

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 45 — July 25, 2014

News Leader

FAR FEWER CUTS

A LONG DIVISIVE MEETING

CHARLIE CRIST SUPERSTAR

Inside

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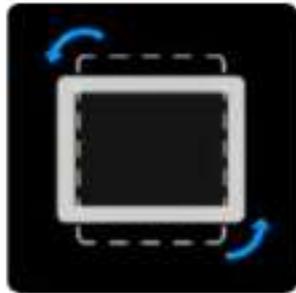
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A.K.A. HELP

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Welcome

Hands down, City Editor Stan Zimmerman had the busiest week among our staff members. The high outdoor temperatures were reflected in the flaring of tempers Monday during the City Commission meeting. And while you may have read about some of those divisive discussions elsewhere, you will not want to miss Stan's versions.

On the flip side, positive remarks ruled at the School Board meetings on July 22. First, the improving economy has led to a lot less stress this year for the board's budgeting process. Second, you may have read about the proposed new Universal Free Breakfast program for eight schools, but if those accounts did not include comments from Food and Nutrition Services Director Beverly Girard and board members, you may not grasp just how vital this plan is.

On the political front, Associate Editor Cooper Levey-Baker clearly conveys the enthusiasm he saw at a Charlie Crist campaign gathering, and he offers an accounting of the latest debate among County Commission candidates.

On the environmental front, County Editor Roger Drouin steeped himself in new details of the Lido Renourishment Project.

Last week, I failed to commend to you the latest wonderful essay by regular contributor Harriet Cuthbert. She offers another one this week on a far different but topical subject. Harriet has a splendid sense of humor that comes through readily in her writing — all the more reason I should mention her articles.

Finally, our other regular contributor, Fran Palmeri, has provided the second installment in our *It's a Wild World* series, which we began last month. Her nature photography is truly amazing.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher





 [Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article](#) 

NEWS

FAR FEWER CUTS

A week before the public hearing on their tentative \$706 million budget for the 2015 fiscal year, School Board members reflect on more robust finances — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

8

A LONG DIVISIVE MEETING

From crime in Newtown to resident angst over higher water rates to a call for updating its shopping districts, the City Commission considers a range of issues — *Stan Zimmerman*

15

CHARLIE CRIST SUPERSTAR

Democratic gubernatorial candidate energizes the base in vital Sarasota — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

25

FULL SPEED AHEAD

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers presents more details of the Lido Renourishment Project during community workshops, but skepticism remains — *Roger Drouin*

30

REMOVING A STIGMA

The School Board has to hold one more public hearing in August before it can implement a Universal Free Breakfast Program at eight schools — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

37

WAITING FOR WINTER

Analysis: City, County commissions part ways on come-as-you-are homeless shelter proposal — *Stan Zimmerman*

40

ONE MONTH TO GO

With Republican primary looming, Sarasota County Commission candidates square off at Tiger Bay — *Cooper Levey-Baker*

47



COVER PHOTO CREDIT
Evenfall - Norman Schimmel

SIESTA SEEN



OPINION

 [Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article](#) 

HIGHER SCHOOL SAFETY EXPENSES

51

The Sarasota School District will pay 10 percent more for its School Resource Officers in the 2014-15 school year — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

AUDITORIUM'S FATE DISCUSSED

55

A number of ideas are proposed at a meeting on a Payne Park facility, including allowing city neighborhood associations to meet there, but the city has no budget for renovations — *Stan Zimmerman*

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

58

On Aug. 20, the County Commission will be prepared to discuss the sale of Warm Mineral Springs to the City of North Port — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

THE SAFER PATH

61

Because of federal rule changes regarding certain affordable housing loans, the County Commission takes the first step toward moving funds from a down payment assistance account to one for housing rehabilitation — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

A CHANNEL, AMBASSADORS AND CITY KEYS

65

A city resident gets another denial on a request to dig a route from his dock to the bay; new Sarasota Police ambassadors begin work; and the City Commission honors Dan Kennedy — *Stan Zimmerman*

SIESTA SEEN

69

Only one bid comes in again for the new Siesta Village maintenance contract; and Siesta Key Association officers have a good meeting with Sheriff's Office representatives over parking and homelessness issues — *Rachel Brown Hackney*

NEWS BRIEFS

76

CRIME BLOTTER

82

SHARE





Click Any **Headline** To Go Directly To That Article

OPINION

EDITORIAL

The Warm Mineral Springs 'D-I-V-O-R-C-E'

85

COMMENTARY

One world — *Harriet Cuthbert*

88

ALL THE REST ...

IT'S A WILD WORLD

The cannibals among us! — *Fran Palmeri*

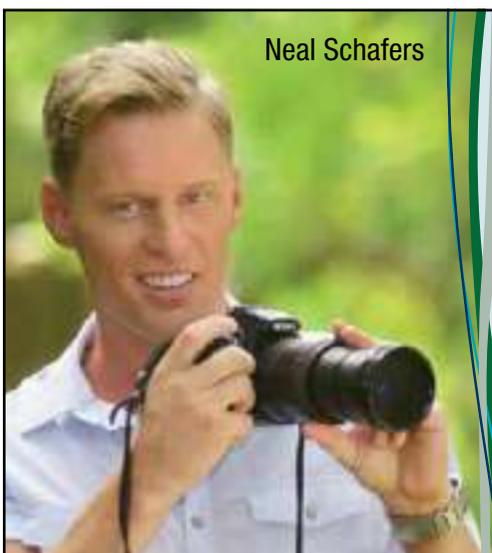
89

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

90

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS

92



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FAR FEWER CUTS

Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner offers comments to the School Board during the July 22 session. Photo by Rachel Hackney

A WEEK BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THEIR TENTATIVE \$706 MILLION BUDGET FOR THE 2015 FISCAL YEAR, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS REFLECT ON MORE ROBUST FINANCES

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

Just before the Sarasota County School Board voted unanimously on July 22 to advertise its millage rates and tentative budget for the 2015 fiscal year, board member Caroline Zucker summed up one big change over the past months.

“This is the first time in a long time where we actually have not been choked by having to make decisions on cutting primary programs,” she said. “It almost feels like I didn’t do any work

on this budget because I didn’t have to think about what I was cutting this year. It’s a relief.”

Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner explained that while the board members had sliced \$124 million from the budget since 2007-08, as they reacted to the effects of the Great Recession, staff needed to trim only about \$108,000 this year.

The School Board will hold a public hearing on the tentative \$706 million spending plan

“ *It’s been a long haul since I’ve been able to present a balanced budget.* ”

Al Weidner
Deputy Chief Financial Officer
Sarasota County Schools

and the millage rates at 5:15 p.m. on July 29 in its chambers at The Landings in Sarasota. The final budget will be adopted on Sept. 16, after the 2013-14 spending plan has been closed out and staff has factored in the actual enrollment figures reported after the new school year begins in August.

The total millage is 7.777, meaning a taxpayer's bill will reflect a payment of \$7.777 for every \$1,000 of property value. The Required Local Effort rate set by the state is 4.529, down 0.193 mills compared to the 4.722 figure for the current fiscal year.

Recommendation

That the following proposed millage rates for 2014 be accepted for advertising in accordance with requirement of Chapter 200.065 of the Florida Statutes:

General - Voting Operating	1.000 mills
General - Local Required Effort at	4.529 mills
General - Local Discretionary at	.748 mills
Capital Outlay at	1.500 mills
For a total of	7.777 mills

The Property Appraiser has certified the Sarasota County 2014 tax roll at \$46,981,167,444 which represents a 7.81% increase from 2013 tax roll of \$43,576,145,919 (see "Certification of School Taxable Value"). The general fund local required effort must be levied by the School Board, if the district is to receive any state FEFP dollars in fiscal year 2014-2015. This millage rate is set at 4.529 mills by the State of Florida. The proposed millage rate required by state law is 2.42% more than last year's rolled-back millage rate. When the local millage is included, the proposed millage rate is 4.20% more than last year's rolled back rate.

A comparison of the 2013 millage levies with the proposed 2014 levies is as follows:

MILLAGE LEVY	2013 ACTUAL MILLAGE RATE	2014 PROPOSED MILLAGE RATE
General - local required effort	4.722	4.529
General - basic discretionary	0.748	0.748
Capital Outlay	1.500	1.500
Voted Operating	1.000	<u>1.000</u>
TOTAL Millage Rate	7.970	7.777

Weidner noted in his presentation to the board that the lower Required Local Effort was made possible by a 7.8-percent increase in the value of county property taxed by the district.

Because the School Board is not rolling back its proposed total millage rate to reflect that rise, the rate represents a 4.2-percent increase compared to the 2013-14 tax level.

District tax revenue is expected to rise by 2.42 percent.

When Vice Chairman Frank Kovach clarified that the budget does not include any salary increases, Weidner replied, "That is 100 percent correct."

Board member Shirley Brown pointed out that district staff has not completed its negotiations with the Sarasota Classified/Teachers Association, so the budget might change as

a result. Still, she said, "We can pretty much mark this down and print it out and say, 'This is what it's going to be.'"

The School Board will take about \$3.4 million from its unassigned reserves, or "rainy day fund," to balance the new budget, slightly more than the \$3.3 million projected to be needed as staff closes out the 2013-14 spending plan, Weidner added. The estimate shows that as of June 30, 2015, the district will have an unassigned fund balance of \$36,559,403, he said, reflecting 9.17 percent of total appropriations.

He noted that during the last board workshop on the general fund portion of the budget, which was held in May, staff expected to have to take \$5.9 million from the unassigned reserves to balance the new budget.



School Board members Shirley Brown (left) and Bridget Ziegler await the start of the presentation of the tentative budget for the 2015 fiscal year. Photo by Rachel Hackney

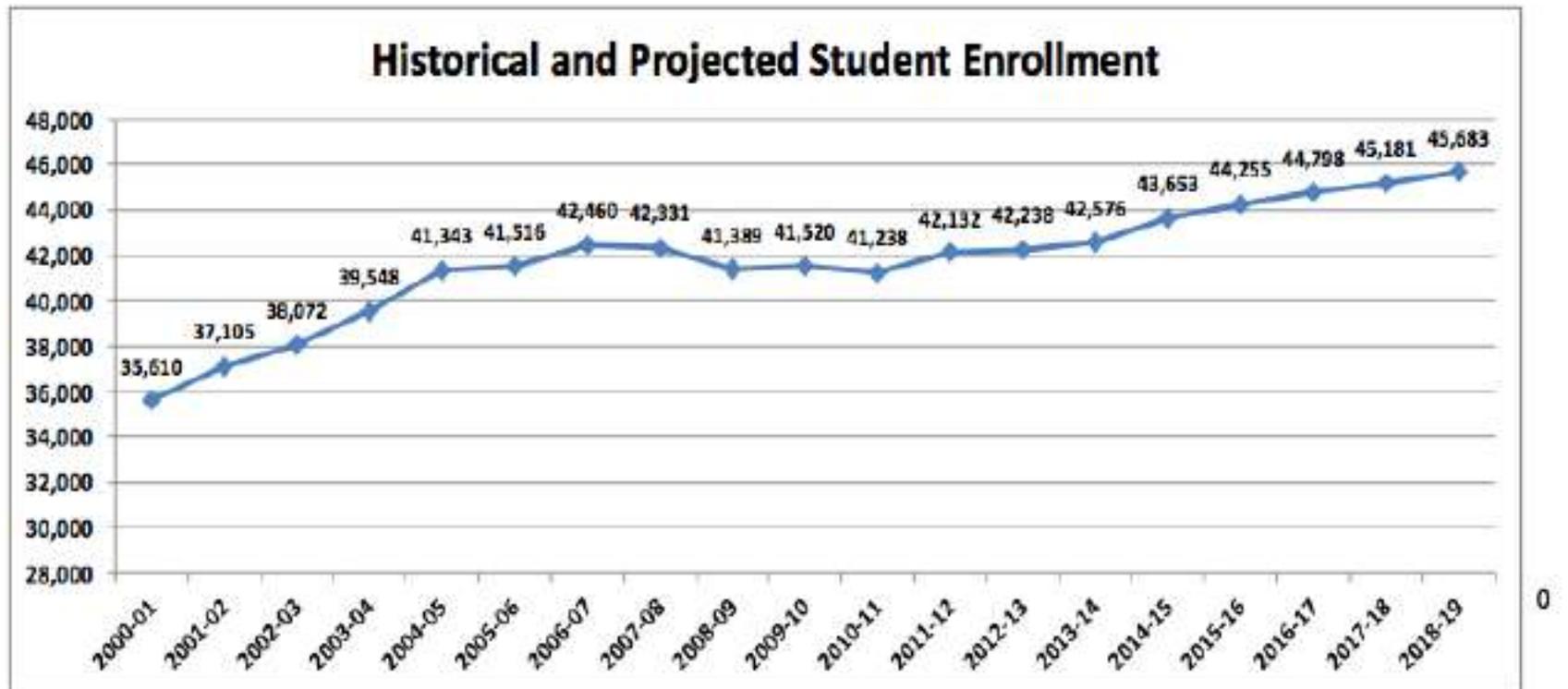
Student Enrollment for the Period 2011-2012 through 2018-2019

Historical Student enrollment by Grade level information (Based upon October of each school year)

The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida

District Summary of all Schools by Grade Level

Student Enrollment by Grade Level								
Grade Level	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
PreKindergarten	492	432	398	422	422	422	422	422
Kindergarten	2,983	3,058	3,102	3,188	3,217	3,223	3,260	3,282
First	2,975	3,101	3,093	3,229	3,259	3,258	3,275	3,304
Second	3,092	3,008	3,191	3,207	3,328	3,358	3,364	3,381
Third	3,256	3,211	3,117	3,276	3,304	3,419	3,456	3,462
Fourth	2,986	3,191	3,164	3,193	3,252	3,278	3,380	3,419
Fifth	3,196	3,017	3,264	3,212	3,278	3,355	3,370	3,471
Sixth	3,229	3,197	3,068	3,254	3,306	3,336	3,393	3,407
Seventh	3,298	3,250	3,293	3,259	3,373	3,404	3,423	3,507
Eighth	3,236	3,315	3,273	3,432	3,402	3,505	3,520	3,530
Ninth	3,545	3,500	3,584	3,605	3,614	3,611	3,696	3,756
Tenth	3,255	3,329	3,360	3,493	3,477	3,475	3,407	3,504
Eleventh	3,443	3,332	3,412	3,502	3,550	3,608	3,589	3,565
Twelfth	3,146	3,297	3,257	3,381	3,472	3,546	3,626	3,673
Total by Grade	42,132	42,238	42,576	43,653	44,255	44,798	45,181	45,683
Students by Program funded through the Florida Education Finance Program								
Basic Education	27,641	28,132	28,302	29,154	29,573	29,918	30,142	30,408
E.S.O.L.	1,736	1,737	1,530	1,545	1,574	1,590	1,596	1,598
Students with Disabilities k-3	2,652	2,544	2,590	2,619	2,655	2,687	2,722	2,752
Students with Disabilities 4-8	4,736	4,807	4,962	4,906	4,954	5,016	5,084	5,163
Students with Disabilities 9-12	2,499	2,451	2,350	2,379	2,402	2,441	2,475	2,528
ESE Level 4	438	436	445	444	451	461	470	478
ESE Level 5	76	67	55	55	56	57	58	59
Career Education	1,076	526	891	900	912	924	930	942
Total Students by Program	40,854	40,700	41,124	42,003	42,577	43,095	43,479	43,928



Charts show enrollment figures and projections from the 2000-01 school year through the 2018-19 school year. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools

One factor besides the higher property values that had helped reduce the transfer, he said, was the district's receipt of \$2.1 million from its health insurance carrier through a profit-sharing plan — money "I had not anticipated at all."

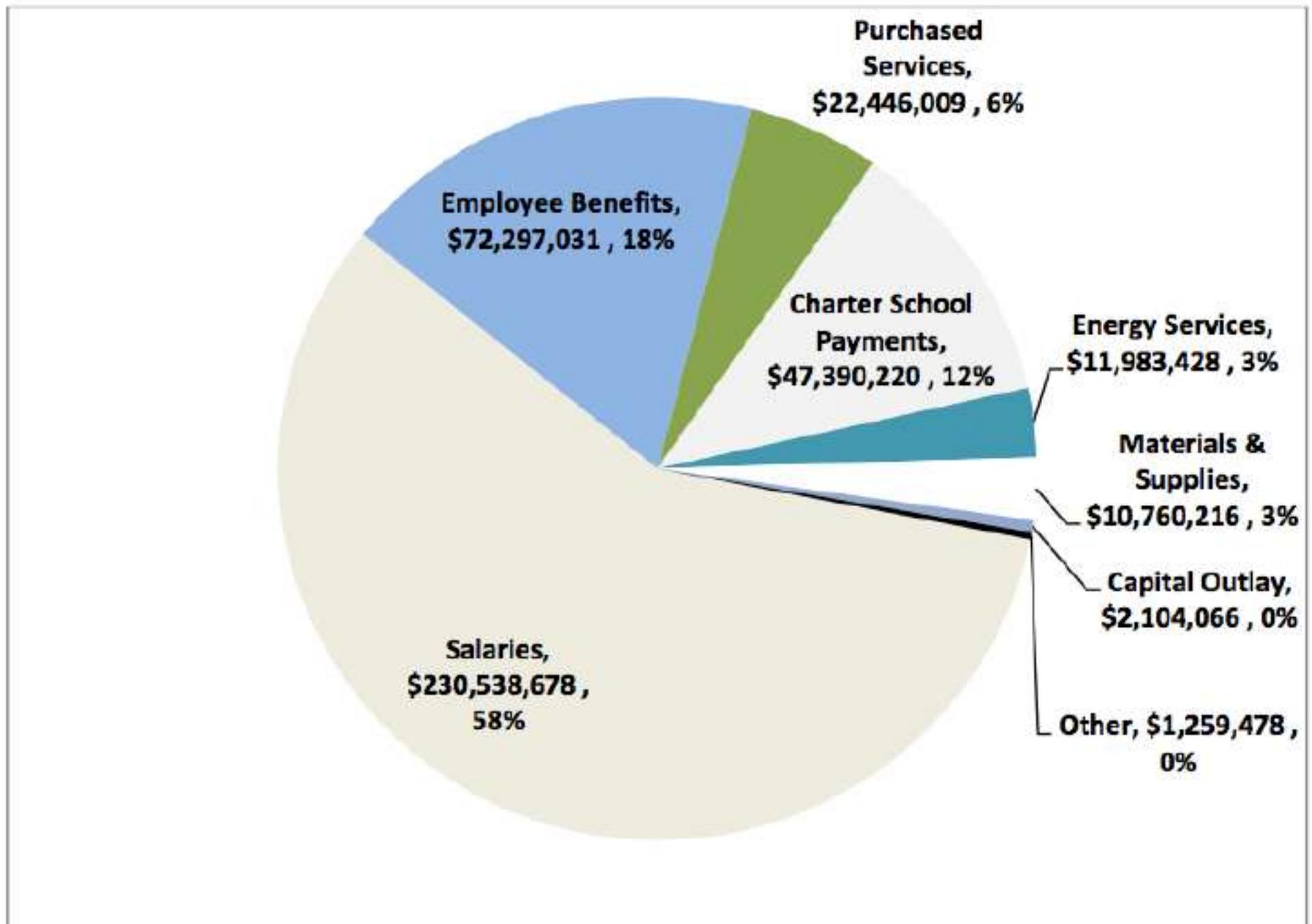
In response to a question from Brown, Chief Financial Officer Mitsi Corcoran explained that the district also had received a refund

of a little more than \$700,000 from its health insurance carrier because the company's total revenue for the 2013 calendar year reflected more than the 15 percent it can retain for overhead under the guidelines of the federal Affordable Care Act. That refund will be used to offset district premiums for employees, whose health coverage the district pays in full, and employees' dependents, Corcoran said.

