

THE SARASOTA

Vol. 2, No. 16 — January 3, 2014

News Leader

The Progressive Voice Of Southwest Florida



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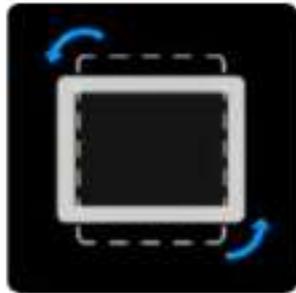
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SARASOTA NEWS LEADER

The Progressive Voice of Southwest Florida

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Welcome

The Sarasota 2050 Plan, Sunshine lawsuits, the 2017 World Rowing Championships, downtown Sarasota improvements, the Fruitville Initiative and the short tenure of County Administrator Randall Reid: Those are just a few of the many topics in the headlines during 2013.

As we did in our first issue of the year just past, we offer you the Year in Review for this first issue of 2014.

I must credit long-time *Pelican Press* Editor Anne Johnson for this idea. It may take a bit of work to compile 12 months' worth of the top stories, but publishing this not only gives our staff a break from reporting over the holidays, it also serves as valuable reference material, we believe.

See how much you remember about exactly what did go on in 2013.

Rachel Brown Hackney

Editor and Publisher





2013

The Year In Review

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NEWS & COMMENTARY



PHOTO CREDITS

Front cover: *Sunset Spectacular* - Norman Schimmel



2013

Riley Cartoon Retrospective

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YEAR IN REVIEW: JANUARY

Plans call for a Walmart to move into the Ringling Shopping Center in downtown Sarasota. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The County Commission is grappling with what to do about former Sarasota County GOP Chairman Bob Waechter's service on two advisory boards. Waechter was charged in December with impersonating Lourdes Ramirez, president of the Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations, in making donations in her name to the congressional campaign of Democrat Keith Fitzgerald. Waechter serves on the [Board of Zoning Appeals](#), which he chairs, and the [Tourist Development Council](#). He and Ramirez previously served together as directors of the Siesta Key Association. Registered as a Republican, Ramirez is said to be mulling a run for County Commission in 2014.



A spreadsheet error in the calculation of impact fees prompted the resignation of Sarasota County Transportation Director

Clarke Davis, County Administrator Randall Reid reports to the County Commission. The board was set to consider new road impact fees on Jan. 16, but the numbers cannot be corrected in time, Reid explains in an email.



The County Commission agrees to hold off on any move to establish a domestic partnership registry while awaiting action on a Florida Legislature bill regarding a statewide registry.

The purported bill, however, may not be introduced before 2014, according to former Sarasota City Commissioner Ken Shelin. He has been working with Commissioner Carolyn Mason since last fall on a countywide measure, with the City of Sarasota already having set up such a registry.



The City Commission agrees on Jan. 7 to hear an appeal by the Alta Vista Neighborhood Association of a Planning Board vote to allow the construction of a Walmart in the Ringling Shopping Center complex. The commission also agrees to a request from Laurel Park residents to require two public workshops on any proposed development near their neighborhood before the city approves the plans.



The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has no covered area in which to store its vehicle inventory, worth more than \$7 million — including specialized units such as the bomb truck fuel tanker and its command post — the County Commission learns on Jan. 8. By unanimous vote, the commission agrees to

hold a workshop as soon as possible with Sheriff Tom Knight and his command staff to discuss the department's long-term facilities needs.



A 12th Judicial Circuit Court ruling on a City of Sarasota ordinance means Sarasota County no longer can enforce its no-smoking ordinance for beaches and parks. The Sarasota County Sheriff's Office has not been writing citations since the judge's decision was handed down.



The Sarasota County Commission on Jan. 9 unanimously denies two requests for variances to construct homes on Siesta Key lots



Photo #1 | Command Vehicle covered storage on site.

Photo #2 | 500 gallon diesel & 1000 gallon high test gas tanks.



A series of photos show some of the existing fleet facilities utilized by the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office. Photos courtesy of the Sheriff's Office



A judge's ruling snuffs out enforcement of a smoking prohibition at the county's beaches. Photo by Norman Schimmel

that have been under water in years past. The owners of the parcels at 162 and 168 Beach Road wanted to build a three-story residence on each lot, but elements of the structures would have been seaward of the Gulf Beach Setback Line.



The North Port City Commission reaffirms its desire to rid itself of Warm Mineral Springs, in the wake of a 3-2 vote on Dec. 18 to sell the 81-acre resort the city and Sarasota County jointly purchased in 2010.



State Sen. Eleanor Sobel, a Democrat from Hollywood, files a bill for the fifth consecutive

year in the Florida Legislature to create a statewide domestic partnership registry. It is expected to be heard first in the Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee when work begins on bills in February, according to legislative sources; Sobel chairs that committee.



On Jan. 16, the County Commission votes to lock in reduced impact fee rates for another two years, bypassing a staff recommendation to extend the reduction only until July. Impact fees accounted for \$3.5 million in revenue in 2012, according to County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr.



View toward Beach Road



The County Commission turns down a petition by the owners of property at 168 Beach Road on Siesta Key to build a house on the site. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The chairwoman of the Sarasota County School Board says district staff will work with representatives of local architectural firms and preservationists on a way to try to save at least part of the interior of a Paul Rudolph-designed building at Sarasota High School. Although School Board members said earlier they did not plan to accommodate requests to preserve the interior of the building, designed in 1958 by the world-renowned architect, Jane Goodwin tells the approximately 60 people attending the Jan. 18 Convocation of Governments at Sarasota County Technical Institute that she met on Jan. 15 with Sarasota Architectural Foundation board members and “discussed going back to the drawing board ...”



As part of a mobility study, the City of Sarasota is considering laying down rails for a streetcar route in and around downtown. On Jan. 22, the Downtown Improvement District members hear consultants say streetcars are more than just a way to get around. The vehicles are

just one aspect of the study, which includes buses, bicycles, pedestrians and even baby buggies. “It’s 20 percent about moving people and 80 percent about economic development,” says downtown business owner Forrest Shaw. “Streetcars create transit corridors that attract development that creates a measurable return on investment.”



Because only one company initially bid on the Siesta Key stormwater project by the due date of Jan. 9, the Sarasota County Procurement Department extended the deadline until Jan. 23 — action that netted three bids, *The Sarasota News Leader* learns. However, the lowest of those bids was about \$4.3 million — almost three times the \$1.5 million expense county staff estimated for the construction. The county’s chief engineer, James K. Harriott Jr., writes the commissioners in a Jan. 23 email, “I have asked staff to review the estimate work and determine why there was such a large discrepancy” between the bids and the estimate.



Preservationists are asking the School Board not to modify the interior of the Paul Rudolph-designed Building 4 on the Sarasota High School campus. Photo by Norman Schimmel

More than 100 Newtown residents, community leaders and elected officials gather on Jan. 23 to unveil a new 28-unit affordable housing complex, King Stone Townhomes, bringing to a close a phase of intense redevelopment sparked by a stimulus grant. King Stone replaces a blighted Mediterranean apartment complex on Martin Luther King Jr. Way, just east of Orange Avenue. The cream-colored, two-story construction is a joint project of the Sarasota Housing Authority and the Sarasota Housing Funding Corp., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit affiliated with the Authority.



The City Planning Board votes on Jan. 23 to delay action on the “NTOD,” an overlay district for the North Tamiami Trail between

downtown and the northern city limits, which probably has been the most studied area in the city. The latest proposal for improving that area comes after three years of work by the North Trail Redevelopment Partnership, a consortium of owners, neighbors, businesses and cultural institutions. “This process was not led by some high-priced, out-of-town consultant,” says City Planner Ryan Chapdelain. “It was led by local stakeholders.”



After Sarasota County commissioners express shock on Jan. 29 at the cost and length of time it takes to erect shelters for Sarasota County Area Transit bus stops, new SCAT Director Glama Carter promises to provide an in-depth analysis of the issues during an upcoming



County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason checks out the kitchen of a new King Stone Townhome in Newtown. Photo by Cooper Levey-Baker

budget workshop. As part of a two-hour presentation during the commissioners' Jan. 29 meeting in Venice, Carter points out that of the 2,000 SCAT stops across the county, only 138 have shelters. She provides a breakdown of the estimated total cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000 involved in putting up a single shelter, including \$6,000 for land acquisition and \$15,000 to \$25,000 for design, permits and construction.



On Jan. 29, the County Commission offers the City of North Port \$2 million to purchase Warm Mineral Springs. Commissioner Christine Robinson proposes an agreement with details on how the \$2 million would be paid out over time, requirements that the city alter its boundaries so the springs sits on county land and thoughts on how the city and county might manage the property in the interim. The city and county jointly own the property.



On Jan. 30, the County Commission votes to have staff schedule a series of public meetings over the next 90 days to present and discuss potential changes to Sarasota 2050, the detailed land-use plan adopted a decade ago to encourage New Urbanist neighborhoods, particularly east of Interstate 75.

Developers have been pushing for the 2050 alterations, arguing that the regulations are too restrictive and present numerous obstacles to new construction. Supporters of 2050, meanwhile, have argued that the relatively small number of projects approved under the plan in recent years has more to do with the

calamitous real estate crash than excessive government regulation.



A representative of the National Institute of Government Purchasing Inc. (NIGP) commends the County Commission on Jan. 30 for the progress Sarasota County government has made in implementing better standards and practices in its Procurement Department. Nonetheless, he says some of the county's self-imposed restrictions following a 2011 scandal in that department were excessive. Louis Moore, lead consultant for the NIGP's review of measures the county has taken to improve procurement practices in the wake of that scandal, adds that he and his team "see some definite productivity problems" with the restrictions on employees' use of county credit cards, or P-cards.



After a month on the job, Sarasota's new police chief has figured out two major problems and is working to remedy them, she says. Chief Bernadette DiPino will be improving training for the force she leads, and she will work to restore trust between members of the public and officers. "We have to re-establish and gain trust in the community," she says. "I believe outreach and education is important." Within a few days, she adds, she hopes to announce the formation of a "Citizens Police Academy." It will start out as a once-a-year course for city residents through which they will take classes, go on tours, visit the gun range, mingle with special police teams and try their hands at simulated street confrontations. 

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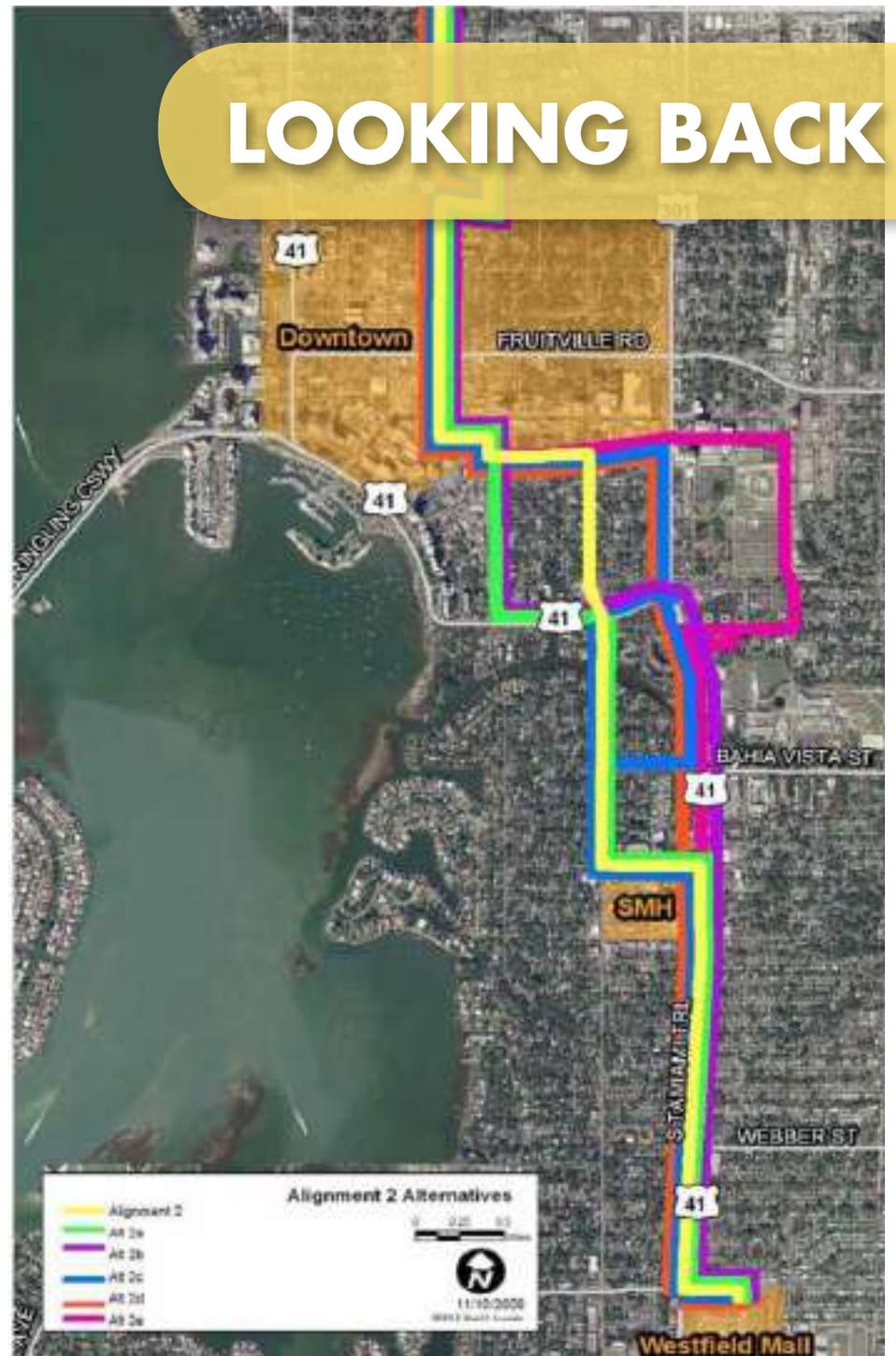
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LOOKING BACK

YEAR IN REVIEW: FEBRUARY

A graphic shows potential bus rapid transit system corridors in Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Facing a federal deadline and the risk of jeopardizing federal funding for its existing bus system, the Sarasota County Commission votes unanimously on Feb. 5 to give the Sarasota City Commission until April 15 to determine whether it has sufficient constituent interest to support the pursuit of a bus rapid transit (BRT) system for the community. County Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who made the motion, characterizes the creation of new land-use plans to make a BRT viable

— along with the transportation system itself — as means to generate the necessary revenue to save the city from fiscal collapse.



Bob Stuckey, general manager of public safety communications for Sarasota County, tells the County Commission during a Feb. 8 budget workshop that the initial plans for the new Emergency Operations Center (EOC) came in over budget.



A map shows the location of the new Emergency Operations Center for Sarasota County. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

MAIN COMPLEX

- A** - Main SO + Corrections (CJC)
2071 Ringling Boulevard
- B** - Forensics
800 Bell Rd. Units A,G,H
- C** - Training Office
6647 Midnight Pass Rd.
- D** - Training Center
101 North Orange (Englewood)
- E** - Youth Service
1960 Landings Boulevard
- F** - Storage Areas
Various
- G** - Fleet + Exterior Equipment Areas
425 Old Venice Rd.

CENTRAL COUNTY

- H** - SIS / Intel
Confidential
- I** - Helicopter Hangar/Aviation
180 Airport Rd.
- J** - Mounted Patrol
3445 Rustic Rd.
- K** - Gun Range
3445 Rustic Rd.
- L** - Marine Unit
Various
- M** - TAC Office
2700 Colson Ave.

SOUTH COUNTY

- N** - South Office
4571 S.R. 776 (Venice)
- O** - Sector III - CIS
682 South Tamiami (Osprey)



A map shows the locations of Sarasota County Sheriff's Office facilities across the county. Image courtesy of the Sheriff's Office

When Commissioner Christine Robinson asks how much, his answer is \$3.9 million. “That’s almost 25 percent over budget,” Commissioner Joe Barbetta points out. The PowerPoint slide about the EOC project pegs its construction cost at \$13.2 million, with another \$830,000 for equipment. The county has received federal grants totaling \$1.3 million to help pay for the facility. Stuckey tells the commissioners staff already has determined it can reduce the overage by \$1 million by modifying plans for window glazing.



A five-year contract initiated by the Sarasota County School Board with Cenergistic Inc. (formerly Energy Education Inc.) has resulted in savings of \$16 million, the school district announces. Scott Lempe, the district’s chief

operating officer, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*, “First of all, just because our contract is up, doesn’t mean our relationship with Cenergistic stops.” He adds, “The contract with us financially, where they get 30 percent of the savings, has ended, but our relationship otherwise will continue. So I see us still meeting with their mechanical engineers and see them informing us of new technologies and developments they have learned from other sites.”



“Terrible” is how North Port Vice Mayor Jim Blucher describes the Sarasota County Commission’s \$2 million offer for the city’s share of Warm Mineral Springs during a City Commission hearing held Feb. 11. The City Commission votes unanimously to reject the



Early this year, the City of North Port reaffirmed its desire to sell its half of Warm Mineral Springs. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

deal and leave the future of the springs once again in limbo. North Port Mayor Linda Yates told *The Sarasota News Leader* two weeks earlier that the county offer represented “a major, significant financial burden on South County residents.” North Port Commissioner Rhonda DiFranco echoes Blucher’s “terrible” comment during the Feb. 11 meeting. “I don’t like the idea of de-annexing Warm Mineral Springs from the city,” she says. “I think everything that the county offered was ‘No way, Jose.’”



Two city responses to homelessness — one at the top of the “food chain” and the other at the grassroots level — are halted by a pair of legal challenges. One judicial decision stops

any meeting of City Manager Tom Barwin’s *ad hoc* committee looking for fast responses to homelessness unless its meetings are properly noticed under Florida’s Open Meetings and Public Records laws. The other stops the city police from arresting homeless people for using signs to solicit donations from motorists. On Feb. 13, the city agrees to a 60-day ban on enforcement of an already-repealed solicitation ordinance.

In both cases, City Attorney Bob Fournier tried to head off court action but was stifled by bureaucratic inertia on one hand and Barwin’s reluctance to open up his meetings on the other. Barwin is unavailable for comment, away on vacation in Ireland.



A man holds a sign on Bee Ridge Road, asking motorists for assistance. Photo by Norman Schimmel

At the request of the Sarasota Architectural Foundation [SAF], the Sarasota County Commission votes 4-1 on Feb. 13 to send a letter to the Sarasota County School Board asking it to direct its architect to amend renovation plans for the interior of Sarasota High School Building 4 to preserve original elements designed by renowned architect Paul Rudolph. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason casts the “No” vote, saying she cannot support Commissioner Joe Barbetta’s motion to send the correspondence. The letter seeks a redesign of the Building 4 interior that “would incorporate and rehabilitate the significant character-defining elements which are: (i) the floating walkway, (ii) linear light wells and, (iii) the steel door frames.”



Expressing ire at last-ditch efforts by the Sarasota County Commission and the Sarasota Architectural Foundation (SAF) to halt the process, the Sarasota County School Board votes unanimously Feb. 19 to proceed with restoring most of the exterior features of an historic structure on the Sarasota High campus but to demolish several key elements of the interior. The School Board says it will send a copy of its plans for Building 4 to state education officials for final approval. During the Convocation of Governments on Jan. 18, during which the School Board hosted the County Commission and representatives of all the county’s municipalities, SAF members used public comment time to criticize Sarasota County Schools administrative staff for putting off meetings requested by SAF members to discuss the plans for Building 4, which was designed by internationally renowned architect Paul Rudolph.



Sarasota’s new Chief of Police Bernadette DiPino is looking for a No. 2, *The Sarasota News Leader* learns. The posting puts emphasis on community policing, problem-oriented policing and “change initiative[s].” The job of deputy chief was posted on Feb. 22; the application period will close March 8. The posting lists all duties expected of a strong deputy — overseeing budget preparation and representing the department in collective bargaining, along with such administrative responsibilities as training, personnel, equipment and records.



The City Commission votes 3-2 on Feb. 26 to side with the Alta Vista Neighborhood Association in the latter’s appeal of a Sarasota Planning Board decision to allow a new Walmart to be built in the Ringling Plaza Shopping Center. The commission heard more than eight hours of testimony over two evening sessions, sitting in quasi-judicial capacity. It was able to make a decision only on the sworn testimony and factual evidence offered. The only issue on the table was whether the site plan met the requirements of the arcane city zoning code.

Commissioners Terry Turner, Willie Shaw and Shannon Snyder vote to support the appeal. Mayor Suzanne Atwell and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo agree with the Planning Board decision.



The County Commission and the North Port City Commission are headed to “conflict resolution,” provided for in the state statutes, the County Commission agrees unanimously on Feb. 26. The two boards cannot agree on the future of Warm Mineral Springs, so a session

with a facilitator seems the logical next step, the county board decides.



The County Commission votes unanimously on Feb. 27 to authorize the transfer of \$245,000 from the Tourist Development Promotion Fund Reserves to the Visit Sarasota County Fiscal Year 2013 budget to assist in Benderson Park's pursuit of the 2017 World Rowing Championships bid. Virginia Haley, president of Visit Sarasota County, and Paul Blacketter, executive director of planning for Benderson Development Co., say the event could have a \$24 million economic impact on Sarasota and Manatee counties. Blacketter has emphasized the \$24 million is a conservative number. Blacketter appeared before the commission on Feb. 12 to explain the timeline to which the nonprofit Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates (SANCA) has to adhere to submit a formal bid in late May.



During its first Fiscal Year 2014 budget workshop, in late February, the Sarasota City commissioners learn their spending plan begins with a \$4.8 million deficit that will have to be filled. By law, the city's budget must be balanced. Chris Lyons, the former city finance director who is helping new Finance Director John Lege, tells the commissioners, "You have to make some tough decisions. ... The bottom line is, cut staff or use the fund balance [reserves]. And that's only good for two more years." The "revenue stabilization fund" — a fancy name for "reserves" — is estimated to stand at \$2.9 million when the 2014 fiscal year begins. Commissioner Shannon Snyder says he has "no appetite for a tax increase" and suggests "the county is going to have to pick up the cost of some of this stuff, or eventually they're going to get all of it."



Saying it appears project teams are designing structures "to a standard that is unreasonably



The effort gets under way to make Benderson Park the site for the 2017 World Rowing Championships, well beyond the scope of the regional regattas it has been hosting. Photo by Norman Schimmel

expensive,” Commissioner Nora Patterson on Feb. 26 refuses to support awarding an \$859,754.45 bid to a local firm for the construction of new restrooms at South Lido Beach. Her queries of staff lead to Commissioner Christine Robinson winning unanimous approval from the board for a fuller discussion of the project during the morning session of the commission’s March 6 meeting. The commissioners also agree, by consensus, to ask County Administrator Randall Reid to schedule a workshop in the not-too-distant future on how county staff and consultants are designing new buildings for which bids seem to be coming in at higher costs per square foot than they expected.

Patterson pulled the South Lido project from the consent agenda, saying, “This comes out to \$533 a square foot. ... It would be pretty unusual unless you were dealing with gold faucets and things” for the cost to be that high.



In an effort to prevent a potential legal challenge, the Sarasota County Commission unanimously approves an emergency ordinance on Feb. 27, changing parts of the current county code banning solicitation on roads and rights of way. The changes substitute “obstruction of traffic” for “solicitation” and prohibit the “distribution of any item to, receipt of any item from, or exchange of any item with the occupant of any motorized vehicle upon a road in the unincorporated area of Sarasota County ...” Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Nora Patterson, however, voice concerns about portions of the new language. County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh assures them the board could advertise a public hearing at any time on the ordinance, with further tweaks if desired, before making it a long-term part of the county code. DeMarsh recommends the Feb. 27 action on the basis of a recent 12th Judicial Circuit Court judge’s ruling that struck down part of a City of Sarasota ordinance related to panhandling. 



County commissioners decry the proposed cost of a new restroom facility on South Lido Beach. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

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YEAR IN REVIEW: MARCH

City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo compares noise readings with a Sarasota Police officer working on St. Armands Circle. Photo by Norman Schimmel

On March 4, Sarasota City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo raises a discussion about the city's noise ordinance after leading two community workshops in 2012 on the background, impact and implications of the measure. He suggests three different approaches. One would be pursuit of a staff-only study, involving planners, police and possibly consultants. A second would be the formation of an *ad hoc* committee, and the third would be a mix of the first two. A majority of public speakers at the City Commission meeting that day say downtown is too noisy. Some bars and restaurants

are singled out as being especially offensive. "We need more enforcement, more qualified [police] officers," Caragiulo says. "There is lots of opportunity to alter some of these things — how you permit operations, how you position speakers. You can't treat all businesses the same." City Manager Tom Barwin adds, "We have the message on enforcement. We'll report back on that. I'd suggest perhaps an *ad hoc* committee, and perhaps we can retain a consultant, and we can come back in 90 or 100 days with a list of options."



When former state Sen. Bob Johnson notified a city commissioner in a September 2011 email that then City Manager Bob Bartolotta was deleting emails at City Hall, little did Johnson imagine his communication would end up costing the city much more than half a million dollars. The investigation into the allegation ends on March 4 with a final report to the City Commission by John Jorgensen, the senior forensic analyst of The Sylint Group in Sarasota. Despite an investigation by three criminal law enforcement agencies, no charges ever were filed against any current or former city employees. The initial allegation eventually led to the resignation of Bartolotta, his replacement with Interim City Manager Terry Lewis and the search for a permanent replacement. One employee was placed on administrative leave with pay for 14 months.

The director of the Information Technology Department was fired. After Jorgensen's report on March 4, City Commissioner Terry Turner circulates a spreadsheet prepared by the city's former finance director detailing the cost of the incident. Nearly \$130,000 was paid to Sylint, and \$72,434 was spent in legal fees. Bartolotta received \$112,760 in severance pay. The grand total for the investigation and its inconclusive aftermath was \$547,017.72. That figure does not include the \$89,169.36 paid to Interim City Manager Terry Lewis, which pushed the total to \$636,187.08.



With staff having told the Sarasota County Commission the cost of a new Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus shelter is about \$40,000, Commissioner Joe Barbetta



The expense of bus shelters draws criticism from Sarasota County commissioners. File photo

asks County Administrator Randall Reid to put renewed effort into checking out the feasibility of a less expensive option: chickee huts.

Barbetta raises the point again during the commission's March 5 regular meeting in Venice. Referring to chickees, he says, "They can be put up very inexpensively, and the permitting's not a problem." A chickee, Barbetta points out, "is Florida-friendly [and] there's nothing that says the bus shelters have to be the ... Plexiglas steel-frame shelters that they are." By law, a Miccosukee or Seminole Indian contractor can erect the open-air chickees, which are exempt from local building regulations. They are considered historic structures. Barbetta pegs the cost per chickee shelter in the range of \$3,500 to \$5,000, "built and installed."

