

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 23 — February 21, 2014

News Leader



**30-YEAR PROPOSAL SNUBBED
IN THE FLESH
TAMING THE NOISE**

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A.K.A. HELP

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Welcome

I could not help but feel bad for City Editor Stan Zimmerman this week. He had to sit through a long City Commission session Tuesday — not to mention the other meetings involving city business that he attended. On the other side of downtown Sarasota, Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker, County Editor Roger Drouin and I split up the County Commission meeting on Wednesday.

Then again, by the time Cooper finished with consultant Donna Arduin's fiscal neutrality report on the 2050 Plan, no one could have blamed him for feeling as tired as Stan must have been Tuesday night.

Recently, when I was talking with a friend about covering local government meetings, she said she could not imagine having to sit through them. That is all the more reason I am grateful every week for Cooper, Stan and Roger. It does take a special person, I like to think, to find enjoyment in following the ebb and flow of local government.

The flip side of that — the view on which I prefer to focus — is that if we did not track all that activity, how would you know what is really going on in this community? I am a firm believer that people should know what their elected officials are doing. After all, our tax money funds those activities.

Well, that is enough from my soapbox this week. Given the wide gamut of topics in this issue, I have no fear you will find something of interest, thanks to the time investment we happily made on your behalf.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher



30-YEAR PROPOSAL SNUBBED



IN THE FLESH



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Front cover: *Busy Harbor* - Norman Schimmel

Sarasota Leisure: *Secluded Beach* - Norman Schimmel



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30-YEAR PROPOSAL SNUBBED



“ *I’m concerned the wrong message was sent tonight.* ”

Charlie Bailey III
Attorney
For GreenPointe Communities

The former Quay site has been in limbo since the start of the Great Recession. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY COMMISSION REFUSES TO RUSH A ZONING CODE CHANGE THAT WOULD GIVE NEW OWNERS OF THE QUAY SITE DECADES TO BUILD THEIR PROJECT

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

How long should it take to develop a property once the site plan has been approved? Is 30 years too long?

That was the question of the evening on Tuesday, Feb. 19. A lawyer representing the company considering purchase of the 14 bayfront acres north of the Ritz-Carlton and south of the Hyatt hotels requested the city change its code to allow the 30-year period. And he requested the city do that fast. The city commissioners did not agree.

Attorney Charlie Bailey III of Williams Parker in Sarasota represented GreenPointe

Communities, a buyer sniffing at the old Quay property. The parcel is fresh from receivership with the Irish government’s version of the FDIC, after the prior owner defaulted on millions in loans from an Irish bank. GreenPointe smelled a deal, but it was smart enough to look for buried bombshells.

Part of the purchase price goes beyond the land. It includes what are called “entitlements,” the official government permission to build something. The more expansive the past approval process, the greater the entitlement, because it saves the new owner the enormous expense of getting approval.

Consider the planning, zoning, building and other government requirements and reviews, plus soliciting approval from the city Planning Board and the City Commission itself, after sometimes stormy public hearings.

In the case of the old Quay property, the entitlements are substantial, including permission for three 18-story buildings and one five-story structure, a 175-room hotel, 695 condominiums, 39,000 square feet of office space and 189,000 square feet of commercial space for retail, dining, drinking and dancing opportunities — plus parking for 1,638 cars. And the public hearings were stormy.

The land is zoned “Downtown Bayfront,” allowing the greatest height and density available under the city zoning code. When the former owner received a “development

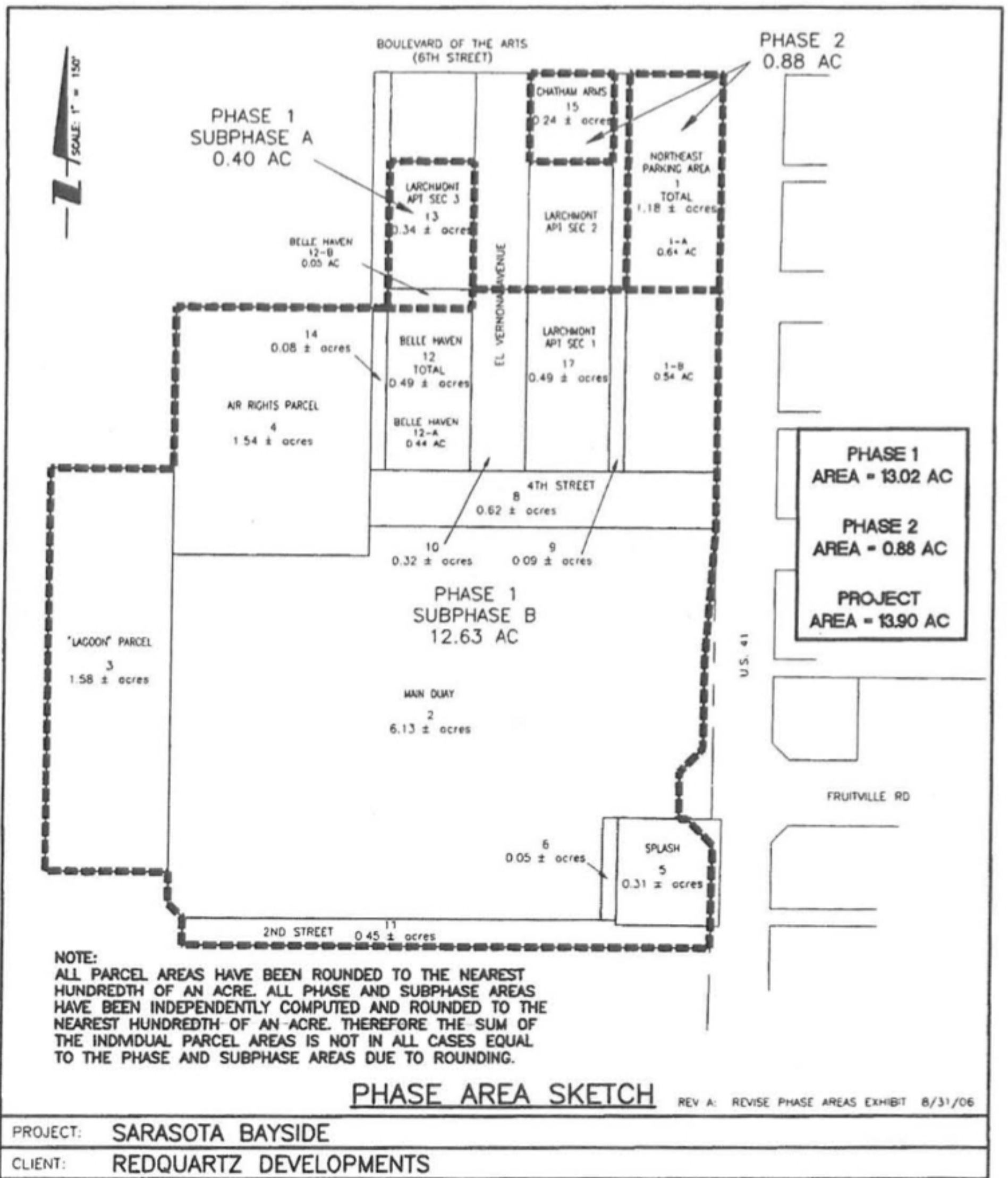
agreement” in 2007, that was good for 10 years, plus a one-year extension. Seven years later, GreenPointe says it needs more time to make preparations. Its representatives reference “the bayside project.”

TANGLED SIGNATURES

Mayor Fredd “Glossie” Atkins signed the original development agreement almost exactly seven years ago, on March 5, 2007. Nearly two years later, on Dec. 18, 2008, Mayor Lou Ann Palmer signed an amendment to the document, saying the development agreement would “automatically expire on Oct. 1, 2013 if a building permit for construction has not yet been issued.” Hovering over her shoulder were architect Bruce Franklin and attorney Michael Furen, who signed as witnesses.



The historic Belle Haven house sits just to the north of the Quay property. Photo by Norman Schimmel



A site plan approved several years ago by the city shows plans for Phase 1 of what was called Sarasota Bayside on the former Quay property. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

EXHIBIT B

REVIEW OF USES IN PHASE I AND PHASE II

The planned density and intensity of primary uses in each category of intended uses within the Project are depicted below. Certain levels of minimal use are also established as part of the transportation review standards in Exhibit D and E. Prior to the Commencement Date for the residential portion of Phase II of the Project, the Developer shall obtain certificates of occupancy (temporary or final) for at least 60,000 square feet of the commercial/retail square footage located within Phase I of the Project. (The 60,000 square feet may include restaurant uses; but shall not include office uses.)

Table B-1

	Project Total*	Phase I	Phase II
Acreage	13.90	13.02	.88
Residential Density*	695*	622	73*
Hotel Units	175	175	0
Commercial Sq. Ft.**	189,050	111,809	77,241
Office Sq. Ft.***	38,972	38,972	0
Docks****	18 slips	18	0

* Residential units based on 50 units per acre for 13.90 acres. Traffic was studied based on 701 units. If Eligible Properties are added pursuant to Article 6, additional residential units may be added in Phase II at 50 units per acre, limited by the traffic study requirements in Exhibit D, up to a total of 1.13 acres or 55 additional units, totaling 750 units.

** Commercial square footage includes both the "Specialty Retail" and "Quality Restaurant" uses identified in the traffic study.

*** Office square footage includes space in the Belle Haven

**** Existing Docks; additional docks will be permitted separately. All existing and future docks are accessory uses to the primary residential or commercial uses. If docks are to be used as a commercial marina, a major conditional use will have to be approved.

DRI Thresholds. As proposed in this Development Agreement, the land uses in the Project (Phase I and Phase II) do not exceed the thresholds for requiring review as a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) pursuant to §380.06, Florida Statutes as demonstrated in Table 2. The cumulative uses in the Project, in both Phases shall not exceed 159.5% of the threshold.

If the agreement expires, the “entitlements” vanish. But in 2012, the Florida Legislature allowed development agreement holders to ask for extensions. The property owner’s representative requested and received an extension in Sarasota, to Jan. 30, 2017.

Bailey argued Tuesday that the remaining 34 months on the development agreement were insufficient for his client to obtain a building permit. And he was not looking for the one-year extension already allowed. Instead, he wanted the city to initiate a change in the city’s zoning text (a so-called ZTA, or zoning text amendment) that would allow the extension of a development agreement for up to 30 years.

“I’d rather wait another six months than grab the first thing that comes along.”

Shannon Snyder
Mayor
City of Sarasota

”

He said his client did not necessarily want a 30-year extension, but the period was allowed under Florida law, and he suggested the city’s zoning text should mirror that, period.

“We’re not here to discuss the bayside project. GreenPointe has a contract to purchase the Quay property,” said Bailey. “It is a distressed parcel, probably the most distressed property on the west coast of Florida.” The land is now an open field with a modest historic apartment building sited there.

“Before GreenPointe closes, there are certain issues that must be pinned down, that any purchaser would want to pin down,” added Bailey. “We need to seek an extension of the



City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo listens to a discussion at a meeting last fall. Photo by Norman Schimmel

development agreement. We're not wedded to 30 years. We think it makes sense to conform to the current state statute that gives the ability to allow 30 years. We're not changing any uses."

STONY GROUND

Bailey asked for an "expedited" ZTA, waiving the need for a formal application and scrutiny by the Development Review Committee that is composed of senior city staffers. Instead, GreenPointe asked for a staff review of the change and then the quick scheduling of public hearings before the Planning Board and City Commission.

Once the ZTA change was finished, GreenPointe could apply for more than a one-year extension. Bailey was unclear about whether his client could ask for 30 additional years; just a total of 30, minus the seven that have already elapsed; or a lower number. In any case, GreenPointe could sit on the property for decades before applying for a building permit, all the while keeping its entitlements intact.

While the entitlements and all they allow are valuable, saving time and money by avoiding a repetition of the permitting process, they also are a straightjacket. Significant changes to the site plan — moving the buildings to a different location, for example — would void the development agreement and trigger the necessity of reapplication. Bailey indicated GreenPointe did not want to meddle with the entitlements, but "What's approved is very intense. It's 11 pounds of nails in a 10-pound bag."

The commissioners balked at the "expedited" ZTA. The two commissioners who previously sat on the city's Planning Board led the

discussion. Commissioner Susan Chapman said, "If we expedite this process, it gives a short leash to the public. But the project could be dead for 30 years. But we're expediting the process."


She moved to deny the request and Mayor Shannon Snyder passed the gavel to second it.

"Every time we have expedited something of great public importance such as this, it has come back and the public has told us this isn't what they want," said Chapman. "It's creating the protection for 30 years to extend a development agreement. That gives a great potential for speculation."

Snyder and Chapman very seldom agree on controversial issues, but this time they were joined at the hip. "I agree with what Commissioner Chapman has said. We have only one shot at this," noted Snyder. "We do not have to do this. I'd rather wait another six months than grab the first thing that comes along."

Vice Mayor Willie Shaw said, "I don't want us to be held hostage." And Commissioner Suzanne Atwell added she would also vote to deny the request. "We've got to do this right. I'm worried about 30 years, just sitting on it," she said.

Only Commissioner Paul Caragiulo, an announced County Commission candidate, voted to support Bailey's request. "I'm at a loss. Are you are serious about redevelopment and extending the [Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency]? I'm at a loss."

After the 4-1 vote, Bailey's parting words were, "I'm concerned the wrong message was sent tonight." 

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IN THE FLESH



The 2050 Plan was created to manage development in the area east of Interstate 75, which has an abundance of farms and pastures. File photo

AUTHOR OF CONTROVERSIAL \$90,000 REPORT ON FISCAL NEUTRALITY MAKES HER PITCH TO THE COUNTY COMMISSION

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

The first draft of Laffer Associates' report analyzing Sarasota 2050's fiscal neutrality rules contained some surprising proposals: Eliminate all density restrictions, obliterate the urban service boundary, cut all zoning regulations and more. But little of that came up Wednesday, Feb. 19, when Donna Arduin, one of the report's authors, appeared in Sarasota to summarize the third and final draft prepared

by her firm, fulfilling the terms of its \$90,000 agreement.

Sarasota County originally reached out to Laffer and Arduin last summer, at the behest of Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who put forward Arduin's name — along with two others — as an expert who could analyze how the county implements the concept of fiscal neutrality. Part of the county's 2050 land-use policy — which is in



There's 390,000 people in the county, [and only] 20 or 30 people complaining about growth.

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County



the middle of a much broader overhaul — fiscal neutrality is the principle that new growth pay its own way. Under 2050, developers are required to prove that new projects generate enough revenue through impact fees and taxes that taxpayers elsewhere are not subsidizing any increased burden on infrastructure.

Fiscal impact analysis is a useful tool employed by many governments, Arduin told the board Wednesday, but she told *The Sarasota News Leader* after the meeting that “only a couple counties” factor in that analysis when deciding whether to approve a new development. There isn’t a clear model the county can just import, she said.



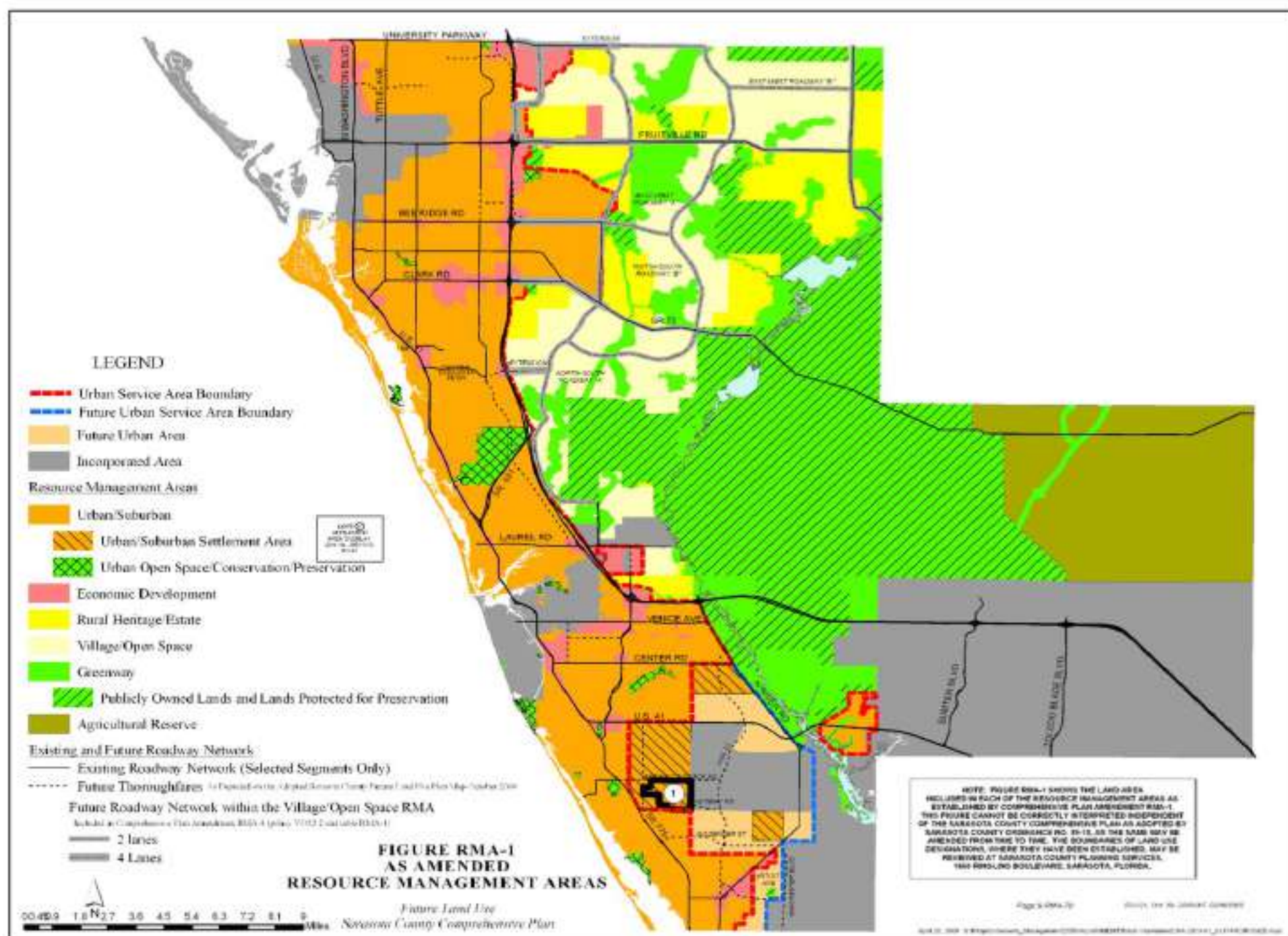
Consultant Donna Arduin sits in the audience, awaiting her turn at the podium on Feb. 19. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Arduin didn't back down from her firm's original suggestion that the county simply eliminate fiscal neutrality in its entirety, telling reporters that gutting the provision might be "economic perfection," but other factors come into play. "That's your guidepost; that's your North Star," she said. While other policy priorities may limit the county's ability to follow that path, Laffer's goal is to help keep the county "walking in that direction."

Arduin's presentation outlined how Laffer felt the county should proceed, assuming it wants to maintain fiscal neutrality as a principle. She suggested the county is effective at estimating what a new neighborhood will cost the

community, but it is failing to "capture" the benefits of new construction. "People moving here are purchasing things here, potentially working within the county and financially contributing to businesses in the county," she told the board, arguing that the current fiscal neutrality analysis fails to factor in those numbers.

She also told the board to have faith in the market, saying 2050's requirements that 15 percent of a new neighborhood be made up of affordable housing and that a certain amount of land be set aside as open space should be removed. If a developer instead chooses to build affordable housing or preserve space,



A map shows county land designations. Image courtesy Sarasota County

the company should be credited for that, Arduin said.

One portion of the Laffer report Arduin did not address in her remarks to the commission was the appendix, a long attack on the concept of smart growth, which the report calls “authoritarian” and “elitist.” That appendix made up the majority of the first draft submitted to the county last November, and it was the focus of sharp criticism, even from commissioners. But the consensus on the board last fall was that the county had drawn up a faulty contract, not that Laffer had delivered a poor report. “They did what they were asked to do,” Commissioner Charles Hines said of the firm in November.

Arduin told the *News Leader* that Laffer approached the fiscal neutrality issue from a very broad perspective and then, in subsequent drafts, narrowed its focus. “It wasn’t specified that we had to do all of that, but for our purposes, coming in as economists rather than land-use planners, it was for our process necessary,” Arduin said. The firm never felt unclear about its task, or misled during negotiations with the county, she added.

The board took no official action on the report, simply instructing County Long-Range Planning Manager Allen Parsons to incorporate Arduin’s suggestions into his department’s ongoing 2050 review. Staff is tentatively scheduled to bring forward the next round of proposed 2050 changes, affecting the comprehensive plan, on May 21. If everything goes as planned, final adoption would take place in early November.


“If you do it a little later, I don’t have to vote,” joked Commissioner Nora Patterson, who will



Commissioner Joe Barbetta has been a staunch advocate of revising the 2050 Plan. File photo

be stepping down after this year’s elections. Patterson is the only current commissioner who was on the board when 2050 was originally approved, and she has been the lone skeptic of some of the proposed changes.

Barbetta asked Parsons if the process could be expedited, saying the changes have “been a long time coming.” Despite the tough words issued in earlier months toward Laffer’s analysis, there was exactly zero public comment after Arduin concluded her presentation on Wednesday. Barbetta criticized “naysayers” who are against any revisions to 2050.

“I’m a little tired of the rhetoric out there that’s slowing things down,” he said. “There’s 390,000 people in the county,” and only “20 or 30 people complaining about growth.” 

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TAMING THE NOISE

Neighbors on the west side of South Tamiami Trail also have complained to the County Commission about loud music from Bob's Boathouse (marked with the flag). Image from Google Maps

A MARCH 19 PUBLIC HEARING WILL DETERMINE WHETHER A REVISED COUNTY ORDINANCE GIVES RELIEF TO NEIGHBORS OF BOB'S BOATHOUSE

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

A Sarasota County Commission vote after a March 19 public hearing could provide neighbors of Bob's Boathouse relief from loud music many say has vexed them for months.

After a brief discussion on Feb. 19, the commission voted unanimously to advertise the public hearing on revisions to the county's Air and Sound Pollution Ordinance. Those changes would allow commercial establishments such as Bob's Boathouse to be treated the same as

intense industrial uses in terms of noise emissions. The revisions also would allow meter readings to be taken from the property line of a person making a complaint instead of solely at the site of the establishment emitting the sound that is the focus of the complaint.

“We can understand how POWs can be broken down so easily and quickly with constant stress, noise and lack of sleep.”

Michelle Lee
Resident
Montclair Drive

A staff memo to the commission says, “An additional table has been provided that will allow for the opportunity to measure sound levels from the receiving property's real

(3) Sound level measurements shall be taken at the real property line of the Generating Property, ~~except for industrial uses which may also be measured when~~ a Code Enforcement Officer or Law Enforcement Officer cannot obtain a measurement at the real property line of the Generating Property, for one of the following reasons:

a. the real property line is not easily accessible or discernible because of steep embankments, fences, or a shoreline;

b. the use of the real property line would endanger the safety of the Code Enforcement Officer or Law Enforcement Officer, including but not limited to the following circumstances:

1. Unsafe surfaces or unstable ground.

2. Risk of being struck by vehicular traffic.

3. Risk associated with triggering potential violent behavior by those persons allegedly in violation of this Article.

c. the use of the real property line would result in unnatural enhancement or diminution of the measured sound, such as standing on a hillside.