The School Board of Sarasota County, Florida

2014-2015 Tentative General Fund Budget

2014-2015 Appropriations by Object \$398,779,126



A pie chart shows how Sarasota County School District appropriations are expected to be divided up during the 2014-15 fiscal year, based on the School Board's tentative budget. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools

Weidner singled out Food and Nutrition Services Director Beverly Girard for special praise, telling the School Board her reserve fund balance would reflect 32 percent of her budget, “and that’s the highest in my whole career here it’s ever been.”

Weidner has been a district employee for 32 years, he told *The Sarasota News Leader* in June.

In wrapping up his presentation, Weidner said, “We continue to budget conservatively,” adding that he hoped to be able to craft a spending plan for the 2015-16 fiscal year that will not necessitate the use of rainy day funds. “It’s been a long haul since I’ve been able to present a balanced budget.”

BUDGET DETAILS

During the 2014-15 school year, district staff has projected an increase of 1,077 students in the regular schools and 891 in the charter schools, Weidner told the board. However, he has heard from a couple of charter schools that their enrollment figures are trending lower than expected. Therefore, Weidner said, some regular district schools may have more students show up than anticipated.

The ending enrollment figure for all schools during the 2013-14 school year was 41,874; the 2015 number is projected to be 42,951.

The school district has lost about 603 teaching positions since the 2007-08 school year, Weidner said in a brief interview after the meeting. A hiring freeze has been in effect since that same year, he added. When a person leaves district employment, the position is not advertised to be filled unless it is of a specialty nature, he noted, such as a teacher of special needs students.

Whenever a long-term substitute can handle a teaching job, the district assigns such an employee to it, he continued. That action has saved the district money, because substitutes do not receive benefits.

The expense for salaries in the 2014-15 budget is projected to be \$230,538,678, or about 58 percent of the total appropriations of \$398,779,126.

According to unaudited figures for the 2013-14 budget, 59 percent of appropriations, or \$229,681,560, went to salaries. Employee benefits made up 18 percent of that spending plan, for a total of \$69,299,644.

Employee benefits account for \$72,297,031, or about 18 percent of the 2014-15 budget. The year-over-year increase results from an expected 10-percent hike in the district’s group health insurance rate, effective Jan. 1, 2015, according to the budget’s executive summary, along with a Florida Legislature-mandated increase in the contribution the district must make to the state retirement plan for teachers.

The district paid for the equivalent of 3,041.1 filled instructional positions in the 2013-14 budget, of which 2,372 were teachers and 544.8 were aides. The 2014-15 spending plan projects a total of 3,168.1 instructional personnel, with 2,470 teachers and 572.7 aides.

Board members complimented Weidner and Corcoran for their work. “I think the two of you are a great team,” Chairwoman Jane Goodwin said, attributing to them the district’s [AA+ rating by Fitch](#) and a long history of top national honors for financial reporting. 



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A LONG DIVISIVE MEETING



(From left) Jetson Grimes, Mary Mack, Ernest Duboise and Lance Shebals address a Police Department plan to impose an 11 p.m. commercial curfew in Newtown, and they were speaking at a similarly late hour in City Hall on July 21. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

FROM CRIME IN NEWTOWN TO RESIDENT ANGST OVER HIGHER WATER RATES TO A CALL FOR UPDATING ITS SHOPPING DISTRICTS, THE CITY COMMISSION CONSIDERS A RANGE OF ISSUES

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The Sarasota City Commission meeting of Monday, July 21, was longer and fierier than any in recent memory. Both commissioners and the public had heated exchanges, and as the evening wore on toward midnight, the session even verged on hostile.

Despite all the heat, there was a lot of light, too, as a significant number of

long-festering issues were decided — some by narrow margins. In government circles, action often comes when motions are made and decisions achieved by majority vote.

“ Many downtown stores look dated; they have a 20- to 30-year-old look to them. You should consider some sort of storefront improvement program.

Robert Gibbs
Gibbs Planning Group
Birmingham, MI



For this story, we will break the action down to issues on which no action was taken, issues on which action was deferred and lastly, issues on which decisions were made.

NO ACTION NEEDED

A beaming Dan Kennedy stepped forward, joined by his wife, to accept the keys to the city for his decades of educational leadership in both public and charter schools. After presiding over Sarasota High for years, Kennedy ventured out to start Sarasota Military Academy when few thought Sarasota was fertile ground for a high-discipline school. (See the related item in this issue.)

How wrong they were. SMA flourished into a high-performing school with an enviable record of college admissions. In addition to the proclamation of achievement and keys to the city, July 21, 2014 will forever be Dan Kennedy Day in Sarasota.

Achievement and leadership of a different kind was also recognized as Maj. Nathan Frizzell came forward to brief the commissioners on The Salvation Army's efforts to fight homelessness and vagrancy in the city. He has been here about a year, and he has started a seven-step program to tackle various facets of the issue.

Housing is the key to fighting homelessness, and he urged "a counterpart to somebody in Wayne Applebee's position" to fight for higher densities and smaller spaces into which people can move. Applebee, Sarasota County's homelessness issues coordinator, is responsible for creating a shelter for the homeless and vagrants, but Frizzell believes there must be



The Sarasota Police Department provided video of shooting incidents in Newtown. Video courtesy Police Department

some kind of graduation from a shelter into affordable, permanent housing.

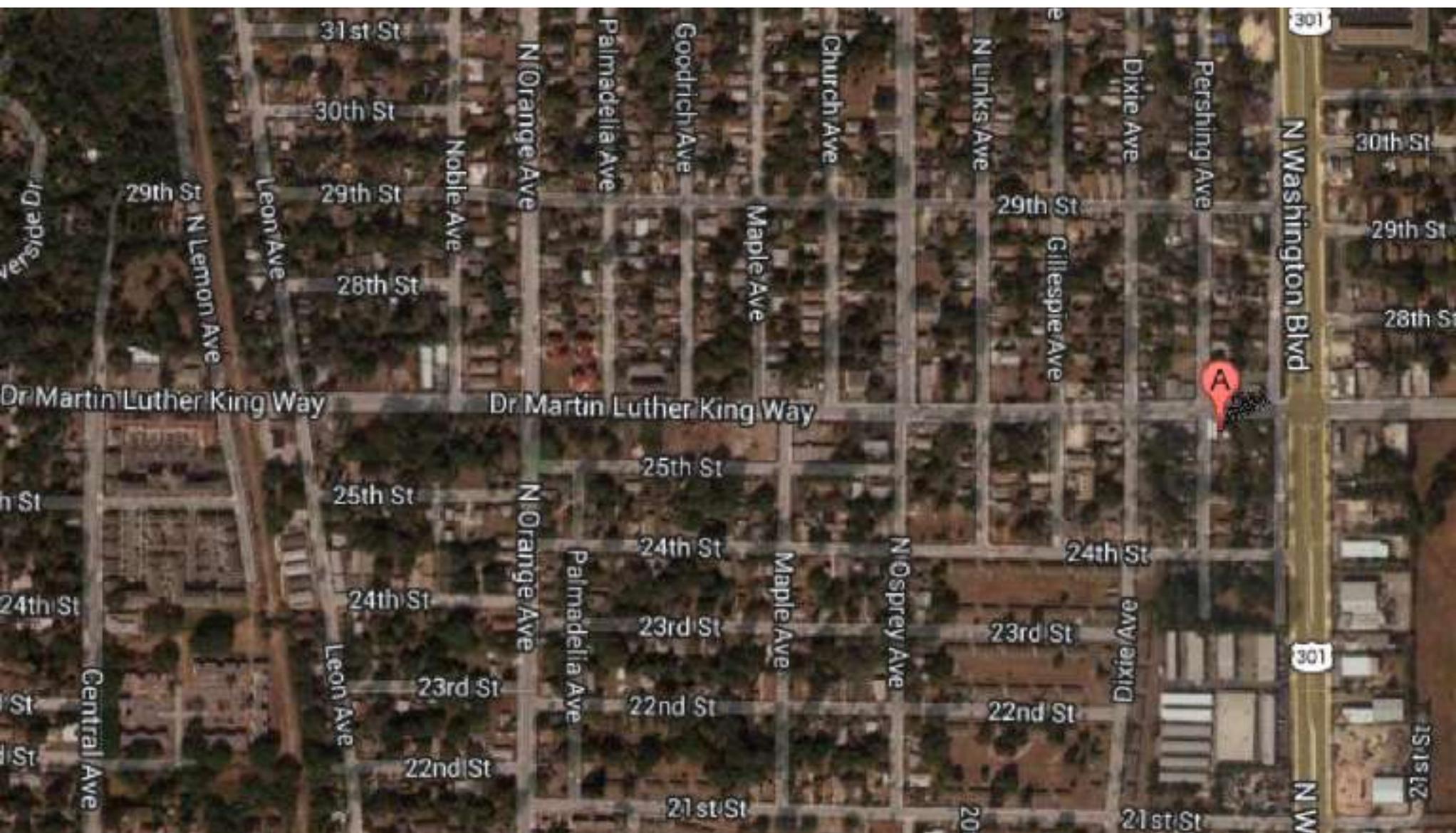
He is asking for \$395,000 from the city to refurbish an old police substation on 890 Central Ave. into a “low-demand shelter” open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. (See the related story in this issue.) He was told that will take some zoning work, but if it is approved for a “fast track,” the change could happen in three or four months. “My opinion is, the county jail should not be the highest quality of life you experience in Sarasota County,” Frizzell said.

The commissioners also heard a report from the other end of life’s spectrum — the future of high-end retail in Sarasota. Consultant Bob Gibbs explained his review of four shopping areas in town and their future after the opening of the new mega-mall at University

Parkway and Interstate 75. “You are a strong market,” said Gibbs. “But when the new retail center opens, you are going to look dated.”

Gibbs reviewed downtown, St. Armands, the Rosemary District and the Newtown corridor along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way. “Many downtown stores look dated; they have a 20- to 30-year-old look to them,” he said. “You should consider some sort of storefront improvement program.”

St. Armands Circle, he continued, “is too top-heavy with restaurants. There will be a tipping point where it becomes an entertainment district, and it will be difficult for retailers to survive. It’s now about 60-percent retail. You want a shopping district with a lot of good restaurants.”



A flag marks the location of the Town Hall Restaurant on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way in Newtown. Image from Google Maps

He proposed Newtown as a business generator. “There is a strong demand for additional restaurants and general retailers, housewares, shoes, general merchandise. It could be an incubator for start-up restaurants and food trucks,” he said.

After the good news came the bad. An unflattering review of the city’s Information Technology (IT) Department was aired. “I commissioned the study to find out where the department was,” said Phil Hurwitz, the city’s IT director. “Two of the items are technical and eight are procedural. We are going to be actively fixing these. The first two items are complete already.”

“We have a lot of work to do,” added Hurwitz. “If 10 is perfect, then we’re about a six.”

There were no motions or calls for consensus to take action on any of these items.

ACTION DEFERRED

Everybody likes free samples — except the city’s code enforcement corps. After a St. Armands business ran afoul of the “code cops,” the owner asked the city mothers and fathers if samples could be liberated from tyranny to be “free” for passersby to taste. City Attorney Bob Fournier asked whether anybody objected to his review of the no-free-samples provision of the code so he could report back later. He received a nod of approval.

Another St. Armands request was pushed off. After some confusion and a bit of rancor this spring, merchants and residents in the area



Plans to increase water rates drew a crowd to City Hall on July 21 to speak to the commission. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

are seeking clarity about when special events are allowed in the park at the center of the circle, as well as larger events that might close off feeder streets.

Should long-standing events have a priority in claiming a date? Should traffic-stymying events be banned during the busiest times of the year? What is the difference between a “park permit” and a “special event permit,” and who needs which to do what? Fournier said he would be back by Sept. 15 with a menu of legal options.

The last item on the agenda was the receipt of impassioned public testimony from a vocal

and hostile audience that had waited almost six hours to speak. In all my years in City Hall, this was one of the wildest meetings ever. The televised proceedings do not do it full justice because there was a significant contingent of police on hand, off camera, to restore order should that have become necessary.

The mayor gaveled the crowd to silence on several occasions and the crowd roared right back. But interestingly, the crowd’s opinion on the issue at hand was not united. Many were for, and many others were against the proposed commercial curfew on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Way.



One drawing surfaced of Jessie Biter’s proposed high-rise rental complex. This shows an exterior view looking east down Second Street. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

Police Chief Bernadette DiPino testified that convenience stores open at 4 a.m. are causing crowds to form, and encouraging criminal behavior. She showed the commissioners a pair of surveillance videos of gunfire in the early morning hours after the July Fourth holiday. One suspect turned out to be a convicted felon.

“People are leaving Bradenton and coming to MLK [Way],” said DiPino. “Some of these stores are staying open until 4 a.m. We recommend they be closed at 11 p.m.”

Thanks to misinformation in the local press, several in the audience believed the move was targeted at The Town Hall, a landmark restaurant and bar open for decades under the aegis of Willis Smith and his family (including local boxer-hero “China” Smith).

Shirley Smith said, “We knew Town Hall was gonna get drug into this mess. Anything happens, it always gets blamed on the Town Hall. We close down at 2 a.m. Newtown needs cleaning up.”

“How many 7-11s, Circle Ks, Racetracs you have to pass to get to MLK?” asked one resident. “Closing these stores isn’t going to solve this issue. You’ll still see them standing outside even when the stores are closed.”

Jetson Grimes disagreed. He has run a Newtown business for decades. “Look around Sarasota and you see prosperity and success, but you don’t see that in our community. I was here 20 years ago with the same thing. People had taken the community and the police were afraid to come into the community,” he said. “We need to stop this craziness. Are you going



A consultant hired by the city says St. Armands Circle ‘is too top-heavy with restaurants.’ Photo by Norman Schimmel

to defend people shooting guns at 3 in the morning? This would not be tolerated in any other neighborhood.”

Mary Mack urged compromise. “Ninety-five percent of the people in Newtown are law-abiding people,” she told the commissioners. “You need to engage the people in the community with the decisions that affect their lives. The community needs to know. Don’t send us home at a time we don’t want. Work with the business owners.”

At night, half of the Sarasota Police Department’s on-duty officers are in Newtown, DiPino pointed out.

“Nowhere else in the city do we have that much concentration,” said Mayor Willie Shaw. “Our conversation is broader than the stores.

Manatee County has already shut down, and everybody is winding up here.”

As the clock neared midnight in the chambers, Vice Mayor Susan Chapman said, “I’d like to know what they are doing in Bradenton and Manatee County. We don’t want to compete for their early morning business.”

The issue was left there, for staff to find out why so many people from Manatee County end up in Newtown in the wee hours of the morning.

ACTION TAKEN

Motions were taken on six issues. Three were decided by the barest majority. First was the decision to release an “Invitation to



Competing proposals have been aired for the city’s bayfront property near the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Negotiate” for a concessionaire at the Lido Pool and Pavilion. It is unusual to find a freshwater public pool on a Florida Gulf Coast beach, but Lido is an exception.

For months, city staff and the Lido Key Residents Association worked to devise a plan for the struggling facility. The Sarasota County Commission at one point controlled the pool and was on the verge of filling it with sand because so few people used it. After the city took control of the pool, it worked with residents to flesh out a master plan to make the facility more attractive.

The result is the Invitation to Negotiate (ITN), asking private parties to use their own resources to improve the facility and then manage it. The motion to approve and release the ITN passed 3-2, with Mayor Shaw and Commissioner Shannon Snyder in the minority.

Next up in the afternoon was a decision to appoint City Manager Tom Barwin as the liaison with a private group studying the future of the city-owned property around the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. In 2007, a consultant created a \$400,000 report called the Cultural District Master Plan, which involved a variety of performing arts organizations.

The so-called 20:20 plan is led by Michael Klauber, chairman of Visit Sarasota County (aka the Sarasota County Convention and Visitors Bureau). Some fear it is an under-the-covers attempt to put a convention or conference center on the publicly owned property. “Do we want to revisit that, set some clear parameters for the city manager? Like no

conference center, or the property will always be public land, or the public will always have a view of the bay?” asked Chapman.

Meanwhile, another investment-oriented group called Bayfront Now is holding meetings with a separate proposal to develop the property with a hotel. Chapman moved to send the city manager as a delegate to the 20:20 discussions, with the proviso that no conference or convention center be considered and the property remain in public ownership. It passed 3-2, with Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Suzanne Atwell in the minority.

A substantial boost to citizens’ water and sewer bills was approved 4-1, with Mayor Shaw voting against. The city Utilities Department proposes a 6-percent jump starting in October and another 6-percent hike in October 2015. The money would be used to upgrade existing infrastructure (including facilities under new traffic roundabouts) and reconstruct the freshwater pipeline from the Verna Well Field in eastern Sarasota County.

During public testimony, Eli Gomez reviewed the recent history of city rate hikes. “In 2006, it was a 16-percent increase. In 2007, 4 percent; in ‘08, it was 4 percent; in 2012, another 4 percent; in 2013, 4 percent again. Total is a 32-percent increase. If we go ahead with the 6 percent and another one, that’s almost 50 percent from 2006 to 2016 pushed on the average user,” he said.

Two years ago, the city dropped its water and sewer impact fees as an incentive to development. Caragiulo asked how the rate hikes would be affected if the impact fees were

reinstated. “It would cut the first 4-percent increase by about 0.7 percent,” said a utilities finance staffer.

One problem is conservation. As users save water (low-flow toilets and showers, for example), water consumption goes down. Because bills are based on usage, less consumption means less revenue for the city.

Chapman proposed reinstating the impact fees, but the effort failed 2-3 (with Shaw and Chapman outvoted). However, during the budget workshop three days later, the commissioners agreed to ask staff to examine the impact of reinstating the fees before the rate hike comes back for its second reading and likely passage.

It was a day of legacies. How to refresh the Lido Pool? Should the Cultural District Master Plan be reconsidered? Should the commission add the sixth and seventh water rate increases in a decade? Then a six-year-old development plan came up for final approval.

In 2008, a stretch of Second Street was approved for a 10-story rental building capitalizing on a quadrupled density boost, and the density provision remains active. The idea was to create affordable housing downtown.