On March 6, the County Commission votes 3-1 — with Chairwoman Carolyn Mason absent — to approve a contract to allow the construction of a new restroom facility on South Lido Beach, but the board members make it plain to staff members that they want a more economical way to manage such projects. More than anything else, Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Nora Patterson take issue with how staff has been billing internal costs for time it spends on projects. Barbetta points out that almost \$280,000 — or about 37 percent — of the \$1.3 million total cost of the Lido project reflects time billed for the Public Works Department employees working on it, plus the expense of an outside construction management firm to oversee construction. Commissioner Christine Robinson is in the minority on the vote.



An aerial view shows where the new South Lido Beach restroom facilities will be located. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Voters on March 12 narrow a field of six Sarasota City Commission candidates to three: Suzanne Atwell, Richard Dorfman and Susan Chapman. Atwell is running for re-election to an at-large seat. The candidates not receiving enough votes to advance to a runoff were Linda Holland, Kelvin Lumpkin and Pete Theisen. The runoff is set for May 14.



On the evening of March 13, Sarasota County residents have the chance to sound off about the fate of [Sarasota 2050](#), the detailed land-use plan approved 11 years ago to preserve open space and to encourage the construction of walkable, mixed-use communities. The plan requires builders to follow a set of specific rules crafted to encourage the construction of village-style neighborhoods

rather than traditional suburbs — regulations that come in exchange for the ability to increase density. The plan's creation was an attempt to strike a bargain between developers hoping to construct housing in new areas, primarily east of Interstate 75, and communities that were concerned about unchecked urban sprawl. Last September, however, the Sarasota County Commission voted to have Planning and Development Services staffers begin reevaluating 2050, specifically tasking them with meeting with developers who have worked with the plan to solicit recommendations on how to alter it. Meet they did, and the department returned with a list of 38 “issues” developers said they encountered when dealing with 2050.



Sarasota City Commission candidates Richard Dorfman (left) and Suzanne Atwell (right) win endorsements from former candidates Linda Holland and Kelvin Lumpkin. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

On March 18, the City Commission scraps an earlier proposal for an *ad hoc* committee to work on problems in downtown Sarasota regarding the noise from live entertainment. The vote is 4-1, with Commissioner Terry Turner in the minority. In the meantime, pressure is mounting on the city administration and the Sarasota Police Department to enforce the Sound Control Ordinance. However, City Manager Tom Barwin has ordered the police not to enforce the section of the code banning amplified recorded music outdoors because of threats of legal action on First Amendment grounds.



During their evaluation of Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid on March 19, all the county commissioners voice a desire for better communication between staff members and themselves, though they acknowledge Reid had a number of challenges before him when he took the position in January 2012. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason leads off the comments, noting she gave Reid an overall rating of “Satisfactory.” She points out, “I had a couple of issues. ... The big one centers around communication and he and I have talked about that.” Commissioner Joe Barbetta is more critical, though he notes he also rated Reid’s performance “Satisfactory” for 2012. “I think things have gotten better,” Barbetta says, adding, “but the 2,000 employees that are out there are supposed to be public servants and they are reflective of us. In the community, we’re on the front line, hearing what’s going on.”



In November 2012, former Sarasota Police Chief John Lewis was asked to provide a comprehensive report in 30 days detailing changes that need to occur at the Sarasota Police Department to make it the best trained law enforcement agency in Florida and the southern United States, according to a press release issued at the time by City Manager Tom Barwin. It took Lewis about twice as long as expected, but his 24-page report, obtained by *The Sarasota News Leader*, indicates there is a lot of work to be done to meet the ambitious goal outlined by Barwin. Lewis was the SPD chief for more than a decade (1989-2000). Chief Bernadette DiPino started work on New Year’s Day 2013. Lewis’ primary focus was training, and he found it had declined over time. He says before 1997, officers received 64 hours of training per year. But after switching to a 12-hour patrol shift (from eight hours) in 2006, training per year was cut in half, to 32 hours. However, those on 12-hour shifts “were paid overtime to attend in-service training on their days off” Nonetheless, because of budget cuts, “funding to pay patrol officers overtime to attend in-service training was virtually eliminated,” wrote Lewis. “This resulted in minimal training for a number of areas” — among them, firearms training.



The County Commission votes unanimously on March 19 to approve the stockpiling of excavated material from the Siesta Key stormwater project for use in the planned beach park improvements. However, the vote comes after Commissioner Joe Barbetta reiterates his ire at the fact that the lowest responsible bid for the stormwater project came in about

\$3 million higher than the \$1.5 million staff estimate. Erickson Consulting Engineers of Sarasota, which worked on the design of an outfall pipeline in the Gulf of Mexico that is an integral part of the project, estimated the pipeline cost at \$681,475, staff reports. The expense for installing that structure, as noted in the lowest responsible bid, is \$2,291,200, staff says. The pipeline is called the most challenging facet of the project.



After listening to a March 20 staff proposal for combining Sarasota County Sheriff's Office facilities on the Cattlemen Road site of the planned new Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the County Commission votes 4-1

to request that staff reassess all other county-owned property in that area and report back in 60 days. Commissioner Joe Barbetta casts the "No" vote. "I couldn't possibly support this complex," Barbetta says of a proposal that would put Sheriff's Office buildings on what he calls "prime commercial footage on a major highway." Speaking to Sheriff Tom Knight during a workshop, Barbetta adds, "I have no problem with what your needs are, just not at [the Cattlemen] location" as staff has proposed. To staff, Barbetta says, "Either put [the proposed buildings] to the rear [of the site] or put them on another piece of property." Ed Gable, the new director of the county's Facilities Services Department, presented a graphic showing how a three-story,



One schematic shows how new Sheriff's Office facilities could be built near the new Emergency Operations Center on Cattlemen Road. Image courtesy Sarasota County

150,000-square-foot Sheriff's Office administrative center; a joint training facility; a four-level, 570-space parking garage; and a 25,000-square-foot building combining the Sarasota County Medical Examiner's Office with the Sheriff's Office's Forensics Unit all could be located on the 1301 Cattlemen Road property at the intersection of Porter Way.



Sarasota County Schools Superintendent Lori White says the district has no choice but to close Phoenix Academy after the current school year ends. The per-student cost at the school far exceeds the expense at other district schools "and is not sustainable," she tells the School Board during a March 19 workshop. Al Weidner, the district's deputy chief financial officer, says it costs \$11,766 per Phoenix Academy student, whereas the average expense for a middle school student in the district is \$8,622; for a high school student, it is \$8,007. Phoenix Academy has been open

since 2004 for students in grades 8 through 10 who needed extra academic assistance or were at risk of dropping out of school.



On March 19, the Sarasota County Commission unanimously approves a revised Procurement Code — a process that began in June 2011 after the county's purchasing department was wracked by scandal. One facet of the new code allows the county administrator or his designees to approve the purchase of something costing up to \$100,000. Anything less than \$5,000 can be bought by an employee with a county purchase card if the price is generally about the same at any place the item or service can be procured. Anything costing between \$5,000 and \$24,999.99 requires three verbal quotes. An item or service valued between \$25,000 and \$99,999.99 necessitates three written quotes. Anything at the \$100,000 level or higher requires a bid or proposal process.



Because of budget constraints, the superintendent of the Sarasota County Schools recommends closing Phoenix Academy after the 2012-13 school year. File photo

Sarasota County staff leads the county commissioners on a walk through the future on March 20. Plans are offered to move the 26-year-old downtown Sheriff's Office to a "campus" near the interstate. In its place, a 10-story building is proposed to combine additional jail space, more courtrooms and a new "central energy plant" providing uninterrupted power. Courts Administrator Walt Smith sketches out a plan in which the new tower would become the center of criminal justice, while the Silvertooth Judicial Center across the street would focus on civil cases. The proposed new judicial tower would be 352,000 square feet. Using an estimate of \$300 per square foot construction cost, the price tag would be \$105 million. If that is added to a suggested \$100 million for a new sheriff's campus on Cattlemen Road, the number rises to almost \$205 million. Assuming the county population is 500,000, that works out to a per capita figure of \$410.



Bill Spitler, director of research and planning for the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, tells

the County Commission the county has seen the largest reduction in crime of any Florida county with a population higher than 100,000. According to 2010 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 34 of Florida's 67 counties have populations exceeding 100,000. The Sheriff's Office's annual report for 2012 shows crime dropped more than 16 percent that year compared to 2011. Major crimes, known as Part 1 Offenses in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Index, decreased nearly 18 percent. The number of violent crimes such as murder, robbery and aggravated assault, which account for part of the Total Index Offenses, was down nearly 16 percent. Burglary incidents declined more than 26 percent, and fraud cases dropped nearly 28 percent. Calls for service fell nearly 5 percent, and total arrests were down almost 4 percent.



Sarasota County projects fare very well in competition with other ecosystem restoration plans submitted to a coalition of area estuary programs in the effort to determine funding priorities for future money paid out by



Procurement Official Ted Coyman seeks County Commission approval of the new Procurement Code in March. File photo

BP in compensation for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the worst environmental disaster in American history. The county's wish list had an estimated price tag of \$145 million, with individual project costs ranging from \$20,000 to \$60 million. Laird Wreford tells *The Sarasota News Leader* the projects had been on "the drawing board" for some time; they included everything from beach restoration to the county's Phillippi Creek Septic System Replacement Program. That list was then submitted to the Joint Florida Gulf National Estuary Programs — made up of organizations that oversee Sarasota Bay, Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor — for a rigorous evaluation and ranking process. Out of the county's 28 projects, 15 "ended up in total in the highest-ranked group," Laird Wreford, the county's coastal resources manager, says proudly.



Because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says insufficient sand of the quality needed is available offshore for the renourishment of Lido Beach, the shoals in Big Pass and New Pass likely will be the sources for the project, Laird Wreford, Sarasota County's coastal resources manager, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. The Corps' project manager for the renourishment initiative met the previous week with City of Sarasota officials and representatives of the Lido Key Residents Association, Wreford reports in a March 27 email to County Administrator Randall Reid. The city's plans include not only seeking state permission for the use of sand from Big Pass' ebb shoal and channel, Wreford adds in the email, but also for the placement of three groins at the southern end of Lido Key. City Engineer Alexandria DavisShaw says Lido has been designated "critically eroded" since about 1990, making the renourishment project vital to maintaining the beach as an attractive tourist destination. 



City of Sarasota staff is proceeding with plans for a renourishment of Lido Beach, which has been designated 'critically eroded.' Photo courtesy City of Sarasota



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YEAR IN REVIEW: APRIL

The North Trail Overlay District draft document points out details for daylight plane provisions. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

A group of community activists has organized in an effort to change the county charter to eliminate partisan politics in local races, hoping to bring the issue to the voters before the 2014 election cycle. Bill Zoller, president of Citizens for Sensible Growth in Sarasota County, says real outrage has arisen about loopholes that prevented large segments of the population from participating in votes, including a tactic that kept Democrats from having a say in the race between County Commissioner Jon Thaxton and incumbent Kathy Dent for Sarasota County supervisor of elections.



In a 3-2 vote on April 1, the City Commission approves an emasculated North Trail Overlay District (NTOD). The ordinance will not have the administrative site plan approval considered critical to encouraging developers'

interest. North Trail property owners had urged the City Commission to approve the whole package, but Commissioner Terry Turner says the administrative site approval element "is problematic." Mayor Suzanne Atwell and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo vote against removing that element of the NTOD. Vice Mayor Willie Shaw and Commissioner Shannon Snyder side with Turner.



On April 3, by a margin of 65 percent to 35 percent, property owners on St. Armands vote to discontinue their Business Improvement District (BID). That district has been levying a 2-mill tax on property, with the revenue used to beautify the area and promote it as a destination. The vote means the BID will expire on Sept. 30.



On April 8, Marty Rappaport, chairman of the St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID), says he believes the correct people did not receive ballots to enable them to vote on the district's continuation. It appears the mailing went to tenants, not owners, he adds. Therefore, the BID attorney will meet with the city attorney to explore the legality of sending out another ballot, along with an informational pamphlet, but sending them by certified mail this time, with return receipts requested.



Reversing a split March 19 decision, the County Commission votes unanimously on April 9 to award Suncoast Charities for Children \$79,000 out of a fund designed for tourism promotion, so the organization can



Lucy Nicandri, vice president of Suncoast Charities for Children, asks the County Commission for funding support for the 2013 Super Boat Grand Prix Festival. Photo by Norman Schimmel



The chairman of the St. Armands Business Improvement District questions the validity of an election on the district's future. Photo by Norman Schimmel

pay the sanctioning fee to hold the 2013 Suncoast Super Boat Grand Prix in July. The vote rescinds a grant of \$10,000 from the county's general fund, but the commission indicates a willingness to continue covering the sanctioning fee in future budget years. On March 19, Lucy Nicandri, vice president of the charity, presented the board with an economic impact study, commissioned by Suncoast Charities, showing the 2012 festival brought \$14,306,173 into the county, up 12.1 percent from the 2011 amount of \$12.7 million.



With a 3-2 vote on April 10, the County Commission authorizes staff to proceed with steps necessary to replacing an outdated

public safety radio system with modern digital technology at a cost of about \$18.5 million. The dissenters — Commissioners Christine Robinson and Nora Patterson — say they need more information about alternatives and more details about “bugs” other users have found with the type of system recommended. “I don’t want to experience problems that could be avoided as a result of [not] going forward with a first-generation system,” Robinson points out. Commissioner Joe Barbetta makes the motion to move forward with what is called a “P25 system,” saying the alternative — upgrading the existing equipment for use through 2017 — would lock the county into a sole-source vendor for new equipment in the future.



State law is specific about the types of golf carts that can operate legally on roads, staff tells the County Commission. Photo by Sfoskett via Wikimedia Commons

On April 10, the County Commission votes unanimously to wait until May 8 to vote on whether to lower the speed limit on a portion of South Midnight Pass Road — between Vista Hermosa Circle and Sanderling Road. Commissioner Nora Patterson says the speed limit request is based on some residents' desire to drive golf carts on the road; they want the speed limit in that section lowered from 40 mph to 35 mph.



The County Commission on April 10 unanimously approves a \$499,496 contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates Inc. for the design of the Myrtle Street Improvement Project from U.S. 41 to west of U.S. 301. The design, which should be completed in March 2014, is for the widening of the existing

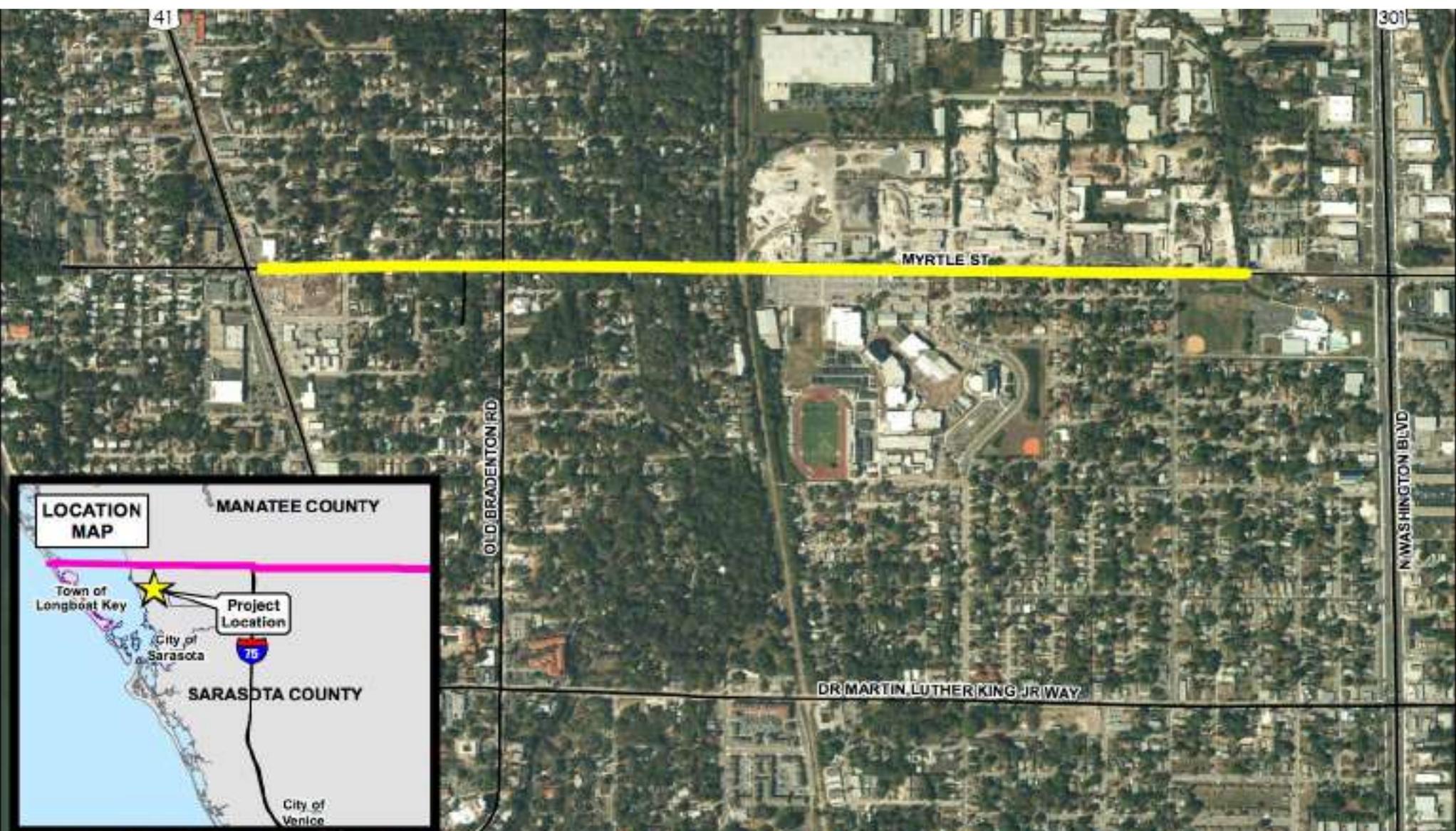
two-lane street with shoulders, bicycle lanes, closed drainage, sidewalks and street lighting. These features will be along approximately 1.25 miles of Myrtle, a staff memo notes.



The City Commission on April 15 votes unanimously on a first reading to approve a new ordinance to make panhandling illegal again, but this time with language City Attorney Robert Fournier thinks will pass court scrutiny. The focus is on traffic, to prevent future challenges on First Amendment grounds.



On April 15, the City Commission votes 4-1, saying that if a decision is made to extend the life of the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) beyond 2016,



The County Commission approves improvements to Myrtle Street between U.S. 41 and U.S. 301. Image courtesy Sarasota County

it “will not be financially participating,” in the words of Commissioner Shannon Snyder. Commissioner Willie Shaw is in the minority. An 11-person advisory committee empaneled by the City and County commissions is evaluating the CRA, charged with recommending whether the CRA should continue past its planned 30-year existence. This year, the district has raised \$6,981,172, reflecting the difference in the property tax revenue generated by the base year, 1986, and current revenue from the same area, with property values having risen.



On April 16, members of the Downtown Improvement District (DID) board debate what they should do about the color-changing lights in Five Points Park. In the two years since those lights were installed, tree growth and squirrels have damaged the system. DID Operations Manager John Moran says it could cost \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year to repair the lights and keep them functioning. The warranty ends in less than a year, he adds. The system cost \$81,000 to install, but the warranty does not cover the types of problems city staff has identified with the lights.



A new report issued by the Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness shows a 65 percent increase in Sarasota and Manatee counties’ homeless population since 2011 — including an 11-fold increase in the number of homeless children. Those numbers sound shocking, but the spike is due at least in part to shifting definitions of homelessness, as well as more refined survey techniques, according to Partnership Executive Director Leslie

Loveless. Overall, the Partnership’s 2011 “Homeless Census” showed 1,242 homeless, while this year’s “Point-in-Time Count” identified 2,054 homeless. The number of homeless kids grew from 44 to 444 — a figure Loveless calls “heartbreaking.”



To plug another budget hole, the Sarasota County School Board agrees it has no choice but to cut media specialists’ positions in district middle and high schools next year. Those specialists will be replaced by paraprofessional aides at a savings of \$595,086, according to budget projections.



In a joint meeting on April 16, the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions agree to explore regional coordination of a bus rapid transit system, and they approve an interlocal agreement to look into collaborating on hiring a private firm to operate their existing bus systems.



Manatee County’s public safety radio communications director explains to the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions that most of the problems U.S. metropolitan areas have encountered with a new type of emergency communications equipment, called a “P25 system,” have resulted from insufficient investment in the equipment. Sarasota County Fire Chief and Emergency Services Director Mike Tobias says at the outset of an April 16 presentation that all the stakeholders in the two counties are meeting every two weeks “and making sure everybody has a chance to be heard.” One subcommittee, Tobias adds,

is working on policies, procedures and the scope of the systems, while another is focusing on the technology itself.



The County Commission votes 4-1 on April 23 to direct County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh to draft an interlocal agreement regarding Warm Mineral Springs for both boards to sign, memorializing their April 17 actions during a facilitated meeting held under the guidelines of the state conflict resolution statute. Vice Chairman Charles Hines casts the “No” vote. After eight hours of facilitation on April 17, a North Port Commission majority embraced the idea of a short-term lease followed by an Invitation to Negotiate-like process to determine how the Springs should be managed. Then North Port Commissioner

Rhonda DiFranco sent an email at 5:30 a.m. April 18 to North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis saying she had changed her mind. DiFranco made no mention of that change of heart during the city board’s April 22 meeting, County Commissioner Christine Robinson points out.



On April 23, the City Commission backs away from a proposal to ban new bars downtown. During its afternoon session on April 15, it approved such a moratorium. However, that evening, the commission rescinded the measure at the urging of City Attorney Robert Fournier. The vote was an attempt to placate downtown property owners who complain about noise. The commissioners agree to hold two public hearings and resolve questions



The County Commission directs the county attorney to draft an agreement memorializing the decisions it and members of the North Port City Commission settled on during an April 17 facilitated meeting regarding Warm Mineral Springs. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

about legal issues before they vote again on a moratorium. Fournier explains the board already has the power to control hours of operation of downtown establishments and that it can demand sound attenuation plans crafted by an engineer. The commission is set to take up the issue again on May 6.

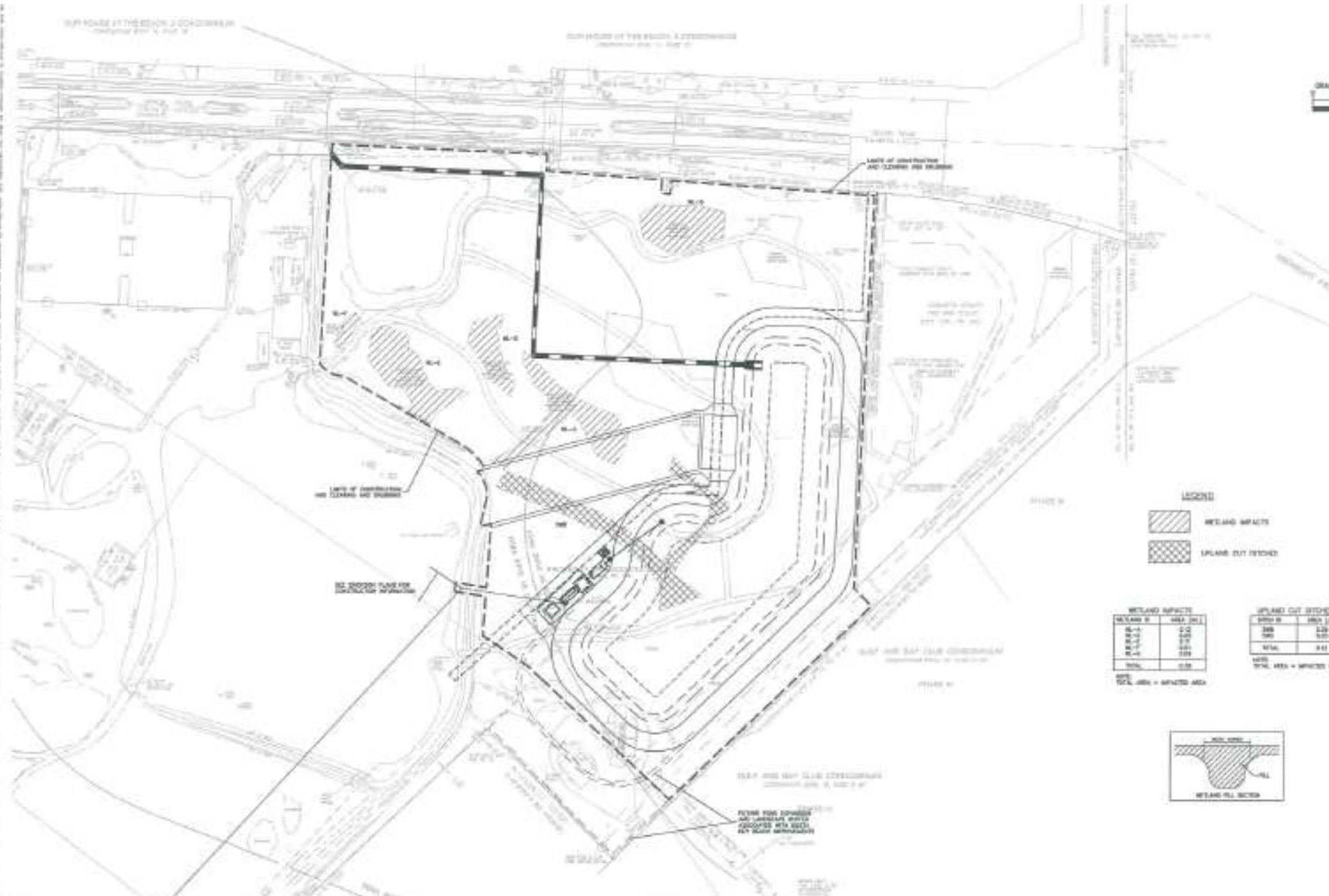


On April 23, the City Commission approves the new ordinance banning solicitation along roadways, and the Sarasota Police Department is training officers on how to enforce it. Nonetheless, a representative of the Sarasota chapter of the American Civil

Liberties Union says the city still could be vulnerable to lawsuits, even though City Attorney Robert Fournier tried to craft the ordinance to avoid free speech issues that saw the previous ordinance shot down in court.



The County Commission votes unanimously on April 23 to award a bid of \$4,550,683.28 to Forsberg Construction Inc. of Punta Gorda to construct the new stormwater project adjacent to Siesta Key Public Beach. The commissioners reiterate their ire over a consultant's mistake that led to a staff estimate the project would cost only about \$1.5



County staff indicates a consultant under-estimated the expense of constructing a pipeline into the Gulf of Mexico because of the technical challenges of that facet of the new Siesta Key stormwater project. Image courtesy Sarasota County

million. Erickson Consulting Engineers of Sarasota has offered to forgo about \$6,000 of its approximately \$200,000 to \$250,000 in billings to the county as a result of its inadequate estimate, but Commissioner Christine Robinson says, “It’s almost a slap in the face to give that small amount back to us.”