In the event that a Code Enforcement Officer or Law Enforcement Officer cannot obtain a measurement at the real property line of the Generating Property, then the Code Enforcement Officer or Law Enforcement Officer shall take a measurement at the ~~receiving residential~~ real property line of the Receiving Property .a complainant, All measurements shall be taken at approximately five feet above ground. Location and timing of measurements shall be arranged to exclude or minimize background noise, to the greatest extent practicable. A correction factor shall be applied to compensate for background noise when the difference between background and source is less than ten decibels.



Jim McWhorter offers comments to the County Commission on Feb. 19. Photo by Rachel Hackney

property line, when the generating property’s real property line is difficult to obtain.”

Before they voted, however, commissioners asked staff to take extra measures beyond the normal advertisement of the public hearing to ensure that businesses that could be affected by the changes would be made aware of them.

Since Bob’s Boathouse opened in early November 2013 at 5515 S. Tamiami Trail, residents along Montclair Drive — across Phillippi Creek from the establishment — and people in other nearby homes have sent dozens of emails to the County Commission pleading for help.

As Montclair Drive resident Michelle Lee put it in public comments to the County Commission on Feb. 19, “We are prisoners in our own homes.” Having listened to the bass

<u>Receiving Land Use Category</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Sound Level Limit (dbA)</u>	<u>Sound Level Limit (dbC)</u>
<u>Residential</u>	<u>7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>70</u>
	<u>10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>Commercial/Business</u>	<u>7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>80</u>
	<u>10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Governmental/OPI</u>	<u>7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>70</u>
	<u>10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>65</u>
<u>Intensive Commercial/Industrial</u>	<u>All times</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>80</u>

(2) *Impulse sound.* Sounds of short duration, as from forge hammers, punch presses, etc., shall be measured in accordance with subsection (b) of this section. For sounds so measured, the time sound pressure levels set forth in Table I shall be increased by six decibels during 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

thumping away “hour after hour” at Bob’s Boathouse, she added, “We can understand how POWs can be broken down so easily and quickly with constant stress, noise and lack of sleep.”

Jim McWhorter, president of the River Forest Civic Association — whose residents also live near the restaurant — pointed out in a Feb. 14 email to members that research shows Sarasota County, through its Air and Sound Pollution Ordinance, allows twice the level of “nightclub noise” during the daytime and four times the level at night “during sleeping hours” than any other county on the west coast of Florida.

McWhorter told the commissioners during the public comments portion of the Feb. 19 meeting that if the board approves the proposed changes, the daytime noise level will have to drop by 44 percent at residential sites in the vicinity of Bob’s Boathouse, and it will have to go down by “a whopping 88 percent at night, a level of normal speech during sleeping hours.”

Susan Phelps, a Realtor, pointed out during public comments that she is “a longtime resident of the idyllic island that is situated across the street from Bob’s Boathouse. I can tell you that this situation is totally out of control.”

Phelps added, “From a professional standpoint, I could not ethically sell a house on this island without disclosing to a buyer that they need to take notice — which wouldn’t

be hard — of the noise issuing from Bob’s Boathouse. If any of the residents wanted to sell, they couldn’t sell for what they would have gotten six months ago,” in spite of the rebound in the market.

THE DISCUSSION

As Assistant Zoning Administrator Donna Thompson began her presentation to the commissioners, she noted she had just distributed to them more emails from River Forest Civic Association residents in support of the proposed ordinance changes.

“Great work by staff,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta said. However, he pointed out, the work had been accomplished in a short time. (Commissioner Nora Patterson first pro-

posed the changes on Jan. 14, during another discussion about issues regarding Bob’s Boathouse.)

“I’m wondering if we’ve had any feedback from affected parties that have special exceptions” or any other entities that would have to deal with the changes, Barbetta asked. “Are there unintended consequences that are going to affect them?”

Barbetta continued, “I support the residents. I know what they’re going through with Bob’s Boathouse, but this is a reaction to that, and I just want to make sure we’re not going to get hammered from the other side ...”

I support the residents. I know what they’re going through with Bob’s Boathouse, but this is a reaction to that, and I just want to make sure we’re not going to get hammered from the other side ...

Joe Barbetta
Commissioner
Sarasota County

Thompson replied that the Zoning Administration Office had had no feedback thus far; but, she added, the proposed changes have not been advertised yet.

At that point, Patterson told her colleagues she had called Russell Matthes, past president of the Siesta Key Village Association and co-owner of the Daiquiri Deck in the Village and the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar restaurants in Venice and on St. Armands Circle, to let him know about the situation.

“This is countywide,” Barbetta replied.



Michelle Lee describes to the County Commission the distress she has suffered from the loud music at Bob's Boathouse. Photo by Rachel Hackney

“I know,” Patterson told him. “I felt like the folks we hear from most often on [noise matters] tend to be surrounding Siesta Village, and I made sure the commercial side had a copy of the ordinance and spoke to them about the specifics ... and haven't had any objections.”

Chairman Charles Hines thanked Patterson for “reaching out” to business owners on Siesta Key.

However, Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson said, “I think perhaps we need to be a little pro-active” with other areas of the county. She asked Thompson to send letters to the county's Chambers of Commerce “to make sure they know about [the proposed changes].” Robinson specifically asked that Osprey business owners be informed of the public hearing.

Thompson said she would work with other county staff to do that.

Patterson also asked that neighborhood organizations be notified, adding that she had not communicated with any of those on Siesta. “We've got to hit both sides [with a notice].”

“I agree,” Robinson said.

Regarding special exceptions, Thompson explained that only three businesses have those without specifications regarding decibel levels, but those exceptions specify that the establishments comply with the county code and that all their entertainment must be indoors.

“That's fine,” Barbetta told her.

Thompson also would work with the Office of the County Attorney, she added, to make certain no unforeseen problems would arise with existing special exceptions.

FOLLOW-UP CONCERNS

In a Feb. 20 email to Thompson, McWhorter, the president of the River Forest Civic Association, expressed some follow-up concerns relative to the commission's request that Chambers of Commerce be notified about the proposed changes. If Chamber representatives do not delve into the recommended revisions, he pointed out, they might not understand their full scope.




Realtor Susan Phelps tells the County Commission that residents near Bob's Boathouse would have difficulty selling their homes. Photo by Rachel Hackney

"To avoid unwarranted confusion and misunderstanding of the proposed Ordinance, we strongly request that ALL be informed of the following ... facts," he wrote:

- The nighttime sound limits would be effective as of 10 p.m., the hour most Florida counties utilize to denote the start of night, he noted. Sarasota County's existing ordinance uses 11 p.m.
- The nighttime sound limit for mid-range frequencies would drop just 5 decibels, from 75 to 70 (dbA), and it would still be the highest nighttime limit of all Florida counties.
- Low frequency — or bass — sound limits would be reduced by just 5 decibels (dbC), also still the highest in all Florida counties.

THE ORDINANCE ITSELF

Although the Air and Sound Pollution ordinance was scheduled to sunset in November 2012, the County Commission approved an initial one-year extension to November 2013. Last fall, the board approved a second extension after Thompson explained that staff felt more public meetings were needed to gain suggestions about changes.

Near the end of the revised ordinance that will be advertised for the March 19 public hearing, the sentence, "This article shall be automatically repealed on November 18, 2014, unless otherwise amended or ratified by the Board," has been struck out. The notation "Reserved" follows it. 



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FISCAL CHECKUP

Pete Ramsden, director of finance with the Sarasota County Clerk of Court's Office, addresses the County Commission on Wednesday. Photo by Roger Drouin

THE COUNTY IS IN STRONG FINANCIAL HEALTH, BUT COMMISSIONERS VOICE CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES AND RISING MEDICAL FUND COSTS

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

A presentation on the 2013 fiscal year budget this week provided a sneak preview into some of the challenges the Sarasota County Commission will likely grapple with during upcoming workshops as it crafts its spending plan for FY 2015.

The first of those sessions will be held Friday, Feb. 21.

Clerk of Court and County Comptroller Karen Rushing and Pete Ramsden,

director of finance with the Clerk's Office, provided the annual financial report to the commission on Wednesday, Feb. 19.

Commissioners emphasized they want to address several items in detail during the

upcoming budget workshops. Among them will be the potential need to upgrade or repair fixed assets, including buildings, other infrastructure — such as roads — and equipment. According

“As the new guy, it is a tremendous benefit to have the audit complete in December and to be here in February talking about this.”

Tom Harmer
Administrator
Sarasota County



to the financial report, an estimated 54 percent of the county's "governmental" infrastructure is considered aged.

"Increasing percentages indicate potential need for capital outlay or rehabilitation," the report reads.

Commissioners said they also want to address the rising costs of the county's medical insurance fund. In October, commissioners and county staffers discussed ways to try to alleviate an anticipated 15-percent medical insurance premium increase for county employees. That expected increase has been

attributed to climbing expenses for the county's self-funded medical account.

Two other topics that drew attention Wednesday were the Building Department fees charged to developers and contractors and the county's strategy for purchasing fleet vehicles.

Regarding the infrastructure issues, Ramsden told the commissioners staff planned to research and present more detailed information about conditions throughout the county. Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson and Commissioner Nora Patterson said they



FISCAL YEAR 2013 AT-A-GLANCE

FINANCIAL STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Assets and deferred outflows exceeded liabilities and deferred inflows by \$2.4 billion (net position)
- Total net position increased by \$21.2 million
- Total revenues increased by \$16.0 million to \$734.3 million (2.2%)
- Total expenses increased by \$11.2 million to \$738.6 million (1.5%)
- General Fund fund balance decreased by \$13.8 million to \$125.9 million (9.9%)
- Total debt decreased by \$32.9 million to \$576.9 million

would like to get that information sooner rather than later.

“That has been a source of discussion as far as road maintenance and other things,” Robinson pointed out. “I was wondering if we will be able to have that [information] for budget discussions we are going to have this year.”

Patterson noted infrastructure such as roadways, smaller bridges and buildings that might have deteriorated over the years are “obvious areas” staff can study.

“Those can be brought back to us by general staff, as opposed to ‘We will come back in two years,’” Patterson said during the presentation.

The topic of infrastructure will likely come up again March 25, during a budget workshop specifically scheduled to go over debt service and capital projects funded by the county’s surtax.

This year’s budget workshops are starting earlier than those of the past, which could prove a positive factor as the commissioners grapple



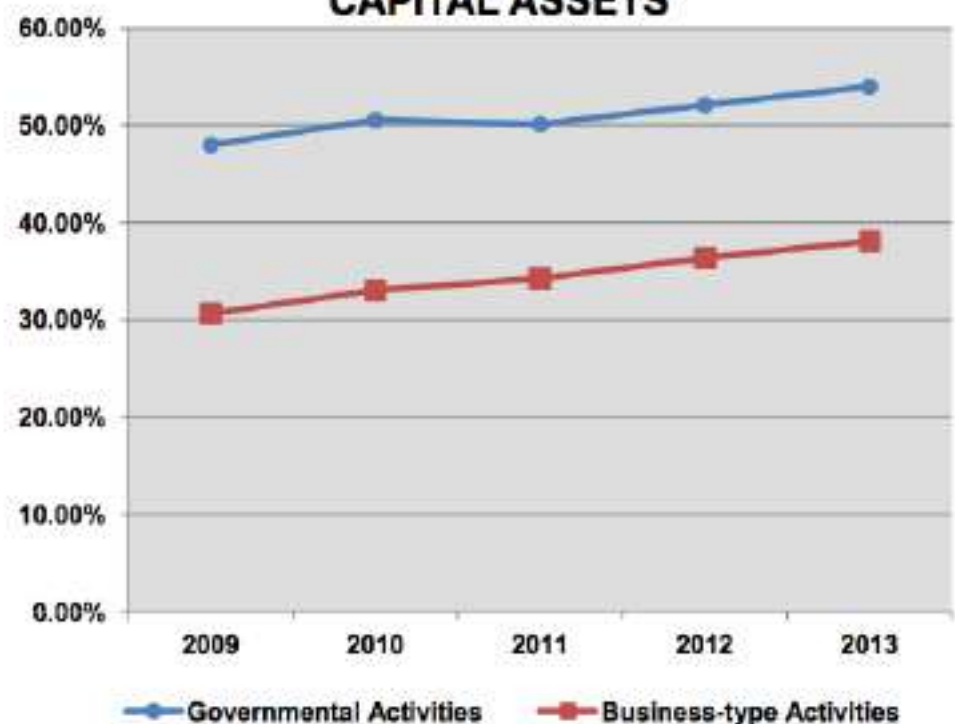
RISK FACTORS – CAPITAL ASSETS FINANCIAL CONDITION OVERVIEW

- Measures aging of County fixed assets (buildings, infrastructure, equipment, etc) as a percentage of useful life.
- Increasing percentages indicate potential need for capital outlay or rehabilitation

FY2013 BENCHMARK ANALYSIS (CAPITAL ASSETS)

	Sarasota County	Benchmark Standard
Governmental Activities	53.96%	42.87%
Business-type Activities	38.06%	41.97%

ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION/ CAPITAL ASSETS



Source: State of Florida Auditor General

‘Increasing percentages indicate potential need for capital outlay or rehabilitation,’ the county’s financial report for the 2013 fiscal year says. Image courtesy Sarasota County Clerk of Court

with ways to address a projected budget deficit in 2016. That shortfall has been based on current spending levels and estimated area growth.

“As the new guy, it is a tremendous benefit to have the audit complete in December and to be here in February talking about this,” said County Administrator Tom Harmer, who was named permanent administrator earlier this month. “We are well under way, working on the department budgets.”

On Friday, Harmer will present the full budget workshop schedule for this year.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

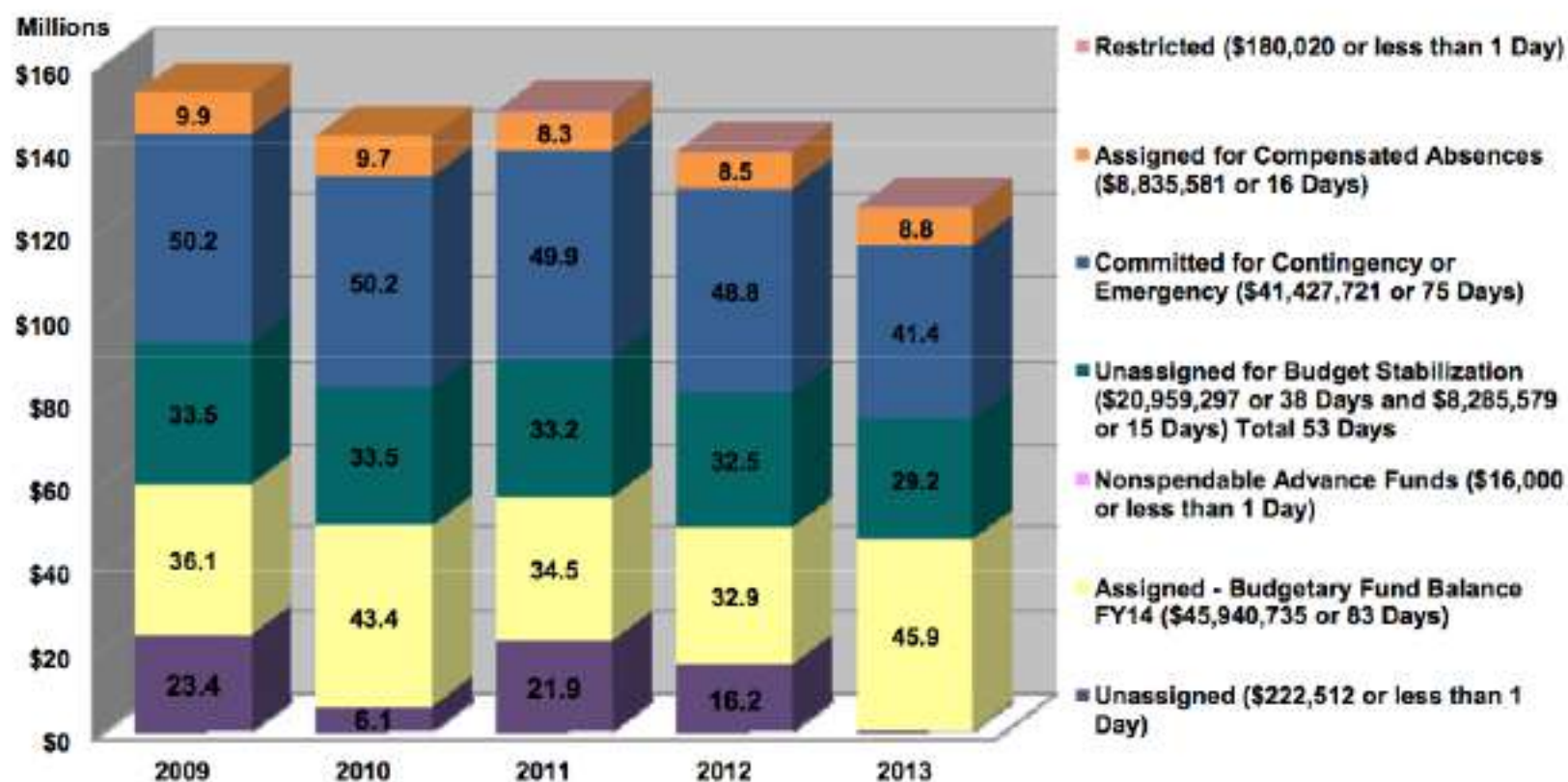
Rushing told the commissioners the overall financial health of the county is strong, thanks in part to measures taken by the County Commission and to the board’s general “stewardship” over the past few years.

In Fiscal Year 2013, expenditures increased by \$11.2 million to \$739 million, but revenues were also up — by \$16 million, to \$734 million. Expenses decreased by 6.4 percent per capita, according to the financial report. “Decreases in expenditures is a result of the County responding to the economic downturn



SOLVENCY – GENERAL FUND FINANCIAL CONDITION OVERVIEW

General Fund - Fund Balance Analysis



**General Fund - Fund Balance
FY13 \$125.9 million**

*Categories have been adjusted to reflect the implementation of GASB 54 beginning in fiscal year 2011. Prior years were not reported under GASB 54.

The county’s general fund is slightly less robust than it was in 2012, according to the report on the 2013 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County Clerk of Court

by becoming more efficient and conserving resources,” the report pointed out.

Total county debt also decreased by \$33 million, to \$577 million, and the general fund debt decreased by \$14 million, to \$125 million.

A decision to fund OPEB (retirement) benefits resulted in the county’s being in the black — the only one of several “benchmark” counties to achieve that status, according to the report. The benchmark counties of similar size and demographics include Paso, Brevard, Marion, Seminole, Polk and Volusia.

One strong indicator of the county’s overall fiscal health is that it has about \$12 in cash and investments for every \$1 in debt obligation, Ramsden said. That ratio is well above those for other benchmark Florida counties.

The county’s general fund reserves, however, are slightly less robust than they were in 2012. That is because the County Commission voted last year to use \$46 million in general fund money to make up for a gap in funding operations in the current fiscal year. The gap

was larger than that of previous years, and the decision left less in reserve for an emergency or for a “budget stabilization” fund.

Even with the FY 2013 decrease in debt, the county’s debt service total gave Patterson pause. “That is a little higher in debt service costs than the benchmark counties,” Patterson said about the ratio of \$7.71 in debt for every \$100 spent in Sarasota County.

The standard ratio for the benchmark counties is nearly \$2 less — \$5.81 of debt per \$100 spent.

According to county staff, part of the reason for the higher debt ratio was the commission’s decision in 2008 to stimulate the economy.

The County Commission will hold its first workshop on the 2015 fiscal year budget at 9 a.m. Friday, Feb. 21, in the Think Tank of the Sarasota County Administration Building, 1600 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota. The meeting will also be broadcast online and on TV at Access Sarasota. For details, visit scgov.net. 

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UNANIMOUS IN THEIR ACTION



“ *In April, we want to be able to say, ‘This is the cost estimate for Site A and this is the estimate for Site B, and this is the timeline for Site A and the timeline for Site B.’*

Wayne Applebee
Homelessness Coordinator
Sarasota County

”

*Wayne Applebee, Sarasota County’s homeless coordinator, addresses the County Commission Feb. 19.
Photo by Roger Drouin*

UNLIKE THEIR CITY COUNTERPARTS, ALL THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS APPROVE EXTENDING A HOMELESSNESS CONSULTANT’S CONTRACT AND PURSUING MORE ANALYSIS OF TWO POTENTIAL SHELTER SITES

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

With little discussion this week, the county commissioners once again voted unanimously to keep momentum going on a plan for a homeless shelter in Sarasota.

On Wednesday, Feb. 19, the County Commission approved a contract extension for homelessness consultant Robert Marbut, so he can spend another nine months in the community, working to implement recommendations he released in November 2013 — including a come-as-you-are homeless shelter in Sarasota.

The board also approved splitting with the City of Sarasota the \$40,000 cost for additional environmental analysis at two possible shelter locations. The Phase Two undertaking will include soil testing and other research to investigate past industrial uses on the properties. The testing is the next step in calculating timelines, building configurations and construction cost estimates for shelters on the two sites, Wayne Applebee, the county’s homelessness coordinator told *The Sarasota News Leader* after Wednesday’s vote.

In April, the City and County commissions will meet to talk about the shelter. By then, Marbut, working with Applebee and an engineering consultant, is expected have cost estimates and other pertinent information for the elected officials.

“We are targeting the date of April 22 for the discussion of homelessness,” County Administrator Tom Harmer told the commissioners on Feb. 19.

The April discussion will likely be lively. While the County Commission acted without debate on Wednesday, the discussion of the same topics at the City Commission dais the previous day ensued as it has in the past — with debate and two commissioners voting against the Marbut contract continuation and environmental assessments. Vice Mayor Willie Shaw

and Commissioner Susan Chapman continue to ask how the finances will work and why other cities in the county are not contributing to the effort. But they were outvoted 3-2. (See the related story in this issue.)

At the County Commission dais, Commissioner Joe Barbetta made the motion to extend the Marbut contract and pursue the additional site analysis. It was seconded by Carolyn Mason. The vote took place within 10 minutes. Referencing the city’s lack of clear support again on Feb. 18, he told his colleagues, “The vote was a 3-2 vote.”

IMPLEMENTING A PLAN

Despite the mixed reactions of local politicians, the “off-screen” planning will continue next week.



Homeless people sat on the sidewalk outside Five Points Park in downtown Sarasota when the city was dealing with maintenance issues in the park. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“Over these next nine months, we are talking implementation,” Applebee said of carrying out Marbut’s recommendations.

When Marbut arrives back in Sarasota next week for two days, he will have a busy schedule.

Marbut and Applebee will be collaborating closely with an engineering firm to “work on further evaluation” of the two proposed shelter sites: 1330 N. Osprey Ave. and 1800 N. East Ave., Applebee told the *News Leader*.

The site evaluation includes the initial drafting of the cost estimate and timeline for a shelter at either site. “In April, we want to be

able to say, ‘This is the cost estimate for Site A and this is the estimate for Site B, and this is the timeline for Site A and the timeline for Site B,’” Applebee said.

Next week, Marbut and Applebee will also meet with Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office representatives to talk about the operation of the shelter, which will be handled by the Sheriff’s Office. The city is to provide security outside the facility.

Additionally, the consultant and the county’s homelessness coordinator will draft operating and training protocols for planned HOTs (Homeless Outreach Teams), which will be




*Chairman Charles Hines and Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson listen to discussion on Feb. 19.
Photo by Rachel Hackney*

part of the effort to get homeless people off the street and into the shelter.

Further, Marbut and Applebee will be reaching out to private donors. Some of that financial support could go towards operation of two “portals” for homeless families and children.