The land and the plan were later purchased by software entrepreneur Jessie Biter, who then bought an adjacent parcel and wanted to add it to the approved development proposal. Both the city Planning Board and the city staff members on the Development Review Committee struggled with Biter’s refusal to provide detailed drawings showing a unified structure, but they eventually gave their approval.

That pattern was repeated at the City Commission meeting. “We have been given only a partial plan,” said Chapman. “The developer says it’s too expensive to provide a full set of plans. This sets a very bad precedent.” The project was approved 3-2, with Shaw and Chapman in the minority.

By another 3-2 vote, the commission decided to ask its Independent Police Advisory Panel to review the Police Department’s voluntary withdrawal from accreditation. Commissioners Snyder and Caragiulo voted against the motion.

In their only unanimous vote of the day (excepting approval of minutes and the consent agendas), the commissioners decided to scrap plans to work with Sarasota County to create a come-as-you-are shelter for the homeless and vagrants. (See the related story in this issue.) 

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CHARLIE CRIST SUPERSTAR

Former Republican governor and current Democratic gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist speaks to supporters at Clásico Cafe & Bar. Photos by Cooper Levey-Baker

DEMOCRATIC GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE ENERGIZES THE BASE IN VITAL SARASOTA

By Cooper Levey-Baker
Associate Editor

Pledging to undo the “nightmare” that Gov. Rick Scott has brought to the state of Florida, Republican governor-turned-Democratic gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist swung through Sarasota this week, energizing locals and Democrats at a handful of events. The fundraisers come on the heels of a number of recent polls showing Crist with a small but noteworthy advantage in the race.

After speaking to a handful of Sarasota

County teachers about education policy on Wednesday, Crist made an appearance at a relatively modest \$50-a-head fundraiser organized by the [Sarasota County Young Democrats](#) and held at downtown Sarasota’s Clásico Cafe & Bar. Around 75 enthusiasts packed the restaurant, sipping wine and nibbling on appetizers before the former governor appeared.

When Crist did show up, driving himself in a white SUV, the

“*They’ve got money; we’ve got people. And guess what, money doesn’t vote. People do.*”

Charlie Crist
Candidate for Governor



crowd went nuts, with supporters lining up for cellphone photos and frantically updating their Facebook pages. Among the throng flitted local Democratic Party Chairwoman Rita Ferrandino, School Board candidate Ken Marsh, County Commission candidate Ray Porter, City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell, congressional candidate Henry Lawrence, former state Rep. Keith Fitzgerald and activists from the Sierra Club, Planned Parenthood and other groups.

Gary Kompothecras was also on hand, his presence a signal of the shifting tides in the gubernatorial campaign. Over the years,

Kompothecras, the man behind 1-800-ASK-GARY, has backed a number of Republicans, including presidential candidate Mitt Romney, U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, state Rep. Ray Pilon and state Sen. Bill Galvano. In late 2010, he cut a \$25,000 check to the Republican Party of Florida, the organization currently backing two trackers who hectoring Crist on Sarasota sidewalks this week. Nevertheless, this year, Kompothecras is backing Crist.

“The right wing of the Republican Party has taken over, and there’s no room for moderates,” Fitzgerald, a Crist campaign surrogate, told *The Sarasota News Leader*. According



Gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist listens to a supporter's remark during a campaign stop at the Clásico Cafe & Bar.

to Fitzgerald, Crist has the opportunity to peel away independent-minded Republican voters turned off by the sharp rightward turn the party has taken since President Barack Obama's election. That doesn't mean winning 20 or 30 percent of GOP votes, Fitzgerald said, but if Crist can pick up 1,000 Republicans in Sarasota County and in other counties like it, he has a good chance of winning.

Indeed, while Sarasota County is a Republican stronghold, with a 43-31 advantage over the Democrats in voter registration, Sarasota Republicans are less reflexively hard right than in other parts of Florida. Even with that severe registration advantage, Scott only defeated Democrat Alex Sink 50-46 in Sarasota County in 2010; and Crist drew 40 percent of the vote in the county as an independent that

year in the U.S. Senate race, preventing the eventual Republican winner, Marco Rubio, from earning a majority.

Fitzgerald said Crist's transition from Republican to Democrat hasn't been "extreme" at all. He remembers attending Crist's first State of the State speech in Tallahassee. Democrats in the back row were applauding, while Republicans up at the front were silent. "Working with Charlie was always a joy," Fitzgerald told the *News Leader*. "He's not a party guy. He follows his conscience."

An example: In 2010, shortly after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Fitzgerald and then-state Rep. Rick Kriseman, a Democrat, approached Crist about calling a special legislative session with the purpose of banning offshore oil drilling. While the plan failed



During a Sarasota fundraiser for Crist, former Democratic state Rep. Keith Fitzgerald speaks about working with Crist in the state Legislature.

(the Republican-led Legislature was clearly not interested in banning drilling), since that session, no state leaders have seriously proposed expanding drilling in Florida's waters, Fitzgerald pointed out.

After Crist invited Fitzgerald to the front of the restaurant to address the crowd on Wednesday, Fitzgerald discussed his experience working with Crist in Tallahassee. Crist then delivered a short stump speech, pitching his campaign as the grassroots alternative to the \$100-million Scott machine.

"They've got money; we've got people," Crist said. "And guess what, money doesn't vote. People do."

Crist said Scott was a man "without a heart," criticizing him for refusing to accept billions

from the federal government to expand Medicaid, while cutting education spending, killing high-speed rail and rolling back voting rights for felons "who paid their debt to society."

"Somebody's got to stop it, and it's us," Crist said, wrapping up his speech before walking down the block for a swankier, \$250-a-head fundraiser at The Francis.

He asked supporters to keep donating money and to slap bumper stickers on their cars, calling the latter a cheap alternative to buying billboards and a way to spark voter-to-voter conversations about the campaign. "That's called campaigning with heart and passion and energy and enthusiasm," Crist said, "and that's how we beat \$100 million." 



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FULL SPEED AHEAD



A view from the eighth floor of the Lido Resort shows erosion on Lido Beach. All photos by Roger Drouin

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS PRESENTS MORE DETAILS OF THE LIDO RENOURISHMENT PROJECT, BUT SKEPTICISM REMAINS

By Roger Drouin
County Editor

After a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers workshop Wednesday, July 23, Milan A. Mora, operations manager at the Corps' district office in Jacksonville, pointed to a map of Big Sarasota Pass as he explained to a resident two options for dredging the waterway.

The Army Corps wants to remove 1.3 million cubic yards of sand from the pass — which has never been dredged — and pump

that sand onto the eroding shoreline of Lido Beach to the north.

Mora told *The Sarasota News Leader* that sand in the pass is exerting pressure south-

ward, toward the northern end of Siesta Key, creating problems on that end of the island. "Dredging the pass will relieve some of that pressure on north Siesta," Mora said.

“ *We've been asking for months for someone from the Corps to come and meet with someone other than city [officials].*

Jono Miller
Environmental Advocate and
Former Environmental Studies Instructor
At New College of Florida

”

For example, Siesta residents long have complained about the instability of North Beach Road as a result of erosion in that area.

The agency plans to submit the necessary permit application to state environmental regulators this fall so it can proceed with the City of Sarasota's Lido Beach Renourishment Project.

This week, Mora and a contingent of other engineers from the Army Corps, along with Sarasota City Engineer Alex DavisShaw, presented details about the plan in a series of public meetings and tried to alleviate concerns residents have raised about it. The group held two public workshops on July 23 at City Hall, along with a meeting for Lido Key residents the previous morning.

In addition to pumping sand onto a 1.6-mile stretch of Lido Beach, the Army Corps wants to install three groins on the southern portion of the island. The project comes with a \$19 million price tag to be covered by the Army Corps of Engineers and the city.

The Army Corps representatives explained why they believe they have to use sand from Big Pass and why they feel there will not be any negative impacts on navigation in the waterway.

Even some skeptics of the proposal to dredge Big Pass said the public workshops were a good step in the city's long process to renourish Lido Beach. But questions remain about the impact of the project on the marine ecosystem, along with the worries that Siesta



““ *Lido Beach cannot be a sacrificial lamb*

Carl Shoffstall
President
Lido Key Residents Association

””

Scalloping of the beach as a result of erosion is visible on Lido.

Public Beach — the acknowledged top tourism draw in the county — will suffer.

“We’ve been asking for months for someone from the Corps to come and meet with someone other than city [officials],” Jono Miller, an environmental advocate and a former environmental studies instructor at New College, told the *News Leader* after the afternoon workshop on July 23. (Miller recently retired from the New College faculty.) “This is the first time they have shown up and shared their expertise and answered questions. This is a big breakthrough.”

Although the workshops were a “good step,” Miller would like to see an in-depth analysis of the impacts of the project. “I wish they would commit to an environmental impact study.”

Rob Patten, another environmental advocate and former Sarasota County ecologist, still

has questions, too. “This project is one of the largest environmental public works projects ever done in Sarasota County, so it deserves as much scrutiny as it is getting,” Patten said.

Sarasota City Engineer Davis Shaw told meeting attendees that the Army Corps has been working on models to show how the plans will affect both Lido and Siesta. “We would not be moving forward with a project if we thought there would be any negative impacts,” she said. “We want to protect Lido while ensuring the beauty of Siesta.”

CONCERNS ON TWO BEACHES

Peter van Roekens, a Siesta resident and boating advocate, is another person with lingering concerns about the plan. The Army Corps “is determined” to see this project through, van Roekens said, but he has “a list of questions.” After Wednesday’s workshop, van Roekens



A resident asks a question during the July 23 workshop held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

told the *News Leader* he will continue to push for what he calls a “truly independent peer review” of the Army Corps plans and modeling.

Lido residents, however, say the project needs to happen sooner rather than later to protect their eroding beach.

“We are in water with a couple of buildings at the end of the island,” said Lido Key Residents Association President Carl Shoffstall, referring to high tide lapping at those structures.

“Lido Beach cannot be a sacrificial lamb,” Shoffstall added.

On July 22, the Army Corps representatives and DavisShaw met with residents at the Lido Resort. Eight floors below them, an exposed rock groin and the thin shoreline were visible

evidence of the erosion problems at one of the city’s major tourist attractions.

Lido resident Laura Bryg said she is worried that opponents of the Army Corps plans are seeking a consultant who will purposely “poke holes” in the [renourishment project study the Army Corps of Engineers released in June](#).

“Anyone who walks on Lido Key will barely see a beach,” said Elsie Souza, who walks the shoreline daily.

ADDRESSING QUESTIONS

The Army Corps of Engineers has committed to funding 62 percent of the cost of the dredging and renourishment and is proposing a 50-year plan to keep sand on Lido.



The SRQ Media Room at City Hall, where the Army Corps of Engineers’ afternoon meeting was held, was packed.

On Wednesday, the Army Corps representatives said the project is the best way to address a situation that has only grown worse over the decades since the island was created by John Ringling in the 1920s. Smaller channels were plugged in that process, they point out, and the marine landscape was altered.

“By the 1950s, we have the current system we have inherited today. South Lido Key erodes,” Mora said. “[Big Pass] is shifting towards north Siesta Key, and middle Siesta Key accretes and creates the Siesta beach we have now.”

“So today, it is no longer a natural system,” Mora continued. “For a fact, Lido Key erodes, and Big Sarasota Pass pushes southward.”

Army Corps engineers say much of the sand placed on both Longboat Key and Lido Key over the years has ended up in the middle of Siesta near the public beach. They maintain that the new Lido project will not impede that southward flow of sand, a natural pattern for the west coast of Florida.

There are two options for dredging Big Pass, Army Corps representatives explained. One would involve digging the current “ephemeral” channel to a depth of 12 feet. Army Corps officials say that option will do the most to reduce some of the erosional forces exerted on north Siesta.

Van Roekens asked the Army Corps representatives what will happen if something goes wrong during the project.



Milan Mora of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers makes a presentation to the Lido Key Residents Association on July 22.

Mora replied that if the agency is allowed to proceed with the initial renourishment of Lido, it will likely be asked to provide extensive reviews of the results, including demonstrating that the plan is working, before it can apply for permits for subsequent renourishments under the 50-year plan.

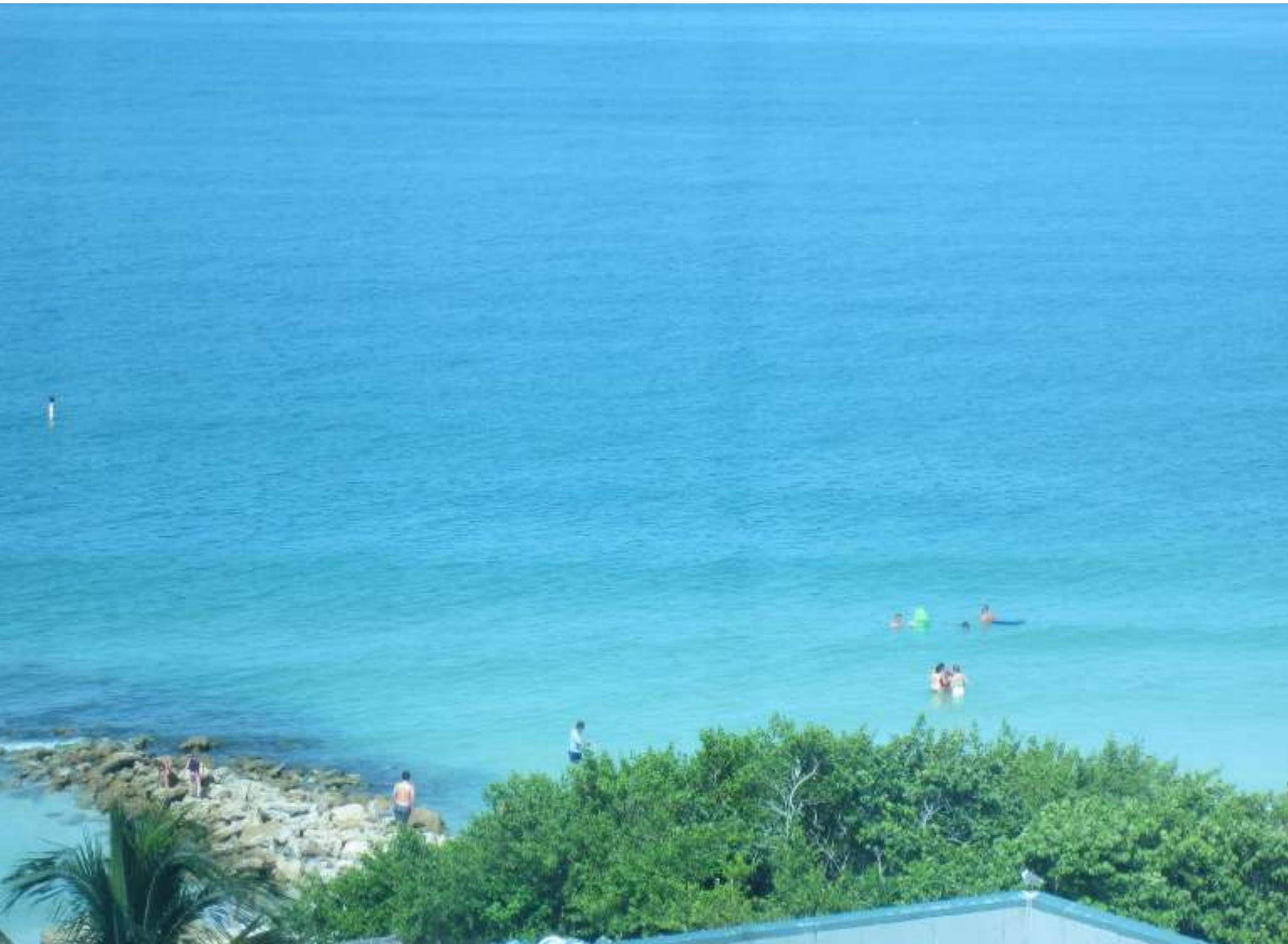
“We believe the state will make us do a lot of monitoring after the project is complete,” Mora said.

“We will have to work closely with [the Florida Department of Environmental Protection

(FDEP)] if something unexpected happens,” added DavisShaw.

Options such as adjusting the size of the groins or filling in areas that were dredged with offshore sand could be possible methods of remediation if problems arise, DavisShaw said.

Army Corps officials contend that the FDEP permit process will necessitate assurances that Siesta Key will not suffer negative impacts. “They will not issue a permit if they think another beach will be adversely impacted,” Mora pointed out.



The rock groin on Lido Beach near the Lido Beach Resort is exposed even at high tide.

A TIMELINE

Army Corps officials this week also went over the timeline for the project, which was initially authorized by Congress in 1999.

The necessary next regulatory steps include wrapping up a public review and environmental analysis and submitting a permit this fall to FDEP, said Mora.

That environmental analysis will not include a more in-depth environmental impact study unless further data shows more significant impacts than those expected, Mora added.

However, a number of Siesta residents and environmental advocates want to see the Army Corps undertake a comprehensive review called an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). They say that would address the issues they have raised.

Patten noted seven major environmental points of concern, ranging from effects on sea turtles to changes in currents. None of those has been analyzed to critics' satisfaction, he told the *News Leader*. "Why have they waited so long to look at the environmental aspects of a project planned for 12 years now?" Patten asked.

If FDEP issues a permit, funding for the first renourishment and the construction of the groins could be secured as early as 2015, Mora said.

WHY BIG PASS SAND?

The Army Corps finalized a feasibility study for the project in 2004. But agency representatives soon found out "we had a problem," Mora explained.

Sufficient quantities of the type of sand acceptable for renourishing Lido were not found offshore, he said. That was compounded by the implementation of stricter environmental standards.

The federal government authorized additional funding for the Army Corps to search for other "borrow sites," but none was found in an approximately 20-mile area offshore.

In 2012, the Army Corps began looking at the feasibility of dredging Big Pass, a possibility raised earlier in a county study, Mora added. "In the county inlet management study, it was recommended to potentially mine the pass. That [study] was peer reviewed by three independent coastal consultants." 

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REMOVING A STIGMA

Beverly Girard, director of Food and Nutrition Services for the Sarasota County Schools, explains the new breakfast program on July 22. Photos by Rachel Hackney

THE SCHOOL BOARD HAS TO HOLD ONE MORE PUBLIC HEARING IN AUGUST BEFORE IT CAN IMPLEMENT A UNIVERSAL FREE BREAKFAST PROGRAM AT EIGHT SCHOOLS

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

At the end of the 2005-06 school year, 33 percent of the students in the Sarasota County Schools were eligible for free or reduced-price meals. By the time the 2013-14 school year ended in late May, that figure was up to 52.18 percent, Beverly Girard, director of Food and Nutrition Services for the district, told the School Board during its regular meeting on July 22.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has funding available for a Universal Free Breakfast Program, and the state over the past two years has proposed districts make use of

“ *It removes a stigma from those children who are attending those schools already.* ”

Beverly Girard
Director
Food and Nutrition Services
Sarasota County Schools

that money, she said. However, “We have not gone in that direction in the past, assuming that our free and reduced [meal eligibility] would start to level off, and it has certainly not.”

