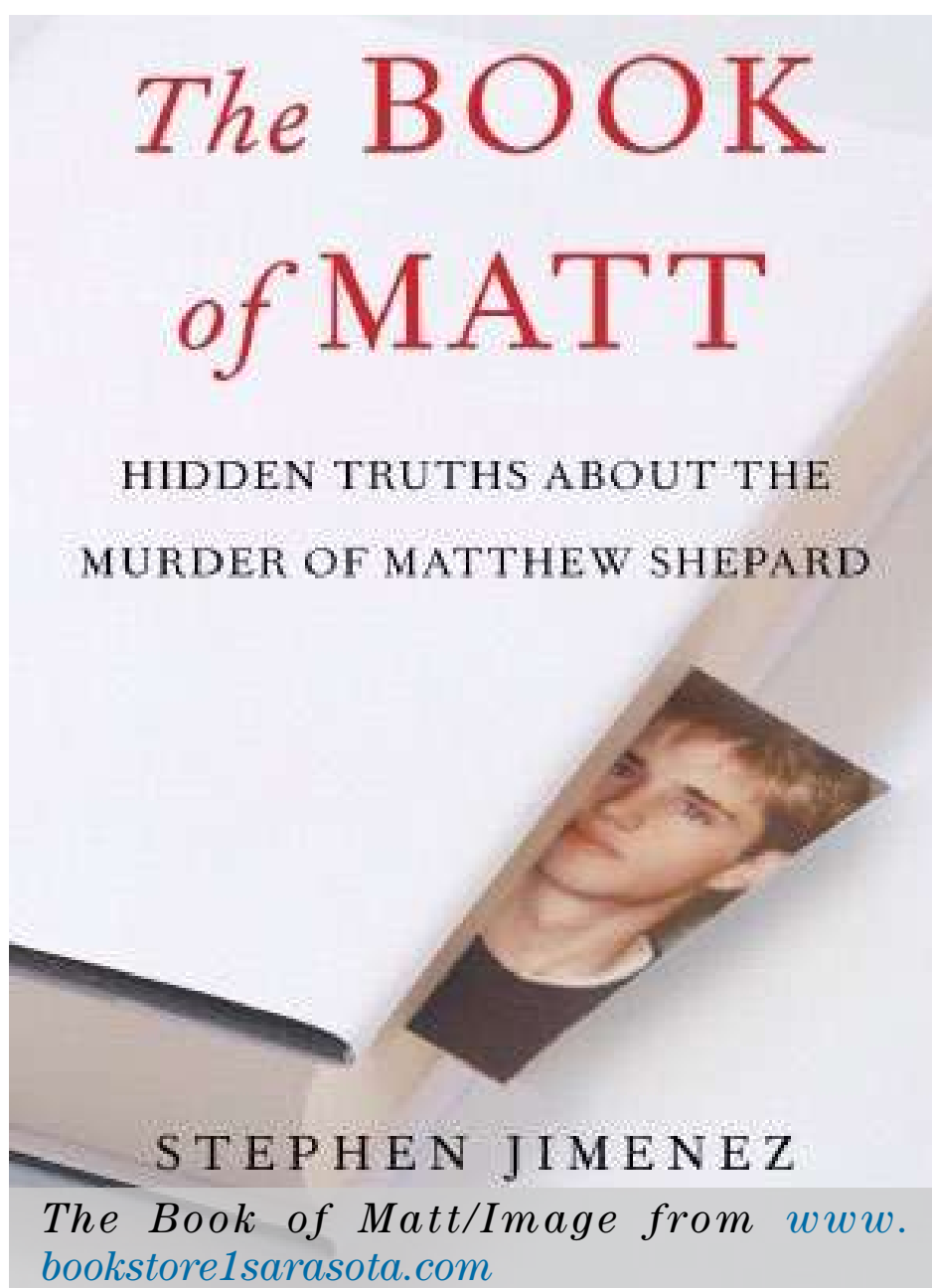
Jimenez went to Laramie in 2000 to research the story of Matthew Shepard’s murder, after the two men convicted of killing Shepard had gone to prison, the release continues. As a gay man, Jimenez “felt a moral imperative to tell Matthew’s story,” the release adds. “But what Jimenez eventually found in Wyoming was a tangled web of secrets.”

*The Book of Matt* “is sure to stir passions and inspire dialogue as it reframes this misconstrued crime and its cast of characters, proving irrefutably that Matthew Shepard was not killed for being gay but for reasons far more complicated — and daunting,” the release points out.