On another front, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh will be reaching out to City Attorney Bob Fournier to address another issue: a unified approach to ordinances regulating panhandling and other matters relevant to homelessness. Barbetta noted on Feb. 19 that the City Commission wants to utilize a city panhandling ordinance that is different from the one recently passed by the County Commission.

“They are adamant their ordinance is better and more encompassing than ours,” Barbetta said, “and I question that.” 



Homelessness consultant Robert Marbut delivers a report on his recommendations to the City and County commissions in November 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel

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Q&A: JULIAN BOND

Julian Bond (left) with Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton. Photo by Bobak Ha'Eri, via Wikimedia Commons

A CIVIL RIGHTS ICON REFLECTS ON WHERE THE MOVEMENT STANDS NOW

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

Bona fide civil rights icon Julian Bond is headed to Sarasota, where he will deliver the headline speech for the Sarasota County Democratic Party's 2014 Kennedy-King Dinner. The theme this Sunday? Civil Rights for All, a Challenge Unmet.

Bond is uniquely positioned to speak on just that topic, having helped found the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which in the early 1960s organized voter registration drives and protests in the Deep South, often at great personal risk. He later served as president of the Southern Poverty Law Center, as a state legislator in Georgia and as the chairman of the NAACP. The Sarasota News Leader couldn't pass up the opportunity to pick his brain.

The Sarasota News Leader: The theme of your talk is the “unmet challenge” of civil rights. Where do we stand now?

Julian Bond: We’ve made great progress, but it hasn’t been sufficient. In some ways we’ve slipped backward. Requiring that people have photo IDs, they’ve cut early voting — those sorts of things. There’s just a litany of attempts to make it more and more difficult to vote.



SNL: Do you believe Attorney General Eric Holder will be successful in challenging some of those voting restrictions? Or will popular action be necessary?

JB: You can never say, “We can only try one thing.” You have to try everything. These ought to be unnecessary. There should not be any shortening of the ability of Americans to vote — it ought to be expanding.



SNL: How does the situation compare to the early days of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

JB: It’s peculiar because it’s both different and the same. In past times, black people were kept from voting by terror and intimidation. Today, there are these voting restrictions. All these things are attempts to make sure that certain people don’t cast votes. That’s so horrific because votes are the key to our democracy.



SNL: You’ve become very outspoken in your support for same-sex marriage. How did you become involved in that issue?

JB: By just chance, I knew many people who were gay who worked with me in the civil rights movement, and when they began to say, “We are facing these restrictions,” it seemed

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The Sarasota County Democratic Party will host a Grand Tribute Reception for Julian Bond on Feb. 23. Image from the party’s website.

to me that if I can help I ought to. I couldn't say, "Well, I'm not going to help because your situation doesn't parallel mine exactly."



SNL: It seems like there's a strong emerging coalition on the issue.

JB: I know there is. For a long time, there was some pushback by some people, but if you look at the progress of marriage equality state by state, it's remarkable.



SNL: What role should direct action play?

JB: That ought to be the basis of all this. If you look at North Carolina, for example, the movement there is run largely by the NAACP, but it's a great, great coalition. These protests they've had in Raleigh once a week for months and months — that's an example of the revitalization of the movement. It's happening in Florida. It's happening in Georgia. You've got to believe that the movement is alive and well.



SNL: How do you feel about [Organizing for Action](#), which grew out of President Obama's reelection effort?

JB: The fact that it's partisan doesn't really make a difference in the end, because if you're registering voters, you can never tell what people are going to do when they walk into the polling place. So these are good things to see happening. Democracy is good for everybody, no matter what political party you belong to.



SNL: One topic that seems to be attracting a lot of attention is what one book calls "the new Jim Crow," the mass incarceration of minorities.

JB: If you see a group of people who are disproportionately locked up and put in jail, either these people are innately criminal, or they're being targeted. If that's the case that's wrong on its face, and its wrongness ought to be evident.



SNL: How do the topics we've discussed tie into the treatment of immigrants?

JB: It just seems important that people interested in civil rights as a subject ought to be embracing civil rights for everyone. We can't just say, "I'll work hard for these people." And that's what I see among young people, who are embracing the expansion of rights.

I'm just uncomfortable with the idea that there's some new civil rights. Every January, someone says, "The new civil right is X, Y, Z." These are not new things. They're not particular to any group of people.



The Democratic Party's fifth annual Kennedy-King Dinner runs from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 23, at Michael's on East, 1212 S. East Ave., Sarasota. It has already sold out, but tickets are still available for the Grand Tribute Reception, which runs from 5 to 6 p.m. Tickets for that are \$100. Call 330-9400 or visit sarasotadems.org for more information.



SHELTER AND CHARTER TALK



Commissioner Susan Chapman (third from left) argues for the losing side in a Feb. 18 discussion of homelessness issues. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE CITY COMMISSION TAKES ANOTHER 3-2 VOTE ON CONTINUING INITIATIVES TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS AND HEARS CAUTION ON ASPECTS OF THE PUSH FOR A NEW CHARTER

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota city commissioners extended the contract for a consultant on homelessness, upped the ante for Chalk Festival street closures and concurred with a county ordinance banning “designer drugs” during the Feb. 18 meeting. And it received a report on efforts to change the city’s charter.

The commissioners agreed by their expected 3-2 vote to extend the contract of

Robert Marbut, who is supervising the city and county efforts to address the problems of vagrancy and homelessness. Commissioner Susan Chapman and Vice Mayor Willie Shaw have been consistently critical of Marbut’s recommendations.

The City and County commissions are splitting the cost of Marbut’s contract and the environmental analyses of two sites he suggests for

“*There is a legal issue of shortening the term of a commissioner elected under the old charter. You cannot deprive a commissioner of a property right to their elected term.*”

Robert Fournier
City Attorney
City of Sarasota



a come-as-you-are shelter in north Sarasota. “Marbut is fundamental to our progress,” said Commissioner Suzanne Atwell.

In the audience was County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who in the past has accused Shaw and Chapman of trying to “sabotage” Marbut’s efforts.

A new wrinkle in the homelessness initiatives was introduced by Eileen Normile with the city’s Independent Police Advisory Panel. She noted that in Marbut’s plans so far, “There is no separate facility for registered sex offenders.” She added that there are restrictions regarding where convicted sex offenders and sexual predators can live, but several here are homeless. “The placement of transient sex offenders and predators must be considered

when shelter plans are considered,” she said.

CITY STEPS ON THE CHALK

The vote was unanimous to require a public hearing before the city grants a street closure permit for more than 72 hours. Only one event in town asks for that: the annual Chalk Festival, which creates art on the pavement.

The closed-street issue has vexed the Chalk Festival for years. Some of the Burns Square merchants love the event and some hate it. The closure requires signatures of two-thirds of the merchants along the street, and there have been allegations of signature chicanery in years past.



Commissioner Suzanne Atwell voices support for extending the contract of homelessness consultant Robert Marbut. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Under the new rules, no petition will be required for a three-day closure. However, anybody asking for a three-day closure would need to pay \$500 to allow the city to notify nearby residents and businesses of a public hearing on the request. After the hearing, the commissioners would make the decision on a street closure instead of letting staffers handle that.

A street closure permit is required as part of the package involving an application for a special event permit, no matter the duration of the closure. Requiring the scheduling of a public hearing before the city commission means Chalk Festival supporters must improve their coordination with the city.

‘DESIGNER’ DOPE

In another matter on Feb. 18, the City Commission used a resolution to piggyback

on a county ordinance banning the sale, marketing or possession of synthetically produced marijuana, methamphetamines, cocaine and opiates. Chemists working out of garages are producing thousands of packets of unknown substances to mimic the effects of banned drugs, according to information from the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office and the county’s Department of Health and Human Services.

“Users really have no idea what they are putting into their bodies,” said Pamela Thomas with the Health and Human Services Department. “It’s designed for popping, drinking, chewing, smoking.”

Sarasota Police Lt. Jim Reeser, who heads the Narcotics Division, said retailers — including convenience stores and smoke shops — are removing the colorful packets from public



The City Commission sits in session on Feb. 18. Photo by Norman Schimmel

view, but they are still vending the substances from under the counter.

Thomas added that the use of synthetic drugs among teens is troubling. “In the 2012 Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 21.7 percent of Sarasota high school students report use of synthetic marijuana, compared to 13 percent statewide,” he pointed out.

A violation would be a second-degree misdemeanor, but fines are \$250 per packet. “Back in September, I had officers go to some 40 different stores. We found a few selling it for \$15 per package,” said Reeser.

The county commissioners approved the ordinance on Feb. 12. (See the related article in this issue.)


CHARTER CHANGE TIDBITS

Proponents of a change — some say a total overhaul — of the city’s charter are starting their petition drive. City Attorney Bob Fournier says that, based on requirements in the charter, the signatures will have to be turned in by June 16 for the measure to qualify for the November ballot. He briefed the commissioners during their Feb. 18 meeting.

“They could have started gathering [signatures] on December 6th last year,” he said. The charter allows a 180-day window to seek the signatures of 10 percent of the city’s registered voters. “The petition is supposed to contain a summary of the proposal. Obviously, it should stay the same for the entire 180-day period, from the earliest to the last signature,” he added.

City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini, who serves as the city’s top elections official, said she has received nothing except a statement of organization for the group promoting the new charter; that came in on Jan. 21. “The clock doesn’t start ticking until I receive something from the organization,” she noted.

Fournier said one troublesome part of the proposal concerns commissioners elected under the current charter if the new charter is approved. The new charter eliminates at-large seats and calls for the five new commissioners to be elected in the spring of 2015.

“Two would get two-year terms, and three would serve three years,” said Fournier. “There is a legal issue of shortening the term of a commissioner elected under the old charter. You cannot deprive a commissioner of a property right to their elected term.” 

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DOWNTOWN TIDBITS



Many downtown Sarasota business owners say they dislike any closure of Main Street for special events. An art show drew thousands to the Pineapple Square area over the weekend. Photo by Norman Schimmel

NEW BUILDINGS, NEW BUSINESSES, OLD PROBLEMS AND OLDER ONES COME BEFORE THE DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BOARD

By Stan Zimmerman

City Editor

Partly sunny with a flurry of news was the forecast for the Downtown Improvement District's meeting on Tuesday morning, Feb. 18. No flake of news was worthy of its story, but altogether they added up to a snapshot of Sarasota's downtown in the midst of high season. Discussions ranged from gleaming new hotels to filthy sidewalks, cheap bikers to "mermaid" problems.

Norm Gollub stopped by. He is the downtown economic development coordinator, and he briefed the four-member Downtown Improvement District (DID) board on the status of projects and security initiatives. He reported that construction cranes are

returning for a flurry of hotel projects. Five are in the planning or building stages, scheduled to bring an estimated 850 new hotel rooms to the city. Three of the five structures will also have condominiums, contributing to a total of 1,284 condo units planned or being built.

Retail vacancies are down to only a couple of storefronts. The former Christian Science Reading Room is returning to its church after decades on Main Street. A women's apparel store will be filling the space. Additionally, the former Floribbean restaurant will be replaced with a sports apparel store, a noteworthy change because retail often becomes

restaurant space but rarely the other way around.

Gollub said that in speaking with businesspeople, he had heard increasing concerns about the wisdom of closing Main Street for special events during high season. “I talked to merchants who told me they hate Thunder by the Bay,” he said, referring to the motorcycle event each January that raises funds for [Suncoast Charities for Children](#).

“Last week the Downtown Sarasota Merchants Association voted to keep Main Street open during season except for major holidays like New Year’s Eve, the Fourth [of July], Memorial and Veterans Day,” Golub added. “I’m just reporting what I hear on the street.”

“As a merchant, I’d agree 100 percent,” said DID board member Eileen Hampshire. “Not one person in 42 stores on Palm Avenue sold anything” during the Thunder by the Bay event, she added.

Street closures longer than 72 hours will now require a public hearing and a vote of the City Commission, following unanimous action taken later in the day by the City Commission. (See the related story in this issue.) The commission also took testimony from John Vetry, who manages a condominium complex at Five Points. The recent arts festival had merchants blocking the entrance to his building, he said.



The former home of the Floribbean and Patrick's restaurants at Five Points soon will house a retail running store. Photo by Norman Schimmel

DID Chairman Ernie Ritz reported that he testified before the Sarasota County Commission last week to support moving the downtown Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) transfer station. He was joined by fellow DID board member Ron Soto and Downtown Sarasota Alliance President Michael Beaumier. “We had four votes to study moving the bus transfer station to Ringling and School Avenue,” Ritz said.

SCAT staffers are not enthusiastic about the move, saying the cost to reschedule all the bus routes will be substantial.

Gollub said he would “add my support to relocation of the bus transfer station.” But instead of moving it a mile away, adjacent to the county Health Department, he recommended another site that is available, adjacent to the downtown post office. “A bus system that carries potentially half a million

customers should be located near downtown,” he pointed out.

During discussion of downtown security, Gollum said he had tried to generate interest in expanding the patrol of a private security guard downtown. “For more than a year, the security officer has provided a presence and monitors situations until police arrive. Sarasota Security is the agent,” he noted. “I asked merchants in the 1300 block of Main if they would be willing to pay \$100 per month, but most said they couldn’t afford it.”

Wendy Getchell, a boutique owner on Main, was in the audience. She asked, “Why is there no action on vagrants in the park, Pineapple Park? It’s disgusting.”

The area on Lemon Avenue south of State Street is also called Mermaid Park for the sculpture in a fountain there. “I see people



Downtown Sarasota merchants are complaining about homeless people gathering routinely in Pineapple Park. Photo by Roger Drouin

passed out there,” she added. “Nobody seems to be talking about it.”


Sarasota Police Sgt. Lori Jaress told the DID board members that the Police Department is aware of the situation but can do little about it. “I go there every day,” she said. “We have no law against congregating there. Right now our hands are tied. They are smoking spice, which is not illegal. We have to come up with solutions. Our hands are tied.”

That evening, the City Commission passed a resolution embracing a new county ordinance making the sale and possession of synthetic drugs such as “spice” a second-degree misdemeanor. However, enforcement may take a while, as officers are trained on the nuances of the law. (See the related stories in this issue.)

Getchell suggested installing a security camera to view the Mermaid Park area. Jaress said that would be a good idea. “I’m open to any solutions,” Jaress added.

Another kind of cleanup matter came before the DID Tuesday — sidewalk cleanup, especially near outdoor cafés. This has become a Hercules and Augean Stables story, a perennial problem. Downtown merchants are proposing operating a scrubbing machine if the DID will buy it. DID Operations Manager John Moran suggests the city change the language in its ordinance to force café owners to clean up after themselves. The city is releasing a call for proposals for “deep cleaning” the sidewalks next month.

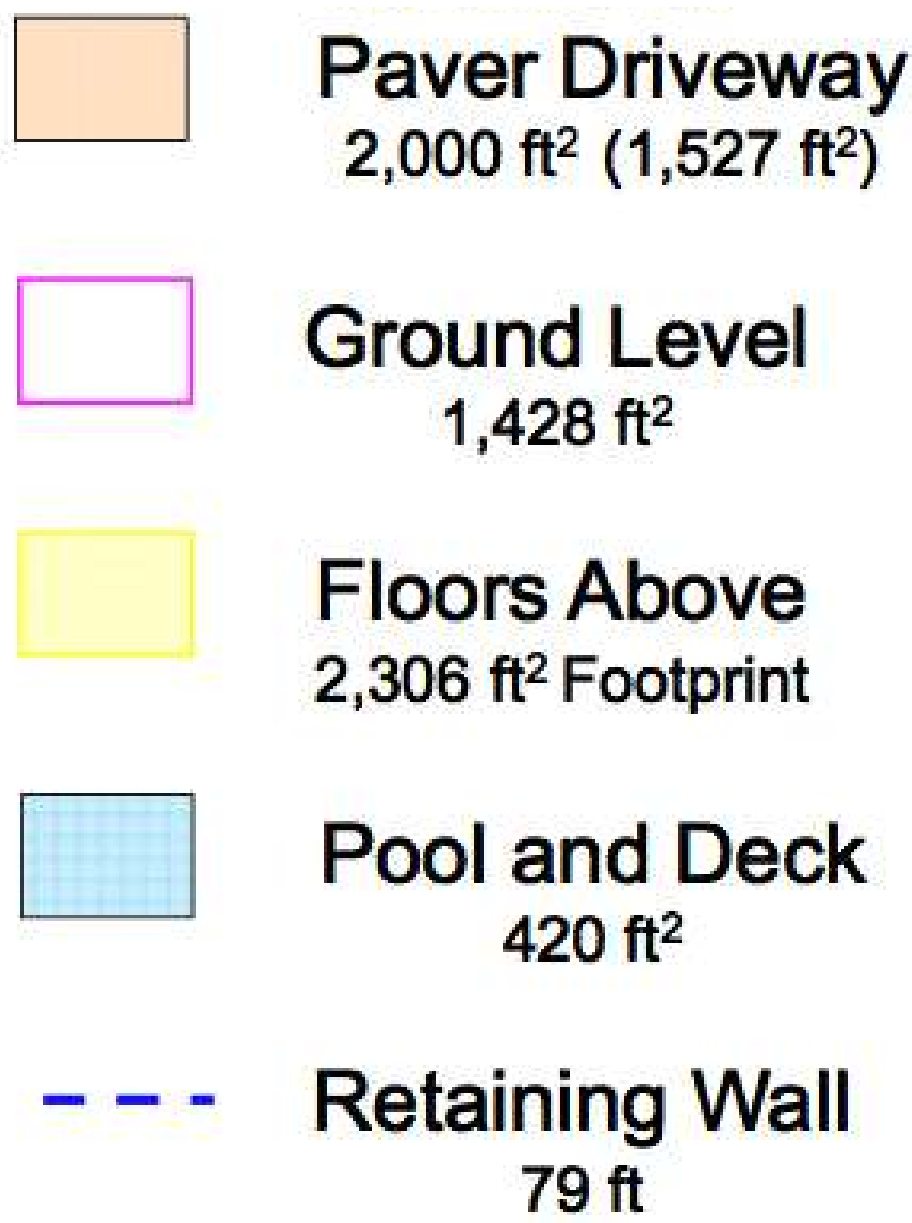
Meanwhile, chewing gum, grease and food stains continue to multiply. The DID board resolved to send a pair of letters, one to the city engineer and the other to city commissioners, asking for help.

Hercules, you may recall, diverted a river to wash the stables clean, but the owner refused to pay as he had agreed. Not a good augury for downtown’s “stables.” 

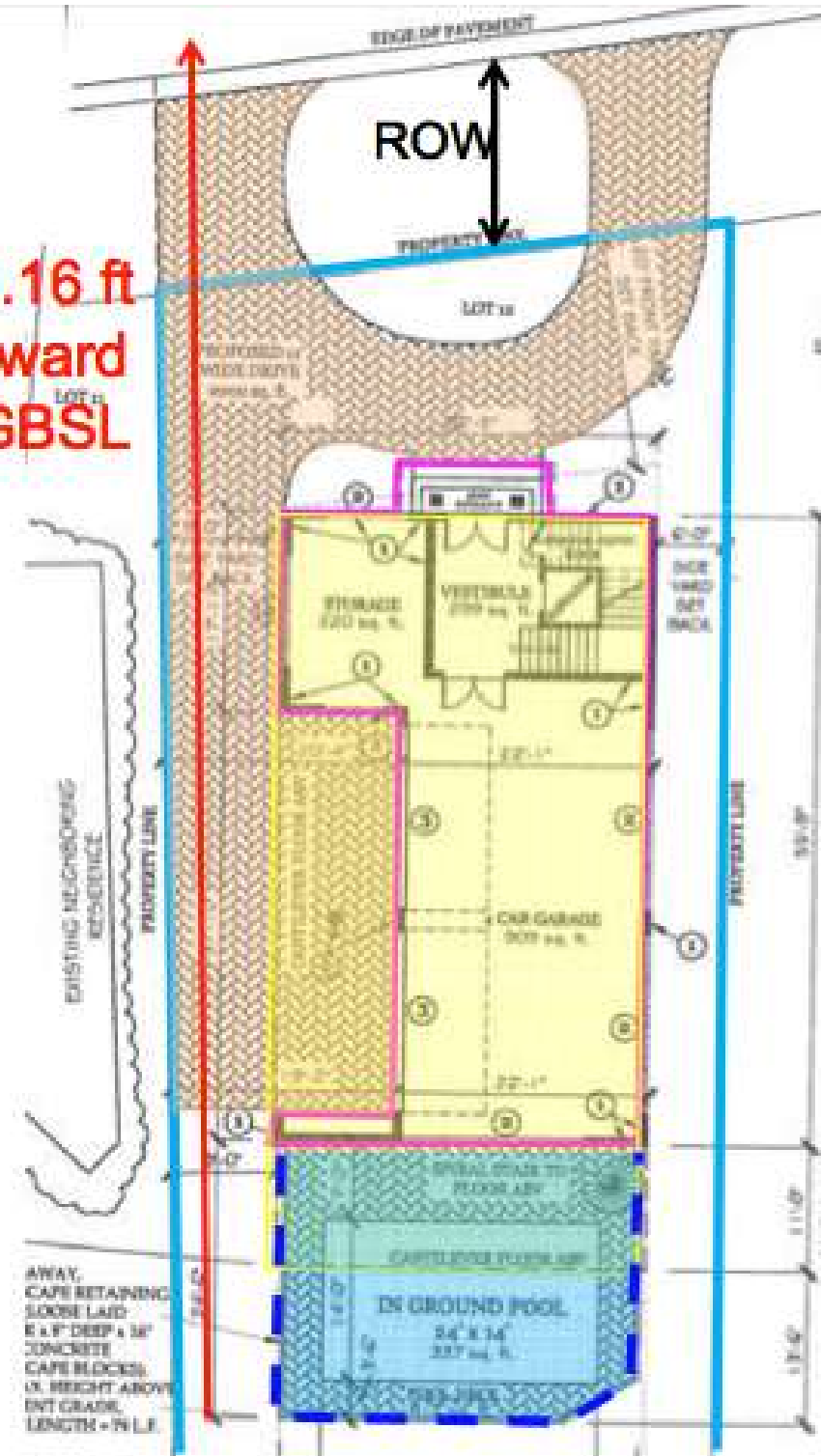


Representatives of downtown Sarasota business organizations are pushing for the county to relocate the bus transfer station at Main Street and Lemon Avenue. Photo by Norman Schimmel

TO BE CONTINUED



200.16 ft
Seaward
of GBSL



A site plan shows how far the house originally proposed for 162 Beach Road would have extended beyond the Gulf Beach Setback Line. Image courtesy Sarasota County

THE COUNTY COMMISSION CONTINUES A PUBLIC HEARING ON A CONTROVERSIAL SIESTA KEY CONSTRUCTION PROJECT UNTIL APRIL 23 WHILE THE OWNERS WORK ON YET ANOTHER A NEW PLAN

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Although the Sarasota County Commission voted unanimously on Feb. 19 to continue a public hearing on a controversial petition regarding [proposed construction at 162 Beach Road](#), the action followed what County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh characterized as an unusual decision to allow brief public comments without a staff presentation.

It also followed a debate over when the public hearing would be rescheduled. The board vote set that date as April 23, with the item set for the afternoon session.

According to sources and comments at the meeting, both Siesta Key Association (SKA) President Catherine Luckner and residents of

the Terrace and Terrace East condominium complexes in Siesta Village learned prior to the start of the Feb. 19 meeting that a request would be made to continue the public hearing.