After almost three hours of comments during an April 24 public hearing, the County Commission approves an amendment to the county’s comprehensive plan and the rezoning of 4.033 acres to allow a Walmart Neighborhood Market to be built on the southwest corner of Bee Ridge and Beneva roads. Plans call for the market to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Commissioner Nora Patterson is the sole board member to oppose the project, saying she has concerns about the additional traffic the store will bring to that intersection and about a legislative change that allows a developer to pay a “proportionate share” of the cost for needed road improvements, instead of a higher expense through impact fees.



Walmart will not fight a Sarasota City Commission decision denying its proposal to

demolish the Ringling Shopping Center and build a “supercenter.” The company had until April 24 to file an appeal. Instead, the owner of the shopping center has filed a last-minute appeal in 12th Judicial Circuit Court to reverse the city’s Feb. 26 decision. The Doyle Family Trust — represented by Lewis and Diana Doyle — is challenging the city action. Attorney John Harllee of Bradenton will represent the trust. Reached by telephone, Harllee will only say, “No comment.”



The Sarasota County Commission votes April 24 to approve a request for a special entertainment exception for the White Buffalo Saloon, the newish watering hole near the intersection of McIntosh and Ashton roads in Sarasota. The exception allows White Buffalo to offer live entertainment after 10 p.m., a rarity in many parts of the county, and particularly in White Buffalo’s neighborhood. County Project Manager Mark Loveridge says his office sees special exception requests “fairly infrequently,” and the ones that do exist are mostly in Gulf Gate or out on Siesta Key. “We’ve really only had a handful of them probably in the last 10 years,” he tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. 

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YEAR IN REVIEW: MAY

Homeless people sit on the sidewalk outside Five Points Park while the park is undergoing maintenance. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A local consortium called Digital WiFi Solutions LLC is wirelessly wiring up downtown with wi-fi repeaters on store roofs. If you look at the top of Epicure restaurant at the corner of Palm Avenue and Main Street, you will see a wee gray dome. And if you fire up your smart phone or wi-fi tablet, you will already see a signal called Digital Sarasota or Free Hotspot. Several notable locals are involved in the initiative. Tony Driscoll, Peter Fanning, John Moran, Rich Swier Jr. and Jesse Biter are all working to get the operation running.



During the May 4, Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA) meeting, City Manager Tom Barwin says that based on national averages from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, given the city's population of 60,000, Sarasota should

have 132 street people. "But on any given night, the Salvation Army will host up to 250 people, and there will be 150 more on the streets," he says. Barwin calls the 400 "street people," a term the "street people" reject during the City Commission meeting the following Monday evening. Deborah Hines tells the commissioners and staff, "We're not all street people. ... We're just homeless." Whatever you call them, they are here in a concentration more than twice the national average, Barwin tells the CCNA. Exacerbating the problem is their density. Barwin says they are concentrated in a one-square-mile area, and they are responsible for a number of crimes far out of proportion to their fraction in society. Barwin adds that he asked the Police Department to cross-index robberies, burglaries and aggravated assaults in 2012 and the first quarter of 2013 with transient status. The department staff told him that 13.3 percent of the

robberies were cleared with the arrest of a transient. For burglaries, the figure was 23 percent; for aggravated assault/battery, it was 16.7 percent.



On May 6, the City Commission waives \$5,000 in city fees for the 2013 Chalk Festival. Denise Kowal, founder of the event, had asked for \$10,000 in waivers. The city has no grant program to help fund special events, but it does waive certain fees normally paid to city departments for services such as parking, trash pickup, utilities and police. The departments' funds are made whole by special allocations in their regular budgets. City departments, in other words, pad their annual budgets to cover festival costs. In effect, these are indirect subsidies.



The City Commission votes to make the new circus-themed playground in Payne Park off limits to pets. Additionally, the board approves a motion to put Payne Park under the regular leash law ordinance, meaning a dog must



The City Commission agrees to make Payne Park's circus-themed playground off limits to pets. Photo by Norman Schimmel



Chalk Festival founder and organizer Denise Kowal sits in front of artwork created during the 2012 event. Photo by Norman Schimmel



ATTACHMENT "A" SCOPE OF WORK / SPECIFICATIONS

1.0 Purpose

It is the intent of Sarasota County to solicit quotes to provide and install fourteen (14) LED bollards at seven (7) crosswalks at Siesta Key Village. The quotes shall include all material, equipment, labor and permits necessary to complete this job.

2.0 Technical Specifications

2.1 LED Bollards

a. Housing

1. Material: Pre-cast concrete
2. Shape: Rectangular
3. Dimensions: 44"x8"x8" to 46"x10"x10"
4. Color: Match Siesta Blend brick pavers
5. LED fixture shall be inlaid into housing at a 40 to 80 degree downward angle

b. LED

1. 14-18 watt
2. 5500K-6500K Color Temp

c. Power source

1. 240v UNV



3.0 Installation

3.1 Bollards must be installed in concrete and/or brick pavers, with concrete footers approximately 8-12" below ground surface.

3.2 All locates are the responsibility of the successful Bidder, a call to Sunshine State One-Call before digging shall be done by contractor, Sarasota County will assist with identifying, making aware of known underground piping and circuits.

3.3 Any dig-in will be reported immediately to the County Project Manager any repair will be approved and inspected by County Project Manager, no repair cost shall be paid by County.

remain on a leash while in the park. Under an experiment allowing dogs to be under “voice control” of their masters, owners were not deemed to be sufficiently responsible.



Almost 16 months to the day after he spoke of the need to illuminate Siesta Village’s crosswalks, Peter van Roekens watches in person as the Sarasota County Commission unanimously directs staff to purchase lighting equipment directly from a manufacturer and use an existing county contract with a firm to handle the installation. The cost is estimated at \$72,000 — \$46,000 below the only bid the county received for the project earlier this year. “I am relieved. I really am,” van Roekens tells *The Sarasota News Leader* following the commission’s action during its May 7 meeting in Venice.

Ryan Montague in the county’s Mobility/Traffic Office says the goal is to have the project completed by November, but he is hopeful that timeline can be accelerated.



Intended to encourage the construction of walkable, mixed-use communities and to limit urban sprawl, Sarasota 2050 has been a hot topic of discussion since last year, when the County Commission directed staff to ask developers how they would like to see the plan changed. On May 8, staff summarizes those developer suggestions, as well as feedback from environmental and neighborhood organizations, asking whether the commission wanted to begin the thorny process of altering 2050’s detailed land-use regulations. The answer: Yes, and let’s get on with it, already. Commissioner Joe Barbetta moves to eliminate a round of neighborhood workshops and Planning Commission consultation in the review process. Commissioner Charles Hines says citizens can register their thoughts at any public hearings, meaning there is no need for neighborhood input in the short term. Commissioner Nora Patterson is the only board member to object.



It may be the first year eighth-graders at Brookside Middle School in Sarasota have



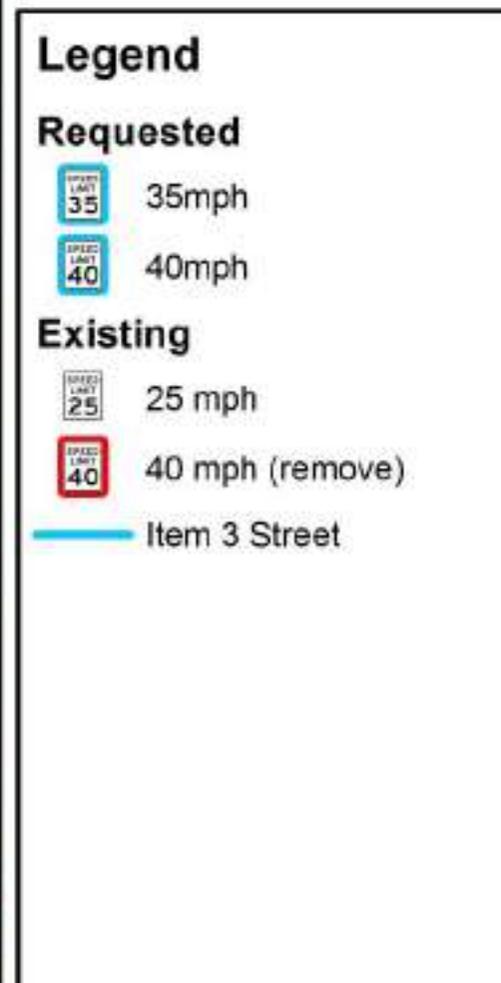
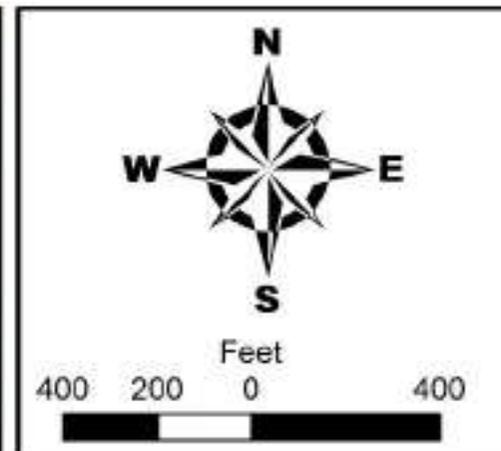
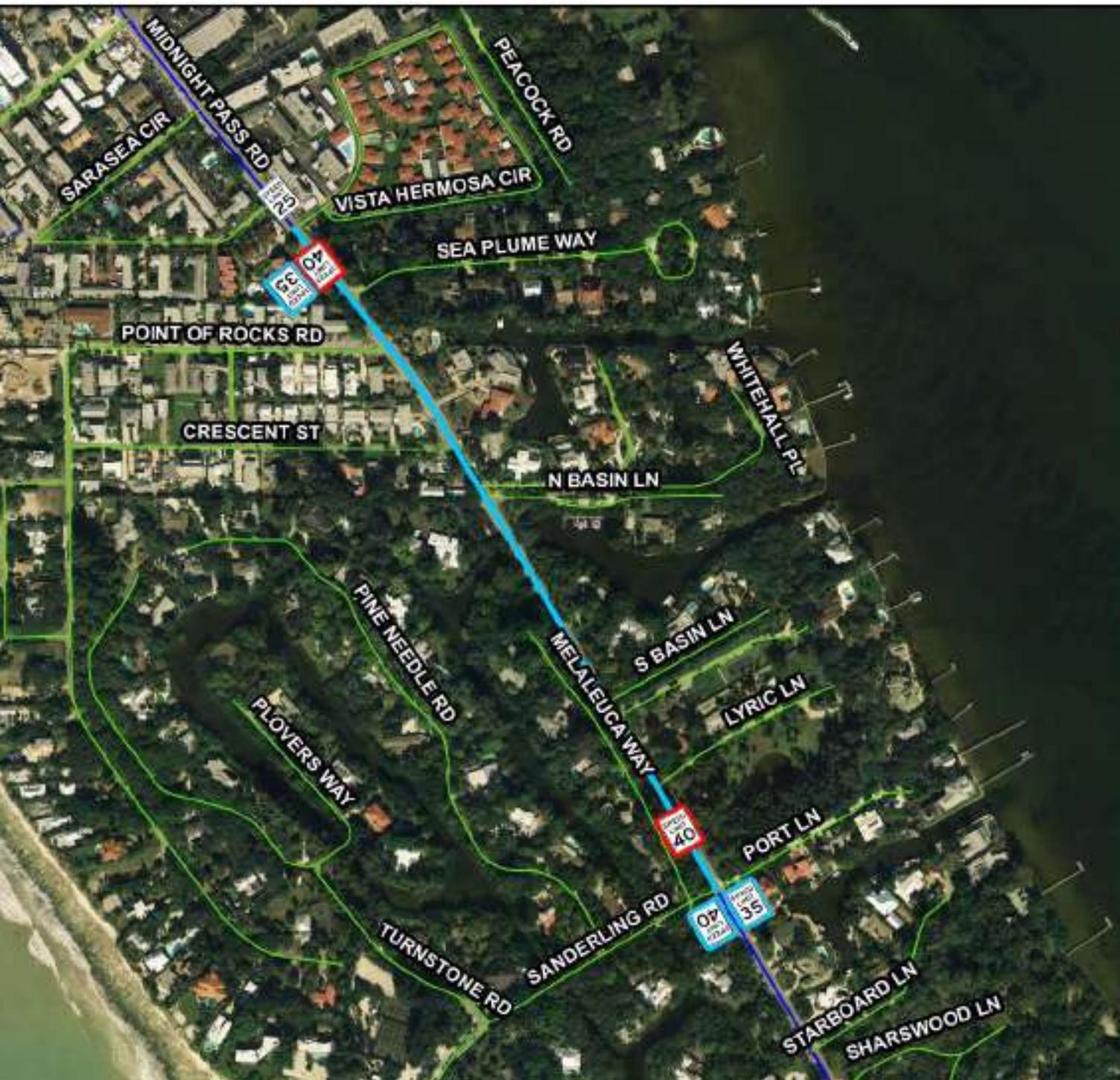
Brookside Middle School robotics team members win accolades at a School Board meeting. Photo by Scott Proffitt

organized teams for the Technology Student Association (TSA) robotics competition, but that first time has proven charmed: The teams take first-place honors at the state level and are headed for the National TSA Competition, which will be held June 28 to July 2 in Orlando. Of the three Florida teams, two are from Brookside.



After reviewing updated road impact fee data, the Sarasota County Commission votes 4-1 on May 8 to direct staff to maintain the existing rate schedule indefinitely. However,

the motion calls for the implementation of an inflation index as of Jan. 1, 2015, and it also directs staff to begin working immediately with representatives of the City of Sarasota on utilizing road impact fees collected within that municipality in multimodal projects — the addition of bike lanes and sidewalks not associated with new road projects. Further, the motion includes a provision calling for the County Commission to revisit the road impact fee schedule six months prior to Feb. 1, 2015.



A graphic shows the stretch of Midnight Pass Road where a resident has sought the lowering of the speed limit. Image courtesy Sarasota County

The Sarasota County Commission votes unanimously on May 8 to indicate a willingness to lower the speed limit on a portion of South Midnight Pass Road on Siesta Key to 35 mph but, at the same time, to prohibit low-speed vehicles on that stretch.

(A low-speed vehicle is defined as one that can travel between 20 mph and 25 mph, Paula Wiggins, the county's transportation planning manager, explains.) However, on a 4-1 vote amending the motion by Commissioner Nora Patterson, the commission also approves the holding of public meetings about the use of golf carts and low-speed vehicles on the island and to provide education about the state law governing such vehicles. Patterson, who lives on the north end of the island, casts the "No" vote on the amendment offered by Commissioner Christine Robinson. Patterson says she feels people will find it difficult to keep straight which Siesta roads are under state control and which are under county control. Moreover, she fears people will be amenable to golf carts and low-speed vehicles traveling in some areas of the key without considering the fact that many residents drive to and from the island to go to work.



When Sarasota City Commission candidate Richard Dorfman files his final campaign treasurer's report on May 8, one donation stands out: a \$500 contribution from the local Police Benevolent Association. Voters six years ago approved a change to the city charter that put a \$200 cap on campaign donations. Since then, the "amount column" on many treasurers' reports is a string of \$200 donations. Therefore, the Southwest Florida Police Benevolent Association apparently broke city

regulations by donating too much. Normally, a campaign treasurer would flag the large donation and do the paperwork to return it, but Dorfman's treasurer is John Dowd, a Venice accountant who may not be familiar with Sarasota's city-specific election laws.



The campaign to make all countywide races nonpartisan [becomes official](#) this week, with the launch of Open Our Elections, a new PAC dedicated to promoting the cause and placing the issue on the ballot. Intended to beat back some of "the recent manipulations, abuses and dirty tricks" employed by local political parties, the effort has already found "broad support," according to Open Our Elections chairwoman and former Venice City Councilwoman Sue Long.



On a May 14 split vote, the Sarasota County Commission modifies its reserves policy to require the county to maintain a fund equal to 75 days of operating expenses instead of 90. The action frees up \$8,131,269 for the coming fiscal year that the commission agrees for the time being not to commit to specific uses. Commissioner Joe Barbetta makes the motion for the change, winning support from Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Vice Chairman Charles Hines. "We're forgetting the fact that we have to look at things that can produce additional revenue for us. We're too dependent on property tax revenue," Barbetta says, arguing the extra \$8 million could be used for unfunded capital projects that would give the county a return on investment.



More money will be going to road resurfacing and bridge repairs over the next five years, thanks to split votes of the County Commission during its May 14 budget workshop. With Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Vice Chairman Charles Hines in the minority, the board approves allocating an extra \$10 million to road repaving and about \$4.1 million to the bridge work. Before the vote, Chief County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. confirms it would take about \$10 million per year to keep no more than 40 percent of the county's roads from falling below a rating of 60. When a road drops below that level, Harriott explains, the commissioners and staff begin to hear complaints from drivers.

With thousands of participants coming in from all over North America, the 2013 Pan-American Masters Swimming Championship is expected to have a \$5 million economic impact on Sarasota County, the chairman of the organizing committee tells the county's Tourist Development Council (TDC) on May 16. The event will be held June 1-13, primarily at the Sarasota Family YMCA Selby Aquatic Center, located at 8301 Potter Park Drive (just south of Westfield Sarasota Square Mall). And because 49 percent of the participants are from outside the United States, "it's an opportunity for us to showcase Sarasota to a whole new group of people," Carl Weinrich points out.



New Olympic-type starting blocks await participants in the 2013 Pan-American Masters Swimming Championship at the YMCA's Selby Aquatic Center in June. Photo courtesy Sarasota County

County Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue has surpassed \$13 million for the first time in a fiscal year, according to the annual report prepared by the Sarasota County Tax Collector's Office. TDT revenue totaled \$13,923,125 for the 2012 fiscal year, which ended on Sept. 30, the report says. The figure was a 21 percent increase over the FY 2011 amount, though the tax rate did increase from 4.5 percent to 5 percent on May 1, 2011, the report notes. With that hike factored out, the amount still was up 13 percent, the report says. Additionally, collections were higher for every month compared to the previous fiscal year's totals except for April 2012, when the revenue was virtually flat compared to the April 2011 figure. For the fourth year in a row, Tax Collector Barbara Ford-Coates tells the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council (TDC) on May 16, condos generated

more TDT revenue than hotels and motels combined. Condos accounted for 46.72 percent of the funds, while hotel and motel room rentals brought in 43.5 percent.

■ ■ ■

The City of Sarasota's two at-large commissioners, Suzanne Atwell and Susan Chapman, are sworn into office on May 17 during a statutory City Commission meeting. They were the winners of the May 14 runoff with a third candidate, Richard Dorfman. Following the ceremony, District 3 Commissioner Shannon Snyder is selected by the City Commission to serve as mayor for the next year. Chapman nominated Vice Mayor Willie Shaw for the position. Then Commissioner Paul Caragiulo nominates Snyder. Atwell votes for Snyder. Shaw is chosen to serve again as vice mayor.

■ ■ ■



Newly elected City Commissioners Suzanne Atwell (left) and Susan Chapman take the oath of office administered by City Auditor and Clerk Pam Nadalini. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Splitting 3-2, the County Commission on May 21 denies Siesta Key resident Marlene Merkle's request to ban parking on part of the south side of Avenida de Mayo — the street on which she built her island home 25 years ago. Instead, the commission unanimously approves a motion calling for county transportation planning staff to work with the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and county's EMS and Fire Department personnel on a recommendation that addresses routine parking violations along Avenida de Mayo that make it impossible for an emergency vehicle to travel down the street. That motion, by Commissioner Nora Patterson also invites more comments from business owners on the island, and it requests staff to research the cost of establishing a residential parking permit program for the affected area. The Siesta Key Association (SKA) had recommended parking permits for residents on the south side of the road as well as a parking prohibition on the north side of Avenida de Mayo and the erection of "Tow Away Zone" signs.

Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Charles Hines are in the minority on the split vote; both agree with Merkle and other speakers who voiced concerns about safety.

The number of Sarasota County permits and inspections has shot up over the last two years, and soon, so will the number of county staffers assigned to deal with them. The county's Planning and Development Services department wins approval from the County Commission May 21 to hire nine new full-timers. According to a staff report, "in [fiscal year 2012] New Single Family housing permits increased 32% from [2011], noting the

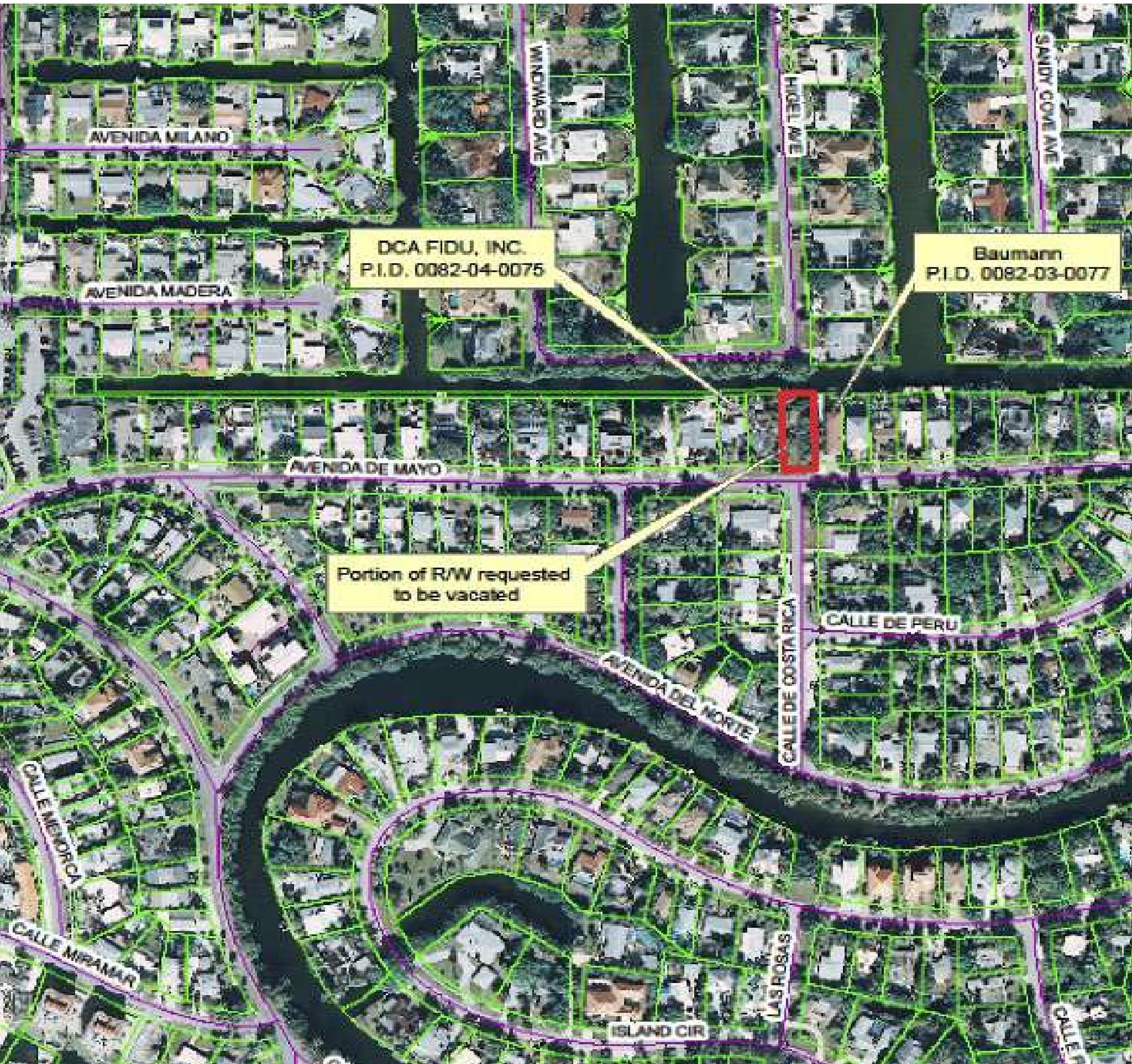
highest increases from July thru the end of the fiscal year." On top of that, the report found that 2013 is already quickly outpacing 2012: A chart shows the number of single-family permits issued in February 2012 was almost doubled in February 2013, growing from 53 to 104.

On May 21, County Commissioner Joe Barbetta remains adamant on a point he has made numerous times: The county should sell "prime frontage" property it owns on Cattlemen Road instead of putting government structures there. However, he agrees with his fellow board members that the future campus of the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office's should be close to the county's new 911/Emergency Operations Center at 1301 Cattlemen Road. Still, Barbetta opposes the withdrawal of a petition to rezone a 2.1-acre parcel at that Cattlemen site — action the board initiated in August 2012 with an eye to the potential sale of that property. Vice Chairman Charles Hines joins Barbetta in the 3-2 split vote. Before the vote, Bill Spitler, director of research and planning for the Sheriff's Office, tells the County Commission that Sheriff Tom Knight prefers relocating his facilities to the Cattlemen site because of the advantages of proximity to the EOC at the time of an emergency, such as a hurricane strike.

In 1924, according to Sarasota County records, a 1.88-acre, 60-foot wide piece of land was dedicated as county right of way for a road later named Calle de Costa Rica in the Sarasota Beach subdivision of north

Siesta Key. In 1957, Calle de Costa Rica was connected to Higuel Avenue, but by 1969, that link had disappeared, according to county maps. With the land specifically having been dedicated for right of way — and no county plans in site for a new extension of the road

to Higuel — the County Commission votes 3-2 on May 21 to vacate the right of way and turn over the land to William and Katherine Baumann of 601 Avenida de Mayo and the DCA Fidu Inc. Trust Estate, represented by Michael J. Silvers. The Baumanns own a



A graphic shows the right of way on Calle de Costa Rica that the County Commission, on a split vote, gave to the adjacent property owners. Image courtesy Sarasota County

house to the east of the right of way, while the DCA Fidu Trust Estate property is to the west of it. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason joins Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Charles Hines in making the decision. “Honestly, in my wildest dreams, I never thought the commission would approve this,” Commissioner Nora Patterson says in joining Commissioner Christine Robinson on the losing side of the vote. Robinson cites county Parks Policy 1.1.13 in her opposition to the action, because the property in question provides access to a Siesta canal. That policy section of the county’s Comprehensive Plan says, “The County shall not vacate road segments on waterfronts along any creek, river, lake, bay, or gulf access point and shall encourage right-of-way use of these areas for coastal beach and bay access.”



A 30-year veteran of the Sarasota Police Department believes an effective initiative to help the community’s homeless could be modeled on a county program that has aided drug- and alcohol-addicted people since 2006. That county program — the CART Initiative — has led to a 75 percent reduction in the number of such people on the city’s streets since it went into effect, Paul Sutton, who recently retired from the Police Department, says during the Sarasota County Commission’s regular meeting on May 22. Sutton is second vice chairman of the Community Alliance of Sarasota County, which comprises about 62 nonprofit entities “to advance communication, collaboration and advocacy of the health and human services needs of all citizens in Sarasota County through the integrated, effective and efficient

delivery systems,” its mission statement says. County Administrator Randall Reid has asked it to assist his staff and City of Sarasota staff in developing an effective approach to handling the county’s homelessness issues.