For more event information, visit [www.bookstore1sarasota.com](http://www.bookstore1sarasota.com). The book is on sale at the store in downtown Sarasota. To reserve a copy, call Bookstore1Sarasota at 365-7900.



Stephen Jimenez/Image from [www.bookstore1sarasota.com](http://www.bookstore1sarasota.com)



*The Book of Matt*/Image from [www.bookstore1sarasota.com](http://www.bookstore1sarasota.com)



## FINAL CALL ISSUED FOR PHOTO CONTEST SUBMISSIONS

Organizers of the Sarasota Bay Water Festival are encouraging photography enthusiasts of all ages to prepare entries for the *I Love Sarasota Bay Photo Contest*. The winning submissions will be displayed at the regional festival on Saturday, Nov. 2, at Ken Thompson Park in Sarasota.

Prizes will be presented for first-, second- and third-places, along with honorable mention honors, for four age divisions, a news release notes. Festival-goers also will have an opportunity to vote on a People's Choice Award.

"The photo contest celebrates the beauty and importance of Sarasota Bay," the release says. The deadline for submissions is Monday, Oct. 21; guidelines are posted at [sarasotabaywaterfestival.com](http://sarasotabaywaterfestival.com).

"Photography is an important way to express the emotional connection many people feel about Sarasota Bay and its wildlife," said

Randy Moore, the festival director, in the release. "Many of us are inspired by photos of birds, aquatic life and other wildlife, as well as images showing people enjoying water sports and recreational activities."

Other Water Festival highlights will be the bay's first dragon boat races, live music on the main stage from noon until 7 p.m., fine artists selling unique gift items, panel discussions on bay-friendly living, food trucks and local restaurants offering all sorts of edibles, displays of vintage and new boats and fun activities for children, including dip netting and nature walks. More than 75 exhibits will focus on boating, fishing, kayaking, paddleboard sports, scuba diving, birding, protection of wildlife and bay-friendly living, the release continues.

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) is the presenting sponsor of the event, while HDR Inc. is the host sponsor.



*Makaela Frankford of Sarasota was a winner in the 2012 I Love Sarasota Bay Photo Contest. Contributed photo*



## SARASOTA OPERA AND LIBRARY TO HOLD VERDI CELEBRATION

This month, Sarasota Opera will join in the worldwide celebration honoring the bicentennial anniversary of the birth of famed Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, the Opera has announced.

In partnership with Selby Public Library, Sarasota Opera has planned a program of public talks and free concerts, “including a big birthday celebration” on Thursday, Oct. 10, the day of the composer’s birth, a news release says. The Oct. 10 observance will begin at 4 p.m. at the library (1331 First St., Sarasota) with the unveiling of special exhibits and a performance by Sarasota Opera artists in the rotunda, the release continues. Immediately afterward, guests will be

invited to follow the red carpet out the south entrance of the library and walk across the street to the Sarasota Opera House. There, at 5 p.m., guests will be offered backstage tours, more performances by Sarasota Opera artists as well as by members of the Sarasota Youth Opera, a meet-and-greet with Sarasota Opera’s production team and children’s activities, the release adds.

Toward the end of the evening, guests will be invited into the William E. Schmidt Opera Theatre to join in a birthday tribute to Verdi, including a community sing of his famous chorus, *Va, pensiero*, from his opera, *Nabucco*, the release says.



*The Sarasota Opera House is located on Pineapple Avenue in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*



Additionally, a series of free public talks will be presented by Sarasota Opera staff members in honor of three anniversaries: the 200th birthdays of Verdi and Richard Wagner and the 100th birthday of Benjamin Britten. These talks, again presented in partnership with the Selby Public Library, will be held in the library's Geldbart Auditorium, the release notes.

On Wednesday, Oct. 9, at 10:30 a.m., Victor DeRenzi, artistic director of Sarasota Opera, will discuss Sarasota Opera's Verdi Cycle, which is scheduled to be completed in 2016. At that time, "Sarasota Opera will have the distinction of being the only opera company in the world to have performed every published note Verdi wrote," the release points out.

On Wednesday, Oct. 16, at 10:30 a.m., DeRenzi will moderate a screening and discussion of the documentary, *Tosca's Kiss*. Produced in 1984, it profiles residents of the Casa Verdi, a retirement home for retired Italian opera singers in Milan, which was established by Verdi in 1902, the release says.