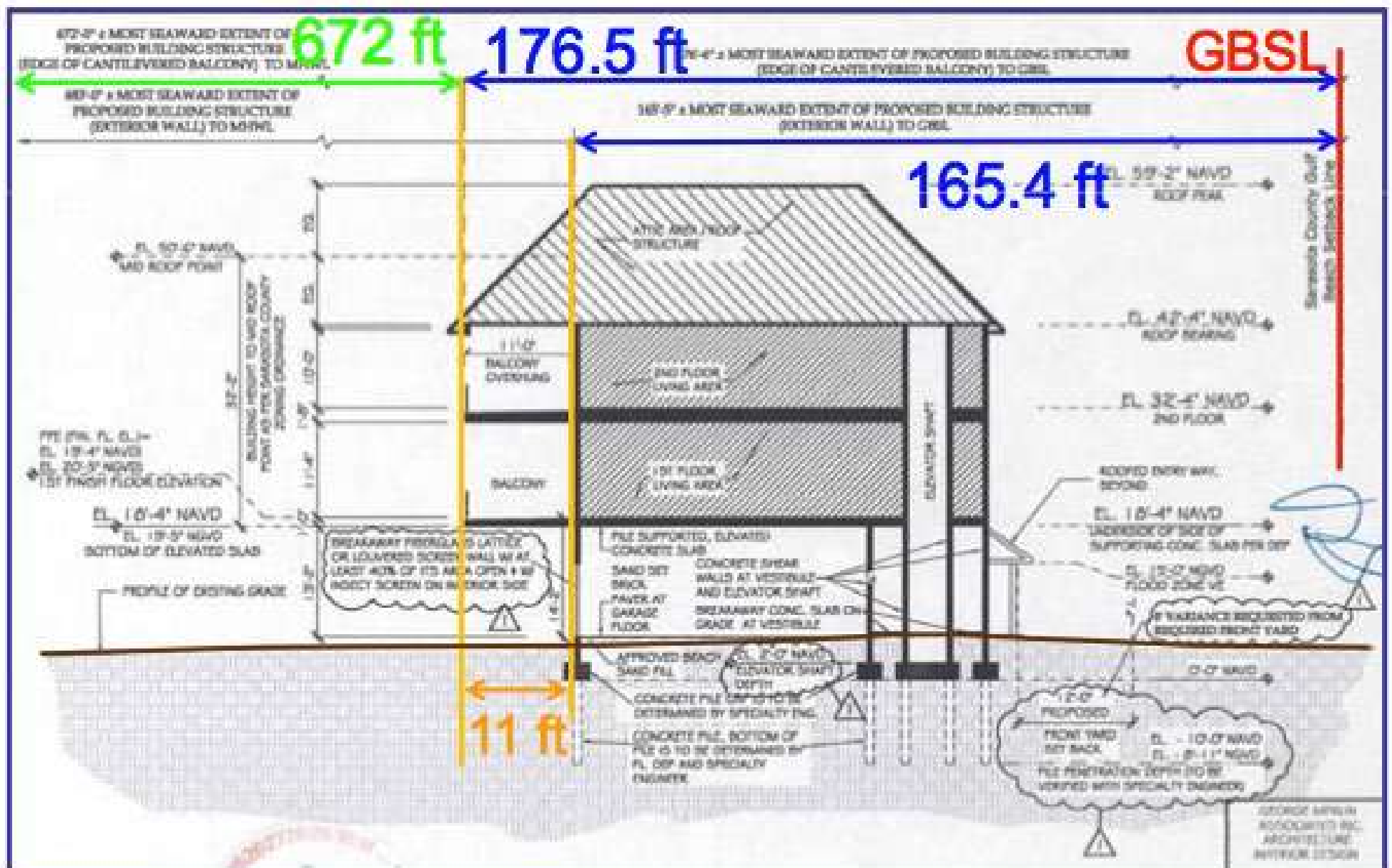
After Chairman Charles Hines announced the agenda item, Howard Berna, the county's environmental supervisor, first told the board he had received "a substantial amount of public comment" on the petition for a variance to construct a new residence and paver driveway that would extend a maximum of 176.5 feet beyond the Gulf Beach Setback Line (GBSL).

Then Berna announced that the property owners' agent, William Merrill of the Icard Merrill firm in Sarasota, had notified him the previous day that the owners wanted to continue the public hearing.

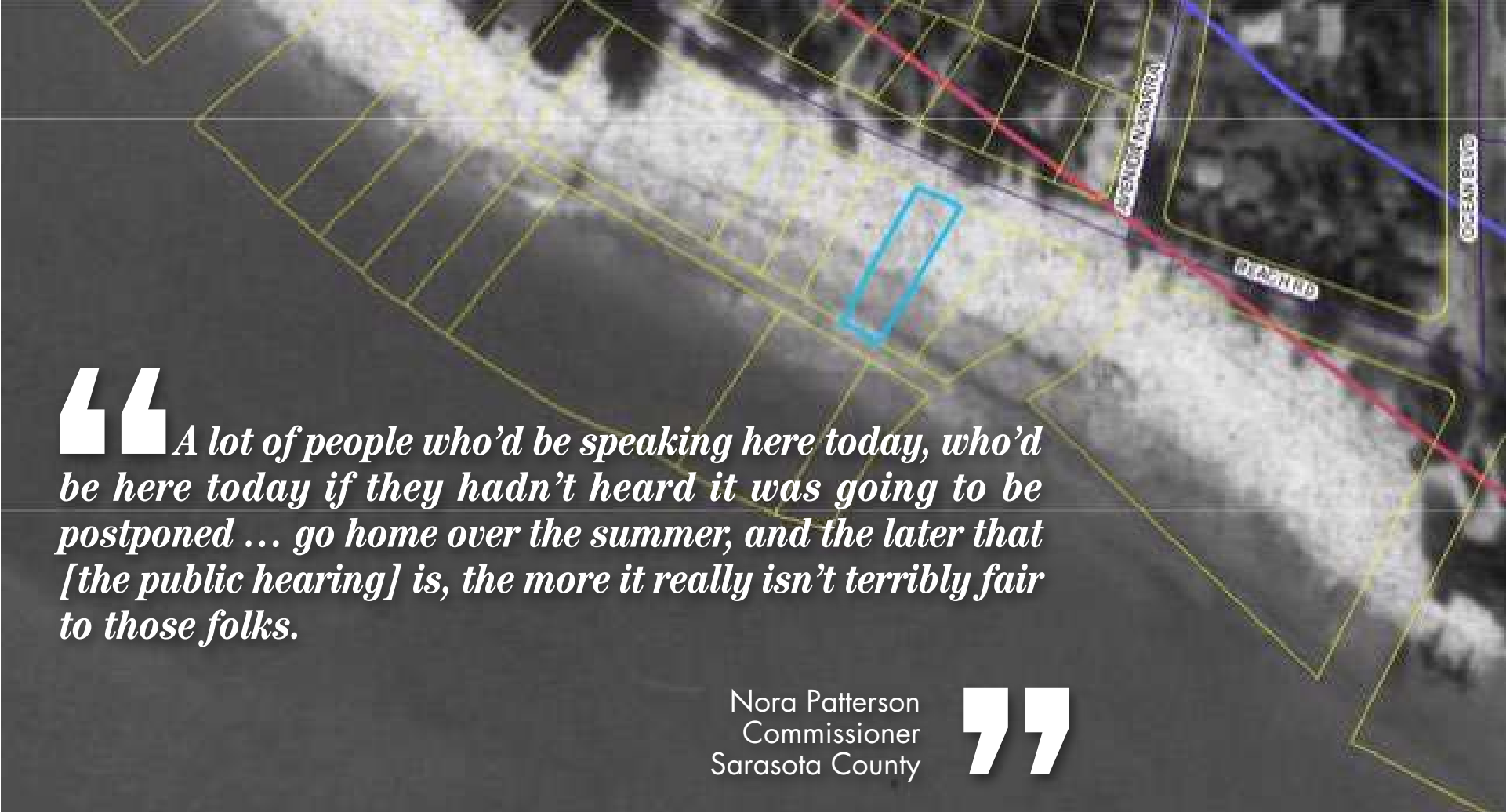
Merrill told the commissioners, "My client and a couple of neighbor property owners had discussions [as recently as the previous weekend] about some alternatives to what is being proposed today, and they would like additional time to be able to discuss that ... to see if that is a fruitful discussion ..."

I see this as a positive, an opportunity to work and be creative.

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission



A revised site plan for 162 Beach Road shows less construction beyond the Gulf Beach Setback Line. Image courtesy Sarasota County



“ *A lot of people who'd be speaking here today, who'd be here today if they hadn't heard it was going to be postponed ... go home over the summer, and the later that [the public hearing] is, the more it really isn't terribly fair to those folks.*

Nora Patterson
Commissioner
Sarasota County

”

A photo of the Siesta Key shoreline in 1948 shows the parcel at 162 Beach Road. Image courtesy Sarasota County



A 2008 aerial view of the parcel at 162 Beach Road shows how much the beach has accreted in front of the property since the middle of the 20th century. Image courtesy Sarasota County



Attorney William Merrill addresses the County Commission on Feb. 19. Photo by Rachel Hackney

The County Commission on Jan. 9, 2013, turned down property owners Ronald and Sania Allen when they made a similar request for construction on the 162 Beach Road parcel, along with a request for a variance to permit a residence on their 168 Beach Road lot.

Commissioner Nora Patterson's recollections about the number of times she had seen those Beach Road lots flooded in the past were a key factor in the board's denial of the 2013 petitions.

In a Feb. 7 letter to the County Commission, the SKA opposed the Allens' latest request in spite of changes in the design. The letter points out that the new proposal still involves a parcel "within a State of Florida defined area of *Critical Beach Erosion* (President Catherine Luckner's emphasis). While an accreted shoreline currently is noted [in the proposal], there is repeated history of rapid flooding and storm surge."

DEBATING WHAT TO DO

When Hines asked DeMarsh for clarification about how best to proceed after Merrill made his request, DeMarsh recommended Hines open the public hearing and then continue it to a time certain.

Merrill explained that the latest date available among those he had received from staff was April 23. "We would be willing to go past that because it may take longer [to settle on a new plan]."

Then Patterson said she had received a phone call from someone the previous evening asking for confirmation about whether the public hearing would be continued. Patterson told

the person she could not predict what would happen.

“People don’t want to truck out here if it’s going to be postponed,” she told her colleagues. However, she continued, “A lot of people who’d be speaking here today, who’d be here today if they hadn’t heard it was going to be postponed ... go home over the summer, and the later that [the public hearing] is, the more it really isn’t terribly fair to those folks. ... Even April 23, frankly, is pushing

the envelope. People [who are seasonal residents] tend to go home at Easter.”

Easter will be April 20.

Patterson said she “sure wouldn’t want [the hearing] to be any later” than April 23.

“I hear what you’re saying,” Merrill responded. “I think April 23 would be fine.”

“Frankly, it should be earlier, really,” Patterson emphasized, “not later.”



Terrace condominium complex property owner Bruce Appleton makes comments to the County Commission. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Then Merrill said he was not sure his clients would have the matter resolved by April 23.

When Patterson asked what other dates were available, it turned out March 5 was the only one remaining.

At that point, Patterson said she felt people who had come to the Feb. 19 meeting to speak “should be encouraged to [do so]. It doesn’t take away their right to speak later.”

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson and Commissioner Joe Barbetta concurred with that view.

DeMarsh noted that in the past, the board had not accepted public comments when a matter was being continued.

However, Hines said the board would forgo the staff presentation, but he would let two people address the board who had signed speaker cards for the public hearing.

The first, Bruce Appleton, owner of a condominium at the Terrace complex, told the board Patterson has “a very good handle” on the petition. He added, “What I would like to suggest is [holding the public hearing] a year from today.”

Peter van Roekens, a resident of Terrace East, said he also was concerned about delaying the public hearing until April 23. “A lot of people do leave,” he pointed out.

Van Roekens added, “I had people fly in from Ohio to be here today, and they were more than slightly annoyed with me when I told them [about the probable continuance].”

Regarding the new date, he continued, “If it can’t be done sooner, maybe the suggestion [from Appleton] was a good one.”

Following those comments, Robinson made the motion to continue the public hearing until April 23.


“I understand the points of the residents,” she said, “[but] we could apply that countywide to any continuance given between the months of January and April.”

Robinson added to the public, “Keep writing,” noting she had acknowledged all the correspondence she had received on the petition. Merrill has a reputation for being able to work out matters for his clients, she continued. “I think this is worth the effort ...” Still, she apologized to those who had come to the meeting with the understanding the public hearing would be held that day.

Commissioner Carolyn Mason, who seconded the motion, said, “For those who can’t come [on April 23], email or write, because that correspondence then becomes part of the record on the issue.”

Barbetta pointed out that the board has always made its decisions on the basis of the quality of correspondence and evidence provided by staff and petitioners. “We never base it on the number of bodies in the audience.”

He also cautioned that the public hearing could be continued again. “But we have to do business in accordance with 12 months a year countywide.”

“I see this as a positive,” Hines said of the delay, “an opportunity to work and be creative.” 



A BIT OF A STRETCH

A photo shows a segment of what used to be Shell Road, looking north, that was platted as Gulf Avenue. Image courtesy Sarasota County

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS QUESTION A SEA-LEVEL RISE ARGUMENT PUT FORTH BY A STAFF MEMBER TO PREVENT THE VACATION OF COUNTY RIGHT OF WAY ON SIESTA KEY

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

A staff argument that sea level rise one day could give the public direct access to the Gulf of Mexico from Shell Road property on Siesta Key did not deter the Sarasota County Commission last week from vacating county right of way as requested by homeowners.

In fact, Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson asked County Administrator Tom Harmer to consult with Parks and

Recreation Department staff members on the position, “because I’m a bit concerned about how we’re using something like that [argument] in other areas. ... I don’t think this was a well-thought-out objection at this point.”

“*I think not [granting this particular right of way vacation] is trying to solve something that happened in the past.*”

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission



Commissioner Nora Patterson, a Siesta resident, was the only board member to vote against the right of way vacation following a Feb. 12 public hearing.

Patterson told her colleagues before they voted in mid-January to advertise the public hearing that she was hopeful staff would be able to determine the county still had a pedestrian easement on that property leading to the Gulf of Mexico. Even though research showed no such easement exists, she said, “I just can’t bring myself to vacate potentially waterfront property of any access.”

In fact, she pointed out, a section of the county’s comprehensive plan calling for the county not to “vacate road segments on waterfronts along any creek, river, lake, bay, or gulf access point” and to encourage right of way use of those areas for coastal beach and bay access might have stemmed from commissioners’ attendance at a conference in Hawaii shortly after she came on the board in 2002. Attendees

at that conference learned the State of Hawaii does not allow people to build “much of anything on the water without reserving some public access,” she continued, “and that just sort of stuck in my mind.”

Referencing Patterson’s concern, Chairman Charles Hines said, “I think not [granting this particular right of way vacation] is trying to solve something that happened in the past.”

Robinson — who joined Patterson in voting against a county right of way vacation in May 2013 involving direct access to a canal on [Calle de Costa Rica on Siesta Key](#) — said this situation was different.

Regarding the argument George Tatge, a Parks and Recreation Department manager, had made earlier that day regarding sea level



A photo shows the view on South Shell Road, looking west, from Higel Avenue. Image courtesy Sarasota County

rise, she questioned just how far it could be extended from the shore, especially in a low-lying coastal community. “Technically, you could apply it just about anywhere [in Sarasota County],” she added.

Charlie D. Bailey III of the Williams Parker law firm in Sarasota, who was representing the Siesta property owners making the Feb. 12 request, told the commissioners the westerly end of the Shell Road right of way at the heart of the discussion is slightly more than 80 feet from the Mean High Water Line.

THE REQUEST

According to a Feb. 12 staff memo provided to the commissioners, the request was “to vacate, abandon, discontinue, and close the County’s interest” in a portion of an improved

50-foot-wide platted public right of way known as South Shell Road — which was platted as Cedar Street — and a portion of an unimproved 40-foot-wide platted public right of way known as Shell Road. The latter was platted as Gulf Avenue, the memo says.

The petitioners were Ronald and Phyllis McSwain and Donald and Susan Stelfox. The staff memo says the South Shell Road right of way serves only as a driveway for the couples, adding, “It does not provide a connection or link to any other roadway, and it does not extend to the shoreline.”

Diane Kennedy, a title agent in the Real Property Division of the county’s Public Works Department, pointed out that the only pedestrian easement staff could find was a 3-foot one reserved for the McSwains and Stelfoxes,



A photo shows the view looking north toward Higley Avenue from South Shell Road on Siesta Key. Image courtesy Sarasota County

as well as any tenant living in a smaller cottage on part of the Stelfox property.

In 1988, she noted, the county's general counsel evaluated the county's rights "and came to the conclusion that the county did not have rights to Cedar Street west of Gulf Avenue."

Moreover, "The Office of the County Attorney finds no evidence upon which the county could successfully assert ownership" of South Shell Road west of the intersection with the former Gulf Avenue, Kennedy pointed out.

Other than the Parks and Recreation Department, she continued, the only parties objecting to the right of way vacation were Michael and Chareese Peters, who emailed the county on Jan. 28 to say that South Shell Road provides the only public turnaround on

Higel Avenue for over a mile. "The public now uses [their] driveway on occasions which only increases the probability of the use of [their] private property should Shell road be closed," their attorney wrote in that email.

If the McSwains and Stelfoxes ever chose to put a gate on South Shell Road, Bailey explained to the commissioners, the county code would require them to provide sufficient room for three vehicles to be "stacked" on the road at any one time, and turnaround area would have to be available as well.

THE PARKS AND REC VIEW

When Tatge addressed the board, he pointed out that the northern part of Siesta Key has experienced erosion over at least the past 100 years. Further, the City of Sarasota is working



An aerial view shows the right of way easement to be vacated in front of the McSwain property on South Shell Road. Image courtesy Sarasota County

with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a \$22 million Lido Key renourishment project that calls for dredging Big Sarasota Pass, Tatge said, leading to the expectation of “additional erosion on the north side of Siesta from that project,” though he conceded, “Now that’s an expectation that may or may not happen.”

Nonetheless, he continued, the thinking among Parks and Recreation Department employees is that sea level rise at some future time could result in the county right of way touching the Mean High Water Line on the right of way to be vacated.

Referring to Higel Avenue, which intersects with South Shell Road, Robinson replied, “Theoretically, we could say that ... [water] will get there in 150 years.”

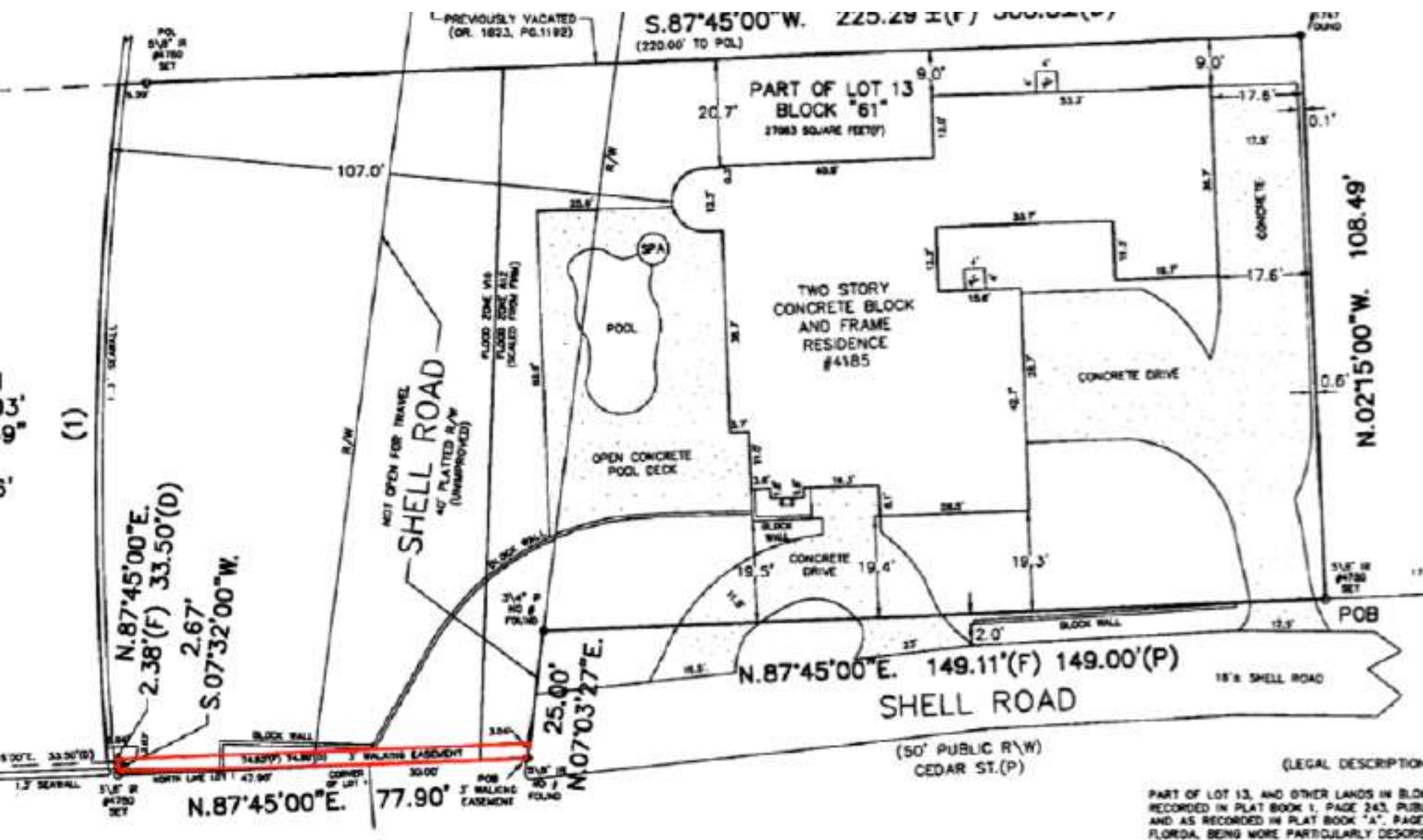
The language in the comprehensive plan could be expanded, Tatge pointed out, “to include all roads on barrier islands and anything within a mile of the coastline.”

“You’re taking that comprehensive plan portion and applying it to the entire barrier island?” Robinson asked.

“Well, no,” Tatge told her. “I’m saying if we wanted to address the point, the policy could be changed.”

In response to another question from Robinson, Tatge said, “A very low-lying shore protection structure [is] on the seaward side of the private property.”

Referencing a slide Kennedy had shown the board, Tatge noted, “There’s actually a wetlands/bay beach on the upland side of that



A recent survey shows the location of a 3-foot private walking easement on South Shell Road. Image courtesy Sarasota County

wall, which is characteristic of a low-lying wall on a water body such as Big Pass.”

The Gulf of Mexico had overtopped that wall frequently enough in the past to create that condition, he added.

“For 24 years, you guys haven’t entered this property or done anything to this property?” Commissioner Joe Barbetta asked, referring to comments Kennedy had made.

“Parks and Recreation has not,” Tatge responded.

Nor has any other county representative, Barbetta pointed out. Referring to the staff report, he called Tatge’s position “a little confusing ... [and] disingenuous.”

Tatge said he did not dispute the opinion of the Office of the County Attorney; instead, he was looking to the future.

Hines clarified with Kennedy that because the right of way does not have direct water access, the board would not be violating the comprehensive plan if it vacated the property.

Nonetheless, prior to the 4-1 vote, Patterson told her colleagues, “It just seems wrong to me that we should give away that right of way when at some future date the county actually might want to condemn a walking easement, which would be a very short path to get to the water.”