On May 28, the Downtown Improvement District chooses to seek bids for the best way to get the light show working properly again in Five Points Park. In early January 2011, variable-color lights were installed in 28 trees in the park at a cost of \$81,000. The Selby Foundation chipped in \$31,000, the city added \$25,000 and the Downtown Improvement District (DID) chipped in another \$25,000. For a while the ever-changing lights were lovely, but as the tree limbs grew, the wires snapped. Squirrels found the wires handy to gnaw on as well.



In both the city’s primary election in March and the final election in May, more people 90 and older voted than people in their 20s and 30s. In March, 202 people 90 and older voted, while 154 people between 17 and 29 cast a ballot. The older voters were eight times more likely to vote (with a 21 percent turnout) than the younger ones (2.7 percent) in the March election, and six times more likely in the May balloting. A total of 5,824 registered voters were 29 or younger, compared to the 235 voters older than 90. Of the 7,085 people who voted in May, 5,040 were 60 or older. These were just a few of the findings discussed by SRQ Editor Jacob Ogles at his biennial, belated morning-after election analysis on May 30. 

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WE ARE TIRELESS IN OUR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION SO PEOPLE CAN MAKE THEIR OWN HEALTH DECISIONS. WE PROUDLY FIGHT FOR WOMEN TO BE ABLE TO GET THE REPRODUCTIVE SERVICES THEY NEED. WE DO ALL OF THIS BECAUSE

WE CARE PASSIONATELY ABOUT HELPING WOMEN, MEN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE

LEAD HEALTHY LIVES.

NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE. NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE. WE WILL DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO GET THEM THE CARE THEY NEED. BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRULY CARED FOR, THEY WILL MAKE THEIR LIVES, THEIR FAMILIES – AND EVEN THE WORLD – BETTER AND HEALTHIER.

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YEAR IN REVIEW: JUNE

Louies Modern opens in the ground floor of the Palm Avenue parking garage well after the city commissioners hoped to have that space leased. The commissioners say they do not want to make the same mistake when the State Street garage is built. Photo by Norman Schimmel

A freshly scabbed-over wound is briefly reopened June 3, when the city committee advising Parking Division Manager Mark Lyons presents the Sarasota City Commission a set of five “guiding principles” and an overall mission statement. After the presentation, city commissioners quiz Lyons about finances.

Lyons says his staff cannot issue enough tickets to put his department in the black. “Revenue through enhanced enforcement is not sustainable,” he adds. The parking meter fiasco of two years ago — put ‘em in, take ‘em out — put Lyons in a bind. “We’re trying to develop a strategic plan,” he says.

Meanwhile, it is back to usual downtown, with merchants and their employees playing a game they are very familiar with — “the parking shuffle”: moving their vehicles from one Main Street space to another every two

hours to avoid tickets. Customers regularly find it is easier to locate open parking spaces at the malls.



The City of Sarasota is preparing to build another parking garage downtown. It is compelled to have the facility finished by the end of December 2014, according to a contract with the developer of Pineapple Square, a downtown project. The garage will have a minimum of 300 public spaces. The project will be one of mixed use, with retail on the ground floor of the structure and — possibly — condominiums on the higher levels. On June 3, the commissioners hear from City Planner Steve Stancel that \$7.2 million has been set aside to build the structure, which could include up to 14,000 square feet of retail and commercial space. Commissioners express a desire



Mark Lyons (left), the city's parking division manager, and Chris Gallagher, chairman of the Parking Advisory Board, speak with the City Commission on June 3. Photo by Norman Schimmel

to have tenants or owners in the space when the building is finished. They are still smarting from the extra year of delay it took to get somebody into the ground floor space at the Palm Avenue garage. Louies Modern and The Francis, a restaurant and banquet space, respectively, opened in early April.



To mix sports metaphors: It is not a slam dunk, but the Sarasota County Commission finally votes unanimously on June 4 to approve a funding guarantee letter required as part of the effort to land the 2017 World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park. The letter says simply that the county “will support the organization of the [championships] up to the level of \$2,782,000.” Assistant County Administrator Lee Ann

Lowery points out that the Manatee County Commission unanimously approved the same type of letter at its meeting earlier in the day. What the letters mean is that Sarasota County and Manatee County together guarantee that if the region lands the 2017 World Rowing Championships bid, the county governments will cover any cost overruns up to the specified monetary level.



No, the Sarasota County Commission does not want to sell its share of Warm Mineral Springs to the City of North Port, commissioners decide during their June 4 meeting. And, yes, they do object to the North Port City Commission’s May 28 vote to proceed on its own with negotiating a short-term agreement to keep the resort open past the June 30



Sarasota and Manatee counties sign a guarantee that they will cover any shortfall in finances for the 2017 World Rowing Championships, up to a certain level, if Benderson Park wins the bid for the event. Photo by Norman Schimmel

termination of the current lease. However, the County Commission steers clear of including in its formal response to the North Port board any language about pursuing the next step on a path to litigation over the Springs. Instead, on a unanimous vote, the County Commission's letter asks the North Port board to consider approving the interlocal agreement County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh and his staff prepared subsequent to a joint meeting of the two boards on April 17 regarding the future of the Springs. At the end of that facilitated session, the commissions agreed on the idea of a short-term lease followed by a process similar to an Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) for proposals on the long-term management of the resort.



Several Siesta Village owners tell the leadership of the Siesta Key Village Association on June 4 of their concerns about stipulations in the Siesta Key Overlay District — the county zoning code that governs businesses on Siesta Key — that prevent them from having outdoor displays. As a result of their frustrations, a group of them agrees to begin an initiative they hope will lead to changes in that code and result in improved marketing options.



The Sarasota County Commission unanimously votes on June 5 to direct the County Attorney's Office to draft two versions of a domestic partnership registry for the unincorporated areas of the county. The commissioners will discuss those drafts and settle on what they want the final document to include before they advertise it for a public hearing, they agree. Commissioner Christine

Robinson specifies in her motion that one draft will offer the option of reciprocity while the second will make it clear that people coming into the county who have registered as domestic partners in another jurisdiction would have only the rights accorded to Sarasota County domestic partnership registrants. Commissioners also instruct County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh to leave out any enforcement provision.



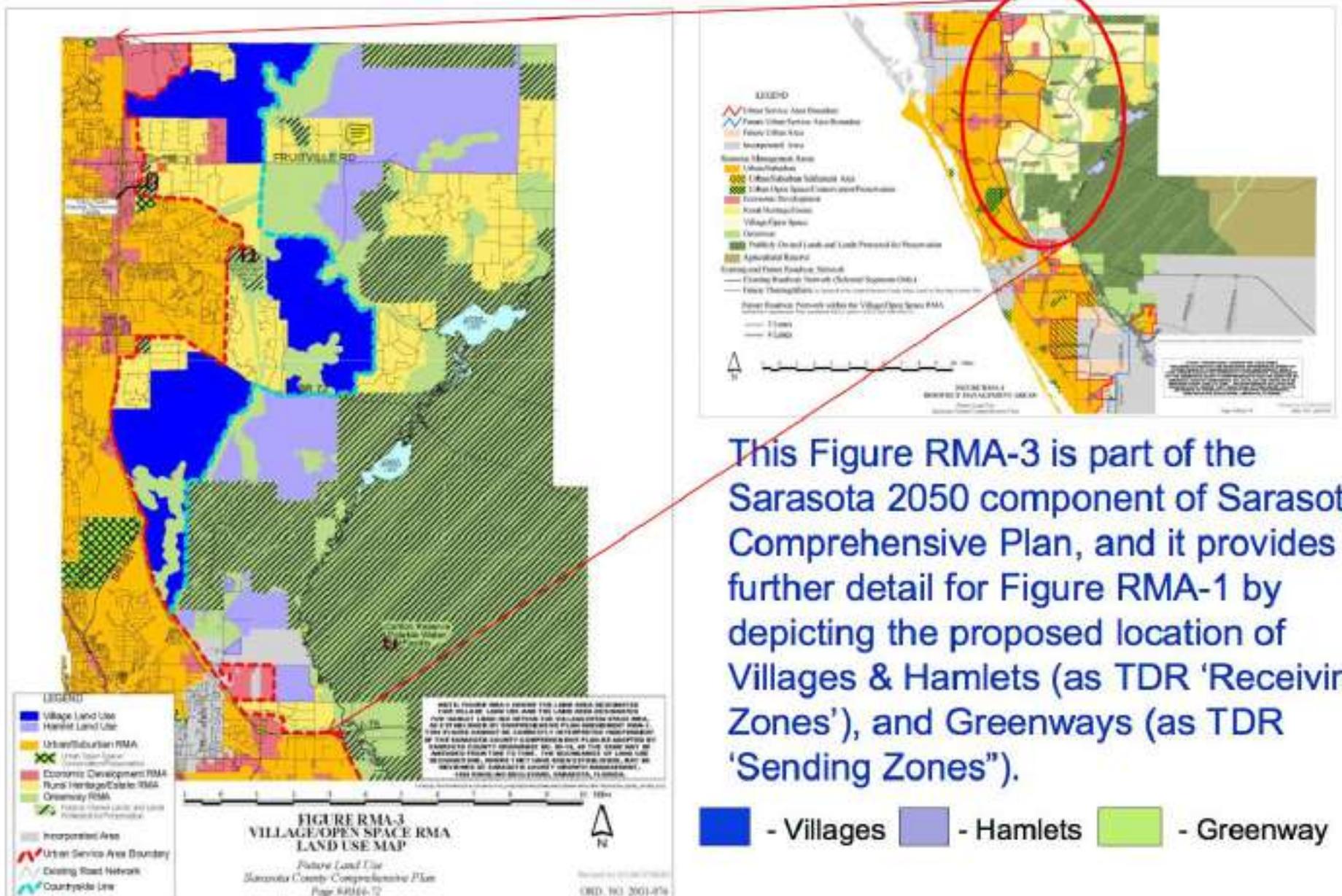
The Sarasota County Commission moves on June 5 to slash the proposed price for the first 100 Transfer of Development Rights associated with county-owned environmentally sensitive lands. Transfer of Development Rights (referred to as TDRs in planning lingo) are part of a system that allows a property owner to sell the right to develop his or her property, which in turn allows the purchaser to apply those rights to build on his or her own land. The intent is to encourage the preservation of open space while also pushing development into the most desirable areas. But in Sarasota County, nobody knows how much a TDR should cost — a major problem as the commission looks to sell TDRs associated with properties acquired through the county's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program. Two months ago, county staffers came before the commission to propose setting the price at 10 percent of the median sale price of homes, but the discussion was kicked back to the county's Environmentally Sensitive Lands Oversight Committee amid complaints the committee had not had a chance to review the proposal in full. The Oversight Committee later suggested the TDRs should be priced at 10 percent of the median sale price of *new*

homes. Since the TDRs would be used to build new units, the thinking went, the price should not be weighed down by sales figures for foreclosures and other distressed properties. But the County Commission decides to offer the county's first 100 TDRs at a quarter of staff's recommended price of \$17,850. Commissioner Joe Barbetta says discussion of the issue has dragged out for years and that the only way to determine a fair price is to sell the TDRs at a low figure and start debating offers.

The Sarasota County Commission on June 5 gives a unanimous thumbs-up to a proposal to redevelop a mostly abandoned shopping center right across South Tamiami Trail from Westfield Sarasota Square mall. The property in question sits to the southwest of U.S. 41 and to the east of Vamo Road; the triangular parcel adds up to just over 13 acres of land. Most passersby probably know it from the Denny's situated in the parking lot, or from the Linens 'n Things that dominated the plaza before being shuttered years ago. The proposed redevelopment will not change the footprint



Comprehensive Plan Amendment 2012-G



This Figure RMA-3 is part of the Sarasota 2050 component of Sarasota's Comprehensive Plan, and it provides further detail for Figure RMA-1 by depicting the proposed location of Villages & Hamlets (as TDR 'Receiving Zones'), and Greenways (as TDR 'Sending Zones').

A graphic explains part of the process involving Transfer of Development Rights in the county's 2050 Plan. Image courtesy Sarasota County

of the L-shaped building itself. Todd Mathes — the director of development for Benderson Development, the company steering the project — tells *The Sarasota News Leader* the company intends to “reuse a bunch of that existing building,” while making “a big investment” in upgrading the structure’s aesthetics.



It is the last Sarasota County structure designed by nationally known architect William Rupp that has not been “altered beyond recognition.” Thanks to a unanimous Sarasota County Commission vote on June 5, the Sarasota School of Architecture-style building will be transformed from the

county’s central mail center and print shop to the home of the Citylab-Sarasota University of Florida Master of Architecture Program. Located at 261 S. Orange Ave. in downtown Sarasota — a short distance from the County Administration Center on Ringling Boulevard — the structure made its debut in 1960 as a furniture showroom, Guy Peterson, an award-winning Sarasota architect, explains to the County Commission. Peterson’s wife, Cynthia, who is heading up the effort to raise the estimated \$150,000 in restoration and rehabilitation expenses, notes its uniqueness among Rupp’s local designs in having maintained its original look.



An aerial view shows the existing Pelican Plaza on South Tamiami Trail. Image courtesy of Sarasota County

The Sarasota County Commission takes some braking action June 10 on its proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) system, saying its wants a firm commitment from the Sarasota City Commission on either funding support and/or a greater land-use density for the U.S. 41 preferred route. Otherwise, the commissioners agree unanimously, they are not certain they will proceed with even the first of three phases of a BRT system, as suggested by county staff during a board workshop.

In his motion, Commissioner Joe Barbetta asks County Administrator Randall Reid to direct staff to complete the process it has been pursuing in earnest since January: to determine whether the county should apply for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding for BRT infrastructure along U.S. 41.

After struggling for years with the ornamental lights in the trees of Five Points Park, the Downtown Improvement District board admits defeat and decides June 11 to turn them off. The lights were wrapped around the upper limbs of 27 trees in the park; they could be programmed to change colors, adding a sense of gaiety to the green space in the center of downtown Sarasota. Tree limb growth led to broken wires, so city staffers advised the DID board to scrap the lights and start over. “The current system is not feasible,” says Purchasing Manager Mary Tucker. “As we looked at this, the pricing you’re looking at — \$30,000 to \$40,000 to fix them — and then \$20,000 to \$40,000 in annual maintenance, you’d be paying the replacement costs



Orlando's bus rapid transit system is among those Sarasota County city and county commissioners have reviewed in discussions about a proposed Sarasota system. Image courtesy Sarasota County

every two years,” adds Senior Planner Steve Stancel. “We think it may be time to go out to bid with a [Request for Proposals (RFP)] for an entirely new system. And this time we include the maintenance contract as part of the RFP.” On a unanimous vote, the board instructs Tucker to “send out an RFP, looking for lighting in the park.”



On June 11, the St. Armands Business District board gets questions from Sarasota Parking Manager Mark Lyons about a proposal for the city to build one or more parking garages for the district’s patrons, “Where would they be and what would they look like?” There are two possible sites: the northern lot, located near the fire station, and the large southeastern lot for the Circle. Lyons calls the BID “gracious”

for being willing to fund an analysis of the shopping area’s parking needs. Results of any feasibility study, he says, will be shared with the so-called “LMR” organization representing the interests of landowners, merchants and residents around the Circle. Advertising for a consulting firm to undertake the work is expected to begin later this month. Firms will have 30 days to respond. Marty Rappaport, chairman of the BID, says the study could begin in October.



Bernadette DiPino, the city’s first female police chief, on June 12 introduces the senior staff she has handpicked to watch her back. In the space of a few minutes, a promotion ceremony sees seven men and one woman elevated to higher ranks — one to colonel,



Eight Sarasota police officers are promoted to higher ranks by Chief Bernadette DiPino. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

two to captain, two to lieutenant and three to sergeant. The promotions to captain are remarkable. Corinne Stannish becomes the department's first female ever to hold that title, and Patrick Robinson's promotion is almost as noteworthy: He skips a rank, jumping up from sergeant to captain. Two of the newly promoted senior officers will work in administration. Stannish will be the administrative captain, and Lt. Philip DeNiro will be the assistant commander of administrative services and support. The man promoted to colonel was previously selected as DiPino's deputy chief: Stephen Moyer.



The City Commission on June 17 makes it clear: There is no interest in establishing another facility for the homeless within the city limits. "Who could have imagined during the [recent City Commission] campaign this would emerge as the top issue?" asks Commissioner Susan Chapman. "But the public agrees: We don't want another facility in the city. A regional solution is required."



A three-year effort will begin next month to rewrite the City of Sarasota's zoning code. It would replace the current code, which dates from 1974. Two contract employees will be hired for the duration of the project, and city planners will participate as well. Karin Murphy and Andrew Georgiadis will spearhead the effort to reorient the zoning effort from the current Euclidian zoning method to the modern "form-based code." "For this to succeed, we will have to open up the arms of City Hall and get the engagement of all

the neighborhoods," says City Manager Tom Barwin on June 17.



Vallerie Guillory parks her motorhome on a 3.6-acre parcel on June 18 and calls it the headquarters for the Sanctuary of Sarasota. Guillory has a lease for \$1 per month on the property at the northwestern corner of the intersection of Washington Boulevard and the Seminole Gulf Railway tracks at 10th Street. The land is immediately north of Gillespie Park and east of the city's sewer plant. She is inviting the homeless to bring their tents and claim their spots, and she is setting up a pair of Porta-Potties. The best spots, with shade, are already taken.

Her action in defiance of the city is certain to raise the stakes in the ongoing debate about homelessness in Sarasota.



If the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office continues to respond to more and more requests to assist with situations in the city of Sarasota — especially in the northern part of the city — the Sheriff's Office might as well take over responsibility for that area, Sheriff Tom Knight tells the Sarasota County Commission during its regular meeting on June 18. "I can assure you we have rescued the City of Sarasota more in the past two months than we have in the previous four-plus years I have been sheriff," he says. "I can assure you we will be rescuing them again in the future." In an interview after his presentation to the county board, Knight stresses to *The Sarasota News Leader* that his two primary concerns are the safety and security of the city's residents and the safety of law enforcement personnel.

Commissioner Christine Robinson tells Knight, “The City of Sarasota is supposed to be the lead agency within the city limits, so this concerns me ... It sounds like you’re taking some lead responsibilities in the City of Sarasota ... That can create some administrative chaos, actually, if they’re not being responsive to what’s going on ... There will be a hole, eventually, that happens, and you’re trying to do the patchwork.” Knight replies, “When bad things happen ... they call the sheriff. Is it becoming more frequent? Yes. Is it becoming a major concern of mine? Is it affecting my overtime? Yes. Yes. Does it create a continuity of command and control? Yes.”



Spencer Anderson, director of field services, tells the County Commission on June 18 that the firm hired in late April to handle right of way mowing and median maintenance in the county’s North Urban Zone has been unable to perform according to the county’s specifications. “How can this many people fail that quickly?” Commissioner Joe Barbetta asks. “I’m really concerned that we can’t get our hands around this mowing.” Barbetta was among the commissioners who had voiced the greatest misgivings about a mowing contract awarded in early 2012 that ultimately led to the county’s falling far behind in mowing last summer, prompting a multitude of complaints about overgrown medians and rights of way. The situation grew so bad that the commissioners finally agreed in February to hire 24 new employees to ensure the county could keep up the mowing and especially to make certain the views along the major roads leading into the county are kept in tip-top

form. By the end of the June 18 discussion, the commissioners unanimously agree to award the contract for the North Urban Zone mowing to JLC Hauling Inc. of Myakka City, but they decline a staff recommendation that a lower bid for the work be sought before the contract expires in 10 months. JLC Hauling’s bid was about \$200,000 higher than the bid of Mainscape Inc. of Sarasota, which had won the bid in April.



County commissioners press city leaders on June 19 to get ‘air rights’ squared away over a downtown parcel eyed by a developer as the site of a new hotel. One month shy of 10 years ago, Sarasota County Government held a figurative gun to the head of the Sarasota City Commission and made its members sign an agreement. This was a matter of “Sign, or the county seat is moving to the interstate.” The county wanted the land under the old city police station to build a new court complex. The city subsequently floated a bond issue to build a new police headquarters only 100 feet away. The old HQ was then torn down; today it is a vacant lot. To provide a little political cover in 2003, then County Administrator Jim Ley tossed a few crumbs to the city. At the time they seemed meaningless, including “air rights” over an 80-odd-space parking lot north of the historic courthouse downtown. Now a developer wants to build a hotel on the property, and the County Commission is hot to strike a deal — except for those pesky air rights. In what could resemble a comedy of errors, all these maneuvers were never “memorialized” in a legal document filed at the courthouse.



As the Sarasota County commissioners craft another version of an interlocal agreement over the future of Warm Mineral Springs, the majority agrees certain points have to be made clear to the North Port City Commission: State law will not allow the county to engage in any lease to keep the facility open without going through a competitive bid process; the two local government bodies are equal partners in the resort; and the two boards did agree in July 2012 to work together on how best to manage the springs in the future. Commissioner Joe Barbetta casts the single “No” on the vote that directs County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh to complete the revised document and send it to the City of North Port as soon as possible.



Thanks to Sarasota County Sheriff Tom Knight’s implementation of an Intelligence Led Policing program since he was first elected in 2008, the county has seen a 25 percent reduction in crime. The decrease from 2011 to 2012 was 18 percent, and the crime rate was down another 14 percent for the first quarter of 2013, Knight tells the County Commission during its June 21 budget workshop. Almost as great a point of pride for him, Knight notes, is the fact that citizen complaints coming into his office have declined 22 percent over the past four years. Because of the effectiveness of the Intelligence Led Policing (ILP) program, Knight also wants to provide pay raises to the sergeants and lieutenants who carry most of the load, he tells the commission — “the law enforcement individuals I believe are responsible for our crime decrease.” He is seeking \$91,873,196 for the 2014 fiscal year, while his current budget is \$86,554,672. However, Knight points out,

\$3,546,424 of the projected expenses for the new fiscal year, which will begin Oct. 1, are beyond his control, including a \$1.7 million hike in payments to the Florida Retirement System. Because most of his employees are in the “special risk” category for health benefits, the Sheriff’s Office’s new chief financial officer, Lisa Kiesel adds, the office also will have to absorb greater expenses for them.



Because the Florida Legislature approved a 2011 bill mandating that county tax collectors take over all driver license services no later than June 2015, the Sarasota County Tax Collector’s Office will need about \$1 million to renovate existing facilities and probably a maximum of \$3.5 million for a new, central location to serve customers, Tax Collector Barbara Ford-Coates tells the Sarasota County Commission on June 21. In presenting her budget for the 2014 fiscal year, Ford-Coates says she also has planned for four new employees next year and another eight for the 2015 fiscal year to make the transition possible. She is anticipating an extra 45,000 walk-in customers at her offices, resulting in a 30 percent increase in transaction time. Already, Ford-Coates continues, she and her staff have been working with Sarasota County Property Appraiser Bill Furst about remodeling her offices in the Terrace Building in downtown Sarasota — with Furst moving employees out of the first-floor space they have been occupying. Remodeling will be necessary as well at the R.L. Anderson Administration Center in Venice. The changes in those two buildings will cost about \$1 million, Ford-Coates said.



Circus Sarasota star Nik Wallenda's 1,500-foot wire walk across and through Hell Hole Bend, AZ, has Sarasotans holding their collective breath with millions of other people around the world. It takes him 22 minutes to make the crossing over an area of the Grand Canyon that is not available to visitors. Hell Hole Bend is desolate — devoid of people and somewhat otherworldly. His cable is 2½ inches thick and 1,400 feet high.



On June 24, the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) unanimously approves a plan for north U.S. 41 from 14th Street to University Parkway, including four traffic roundabouts. Do not look for construction to begin soon, however. The project goes to the bottom of a priority list, coming

in at No. 29. The MPO is composed of elected leaders of the two counties and their respective cities. The estimated construction cost would be \$52 million from state and federal funds. However, segments of the project — the roundabout at University Parkway, for example — could be accomplished as an intersection improvement through use of other funding sources.



After a quarter-century run in an old movie theater on the North Tamiami Trail, McCurdy's Comedy Club will be moving downtown, practically next-door to the historic Sarasota County Courthouse. The iconic comedy venue will be in the Courthouse Square building near The Melting Pot fondue restaurant.



Nik Wallenda trains at Benderson Park for his walk across a section of the Grand Canyon. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Sarasota police are quietly beginning to utilize the “High Point strategy” to take violent offenders off the streets with the help of community residents. Several sources have confirmed the action, named after a North Carolina city that used it to cut crime significantly. City police officers are using parole violations, drug sales and other charges to move offenders to prison, and local judges are setting high bails to keep them from returning to the streets. The strategy calls for the offenders to receive stiff sentences as an incentive to urge lower-tier criminals to go straight. The anti-crime offensive began earlier this month. “They grabbed 20, and the bonds were amazing,” said one source knowledgeable about jail activity. “Nobody made bond.” Police are now identifying “second-tier” offenders, who will be offered a second chance to become productive members of the community, or they will face the fate of those in the “first tier.” Through the Police Department’s use of “deferred prosecution,” home visits and “letters of intent,” the second-tier violators are being given the opportunity to change their ways at a distance from the criminal justice system. Sarasota Police officers are

calling the operation DMI — drug market intervention, and they are focusing on the Newtown area.



Sixty days: That is the time frame within which the City of North Port hopes to have responses to an advertisement seeking a short-term manager for Warm Mineral Springs.

A special meeting of the North Port City Commission probably will be necessary in August to approve an agreement, City Manager Jonathan Lewis tells his board during its regular meeting on June 24. That is because after its last regular session in July, the City Commission is not scheduled to meet again until September. According to the terms of a new interlocal agreement between the city and the county, the Sarasota County Commission will have 30 days to vote on the North Port board’s action regarding short-term management.

Lewis’ comments come just before the North Port Commission votes unanimously to approve that interlocal agreement with Sarasota County regarding the future of the 81-acre resort the two local governments purchased jointly in 2010 for \$5.5 million. 

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LOOKING BACK



YEAR IN REVIEW: JULY

Siesta Key celebrates July 4 with its traditional fireworks show, put on by the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce. Contributed photo by Peter van Roekens

After listening to wildly conflicting claims about the quality of care offered to injured seabirds at Save Our Seabirds (SOS) on City Island, the City Commission votes unanimously on July 1 to deepen its probe of the nonprofit. For weeks, former volunteer Greg Para has been leveling serious charges against Save Our Seabirds, describing a facility where

rats are killing caged birds and where injured birds are being euthanized more quickly than necessary. However, City Purchasing Manager Mary Tucker says she and other staff members conducted an unannounced inspection of SOS and found no reason for concern.