On July 22, the School Board held the first of two required public hearings on implementing the Universal Free Breakfast Program in eight district schools for the 2014-15 school year. After the second hearing at the board's regular meeting on Aug. 5, the program is expected to be adopted.

To qualify, a school has to show that 80 percent or more of its students are receiving free or reduced-price meals, Girard said. After the program begins, Girard explained, any child attending one of the participating schools who wishes to eat breakfast for free will be allowed to do so.



“It removes a stigma from those children who are attending those schools already,” Girard added. “We know that children who participate in the [free and reduced-price] breakfast program have higher levels of attention at school [and] there’s less tardiness,” she noted. Research has proven improved academic performance by those students and the need for them to make fewer trips to the school clinics.

Most of the funding will be coming from the federal government, she pointed out, with the state picking up a small portion of the expense.

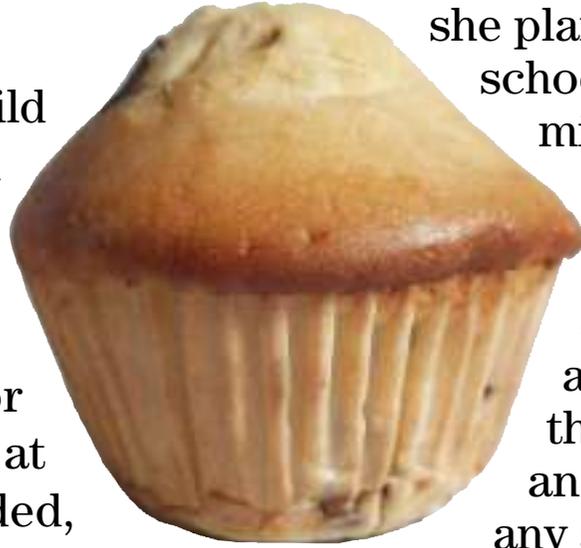


(From left) Superintendent Lori White, School Board Vice Chairman Frank Kovach and School Board member Caroline Zucker listen to a speaker during the July 22 meeting.

The qualifying district schools are Alta Vista, Emma E. Booker, Gocio, Tuttle and Wilkinson elementary schools; Booker Middle School; [Triad North](#) and Triad South; and both the elementary and middle levels of the [Suncoast School for Innovative Studies](#).

“There’s nothing worse than a child sitting there with their stomach grumbling, trying to participate in class,” board Chairwoman Jane Goodwin pointed out. Opening up the opportunity for free breakfasts for all students at the qualifying schools, she added, “certainly takes some of that stigma away” from children who have been getting free and reduced-price breakfasts.

“I think it sounds like a wonderful program,” Vice Chairman Frank Kovach said.



New board member Bridget Ziegler concurred. “I’m glad that we’re able to provide that.”

When board member Shirley Brown asked about the possibility of more schools becoming eligible for the program, Girard said she plans to investigate whether other schools, “with just a little tiny bump might be able to come [on board].”

Glenallen Elementary School in North Port is just below the 80-percent mark, Girard noted, adding that she plans to talk with the principal about the situation and learn whether she can offer any assistance.

According to the backup agenda material for the July 22 meeting, all parents of students at the participating schools will be notified in writing about the Universal Free Breakfast Program. 

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WAITING FOR WINTER



Sarasota Police Department Officer Dubendorff, Sgt. Lori Jaress and the new homeless caseworker, Calvin Collins, brief the City Commission on July 21. They are members of the Homeless Outreach Team. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

ANALYSIS: CITY, COUNTY COMMISSIONS PART WAYS ON COME-AS-YOU-ARE HOMELESS SHELTER PROPOSAL

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

It was a pleasant morning to be downtown Tuesday, July 22. There was an open-air press conference conducted by the Sarasota police chief in Five Points Park, a site shunned not so long ago as a veritable tea room of homelessness. New sod lay behind orange construction mesh, the setting was shady and, thanks to the heavy police presence, not a homeless person was in sight.

It was quite a contrast to the situation a couple of years ago when City Commissioner Suzanne Atwell walked through the

park and then told a television crew she did not feel safe with all the homeless people around. Her comments touched a nerve in the community, setting off a cascade of events.

A new city manager arrived in town, and he pledged to address the homelessness problems with a task force. That group's work

was promptly halted by Florida's Sunshine Laws.

Later, after Atwell and fellow City Commissioner Susan Chapman listened to

“ *At some point we cannot take responsibility for those who will not accept help.* ”

Maj. Ethan Frizzell
The Salvation Army
Sarasota

downtown merchants complain about how homeless and vagrant people were driving away customers, they were slapped with a Sunshine suit for having been in the same room together while a public issue was being discussed.

Meanwhile, the population migration continued to grow as the weather worsened up north. While this produced the normal seasonal influx of homeless people, the numbers seemed larger. In January, when the annual homeless census was conducted, and then in February, when the bed-tax dollars were counted, hard numbers backed up the “guess-timates.” It was proving to be a bonanza season for tourists and homelessness alike.

A Texas-based consultant was hired by the city and county last year to devise a plan to

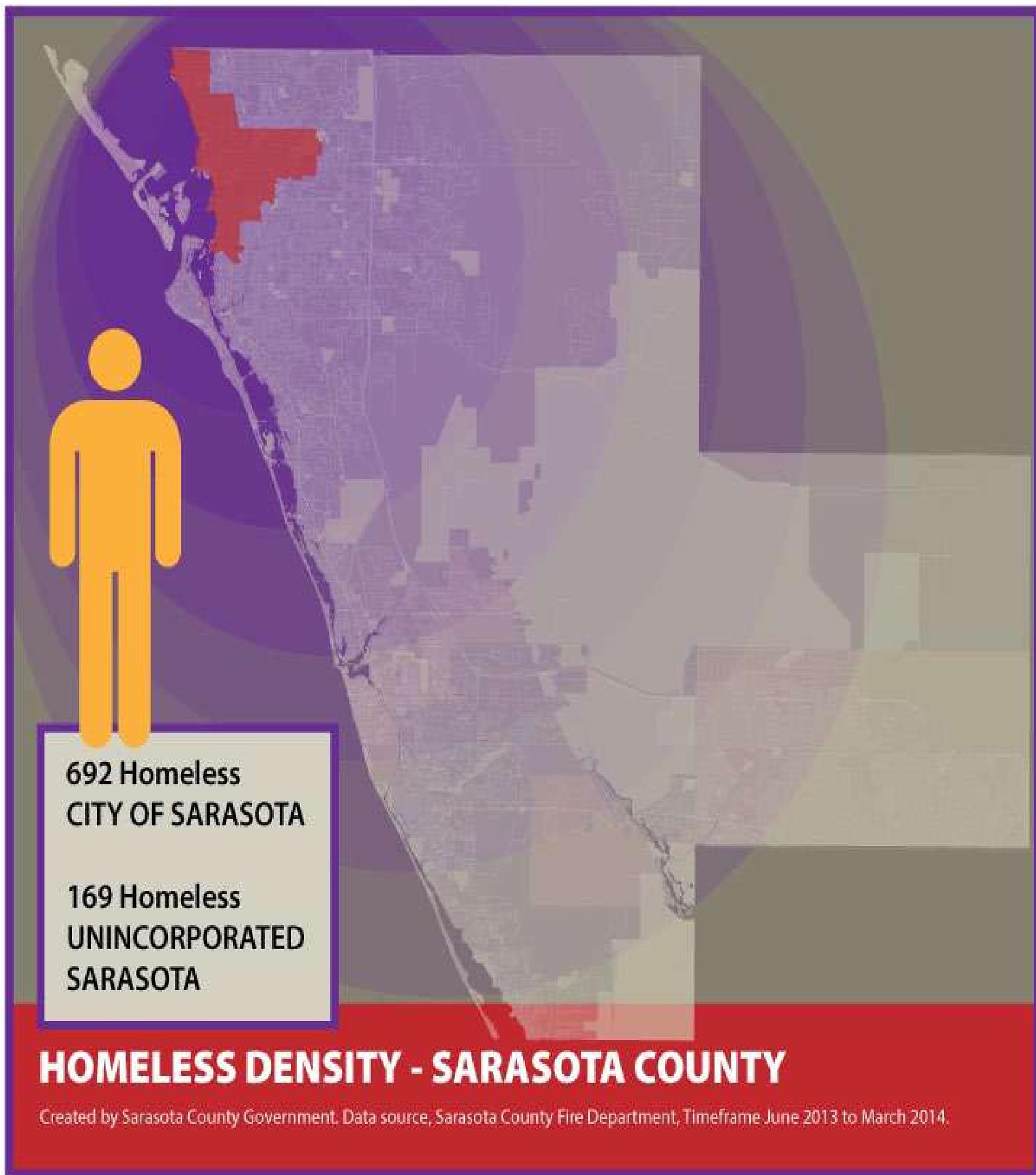
somehow abate the problem of the “visibly homeless.” In the meantime, merchants and landlords traded horror stories, vandals were tearing up landscaping to make trinkets that they could force on tourists as “gifts” and politicians were getting panicky again. This time Atwell was not alone in feeling the heat.

The consultant virtually demanded that any shelter be constructed near downtown, and neighbors virtually demanded it be someplace else. When asked for public documents to back up his assertions, the consultant told the city commissioners to make public records requests about facilities in other cities.

After two Sarasota sites were investigated for a shelter location, the \$9 million price tag turned official enthusiasm limp.



Homeless people gather on Lemon Avenue in late June. Photo by Norman Schimmel



A graphic presented to the City and County commissions in April showed statistics about the homeless populations in the City of Sarasota and in the unincorporated part of the county. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The day before my July 22 stroll through Five Points Park, the City Commission pulled the plug on the in-town shelter concept. It was a unanimous vote. Three city commissioners who had steadfastly held for the shelter quietly flipped their votes to “No.”

EASY TO SAY ‘NO’ NOW

The driver of this chain of events has been the inrush of vagrants and the homeless into the city. A couple of weeks before Christmas 2012 and shortly after Atwell’s TV interview, a parade of Gillespie Park residents complained to the city commissioners that — in the words of Louise Tracy — “It’s become a homeless camp.” They offered pictures to back up their testimony about an area near their homes.

Police began to patrol there, and the vagrants moved on. It became a variation

of Whac-a-Mole. Cops chased homeless encampments from Florida Avenue to Central Avenue, from Five Points to the railroad right of way near North Washington Boulevard. Eventually, the City Commission told the police not to enter camps of homeless people unless called upon to enforce the law.

Throughout this whirlwind, The Salvation Army remained steady to its core mission, even though it started operating well beyond its nominal capacity. A new commander, Maj. Ethan Frizzell, began tinkering with services and fees. He is now about to embark on a 24-bed “triage” facility similar to what is used in Fort Myers.

While there are a number of social service agencies working with the vagrants and homeless, Frizzell’s population is the largest among them. He normally is juggling 240 people in different programs, making slow but steady



Volunteers working on the national Point in Time census of homeless people counted residents at the Trinity Without Borders sanctuary on North Washington Boulevard in late January. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

progress. He told the city commissioners July 21, “We are moving one individual or family out per day into housing.”

Frizzell would like the city to repurpose an old police substation at 890 Central Ave. into what he called a “progress center or welcome center.” He said it “needs some building upgrades, showers for instance. We would like to be able to coordinate with other agencies on the site. And we would like to be open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.” That was part of a seven-step initiative he proposed to attack the problem of vagrancy and homelessness.

Converting the building would cost an estimated \$395,000. While it would handle only one-tenth of the population of the proposed shelter, it would cost about 3 percent of the estimate for the shelter, in part, because the

city owns the land and the building is already standing.

Mayor Willie Shaw was concerned about the chronic homeless. “There are persons on the Rosemary [District] side of Central Avenue who will not walk over to the 890 building,” he said. “We’re still not addressing the issue of the chronic homeless person. You can’t make them [use the facility].”

Sarasota’s homeless in the past were primarily local people. Census after census found the large majority of homeless and vagrants reached in what used to be a biennial count had ties to the community. That has changed, leading Shaw, among others, to start talking about offering homeless services just to people with local connections.



Homeless people routinely gathered on Central Avenue in early 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Sarasota's seasonal homeless are gone now. The summer heat and evening mosquitos are strong deterrents to living outside. But as the first snows of winter creep south as they did this year, so will the vagrants and homeless. In six months, it is highly likely the problem will be as bad or worse than it was this winter and the winter before that.

In other words, with the shelter plan in ruins, how will the county handle the next winter wave? The City and County commissions are in the midst of their budget deliberations, and neither is setting aside the resources necessary to build and staff any kind of facility for homeless and vagrant people.

BALL IN COUNTY'S COURT

The months-long city-county discussion regarding how to address homelessness and vagrancy displayed two entirely different

ways governments make decisions. The county is responsible for health and human services and the Health Department, and it provides millions in grants for local social service agencies. Florida cities do not take such action or offer such services.

The county does have the people and systems in place to provide for another social assistance agency. It also is responsible for criminal justice facilities, including the jail. At any one time, it is estimated that more than one-fifth of the jail population comprises homeless people or vagrants, making the jail a very expensive shelter.

The city, by contrast, has no jail and no social service budget. It has spent more than \$100,000 this year on the consultant and has created a three-person Homeless Outreach Team now working the streets. While the



Homelessness consultant Robert Marbut presents his recommendations during a joint meeting of the City and County commissions on Nov. 25, 2013. Photo by Norman Schimmel

city has declared no veteran will be homeless in Sarasota, it must rely on The Salvation Army's shelter and social programs to keep that promise.

Thus, the city by itself is virtually defenseless against the repeated onslaughts of vagrants and homeless people. The condition has been made worse by a Miami federal judge's decision in a case named after Michael Pottinger. He was a homeless man tired of being arrested for sleeping, eating and going to the bathroom in public. His case was picked up by the American Civil Liberties Union. A federal judge found the repeated arrests for "life sustaining activities" constituted "cruel and unusual punishment." After a decade of hearings and appeals, the resulting Pottinger ruling bans arrests for these daily activities unless the offenders are offered the option of shelter.

The ruling was relaxed slightly in January. The *Miami Herald* reported on Jan. 9, 2014, "The homeless will no longer be permitted to build fires in parks to cook or build makeshift tents to sleep in. They can still sleep on sidewalks, but only if they don't block the right of way for pedestrians. Exposing themselves to go to the bathroom or to clean up would still be allowed, but not if they're within a quarter mile of a public restroom."

While working with the county to create a shelter and avoid the onus of the Pottinger rules, the City Commission instructed the city police to suspend enforcement of a variety of ordinances and laws. But without the promise of a shelter to avoid running afoul of the Pottinger ruling, the City Commission will be forced to revisit that instruction.

Two new members will be coming on the City Commission because Commissioners Paul Caragulio and Shannon Snyder are resigning on Nov. 18 to run against each other for the same open County Commission office. Their resignations are necessary because of Florida's "Resign to Run" Law.

Two replacement city commissioners will be appointed in mid-December. Thus, Caragiulo and Snyder will not face the consequences of their decisions between now and then. That might explain their change in stance from pro- to anti-shelter. It could be a campaign strategy instead of a policy decision.

Come December, Commissioner Atwell may again find Five Points Park a figurative personal "no-fly zone," and Gillespie Park may again be swamped with homeless people, sharing that situation with communities along the Seaboard Coastline Railroad right of way or those near the Celery Fields off Fruitville Road.

Furthermore, this is a national problem, because a fraction of the vagrants and homeless are mentally ill. While 500,000 public and private mental health beds have been eliminated in the past 20 years, 1.5 million new jail and prison cells have been created. It is estimated that 20 percent of jail and prison beds hold the mentally ill.

Every night on Central Avenue, next to an historic cemetery, the vagrants and homeless reportedly hold a party. The site is only a stone's throw from The Salvation Army facility on 10th Street, which they shun. As Salvation Army Maj. Frizzell noted on July 21, "Some of them walked out of housing to be on Central. Every city has that. At some point we cannot take responsibility for those who will not accept help." 



ONE MONTH TO GO

Commissioners Joe Barbetta (left, on the right side of the table) and Nora Patterson (right, on the right side of the table) will be leaving the board in November. Photo by Norman Schimmel

WITH REPUBLICAN PRIMARY LOOMING, SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION CANDIDATES SQUARE OFF AT TIGER BAY

By Cooper Levey-Baker

Associate Editor

As they did two weeks ago, growth management and urban sprawl dominated the conversation at this week's Tiger Bay Club meeting, a showcase for the four candidates vying for the District 4 seat on the Sarasota County Commission. Republicans Alan Maio and Lourdes Ramirez, who will square off in the Aug. 26 primary, debated the topics with Democrat Ray Porter and write-in candidate John Minder, who will face either Maio or Ramirez in November.

The discussion, moderated by WSRQ owner and host Susan Nilon, touched early and often on traffic congestion at University Parkway

and Interstate 75, branching out into road impact fees, the Sarasota 2050 plan and public transportation. Maio disputed the "doom and gloom" predictions for traffic around the new Mall at University Town Center, noting that the road network around the structure is already expanding. Ramirez called for a return to previous road impact fees, which have been slashed by the current board. She argued that is the only solution to the area's road woes.

When asked to grade the county's infrastructure, no candidate gave a mark higher than a C-plus.

Porter called the I-75 interchange a “traffic nightmare” and blamed the sitting County Commission for not planning better for the increased burden. He said his experience as an investigative reporter would have led him to ask tougher questions. “If I had been on the board years ago, this probably wouldn’t have happened,” he told the audience.

Nilon relayed a question submitted by each candidate. Ramirez asked if the candidates would support the proposed changes to the 2050 fiscal neutrality rules, which seek to ensure that new development pays for any increased burden on county resources. She said, “No,” arguing that developers who receive additional density allowances under the plan should be forced to prove their neighborhoods are not costing county taxpayers elsewhere.



Alan Maio. Contributed photo by Barbara Banks



John Minder speaks to the city and county commissioners during a joint meeting on April 1. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Maio told the audience he would not vote to completely eliminate fiscal neutrality, which led to heckling. Dan Lobeck, an attorney vociferously opposed to altering 2050, shouted, "That's not the issue!" He earlier accused Maio of not answering a question he had posed. When Nilon jokingly threatened to hit Lobeck, applause broke out. "What I need is one moderator," Maio said.

Without naming names, Maio later criticized those in the community who accuse elected officials of being "liars, cheats and crooks,"

saying the rhetoric scares off companies considering relocating to the region. "I've had to sit there and defend our beautiful county," he added, "because people say to me, 'I want to move in 50 people. Why are you people so angry?'"

He also slammed the media for focusing on his ties to developers and their investment in his campaign. "As a community, we tend to just pick the extremely titillating, sexy, little sound bites to try to ridicule somebody," he said earlier in the debate.