In response to a question from Robinson, County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh explained that at some point in the future the county could exercise the right of eminent domain to create such a public access, if it could “show a public purpose for its decision to acquire and then to pay [for the land].” **SNL**

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Large: \$1,635

An illustration shows the costs associated with putting up a medium Sarasota County Area Transit shelter. Image courtesy Sarasota County

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS REMAIN WARY OF BUS SHELTER EXPENSES, WITH ONE COMMISSIONER CALLING FOR A NEW MEANS OF PROCURING THE STRUCTURES

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), utility and drainage considerations and permitting and land acquisition costs are all factors that lead to an expense between \$15,000 and \$34,000 for a Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) shelter, the Sarasota County Commission learned last week.

However, Commissioner Joe Barbetta

— who has been adamant over the years about the need for more shelters to go up — remained convinced a less expensive means

to accomplish the goal could be found. “I ride up and down [U.S. 41] and I see sticks in the ground with a SCAT stop sign and a bike lock ... and that’s a bus stop,” he said during the board’s Feb. 12 meeting. “I’m at the point right now

“ *We don’t just drop off passengers with nowhere to go necessarily. ... In some cases, we might have a 100-foot sidewalk extension. ... ADA is actually a significant consideration.*

Isaac Brownman
Director
Capital Projects
Sarasota County

”

I'd rather just put out an ITN [Invitation to Negotiate]" to hire a firm to build and install shelters, he added. "If we can do it for \$20,000 a shelter, let's do it. ... That's the only way we're going to get these done."

"It's worth a try, maybe," Commissioner Nora Patterson agreed.

"I think it is a possibility," SCAT Director Glama Carter told the board. "We just have to consider the pros and cons."

“Some agencies wouldn't even give us numbers.”

Cindy Zambella
Fiscal Analyst
Sarasota County Area Transit

She and other staff members would investigate the possibility and report back to the County Commission, she added.

Referring to a bar graph Carter provided during a nearly hour-long presentation, Chairman Charles Hines said, "That picture's worth a thousand words."

It shows the county installed no shelters in the 2009 and 2010 fiscal years; two in FY 2011; 13 in FY 2012; and 51 in FY 2013. Carter said plans call for 25 to be erected during the



An illustration shows other features necessary to install a bus shelter on Central Sarasota Parkway at U.S. 41. Image courtesy Sarasota County

current fiscal year, giving the county 183 altogether by Sept. 30.

Cindy Zambella, the SCAT fiscal analyst, explained that that would mean 10 percent of the bus stops would have covered structures.

When Carter told the board in January 2013 that the average cost of a shelter was \$40,000, Hines pointed out, “That just blew us all away. ... Let’s keep working through this and find the best way to go on this program in the future.”

SHELTER SITE SELECTION

Although the County Commission late last year gave Carter a directive to focus attention on the “low-hanging fruit” for shelters



Less than 10 percent of the county’s bus stops have shelters. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Current 5 Year Shelter Program Budget

	5 YEAR PROJECTION					
	(Total shelters by funding per year at \$32,000 per location)					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total FY15-18
Anticipated Grant Funds	\$325,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$400,000
Allocated Surtax	\$150,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$0	\$300,000
CST Funds	\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Funding	\$625,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$100,000	\$700,000
Number of Shelters	25	6	6	6	3	21

A chart shows the projections for shelter projects to be completed from the current fiscal year through the 2018 fiscal year. Image courtesy Sarasota County

— places where structures could be erected fairly quickly and/or at a lower cost — Carter explained on Feb. 12 that a number of factors go into site selection. Among them are availability of rights of way and easements, whether the site is part of a project already planned by a developer or the county, and the level of ridership at a particular spot, among others.

Barbetta asked why the SCAT stop in front of the County Administration Center at 1660 Ringling Blvd. in downtown Sarasota still has no shelter. “Buses stop there frequently every day, and there’s a bench,” he said.

That is among the sites scheduled to get a shelter this year, Carter responded.

An average medium SCAT shelter — 4 feet 6 inches by 12 feet — costs \$5,625, Carter said, with a trash receptacle and a bench. The average installation cost is \$1,544.

However, Isaac Brownman, director of capital projects in the county’s Public Works Department, explained that the expenses for site survey and engineering, permitting, land acquisition, construction and other factors lead to a final cost between \$15,000 and \$34,000. “We believe that to be a credible range,” he added.



Overview of Findings

- Average peer purchase cost of a shelter with amenities is **\$5,906**
 - SCAT: **\$5,625**
- Costs for construction of ADA compliant pads and infrastructure vary greatly by site and can be as high as **\$60,000**
 - SCAT: typically range from **\$15,000 - \$34,000**
- Peers have shelters at **3% - 14%** of their stops
 - SCAT: **9%** as of 2013; in 2014, will be **10%**

When Patterson asked about sites where benches already exist, Brownman told her right of way is a major consideration in whether a shelter can be added at those spots. Because of ADA guidelines, he said, the pad on which a shelter rests must lead to a sidewalk, and the facilities cannot in any way obstruct a roadway.

“We don’t just drop off passengers with nowhere to go necessarily,” he added. “In some cases, we might have a 100-foot sidewalk extension. ... ADA is actually a significant consideration.”

The county has had to erect streetlights on sidewalks at some spots on Beneva Road, he pointed out, “because of lack of right of way.”

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson told Carter it appears some bus stops along U.S. 41 from North to South County are within 100 feet of each other. “Tell me how you’re dealing with that while you’re putting up these bus shelters,” Robinson said.

Bus stops could be as close as 200 feet from each other, Carter replied. Thai Tran, the county’s transportation operational manager, added that SCAT staff works to combine stops whenever possible to improve efficiencies.

Carter also pointed out that her staff examines the ridership levels for each stop in a series when the stops are as close together as every 200 or 250 feet.

Years ago, Carter explained, because of requests from residents with disabilities, the county installed stops close together on

Beneva Road, for example, to enable those passengers to reach their destinations.

Typically, Zambella noted, stops are no closer to each other than 800 to 1,000 feet.

OTHER COUNTIES SURVEYED

As Carter promised late last year, staff had obtained and analyzed shelter cost information from five counties with similarities to Sarasota: Collier, Lee, Manatee, Pinellas and Volusia. However, Zambella cautioned, “We’re not always comparing apples to apples.”

The biggest variables are site considerations and utility issues, she added. “Some agencies wouldn’t even give us numbers,” she pointed out, because the figures vary so much on the basis of the site factors.

The expense of the shelter itself averaged \$5,906 in those counties, Zambella said, compared to \$5,625 in Sarasota County.

Additionally, those peer counties have shelters at 3 percent to 14 percent of their stops.

According to a chart provided to the commissioners, the lowest cost for a shelter, exclusive of the easement or right of way expense, is \$10,000 in Manatee County. That figure does not include ADA-compliant infrastructure, the chart points out.

Even with an extra \$12,000 for the ADA facilities, Barbetta said, the total cost would be \$22,000, compared to \$34,000 for SCAT.

Zambella reminded him that his figure did not include sidewalk and utility expenses.

In response to another comment from Barbetta, Brownman explained that his staff members also bill a shelter project for their time in managing a contract to completion, prompting Barbetta to point out that the county also pays a consultant for assistance.

“If we didn’t charge for our staff’s time, we’d still have to pay the staff,” Patterson told Barbetta.

Brownman explained that he had talked with a local engineer to determine whether the county could handle all the work in-house by hiring three people to deal with the various facets of shelter projects. The personnel expense would be \$200,000 a year, Brownman said, and the employees could get 15 to 25 shelters put up annually. However, if the county hired one new person with all the

responsibilities involved in the shelter work, Brownman noted, the maximum number of structures that employee could get installed each year would be 10.

“Ten?” Patterson repeated.

“Ten,” Brownman told her.

“Wow,” Patterson said.

Going back to the Manatee figures provided on the chart, Patterson continued, “Maybe you don’t need to do all the things you’re doing to make [a shelter] just perfect.”

She suggested Brownman talk with representatives of counties with lower costs to find out how they achieve those numbers.

Brownman said he could do that. **SNL**

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FIGHTING SYNTHETIC DRUGS



A Sarasota County Health and Human Services staff presentation included images of an array of synthetic drug packages. Image courtesy Sarasota County

A NEW LAW WILL ENABLE THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND COUNTY CODE ENFORCEMENT STAFF TO ENFORCE A BAN ON SALE AND POSSESSION OF CERTAIN TYPES OF 'DESIGNER DRUGS'

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

The Sarasota County Commission incorporated one new recommendation from the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office in a proposed synthetic drug ordinance before voting unanimously last week to approve the law.

That change added an impairment standard in determining whether a substance can be considered a "designer drug" under the ordinance.

The measure will make it illegal to possess synthetic Cannabinoids — popularly known as K2 or Spice; synthetic or substitute Cathinones, stimulants commonly called

"bath salts" that produce effects similar to those of methamphetamine or cocaine; and Kratom, a "natural, herbal psychotropic stimulant and opioid substitute," according

"I'm kind of disgusted that our local stores would sell this to our kids and promote it the way they've done."

Charles Hines
Chairman
Sarasota County Commission



to the staff report. Kratom is “[h]ighly addictive with symptoms ranging from dry mouth to hallucinations,” the report adds.

Enforcement will be handled by the Sheriff’s Office, police officers or county Code Enforcement staff, according to a PowerPoint presentation provided to the commission. Among the possible penalties for possession of the substances are fines of \$250 per package and revocation of a business’ Certificate of Occupancy. A Feb. 12 memo to the board explains of the latter, “Although the use of this remedy would likely be rare, it is an available option should multiple violations by the same business continue to be documented ...”

The ordinance even provides “for a cause of action for a citizen to enforce the code as a

‘private attorney general,’” Mel Thomas, a planner with the county’s Health and Human Services Department, told the board.

The Feb. 12 memo pointed out, “This new language would allow a person to seek damages, including but not limited to damages for medical expenses and wrongful death, for injuries sustained” as a result of a violation of the ordinance.

THE LATE CHANGE

After hearing a reprise on Feb. 12 of a [staff presentation from its Dec. 11, 2013 meeting](#), the County Commission learned from Assistant County Attorney David Pearce that the Sheriff’s Office had contacted him Monday about the suggested tweak to the

Who do you think the customer is? Who’s the pitch designed to reach?



An illustration shows samples of packages in which synthetic drugs are marketed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

proposed ordinance. In the section regarding *Prima Facie Evidence*, Pearce pointed out, the Sheriff's Office wanted language added to make it clear the substances were designed or engineered "in furtherance of impairing a person's normal faculties."

Pearce added that staff in the State Attorney's Office concurred that the revision would help counter any constitutional challenge to the ordinance.

However, Pearce said he felt the change was not necessary and could, in fact, "make prosecution a little more difficult. ... How do you

prove [a substance] is ... impairing someone's normal faculties?"

"My only concern with this," Commissioner Joe Barbetta responded, "is the burden of proof. You have to prove intent."

Pearce told the commissioners that staff in the Sheriff's Office and State Attorney's Office agreed that if the revision proved to be problematic, they could ask the board to amend the ordinance.

Chairman Charles Hines asked whether the change was intended to prevent substances



Kratom: why we are concerned

- **Frequently mentioned as the drug most likely to replace synthetic marijuana and bath salts**
- **Currently on the DEA watch list**
- **Not FDA approved -- unknown short- and long-term effects**
- **Health Department does not condone self-medication**
- **Packaged and sold like other designer drugs**

A chart presented to the County Commission lists reasons why Kratom was included in a new ordinance banning certain synthetic drugs. Image courtesy Sarasota County

outside the planned scope of the ordinance from being unintentionally targeted by it.

“That’s the concern that’s been expressed to me by the Sheriff’s Office,” Pearce replied.

Vice Chairwoman Christine Robinson made the motion to approve the law with the proposed new language. “I trust that if the County Attorney’s Office is encountering problems with this or the State Attorney’s Office is encountering problems with this, this will be brought back,” she pointed out.

As for the use of the synthetic substances, she continued, “This is a *terrible* problem. ... The state’s struggling. ... This is something that we’ve got to get in front of. ... I’m concerned that we still have folks out there that are trying to market this to our youth.”

Commissioner Nora Patterson, who seconded the motion, told her colleagues, “I think Commissioner Robinson summed it up.”


“I’m ecstatic about this ordinance,” Commissioner Carolyn Mason said. As the board’s representative on the county’s Juvenile Justice Council and the [Safe and](#)

[Drug Free Schools Advisory Committee](#), she added, she has “seen and heard a lot of negative things about these designer drugs ...”

Hines pointed out, “There’s no redeeming benefit to this type of stuff. ... I’m kind of disgusted that our local stores would sell this to our kids and promote it the way they’ve done.”

He is hopeful, he continued, that other counties and the state will follow Sarasota County’s lead on the law.

Following passage of the ordinance, Sheriff Tom Knight said in a news release, “The Board of County Commissioners clearly understood the importance of banning these substances to protect our community. There is no legitimate use for synthetic drugs and now we can safeguard our youth from their harmful effects.”

The Sheriff’s Office’s release added, “The Sarasota County ordinance fills the gap between products regulated as controlled substances and products regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). ... Once the ordinance is officially recorded by the State of Florida, the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office will take immediate enforcement action.” 



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BIG HEARTS

(From left) First Step Board Chairman Peter Abbott, First Step Director Lynne D. Ross, First Step President and CEO David J. Beesley and Sheriff Tom Knight. Photo by Norman Schimmel

FIRST STEP OF SARASOTA HONORS SHERIFF TOM KNIGHT AND UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS MOTHERS AND INFANTS PROGRAM

By Vicki Chatley
Contributing Writer

Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight received the Caring Heart of the Year Award from First Step of Sarasota Wednesday, Feb. 19, in recognition of his leadership in tackling the prescription drug problem with innovative solutions.

The award was presented by Marcella Schuyler, chairwoman of the Caring Hearts Luncheon committee, who lauded Knight for being one of the people leading Sarasota through “murky times” with respect to the

drug culture. In accepting, Knight noted he did so “on behalf of the Sheriff’s Office” and not himself personally.

Looking out on the 326 people who filled the banquet facility at Michael’s On East in Sarasota, Knight commented, “It’s great we have a community that gives so much.”

The Caring Hearts luncheon is an annual event, now in its 11th year, to benefit First Step’s Mothers and Infants program. The program was launched in the 1990s in response

to the high infant mortality rates reported by local hospitals as a result of women addicted to cocaine giving birth to premature and low birth weight babies.

The program has two goals. The first is for each mother to deliver a drug-free baby. The second goal is to enable the mother to live an independent, drug-free lifestyle. The women live in a First Step campus facility while going through the program. The services they receive include prenatal care, parenting and nutrition classes, smoking cessation sessions, and tutoring for GED or college preparation, as well as group and individual counseling that addresses the core issues that led them to their substance abuse disorders.

The Sandy Seidman Second Step fund, named in honor of the First Step board member who started the luncheon, was established to assist the women with rental or utility deposits, baby items, home furnishings and other needs as they transition from a treatment setting to independent living.

Two graduates of the program, Tiffany and Lisa, spoke about the experiences which led them to addiction and the role First Step played in helping them regain control of their lives. Both women stressed, "You can't do it alone."

They praised the First Step Mothers and Infants staff. "They know what they're doing,"



Sheriff Tom Knight addresses the audience. Photo by Norman Schimmel

said one. The other added, "It is a hard program."

"If it wasn't for Mothers and Infants, I wouldn't be here," Tiffany said. An addict for seven years, she was in jail and pregnant when her lawyer found help for her at First Step and she was accepted into the program. Today her daughter is 14 months old, she is engaged and she has a home. As she told the audience, "Today I'm a mom. ... I am so happy."

Lisa has been sober for almost three years. "My life is just amazing now," she said. She is employed, has a car and is "working on a

Habitat [for Humanity] house." She is "still using the tools [Mothers and Infants] gave me ... not just to be sober, but to use in my life."

This is "a day of celebration," David J. Beesley, president/chief executive officer of First Step, announced, noting the 326th healthy baby had been born the previous night. As that equaled the number of attendees, he took "it as a sign some awesome power is at work."

He continued, "Many consider [addiction] the number one problem" in the United States. People come to First Step in ambulances, in handcuffs and by court order. "Recovery is a



Silent auction items await bids. Photo by Vicki Chatley

possibility for many,” he said, adding, “[We] never give up on people.”

Noting that funding, which is provided by the Florida Department of Health, is inadequate and fundraising a challenge, Beesley asked the audience members, “Help us to save lives today and many days in the future.”

Peter Abbott, chairman of the First Step Board of Directors, followed up on the financial aspect of First Step’s services. He stated the cost of caring for an addicted newborn ranges between \$250,000 and \$500,000. “Addiction services are a tough sell,” he pointed out, even though addiction “impacts family, employees, friends.” He added, “We’re here to help save lives.”

The luncheon included a live auction, a silent auction and a raffle. In addition, the orchid centerpieces at each table were available for purchase.

The program began with a vocal presentation by Devin Bradbury, a 17-year-old student at Booker High School who has appeared in several performances at the Sarasota Opera House.

For more information on First Step or the Mothers and Infants program, contact Kelly French at First Step, 552-2065 or kfrench@fsos.org; or go to fsos.org. 



Luncheon attendees are gathered at Michael's on East. Photo by Vicki Chatley

The roundabout at Pineapple Avenue and Ringling Boulevard is the most recent one completed in the city of Sarasota. It was finished in June 2012. Photo by Norman Schimmel

PUBLIC MEETING TO BE HELD ON ROUNDABOUTS ON FEB. 27

On Thursday, Feb. 27, at 5:30 p.m., the City of Sarasota will host a public meeting about roundabouts and their benefits in an urban location, the city has announced.

The event will be held at the City Hall Annex/SRQ Media Studio, located at 1565 First St. in downtown Sarasota. It will include the review of a concept of a roundabout at Ringling Boulevard and U.S. 41, a news release says.

“An interactive discussion that involves our citizens at the very beginning of the process is vital for the development of proposed roundabouts,” said City Engineer Alex DavisShaw in the release.

“Studies conducted in the United States have shown that roundabouts have better safety

records than intersections with traffic signals,” the release continues. “The design of a roundabout eliminates severe collisions caused by red light runners and also compels drivers to slow down, giving them additional time to react,” the release adds. “Roundabouts promote a continuous, circular flow of traffic and reduce pollution as well as fuel usage,” the release says.

With no traffic signal equipment to install or maintain, cities also save money through the use of roundabouts, the release notes. In addition, pedestrians have to cross in front of only one direction of traffic at a time at each roundabout approach, “with a safe harbor to pause in a median, which is not the case with signalized intersections,” the release adds.

VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE NEARS FOR MARCH 25 ELECTIONS

Sarasota County residents must be registered to vote by Monday, Feb. 24, to be eligible to vote in the Special County School District Election on March 25, Kathy Dent, Sarasota County supervisor of elections, is reminding the public.

Residents of the City of Venice, Town of Longboat Key and Holiday Park Park & Recreation District must also be registered by Feb. 24 to vote in their respective elections on March 25, a Supervisor of Elections news release points out.

To register, one must complete a Florida Voter Registration Application, which is available at Supervisor of Elections' offices, city halls, county libraries, county offices and social

service agencies. It also may be downloaded from the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) website at SarasotaVotes.com.

Dent also is recommending voters verify their registration and precinct information by going to her [website](#). Just click on "Voter Information" in the main menu and then select "Voter Lookup" or "Precinct Finder" and follow the instructions.

A voter who has moved, has had a name change or needs to update his or her signature since the last election may do so by completing a Florida Voter Registration Application, the release also points out. Voters may call the Supervisor of Elections at 861-8600 for assistance or for more information.



The entrance to the main office of the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections is located at the rear of the Terrace Building in downtown Sarasota, at the intersection of U.S. 301 and Ringling Boulevard. Photo by Norman Schimmel

PROGRAM TO FOCUS ON THE ISSUE OF HUNGER IN SARASOTA

The Unitarian Universalist Church, in conjunction with [VegSarasota](#), will hold a public screening of the 2013 documentary *A Place at the Table* on Saturday, Feb. 22, at 6:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, located at 3975 Fruitville Road in Sarasota.

Admission will be free, but food and cash donations will be accepted at the door, a news release says.

“The film examines the extent and causes of hunger in America,” the release says. Following the showing, a panel-audience discussion will be held, focusing on the film and local hunger issues, initiatives and needs. Panel members will be Jennifer Hayes, manager of the [BackPack Kids Program at All Faiths Food Bank](#); Michelle Anderson, student activities coordinator and head of the Law Academy at Booker High School; and Susan Chapman, Sarasota city commissioner. The panel moderator will be Don Hall, director of [Transition Sarasota](#).

Regarding the film, the release points out, “Fifty million people in the U.S., including one in four children, do not know where their next meal is coming from. Directors Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush examine the issue of hunger in America through the lens of three people struggling with food insecurity: Barbie, a single Philadelphia mother who grew up in poverty and is trying to provide a better life for her two kids; Rosie, a Colorado fifth-grader who often has to depend on friends and neighbors to feed her and has trouble



**Why do we have hunger
in Sarasota Florida?**

concentrating in school; and Tremonica, a Mississippi second-grader whose asthma and health issues are exacerbated by the largely empty calories her hardworking mother can afford.”

The release adds, “Ultimately, *A Place at the Table* shows us how hunger poses serious economic, social and cultural implications for our nation, and that it could be solved once and for all, if the American public decides ... that making healthy food available and affordable is in the best interest of us all.”

For more information, email justice@uusarasota.org or call 371-5944.

Press Releases & News Tips

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EVENT DESIGNED TO HELP FEED THE COMMUNITY'S HUNGRY

The public will have the opportunity to watch sculptures being built and cheer on their favorite teams in Westfield Southgate Mall on Friday, Feb. 28, as part of a national program called Canstruction®.

Teams of local design professionals — including architects, engineers, interior designers and students — will put their skills to the test by constructing original themed sculptures, all made of cans of food, a news release points out. The project has been orchestrated by the Florida Gulfcoast chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the release notes. The build-out will begin at noon. It can be viewed right up until the mall's closing time. The food sculptures will be on display in the mall as a giant art exhibit from March 1 through March 10, the release notes. At the end of the exhibit, all food will be donated to All Faiths Food Bank, the release adds.

In conjunction with those activities, Bob Harrigan, popular weather forecaster on WWSB ABC7 TV, will be the master of ceremonies on March 1 for Canstruction® Soirée, which will feature food by Mattison's, drinks and live music, the release continues. That

event will be the setting for the presentation of a series of design awards to the winning teams. The party will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. in the space once occupied by Restoration Hardware in the mall, the release says.

Judged by local professionals, the competition's award categories are Best Meal, Best Use of Labels, Structural Ingenuity, Jurors' Favorite, People's Choice and Most Cans.

Tickets to the soirée are available to the public at \$55 per person. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit aiagulfcoast.org/canstruction, contact event chairwoman Lisa Hess at LHess@trojb.com or call 315-8242.

All proceeds from the soirée will also be donated to All Faiths Food Bank, the release points out.

Canstruction was founded in 1992. Since then, it "has grown to become one of the largest and most consistent canned food contributors to food banks in the world," the release explains. Canstruction events have been held in more than 150 cities worldwide, donating more than 21 million pounds of food to feed the hungry.



The Canstruction website offers examples of 'canned food' art. Image courtesy construction.org

AUTHOR OF *OUR BODIES, OURSELVES* TO SPEAK AT NEW COLLEGE

On Thursday, Feb. 25, Judy Norsigian, author of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, will speak on the topic *Four and a Half Decades of Advancing Women's Health and Human Rights*, during a program at New College of Florida.

The event, part of the New Topics New College series, will begin at 5:30 p.m. at Sainer Pavilion. The cost is \$20 for the general public; the program is free for New College faculty, staff and students.