Owls peer out of their enclosure at Save Our Seabirds on City Island. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The Sarasota County Commission on July 9 appoints Michael Beaumier and Paul Bispham to the Planning Commission, denying the candidacy of former three-term County Commissioner Jon Thaxton. General contractor Beaumier and sod business owner Bispham garner five and four votes, respectively, while Thaxton receives a lone vote, cast by Commissioner Nora Patterson. In August, the two new planning commissioners will fill open seats vacated by Cheryl Luehr and Roland Piccone.



On July 9, the County Commission votes unanimously to give County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh approval to file a civil lawsuit against Siesta Resorts LLC, which has been renting a house at 6537 Sabal Drive on Siesta Key that violates the county building code and Federal Emergency Management Agency floodplain regulations. A renter in November 2012 alerted county Fire Department staff to construction on the lower level of the house that prompted county Code Enforcement staff to call the structure a “firetrap.” “While we have aggressively pursued this through Code Enforcement,” DeMarsh explains to the County Commission, “we believe it’s



The county commissioners turned down former Commissioner Jon Thaxton's application for a seat on the Planning Commission. Photo by Norman Schimmel

advantageous at this time to go to court and seek redress ...” The owners have refused to respond to county attempts to rectify the situation, he points out.



On July 10, it takes less than 10 minutes to wrap up six years of legal action Siesta Key property owner Chris Brown has filed against Sarasota County over parking issues related to his businesses in Siesta Village. On a 3-1 vote — with Commissioner Nora Patterson, a Siesta resident, in the minority; and Vice Chairman Charles Hines recusing himself — the County Commission approves the vacation of a right of way along Columbus Boulevard adjacent to The Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village. Earlier this year, Patterson opposed settlement terms for this third lawsuit Brown had filed against the county since the fall of

2007. When the commissioners voted on April 24 to approve those terms — which necessitated a public hearing before they could be finalized — Patterson said of the right of way vacation, “It’s a little bit of a heartache that that is part of a lawsuit, just like [the right of way on the Ocean Boulevard side of The Hub] that we vacated. ... I do have a problem with somebody settling a lawsuit and coming back for another bite at the apple.” As part of the settlement of Brown’s first lawsuit, the County Commission agreed to pay \$35,000 and vacate a portion of its Ocean Boulevard right of way. (Brown had been accused of allowing outside tables at the restaurant to encroach on that county property.) “I’m certainly glad it’s over,” Brown tells *The Sarasota News Leader* after the board’s July 10 action.



The County Commission agrees to a civil suit against the owners of rental property on south Siesta Key that is in violation of county and federal building codes. File photo



An aerial map shows the location of the county right of way to be vacated for The Hub Baja Grill in Siesta Village. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Merchants around Burns Court are considering joining the Downtown Improvement District (DID), an area of self-taxing property owners using the money for a variety of landscape and hardscape improvements. The Sarasota County Property Assessor's Office has appraised the property at \$57 million, so the addition of Burns Square to the DID would bring in about \$114,000 more each year.



The Sarasota County commissioners on July 10 unanimously adopt the tentative millage rates for the 2014 fiscal year, leaving the total flat from the current year at 3.93. The total of the proposed 2014 fiscal year budget is \$1,032,677,312. That compares to the \$897 million spending plan adopted for the current fiscal year and \$870 million in FY 2012. The last time the county budget exceeded \$1 billion was in FY 2010, when it was \$1.003 billion, according to documents provided by the county's Office of Financial Planning.



Next month, city property owners will receive a Truth in Millage notice telling them how much each taxing body wants for the coming fiscal year. By law, it contains something called "the rollback rate," guaranteed to confuse many homeowners, because any tax rate higher than the "rollback" is often seen as a tax increase. For Sarasota city property owners, the rollback rate this year is 2.8480 mills, or \$2.85 on every \$1,000 of appraised value of the taxable property. But the tax rate decided by city commissioners on July 17 is a tad higher, at 3.1738 mills. Kicking

aside the decimals, the latter represents an 8.5 percent increase in taxes. For a home valued at \$200,000, that represents a tax bill \$49.58 higher than last year (or 14 cents per day). Commissioner Susan Chapman makes the motion to approve the proposed millage rate for the 2014 fiscal year; Commissioner Suzanne Atwell seconds it, and it passes 3-2 (Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Mayor Shannon Snyder in the minority). The 3.1738 mills is a line in the sand; commissioners can lower the rate later, but they cannot go above it when they adopt the final FY 2014 budget.



As part of a \$1 million wetland restoration at the 72-acre Red Bug Slough nestled between suburban development surrounding Clark and Beneva Roads, bulldozers have dug up and removed much of the Cogongrass from canal banks and wetlands. The bulldozed canal banks are being reshaped into gently sloping "littoral shelves," where hundreds of native wetland plants such as pickerelweed and arrowhead will soon filter nutrient-rich rainwater. While the restoration project will not remove all of the Cogongrass at Red Bug Slough, it will make a big difference. The project — which is slated for a December completion — will bring improvements to three different segments of the preserve, restoring more than 4 acres of wetlands. The main goal is to improve the water quality in the waterways and swamps flowing through the preserve and then into Phillippi Creek and eventually Roberts Bay.



The Sarasota County School Board votes unanimously on July 23 — with member Carol Todd absent — to advertise a total tentative millage rate of 7.970 mills for its 2014 fiscal year.

That is an increase from the total rate of 7.816 for the current fiscal year. A person with a house valued at \$200,000 will pay an extra \$30.80 in school district taxes, Deputy Chief Financial Officer Al Weidner notes. The district will use almost \$12.9 million from its reserve fund to balance the new budget, Chairwoman Jane Goodwin points out.



During its regular meeting on July 23, the School Board approves four contracts totaling \$1,317,608.29 to provide school resource officers (SROs) in its middle schools and high schools for the 2013-14 school year. However, board members lament not only Sheriff Tom Knight's decision to put his officers only in county schools as of next year, they also criticize the City of Sarasota for not offering to cover part of the cost of SROs in its jurisdiction. According to the new contracts, the School Board will cover the total cost of the SROs in the city of Sarasota, which is \$312,248. The Sarasota Police Department has agreed to provide one SRO at each of the



Once the Red Bug Slough project is complete, water will flow better through a canal that feeds the lake in the slough. Photo by Roger Drouin

following schools: Booker and Sarasota High Schools and Brookside Middle School. The contract also calls for the Police Department to assign a supervisor to oversee the SROs in the city. While the district has a partnership with the Cities of North Port and Venice as well as the Sheriff's Office for SROs, School Board member Frank Kovach tells his colleagues, "I would not define our relationship with the City of Sarasota as a partnership."



City Commissioner Paul Caragiulo will be a candidate for the Sarasota County Commission in 2014, aiming at the seat vacated by his friend, Joe Barbetta, who is limited to two terms.

Caragiulo will open his campaign account next week to legally raise and spend money,

though candidate qualification does not begin until 2014. He will face Pete Theisen in the Republican primary a year from now. No other candidates have announced they are running for the seat.

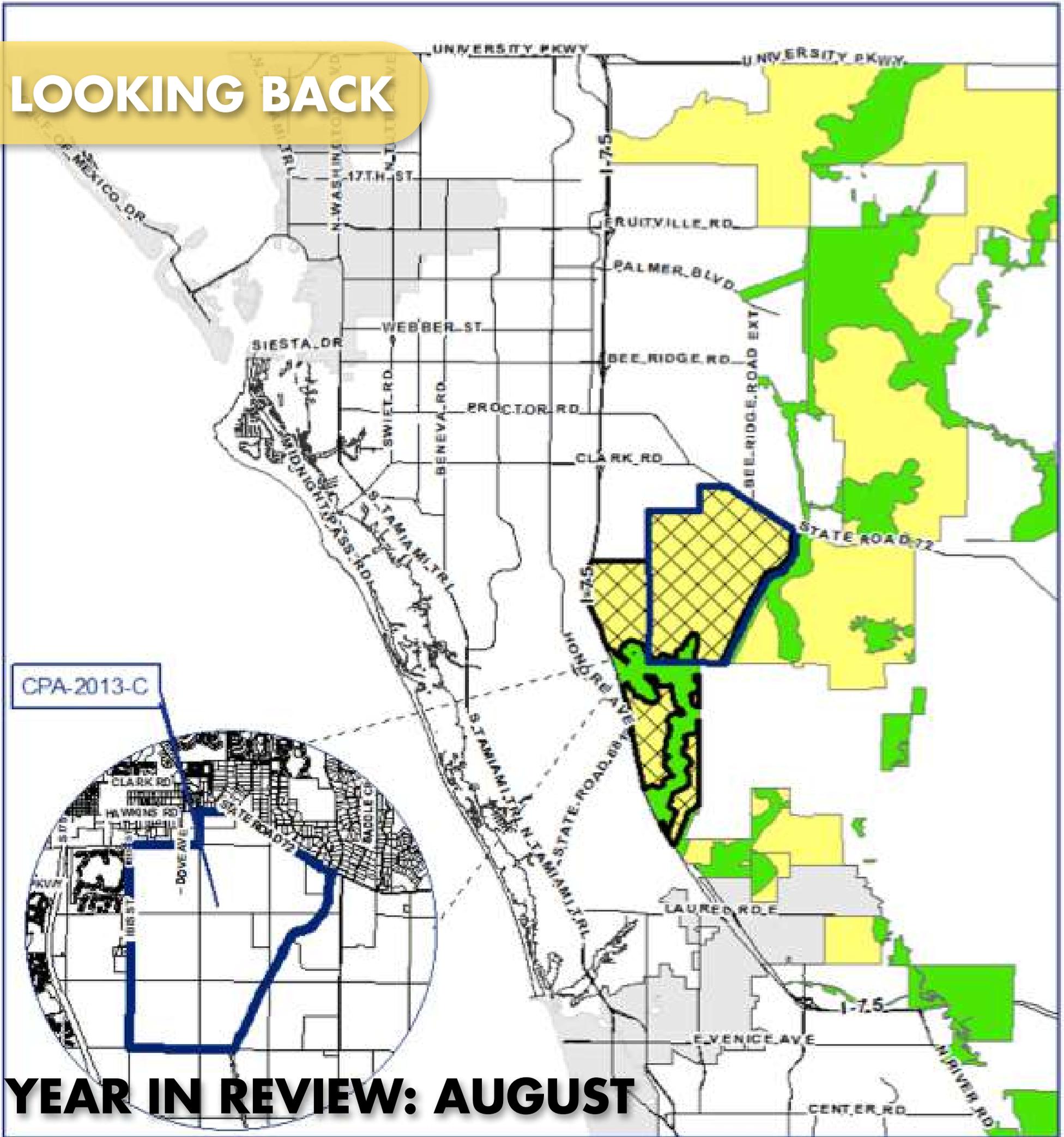


On July 31, county residents, nonprofit service providers, homeless advocates and local officials attending the meeting of the Sarasota County Community Alliance Homeless Committee session agree that homelessness consultant Robert Marbut should be paid \$16,500 for four months of services in the county. By a show of hands, nearly all of the 50-plus people in the County Commission Chambers on Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota indicate their support. With additional costs for travel, the total expense for Marbut's consulting assistance will be about \$40,000. 



Paul Sutton, a retired Sarasota Police Department captain, conducts a meeting of the Sarasota County Community Alliance Homeless Committee, which endorses the community hiring of a nationally known expert on homelessness. Photo by Roger Drouin

LOOKING BACK



YEAR IN REVIEW: AUGUST

-  CPA-2013-C
-  SOUTH VILLAGE RMA
-  GREENWAY RMA
-  VILLAGE / OPEN SPACE RMA

SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT
CPA-2013-C**

NOVEMBER 19, 2013



0 5000 10000

Map prepared by the Planning Department, Sarasota County, Florida. All rights reserved. No part of this map may be reproduced without the written permission of the Planning Department.

A map shows the location of the proposed development on Clark Road under the aegis of the 2050 Plan. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Over the next three months a national consulting firm will undertake a review of Sarasota County's beleaguered Public Utilities Department. A countywide procurement scandal came to light in 2011 after a utilities manager was charged with receiving illegal gifts from a contractor awarded millions in bids for sewer repair work for the county. "Unfortunately this is one of the areas where the procurement problems came up," County Administrator Randall Reid tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. The department was again thrust into controversy and the media spotlight after a billing mix-up in which customers were charged for backflow valve inspections that were never conducted. The refunds due were then sent to the wrong customers. After the two fiascos, several of the department's managers resigned—including the utilities director. Reid hopes the review and a resulting report will help guide new managers that will soon be hired by the county.



Sarasota 2050, the county's long-range development blueprint, is already facing tough scrutiny. Now, thanks to a proposal brought by owners of 4,638 acres along Clark Road, even more changes might be in the offing. The Sarasota County Planning Commission soon will consider big changes to the section of 2050 dealing with the so-called South Village Area. The 2050 plan, approved a decade ago to encourage walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods in previously undeveloped areas, stipulates "only one Village Master Development Plan may initially be approved on land designated for Village land use located south of Clark Road." According to the proposal brought by representatives of LT Ranch

and 3 H Ranch, that language would be eliminated and swapped out with text stating that "the County shall support development within the portion of the South Village Area" to be dubbed "the Clark Road Properties." That agricultural land, 4,638 acres in total, lies south of Clark and east of Ibis Street and the neighborhood of Serenoa. According to the proposal, the 2050 revisions would ensure that development within the Clark Road Properties would generally follow current 2050 guidelines, but they would also allow for just 33 percent of open space in a new neighborhood, rather than the current 50 percent rule.



Chris Brown hopes the City of Sarasota will approve his plans for a radical makeover of the triangular structure at Five Points in the heart of downtown. The building housed Patrick's Restaurant for more than 20 years; recently, it was home to the Floribbean. Brown wants to add "galleries" on the second floor that would protrude over the sidewalks. They would be supported by columns stretching 12 feet down to the sidewalk. Because the sidewalk is public property, he needs city permission to proceed with the design. He takes the initial step in that process on Aug. 7 when he asks the Development Review Committee (DRC) to look at his plans and offer feedback. Courtney Mendez, a senior city planner, notes this would be the first application of a zoning code amendment that allows galleries. Not only would the structures be 12 feet above the sidewalk, but they also would project 8 feet out from the building and be fronted with a railing. Brown offers two sketches, which show a New Orleans French Quarter flavor, including wrought iron railings.





Sarasota businessman Chris Brown proposes a New Orleans-style look for the triangular building that used to house Patrick's Restaurant at Five Points. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is continuing work on the design of the proposed Lido Beach renourishment project, including an examination of shoaling in Big Pass and plans for three proposed groins on the south end of Lido Key to help stabilize the beach, Alexandria DavisShaw, engineer for the City of Sarasota, tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. Sarasota County staff members provided the Corps several different modeling scenarios relative to Big Pass, she says. Corps officials have expanded on those, she adds, spending the past several months running them out for a number of years as they consider the

best approach. Corps officials also are looking at reducing the size of the groins, she notes, while trying to ensure the structures will provide much-needed protection for the shoreline. The modeling is scheduled to be complete in October, DavisShaw says, with the results to be made available not just to city and county officials but also to the public. Tourism on Lido Beach is vital to the community's economy, DavisShaw points out, which is all the more reason the City of Sarasota is proceeding with plans to renourish that beach. City officials have estimated the cost of the project at \$17.5 million, while federal



An aerial map shows the location of Little Salt Spring near North Port. Image courtesy Sarasota County

officials have put it at \$20 million, she notes, though the latter figure includes “a very large contingency.”



Sarasota County soon could become the owner of Little Salt Spring, “one of the most significant archaeological sites in the Southeast,” says University of Miami Research Associate Steve Koski, who has lived on the property since 2004. The University of Miami has owned the site since 1982, thanks to a donation. However, because of cuts in funding to the university’s Rosenstiel School’s Division of Marine Affairs program — which managed research at the spring — the university is looking to sell the property. Talks are continuing between Sarasota County and the University over the cost.

Commissioner Christine Robinson tells *The Sarasota News Leader* she believes the university wants to sell the site soon. “I think we are talking months, not years,” Robinson notes. Unlike Warm Mineral Springs — which began operating in the 1960s as a health spa — Little Salt Spring should be protected as a limited-access archaeological and ecological preserve, Robinson points out.



It likely will be September at the earliest before the Sarasota County Commission again addresses a request by Siesta Village merchants to amend the zoning code to permit some types of outdoor merchandise displays. That is the assessment Kevin Cooper, executive director of the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce, provides to about 20 members of the Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) during the latter organization’s monthly

meeting on Aug. 6. Cooper adds that he is not certain whether the three groups working on the issue — the Chamber, the SKVA and the Siesta Key Association — will have reached any agreement by September on modifying the Siesta Key Overlay District, the special zoning ordinance that governs activities on the island. Cheryl Gaddie, the SKVA president, points out that such an agreement would be necessary before the groups take the matter back to the County Commission.



As many as six new hotels are planned for the downtown area, City of Sarasota Chief Planner Steve Stancel tells the Downtown Improvement District board Aug 6. While five of them are already well-known projects as a result of recent community discussions, Stancel says there is “potential for a sixth, which I cannot tell you about.” If just five were actually built, they would add more than 1,000 hotel rooms in the downtown area. And just as important, Stancel notes, would be the range of room rates: “That makes a difference, because you reach different markets.” One of them — the Gulfstream Sarasota — would be adjacent to the Ritz-Carlton at the intersection of U.S. 41 and the Ringling Causeway. Embassy Suites has filed pre-application paperwork for a 200-room hotel at Second Street and Tamiami Trail, across the street from the Ritz.



During the Aug. 19 City Commission meeting, Commissioner Paul Caragiulo says now is the time to start planning for a public homeless shelter in the city of Sarasota — and setting aside funding to build it. He adds the details

— ranging from a site to the number of beds to who will operate the facility — can be worked out later, but he urges his fellow commissioners to take action before the city and county finalize their budgets for the upcoming year. The other commissioners, however, are not interested in pursuing plans in a hurry, and Commissioner Willie Shaw says he does not want to move forward with a city shelter at any speed.



On Aug. 20, the County Commission votes unanimously to set aside \$500,000 in a fund to be used to deal with the issue of homelessness in the area. The actual expenditure of the money will be linked to a proposal developed

by Robert Marbut, an expert on homelessness, who is working as a consultant for the City and County of Sarasota.



On a 4-1 vote Aug. 20, the Sarasota County Commission agrees to provide up to 3 percent in merit pay raises for non-union county employees who receive the top two scores on evaluations to be conducted in the new fiscal year. Those employees who earn a 3 out of 5 — with 5 reflecting superior work — would get a boost up to 2 percent, while those rated 1 or 2 would receive nothing, according to the motion put forth by Commissioner Joe Barbetta. “The concern I have is a lot of 4s and 5s ... are watching the 1s or 2s mail it in,



Youngsters compete in a BMX Strider event in Sarasota County. Image courtesy Sarasota County

showing up, doing the minimum and collecting their check,” Barbetta says. “We need to reward those that are working hard to be 4s and 5s.” Commissioner Christine Robinson casts the “No,” vote, as she did last year when County Administrator Randall Reid proposed a \$1,000 lump sum payment to non-union employees. “This is *hard*,” Robinson said, “because the people I work with — it directly impacts them. But I can’t, as long as we’re deficit spending, take on more deficit spending ...”



It has taken him a few months, but Sarasota County Commissioner Joe Barbetta finally wins support from his fellow board members for upgrading the county’s [BMX facility on 17th Street](#). Although Barbetta’s motion is pegged to the county’s Parks and Recreation Department supplying documentation of project details and estimates, his motion passes on a unanimous vote. It comes after more people appear before the County Commission during the public comments portion of its regular meeting on Aug. 27 to plead for the addition of a 5-meter ramp and the reconfiguration of the track to make the BMX facility the only one of its type available on the U.S. East Coast — and only the second one in the nation. The other facility, in [Chula Vista, CA](#), is in demand by athletes from all over the world for training purposes, the commissioners heard in public comments at their Aug. 20 budget workshop.

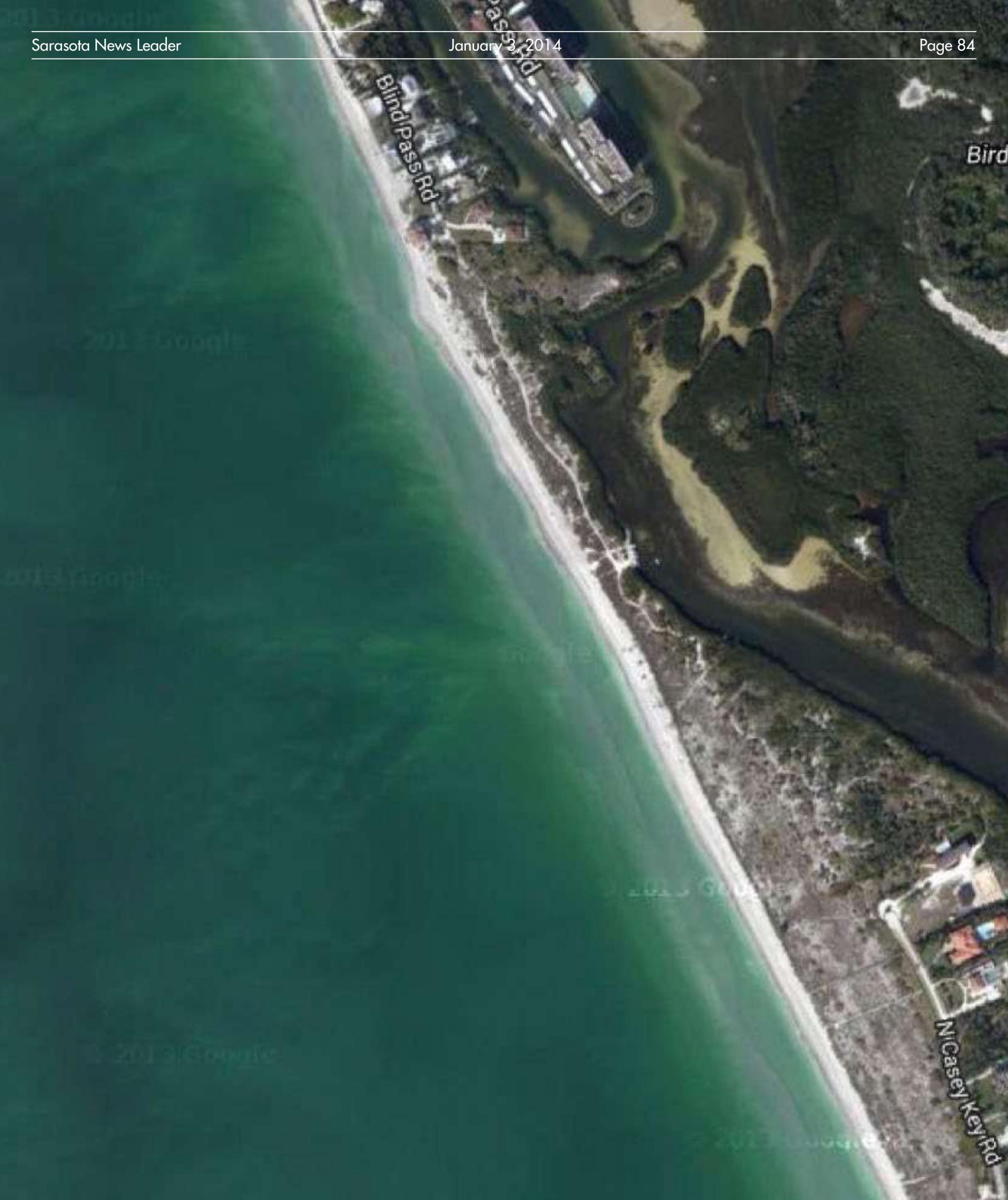


The chairman of the [Midnight Pass Society](#) says he is “cautiously optimistic” about renewing an effort this year to open Midnight

Pass, as the area marks the 30th anniversary of the inlet’s closing. Jim Herbert was among a delegation of Sarasota County residents who met on Aug. 21 with officials of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to discuss whether the county was treated unfairly in its last attempt to gain state and federal approval to allow water once again to flow through Midnight Pass from Little Sarasota Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. “We feel Sarasota County’s permit application was improperly handled [in 2008],” Herbert tells *The Sarasota News Leader* on Aug. 26. The Aug. 21 meeting was an opportunity to make the case for DEP’s reconsideration of the issue, he adds. Although it will be up to the Sarasota County Commission to pursue the endeavor, state officials have indicated they are “open to scheduling a formal pre-application meeting during which specific elements of a proposed project would be carefully vetted,” Sarasota County Coastal Resources Manager Laird Wreford wrote County Administrator Randall Reid in an email on Aug. 22 that summed up the meeting.



After about nine months of more intensive staff time and discussions among the Sarasota County Commission, the Sarasota City Commission and the Manatee County Commission, the Sarasota County board votes 4-1 on Aug. 27 to withdraw its application for federal support for a bus rapid transit (BRT) system to serve the community. The board was facing a September deadline to decide on proceeding with its 2010 application for federal support for a BRT system along the CSX railroad corridor or choosing to withdraw it and pursue a new application



An aerial map shows the area where Midnight Pass once existed on southern Siesta Key. Image from Google Maps

for a system along U.S 41. Both the City Commission and the Manatee Commission had voiced support for the latter option in meetings in February and April, respectively. Commissioner Joe Barbetta, who has been a staunch advocate of the BRT as a means of redeveloping the North Tamiami Trail, cast the lone “No” vote on withdrawing the application. “Redevelopment follows transit,” he says, “and we’re never going to get the North

Trail redeveloped if we don’t proceed with the BRT proposal, albeit as costly as it is.”

“I totally believe in public transportation,” Vice Chairman Charles Hines adds. “It’s the way of the future.” However, he points out, “This community, in my opinion, is not ready for [BRT] yet. ... We’re struggling so hard to fund these things.”