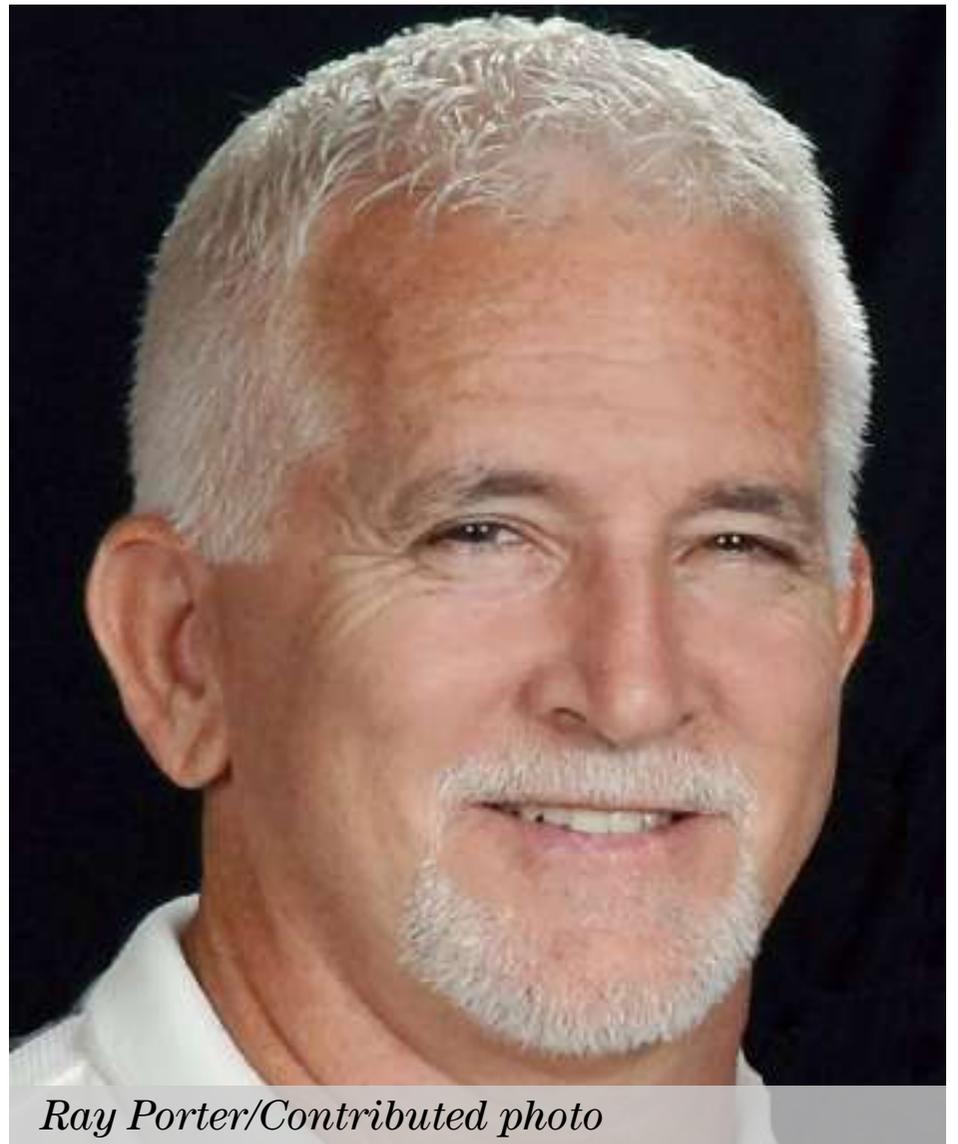
Lourdes Ramirez/Contributed photo

On public transportation, Ramirez called for more frequent bus routes, which have improved access on Siesta Key, and better shelters for riders. It's "terrible" to see people standing in ditches waiting for a ride, she said.

Maio agreed on the need for more, better shelters. Porter said Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) saves him and his wife hours of time driving their sons around town, and he praised the bus system for reducing car trips and lessening the amount of carbon dioxide in the air. Despite that, no candidate said he or she had used SCAT since at least 2000.

Porter called County Administrator Tom Harmer's decision to fire Ethics and Compliance Officer Steve Uebelacker "troubling." While he understands that people are hired and fired all the time, Porter said, "we don't want to have a county that has any ethical questions." Maio disagreed with the other candidates, who all supported the idea of an independent ethics commission. He said Sarasota Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller Karen Rushing has established a solid process for handling ethical questions.

Delivering their final pitches, Ramirez called herself a "fiscal conservative" comfortable

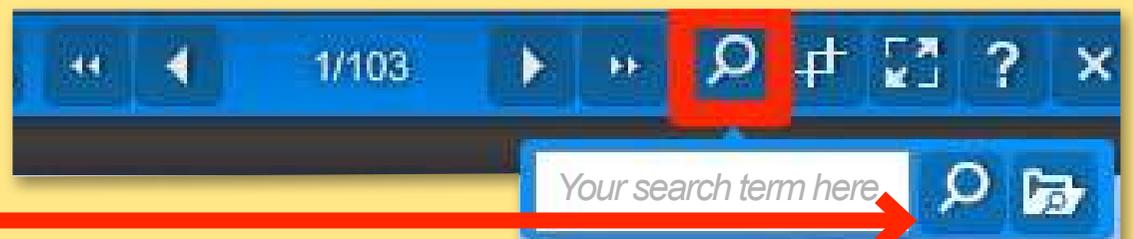


Ray Porter/Contributed photo

with bridging the gap between neighborhood groups and developers, while Porter again emphasized his experience as a journalist, asking tough questions while covering "hundreds and hundreds of hours" of government meetings. Echoing his earlier point about civility, Maio said he'd bring the county "a giant dose of positive passion."

Absentee ballots are in the mail. 

QUICK TIP



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HIGHER SCHOOL SAFETY EXPENSES

Fencing and gates allow school leaders to control public access to campuses. Photo by Scott Proffitt

THE SARASOTA SCHOOL DISTRICT WILL PAY 10 PERCENT MORE FOR ITS SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN THE 2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

Providing School Resource Officers at all public middle and high schools — including a second officer at Riverview High — will cost the Sarasota County School District 10 percent more in the 2014-15 school year than it did in the 2013-14 year, Superintendent Lori White told School Board members during their regular meeting on July 22.

The total amount budgeted for the next school year is \$1,347,985, according to a slide White showed the board.

The expense for the 2013-14 school year was \$1,225,300.

In February 2013, Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight informed the board of his decision to put his officers only in schools in the unincorporated part of the county, starting with the 2013-14 school year. Knight felt the cities should staff schools in their jurisdictions, Sheriff's Office Community Affairs Manager Wendy Rose explained

“ So there has been additional pressure put on the [district's] general fund.”

Lori White
Superintendent
Sarasota County Schools



ing with the 2013-14 school year. Knight felt the cities should staff schools in their jurisdictions, Sheriff's Office Community Affairs Manager Wendy Rose explained

to *The Sarasota News Leader* in July 2013. The district already had partnerships with the Police Departments in North Port and Venice to provide School Resource Officers (SROs) in those municipalities, but the School Board had to work with the Sarasota Police Department (SPD) to arrange for SROs in Sarasota schools. The split of the SPD expense was 63 percent for the district, 37 percent for the Sarasota Police Department. That ratio remains intact for the 2014-15 school year, according to one of White's July 22 slides. However, the cost of the 3.5 equivalent SROs in the City of Sarasota has increased by 11 percent for next year to \$346,670.

If the district had maintained one SRO at Riverview, the increase in its SRO agreement with the Sheriff's Office would have risen by 6.1 percent, White explained. However, because the district is adding an SRO at Riverview — the system's largest school, with 2,560 students during the 2013-14 school year

— the cost is going up 14.2 percent, she noted, to \$599,088.

The expense for the Venice SROs is rising 2.2 percent, to \$128,900; the North Port expense is going up 4.3 percent, to \$273,326.

The Sheriff's Office provides 12 deputies for the program, while the Venice Police Department supplies two SROs and the North Port Police Department provides four.

The district's 2014-15 Safe School funding allocation from the state will be 11.5 percent lower than the 2013-14 level, White continued. "So there has been additional pressure put on the [district's] general fund."

Although Chief Deputy Financial Officer Al Weidner built an increase into the tentative budget for the 2015 fiscal year, White said, the expense of the SRO program "is exceeding even what he anticipated." That means an extra \$122,000 will be coming out of the general fund to pay for it, she added.

Controlled Access



Unrestricted Access



New and rebuilt schools in Sarasota County feature single points of entry for the public, while some older schools still have less restrictive access. Images courtesy Sarasota County Schools

“I have heard a lot in the community these past couple of weeks about the need for an SRO officer in every elementary school,” board member Caroline Zucker pointed out. When Zucker asked how much more that would cost the district, White replied, “Probably over \$4 million,” adding that because of budget concerns among the law enforcement agencies, she did not believe any of them would be able to maintain a 50/50 split for the cost of

more officers. Therefore, the district probably would have to pick up the entire expense, she said, including benefits.

School Board candidate Velton Hodges, who is vying for the District 1 seat previously held by long-time board member Carol Todd, told the *News Leader* early this month that he believes “a licensed, uniformed, armed, trained law enforcement officer” should be on every elementary school campus.

Summary of Program Costs

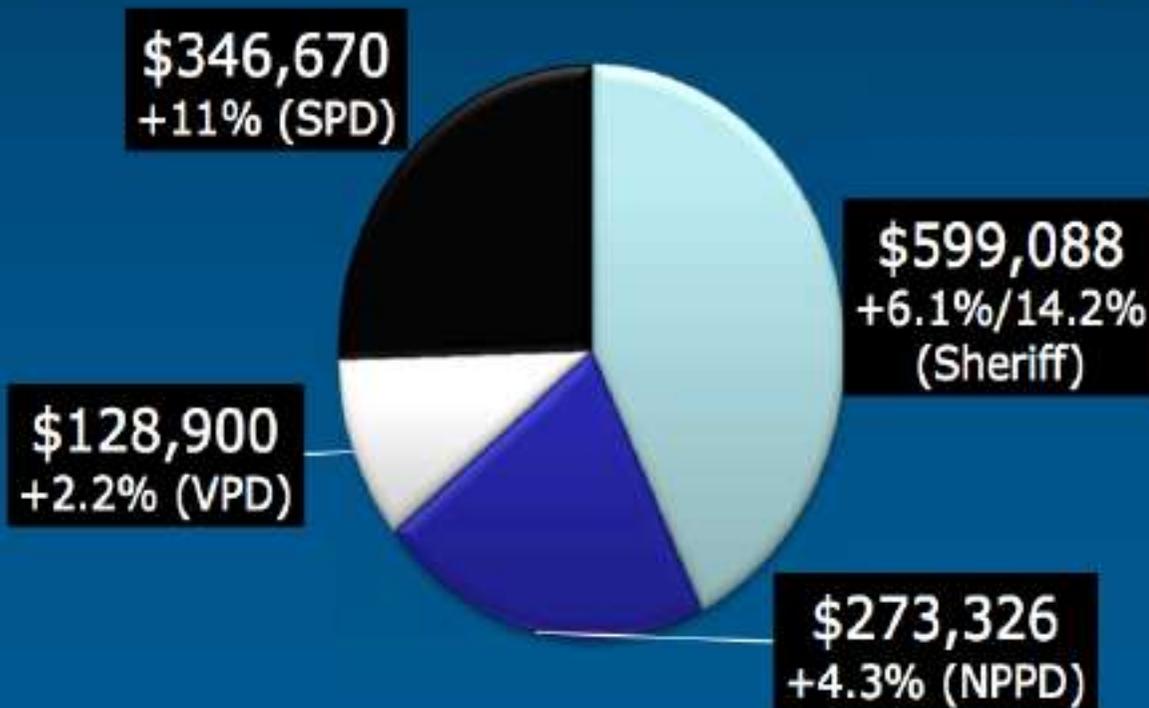


SARASOTA
COUNTY SCHOOLS

2014-15 Total: \$1,347,985 +10%

District % / Agency %

- Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office 50/50
- City of North Port Police Department 50/50
- City of Venice Police Department 50/50
- City of Sarasota Police Department 63/37



A graphic shows the breakdown of costs for School Resource Officers in the 2014-15 school year for the Sarasota County Schools. Image courtesy Sarasota County Schools

OTHER MEASURES

In response to a question from board member Shirley Brown, White explained that the district has taken a number of steps over the past several years to make its schools safer. All new and rebuilt schools have been designed with single points of entry, which makes it easier for staffs to manage the admission of people to those campuses, White said.

“Even with our older schools, where we’re not rebuilding, we provide fencing and gates that really establish a controlled single entry,” White continued. Further, the district has more than 4,000 video surveillance cameras, which have been upgraded with new software that provides better images, she pointed out. Staff members check the cameras each day to ensure they are functioning properly, she added.

Each district school also has an enhanced classroom door-locking system, White noted. When she visits classrooms, she continued, she watches principals pull out their keys to unlock the doors. “Not anyone can [just] walk into a classroom.”

More cameras and fencing are included in the next fiscal year budget, she added, and the training of staff members and principals will be enhanced in cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

“I think the door-locking device is a very big, important thing,” Chairwoman Jane Goodwin said. Even if every school had an SRO, Goodwin noted, statistics have shown that an officer is not always going to be in the location where an incident occurs. 

THE SARASOTA

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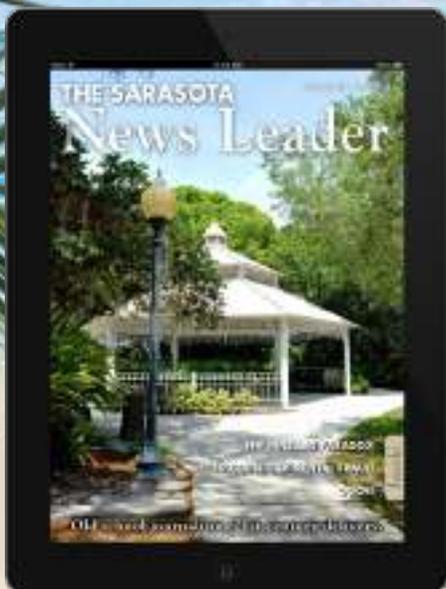
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AUDITORIUM'S FATE DISCUSSED

Low-swept with high ceilings, the Payne Park Auditorium is a classic example of the Sarasota School of Architecture. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

A NUMBER OF IDEAS ARE PROPOSED AT A MEETING ON A PAYNE PARK FACILITY, INCLUDING ALLOWING CITY NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS TO MEET THERE, BUT THE CITY HAS NO BUDGET FOR RENOVATIONS

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

A sparse group of neighbors turned up for a discussion of the future of the Payne Park Auditorium on Tuesday evening, July 22.

The Sarasota School of Architecture structure was built in 1962 as a community meeting space for residents of the mobile home park that once surrounded it. Deciding the future of the structure is one of this year's strategic City of Sarasota objectives.

The land was donated by the Payne family for a city park, and a spring training baseball stadium was built there in the 1920s with a space set aside for "tin-can tourists." People who started out in "tin-can trailers" became

permanent residents in mobile homes, remaining on the site until the early 21st century, when they were slowly moved out so a large public park could be created in the center of Sarasota.

Opening day for Payne Park was Oct. 6, 2007, when a well-attended citywide party introduced residents to the new facilities. A number of neighborhood associations and churches, as well as the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations, cooperated with the city in the grand opening.

The auditorium is now more than half a century old. Although it has been maintained, many of its mechanical

“ Right now nobody knows what it looks like in here, and it's beautiful.

Pat Kolodgy
Former President
Alta Vista Neighborhood Association



features are dated. In a “visioning process” started last year, city staff asked if the building should be razed and a new one put in its place. A computer survey indicated that by a 3:1 margin, people wanted to keep the old structure. And by an 85-to-15 vote, they said historical designation should be sought for the building. That would make it eligible for various grants — major and minor — that could pay for renovations.

Attendees of the “visioning process” recommended a variety of improvements. Fundamentally, the auditorium is a big open space with a concession stand, a stage, a large wooden dance floor, restrooms and two smaller rooms. It was used for decades for Saturday night dances.

Among the new ideas proposed this week was replacing the concession stand with a caterer’s kitchen to facilitate wedding receptions and other gala events for up to 600 people. Retrofitting the facility for Internet service

and adding fiber optics and other modern communications equipment was proposed as well. Removing the covers from the boarded-up windows at the tops of the walls to let in natural light was another suggestion.

It takes about \$140,000 annually to keep the building in use, in part, because it is not energy-efficient. The installation of a more modern, “zoned” air conditioning system was another proposal.

There is no money in the city budget to pay for any upgrades. And there are no estimates on expenses for any or all of the proposed improvements. “The next phase is costing out the renovation of the auditorium and then adding that to the master plan of the overall park,” said Todd Kucharski, public works general manager, during the session this week. The city has no independent parks department.

One proposal that kept recurring called for opening up the facility to use by city-recognized

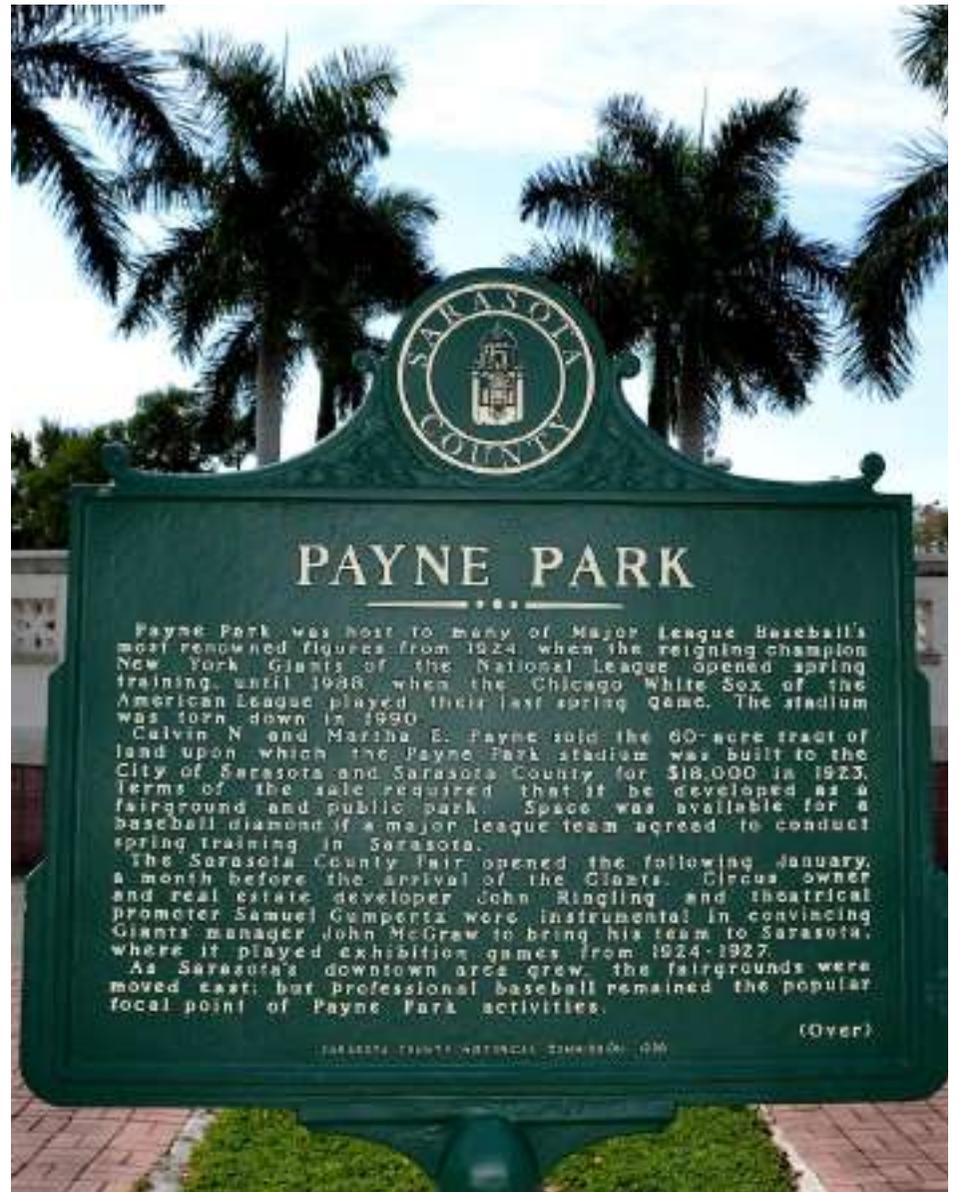


While the crowd was small on July 22, the ideas flew about how the building could be adapted to modern needs. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

neighborhood associations for their meetings and other events. “There is a great lack of civic meeting space in the city,” said Kate Lowman, board member of the Laurel Park Neighborhood Association. “We used to meet here, but then the city wanted to charge us and we couldn’t afford it.”