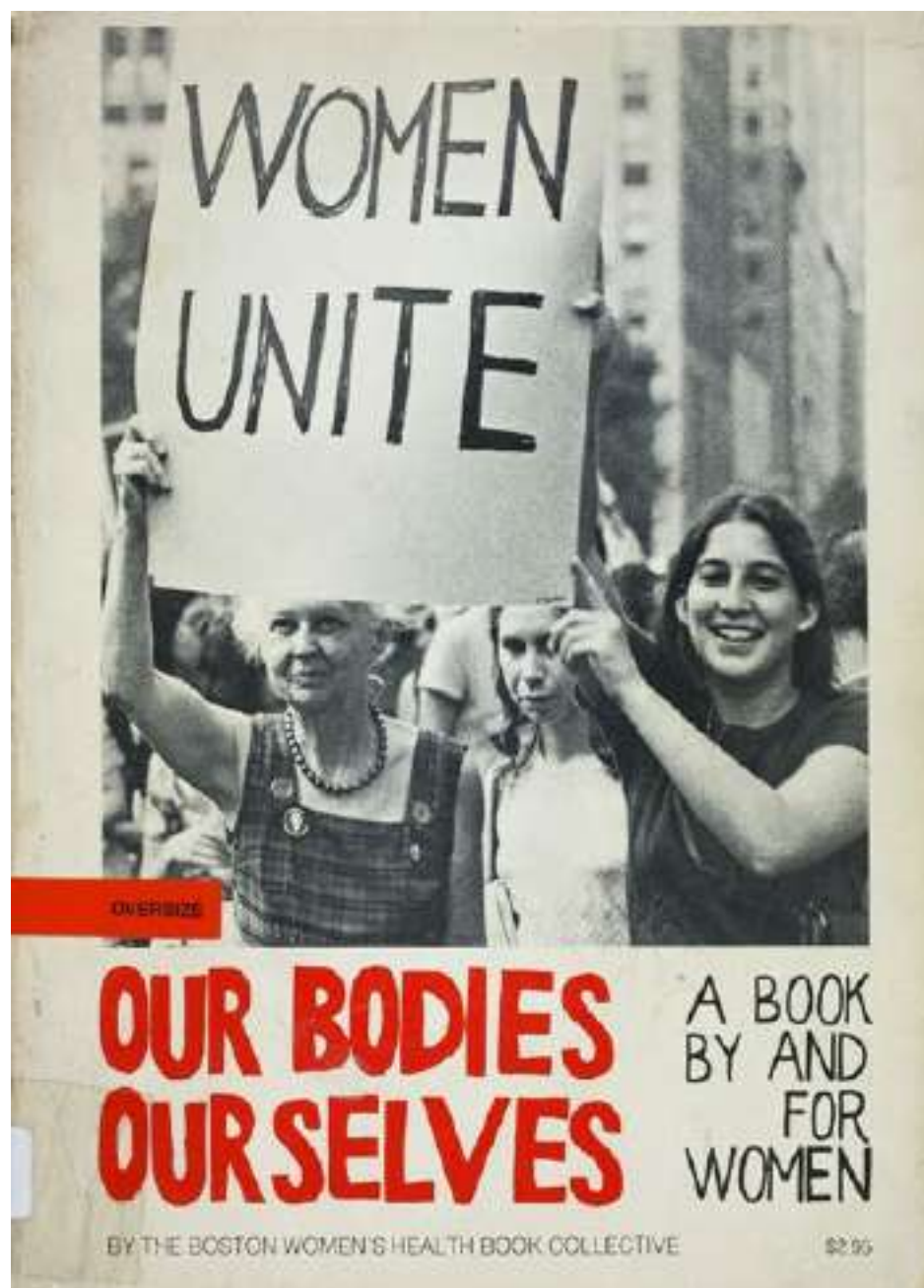
Tickets may be reserved [online](#) or by calling 487-4888.

Sainer Pavilion is located at 5313 Bay Shore Road on the college's Caples Campus in Sarasota.

Norsigian will discuss the major challenges to women today in regard to reproductive health and justice, a news release says.

Norsigian is one of the founders of Our Bodies Ourselves (OBOS), also known as the Boston Women's Health Collective, the OBOS [website](#) explains. Since 2001, she has been executive director of the organization and its primary spokesperson, the website adds.

She also has been an editor for each of the nine editions of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, "the organization's landmark book on women's health and sexuality," the website points out. A revised edition of the book was published by Simon & Schuster in 2011, 40 years after its



Judy Norsigian, author of Our Bodies Ourselves, will be the speaker at a New College of Florida program on Feb. 25. Contributed image

initial appearance. The Library of Congress has named the original version one of the "88 books that has shaped America," according to the news release.

Copies of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* will be available for purchase, the release notes.

SBEP OFFERS FREE GUIDED KAYAK TRIPS ON SARASOTA BAY

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) has scheduled a number of free guided kayak excursions on Sarasota Bay through April, the organization has announced.

All of the SBEP kayak excursions require online registration at sarasotabay.org.

“The SBEP Bay Wise Kayak Tour Program is a fun learning opportunity to discover the plants, animals, habitats and restoration projects that distinguish Sarasota Bay,” a news release says. Brad Tanner, a professional guide and the school programs coordinator for Mote Marine Laboratory, is the kayak tour leader, the release notes. He is also a member of the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee.

The next trips are planned for Blind Pass (March 1 and March 15) and Lyons Bay

and Blackburn Bay (April 12 and April 19). Participants are required to bring their own kayaks and gear. Outfitters throughout the region rent kayaks and offer demonstrations and beginner classes, the release points out. The Bay Wise Kayak Tour Program is for experienced kayakers.

The late Jack Taylor, a respected marine biologist and former member of the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee, launched the kayak tour program in 2007 as part of an SBEP Bay Partners Grant, the release adds. Having earned a doctorate in marine biology from the University of Florida, he was active with many conservation groups throughout the region, the release says.



The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program will offer guided kayak excursions on Sarasota Bay in March and April. Contributed photo

SELBY AND EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS DEDICATE COMPUTER LAB

Trémaya Moore had been looking forward to this day for weeks. “I am so excited to use the computers to help with my homework. I can’t wait to start playing math games — oh, and reading games, too!”

The Alta Vista Elementary School second-grader then grabbed a mouse and showed grownups how to play *Fashion Store Fractions*.

Trémaya and her fellow students from the We R 4 Kids after-school program joined family members and local leaders to dedicate a new Digital Learning Lab at the

Sarasota Housing Authority on Feb. 12, the Education Foundation of Sarasota County has announced. The lab’s 20 laptops, 10 desktops, a mobile charging cart, printers, headphones and work tables were made possible by a grant from the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation to the Education Foundation, the release notes.

Housing Authority Executive Director William “Bill” Russell said in the release, “We are pleased to partner with the Education Foundation to provide learning opportunities for our residents. We know how important



Trémaya Moore and Selby Foundation trustee Carolyn Johnson joined Education Foundation officials to dedicate the new Digital Learning Lab at the Sarasota Housing Authority on Feb. 12. Contributed photo

technology is in the classroom and the workplace. Now our residents and youth will have access to computers, Internet and computer training right here in their own backyard.”

A \$100,000 award from the Selby Foundation will cover capital and equipment costs for 10 new Education Foundation Digital Learning Labs in Sarasota County this year, the release continues. Every lab will be designed to give students access to computers, the Internet and digital literacy training in a safe supportive setting, the release adds. Each lab also will be designed to custom specifications with partner agencies to enhance youngsters’

existing learning activities, promote success in school and prepare the students for college and careers, the release points out.

Susan Scott, executive director of the Education Foundation, announced the Selby grant at the Housing Authority dedication. “The Selby Foundation is a long-time partner with the Education Foundation, helping us identify and meet the needs of Sarasota County’s students and teachers since 1988,” she said. “Even with the success of our Texcellence computer take-home program, we found that an alarming number of students still had limited or no access to digital



Susan Scott, the Education Foundation’s executive director, works with Reggie Dyson on one of the new Digital Learning Lab computers at the Sarasota Housing Authority’s We R 4 Kids after-school program. Contributed photo

technology outside the classroom. Having this Selby Foundation grant means we can reach so many more young people who need these tools and are tremendously motivated to learn with them.”

Carolyn Johnson, a Selby Foundation trustee, participated in the ribbon cutting. “The Selby Foundation Board was delighted to fund this important project to help students and their families bridge the digital divide,” she said. “In today’s world, every child needs access to computers and digital literacy — and caring adults to guide them.”

“The first Education Foundation Digital Learning Lab was established in April 2013 to enrich Laurel Civic Association’s after-school, weekend and summer programs,” the release continues. A total of 30 labs are under way or planned for other youth-serving sites, such as the YMCA’s Triad program, Sarasota County Libraries, Boys and Girls Clubs, Alta Vista’s A+ Adventure Club and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the release says.

The We R 4 Kids after-school program operates at the Sarasota Housing Authority Monday through Thursday from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Gulf Coast Community Foundation’s 2014-15 scholarship application deadline is 4 p.m. on March 5, the nonprofit organization is reminding interested persons.

The application is [available online](#), a news release points out.

Gulf Coast offers scholarship opportunities for local students of all ages who will be pursuing postsecondary education in 2014-15. Applicants must be residents of Sarasota County, Charlotte County or Boca Grande, and they must be accepted to attend or already attending an accredited postsecondary vocational school, college or university, or graduate institution, the release points out. Scholarships are awarded from more than 50 scholarship funds administered by the foundation.

Students must complete the entire scholarship application online, the release notes. Applicants need to submit only one application to be considered for all Gulf Coast scholarship opportunities for which they are

eligible. Eligibility requirements, answers to frequently asked questions and a sample application can be found [on the foundation’s website](#). Information is also available via Gulf Coast’s scholarship hotline at 486-4607, the release adds.

Community service or other leadership development activities are among the qualifications considered for Gulf Coast scholarships, just as many other academic scholarships require students to demonstrate volunteer service, the release notes. Students seeking local volunteer opportunities can find many listed on [YoudBePerfectForThis.org](#), a volunteer-matching website managed by Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

“In 2013, Gulf Coast awarded 366 scholarships totaling more than \$450,000 to help 232 local students pursue their goals of meaningful higher education, the release says. “Since 1997, together with its donors, the foundation has invested \$5.1 million in scholarships for promising students.”

EDEXPLORESRQ SHOWCASE BRINGS EDUCATORS, PROVIDERS TOGETHER FOR INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County recently hosted the EdExploreSRQ Showcase, featuring local community providers who post “explorations” — experiential learning programs — for teachers to access for the benefit of their students.

“The celebratory event, a partnership of the Community Foundation and the Sarasota County Schools, offered a rare opportunity for informal conversation, refreshments and, most importantly, a chance for teachers to talk face-to-face with the EdExploreSRQ providers,” a news release explains.

EdExploreSRQ is an initiative that provides students in grades K-12 “with valuable

exposure to arts, science and culture through ‘explorations,’ in-classroom and off-campus experiences offered by numerous partner organizations,” the release explains. The goal is to improve connections between the classroom and community assets that better support [Common Core](#) and the Sarasota County Schools’ Next Generation Standards, the release adds. The associated website — [EdExploreSRQ.com](#) — serves as a resource not only for teachers but also for parents seeking family entertainment opportunities that support their children’s learning in school, the release says.

“The Showcase bubbled with enthusiastic teachers and administrators who wandered



(From left) Booker High School teacher Myndel Miller, artist Amy Webber and Helena Cao, a teacher at Laurel Nokomis. Contributed photo by Jake Hartvigsen



Patrick Jackson (left) from Florida Studio Theatre and art educator Patrice Kennedy. Contributed photo by Jake Hartvigsen




(From left) Angela Hartvigsen, fine arts program specialist for the Sarasota County Schools, with Sara Sardelli and Jason Webb from Sarasota Ballet. Contributed photo by Jake Hartvigsen

throughout the venue,” chatting with the various exhibitors to learn more about program offerings for students, the release continues. Guests were welcomed by Terri Vitale, board member and chairwoman of the Community Foundation’s Education Taskforce. Vitale also announced the Community Foundation’s new rolling grant application process, which enables teachers to apply for exploration funding throughout the year, the release notes.

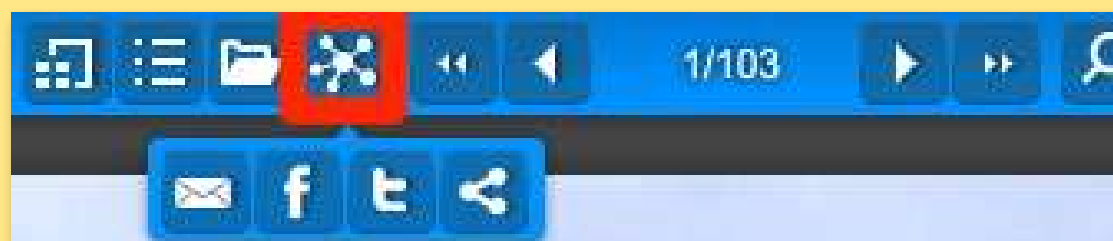
Several of the teaching artists performed, including the Fuzion dance company, storytellers and Florida Studio Theatre thespians.

Fruitville Elementary School won a \$3,000 exploration for bringing the most teachers to the event.

The Community Foundation has committed \$500,000 over the next five years for explorations. Additionally, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and The Patterson Foundation created an EdExploreSRQ Endowment Fund to increase awareness of the program and funding, the release continues. The Patterson Foundation has designated up to \$3 million in matching funds to go into the explorations endowment fund, matching dollar for dollar the Community Foundation’s investment as well as providing a 2-to-1 match for all donations for existing and future explorations.

More information may be found at the Community Foundation’s website, cfsarasota.org, or at EdExploreSRQ.com. 

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CRIME BLOTTER



Area outside Selby Public Library in downtown Sarasota is marked off with crime scene tape after an altercation on Feb. 14. Photo courtesy Sarasota Police Department

STABBING AT SELBY LIBRARY UNDER INVESTIGATION

A homeless man was charged with Aggravated Battery with a Deadly Weapon on Feb. 14 after allegedly stabbing another man at Selby Library, the Sarasota Police Department has reported.

The library is located at 1331 First St. in downtown Sarasota.

Just after 11 a.m. on Feb. 14, Andrew Timshin, 27, and Marcus Colbert, 26, of 2805 Palmedelia Ave., Sarasota, were on the second floor of the library, near the computers, when they became involved in an altercation, a news release says. According to one witness, the two men appeared to begin shoving each other near the copy machine, the report notes. Another witness told officers he heard Timshin shout, “I don’t want him to put his hands on me!” During the course of the fight, Timshin stabbed Colbert, the release says.



Andrew Timshin/Contributed photo

A third witness said he saw the two men were not getting along for about an hour before the incident occurred, according to the report.

When officers arrived, they were directed upstairs, where Timshin was sitting near the computers. He was cooperative, the release continues. An officer found a knife in Timshin's right front pants pocket that appeared to have blood on it, according to the report. Timshin

was placed into custody and transported to the Sarasota County Jail, the report adds.


Colbert was treated for wounds to his right shoulder and the left side of his neck, the report says. Because of the nature of the injuries, he was unable to speak, the report notes. He was taken by Bayflight Medical Helicopter to Blake Medical Center in Bradenton, where he was reported in stable condition, the release says.

TEENS ARRESTED TWICE IN TWO DAYS ON BURGLARY CHARGES

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office arrested two Sarasota teens twice in two days on burglary charges, with one of the crimes occurring just hours after their release from jail, the office has reported.

Malachi Greulich, 15, of 2938 West Mark Drive, and Shane Crowther, also 15, of 4448 Denice Lane, were arrested Feb. 13 with two other people in connection with a January burglary reported on East Mark Drive in which \$3,600 worth of electronics, jewelry and fishing equipment was taken, a news release says. The teens were released to their parents that afternoon, the release notes.

Then on the night of Feb. 13, deputies responded to a burglary on South Mark Drive after a neighbor spotted the teens breaking into a house. The witness realized the suspects were the same ones who burglarized his home last month, according to the report. "Greulich and Crowther were located a few blocks away," the release says. "The pair had taken a stereo and a skateboard valued at more than \$500," the release adds.

Each teen faces one new felony charge for Burglary in addition to the two prior counts of Burglary and Larceny. They are being held by the Department of Juvenile Justice. 



Shane Crowther/Contributed photo



Malachi Greulich/Contributed photo

OPINION



BOB'S BOATHOUSE PROVES TO BE A SCOURGE ON ITS NEIGHBORS

EDITORIAL

It is a situation we all would dread: moving to a quiet neighborhood in a sunny resort town, only to find that across a narrow body of water from your home sits a raucous honky-tonk that blasts out music till all hours of the night, making sleep impossible.

Anyone can choose unwisely the location of a home. Buying a house under the flight path of a busy city airport is not the best way to attain peace and quiet.

We also have observed previously in this space that those who buy condominiums in the heart of a bustling downtown are being somewhat naïve when they express outrage upon encountering noise in that city center.

However, purchasing a home in a quiet residential area located on an island in Phillippi Creek, only a few hundred feet from a major cemetery, should come with the reasonable expectation that you have found the perfect combination of rural and urban life on the Suncoast.

Unfortunately, that is not the reality for the hapless residents of the Monticello neighborhood and its environs, especially those living along Montclair Drive. They are separated by a narrow tributary of Phillippi Creek from their nemesis, Bob's Boathouse.

Advertised as being open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, Bob's Boathouse opened on Nov. 3, 2013, with posted hours from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. And almost immediately after that opening,

OPINION

complaints about noise began to pour into county email accounts from residents in the adjoining neighborhoods.

With live music until the late-night hours, Bob's Boathouse was keeping its neighbors awake. Even during the day, most could not relax outside their homes as the musical entertainment disrupted their afternoons as well.

As *The Sarasota News Leader* has revealed in its extensive coverage of the problems over the past several months, Bob's Boathouse had an unsavory history before it ever opened in an abandoned car dealership on Tamiami Trail. And it was in conflict with county officials within weeks of its latest opening.

Originally, Bob's Boathouse was located on Little Sarasota Bay, off Stickney Point Road just east of Siesta Key. From its first days in 1997, the nightspot generated complaints from residents on Siesta Key and the area east of Little Sarasota Bay.

Fortunately for those residents, the owners of Bob's closed the restaurant to convert the land on which it was sited into condominiums.

Then the owners leased their current location in 2013, which had been the former site of Royal Oldsmobile GMC Trucks. The county issued a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) on Oct. 31, 2013, allowing

the establishment to open for business while completing improvements required by county Code Enforcement.

Then Bob's asked for an extension of that TCO in late November, which the county granted.

The new expiration date would be Dec. 30.

Yet an investigation ordered by the County Commission in the wake of the numerous complaints from neighbors revealed that Bob's owed the county more than \$77,000 for water and

sewer capacity fees, which normally must be paid before a TCO can be issued. When the owners of Bob's were told they had to pay these past due fees, their response was to file suit against the county to avoid turning over the money until a final Certificate of Occupancy was granted.

When Dec. 30 came and went without full compliance with the terms of their TCO, the owners of Bob's also asked for another extension. The county refused that on Jan. 30, allowing the TCO to expire at the end of that day. Thereafter, Bob's continued operations without completion of agreed upon items on a county Building Department "punch list," putting the establishment in violation of the county building code.

“With live music until the late-night hours, Bob's Boathouse was keeping its neighbors awake. Even during the day, most could not relax outside their homes as the musical entertainment disrupted their afternoons as well.”

OPINION

In addition to seeking a delay in the payment of the water and sewer capacity fees, the lawsuit filed by Bob's owners sought to force the county to extend the TCO to allow them to make enough money to complete the required improvements on the punch list.

But the county's response to the court pointed out that Bob's was asking for relief from a problem of its own making — insufficient funds to properly run its business in compliance with all existing codes. That possibly led the attorney for Bob's to delay an emergency hearing originally scheduled for Feb. 11.

As it now stands, Bob's Boathouse has a long list of outstanding site requirements to be fulfilled, which should be cataloged in an expected Notice of Violation the county should issue on Feb. 20. That will require the owners to appear before a Code Enforcement Special Magistrate, who can begin levying fines of up to \$500 for each day of continued noncompliance.

And, most important, there is the matter of Bob's Boathouse conducting its business with callous disregard for the well-being of its neighbors in the adjoining residential areas. Partly as a result of this ongoing problem, the County Commission has ordered a public

hearing on a proposed new noise ordinance which, if adopted, should provide enforcement officials with more leeway in reining in the excessive noise emanating from Bob's.

In the meantime, the neighbors around Bob's Boathouse find its continued late-night musical entertainment to be untenable. Ironically, one of the residents, forced awake in the middle of the night by the noise, reported driving to the city of Sarasota and walking around downtown to escape the cacophony. Given the carping of downtown condo residents about how "noisy" the downtown area is — as it should be — that provides a stark reminder of just how intolerable living in the vicinity of Bob's Boathouse has become.

Every business owner has a right to pursue the successful operation of his or her establishment, within the limits of applicable laws. But such an establishment cannot be allowed to flout required building codes established for the protection of the public welfare, nor can it be allowed to cheat the taxpayers out of rightfully owed fees. And it certainly cannot create a public nuisance that destroys the quality of life of those living in the vicinity of the business.

It is time for Bob's Boathouse to be cast off. 



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Sarasota News Leader welcomes letters to the editor from its readers. Letters should be no more than 300 words in length, and include the name, street address and telephone number of the writer. Letters should be emailed to

Letters@SarasotaNewsLeader.com, with "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line. Letters actually printed will be selected based on space available, subject matter and other factors. We reserve the right to edit any letters submitted for length, grammar, spelling, etc. All letters submitted become the property of *The Sarasota News Leader*.

Sarasota Leisure



SPREADING HER WINGS

THE UGLIEST MONTH

SIESTA SEEN

Your Lifestyle Guide To The Suncoast

Inside



SPREADING HER WINGS

*On board: Francesca MacBeth will cue the ship on and off stage for seven performances of *The Flying Dutchman* at the Sarasota Opera. Photo by Fran Palmeri*

A DEW DROP FAIRY RETURNS TO SARASOTA TO THRIVE OFF STAGE

By Barbara Dondero

Contributing Writer

"I was understudying the Angel of Death," Francesca DeRenzi MacBeth told me. "Imagine how thrilling it was to be a young dancer on the Metropolitan Opera stage — even if I was delivering bad news to the star, who was rehearsing alone with me."

"Who was it?" I asked. She closed her eyes before answering. "Placido Domingo."

Today, MacBeth, 31, is a production stage manager for the Sarasota Opera. She is in rehearsals for Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, which opens on March 1. "I'm much more suited to this role!" she said.

A dance injury forced her to reconsider her career path. Did she want to endure a long

rehabilitation or try other opportunities in the opera world? Job opportunities soon appeared. "Early on, I did *everything*," she explained. "For one show, I handled all scheduling and load-ins (moving in scenery). I was both animal wrangler and child wrangler! I learned how to be a property mistress and an assistant director. Then came the terrifying job of acting."

"Terrifying?" I asked.

"More than that," she responded. "For me, it was *debilitating*. I can now empathize with actors in my shows."

In a baptism of fire, she was once production stage manager for a national tour group

based in New York City (25 performances in six weeks).

“The show almost unraveled,” she said. “Because there were so many different adjustments, we were punchy by the end of the run. However, I was hooked.”

Managing became her forté, as evidenced by her recent position in Manhattan: production activities administrator for vocal arts at the [Juilliard School](#).

“Among my 25 major rehearsal and performance duties? Making sure the harpsichords were tuned,” she pointed out.