Siesta Key Trolley Route Map (deferred to 2016)



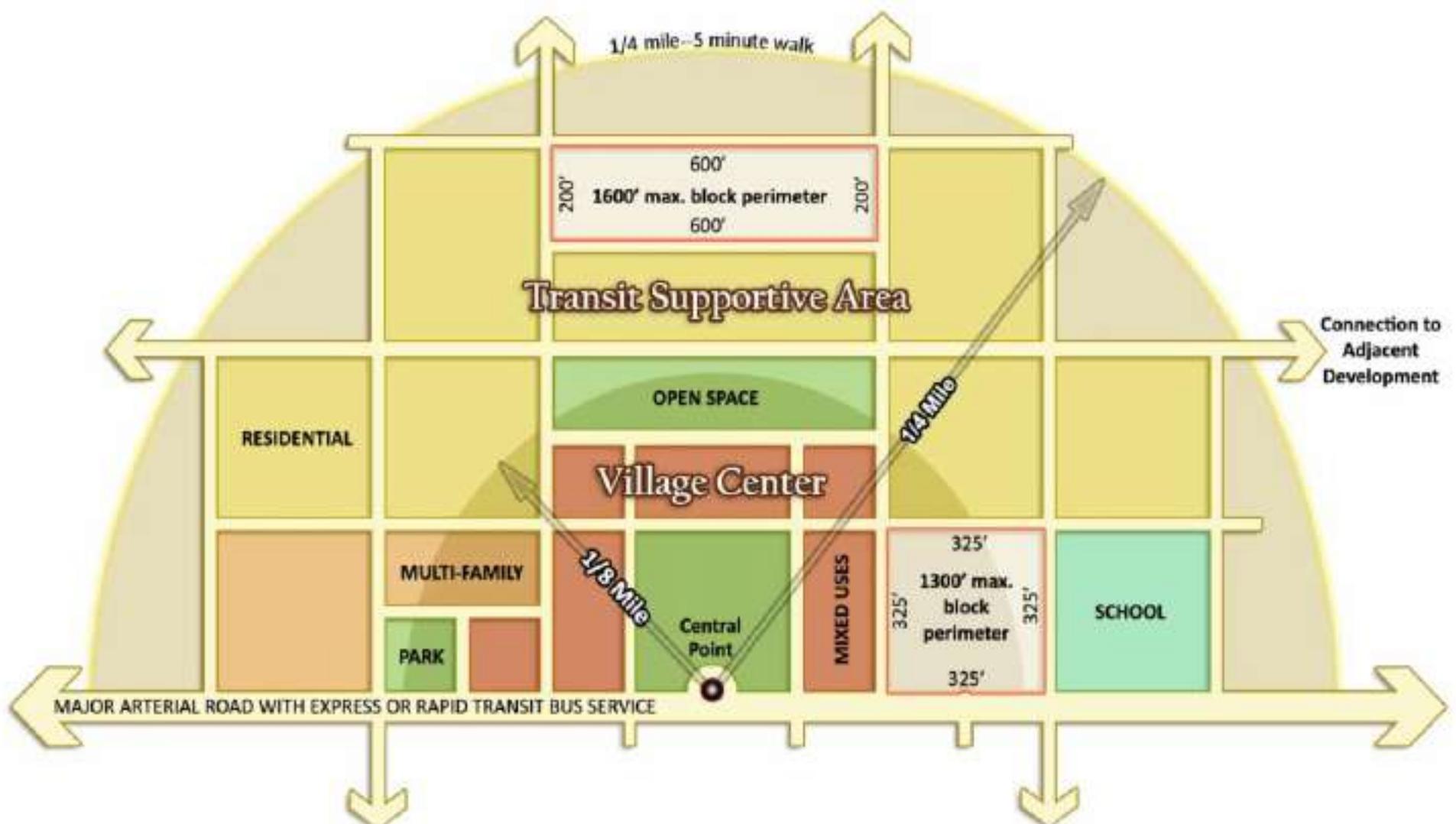
A map shows the proposed routes for the Siesta Key trolley. Image courtesy Sarasota County

With perpetual concerns about parking on Siesta Key, the Sarasota County Commission moves ahead on a plan to implement trolley service — in the form of a regular bus with appropriate decal “wrapping” to make it resemble a trolley — starting after July 2014. The unanimous vote comes at the end of a discussion that pits the Siesta route against new service for University Parkway — including service at the forthcoming University Town Center and the Benderson Park rowing venue.

What won the day was the ongoing worry about the county’s future budgets. While

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) has a grant from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to cover half of the Siesta trolley’s operating expenses for three years, no money is available right now for the proposed University Parkway route. With 17 new SCAT buses arriving in May or June 2014, Sarah Blanchard, the SCAT planning manager, tells the board during its regular meeting on Aug. 27, the department would have the necessary two extra buses to extend Route 11 seven days a week from downtown to Southgate Mall to Siesta Village and on to Turtle Beach. 

What is TOD?



For a bus rapid transit system to be successful, sufficient development must exist to inspire riders to use a route, county staff says. Image courtesy Sarasota County



YEAR IN REVIEW: SEPTEMBER

On Sept. 1 (United States time) Benderson Park won the bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships. Photo by Norman Schimmel

On Sept. 1, Eastern Daylight Time, the news officially begins to spread among Sarasota County officials that Nathan Benderson Park, located off University Parkway, has won the bid to host the 2017 World Rowing Championships. With a Sarasota/Manatee delegation behind him, Paul Blackketter, chairman of the nonprofit organization that manages events at the park, stood before members of the Congress of the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron* — the International Federation of Rowing Associations (FISA) — in Seoul, South Korea, to accept the bid. On Sept. 4, Benderson Park hosts a celebration and show of thanks to government leaders, sponsors and supporters who have strived to help the facility achieve this goal.

The man arrested on Jan. 7, 2012 for hitting and killing a Siesta Key runner while he allegedly was driving drunk turns down a plea deal that would have sent him to prison for 15 years. Instead, Blake Talman, 24, of Bradenton is expected to go on trial in mid-November in connection with the death of 53-year-old Donna Chen of Sarasota. Talman was scheduled to appear in 12th Judicial Circuit Court on Sept. 3 to accept the plea deal on the vehicular homicide charge and multiple counts of DUI damage to property, Assistant State Attorney Amanda M. Gambert tells *The Sarasota News Leader* in an interview. However, Gambert says she received notification the morning of Sept. 4 that Talman would be rejecting the plea deal after all. She was surprised by the decision, she adds. “We were looking to find a resolution today,” Gambert says, “just because we would like to see the family have some closure.”





County Commissioner Nora Patterson and Randy Benderson of Benderson Development celebrate Benderson Park's international recognition in its effort to land major rowing events. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Following a County Commission pledge last month to set aside \$500,000 to deal with homelessness issues in the area, the City Commission votes 3-2 on Sept. 3 to match that. The city board takes the action after a discussion about funding for a homeless shelter, which has also been called a “transitional center” by consultant Robert Marbut. Commissioners Paul Caragiulo and Suzanne Atwell and Mayor Shannon Snyder vote to dedicate the money to initiatives for the homeless. Commissioners Willie Shaw and Susan Chapman say they cannot support the effort. Although Snyder and Atwell vote for the funding, they do voice concerns about the overall cost of building and operating a new facility. The \$500,000 includes \$289,000 in the form of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) that had already been

allocated for a homeless center. Thus, the City Commission effectively put up another \$211,000 for the proposal.



City commissioners say they want the city attorney to tighten the current noise regulations, combining two ordinances into one. During their Sept. 3 regular meeting, they also direct Police Chief Bernadette DiPino to meet with several bar owners about continuing problems. Mayor Shannon Snyder has a direct message for DiPino and police officers to send to several Main Street bar owners — including those at Tequila Cantina and Smokin’ Joe’s — who are evading the city’s noise laws. “We have a problem with two or three businesses that don’t want to comply,” Snyder says. “It’s time for these folks to get



Tequila Cantina has been one Main Street establishment at the focus of downtown noise concerns. Photo by Norman Schimmel

the hint.” The mayor talks about limiting the hours liquor can be sold downtown to 11 p.m. to underscore his message. “If these guys can’t get on the right page and can’t get cooperating, I have no problem cutting them off at 11,” Snyder tells his colleagues. “They will understand: Turn the volume down.”



Sarasota County Administrator Randy Reid on Sept. 5 signs off on a \$90,000 deal that puts a Tennessee-based economic research and consulting firm with ties to the Reagan Administration in charge of reviewing Sarasota 2050’s fiscal neutrality rules. The regulations have been one of the most controversial points in the debate over the county’s overhaul of 2050, a land-use plan approved a decade ago to encourage the construction

of walkable, mixed-use communities. Fiscal neutrality is simply the “requirement that any new growth pay its way,” Allen Parsons, the county’s long-range planning manager, told the County Commission in July. Donna Arduin, who worked with the county to analyze the economic impact of the Nathan Benderson Park rowing facility, will represent Lauffer Associates in the review. Arduin was also the architect of [Gov. Rick Scott’s “7-7-7” plan](#), which he touted throughout his 2010 campaign. The scope of work in the county contract calls for a “policy assessment” that will examine how the county should assess and monitor fiscal neutrality. Laffer Associates will first report back on its findings to the County Commission in early December, with two additional meetings scheduled for early 2014. A draft of the company’s report is due



The county in September inked a deal to have Donna Arduin review the fiscal neutrality section of the 2050 Plan. Photo from the Virginia Institute for Public Policy

within 60 days of the deal. For its part, Laffer Associates promises to “provide a supply-side economic overview on the costs and benefits of New Urbanism/Smart Growth development.” The contract is worth \$85,000, plus another \$5,000 set aside for travel and costs.



Main Street in downtown Sarasota has been undergoing a facelift. Crews are wrapping up three different segments of work that added stretches of wider brick sidewalks along the middle and lower portions of Main Street. The total project cost of \$1.9 million was paid for by the Downtown Improvement District. In one phase, workers expanded the brick sidewalk at the busier pedestrian stretches in front of the Gator Club, Pastry Art and C'est La

Vie on Main Street. That phase, from Lemon Avenue to Orange Avenue, is complete.

The wider sidewalk sections — or bulbouts — are designed to encompass additional outdoor café seating while making downtown more walkable. As crews constructed the bulbouts, lampposts also were repainted; brighter light bulbs also are in the works. The largest construction segment, currently under way, will replace diagonal parking spaces on the north side of lower Main Street — from Gulfstream Avenue to Five Points Park — with parallel spaces, which will free up more room for sidewalk expansion. The sidewalk in that area will gain eight feet. The third segment of work will bring enhancements to the intersection of Main Street and Palm Avenue, one of the busiest and most visible



Downtown construction has transformed the landscape, including providing wider sidewalks. Photo by Norman Schimmel

downtown. The Sarasota city commissioners voted in July to install brick pavers at the four crosswalks at that intersection.



On Saturday, Sept. 6, a pair of planners brings the newest thinking in urban rule making to the Sarasota City Neighborhood Association (CCNA) meeting and pitches it way over audience members' heads. Karin Murphy and Andrew Georgiadis have been hired by the city to establish an "Urban Design Studio" in the Federal Building at Orange Avenue and Ringling Boulevard. Inside, they will begin to fabricate new zoning regulations for the city based on something called "form-based codes." "Community comfort is a critical component," says Murphy. But when she adds, "We don't care about the style of building, we

care about the form," and struggles to explain some of the planning jargon, audience members grow restive. "It is unfortunate we had representatives at the meeting who had no experience in land use or zoning regulations," says CCNA regular attendee Kafi Benz. "I think Karin was talking to the choir, to people who already had some basis of understanding." "The 1974 zoning code is now just a pile of stuff," adds Avondale representative and former Mayor Mollie Cardamone. "In my opinion, we're asking this group to write a new zoning code for the entire city."



People eager to see the reopening of Warm Mineral Springs will have to wait just a bit longer, so more extensive background checks can be undertaken on the principals of the firm



A team working on a new form-based zoning code for the city has made itself at home in a studio in the downtown Federal Building. Photo by Norman Schimmel

recommended to receive a one-year contract to operate the facility. That is the decision of the Sarasota County Commission on Sept. 10. Although the North Port City Commission on Sept. 9 approved awarding the contract to WMS Sarasota Management LLC — one of just two bidders — county commissioners seek assurance that the firm's officers have clean criminal and business records. The City of North Port is open to more extensive background checks, Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Director Carolyn Brown tells the county board. In fact, Vice Mayor James Blucher made that a part of his motion on Monday, which passed on a 3-1 vote. Therefore, according to a motion put forward by County Commissioner Nora Patterson on Sept. 10, County Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Mason will not execute the agreement

with WMS Sarasota Management until after County Administrator Randall Reid and North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis have completed their research. The motion passes unanimously.



Former Republican Party of Sarasota County Chairman Bob Waechter's criminal trial will not start until Oct. 21, but in the meantime, the Florida Elections Commission has found "probable cause" of an election law violation and fined him \$750. Prosecutors charged Waechter late last year with [Criminal Use of Personal Identification Information](#), a third-degree felony, for allegedly making donations to two 2012 Democratic candidates, Keith Fitzgerald and Liz Alpert, in the name of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood



In September, the Sarasota County and the City of North Port commissions believed they were close to hiring a short-term operator for Warm Mineral Springs. Image courtesy Sarasota County

Associations President Lourdes Ramirez. According to a four-page document given to *The Sarasota News Leader* by Ramirez, the Elections Commission has reached a “consent final order” agreement with Waechter in the case of the Alpert donation and fined him for his role. The \$35 Alpert donation was made online in Ramirez’s name on Oct. 2, 2012 with a prepaid VISA credit card. According to the Elections Commission, the card loaded with \$500 was purchased that same day at a Sarasota Sweetbay by “an individual resembling” Waechter. Elections Commission staff and Waechter reached an agreement in May to settle the issue, with Waechter accepting the \$750 fine. The commission itself ratified the order just last month.



For the sixth consecutive year, “economy/jobs” wins the top ranking as the most important issue facing Sarasota County, according to the 2013 Citizens Survey, but only 18 percent of the 801 respondents put that in first place, compared to 36 percent in 2012. Regarding the county’s current economic condition, the survey shows 69 percent of respondents think the county “is on the road to recovery,” up from 56 percent in 2012. However, the survey’s executive summary points out, “many still believe the economy is subject to some very real threats,” a pattern that has been observed nationally. Overall, 48 percent of the respondents rated the quality of life in the county as “excellent,” compared to 55 percent in 2012. The proportion ranking it “good,” though, increased from 36 percent last year to 43 percent in 2013, according to the survey conducted under the aegis of Susan A. MacManus at the Florida Institute

of Government, located at the University of South Florida in Tampa. This is the county’s 22nd survey of citizens’ views on a variety of topics.



Former Republican Party of Sarasota County head honcho Bob Waechter **has been hit** with another fine, this one from the Federal Election Commission (FEC), for his alleged role in a series of fake campaign donations made to 2012 Democratic candidates. On Sept. 17, the FEC notifies the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office that it has reached a \$5,000 settlement with Waechter in the matter, which was referred to the FEC by the Sheriff’s Office on behalf of Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations President Lourdes Ramirez. Waechter attorney Cleta Mitchell — who has represented a number of high-rolling Republican federal officials, including Sens. James Inhofe and Jim DeMint, and the NRA — asked the FEC to drop its investigation in March. She claimed the \$200 Fitzgerald donation was too little “to warrant the use of Commission resources.” But the FEC pressed on, transferring the case to its Alternative Dispute Resolution Office in June. Mitchell and Waechter eventually agreed to the settlement process. The agreement was signed by Mitchell on July 1, but it was not approved by Krista Roche, the assistant director of the FEC’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Office, until Sept. 10.



On Sept. 18, the tally of 58 ballots in the re-vote on whether to extend the life of the St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID) for another decade shows 68 percent

of the property owners agree to the proposal. Only 6 percent actually vote no. Eleven ballots were not returned, making up the remaining 26 percent. What's next for the rejuvenated district? Chairman Marty Rappaport is conducting a feasibility study for a parking garage (or maybe two?) on city-owned lots. "Hopefully we'll get a garage," he says.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manager in charge of the planned \$22.7 million Lido Beach renourishment project expresses confidence on Sept. 18 that dredging sand from Big Pass and placing three groins on the southern end of Lido would not harm either the pass or Siesta Key Public Beach. "The only logical solution for initial construction and ... subsequent renourishment material is to recycle

the accumulated sand [from Big Pass], which originally came from Lido Key," Milan A. Mora tells members of the Sarasota County Coastal Advisory Committee. The project team hopes to start the permitting process with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in the next month or two — late October or early November, Mora says, and he is hopeful the state will grant the permit within a year, though he concedes he has no idea how long the review would take. Nonetheless, funding for the Lido project is not included in the federal budget for 2014. Mora adds that he hopes the funding will be granted for the 2015 fiscal year. "I cannot comment on internal policy of the Corps, but it could be as early as 2015 ... It all depends on what Congress decides to appropriate, and right now, all I know is we're asking for it."



*Property owners agreed to extend the life of the St. Armands Business District for another decade.
Photo by Norman Schimmel*

Former volunteers and staffers this summer charged Save Our Seabirds (SOS), the Sarasota nonprofit that rescues, rehabilitates and releases injured birds, with a wide range of misdeeds. The organization was improperly housing birds, euthanizing them unnecessarily and operating without the proper licensing, they said. But a new round of inspections, ordered by the Sarasota City Commission, shows everything is in fact hunky-dory. In July, the City Commission voted unanimously to have staffers and state regulators conduct a new round of visits at the SOS site on Ken Thompson Parkway and to compile any past inspections for review. Two days after the city meeting, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Inspecting Officer Lar Gregory toured SOS and found the site in “overall good condition with all pools clean, adequate perching and enclosure safe for birds,” according to a report submitted to the city. Gregory wrote that the records-keeping system at SOS had been “vastly improved” since a 2011 inspection and that the “only discrepancy” was the need for “additional shelter” for larger birds during severe rain.



During the County Commission’s second required public hearing on the budget, held Sept. 23 in Venice, no one comes forward to speak. With Commissioner Christine Robinson in the minority, the board votes 4-1 to approve its FY 2014 spending plan. She has protested the continued reliance on the county’s economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the budget. The County Commission keeps its millage rate at the 2012 level of 3.3912, though that will mean a slight increase in tax bills for some homeowners, as property

values went up 4.2 percent across the county this year. The board’s resolution regarding the final millage rates also notes the total is a 3.3 percent increase over the rolled-back total of 3.2828. The FY 2014 budget is \$1,077,919,038, about 20 percent higher than the 2013 spending plan when it was adopted. Steve Botelho, the county’s chief financial planning officer, has estimated that \$11 million will have to be used from the economic uncertainty reserve fund to balance the FY 2013 budget.



On Sept. 24, the City Commission approves its 2014 fiscal year spending plan on a 3-2 vote, with Commissioner Paul Caragiulo and Mayor Shannon Snyder in the minority. They have been voting against the budget since July, when the preliminary millage rate was set. Despite a 6.8-percent increase in that millage rate, the city still needed to pull \$1.1 million from its reserves to balance the budget. Neither Caragiulo nor Snyder offers any suggestions on where the budget can be cut further or how to reduce the reliance on reserves. The millage increase on a \$200,000 home will cost an additional \$50. The total budget is \$191 million. Property tax revenue accounts for less than half that sum.



Because Sarasota County has been a participant in a flood insurance rating initiative since 1992, homeowners will still receive a discount of up to 25 percent on National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies, regardless of federal efforts to eliminate subsidies in the NFIP, the Sarasota County Commission learns. In an example provided by Desiree Companion of the county’s

Environmental Utilities Department, one Sarasota resident who owns a house built in the 1970s that is 1.9 feet below base flood elevation has been paying \$1,500 a year for an NFIP policy. The homeowner has had a \$418 discount because of the county's participation in the Community Rating System (CRS), Companion says in a Sept. 25 presentation to the commission. Even if the resident's flood insurance bill goes up to \$3,000 a year under the [Biggert-Waters Act](#), the homeowner still would enjoy savings, Companion points out. The Community Rating System (CRS) program, Companion continues, is similar to one for fire insurance, with homeowners eligible for discounts because of the best practices pursued in the county since it became part of the national initiative. However, Companion tells the board the county's 25 percent CRS discount likely could fall to 20 percent because

of federal changes to the NFIP. Still, she says, she is hopeful the county could meet the new requirements and maintain the higher level.

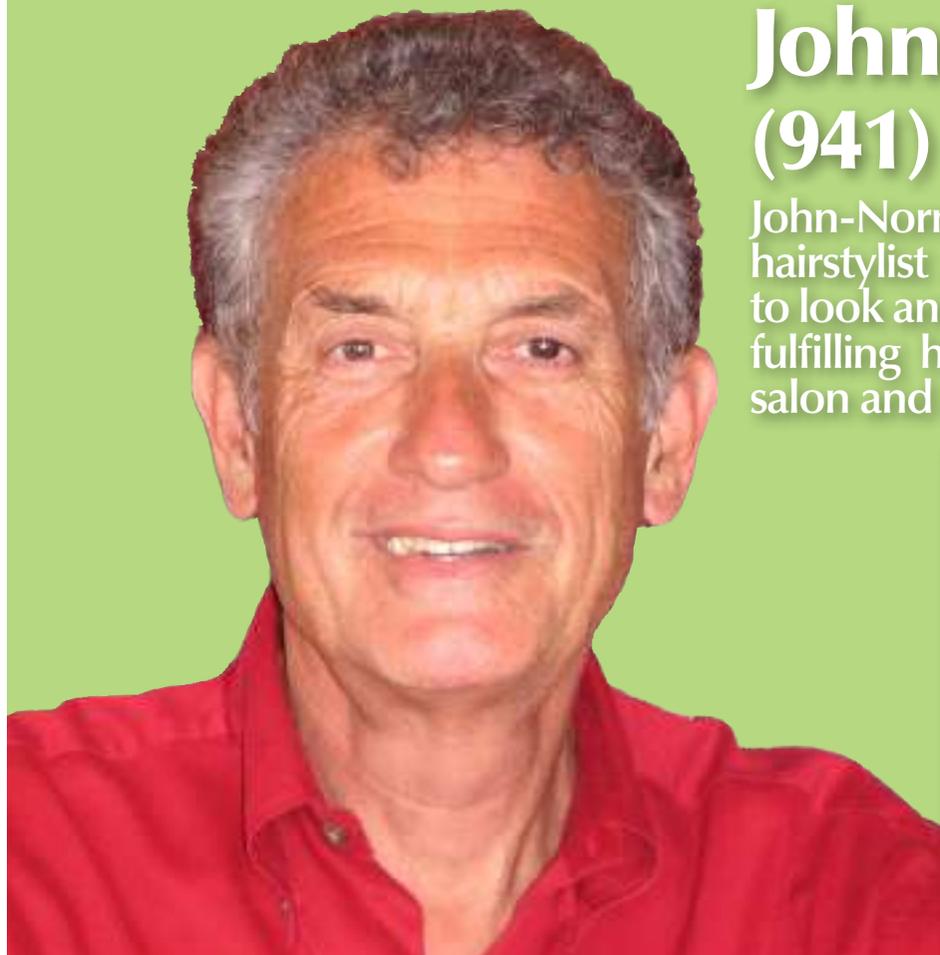


As promised, the City of Sarasota and contractor McKim & Creed hold a biweekly meeting on Sept. 23 to keep each other on the same page regarding the status of Lift Station 87. One important page was the project schedule. Robert Garland, a vice president with the firm, distributes the timeline during that meeting. It indicates everything will be wrapped up by Halloween 2015. That includes demolition of the "star-crossed" Lift Station 7, where repeated spills demonstrated the need for a new facility. The new facility — dubbed Lift Station 87 — is located in Luke Wood Park, where U.S. 41 and U.S. 301 join just south of downtown Sarasota. 

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YEAR IN REVIEW: OCTOBER

The City Commission decided not to allow businessman Chris Brown to transform the Kress Building at Five Points into a New Orleans-style structure. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

The chairman of the Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency Extension Study Committee, David Merrill, has resigned. He tells *The Sarasota News Leader*, “The county doesn’t want to hear some of the things I’m raising.” County Commissioner Joe Barbetta had called for the resignation, and at least two other county commissioners were critical of Merrill’s leadership of the committee. Merrill had contacted mayors in the southern portion of the county, asking if they had any interest in a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA). And he asked his committee to draft a “model CRA ordinance” that could be used not only for downtown Sarasota, but also in North Port, Venice and Nokomis. Every CRA represents a subtraction from the county commission’s property tax revenue. The study committee was established to examine whether the Downtown Sarasota CRA should be extended beyond its 30-year life, which is up in 2016.

More than 120,000 bicyclists, runners and walkers use the Legacy Trail every year, according to electronic counters on the route. An effort is under way to extend the popular multi-use trail from south of Clark Road, where it ends, into downtown Sarasota. The 8-mile extension would be a big effort that could take years. The Friends of the Legacy Trail has been making presentations to local groups and elected officials — including one on Oct. 7 to the City Commission and an update to County Commissioners on Oct. 8. The plan would expand the route, which has become the backbone of outdoor recreation in the county, into the more densely populated northern neighborhoods and ultimately downtown. For instance, 27 schools are located within one linear mile of the border of the proposed extension, according to a map created by the Friends of the Legacy Trail. Project costs are unknown, but if the original leg of the trail — slightly more than 10 miles — is any indication, the extension could cost millions.

During its Oct. 7 meeting, the Sarasota City Commission stops a “major encroachment” proposed at 1400 Main St. The item of greatest public interest is a proposal to wrap the old Kress Building at Five Points with “galleries.” The structures would provide shade for the sidewalks and room for up to 78 café tables on a second-floor covered porch overlooking Main Street. A total of 21 people speak, most of them downtown residents opposing the plan. “This is probably one of the largest major encroachment permits we’ve had downtown,” says city Development and Neighborhood Services Director Tim Litchett. It is also the first application ever for a “gallery.” By a slim 3-2 margin, the commissioners turn it down, with Mayor Shannon Snyder and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo in the minority. Vice Mayor Willie Shaw joins

Commissioners Suzanne Atwell and Susan Chapman in opposing the request from businessman Chris Brown, who says he has been in discussions with a party that wants to put a “high-end restaurant” in the building.



A combined session of the boards of the St. Armands Business Improvement District (BID) and the Sarasota Downtown Improvement District (DID) comes close to fracturing several state laws on Oct. 8. The two groups, meeting together on Oct. 8 for the first time, explore the idea of limiting the number of bars and restaurants in their two shopping districts. Both organizations represent commercial landowners willing to pay more property taxes to improve their shopping areas. “The two special districts are



South Creek Trestle

In early 1892 the Great Northern Railroad (GN) completed 2,000 miles of track stretching from Virginia to Florida. In 1911 GN constructed a 16.5-mile extension from Sarasota (Punta Gorda) to Venice. The bridge over South Creek is one of the remaining trestles built in 1911. The trestle is located at mile marker 487.6. Approximately 121 feet long, it is an open steel truss bridge. The current span of the new bridge is 175 feet and supports the heavy track. As you traverse the Legacy Trail, note the mile markers present to reflect the original railroad mile markers starting from north to south. Mile marker 0 is road entrance, Virginia.



Oscar Scherer History

In 1868, the Oscar Scherer (1868-1952) left the territory of South Creek Ranch to the state in memory of his father Oscar Scherer who provided a grant for opening the park in 1872. After a year of preparation, Oscar Scherer State Park opened to the public in 1926. Over decades later, a residential, commercial and future development began comprising for the state to purchase and protect adjoining Florida state land. After long from The Nature Conservancy, Sarasota County and other public support, the state purchased an additional 422 acres from Palmer Ranch in 1991. The park now protects more than 2,000 acres of natural land in a rapidly developing region and provides income-based recreation for over 112,000 visitors annually.