Her comments were echoed by Pat Kolodgy, former president of the Alta Vista Neighborhood Association, which sponsored the park’s grand opening in 2007. “Right now nobody knows what it looks like in here, and it’s beautiful,” she said, adding that opening up the building for neighborhood civic meetings could lead to spreading the word that the auditorium is available for public use.

Kucharski suggested a benefactor might arise to donate money for the restoration of the auditorium in return for naming rights. Recently, the city accepted a donation for playground equipment and an endowment for maintenance in return for renaming the park under the eastern side of the John Ringling Causeway Bridge. 



A City of Sarasota historic marker explains part of Payne Park’s Major League Baseball role in the community decades ago. Photo by Norman Schimmel



City staff conducts a ‘visioning meeting’ on the Payne Park Auditorium in early December 2013. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD



Chairs for visitors surround the body of water at Warm Mineral Springs. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

ON AUG. 20, THE COUNTY COMMISSION WILL BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE SALE OF WARM MINERAL SPRINGS TO THE CITY OF NORTH PORT

By Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor

With the Sarasota County Commission on its summer recess until Aug. 18, Chairman Charles Hines has confirmed to the North Port City Commission that the board will discuss the city's offer to purchase Warm Mineral Springs when it holds its next budget workshop, which is set for Aug. 20.

The letter adds that the county board "will be able to take action on a purchase contract should the City Commission approve a contract for our consideration."

On July 21, Mayor James Blucher of North Port sent Hines a letter saying the [City Commission had agreed to purchase the county's interest in the Springs](#) for \$2.75 million,

including all closing costs, subject to the following conditions:

- The city must follow all state statute requirements for such transactions by a municipality.
- A final resolution and contract for the purchase and sale will be brought to the City Commission with authorization to close on the deal after the County Commission considers the offer.
- The county "will grant/assign/empower the City to continue the current contract with National and State Park Concessions pending a sale and closing of Warm Mineral Springs to the City."



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

Hines added in his July 23 letter that he had been advised County Administrator Tom Harmer and North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis “are in regular communication with respect to the sale.”

Hines further indicated that Harmer and County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh are collaborating on the terms of the contract regarding the city’s purchase of the Springs “so that the two commissions can move forward expeditiously.”

Blucher added in his letter, “We believe that it is important to prevent or at least limit the closing of Warm Mineral Springs to the greatest extent possible.”

The short-term management contract with National and State Park Concessions is set to expire on Aug. 31, according to the agreement for Warm Mineral Springs approved earlier this year by the city and the county boards.

In a July 16 memo to county Parks and Recreation Director Carolyn Brown, DeMarsh wrote that he and his staff have considered a request from the City Commission to extend that short-term contract. However, the county “cannot be party to any extension [of it] under Section 125.35, Florida Statutes,” he pointed out. “The County is required to utilize a competitive process when it conveys an interest in County property to a private entity.”

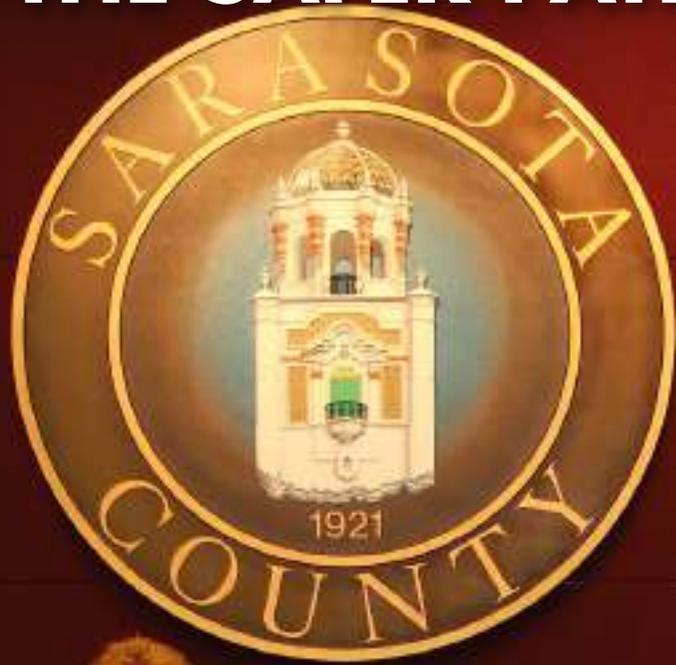
DeMarsh added that the contract existing between the two local governments and National and State Park Concessions “did not allow for the ability to extend the term.”

On July 8, Brown emailed the County Commission the latest Warm Mineral Springs revenue report she had received from the City of North Port. Since National and State Park Concessions began its operation on April 9, she wrote, the total amount collected was \$353,321. 



Tom Harmer is the county administrator. Photo by Norman Schimmel

THE SAFER PATH



(From left) County Commissioners Charles Hines, Christine Robinson and Nora Patterson. File photo

BECAUSE OF FEDERAL RULE CHANGES REGARDING CERTAIN AFFORDABLE HOUSING LOANS, THE COUNTY COMMISSION TAKES THE FIRST STEP TOWARD MOVING FUNDS FROM A DOWN PAYMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNT TO ONE FOR HOUSING REHABILITATION

By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Although County Commissioner Joe Barbetta voiced frustration about the need for the change, he joined his fellow board members this month in supporting action that is expected to result in the addition of \$600,000 to a fund that assists low-income families with rehabilitation of housing.

The unanimous County Commission vote to advertise the change

was spurred by the Sarasota City Commission's reaction to new federal rules that would leave the city on the hook for repayment of funds to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under certain circumstances.

The final county vote is expected in late August or September on the formal transfer of the money from the Down

“ One of the big concerns that everyone has is the severe limitations that are being put on the HOME program.”

Don Hadsell
Director
Sarasota Office of Housing
And Community Development



Payment Assistance Program to the Housing Rehabilitation Program overseen by the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), Tom Polk, director of the county's Planning and Development Services Office, said during the County Commission's regular meeting on July 9.

Barbetta told Don Hadsell, director of the OHCD, "I'm all for rehabilitation, don't get me wrong." However, Barbetta said he felt more of the people who qualify for assistance need the money for down payments.

The board vote late this summer is expected to resolve an issue that arose months ago.

On April 7, Tim Litchet, director of the city's Neighborhood and Development Services Department, explained to the City

Commission that HUD's HOME program is the largest source of federal block grants for state and local governments. It is designed to create affordable housing for low-income families. He added that the city receives HOME program funds on behalf of the Sarasota Consortium, which includes the county and the Cities of Sarasota, North Port and Venice.

In July 2013, the County Commission approved an amendment to its 2013 fiscal year Sarasota Action Plan to transfer \$600,000 in federal HOME funding from the rehabilitation program to the Down Payment Assistance Program.

In February, Hadsell told the board members that none of the money had been distributed because of rule changes originating with HUD. In the past, Hadsell explained, if problems that



Don Hadsell addresses the County Commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel

arose with loans through the Down Payment Assistance Program were outside the control of the local governments involved, HUD “was willing to overlook or forgive those indiscretions. ... Now they’re coming back and saying we need to repay the funds.”

CITY ACTION

On April 14, then-Sarasota Mayor Shannon Snyder wrote County Commission Chairman Charles Hines to say that the city did not want to take a risk on such repayments as a result of the new HUD rules. Snyder pointed out that those new HOME regulations “reinforce that all homebuyers must remain in the HOME assisted unit for a length of time that HUD calls the ‘affordability period,’” which is between five and 15 years, “depending

upon the amount of HOME assistance that is provided.”

Among the situations in which the city could be forced to repay the federal government, Snyder continued, are the following:

- The homeowner vacates the property prior to the end of the affordability period by abandoning it or leasing it to someone else.
- The homeowner dies prior to the end of the affordability period, leaving the home to an heir who is not income-eligible, or the heir leases the property, and it is no longer owner-occupied.

Snyder added, “It is inconceivable that all of the families receiving the Down Payment Assistance will meet the complete required



Commissioner Joe Barbetta/File photo

HUD affordability period and if the Down Payment Assistance Program begins again it is virtually certain that the City of Sarasota would have to repay funds from its general fund to the federal government.”

Snyder added in his letter that the City Commission would prefer an amendment to the Sarasota Action Plan to eliminate HOME funding for the Down Payment Assistance Program. The city also wanted to move the \$600,000 set aside for down payment assistance into the Housing Rehabilitation Program, the letter said. “HUD does not have an affordability period for homes repaired with HOME funds and so the financial risk described above would no longer exist,” the letter says.

If the County Commission does not want to support the reallocation of the funds, Snyder continued, the City Commission wants the County Commission to indemnify the City of Sarasota “for any Down Payment Assistance loans that HUD ultimately determines do not complete the entire required affordability period.”

“I don’t even want to be on the hook for our percentage of [any repayments],” Commissioner Nora Patterson said on July 9. “I think it’s ridiculous.”

The county should ask its national lobbying firm to address the issue, she added.

“I agree with you,” Hadsell responded, adding that he had just attended a meeting of community development directors from across the country. “One of the big concerns that everyone has is the severe limitations that are being put on the HOME program,” he said.

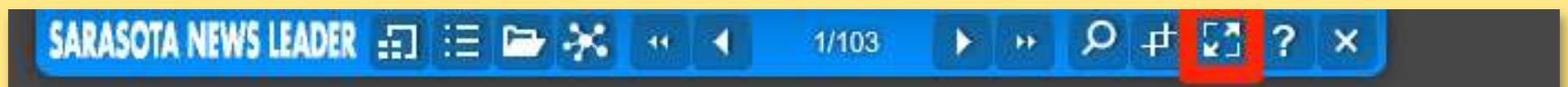
However, Hadsell continued, “The problem is moving anything through Congress right now.”

Snyder’s letter pointed out that the interlocal agreement between the city and county that established the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development “requires the City Commission and County Commission to agree on the uses of HOME funds so it is important that we reach an agreement on the use of [them] quickly so that OHCD can begin to obligate HOME funds to our residents in need and meet the federal deadline for the commitment of funds.”

That deadline is Oct. 31, the letter noted.

Patterson made the motion to advertise the amendment to the Sarasota Action Plan. Commissioner Carolyn Mason seconded it. 

QUICK TIP



For the best viewing experience on a computer click the  icon in the menubar to zoom to fullscreen mode.

A CHANNEL, AMBASSADORS AND CITY KEYS



A current aerial shows the house at 4449 Bay Shore Road and the bay. Image from Google Maps

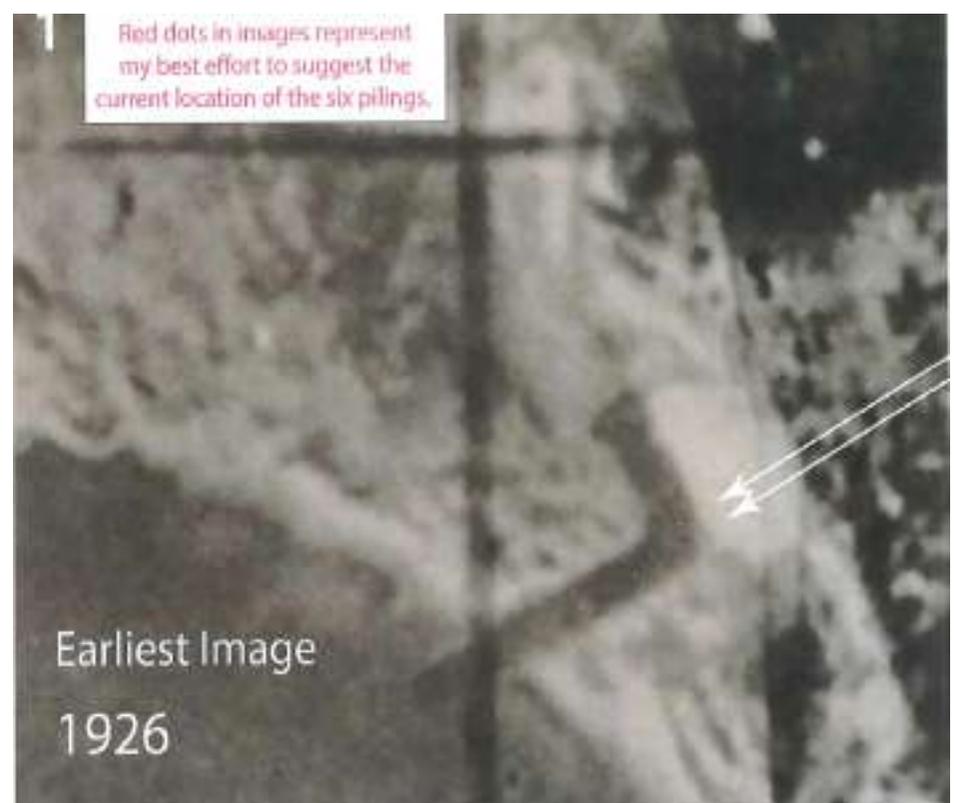
A CITY RESIDENT GETS ANOTHER DENIAL ON A REQUEST TO DIG A ROUTE FROM HIS DOCK TO THE BAY; NEW SARASOTA POLICE AMBASSADORS BEGIN WORK; AND THE CITY COMMISSION HONORS DAN KENNEDY

By Stan Zimmerman
City Editor

The City of Sarasota Board of Adjustment on Friday, July 18, turned down James Armour's appeal to cut a 400-foot channel through sea-grass to connect the dock at his house, where he would like to keep his Viking 74 sport fisherman, with the Intracoastal Waterway.

That action marked his third failure at the initiative. He earlier tried appealing to the County Commission and then to the City Commission.

Armour lives in the second-largest house in the county, which stands at 4449 Bay Shore Road. At 39,000 square feet, the home is smaller only than John Ringling's Cà d'Zan, which is just up the street.



The channel is open in a 1926 aerial provided by Jono Miller. Image courtesy Jono Miller

Armour's lawyers all plied the same argument: There once was a channel in front of the house and all it needs is maintenance.

Neighbors have produced volumes of data, including videos of people walking across the "channel," showing the flat bottom and lush seagrass. But Armour's attorneys repeatedly told the two local government commissions a variation of "The state says if the channel was legally done originally ... it can be maintained."

"When the channel is gone, there is nothing there to maintain," a senior city staffer told the city commissioners. But two of them did not buy the argument on July 1 last year. "We're holding these folks up and we're going to court," said Shannon Snyder. He was joined

by Paul Caragiulo in the minority of a 3-2 vote to deny the "maintenance dredge."

Now the Board of Adjustment has voted 4-1 to veto Armour's application to perform maintenance on a nearly century-old dredged cut that is now filled with sand. Should Armour wish to continue his battle, he has the right to sue in Circuit Court.

DOWNTOWN AMBASSADORS STEP OUT IN THE PARK

The latest evolution of community policing debuted Tuesday, July 22, as 21 citizen volunteers stepped forward to become Sarasota's "ambassadors" downtown. This is part of the [Blue + You](#) initiative launched earlier this year by the Sarasota Police Department.



Police Chief Bernadette DiPino introduces the new program during a press conference at Five Points Park on July 22. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Dressed in blue polo shirts with “Police Volunteer” on the backs of them, the ambassadors will walk the streets in the downtown area to provide help, answer questions and give directions to visitors (and maybe even a few locals).

Like all the department’s volunteers, they have no arrest or detention powers, but they are armed with radios to summon sworn officers if they decide a “higher authority” is needed. Each of the ambassadors has received 24 hours of training.

“They are an extra set of eyes and ears,” said Police Chief Bernadette DiPino at a short ceremony in Five Points Park. “I saw this in

Memphis, TN. They asked me if I was lost,” she recalled. “It made me feel welcome.”

There are a lot of people to welcome here. The evening before, a consultant told the City Commission Sarasota is host to 1 million visitors per year, with an average stay of nearly a week (6.5 days). “It is important we are a clean, safe and friendly city,” said Tom Barwin, city manager, at the Tuesday event.

The blue-clad ambassadors will be the walking arm of the city police volunteer corps. The well-established gray-clad volunteers will remain the motorized arm, cruising the city in cars marked “Civilian Volunteer Sarasota Police.”



City Commissioner Susan Chapman offers remarks on the Police Ambassadors Program. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The ambassador ranks are still open to people “with an outgoing disposition” able to walk several miles in the afternoon. Call Volunteer Coordinator Michelle Rinaca at 366-2845.

SMA HONCHO KENNEDY GETS KEYS

Although there is nothing in the rules to prevent it, it is very rare for a local resident to receive the keys to the City of Sarasota. Internationally known aerialist Nick Wallenda has a set, and on Monday, July 22, Dan Kennedy received one, too.

Mayor Willie Shaw made the presentation to a beaming Kennedy, proclaiming Dan Kennedy Day by resolution of the City Commission. Kennedy was an educator and administrator for more than three decades in town.

He served as principal of Sarasota High School before leaving to start Sarasota Military Academy (SMA) as a charter school demanding order, discipline and structured learning with strong parental involvement. He recently retired from the SMA and its board of directors. 