RETURN TO SARASOTA

In New York, she was expected to be available nights and weekends. “That’s not going

to work for me,” she thought. Her life had come to include marriage and a new baby. Sarasota beckoned. Her parents, Maestro Victor DeRenzi and Stephanie Sundine, have been at the creative helm of the Sarasota Opera for more than 30 years. MacBeth practically grew up backstage.

Like Kelli Karen, the Florida Studio Theatre production stage manager recently profiled in *The Sarasota News Leader*, MacBeth started out in the dance world. She developed a respect for choreography while performing the role of the Dew Drop Fairy in *The Nutcracker* on the Metropolitan Opera stage. She saw how individual roles blend to create an ensemble.

That appreciation has served her well. Over the past weeks, she has preferred to see



Francesca MacBeth works at her console backstage at the Sarasota Opera. Photo by Fran Palmeri



Just as every ship has a figurehead for good luck, Francesca MacBeth relies on 'Our Lady of Perpetual Standby' to light her way. Photo by Fran Palmeri

the 36-member ensemble for *The Flying Dutchman* from her rehearsal position atop the renovated orchestra pit. On one recent day, Stage Director Tom Diamond made changes that had been agreed upon and MacBeth recorded them in the “Bible,” or prompt book. That color-coded book stays with her backstage as she calls the show.

Ready for any emergency, she can also rely on her stage manager’s kit. Tools for medical emergencies or technical and costume malfunctions are there. “It’s weird, I know, but I love my Staples runs,” she says. “I spend happy hours deciding which colored tabs and markers to use!”

HER LATEST ‘BABY’

Long ago, MacBeth memorized every word and note of the Wagner opera. Based on an old mariner’s tale, its main character is an impatient Dutch sea captain who makes a deal with Satan: “I’ll sail around the Cape of Good Hope if it takes me forever.” The devil hears him, and the Dutchman is doomed for all eternity to roam the high seas. But an angel reveals that every seven years, he may come ashore to try to find a faithful woman who will give him undying love. That will free him from the curse.

Bass-baritone Kevin Short, a veteran performer on world opera stages, including



Line by line, note by note, MacBeth calls the show from her color-coded prompt book. Photo by Fran Palmeri

that of the Met, will play the title role in the Sarasota Opera production. “The Dutchman,” he says, “is not to be pitied. It’s his own arrogance in defying nature and God that caused his predicament.”

ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE

“What kind of lighting and sound cues do you call for this romantic Wagnerian opera?” I asked MacBeth. “How do you make shipwrecks, ghosts and furious Norwegian gales come to life?”

“After Conductor David Neely whips up Wagner’s tempest in the overture,” she replied, “I prepare cues for the wind machine and the dramatic lighting effects, as the ghost ship appears.”



Francesca MacBeth watches a rehearsal from the orchestra pit. Photo by Fran Palmeri



An authentic spinning wheel stands in the rehearsal room. Photo by Fran Palmeri

She pointed to the ship, ready to make its entrance. “We were thrilled to see such a true-to-life ship when it arrived.”

MacBeth added, “The chorus members who bravely climb the rope ladders wanted to understand more about sailing terminology, so we studied that in rehearsals. ... At the end of Act I, the ship leaves the stage.”

In the rehearsal room, where stage positions are taped onto the floor, MacBeth marveled at her resourceful property mistresses, who found five authentic spinning wheels to use in Act II. “That’s when the ladies’ chorus takes the stage. ‘Whir and Whirl, good wheel,’ they sing.”

She flipped the page in her prompt book. “In Act III, the ghost ship sinks. The challenges are ongoing.”

HER MOST PRECIOUS ASSET

Although not included in her stage manager’s kit, MacBeth says her most valuable asset is her voice. Because she speaks continually to cast and crew — either in person or over her headset — her voice needs to be strong and clear, yet reassuring.

Once, before calling cues for a performance of *Giselle*, MacBeth lost her voice. “Completely. I couldn’t even whisper! There was no assistant stage manager available either.”

She enlisted a friend to take her headset and call the show by watching her hand signals. “Holding up five fingers meant ‘Standby.’ The lighting and sound directors listened in the control booth for their cues. Pointing my finger meant ‘Go.’”



Artwork shows the design of a scene from a 1950 Munich production of The Flying Dutchman. Photo of the artwork by Uwe Juergens via Wikimedia Commons

Her favorite compliment from actors and crew? “Hearing your soothing voice makes me feel like I’m back in the womb,” she replied.

MacBeth has found her voice in the theatre. The graceful Dew Drop Fairy has spread her wings. Come see how she cues the ghost ship on the high seas — and the high Cs of her talented ensemble.

Richard Wagner’s The Flying Dutchman opens Saturday, March 1, and runs for seven performances through March 23.

For more information, visit SarasotaOpera.org or call 328-1300. 



THE UGLIEST MONTH

These hibiscuses are weary of winter. Photo by Rick Wielgorecki

COOLER TEMPERATURES, THE SUN'S ANGLE AND LACK OF RAIN CAN MAKE FOR LESS THEN PLEASING APPEARANCES IN THE LANDSCAPE

By Rick Wielgorecki

Contributing Writer

Sorry to say it, but February is the month when clients ask, “Why does the _____ (fill in the blank with any landscape tree, shrub or ground cover) look so bad?” Usually, the short answer is, “Well, it’s February.”

The long answer is that there are things that happen this time of year that conspire to make the healthiest of plants look ragged.

The advent of cooler temperatures means that plants have to adjust to getting less of Mother Nature’s beneficial moisture. Everything looked lush and beautiful after last summer’s copious rainfall — almost 10 inches each month. Since September, our rainfall has been

far short of the usual amount. Irrigating with well or city water can minimize the shock, but most plants will still register the difference by dropping leaves and looking spindly.

Another factor that contributes to the February flop is temperature inversions. They do not have to be sub-freezing plunges. When temperatures vary from between 40 and 80 degrees that is enough to shock plants into dropping foliage, and even browning of the tips of leaves can occur. This is especially true of the fragile tropical cultivars that so many of us enjoy planting, even though this area is slightly north of their most desirable climatic location.

Additionally, our daylight hours have shrunk during the first few weeks of winter and pushed plants into dormancy. The position of the sun in the sky in winter months also means the light we receive arrives at an acute angle and with a diminished intensity.

Finally, February marks the time right before we begin annual pruning of many of our favorite cultivars. Much of the remaining foliage is now a year old and is showing signs of its age. Some foliage has dropped, resulting in the shrubs looking “leggy.” (See the accompanying photo of hibiscuses.) The leaves that remain are often spotted and small, and they may even appear withered. They are telling us they need pruning. However, the wise gardener will wait until the first of March, when, traditionally, we are out of danger of an Arctic cold snap.

What, you may ask, *can* the prudent gardener do in February? Be patient. That is the virtue

all successful horticulturalists have in common. Reduce watering, since soil-drying rates are low. Over watering in winter will result in disease issues and encourage the proliferation of moisture-loving weeds.

One should plan to make autumnal fertilization a habit, so there will be some nourishment available to plants when winter warm spells occur and temperatures spike.

Finally, be vigilant about watching for the appearance of disease or pest infestations.

Sometimes, if your yard plants are looking unattractive, you can squint until they appear blurred and imagine how beautiful they will all be when February departs and spring returns! After all, even in a leap year, this *is* the shortest of months.

Rick Wielgorecki may be contacted at 362-0600 or wielgo@hotmail.com. 



These bougainvilleas are tired of February, too. Photo by Rachel Hackney



'SO HAPPY TOGETHER'

The crowd of couples faces the magistrate for the ceremony as the sun begins to set. All photos by Norman Schimmel

SIESTA BEACH IS THE SETTING FOR MORE THAN 400 COUPLES TO RENEW THEIR VOWS ON VALENTINE'S DAY


Staff Reports

More than 800 people gathered on Siesta Public Beach on Valentine's Day — Feb. 14 — to renew their wedding vows during the popular Sarasota County Parks and Recreation event *Say I Do Again*.

County spokesman Curt Preisser told *The Sarasota News Leader* that 421 couples registered for the ceremony, which was held close to sunset. Sarasota Magistrate Ed Wilson officiated.

Jim and Anna Mae Duke marked the longest marriage of all the couples present, Preisser added: 72 years.

Music, commemorative certificates and wedding-themed refreshments were part of the festivities.

Staff Photographer Norman Schimmel was present to record the occasion. He and his wife, Patti, were among the celebrants. 



One couple wears complementary T-shirts.



People stop at the registration table on the west side of the park.



Magistrate Edward Wilson is joined on the beach by his daughter (far left) and his wife. At right is Sandy James, regional director of advancement of Live the Life, which was a sponsor of the event.



With certificate in hand, one couple takes advantage of a keepsake photo op of the occasion.



SIESTA TOWERS WINS COUNTY APPROVAL FOR TWO NEW PIERS AND SNOWY PLOVERS SOON WILL BE NESTING AGAIN ON THE PUBLIC BEACH



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

In less time than the 20 minutes normally accorded a petitioner, the Sarasota County Commission on Wednesday, Feb. 19, approved a variance to allow the Siesta Towers Condominium Association to replace

two fishing piers on its property, which fronts Big Sarasota Pass and the Gulf of Mexico.

The complex is located at 4822 Ocean Blvd., just north of Siesta Village.



An graphic shows the position of the fishing piers relative to the Barrier Island Pass Twenty-year Hazard Line (PHL). Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

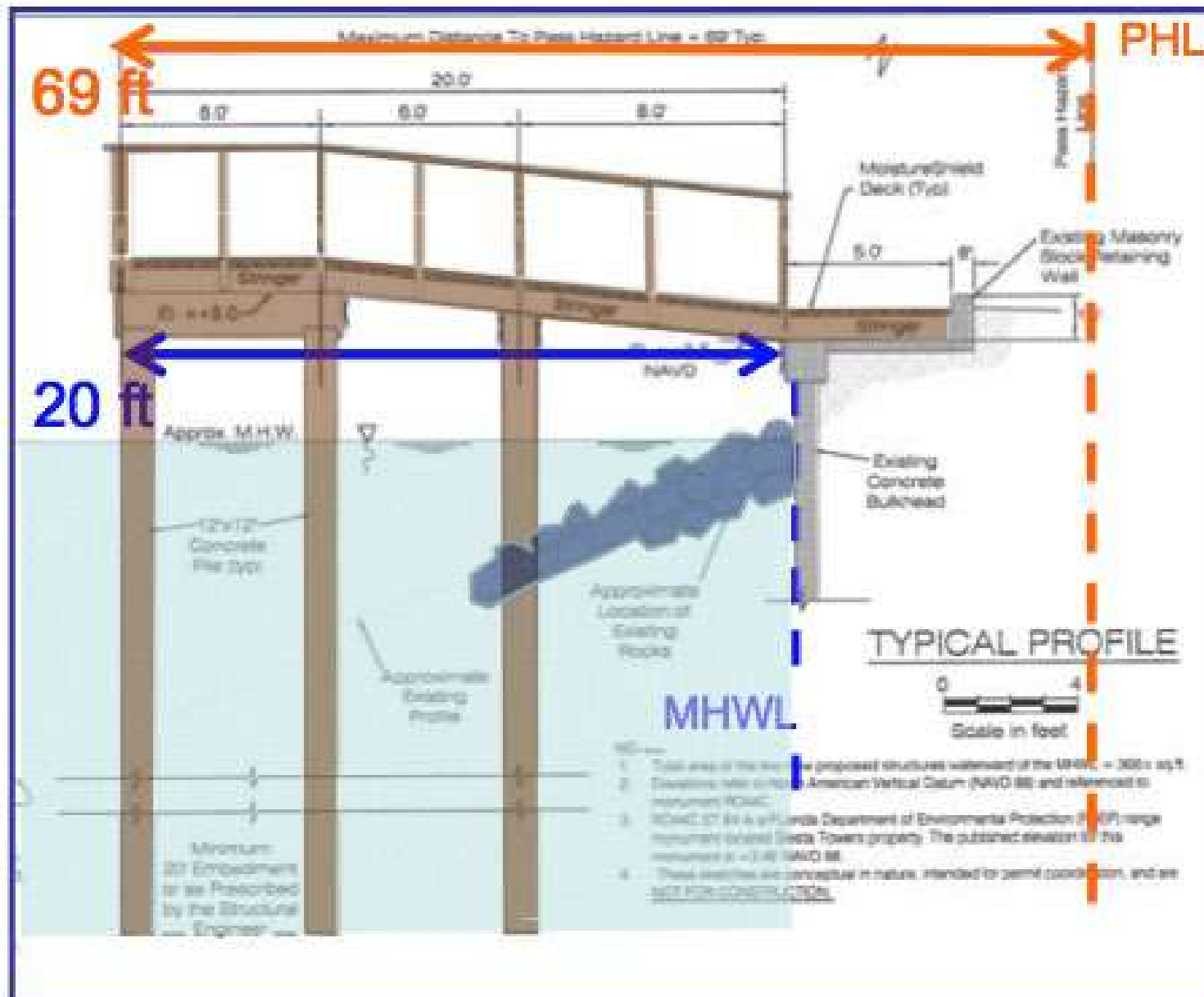
The construction will be a maximum of 69 feet seaward of the Barrier Island Pass Twenty-year Hazard Line (PHL), a staff memo explains.

The unanimous commission vote followed about five minutes of presentation by Howard Berna, the county's environmental supervisor in the Natural Resources Department, and comments from Lewis Zipkin on behalf of the condo association.

The 12-story Siesta Towers was constructed in 1972, Berna explained, predating the establishment of the PHL. Two "dock" structures have been at the site since then, he pointed out. "The piers were apparently roofed structures at one point, but roofs were not reinstalled when the structures were rebuilt" through a 1986 Water and Navigation Control Authority work permit, the staff memo continues.



Proposed Cross Section



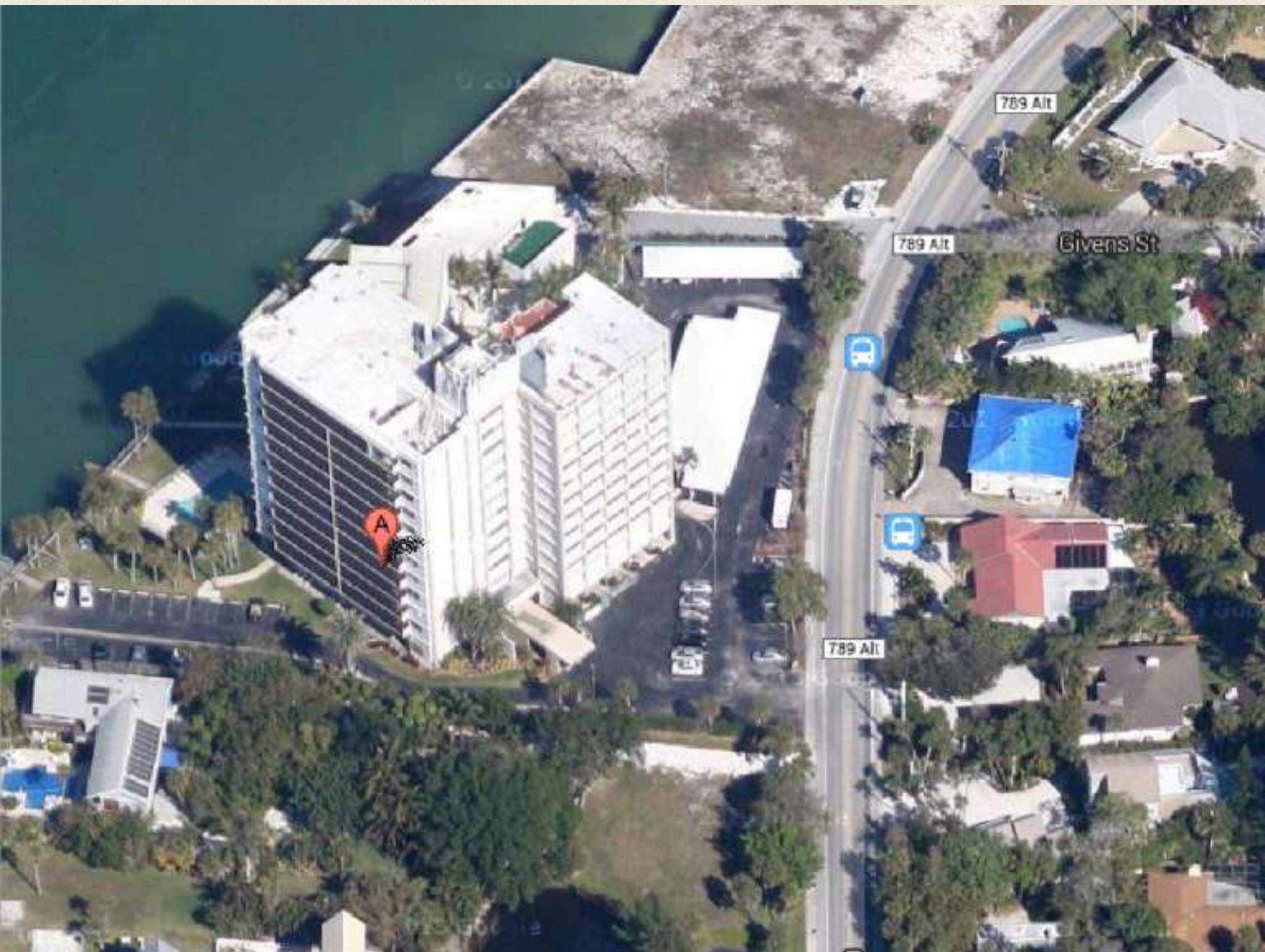
A graphic shows how the fishing piers at Siesta Towers will be constructed. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Siesta Seen

The northeastern-most pier was damaged by storms and removed in late 2011, Berna pointed out to the board. The existing pier is an unsafe structure, he added; it has been roped off to prevent its use.

The original piers' design did not include pilings, the memo says; instead, it utilized concrete groin structures as the supporting foundation for each structure. Because the

groins have deteriorated over time, the condo association sought permission to construct new pile-supported piers with decking about two feet higher than the existing deck level, the memo notes. The latter design would be employed in the effort to keep up-swells in the pass and the gulf from pushing up the pier planks — especially during storms — as that action ends up necessitating the replacement of those wooden boards.



Siesta Towers is located at 4822 Ocean Blvd. on Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps

Siesta Seen

Berna emphasized that the piers would not be used for the docking of any vessels.

After Berna completed his presentation, Chairman Charles Hines told Zipkin he would have 20 minutes to make his remarks. Zipkin assured Hines he did not need that much time.

Zipkin — who noted he is a lawyer — first pointed out that he had planned to rent a bus and bring with him the 63 Siesta Towers residents in favor of construction of the new piers. However, Berna “suggested that might not be the wisest approach,” Zipkin added — no need to overwhelm the commissioners.

As far as Berna’s presentation, Zipkin told the board, “I think his prep is more than sufficient. ... Mr. Berna and his staff have been extremely sensitive to this project.”

Zipkin then showed the board a document dated Nov. 15, 1976, which mentions the piers as part of the original plan for Siesta Towers. He explained that the complex was erected as an apartment complex.

“It did have two piers from the very beginning,” he added, referring to the document.

When he concluded his remarks, Hines told him, “As a good lawyer, you know not to over-try your case.”



A snowy plover chick has been described as resembling a ‘cotton ball on toothpicks.’ Photo by Hans Hillewaert via Wikimedia Commons

Siesta Seen

'CHICK CHASERS'

In about a month, the endangered birds known as snowy plovers will be back on Siesta Key, trying to build nests and hatch chicks, Bob Luckner, a Sarasota Audubon volunteer, explained to Siesta Key Association (SKA) members on Feb. 6.

Luckner — husband of SKA president Catherine Luckner — added that after an abundance of least terns were recorded on Siesta last year, Audubon members expect to see those birds returning to nest as well.

Buffers will be put up around known nesting areas, he pointed out, in an effort to protect

the avian visitors from human visitors. Those buffer zones — with rope and posts — will be visible between Beach Accesses 9 and 11 and Accesses 3 and 4, he added.

As another measure of protection for the birds, Luckner said, Audubon volunteers have about 3,000 brochures from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to distribute, which offer information about helping the threatened species survive, he continued. Many brochures will go to condominium complexes on the island, so managers can give them to guests as the latter check in. Others will be left at the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce for visitors to pick up, he said.



Adult snowy plovers are seen on Siesta Key throughout the year, Audubon members say. Photo by Fran Palmeri

Siesta Seen

The information in the brochures is of the common sense variety, Luckner added. “Don’t harass the birds. If you do, we’re going to have an officer come visit you with a big gun and badge.” When that comment elicited laughter, Luckner added, “Seriously. We did last year.”

At the end of the 2013 nesting season, the SKA recognized representatives of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office for their help in dealing with people whom witnesses had seen vandalizing nesting areas.

Although Siesta only had six snowy plover chicks survive last year, that was the highest count for any Suncoast community, Luckner pointed out. Storms and natural predators such as crows are threats to the plover chicks, he said. “But we’ll try again this year, and we’ve been more and more successful.”

Catherine Luckner added that Sarasota Audubon always welcomes volunteers to help keep an eye on the chicks — from a distance — after the birds hatch.

“We call it ‘chick chasing,’” Bob Luckner said. Because a baby snowy plover looks like “a cotton ball on a toothpick,” he continued, it easily can be stepped on when it begins roaming the beach on its own.

The brochures Bob Luckner referenced are published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife

Conservation Commission (FWC). They explain that snowy plovers “are small, pale birds with short beaks. Snowy plovers begin to forage on their own just hours after hatching.”

For more information, visit the FWC [website](#).

ANNUAL MEETING

The SKA will hold its annual membership meeting on Saturday, March 1, in the Community Room at St. Boniface Episcopal Church.


The church is located at 5615 Midnight Pass Road.

Special guests will be Commissioner Nora Patterson, who will offer remarks on various county topics, and County Administrator Tom Harmer.

The event will begin at 8 a.m. with coffee, tea and juice service. The breakfast buffet will open at 8:30 a.m.

The organization will be celebrating 65 years of service to the community.

Priority for reservations will be given to members, President Catherine Luckner pointed out at the Feb. 6 meeting.

Membership is \$30 per year. More information about the organization is available on its [website](#). 

Take Your Time You Have All Week

Enjoy The News Leader Anytime - Day or Night



The Unitarian Universalist Church on Fruitville Road welcomes the public to enjoy the exhibits in its art gallery. File photo

ALICE BENJAMIN RETROSPECTIVE ON VIEW AT LEXOW GALLERY

Old and New, an Alice Benjamin Retrospective, featuring paintings by Alice Benjamin Boudreau, is on exhibit in the Lexow Gallery at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, located at 3975 Fruitville Road.

An artist's reception will be held on Sunday, Feb. 23, from noon to 1 p.m. The show will run through Thursday, Feb. 27, a news release says.

Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and Sundays after services, noon to 1 p.m. Admission is free.

Benjamin characterizes her style as "expressionism based on observation," with notable line, color, space, rhythm and value considerations, the release explains. Her award-winning landscapes, figures, still life and abstractions



St. Armand Oak by Alice Benjamin. Contributed photo

have been shown at art centers in Bradenton, Venice, Sarasota and Longboat Key, as well as in galleries in Bradenton's Village of the Arts and other venues, the release adds.

She began her career as a zoology illustrator, teaching art at many levels and being represented in several collections, the release notes.

Since moving to East Bradenton in 1997, Benjamin has been active in such organizations as Art Center Manatee, the Sarasota Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, Women Contemporary Artists, the Arts Council of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota and the Wellesley Club of Sarasota.

Learn more about the Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota and its varied programs at uusarasota.org.