The Legacy Trail features educational signage. Image courtesy Sarasota County

established by ordinance that sets forth enumerated powers and no others,” says Deputy City Attorney Michael Connolly. “Each can contract for planning services and assistance.” One power neither board has is the ability to dictate land use. If either or both boards want to explore how to limit the “proliferation” of bars and restaurants, Connolly adds, they need to start with a “professional opinion.” Members of both boards begin talking about hiring the same consultant until they are brought back to legal reality by city Purchasing Manager Mary Tucker. “You can’t just go out and hire somebody,” she points out. “If [the expense is] over \$5,000, you are going to need bids. If it’s over \$50,000, then you need a proposal we can use for a [Request for Proposals].” The DID board unanimously approves a motion asking the city Purchasing Department to put out a Request for Proposals to hire a consultant to examine the “present mix of bars, restaurants and food-related-consumption-on-the-premises businesses to determine if it is a proper mix.”



The Sarasota County Commission on Oct. 9 takes another step toward creating a domestic partnership registry. The measure, similar to ones already approved by the Cities of Sarasota and Venice, would grant unmarried couples rights such as emergency notification, burial decision-making, healthcare visitations and more. County staff presents two possible ordinances, identical except for one section dealing with reciprocity, a measure that would guarantee partners registered in other jurisdictions the same rights as those granted to partners registered in Sarasota County. Former Sarasota City Commissioner Ken Shelin, who has become the face of the local registry movement, presses the commission to

include the reciprocity language. He emphasizes the high number of tourists and other visitors who come to the county, sometimes for months at a time. Vice Chairman Charles Hines wants a guarantee the county would not be committing itself to granting rights extended by other jurisdictions that might not be included in the Sarasota ordinance, a concern Commissioner Nora Patterson echoes. County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh reassures the commissioners that the ordinance would grant only the rights specifically enumerated, even if visitors are entitled to greater rights in their hometowns.



The Sarasota County commissioners on Oct. 9 unanimously approve a revised transportation agreement for the proposed Villages of Lakewood Ranch South development, moving the large housing development one step closer to construction. The agreement requires developer Schroeder-Manatee Ranch Inc. (SMR) to construct certain roadways to serve both the interior of the Villages and the project’s traffic. SMR will pay for an east-west connector from Lakewood Ranch Boulevard to Lorraine Road through what the agreement terms “the Development of Regional Impact (DRI).” It also is required to construct additional transportation improvements with a value of \$7.5 million through a “proportionate share” clause in the document. The developer will fund one of two possible projects. SMR initially has focused on construction of two outer lanes of the future four-lane Iona Road, between Fruitville Road and Palmer Boulevard, but the county could opt instead for an east-west route that would include an overpass of Interstate 75 and Cattlemen Road.



The County Commission votes 4-1 on Oct. 9 to approve a \$12.5 million loan to help pay for the \$21.5 million in improvements to Siesta Public Beach. Commissioner Christine Robinson, who is in the minority, has protested the county's deficit spending. Richard Gleitsman, representing the county's Office of Financial Management, tells the board the plan originally called for a \$14 million loan. However, staff determined \$1.5 million could be allocated for it out of Tourist Development Tax revenue. Therefore, the borrow will be about \$12.5 million.



The “scared-straight” policing strategy pioneered by High Point, NC, and adopted by Sarasota has widened beyond street-level drug dealers to include prostitution. Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino announces at a press conference on Oct. 9 that the six individuals who entered the “deferred prosecution program” in August remain crime-free. Further, a roadside roundup of prostitutes last month netted five women who have all volunteered to enter the program as well, DiPino says. Sarasota Police call the program DMI, the drug market intervention strategy. Modeled on High Point's experience,



Sarasota Police Chief Bernadette DiPino reports her department is having success with a new policing program modeled after one in High Point, NC. Photo by Lindy676 via Wikimedia Commons

intelligence is gathered and gleaned to locate crime “hot spots.” Undercover officers then are assigned to gather more intelligence in those areas and begin building cases against violators. On June 11, the Police Department’s narcotics squad made 25 arrests in an area defined as a drug market hot spot. Six of the arrestees did not have a criminal record for violent crimes or gun offenses, nor had any of them served a lengthy prison sentence. The six were offered “deferred prosecution” if they would participate in rehabilitation, and all of them accepted the offer. If the individuals stay out of trouble, it is possible and even likely the charges will be dropped against them in the future.



Improved connectivity can be created without a radically new interchange design at University Parkway and more lanes on Fruitville Road: That is the argument Sarasota County staff members plan to make when they meet at the end of this month with the District

One secretary of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). During an Oct. 9 discussion of a revised road proposal for the [Schroeder-Manatee Ranch \(SMR\) Villages of Lakewood Ranch South](#), Jonathan B. Paul, the county’s interim transportation planning director, says he hopes to convince FDOT officials that a new overpass across Interstate 75 and Cattlemen Road would be preferable to the “diverging diamond” interchange plan FDOT is espousing for I-75 and University Parkway. During an April 16 presentation to both the Sarasota and Manatee county commissions, FDOT consultants discussed the interchange proposal. A memo from Sarasota County Engineer James K. Harriott Jr. to the board explained it would encompass two special-use lanes that would run both northbound and southbound, along with three general-use lanes in each direction, a 64-foot-wide median and auxiliary lanes in both directions. “The basic concept of the diverging diamond interchange is to switch the eastbound and westbound lanes



Sarasota County’s interim transportation planning director is hopeful he can convince state transportation officials of the merit of an alternative to a ‘diverging diamond’ proposal to handle University Parkway traffic in the future. Image courtesy Sarasota County

so that turns on and off the ramps become right turns, thereby saving signal green time and increasing capacity through the signals at the interchange,” Harriott added.



On a 3-1 vote, the North Port City Commission on Oct. 14 directs City Manager Jonathan Lewis and his staff to work with Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid and his staff to come up with options for reopening Warm Mineral Springs for swimming only. While they pursue those discussions, the motion stipulates, staffs of both local governments also can work on a long-range plan for management of the 81-acre resort that has been closed since June 30. Commissioner Tom Jones casts the “No” vote, saying he feels the action is premature. It follows a unanimous vote to rescind the award of a bid to WMS Sarasota Management LLC for the short-term operation of the springs. Commissioner Cheryl Cook was suffering ill health and unable to stay for the discussion. On yet another motion, the board votes 3-1 — with Mayor Linda Yates in the minority — to allow Lewis and Reid the option of pursuing another short-term management bid process. That morning, Lewis says, he talked with the personal attorney for Dr. Grigory Pogrebinsky — one of the principals of WMS Sarasota Management — to reiterate points staff already had made: The bid terms were non-negotiable. The attorney most recently had asked an extension of the lease period from 12 months to 24, writing, “[M]y client does not see a realistic opportunity for at least recouping in 12 months substantial costs (including marketing and 24% revenue fee to the City and the County) of the operation

that would start from the standstill position since the Springs’ facilities are empty and the Springs has been closed for months.”



With the Sarasota County Schools’ health insurance costs predicted to rise 60 percent over the next couple of years, Superintendent Lori White has asked the district’s chief financial officer, its wellness coordinator and other staff members to work as a task force to find ways to improve employee health, the School Board members learn during their Oct. 15 workshop. Suzanne DuBose, the district’s wellness coordinator, says during the annual update on her work that the group held its first meeting last week. One big goal is to find funding for employee incentives to encourage them to take better care of themselves, DuBose points out. The district is quickly approaching the level at which 70 percent of its employees will be classified as overweight, she noted. According to the September economic report prepared by Sarasota County finance staff, the school system has more than 5,500 employees. “The numbers keep going up,” DuBose adds in regard to overweight staff.



On Oct. 21, the City Commission receives a new option from the Urban Design Studio team for the design of the State Street parking garage. It is dubbed “Pad Lite,” and by a 4-1 vote, they take it. Week after week, the commission had skirted a final decision on the look of the structure. Meanwhile, the city’s contractual deadline of February 15, 2015 to finish and open the structure kept moving closer and closer. The plan the commissioners

select divides the narrow lot in two parts. The portion next to Lemon Avenue could be developed separately. It would be only 25 to 30 feet deep, with retail on the first floor and six dwelling units on the upper levels. The city would create a “pad” with appropriate plumbing and electrical “stub-ups.” A developer would simply tie into the utility connections.

The much larger, remaining parcel would be home to a six-story building with four levels of parking (345 spaces) and 16,000 square feet of retail space occupying the bottom floor. Because of the height of the bottom floor, that level counts as two stories under the zoning and building codes.



The Sarasota County Commission unanimously agrees on Oct. 22 to concur with the North Port City Commission’s rejection of the bid awarded in September for the short-term operation of Warm Mineral Springs. Working from a draft provided by Commissioner Christine Robinson, they also decide that the two boards — joint owners of the 81-acre resort in North Port — should pursue another solicitation process for a short-term operation. They further ask that the North Port City Commission provide them a scope of services for long-term management of Warm Mineral Springs within 90 days of the date of their letter. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason signs the letter on Oct. 23. Moreover, they agree unanimously with a motion by Commissioner Joe



The City Commission finally agreed to a design for the new State Street parking garage and retail space. Photo by Norman Schimmel

Barbetta that the City of North Port's new solicitation for a short-term operator could be an Invitation to Negotiate (ITN), a Request for Proposals (RFP) or any other legally authorized competitive process. That was incorporated into the letter.



Developer Rod Connelly is proposing to construct a nine- to 10-story, 150-room hotel with a 6,000-square-foot conference center on a county-owned parcel that serves as a parking lot at the northeast corner of U.S. 301 and Main Street in downtown Sarasota. The County Commission on Oct. 23 chooses Connelly's proposal out of two submittals for the parcel. The commissioners direct staff to negotiate with Connelly and his development venture, SHD Partners LLC.



Almost exactly 11 months after she sought county help to alleviate what she and her neighbors believed to be a hazardous situation on her Siesta Key street, Avenida de Mayo resident Marlene Merkle is very happy on Oct. 23. The Sarasota County Commission votes unanimously on a motion by Commissioner Nora Patterson to direct staff to prohibit parking on both sides of the street from Canal Road to Avenida de Cortez and to provide for staggered no-parking zones from Avenida de Cortez to Avenida Del Norte in 500-foot sections. The action comes after an assessment by Fire Chief Mike Tobias and his staff that overflow parking on the street from Siesta Village's municipal lot and business areas could prevent emergency vehicles' passage. On Aug. 28, the commission responded to an Aug. 16 memo from Tobias pointing out that

the National Fire Protection Code requires roads to have an unobstructed width of not less than 20 feet. Referencing his memo, Patterson says on Oct. 23 that she spoke with Tobias, and he had explained it was inadvisable to allow vehicles to park across from each other on Avenida de Mayo. "It is a particularly narrow road, apparently, even for Siesta Key," she adds.



The county commissioners on Oct. 23 vote County Administrator Randall Reid out of the post he held for less than two years. The 4-1 decision comes despite the pleas of half a dozen residents who spoke in support of Reid, praising his integrity and accomplishments during his short tenure in the midst of challenging times for the county. Deputy Administrator Tom Harmer — whom Reid hired last year — will serve as interim CEO for



Randall Reid served as county administrator for slightly less than two years. File photo



Tom Harmer is the interim county administrator. File photo

the county. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson vote to fire Reid. In evaluations made public Oct. 15, the three commissioners gave Reid a below-average rating for his overall job performance from April to September of this year. Barbetta says he was frustrated when Reid wanted to hire an independent consultant from the University of South Florida (USF) to appraise changes to the county's [2050 Plan](#) and the way the administrator applied the county's public records policy. Barbetta references several instances when he felt Reid was not doing his job properly — from mowing fiascos to the resignation of Suzanne Gable. Gable left her post in the Office of Financial Planning during the summer after staff discovered she did not have a valid CPA license. Yet, commissioners voiced frustration that Reid did not mention the CPA factor when he first informed the board members about her resignation. Meanwhile, Commissioner Nora Patterson and Vice Chairman Charles Hines support the administrator for hiring quality staff members to fill vacancies, tackling problems left in the aftermath of former Administrator Jim Ley's resignation and working to bring the World Rowing Championship to Sarasota in 2017.



The County Commission votes 3-2 on Oct. 23 to extend an offer to the University of Miami for Little Salt Spring. Under the proposal, the county would clean up the property and maintain and manage it if the university transfers ownership of it “as is” to the county at no cost. Commissioners Joe Barbetta and Christine Robinson and Chairwoman Carolyn Mason direct county administrative staff to

proceed with discussions on those points. Commissioners talk about how little the county should pay upfront for the 112-acre spring and surrounding property, because the county, as the new owner, would have to cover annual costs of maintenance, upkeep and security.



A recent victory in Tallahassee for the Sarasota Housing Authority means the completion of the final phase of the stalled Janie's Garden redevelopment project may finally be within reach. And with that will come the demolition of the last 60 units of Newtown's Janie Poe complex, notorious for its extreme disrepair and a “horrible mess” in the words of County Commissioner Nora Patterson last year. But it took a fight to make it happen. The Authority had applied for federal tax credits for three straight years with no luck. The Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, also known as the 9 percent program, is really the only major affordable housing initiative left at the federal level, Housing Authority Executive Director Bill Russell tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. And it had been structured to the disadvantage of housing authorities: The application process was weighted to favor proximity to public services such as bus routes and schools. “Developers would read that and go around the state and try to find parcels of land to put under contract to maximize their profits,” he says. The Authority doesn't have that flexibility. “We are really focused on redeveloping a specific property. So we're kind of caught because we can't pick up and move.” But this time around, the Florida Housing Finance Corp., which administers the tax credits in Florida, put out a specific Request

for Proposals for housing authorities. The Sarasota Housing Authority placed second out of seven, qualifying it to receive the credits. But, problem: The Authority's application did not specifically identify the manager of the firm working with the Authority on the project. "This one staffer, who was responsible for looking at the corporate structure — she threw out five of the seven housing authorities," Russell says. He understands that it's important for the state to know all the key players in a deal, he adds, but to throw out

the whole application over that was "silly." So the Housing Authority appealed the decision, and on Oct. 1, it made its case in Tallahassee. Russell gets some very good news Oct. 25. "Assuming the [Florida Housing Finance Corp.] board accepts the hearing officer's recommended order (which is standard), Janie Poe III will FINALLY be awarded 9% tax credits and we can shortly begin developing the final phase of the Janie Poe redevelopment," Russell writes in an email to stakeholders. 



The King Stone Townhomes is the most recent public housing project to open in Sarasota. A ribbon cutting was held in January. Photo by Norman Schimmel

YEAR IN REVIEW: NOVEMBER

Lourdes Ramirez puts her hat in the ring for the 2014 County Commission race. Contributed photo

On Nov. 4, it becomes official: Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations President Lourdes Ramirez files paperwork to run for the Sarasota County Commission seat being vacated by Nora Patterson next year. Ramirez's opponent in the Republican primary is Al Maio, a vice president with the design consulting firm Kimley-Horn and Associates. Maio will undoubtedly hold the fundraising edge in the race, having already socked away almost \$83,000, but Ramirez says her "grassroots" effort will offer stiff competition.

The County Commission moves forward on Nov. 6 with the second of two major aspects of the planned acquisition of Dolomite Utilities Corp. In a unanimous vote, the board proceeds with the purchase of 115 acres owned by the utility system, located at the northwest corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Tuttle Avenue. The plan is to develop the site into a long proposed North County Sports Complex. The property that once was home to a water plant and wastewater treatment facility has sat vacant since the early 2000s. Once the land is redeveloped as a park, it will become the third largest recreational facility



in the county — behind Englewood Sports Complex, with 137 acres, and Twin Lakes Park, with 123. The Dolomite deal also includes the county's acquisition of the company's utility system assets, including its customers. The County Commission earlier this year voted to move forward with that acquisition.



With a unanimous vote on Nov. 6, the Sarasota County Commission approves a Domestic Partnership Registry ordinance advocate Ken Shelin has been working on for about a year. “Fundamentally, the major rights that domestic partners need are there,” he tells *The Sarasota News Leader*. Those rights include the ability to visit a domestic partner in the hospital and to be able to make funeral and burial decisions. The ordinance will take



Ken Shelin addresses the County Commission before it approves the Domestic Partnership Registry on Nov. 6. Photo by Norman Schimmel



The site of a proposed new county sports complex is located at the northwest corner of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and Tuttle Avenue. Image courtesy Sarasota County

effect 120 days from the date it is registered with the Office of the Florida Secretary of State, according to a memo provided to the County Commission. Shelin says he was told that registration probably would happen by the end of the week.



Of the more than 2,000 Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) stops, only 172 have shelters, and a contract amendment the Sarasota County Commission approves will increase that by 47 at the most in the 2014 fiscal year, the County Commission learns on Nov. 6. Nonetheless, Glama Carter, the SCAT director, tells the board she is working with other

county staff on a new procurement process that she hopes will speed up the installation of shelters and create more cost efficiencies. Carter adds that she plans to be back before the board in February with an analysis of information from six peer counties in regard to their procurement and erection of shelters, so the commission can have the best possible information as it moves forward on this issue. Commissioners ask Carter to speed up the pursuit of public records from those counties at the same time she works with staff to try to get more Sarasota County shelters in place on a faster schedule. Carter points out that staff installed 51 shelters in the 2013 fiscal year.



- Six anchored column connections for stability and wind resistance
- 1/8" thick rolled aluminum roof for strength and durability
- Heavy duty header beam supporting shelter roof
- All aluminum, powder-coated, rust-resistant structure

Two towers will be coming out of the ground soon. The Jewel condominium complex at Gulfstream Avenue and Main Street has received its first building permit, so construction can get started. And the hotel complex planned for the northern corner of Ringling Boulevard and Palm Avenue has received its initial approval to get under way. The building is expected to be an Aloft hotel, with European business-class accommodations.



Two downtown commercial icons are undergoing radical rehab. The former Golden Apple Dinner Theater is being gutted. It will be rebuilt to the specifications of a new tenant.

And the go-to place downtown for handguns and ammo — the Bullet Hole — is in the same

stage of indignity: being gutted before the next tenant moves in. Both were long-standing downtown business anchors for decades. It is doubtful we will see their likes again.



By a 3-1 margin, the Sarasota City Commission agrees on Nov. 7 to settle a lawsuit claiming a violation of Florida's Government in the Sunshine laws. Vice Mayor Willie Shaw votes against the motion, and Commissioner Susan Chapman abstains because the outcome could affect her financially. She and Commissioner Suzanne Atwell were named personally in the suit after they met with downtown merchants to hear concerns about homelessness and vagrancy. Mayor Shannon Snyder passes the gavel to make a motion to offer the settlement, and Commissioner Paul Caragiulo



Plans call for the vacant Golden Apple building on Pineapple Avenue to be gutted for a new tenant. Photo by Norman Schimmel

seconds the motion by telephone from the Appalachian Trail, where he is vacationing. Earlier in the meeting, Atwell's attorney, Robert Lincoln, announced he had reached an understanding with the plaintiffs — Citizens for Sunshine — and Atwell had signed a settlement agreement. That relieves her of any conflict of interest, he notes. Without comment, she supports the motion to offer a city settlement. "I was hung out to dry by my political opponents," Chapman says after the meeting adjourns.



This summer, Sarasota County asked a consulting firm with ties to the Reagan Administration to review the fiscal neutrality requirements in its Sarasota 2050 Plan. It gets more than it bargained for. A draft version of

the Laffer report is being derided as "awful," "extreme" and "beyond" what the county wanted — by urban planning experts, long-time commission critics and members of the commission alike.

Sarasota County inked a \$90,000 deal with Tennessee's Laffer Associates in early September for the firm to analyze Sarasota 2050's fiscal neutrality regulations. The 2050 Plan, adopted a decade ago, was created to encourage the construction of walkable, mixed-use communities in areas that had previously been closed to development, largely east of Interstate 75. Fiscal neutrality is the "requirement that any new growth pay its way," in the words of county Long-Range Planning Manager Allen Parsons. That means builders must demonstrate at multiple stages



Marchers in the Sarasota Veterans Day Parade represent POW and MIA groups. Photo by Norman Schimmel

that a new development will produce enough revenue through impact fees and taxes to make up for the increased burden on county services such as roads, schools, libraries and more. The first 27 pages of the 48-page report barely mention Sarasota. They instead feature an extended attack on the very notion of smart growth itself, going all the way back to Chaucer to make the case that smart growth is “authoritarian,” “coercive” and “elitist.” The report draws largely from the work of writers such as Randal O’Toole, a senior fellow with the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank founded in part by Charles Koch, one of the infamous Koch brothers, and Wendell Cox, affiliated with the Heritage Foundation, also funded in part by the Koch brothers.



The Sarasota Downtown Improvement District (DID) board on Nov. 12 decides to give a loan to a merchants association to speed up the installation of decorative lighting in time for the holidays. The DID board is reviewing a proposal for \$135,000 to put color-changing lights around 28 trees in Five Points Park. Meanwhile, the Sarasota Downtown Merchants Association is looking at a \$14,800 project to illuminate 22 trees with white lights along Main Street. “We just finished a fantastic streetscape and we need to attract people to enjoy it,” says DID Chairman Ernie Ritz.



The Sarasota County Commission in mid-November roundly dismisses the first draft of an analysis of portions of the county’s Sarasota 2050 Plan, while at the same time absolving Laffer Associates, the consulting firm that

prepared it, of blame, and recommitting to its contract with the company. The firm’s contract with the county called for Laffer to “review the history of New Urbanism/Smart Growth development” and to “place the Florida state regulations, as well as the Sarasota 2050 Policy, into proper context.” “They did what they were asked to do,” Commission Vice Chairman Charles Hines says of Laffer. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason agrees: “It’s not this firm’s fault.” Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer says the request for the history of smart growth was added at the behest of Laffer, but that “staff is responsible for managing the contract and finalizing the scope of work.” After speaking with Laffer representatives that morning, Harmer tells the commissioners the document the county received should be considered an “initial preliminary draft,” and that the firm is willing to rework it and come back with a second first draft. Under the revamped arrangement, Laffer is due to be paid half its \$90,000 fee upon delivery of that version, and it will present its final draft in January instead of December, as originally planned.



On Nov. 18, the Sarasota City Commission votes unanimously to approve a request from attorney Bill Merrill for a speedy change to the city’s comprehensive plan to increase density in the Rosemary District. Merrill will work with staff to triple the current 25-units-per-acre density in the Rosemary District, just across Fruitville Road from downtown. A staff report says that will “allow for the development of smaller, market rate housing units.” Merrill’s plan calls for creation of a “Rosemary Residential Overlay District.”

His client is Rosalyne Holdings. He says the firm “has a short timeline for developing this project, and would like to have the comprehensive plan and zoning text amendments in place by next summer,” according to a staff memo.



On Nov. 19, the Sarasota County commissioners approve the boundaries for the Fruitville Initiative Special Planning Area, which includes rezoning approximately 300 acres. The vote is the latest phase in the Initiative, the county’s master plan outlining a mixed-use “gateway village” east of Interstate 75.



With Commissioner Joe Barbetta in the minority on Nov. 20, the Sarasota County

Commission votes 4-1 to approve a resolution setting March 25 as the date for the fourth Sarasota County School Board referendum on a special 1 mill tax. He points out that the School Board should have the referendum in conjunction with a November general election, when voter turnout typically is higher. “They could plan for that,” he says of the School Board members. “They’ve had years to plan for it.”



On Nov. 20, the County Commission approves a series of zoning changes presented by staff as part of its long-term review of Sarasota 2050 — among them a reduction in the number of housing types required to be built in neighborhoods and the elimination of a requirement that a new neighborhood’s commercial sector



Brainstorm wins top honors in the 2013 Siesta Key Crystal Classic Master Sand Sculpting Competition. Photo by Robert Hackney



Michela Ciopini and Jan Zelinka work on World Breathe on Nov. 15. It takes second-place honors in the 2013 Crystal Classic. Photo by Norman Schimmel

be located inside the community. The changes open the doors for developers to build fewer housing types within a new community and to place commercial properties closer to arterial roads. Working into the evening, the commission also approves a timetable for 2050 changes in the county's comprehensive plan, scheduling a series of public meetings on the topic and sending them on to the Planning Commission. But that's not all. The County Commission further approves changes to 2050 affecting 4,638 acres along Clark Road east of the interstate, opening the possibility of 9,334 — rather than 934 — units there. That proposal, brought by representatives of LT Ranch and 3 H Ranch, calls for a change in how density rules are calculated, a reduction in the amount of open space required to be set aside and the elimination of the rule that commercial space be centrally located, among other items. County staff largely supports the applicants' requests, with the exception of the density edits. But even in that instance, county Long-Range Planning Manager Allen Parsons says staff's objection is not about the eventual number of units that could be built on the Clark Road properties, but with the formula used to generate that number. Critics of the proposal argue the changes will lead to suburban sprawl, exactly what 2050 was created to prevent. Commissioner Nora Patterson is alone in opposition to the proposal.



After hearing homelessness consultant Robert Marbut discuss his 12-point strategy and listening to residents offer public comments — most in support of Marbut's plan — the City Commission and County Commission on Nov. 25 approve motions

to begin implementing Marbut's recommendations. They also vote to do the following: extend Marbut's contract to keep him working as a consultant in Sarasota County; and begin drafting a uniform code of ordinances on crimes such as panhandling and camping on private property. In a 4-1 vote, with Vice Mayor Willie Shaw in the minority, the City Commission agrees to move ahead with due diligence on three possible sites for a permanent shelter — a list narrowed down from Marbut's top four suggestions. Shaw earlier called for a motion to postpone any decision on a shelter until a public hearing could be held in District 1, where three of the four suggested sites are located, but that motion was voted down 3-2; City Commissioner Susan Chapman sided with Shaw. Shaw also casts the lone "No" vote on the motions to move forward with investigating the three possible shelter sites and to extend Marbut's contract.



The driver of the vehicle who was drunk when he struck and killed a Siesta Key runner in January 2012 accepts a plea deal from the State Attorney's Office on Nov. 25 and is sentenced to 15 years in prison, with four years set as a mandatory minimum, court records show. Blake C. Talman, then 23, was arrested on the afternoon of Jan. 7, 2012, for striking and killing Donna Chen, 53, of Sarasota; she was running with her dog on the sidewalk in what Siesta Key residents have long described as a dangerous curve near St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church on Midnight Pass Road.

Talman pleads guilty on Nov. 25 to one count of Driving Under the Influence (Manslaughter); one count of Driving Under the Influence

(Serious Bodily Injury); three counts of Driving Under the Influence (Property Damage-Misdemeanor); and one count of Leaving the Scene of an Accident with Property Damage (Misdemeanor).

He also is ordered to surrender his driver's license for the remainder of his life, attend and complete DUI School and perform 50 hours of community service. He has 30 days from the time of his release to enroll in DUI School, and he must complete it on his first attempt, the plea deal notes.