On Wednesday, Oct. 23, at 10:30 a.m., Sarasota Opera Executive Director Richard Russell will present a program on the operatic world of Richard Wagner, focusing on Sarasota Opera's 2014 winter production of Wagner's opera, *The Flying Dutchman*.



*A portrait of Guiseppe Verdi hangs in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome. Photo by Giovanni Boidini via Wikimedia Commons*

On Wednesday, Oct. 30, at 10:30 a.m., Samuel Lowry, director of audience development at Sarasota Opera, and Jesse Martins, Sarasota Youth Opera's music director, will present a talk on the operatic world of composer Benjamin Britten. This will include musical excerpts from Britten's children's opera, *The Little Sweep*, which will be presented by the Sarasota Youth Opera Nov. 9-10, the release notes.

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## VENICE THEATRE PUTS OUT CASTING CALL FOR THOSE AGE 50 AND UP

Venice Theatre's senior outreach troupe, The Silver Foxes, is seeking new members to enable it to bring variety shows to venues throughout the county from November to April.

Each March, the troupe also presents five performances of its annual *Follies* on the theatre's MainStage, a news release says.

Harry Moses, president of the Silver Foxes, is inviting people age 50 and up to audition, the release adds.


Auditions for singers will be held on Monday, Oct. 7, at 9:30 a.m., the release continues. Singers should bring 16 to 32 bars of sheet music; no tapes or CDs should be used. Musical Director Bobby Brader and Artistic



Director Joe Simmons will conduct the auditions, the release says.

Auditions for dancers will be conducted on Tuesday, Oct. 8, at 11 a.m. under the direction of Choreographer Maria Santagada. Auditions for actors will be held at a later date.

"There are also opportunities to work behind the scenes," the release notes, including providing technical assistance with sound, handling backstage responsibilities and assisting in the production of shows. The Silver Foxes meet every first and third Tuesday of each month from November until the Follies performances on the MainStage in March, the release continues.

All auditions and meetings will take place in the second floor Studio Rehearsal Room at the theatre, located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. on the Island of Venice. For further information, call Venice Theatre's Education and Outreach Department at 486-8679. 



*Harry Moses is not just the president of Venice Theatre's Silver Foxes, he is also a performer. Contributed photo*



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# RELIGION BRIEFS



*The First United Methodist Church is located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel*

## **WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY TO BE CELEBRATED ON OCT. 6**

First United Methodist Church, located at 104 S. Pineapple Ave. in downtown Sarasota, invites all residents of the community to join its members for a special worship service on Sunday, Oct. 6, at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary.

In this celebration of World Communion Sunday, the Rev. Pam Carter, wife of presiding Florida Conference Bishop Ken Carter, “will share her passion for the impoverished people of Haiti” and her vision for the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church to package 1 million meals this year in partnership with Stop Hunger Now, a news release says.

Before and after the service, worshippers will be invited to help First Church prepare 10,000 meals towards this initiative, the release adds. The cost is only 25 cents per meal, the release points out.

All attending the World Communion Sunday service will be asked to consider making a gift offering to help cover the cost of that mission, the release adds.

For additional information, call the church office at 955-0935. 





# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

**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).

**04****OCTOBER**

**WSLR presents Steve Arvey & the Delta Swamp Rats**

Oct. 4, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10. Information: 894-6469 or [WSLR.org](http://WSLR.org).

**04+****OCTOBER**

**Dabbert Gallery presents *Season of Color***

Oct. 4 to Nov. 29, 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or [DabbertGallery.com](http://DabbertGallery.com).

**05****OCTOBER**

**Second Annual Sarasota Book Fair**

Oct. 5, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Art Center Sarasota, 707 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 365-2032 or [ArtSarasota.org](http://ArtSarasota.org).

**05****OCTOBER**

**Trumpet & Organ Recital, featuring Daniel Mendelow and Ann Stephenson-Moe**

Oct. 5, 5:15 p.m., Church of the Redeemer, 222 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Admission: \$10. Information: 955-4263 or [RedeemerSarasota.org](http://RedeemerSarasota.org).

**11****OCTOBER**

**Jazz Club of Sarasota presents *Jazz at Two*, featuring the Ken Loomer Quartet**

Oct. 11, 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).





## SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



**SO MANY OPTIONS!**

*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.*