Dan Kennedy (right) accepts the keys to the city from Mayor Willie Shaw in recognition of Kennedy's decades of leadership in education. Photo by Jan Thornburg, courtesy City of Sarasota



Siesta Seen

ONLY ONE BID COMES IN AGAIN FOR THE NEW SIESTA VILLAGE MAINTENANCE CONTRACT; AND SIESTA KEY ASSOCIATION OFFICERS HAVE A GOOD MEETING WITH SHERIFF'S OFFICE REPRESENTATIVES OVER PARKING AND HOMELESSNESS ISSUES



By Rachel Brown Hackney
Editor

Buccaneer Landscape Management of Pinellas County was the only firm to bid on the new maintenance contract for Siesta Village, county staff reported this week.

Mark Smith, the liaison between the Siesta Key Village Maintenance Corp. (SKVMC) and the county, told me on July 21 that the bid was \$129,041.50, which county staff members indicated to him was in line with their expectations. "I thought it was in line," he said, based on the expenses of the first firm that handled the work, JWM Management Inc. of Sarasota, which had the contract in 2010-11.

County spokeswoman Jamie Carson told me on July 21 that county Procurement Department staff is evaluating the bid and hopes to have a recommendation about it by the end of this week.

Smith added that county staff told him if all goes well, the contract will be on the County Commission's Aug. 26 regular meeting agenda for final approval.

According to its [website](#), Buccaneer is a St. Petersburg firm that has contracts in Sarasota, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Manatee, Charlotte, Osceola, Orange, Lee and Collier counties. It serves banks, business parks, homeowner associations, pharmacies, restaurants, shopping centers and state and local government.

Buccaneer was the only firm registered for a June 30 mandatory pre-bid conference in the Village, Smith said, and he was impressed with the Buccaneer representative. "I was very pleased with his answers and comments, just walking around with him."

For example, Smith told me he previously had learned from county staff that a county arborist had indicated that the black olive trees struggling for survival in the Village landscaping need more oxygen. The Buccaneer representative offered the same assessment without knowing of the county staff remark, Smith continued. When Smith asked him how the situation could be remedied, the man



Some of the black olive trees, designed to provide shade as part of the Siesta Village landscaping, have been suffering from insufficient oxygen, a county arborist says. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

offered a detailed response. “That gave me some hope,” Smith added.

“These people actually seem very qualified,” he said of Buccaneer and its employees.

After Buccaneer proved to be the only company to bid on the maintenance contract by the original July 2 deadline, Procurement staff issued an addendum to the bid and extended the time for responses to July 16.

The addendum included more detailed information in regard to a number of Village upkeep responsibilities. Among them were the replenishment of mulch and power washing of the sidewalks.

Championship Landscape Management Professionals of Fort Myers won the Village upkeep contract from the county in August 2012 with a bid of \$97,417.70. The County Commission awarded the contract to that firm on Aug. 21, 2012, with the possibility of two automatic renewals. However, complaints arose in recent months among county staff and members of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) that the quality of Championship’s work had declined.

The maintenance work is paid for by the property owners in the area where the county completed a beautification project in early 2009. Those owners are represented by the SKVMC.



When county ‘No Parking’ signs first went up on Avenida de Mayo in early February, residents said a number of them — including this one, which seemed to point to a driveway — were confusing. File photo

Siesta Seen

Early this year, the SKVMC board asked the county to advertise for a management firm to take on the upkeep instead of another contractor like Championship.

MY MISTAKE

In the [July 18 Siesta Seen](#), I made a mistake in reporting the reason why Sarasota County Code Enforcement Officer James Holderby was at the Sandy Cove Avenue property of Craig Siegel in late April when Siegel allegedly threw a bucket of urine on Holderby, resulting in criminal charges against Siegel.

Holderby told me he had arrived on the property that morning to follow up on a report that Siegel was continuing to rent the 5174 Sandy Cove Ave. house every week, a violation of county code. Holderby and Siegel both had appeared before a Code Enforcement Special Magistrate the previous Friday, Holderby said, for a Finding of Fact hearing related to that case.

I confused that situation with another Special Magistrate case involving debris Siegel had strewn around the Sandy Cove Avenue property.



Illegal parking has continued to be a problem on the right of way just north of the intersection of Avenida de Mayo and Canal Road. File photo

Siesta Seen

AVENIDA DE MAYO AND THE HOMELESS

On July 15, representatives of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and officers of the Siesta Key Association (SKA) had an opportunity to talk about the parking situation on Avenida de Mayo and matters pertaining to the homeless on the Key, SKA President Michael Shay told me.

Lt. Debra Kaspar of the Sheriff's Office's Administrative Law Enforcement Division had requested the meeting, primarily to review with SKA leaders the handling of July Fourth

holiday events. (A number of concerns were raised at the June SKA meeting in regard to illegal fireworks.)

"I think it went very well," Shay told me after the meeting. "I think they wanted to assure us the [illegal parking issues] and homeless are priorities."

Shay has voiced concerns in the past that more county attention seems to be paid to keeping tourists and business owners happy, with residents as a third priority. The Sheriff's Office representatives "were very adamant that that is not the case," he said.



Sheriff's deputies say Lance, who is commonly seen in his wheelchair on the north end of Siesta Key, is not violating any law by staying on the sidewalk. File photo



After questions were raised about the legality of this table at the front of the Robin Hood Rentals property on Ocean Boulevard, county Code Enforcement staff investigated the matter. Code Enforcement staff said people are allowed to distribute brochures from the table, in accord with the zoning code, but the sign advertising the firm is not legal. Photo by Rachel Hackney

Siesta Seen

The officers explained that on Avenida de Mayo, they are working to find out whether the owners of vehicles parked illegally are new renters or homeowners on the street, he pointed out. Education is the key to keeping those people from continuing to park illegally, the Sheriff's Office representatives explained.

"I'm not going to argue with that point," Shay said, adding, "Both sides got to understand where the other side is coming from."

I also learned late last week that county staff has posted two more "No Parking" signs on Avenida de Mayo and repositioned an existing sign. Residents credited Shay for his persistence in helping them address their frustrations about the signage.

As for the homeless on the island: Quite a bit of discussion on that topic arose during the SKA's June meeting. Through the years, numerous complaints have been lodged regarding Lance, the fellow who sits in a wheelchair by the roadside on the northern end of the island. Over the past couple of years, he has tended to stay close to the vacant, Gulf-side lot across Ocean Boulevard from Givens Street.

Sgt. Scott Osborne, who heads up the Sheriff's Office's Siesta Key Substation, has told SKA audiences that Lance is not crippled, that deputies know he can walk and have seen him do so.

Most regulars on the northern end of the Key are well aware of the fact that people provide handouts to Lance, an action that the community's Texas-based homelessness consultant, Robert Marbut, has argued must end if a come-as-you-are shelter for adults is constructed.

When more complaints about Lance arose at the June 5 SKA meeting, Deputy Chris McGregor pointed out that Lance does not violate laws, to the knowledge of deputies. One time Lance was cited for having an open container of alcohol, McGregor noted, but Lance "took care of the charge."

Furthermore, McGregor said, "Lance has lots of friends out here on the island" who give him food and rides.

McGregor added that it also is not against the law for Lance to stay on the public sidewalk in his wheelchair.

Finally, McGregor said, "Every time that I have talked to him, he has been nice and polite."

Other complaints about homeless people have been aired over the past several months, including reports of inappropriate activity near the north end of the Village.

Shay told me the Sheriff's Office also is addressing problems reported with the homeless on the island.

"It was definitely a positive meeting," he added of the July 15 get-together. 

SHARE



Voting By Mail Is Quick And Easy!

ABSENTEE

Election Supervisor:

This is my formal request for an absentee ballot. I am listed on your rolls at the address on the reverse side of this envelope. Please send my ballot to the following address:

NEWS BRIEFS

The Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office began mailing absentee ballots on July 22. File photo

SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS BEGINS MAILING ABSENTEE BALLOTS

On July 22, the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office began mailing absentee ballots for the Aug. 26 primary election to non-military domestic voters, according to Supervisor of Elections Kathy Dent.

More than 34,000 ballots went in the mail on that date, a news release says.

Mailing of ballots to military and overseas civilian voters began July 11, the release notes. Since then, approximately 1,300 ballots have gone out to those voters, it adds.

To request a mail ballot, a voter may email absentee@SarasotaVotes.com, request one online at the Supervisor of Elections Office [website](#) or call 861-8618.

Requests for a ballot to be mailed must be received by the Supervisor of Elections Office no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 20, the release points out. To be counted, voted absentee ballots must be returned to the Supervisor of Elections no later than 7 p.m. on election day. Voted absentee ballots may not be left at an early voting site or precinct, the release notes.

Because of changes in Florida election law, as of Jan. 1, 2014, any voter, except uniformed service and civilian voters living overseas, who requests a ballot be mailed to an address other than the address on file in the Florida Voter Registration System must submit a signed written request, the release explains.

Also effective this year, a voter who returns a voted mail ballot but forgets to sign the certificate envelope may cure the missing signature by submitting a signed affidavit and proof of identification to the Supervisor of Elections Office before 5 p.m. on the day before the election, the release adds. A copy of the affidavit and instructions may be viewed and downloaded from the [website](#).

Dent reminds voters that the signature on the absentee ballot certificate must match the voter's signature on file in her office to be counted. Voters may update their signatures by submitting a Florida Voter Registration Application to the Supervisor of Elections Office, the release notes.

TEMPORARY FENCE INSTALLED AROUND FIVE POINTS PARK

A temporary fence was erected last week at Selby Five Points Park to protect the park's new sod and help it get established, the city has announced.

"Heavy usage of the park is preventing the grass from taking root," a news release says. City staff hopes the turf will stabilize soon and that the fence can be removed within two to four weeks, the release adds.

The sod was installed approximately five weeks ago, it notes. Every two years, the Downtown Improvement District funds the replacement of the grass at Selby Five Points Park, which is necessitated because of wear and tear, the release says.



A fence has been erected around Five Points Park in downtown Sarasota to protect new sod. Photo courtesy City of Sarasota

COUNTY'S NEXT EMERGENCY SERVICES DIRECTOR TO START IN AUGUST

Sarasota County's next Emergency Service director is scheduled to begin work Aug. 4, bringing with him 25 years of public safety experience, the county has announced.

On July 18, County Administrator Tom Harmer notified the public that Rich Collins, the emergency management director of Osceola County, will fill the vacancy created by the May retirement of Chief Mike Tobias.

The county concluded a thorough search for a new emergency services director, a news release notes, with Tobias offering assistance during the interview and selection process.

"We are pleased to welcome Rich and his family to Sarasota County," said Harmer in the release. "We're confident that Rich will do a great job leading our Emergency Services team here."

Collins, originally from the Chicago area, is no stranger to Sarasota County, the release continues.

"My family's love of Florida has always been with the southwest area, and Sarasota County

is exactly where we want to be," said Collins in the release.

In his current role with Osceola County, Collins is responsible for planning, preparedness, recovery and mitigation to and from disasters. He is also responsible for the county's intergovernmental communications, the release points out.

When Collins, a former fire chief, starts work with Sarasota County, he will oversee the Sarasota County Fire Department, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services and Lifeguard Operations, the release adds.

"I look forward to this incredible opportunity and am honored to lead the public safety team in service to the residents and visitors of Sarasota County," said Collins, who holds degrees in organizational management and leadership.

Collins and his wife, Kathie, have been married for 26 years and have three children, the release continues.

LIBRARY GROUP SCHEDULES BOOKS, BAUBLES & BLING SALE AUG. 1-2

From 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 1, and Saturday, Aug. 2, the Friends of the Selby Public Library will host a Books, Baubles & Bling Sale, the organization has announced.

The event will be held at the Friends' bookstore inside the library, which is located at 1331 First St. in downtown Sarasota.

Not only will books be available, but the sale also will feature jewelry, collectibles,

bric-a-brac, accessories, handbags, art, antiques and curios, a news release says. All books will be half-price, including rare volumes and collectible titles, the release adds.

Donations are welcome for the event, the release notes.

Call 861-1140 for information. Donations may be brought directly to the bookstore, the release says.

AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY TO BE SHOWN AT SELBY LIBRARY

The Lord is Not on Trial Here Today, an award-winning documentary, will be shown Thursday, Aug. 7, at 4 p.m. in the Geldbart Auditorium at Selby Public Library on First Street in downtown Sarasota, the Women's Interfaith Network has announced.

"It is a beautifully researched and remarkable story of how one citizen's courage and idealism profoundly affected a nation's future and forever changed the relationship between religion and the public schools in America," a news release says, adding, "And, no, [the person] was not Madalyn Murray O'Hair."

The film will be presented by the Women's Interfaith Network of Sarasota/Bradenton/Venice and the Center for Religious Tolerance, the release continues. It "tells the personal story behind one of the most important and landmark First Amendment cases in U.S. history, the case that established the separation of church and state in public schools," the release notes.

"More than 60 years after the decision," the release adds, "the conflict still resonates in church-state issues."

The event is free and open to the public. The documentary is 60 minutes long, and it is closed-captioned.

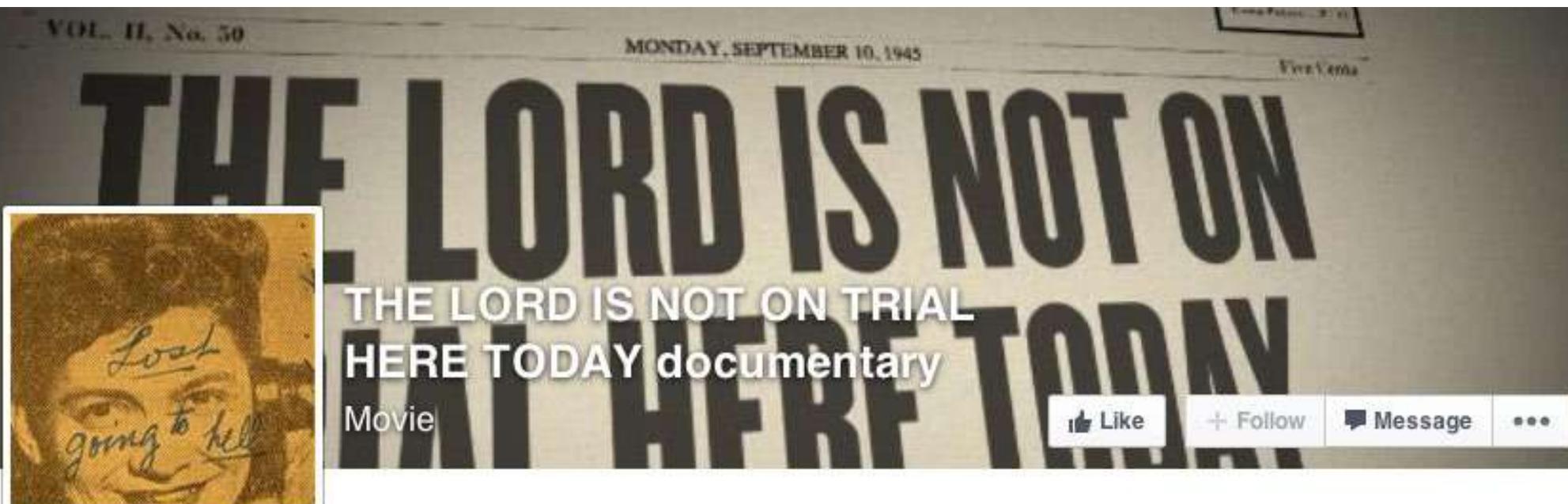


Image from the [Facebook page](#)

PRIVATE FIRM TO ASSUME SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD SERVICES

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has selected Staffing Connection/Action Labor of Fort Lauderdale to assume school crossing guard services for the Sarasota County schools, the office has announced.

The agency announced a Request for Proposals (RFP) on May 22, with a final due date for all submissions of June 18, a news release explains. The contractor will be responsible for providing crossing guards who are certified by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) at specified locations throughout Sarasota County at the appropriate times before and after school, the release points out. The contractor will also be completely responsible for the recruitment, retention, training and supervision of personnel, it notes.

In Sarasota County, between 30 and 35 school crossing guards are required for each school day, the release says. Current school crossing guards who are part-time employees of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office were notified about the change and advised that a transition mechanism is in place for those interested in continuing in their positions, the release adds.

"The staffing of school crossing guard positions is better suited for a private labor agency than as a function of a law enforcement agency as it has been in the past," said Sheriff Tom Knight, in the release. "To continue to provide a high level of service to our community, we believe this is the best solution for the children of Sarasota County."



The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has hired a private firm to handle school crossing guard services for the county school system. Photo by Cleve Posey

USF SARASOTA-MANATEE NAMES INTERIM REGIONAL CHANCELLOR

Terry A. Osborn, University of South Florida (USF) Sarasota-Manatee regional vice chancellor for academic and student affairs, will serve as interim regional chancellor effective Aug. 1, the college has announced.

Arthur M. Guilford will be stepping down from his position as regional chancellor effective July 31 and retiring as of January 2015, a news release points out. A national search is under way for Guilford's successor, chaired by Sophia Wisniewska, regional chancellor of USF St. Petersburg, the release notes.

"Osborn's interim position will ensure a smooth transition for USF Sarasota-Manatee when the new regional chancellor is named by USF System President Judy Genshaft," the release continues.

"We are excited about welcoming back our faculty and students to the fall semester beginning Aug. 25 and are committed to providing all of our stakeholders with a seamless changeover to our new administration," said



Terry Osborn/Contributed photo

Osborn in the release. "Until that time, it is my honor to serve as Dr. Guilford steps down at the end of July."

CITY PLANNER APPOINTED TO FLORIDA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Gov. Rick Scott has appointed Clifford Smith, a senior planner in the City of Sarasota's Neighborhood and Development Services Department, to the Florida Historical Commission, the city has announced.

Smith will fill a seat designated on the board for a historical archaeologist, a news release notes.

"This is an incredible honor," said Smith in the release. "I look forward to working with the

six other board members and recommending policies to Gov. Scott which will lead to protecting and preserving our vast historical resources throughout Florida."

Smith's term began July 11 and will end on Dec. 31, 2016, the release adds.

He was hired by the City of Sarasota in December 2006 to staff the historic preservation program, the release says. 

SHARE





CORRECTIONS EMPLOYEES PROMOTED

On July 17, Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight promoted four employees to new ranks in the Corrections Division, the Sheriff's Office announced. Lt. Brian Meinberg, who was promoted to captain, became the Corrections Operations bureau commander, a news release noted. Sgt. Jay Doyle was promoted to lieutenant, and Deputy Eleni Koenig and Deputy Michelle Gilbert were promoted to sergeant. "These men and women have demonstrated their commitment to the care, custody and control of inmates at the Sarasota County Jail," said Knight in the release. "They have established themselves as leaders and have worked diligently to advance their careers." From left are Koenig, Meinberg, Doyle, Gilbert and Knight. Contributed photo

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The SCAT aggravated assault suspect is shown in video surveillance. Image courtesy Sarasota Police Department

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT ON SCAT BUS UNDER INVESTIGATION

Detectives with the Sarasota Police Department are continuing to investigate an aggravated assault that was reported on Saturday, July 19, involving a passenger on a Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus, the department has reported.