Heart by Alice Benjamin. Contributed photo

RICH LITTLE TO BRING HIS 'THOUSAND VOICES' TO VENICE STAGE

"Rich Little is alive and well and bringing his Las Vegas show about the life of Jimmy Stewart to Venice Theatre's MainStage," the theatre has announced.

Audiences will have three chances to catch his performance: Sunday, March 2, at 8 p.m.; Monday, March 3, at 3 p.m.; and Monday, March 3, at 8 p.m. Limited seats are available, the release adds. Tickets are \$49 and may be purchased at the theatre's box office, by phone at 488-1115 or online at venicestage.com.

"Often referred to as 'The Man of a Thousand Voices,' Little might not appear on television as often as he did during his heyday in the 1970s, but he has never stopped performing and he continues to inspire new generations of comedians," the release continues. In a *New York Times* article about Little's new show, *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Darrell Hammond said, "I've studied him for a long

time and I think there are a couple reasons that he's the best that ever lived. Impressionists say about certain voices, 'I can do it because it's in my range.' Well, Rich Little is rangeless. Most great impressionists can do 10 or 20 great impressions. He can do 100, or 200. I can't even wrap my head around that," the news release points out.

Little resides in Las Vegas, where he originated the new show he hopes to bring to Broadway, the release adds. "*Jimmy Stewart & Friends* is a hybrid of biographical theater and comedy that tells the story of that beloved actor's life," as voiced by Little, "with vocal cameos by dozens of luminaries who crossed Stewart's path," the release notes.

Venice Theatre is located at 140 W. Tampa Ave. on the island in Venice. Box office hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and one hour before all performances.



Rich Little will bring his legendary one-man show to Venice Theatre March 2 and 3. Contributed photo

ALEXIS COLE QUINTET TO HEADLINE SARASOTA JAZZ FESTIVAL

Rising young jazz vocalist Alexis Cole and her all-star quintet will appear at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 28 as part of the 34th annual Sarasota Jazz Festival, which runs from Feb. 23 through March 1, the Sarasota Jazz Club has announced.

Cole's quintet includes saxophonist Eric Alexander, pianist John di Martino, bassist David Finck and drummer Kenny Washington, a news release says. The concert will be at The Players Theatre, located at 838 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. Tickets are \$35 for general admission; \$30 for Jazz Club members; and \$5 students. For tickets, call The Player's box office at 365-2494. For group prices or more information about the festival, call 366-1552 or visit jazzclubsarasota.com.

With a voice praised as "a deep contralto as smooth and dark as the richest espresso" (*Jazz Times*), 38-year-old Cole has seven recordings under her belt and is the winner of the 2007 Jazzmobile Vocal Competition as well as recipient of an award at the Montreux Jazz Vocal Competition and at the Sarah Vaughn Competition in 2012, a news release points out. Christopher Loudon of *Jazz Times* says, "Cole's easy sense of swing is strongly reminiscent of Sarah Vaughan," the release adds.

Born in New York City and raised in Fort Lauderdale, Cole began performing at established music venues while she was still in high school, the release continues. She released her first CD in 1999, a duo project with Blue Note recording artist Harry Pickens. In 2004, she



Kenny Washington/Contributed photo by Johan Broberg



Alexis Cole/Contributed photo



Eric Alexander/Contributed photo by Gene Martin

released a second CD, *Nearer the Sun*, which renowned jazz critic Scott Yanow lauded as “a particularly strong effort from a jazz singer well worth discovering,” the release notes. For more information, visit alexiscole.com.

Saxophonist Alexander began playing piano at age 6, but “the tenor sax became his obsession” while he was at Indiana University, the release explains. In 1991, he placed second at the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition, “a triumph that catapulted him into the whirlwind life of a professional jazz musician,” the release adds. He played with organ trios on Chicago’s South Side, made his recording debut with Charles Earland in 1991 and cut his first album as a leader, *Straight Up*, that same year, the release notes. For more information about Alexander, visit ericalexanderjazz.com.

“New York-based jazz pianist, arranger and producer John di Martino has been described as a ‘shape-shifter’ for his genre-leaping musical creativity,” the release says. He has performed and recorded with David “Fathead” Newman, Pat Martino, Houston Person and Taj Mahal. He is sought after as a musical director and his talents as arranger and pianist can be heard on recordings with Gloria

Lynn and Grady Tate, as well as R&B artists Joe Thomas and Chico DeBarge, the release continues. For more information about Di Martino, visit johndimartino.com.

Bass player Finck has performed with such esteemed and diverse artists as Dizzy Gillespie, The Manhattan Transfer, Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole, Rod Stewart, Herbie Hancock, Al Jarreau, Tony Bennett and Andre Previn, the release says. His discography lists more than 100 recordings, including platinum- and gold-selling records with Rod Stewart, Natalie Cole and Elton John, the release adds. For more information about Finck, visit davidfinck.net.

“One of the many young hard bop revivalists to have arrived on the scene in the late ’70s and early ’80s,” drummer Kenny Washington has been in particular demand with such legendary performers as Betty Carter, Johnny Griffin, Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry and Tommy Flanagan, the release notes. Washington’s recording discography numbers more than 500 records, including collaborations with Ahmad Jamal, Clark Terry, Benny Green, David “Fathead” Newman, Freddy Cole, Jane Monheit, Arturo Sandoval, Betty Carter and Dizzy Gillespie, it adds.

BOB NEWHART RETURNING TO THE VAN WEZEL STAGE

Bob Newhart will be back at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota on Feb. 25, so “prepare to roll around in the aisles in fits of laughter!,” a news release says.

Newhart was an accountant when, at the age of 30, he began creating monologues as a diversion from his everyday life, the release points out. His career “dramatically changed path,” the release adds in an understatement.

He has been the star of two successful television shows, 14 feature films and millions of sales in albums worldwide. He has won many awards, including Grammys, The Mark Twain Prize for Humor and a Peabody Award. In 2013, he received his first Emmy, for Outstanding Guest Actor in an appearance on CBS’s *The Big Bang Theory*.

Newhart's comedy album *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart*, released in 1960, went straight to No. 1 in the charts, beating Elvis Presley and the cast album of *The Sound of Music*, the news release notes. It was the first comedy album to ever make it to the top spot on the Billboard Charts; it also received the 1961 Grammy Award for Album of the Year.

"There's gratification in making somebody laugh. It's a wonderful sound. I find myself, to this day, doing it, wanting to make people laugh," Newhart says in the release.

Tickets are priced from \$45 to \$75. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit VanWezel.org.



Bob Newhart/Contributed photo

MUSICA SACRA CANTORUM TO PERFORM SOME ENCHANTED EVENING

Musica Sacra Cantorum, Sarasota's sacred choral music ensemble, will present *Some enChanted Evening* on Sunday, March 2, at 4 p.m. at St. Boniface Episcopal Church, located at 5615 Midnight Pass Road on Siesta Key, the group has announced.

Artistic Director Robert Parrish has assembled a program with traditional chants from early Christianity, Judaism and Russian and Greek Orthodoxy, a news release explains. The program also will feature chant-inspired works by popular choral composers Ola Gjeilo, Morten Lauridsen, John Tavener and Maurice Durufle.

This program of sacred music "investigates chant and chant-inspired works of all types, eras and belief systems," the release adds.



Two guests will join Musica Sacra Cantorum for the concert: singer, recording artist and world music specialist Stephanie Heidemann and Mary Mozelle, distinguished concert organist, harpsichordist and recording artist, the release adds.

Tickets purchased in advance are \$15. Purchase them at musicasacracantorum.org or call 405-7322. Tickets will be \$20 at the door on the day of performance.

ARTIST SERIES CONCERTS TO PRESENT THE TEMPEST TRIO

Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota will present The Tempest Trio in *Trios Anyone?* on Saturday, March 1, and Sunday, March 2, at the Historic Asolo Theater, located at 5401 Bay Shore Road in Sarasota.

Both performances will be at 7:30 p.m., a news release says. Tickets, which are \$25 to \$45, may be purchased online at artistseriesconcerts.org or by calling 360-7399.

Described as “breathtaking — an exciting blend of experience and youthful energy” by the *Evanston Review*, The Tempest Trio will perform Beethoven’s *Trio, Op. 11*; Bernstein’s *Piano Trio*; and Dvorak’s *Dumky Trio*, the release adds.

The group is composed of pianist Alon Goldstein, violinist Ilya Kaler and cellist Amit Peled, the release notes. They are “known for combining technical mastery, expressive depth, and performance experience,” the release says. “[T]he Trio has quickly become known as one of the most exciting ensembles on the international scene,” the release continues. “Each member of the ensemble has a successful solo career; together they bring vitality to the concert stage with their dynamic musical interplay and collaborative spirit.”

For more information about the Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota’s 2014 season, visit artistseriesconcerts.org or call 306-1202.



The Tempest Trio/Contributed photo

SARASOTA WILDLIFE ART FESTIVAL AND SYMPOSIUM SET FOR MARCH 1-2

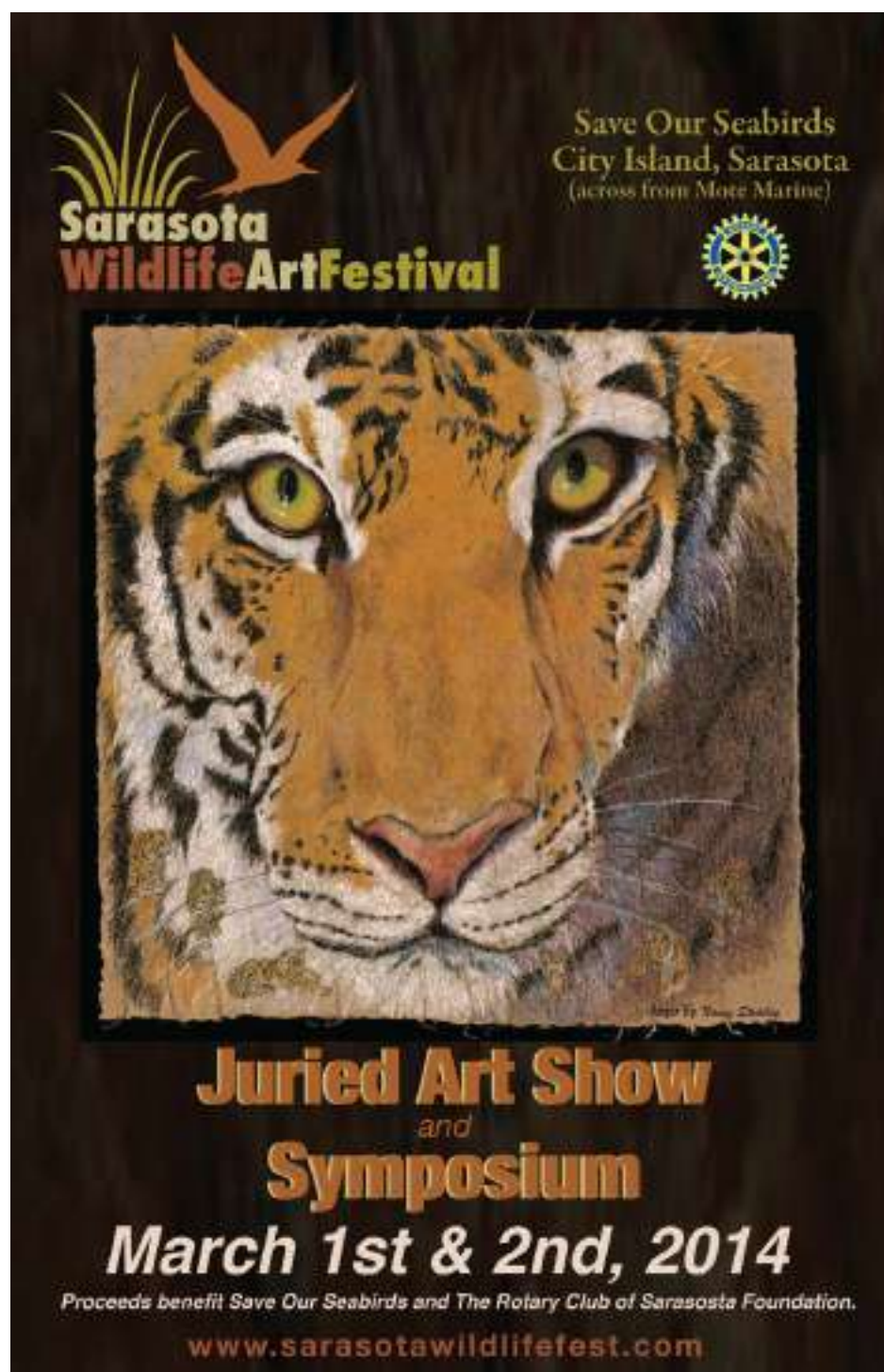
The Rotary Club of Sarasota and Save Our Seabirds will present the second annual Sarasota Wildlife Art Festival and Wildlife Symposium Saturday and Sunday, March 1 and 2, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Save Our Seabirds, located at 1708 Ken Thompson Parkway on City Island in Sarasota, the organizations have announced.

Tickets are \$5 for adults; children 12 and under will be admitted free. Admission entitles guests to free entry to the Save Our Seabirds Wild Bird Learning Center and a \$5 discount on admission to Mote Marine during the festival, a news release notes. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. Proceeds from the festival will benefit Save Our Seabirds and the Rotary Club of Sarasota Foundation. For more information, visit sarasotawildlifefest.com or call 840-1193.

The event will feature a juried exhibition of wildlife-inspired art and fine crafts by more than 40 painters, sculptors, photographers, jewelers and other craftspeople, the release says. The works, which will be for sale, were juried by Ringling College of Art and Design instructors and staff.

Along with plenty of family-friendly activities, there will be guided tours of Save Our Seabirds, and each day the Sarasota Ski-a-Rees will perform its water team ski show adjacent to the Save Our Seabirds Wild Bird Learning Center, the release adds.

Additionally, the event will include a symposium “with prominent speakers in the field of wildlife rehabilitation and other environmental topics,” the release notes. Headlining



the symposium will be Lee Nesler, executive director and CEO of the Lemur Conservation Foundation in Myakka City; Jeff Kremer, director of donor appreciation at Big Cat Rescue in Tampa; and Dr. Norm Griggs, “who has performed innovative stem cell therapy on a Florida panther named Buddah,” the release continues. Among the other speakers will be Barbara Walker, volunteer for Audubon Florida’s eagle watch program, and Debi Osborne, director of land protection with the Conservation Foundation of Gulf Coast.

DAYTIME PERFORMANCE OF *CHICAGO* ADDED AT THE VAN WEZEL

As a result of popular demand, a 2 p.m. matinee of the longest-running American musical in Broadway history, *Chicago*, has been added on March 5 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota, the hall has announced.

With two evening performances nearly sold out, the Van Wezel was able to schedule the Wednesday afternoon show to “allow another full house to enjoy the glitz and glam of the decadent 1920s,” a news release says.

Chicago is the tale of murderous nightclub dancer Roxie Hart, the release points out. Winner of six 1997 Tony Awards, including Best Musical Revival, and the Grammy Award for Best Musical Cast Recording, *Chicago* continues “to leave audiences singing *All That Jazz!*,” the release adds.

Tickets are priced from \$35 to \$80. For more information, call the box office at 953-3368 or visit VanWezel.org.



A matinee performance of Chicago has been added to the Van Wezel schedule. Contributed photo

SARASOTA OPERA TO HOST *HOMAGE TO VERDI* EXHIBIT FROM ROME

From March 8 to March 25, Sarasota Opera will host an exhibition from the Rome Opera House titled *Homage to Giuseppe Verdi: Celebrating the Bicentennial of his Birth*, the Opera has announced.

The exhibition “tells the story of the most famous performances of Verdi’s operas [and] the great performers, singers, set designers and costume designers who have kept the legend of Giuseppe Verdi alive,” a news release says.

On display will be select scenic and costume sketches from productions “designed by some of the greatest opera names of the 20th century,” including Luchino Visconti, Franco Zeffirelli, Pierluigi Pizzi, Danilo Donati and

Nicola Benois, the release adds. The exhibit will also feature 18 costumes dating back to 1916, some worn by Beniamino Gigli, Renata Scotto and Angela Gheorghiu, along with a video collage of Verdi operas performed at the Rome Opera House, the release points out.

“Sarasota Opera patrons have become passionate about Verdi’s music and we are glad to be able to bring a piece of Italy’s rich operatic history to Sarasota,” says Sarasota Opera Maestro Victor DeRenzi in the release. “I want to thank the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma and the Italian Foreign Ministry for allowing this exhibit to come to Sarasota, as well as Piero and Rachele Rivolta (underwriters), for their help in making this possible. We are happy



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

to join the many cities in Italy and around the world that can claim a close connection with Verdi.”

The exhibition originated as a joint effort between the Rome Opera House and the Italian Foreign Ministry to promote Italian music and opera around the world, the release explains. Since its debut in 2011, it has traveled around the world.

The exhibition will be housed in the Jonas Kamlet Library in the pavilion of the Sarasota Opera House, the release explains. It will be free and open to the public Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 4 p.m., and it will be open until 8 p.m. on performance evenings. No ticket for a performance is required for admission.

A *Legacy of Verdi* panel discussion will mark the opening of the exhibition on Saturday,

March 8, the release continues. It will be conducted in the Opera House at 11 a.m., focusing on the legacy of Verdi as illustrated through the exhibit and the Sarasota Opera Verdi Cycle. The panel will include Victor DeRenzi, artistic director of Sarasota Opera; Francesco Izzo, director of the American Institute for Verdi Studies; Martha Collins, stage director of Verdi's *Jérusalem*; and Francesco Reggiani, director of historical archives at the Rome Opera House. Sarasota Opera Executive Director Richard Russell will moderate. In attendance to help open the exhibit will be Adolfo Barattolo, Italian Consul General in Miami.

That event also will be free and open to the public, but a reservation is required. To reserve a complimentary ticket, call the Sarasota Opera box office at 328-1300.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH AUTHOR EVENTS SCHEDULED

Meet the 2013 Pulitzer Prize-winning author Gilbert King!

In two separate events in Sarasota, authors will focus on works relevant to Black History Month.

On Monday, Feb. 24, at 5:45 p.m. at Selby Library, 2013 Pulitzer Prize-winning author Gilbert King will discuss his book, *Devil in the Grove*, which chronicles the infamous 1939 “Groveland Boys” case, a news release says. A book signing will follow his remarks.


The library is located at 1331 First St. in downtown Sarasota.

This program is sponsored by the Sarasota Authors Connection and co-hosted by the Friends of the Selby Public Library and the Historical Society of Sarasota County.

Then on Friday, Feb. 28, at 6:30 p.m., award-winning local author Liz Coursen will present a 70-minute program on her fifth book, *Shade in the Sunshine State: Reflections on Segregation in Florida*.

That event will be held in the Community Room at the Herald-Tribune Building, located at 1741 Main St. in downtown Sarasota.

“Learn about Rosenwald Schools and the ‘Green Books’; hear the words of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. du Bois and Vice President Lyndon Johnson; see how contemporaneous photographs and postcards reinforced racial stereotypes,” the release adds. A book signing will follow that program as well.

Both events are free and open to the public. Plenty of free parking is available at each location, the release notes. 

The Church of the Redeemer is in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

CHOIRS AND ORGANISTS TO PRESENT WORKS OF MASTER COMPOSERS

With the music of two organs and the singing of two choirs, the Church of the Redeemer in Sarasota will present a free concert showcasing Louis Vierne's *Messe Solennelle* and Charles-Marie Widor's *Mass for Two Organs and Two Choirs* on Sunday, Feb. 23, at 6 p.m.

"The evening's performance will surround the audience with the sounds of these masses written specifically for two organs," as the choirs of Redeemer and St. Boniface Church on Siesta Key — nearly 100 voices — lend their combined vocal talents to the works of master Parisian organ composers Widor and Vierne, a news release says. Organists Ann Stephenson-Moe of Redeemer and Neil Page of St. Boniface "will perform on Redeemer's magnificent 50-stop Nichols & Simpson pipe organ and a second organ brought in for the event," the release adds.

The church is located at 222 S. Palm Ave. in downtown Sarasota.

"The audience will be impressed with the majesty of the sound and presence of the two

organs," said Stephenson-Moe in the release. "They will be surrounded by choir and organ sounds from every direction."

"Louis Vierne and Charles Marie Widor were two of the greatest French composers of the late 19th and 20th centuries," added Stephenson-Moe in the release. "Both organists served in their famous positions for almost a half century, and both upgraded and uplifted organ music to a new level of popularity."

She continued, "Louis Vierne died on the organ bench in 1937, but not before he made the Catholic Church of Notre Dame one of the most famous churches in the world. And that fame was largely due to the masterful playing and improvisations that Vierne produced on a daily basis."


The concert is free and open to the public. A freewill offering will be taken to help defray costs, the release points out. For more information, visit redeemersarasota.org or call 955-4263.

FATHERS AND LITTLE GIRLS ENJOY DADDY-DAUGHTER DANCE

“More than 120 fathers and their favorite girls enjoyed a magical evening at Temple Emanu-El’s Daddy-Daughter Dance” on Feb. 9, a Temple news release says.

“In a room festooned with colorful balloons, gumball machines, sparkling confetti and a disco ball, the dance featured daddy-daughter portraits; a makeup, hair and nail salon staffed by a professional makeup artist and teen volunteers; a father-daughter art project; games and prizes; and a menu including finger sandwiches, chicken tenders, macaroni and cheese, fruit kebabs, tea, punch, root beer floats and a gallery of homemade desserts,” the release adds.

The evening’s centerpiece was music by local disc jockeys Soundsational, who donated their services for the event. Daddies and daughters enjoyed dancing to new and classic songs and especially crowded the dance floor for *My Girl* as well as spirited rounds of *Freeze Dance* and the classic party game *Coke and Pepsi*, the release notes.

The Daddy-Daughter Dance was sponsored by the Temple Emanu-El Religious School Social Committee and chaired by Jay and Beth Vandroff and Rabbi Elaine Rose Glickman. For more information about the event, call 379-1997. 



Eden Glickman brought her father — Temple Emanu-El Rabbi Brenner J. Glickman — to the Daddy-Daughter Dance. Contributed photo



Andy and Kaila Cohen shared a sweet moment on the dance floor at Temple Emanu-El's Daddy-Daughter Dance. Contributed photo



Sasha Drapkin received a long-stemmed rose as she and her father, Russ, arrived at Temple Emanuel's Daddy-Daughter Dance



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

21+
FEBRUARY

Dabbert Gallery presents *Nouveaux Two Déjà Vu*

Through March 3; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

21+
FEBRUARY

FST presents *Thurgood*

Through March 8; times vary; Keating Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$36 to 39. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

21+
FEBRUARY

FSU/Asolo Conservatory presents *How I Learned To Drive*

Through March 9; times vary; Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$27 to 29. Information: 351-8000 or AsoloRep.org.

21+
FEBRUARY

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents *Harry and Lena*

Through March 23; times vary; 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or wbttstrq.org.

27
FEBRUARY

Sarasota County Butterfly Club presents *The Back Ten Feet: A Primer for People New to Native Plants*

Feb. 27, 9:30 a.m., Garden Club of Sarasota, 1131 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota. Tickets: \$5 for non-members (members admitted free). Information: 955-0875.

28
FEBRUARY

WSLR presents Dayna Kurtz, with John Howard

Feb. 28, 8 p.m., Fogartyville Community Media & Arts Center, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10 in advance/\$12 at the door. Information: 894-6469 or WSLR.org.

16
MARCH

Sarasota Pops presents *Music of 007 and Other Movies*

March 16, 3 p.m., Riverview Performing Arts Center, 1 Ram Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$5 to \$25. Information: 926-7677 or SarasotaPops.org.

YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



FIRST MATE IN THE LOOKOUT PERCH

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.