The victim told detectives she was riding the bus to work when a suspect in his late 20s or early 30s sat down near her, a news release explains. “During the ride, the suspect attempted to engage the victim in conversation,” it adds. She tried to ignore him, it continues, but when the suspect asked the victim her name, she gave it. The victim told officers the suspect then began to repeat her name incessantly.

The victim said he also asked for her phone number, the release notes, but she refused to give it. Afterward, the victim reported that the suspect rose from his seat and, with his back to the front of the bus, removed his black flip phone, wallet and a light blue or silver box cutter knife from his pocket, the release says. He proceeded to open the knife, revealing the square blade, according to the release. The victim said the suspect brandished the knife and then closed it and put it away.

Video footage of the suspect can be viewed on the Sarasota Police Department YouTube [page](#), the release points out.

It is unknown where the suspect departed from the SCAT bus, the release adds.

The victim described the suspect as a black male about 6 feet tall and weighing approximately 160 pounds. He has a slim build, she told officers. When he was on the bus, the suspect was wearing a light colored T-shirt, dark shorts, sneakers and a white Miami Heat flat-bill ball cap with green and red accents.

Anyone with information about the suspect or knowledge of similar incidents on buses is encouraged to call Detective Kim Laster at 364-7327, leave an anonymous tip with Crime Stoppers by calling 366-TIPS (8477) or go online at sarasotacrimestoppers.com.



A second photo shows a different view of the SCAT aggravated assault suspect. Image courtesy Sarasota Police Department

POLICE ASKING FOR HELP TO IDENTIFY ARMED ROBBERY SUSPECT

The Sarasota Police Department is investigating an armed robbery reported at approximately 9:45 p.m. on Saturday, July 19, at Subway, located at 1154 N. Washington Blvd. in Sarasota, the office has announced.

When officers responded to a report of an armed robbery in progress, the clerk at the Subway told them a male suspect had entered the store wearing a black ski mask and brandishing a black semi-automatic handgun, a news release says.

The clerk added that the suspect grabbed the other clerk on duty and forced him to open the cash register and then empty an unknown amount of cash into a bag before the suspect fled on foot, the release adds.

Officers who searched the area were unable to find the suspect, the release notes.

Anyone with information regarding the case is asked to call the Sarasota Police Department at 316-1199.



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

Call: (941) 366-TIPS (8477)

Click: SarasotaCrimeStoppers.com

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

SHERIFF'S OFFICE SEEKING SUSPECT IN ATTEMPTED HOME BURGLARY

The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office is investigating a July 20 report of an attempted burglary at an occupied residence, the office has announced.

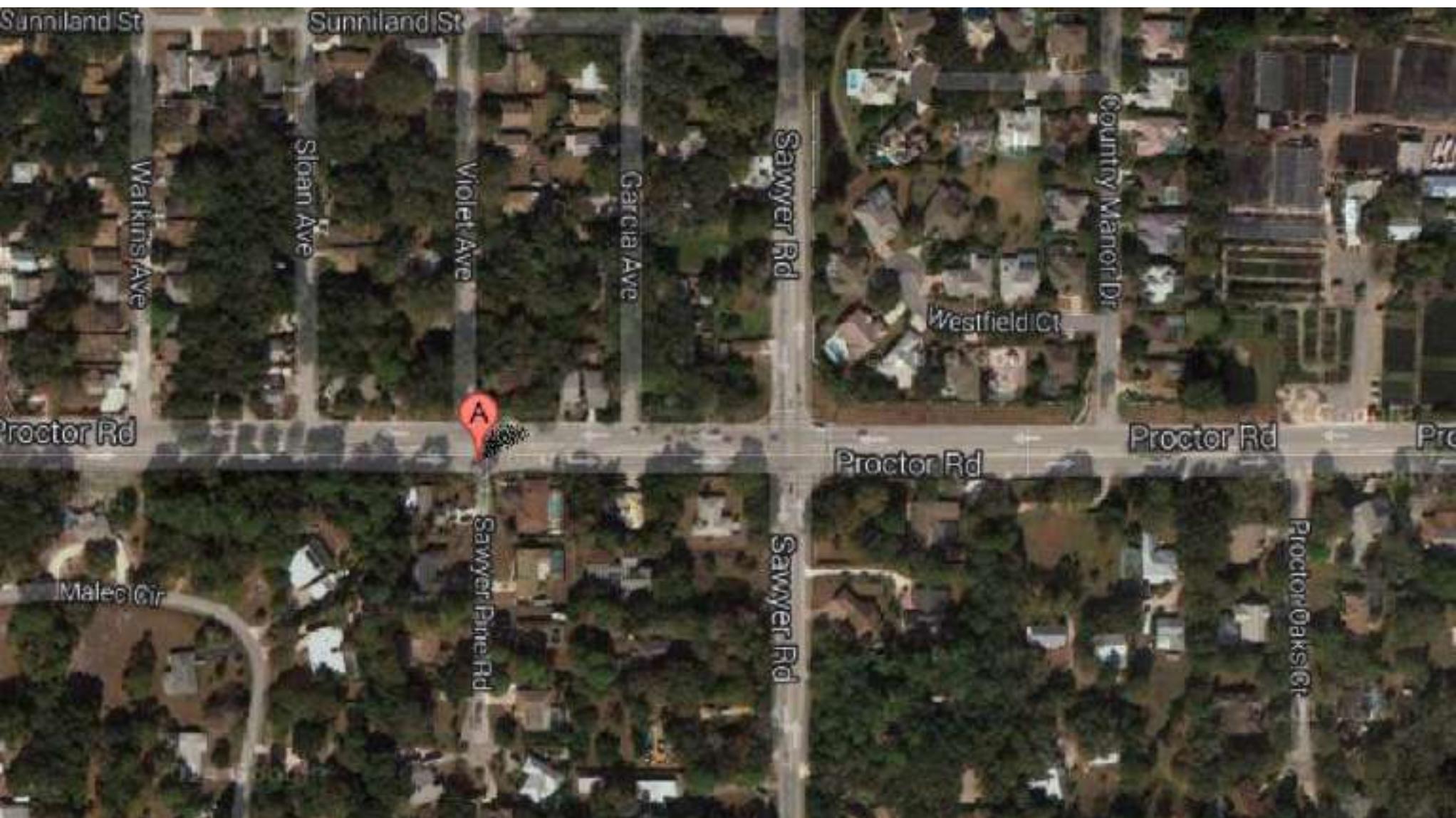
At 1:10 a.m. on July 20, officers responded to a call about an incident in the 4800 block of Sawyer Pine Road in Sarasota, a news release says. Upon arrival, deputies spoke with the 15-year-old victim, who told them he was home alone when he heard banging from the rear of the residence, the release adds. While trying to find out the source of the noise, the release continues, the juvenile observed a suspect attempting to enter the house through the rear door. "At this point the juvenile feared for his safety, so he armed himself with a shotgun," the release adds. The juvenile then fired a warning shot into an interior door, which caused the suspect to flee, the

release says. "No one was injured as a result of the gunshot," the release notes.

Deputies established a perimeter around the residence, and a K-9 Unit unsuccessfully attempted to track the suspect, the release continues.

The suspect is described as a white male, 5 feet 10 inches to 6 feet tall with a thin to medium build, the release says. He was wearing a black mask, a black zippered jacket and blue jeans.

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



A map shows the location of the 4800 block of Sawyer Pine Road in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps

OPINION



THE WARM MINERAL SPRINGS 'D-I-V-O-R-C-E'

EDITORIAL When parents decide that their relationship cannot continue, how to explain to the children that mommy and daddy no longer will be together is perhaps the most delicate task. Yet children, especially those who are older, are quite perceptive and likely recognize the unsustainability of a dysfunctional relationship. They might not like the idea of divorce, but they usually are not surprised when it happens. That is especially true when one parent unilaterally changes the nature of the relationship, forcing the other partner to either go along or get out.

And so it figuratively has been with the residents of Sarasota County in general — and those of North Port in particular — as they witnessed the acrimonious deterioration of the

relationship between the County Commission and the North Port City Commission over their joint ownership of Warm Mineral Springs.

When the two entities decided to purchase and jointly develop Warm Mineral Springs in 2010, there was cordial unanimity about the future of the popular attraction.

There were discussions about developing the Springs into a world-class eco-tourism resort, which would bring visitors from around the world to southern Sarasota County.

Unfortunately, that all changed in 2012 with the election of two new city commissioners — Rhonda DiFranco and Cheryl Cook — who joined then-Mayor Linda Yates in upending all of those previously contemplated plans. The new triumvirate wanted to maintain the

OPINION

Springs as a public park only, with no development other than the minimal facilities that existed to accommodate swimmers.

To exercise their clout, the three blocked any attempt by the county to agree on long-term plans for Warm Mineral Springs. At one point, the city and county participated in a formal dispute resolution with an outside mediator. That process yielded a tenuous agreement, but subsequent hesitancy by the three North Port commissioners delayed that hard-fought accord. Even an offer by the county to buy North Port's share for \$2 million was curtly rebuffed without a counteroffer.

As a result, the contract with the existing facility manager expired last year without a successor, and Warm Mineral Springs was closed to the public.

Eventually, the voting block on the North Port Commission weakened in the face of public criticism about the closed attraction, but a solution that would reopen the Springs was months away. The county was bound by state law in carrying out a competitive bidding process for seeking even a short-term operator for Warm Mineral Springs, so until that process could be completed, the attraction had to remain closed.

Finally, a short-term contract was awarded to National and State Park Concessions to operate the site through Aug. 31, 2014. Once the agreement was finalized and the facilities assessed, the park reopened to the public. This gave the two commissions time to entertain long-term proposals for the management of the attraction.

Several proposals were received as part of that bidding process, and in June, the two commissions narrowed the field down to two. National and State Park Concessions was one of them, with a proposal to keep the park open with minimal changes; it gradually would begin improvements after a couple of years of

continued operations. The other bidder, local developer Jebco Ventures, proposed a much grander vision for the park, with extensive renovations and improvements to facilities, the creation of a spa-type resort and, eventually, even residences on the grounds.

But in June, the majority of the North Port commissioners embraced the minimalism of the National and State Park Concessions proposal and expressed disdain for the Jebco plan, which they felt would overdevelop the attraction. Conversely, the county commissioners felt the Jebco proposal would yield the greatest potential for the Springs in the

“What started less than four years ago as an exciting prospect for Sarasota County-North Port cooperation in the preservation and development of a world-renowned natural resource was derailed only two years later by new faces on the North Port Commission and a sea change in that city's politics.”

OPINION

long term. They expressed the view that the National and State Park Concessions proposal simply did not provide for any significant investment by the operator, which placed too much risk on the owners.

While some county commissioners at the time proposed compromises that would blend the best elements of both proposals, the North Port commissioners resisted. They wanted the National and State Park Concessions proposal in its current form. With the two commissions deadlocked, no long-term proposal was selected.

Given the failure to select a long-term operator, the possibility arose that the Springs would have to close yet again. The current short-term operating contract could not be simply extended under state bidding regulations. And a new bidding process would take months.

Finally, in frustration, the County Commission offered to sell its share of the Springs to North Port for the amount it paid, plus the payment of all closing costs by North Port. The North Port Commission quickly accepted that offer.

Regardless of the plans, however, it appears virtually impossible to conclude the transfer in time for North Port to extend the existing short-term contract with National and State Park Concessions. In all likelihood, the Springs will close again, although perhaps for a shorter period than before.

What started less than four years ago as an exciting prospect for Sarasota County-North Port cooperation in the preservation and development of a world-renowned natural resource was derailed only two years later by new faces on the North Port Commission and a sea change in that city's politics. The intransigence of the three North Port commissioners — Yates, Cook and DiFranco — ended any hope of pursuing the original plan of development, forced the closure of Warm Mineral Springs and caused the county to expend considerable resources in the back-and-forth with North Port and the various bidding processes which the county had to handle.

While the upcoming municipal elections in North Port could change the balance of power so more open-minded commissioners could once again be in the majority, the County Commission decided not to take that chance. After agreeing to be an equal partner in 2010 mostly to assist North Port in the acquisition of the Springs, the county threw in the towel this month and decided to sell its interest.

If the sale is properly concluded, the county will be free of this troublesome entanglement. What becomes of Warm Mineral Springs will rest entirely on the City of North Port. And the County Commission is reminded once again of the veracity of the old saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.” 

OPINION

ONE WORLD



By Harriet Cuthbert
Contributing Writer

COMMENTARY

It is absolutely fascinating to note that a sport would prove to be the only “genre” to unite the world — and that the only sport to do this would be soccer.

Known as “football” in every country but the U.S., this phenomenon is nothing short of unparalleled.

Even in the States, learning to play soccer begins in childhood; but I have a feeling that it is more organized here than in the rest of the world. We have teams, uniforms, coaches and, my favorite, “soccer moms.” And I was probably one of the latter in the past, having attended every game my son, Eric, played and not understanding a thing.

Buy I *did* understand that I was to save his uniforms, and he is very grateful to me for that.

Other countries have kids kicking a ball up and down a field, trying to get a goal and taking pride in their win with just as much passion and joy as their more organized mates. Many countries have soccer idols/superstars who are followed fanatically by adults; and when the children are very young, they are taught by their parents to love this game and to root hard and strong for the team that is the parents’ choice.

I remember being in England once, visiting a family who had two boys, ages 4 and

6. The family was watching a soccer match on TV with total silence and intense concentration. The boys sat with their dad, wearing the team’s T-shirt and holding onto a soccer ball for comfort; and they already understood all the basics of the sport. I was banished to the kitchen because, as an American, I “just didn’t get it.”

Now, having lived through the past few weeks as a new soccer fan, maybe I understand a little more. The World Cup is unique. Every country competes until there are two teams remaining, and then we watch the talented players, creating their own form of magic until one team wins the championship. It is an incredibly grueling sport that even I, as a novice, can appreciate.

I watched the last few matches of the World Cup and empathized with Brazil and its unheard-of trouncing. I could not take my eyes off Tim Howard, with his mastery of reaction time and amazingly accurate anticipation of where the ball would go.

I rooted for Argentina all along because Lionel Messi is the only soccer player I recognize and also because he plays for Barcelona, a city dear to my heart. My team came close to winning it all, but in the end, the better team prevailed.

One billion people all over the world watched the finals of the World Cup. I am proud to say I was one of them. 

IT'S A WILD WORLD



THE CANNIBALS AMONG US!

Photo by Fran Palmeri



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

25 JULY	FridayFest presents Come Back Alice July 25, 5 to 9 p.m., rain or shine. Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free. Band will perform Southern gypsy funk. Guests encouraged to bring blankets or lawn chairs. Food and beverages available; no edibles or drinks permitted. Information: 953-3368 or vanwezel.org .
25+ JULY	FST presents <i>Becoming Dr. Ruth</i> Through July 27; times vary. Keating Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$34 to \$44. Information: floridastudiotheatre.org or 366-9000.
25+ JULY	Allyn Gallup Gallery presents <i>A Few Great, Big Pictures</i> Through July 28; times vary. 1288 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free. Information: 366-2454 or AllynGallup.com .
25+ JULY	Florida Studio Theatre presents <i>Clearly Invisible, Magic Up Close with Carl Seiger</i> Through Aug. 3; times vary. John C. Court Cabaret, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$32 to \$36. Information: 366-9000 or floridastudiotheatre.org .
25+ JULY	Banyan Theater Company presents <i>The Styx of the Blind Pig</i> by Phillip Hayes Dean Through Aug. 3; times vary. Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$28.50 for a single performance and \$52 for two of Banyan's summer season plays. (<i>Collected Stories</i> by Donald Margulies will be presented Aug. 7-24.) Information: banyantheatercompany.com .
25+ JULY	Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents <i>Marvin Gaye: Prince of Soul</i> Through Aug. 10; times vary. 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50, adults; \$16.50, students. Information: 366-1505 or wbttsrq.org .
25+ JULY	Art Center Sarasota presents <i>Florida Flavor</i> Through Aug. 15; times vary. 707 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free. The all-Florida, all-media juried exhibition showcases two- and three-dimensional works. Information: 365-2032 or artsarasota.org .

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

25+
JULY

Florida Studio Theatre presents *Taking Shakespeare*

Through Aug. 17; times vary. Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$32 to \$36. This will be the play's U.S. premiere. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

25+
JULY

FST Improv: *Out of Bounds Match Up*

Through Aug. 23, 7:30 p.m. Browne's Lab Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$15. Information: 366-9000 or www.FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

25+
JULY

UUCS Presents *Jane Shannon: Works in Fabric*

Through Sept. 4; times vary. Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota, Lexow Wing Gallery, 3975 Fruitville Road, Sarasota. Free. Information: 371-4974 or the church [website](#).

25+
JULY

Dabbert Gallery presents *Summer Showcase*

Through Sept. 29; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free. Featuring works by three sculptors, one printmaker, 15 painters, one pastel artist and one photographer. Information: 955-1315 or dabbertgallery.com.

26+
JULY

Bookstore 1 Sarasota presents *Breakfast Serial Book Club*

July 26 and each succeeding Saturday during the summer. From 10:30-11 a.m., staffers will read to 3- to 6-year-olds; from 11:15-11:45 a.m., they will read to 7- to 9-year-olds. 1359 Main St., Sarasota. Information: bookstore1sarasota.com or 365-7900.

31
JULY

Players Theatre presents *Into the Woods Jr.*

July 31; 7 p.m.. 838 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$10. A Summer Camp Session II production. Information: 365-2494 or theplayers.org.

31+
JULY

Venice Theatre presents *Cabaret*

July 31 through Aug. 10; times vary. 140 W. Tampa Ave., Venice. Tickets: \$13 to \$25. Information: 488-1115 or venicestage.com.

02+
AUGUST

Fuzión Dance Artists present *In the Round Interactive Dance Performance*

Aug. 2-3; times vary. The Black Box Theater, [Hamilton Center](#), New College of Florida, Gen. Spaatz Blvd., Sarasota. Tickets: \$20; for students, \$10. Limited seating. Information: ad.fuziondance@gmail.com or 345-5755.

Submit Calendar Events To
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SUMMERTIME MEANS FAMILY VACATION TIME

PRESS



Norman Schimmel
Photographer

The Sarasota News Leader

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SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



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



Neal Schafers



Find joy in a picture-perfect smile.



Awarded 20 Gold Medals for Smile Makeovers by the Florida Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry.

My interest in photography reminded me about how my former smile made me uncomfortable to have my own picture taken.

A childhood accident resulted in lost teeth. When my permanent teeth came in they were askew and very small in proportion to my smile. I had seen how Dr. Koval perfectly restored the smile of my friend's father. Upon my own exam with Dr. Koval, we discovered that I also had worn and cracked fillings, and a shifted jaw - all which she corrected.

Dr. Koval sincerely cares about her patients and their smiles. I am 100% satisfied with her meticulous work to make my smile look natural and picture-perfect.

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