Sarasota County will enter into negotiations to sell Benderson Development 42 acres off Fruitville Road where the company wants to create what Vice President Larry Fineberg calls “basically a product that doesn’t exist in

Sarasota County right now” — an attractive center for industrial light manufacturing. That is the 3-2 decision of the County Commission during a special meeting on Nov. 26. Vice Chairman Charles Hines and Commissioner Nora Patterson are in the minority. Hines voices concern that the project could be competition for facilities that already exist in the county, while Patterson says the Benderson plan “really changes the whole concept of what’s been thought of for the Fruitville area.” She adds, “This is like your key chess piece in this whole development,” referring to the [Fruitville Initiative](#). However, Commissioner Christine Robinson says of the Benderson proposal, “I was interested in a stable economic driver ... The track record that Benderson has had brings a lot of relief to me as far as their ability to attract quality tenants” 



Benderson Development representatives are negotiating with Sarasota County for the purchase of 42 county acres off Fruitville Road. The company has proposed a business park for light manufacturing, warehouses, distribution, research and development on the site. Image courtesy Sarasota County

YEAR IN REVIEW: DECEMBER

The City Commission agrees to let Parkers Books on Main Street put a table or two out front on the recently widened sidewalk, so people can play chess or conduct book signings. Photo by Norman Schimmel

The Sarasota City Commission on Dec. 2 agrees to extend the time it will pay for the defense of Commissioner Susan Chapman in a suit charging she violated the state's open meetings law. City Attorney Bob Fournier opens the discussion by changing the recommendation he previously made to the board. He had offered the commission three options: pay all of the legal fees for Chapman, pay installments or wait and see. The law requires full payment from the city if Chapman succeeds in her defense. On Dec. 2, he endorses one of his options. "Authorize the full payment of Commissioner Chapman's attorney's fees, win or lose. If you have some discomfort, make it six-month or quarterly payments." Commissioner Paul Caragiulo moves to "extend payment of fees for the next 90 days." Vice Mayor Willie Shaw seconds the motion, and it passes 3-1, with Mayor Shannon Snyder in the minority. Commissioner Suzanne Atwell also is in the majority on the action.



City Commissioner Susan Chapman will continue to have her legal fees paid in a Sunshine lawsuit. Photo by Stan Zimmerman

On Dec. 2, the City Commission votes 4-1 to allow a table or two in front of Parker Books for people to play chess or conduct book signings, with Vice Mayor Willie Shaw in the minority.



On Dec. 2, the City Commission shelve a plan to charge for parking in the Palm Avenue garage starting next month. Commissioner Susan Chapman casts the only “No” vote. Parking will remain free until the end of the tourist season at the request of the owners of Louies Modern and The Francis, which will be marking their first season on the ground floor of the garage.



Of consultant Robert Marbut’s 12 strategic recommendations for addressing homelessness in Sarasota County, No. 4 on the list will likely prove the most challenging and the most controversial. City and county staffers and elected officials are already taking the next step in regard to No. 4 — an environmental study of the three short-listed sites for a permanent homeless shelter in Sarasota. The report will look into issues such as possible contamination and specific areas on each site that are buildable or not buildable. Once it is complete, county staffers will be able to put together cost projections for a shelter at each location, Wayne Applebee, Sarasota County’s director of homeless services, tells *The Sarasota News Leader* in early December. Applebee has been tasked with implementing Marbut’s recommendations.



Parking will remain free in the Palm Avenue garage during season. Photo by Norman Schimmel

“I would hope within one to two months we would have [the environmental studies] wrapped up,” Applebee says. After a site is chosen, the city and county leaders will hold public meetings to begin vetting plans with the county’s residents, Applebee adds.



A committee working on a proposed zoning change to allow for limited outdoor merchandise displays on Siesta Key should have its draft ready for review soon, a spokesman for the group tells the approximately 20 people attending the Dec. 3 Siesta Key Village Association (SKVA) meeting. Mark Toomey, owner of [Robin Hood Rentals](#), says he and the other committee members would like to make a presentation to representatives from the SKVA, the Siesta Key Association (SKA)

and the Siesta Key Chamber of Commerce once the draft has been completed.

Furthermore, Toomey says, the group has been working on two different proposals — one for businesses like his, which rent equipment such as bicycles and [Segways](#), for example; the other would cover retail companies. Several businesses on the south end of the island have been involved in the process along with those in Siesta Village, he notes.



The possibility that Sarasota County might enact an ordinance prohibiting the sale of puppies at commercial pet stores draws dozens of supporters and opponents to the County Commission meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 10. After almost two hours of public comments,



1330 N. Osprey Ave. is consultant Robert Marbut's preferred site for a new homeless shelter in Sarasota. Image from Google Maps

the county commissioners vote 5-0 to request the county attorney to provide a legal opinion to them within 60 days on the proposed ordinance regulating the sale of dogs, cats and rabbits in retail stores. That opinion will likely prove pivotal in whether the board offers the ordinance for a public hearing. The draft version under review would prohibit the sale of the pets in retail stores, of which there are four in Sarasota County. Under the ordinance, animals could only be obtained only from an animal shelter, an animal control agency, a humane society or directly from a breeder.



On a 4-1 vote — with County Commissioner Joe Barbetta in the minority — the County Commission agrees to send a letter to the North Port Commission saying the latter

should proceed with a competitive solicitation process to seek a long-term operator of Warm Mineral Springs. Additionally, the County Commission agrees to North Port's proposal to work on a short-term management agreement for the resort — with the stipulation that it would end by Sept. 1, 2014. The motion further calls for North Port City Manager Jonathan Lewis and Interim County Administrator Tom Harmer to collaborate on marketing the competitive solicitation for the Springs.



The state of Florida wanted to make sure that if its investment in the rowing facility at Nathan Benderson Park doesn't pan out, Sarasota County would pay it back. The county wanted no such thing. But the Board of County



The County Commission Chambers in Venice are nearly full as the board discusses a proposed puppy mill ordinance in early December. Photo by Roger Drouin

Commissioners on Dec. 11 goes ahead anyway with a deal including just such a so-called “clawback” provision, after an at-times-tense meeting with Paul Blackketter, the head of the nonprofit created to raise money for and manage the park. The Florida Legislature has approved a total of \$10 million for the rowing project, in two \$5 million chunks. But the latest round of money, approved by Gov. Rick Scott after this spring’s legislative session, comes with strings attached. Enterprise Florida, the public-private entity that manages economic development in the Sunshine State, pushed for a clause in its contract with the county that requires Sarasota to pay back its investment if the rowing facility does not generate \$25 million in state sales tax money by the end of 2018. Pretty much everyone on the commission agrees with Visit Sarasota County Director of Sports Nicole Rissler when she says that proving the facility generated \$25 million in state money will be a “challenge.”



The county commissioners vote 3-2 on Dec. 11 to hold a public hearing on a panhandling ordinance that would replace a temporary, “emergency” ordinance now in place. The hearing will likely take place in March, according to county officials. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason and Commissioner Christine Robinson, who cast the dissenting votes, say they do not want to set a public hearing without first collaborating on the issue with municipalities throughout the county. At the joint city/county meeting held last month to hear homeless consultant Robert Marbut’s 12 strategic recommendations, the county commissioners agreed to work with the cities to address homelessness in the region.



The Sarasota County Commission schedules a public hearing for the morning of Feb. 12 regarding a proposed county ordinance to control a new array of substances — synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic or substitute Cathinones and Kratom. The board votes unanimously on Dec. 11 to advertise the hearing. The commission in late August identified the abuse of synthetic drugs — referred to as “designer drugs” — as “a pressing community issue,” according to a staff memo. Chairwoman Carolyn Mason seconds the motion Commissioner Christine Robinson makes to approve advertisement of the hearing, adding that a couple of months earlier, a homeless man walked up to her in church and said, “You’ve got to do something about this synthetic marijuana stuff that’s going on in the community.” Mason tells her colleagues and staff, “That says something loud and clear, to me, and I’m happy to see this ordinance [proposed].”



Former Republican Party of Sarasota County Chairman Bob Waechter pleads guilty Dec. 12 to breaking election laws and impersonating another person with the intent to harass. The deal puts an end to a yearlong case that started when he used the personal information of a Republican opponent to make potentially damaging campaign contributions to Democrats. But the victim, current Sarasota County Commission candidate Lourdes Ramirez, says justice has not been served, arguing that political connections between Waechter and State Attorney Ed Brodsky put the state’s objectivity in doubt. Waechter did donate \$250 to Brodsky’s 2012 campaign in June 2011, and his name pops up

on a number of flyers advertising fundraisers for the candidate. Brodsky tells *The Sarasota News Leader* he is unaware of any donations Waechter made to his bid for office, and he says Waechter in fact worked against him during the Republican primary. The investigation into Waechter began last year, when Ramirez went to authorities after receiving a note thanking her for donating to Democrat Keith Fitzgerald's congressional campaign. She insisted she had never given money to Fitzgerald.

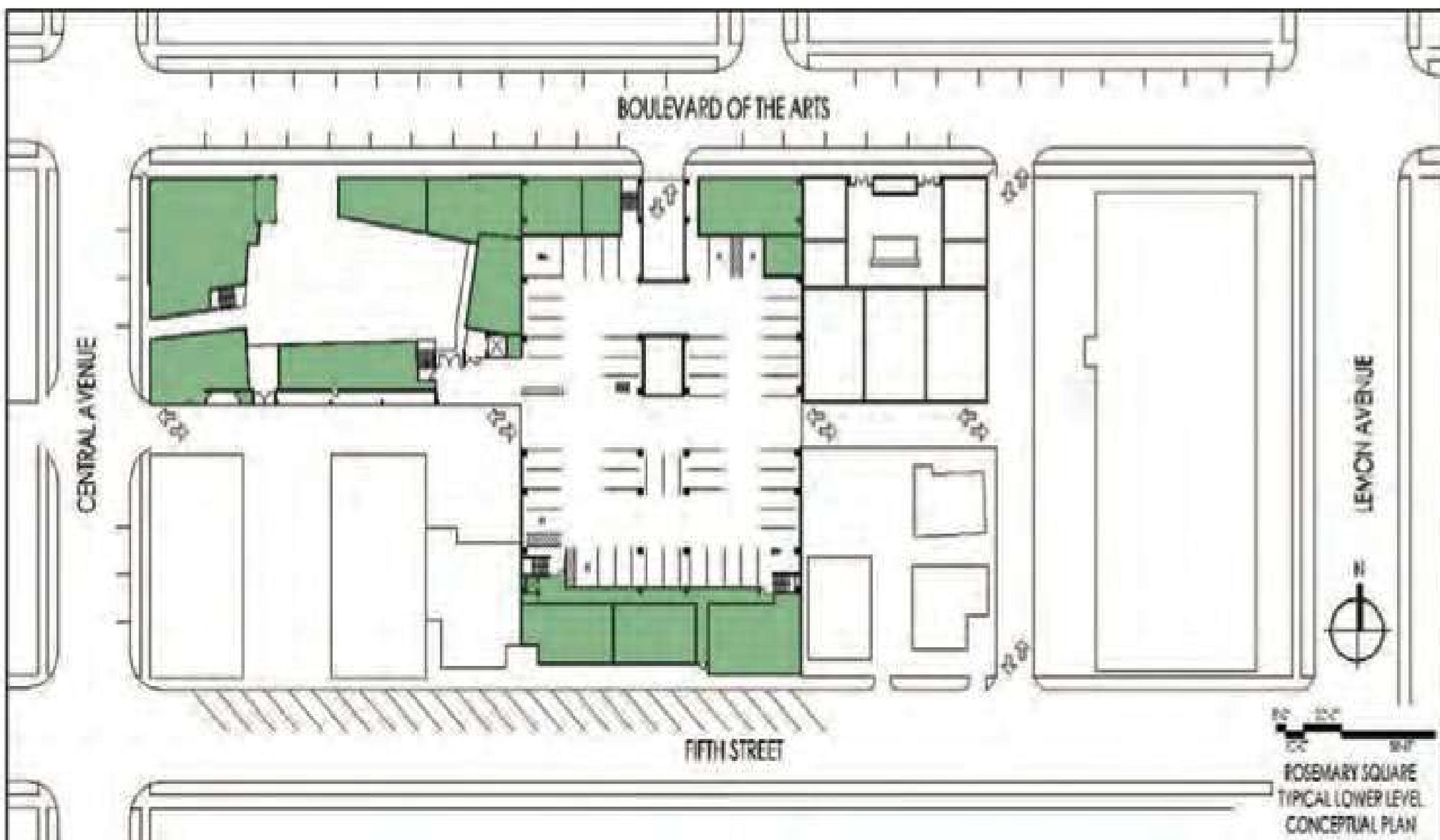


The state's most recent estimates of taxable property values in Sarasota County show four years of consecutive growth.

On Dec. 13, the state projects an increase of 5.4 percent in Fiscal Year 2015. Earlier this summer, the estimate was for a 4.1-percent rise. If the latest projections hold true, they will mark a recent milestone for Sarasota County. "We haven't had an increase of over 5 percent since 2008," says Sarasota County Fiscal Consultant Karen Fratangelo. The state's Department of Revenue also predicts real estate value upswings of 5.6 percent, 5.9 percent and 5.8 percent for Fiscal Years 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively.



A nine-member city evaluation committee agrees unanimously on Dec. 17 to send a Rosemary District redevelopment plan to the next stage on the way to city approval. Rosemary Square is a proposed mixed-use



A drawing shows a lower level conceptual plan for the Rosemary Square development. Image courtesy City of Sarasota

project involving about 40 rental units and 36,000 square feet of retail, office and art gallery space. A second phase would add a multi-level parking structure and either a boutique cinema or a theater for live performances. Getting to agreement takes about two hours, as the development team presents its plans and then defends them. The team had responded to a city “Invitation to Negotiate” over six contiguous city-owned lots along the Boulevard of the Arts. In one of his first acts in office, City Manager Tom Barwin proposed that the property — the site of a former community garden — be offered as a “catalyst project” to kick-start development of the Rosemary District. Only one team rose to the occasion, a congregation of locals including Dr. Mark Kauffman and his daughter, Mindy; architect Jonathan Parks, who has his own firm; builder Michael Beaumier; and planner Joel Freedman. In the next step, city representatives will hammer out additional details of the project in collaboration with the Rosemary Square team.



After \$1.1 million worth of study, the official recommendations are in on how to proceed with Lift Station 87 on the northern side of Hudson Bayou at Osprey Avenue. Project Manager Robert Garland with the engineering and design firm of McKim & Creed is recommending another microtunnel under the bayou, running about 7 feet deeper than the depth called for in the previous plan. For the past three months, Garland has conducted a rigorous examination of the underground strata where a pipe carrying one-third of the city’s sewage must lie. His back-up idea was a horseshoe-shaped siphon. The tunnel is as

much as \$1 million cheaper than the siphon system, and it requires vastly less maintenance. He presents his findings at a public meeting on Dec. 18, concluding Phase One of McKim & Creed’s contract with the city.



The Downtown Sarasota Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Extension Study Committee members have agreed to recommend an extension of the CRA past 2016 and to propose that a new governing structure be created for it, comprising two city commissioners, two county commissioners and three city citizens selected by the City Commission. It further has agreed to give the county an undetermined percentage of the CRA funding, a “skim” on the proposed \$500 million projected to be raised over the next 30 years of the CRA’s life. On Dec. 18, members decline to prepare a written report of recommendations to the City and County commissions — which appointed them. They ask Deputy City Manager Marlon Brown — who has been a city liaison at the meetings — to prepare a PowerPoint slide show to present to the two commissions in January.



The Celery Fields, which was historically agricultural land until Sarasota County purchased it in 1995, is getting two new additions that will improve it for residents and tourists alike.

In the first project, the county is constructing permanent restrooms and parking spaces. That work began Nov. 13, with completion estimated for spring 2014. Adjacent to the restrooms and parking area, the Sarasota Audubon chapter will be building a \$1 million

nature center. The society will operate the facility and fund its upkeep through donations. The group will lease the land from the county for \$10 per year. So far, Sarasota Audubon has raised 70 percent of the total needed to build the center. Construction is slated to start in June 2014 and take six to eight months. Nature center visitors will use the public restrooms in the county structure.



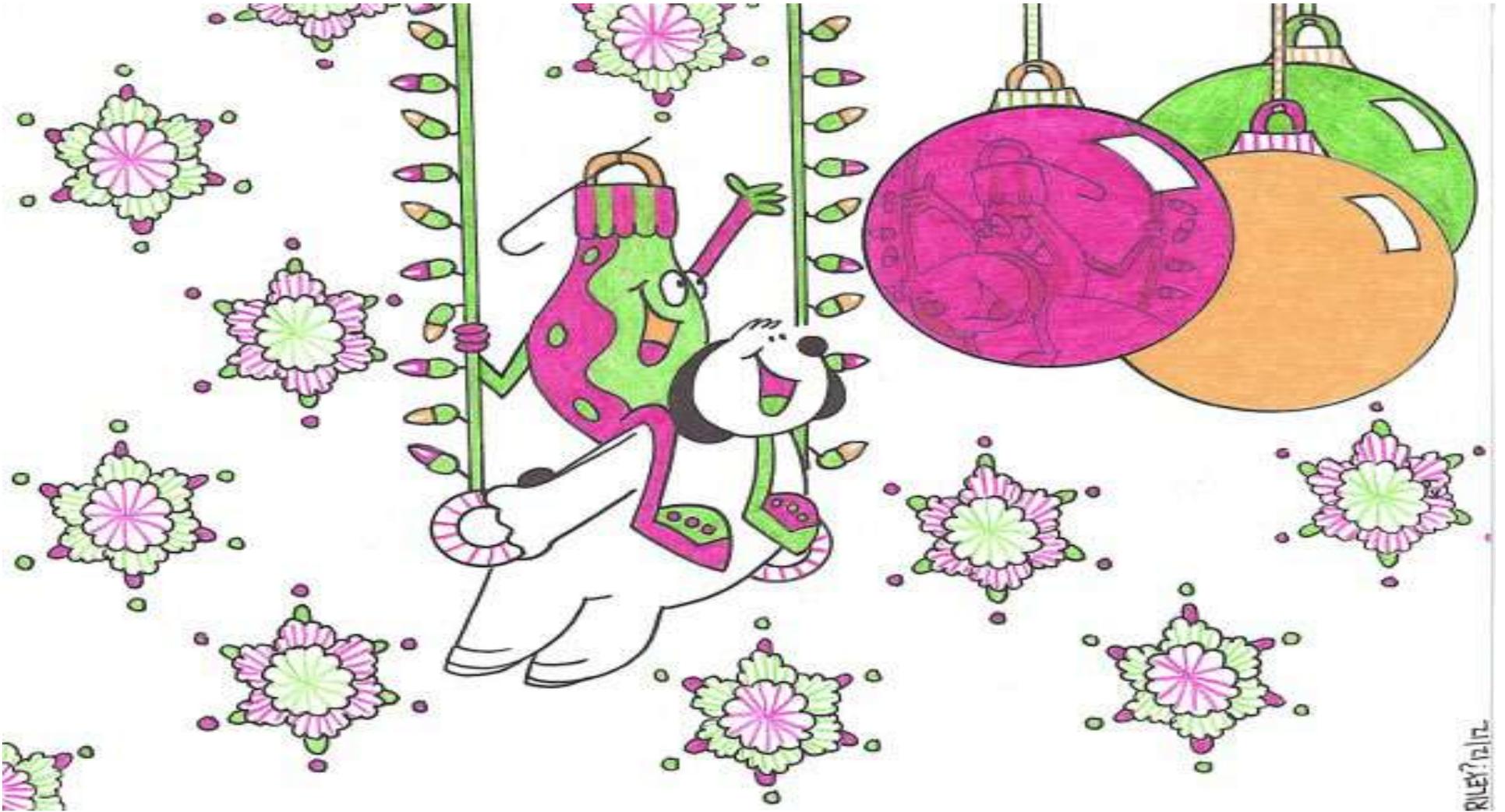
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has pushed back the timeline for delivery of its comprehensive analysis of the Lido Beach Renourishment Project — including potential impacts related to the dredging of Big Pass,

Sarasota City and County staff has learned. While the project manager, Milan A. Mora, told attendees of the Dec. 5 Siesta Key Association meeting that the plan was expected to be finished in late January or early February, City Engineer Alexandria DavisShaw tells *The Sarasota News Leader* that Army Corps representatives notified her on Dec. 17 that it would be late February or early March when everything is ready for release. DavisShaw has promised the documents all will be available to the public. As a result of the Corps announcement, county staff has postponed the date of a County Commission discussion of the project from Jan. 28 to March 18. **SNL**



Santa Claus arrives on St. Armands Circle Dec. 6 to kick off the holiday season. Photo by Norman Schimmel

OPINION



A JOHN RILEY 2013 RETROSPECTIVE



NOT YOU AGAIN!!



RILEY? 8/13 SNL



RILEY? 9/13 SNL



"IT IS **NOT** NECESSARY TO TALK ABOUT THESE **ISSUES** ALL THE **TIME**."

"YOU ARE **RIGHT**, YOUR HOLINESS, BUT WHEN I DO DISCUSS IT I WANT TO HAMMER MY **POINT** HOME!"

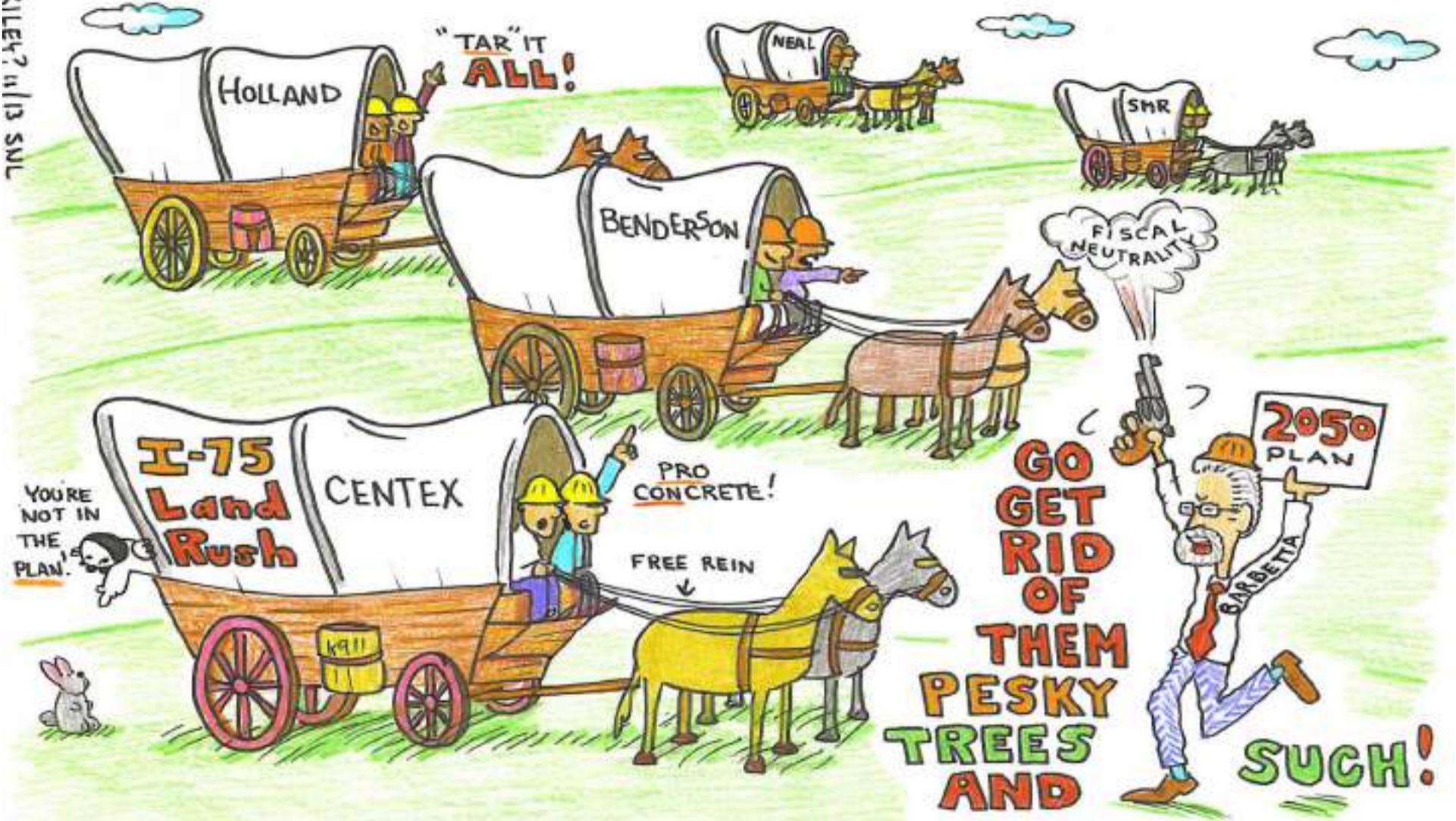


BUT IS YOUR POINT OF VIEW THE POPE'S?

RILEY? 10/13 SNL



RILEY? 11/13 SNL



YOU'RE NOT IN THE PLAN.

"TAR IT ALL!"

FISCAL NEUTRALITY

PRO CONCRETE!

FREE REIN

GO GET RID OF THEM PESKY TREES AND SUCH!

2050 PLAN

SUCH!



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

THE BEST OF UPCOMING EVENTS

03+
JANUARY

FST presents *Monty Python's Spamalot*

Through Jan. 12; times vary; Gompertz Theatre, 1241 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$18 to 49. Information: 366-9000 or FloridaStudioTheatre.org.

03+
JANUARY

FSU/Asolo Conservatory presents *Loot*

Through Jan. 19; times vary; Jane B. Cook Theatre, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$27 to 29. Information: 351-8000 or AsoloRep.org.

03+
JANUARY

Dabbert Gallery presents *10th Anniversary Exhibition*

Through Feb. 1; times vary. 76 S. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 955-1315 or DabbertGallery.com.

03+
JANUARY

Allyn Gallup presents *Nature and Irony*

Through Feb. 1; times vary; Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art Gallery, 1288 N. Palm Ave., Sarasota. Free admission. Information: 366-2454 or AllynGallup.com.

03+
JANUARY

Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe presents *The Whipping Man*

Through Feb. 2; times vary; 1646 10th Way, Sarasota. Tickets: \$29.50. Information: 366-1505 or wbtsrq.org.

04
JANUARY

Perlman Music Program 10th Anniversary Concert: Itzhak Perlman conducting the PMP String Orchestra

Jan. 4, 5 p.m., Sarasota Opera House, 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota. Tickets: \$40 to 80. Information: 366-8450 or PMPSuncoast.org.

06
JANUARY

Sarasota Concert Association presents Mark-André Hamelin

Jan. 6, 8 p.m., Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Tickets: \$40 to 70. Information: 351-7467 or SCASarasota.org.

12
JANUARY

Sarasota Concert Association presents the Jerry Eckert Jazz Trio

Jan. 12, 12 noon, Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center, 709 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Free Admission. Information: 351-7467 or SCASarasota.org.

YOUR LIFESTYLE GUIDE TO THE SUNCOAST

PRESS



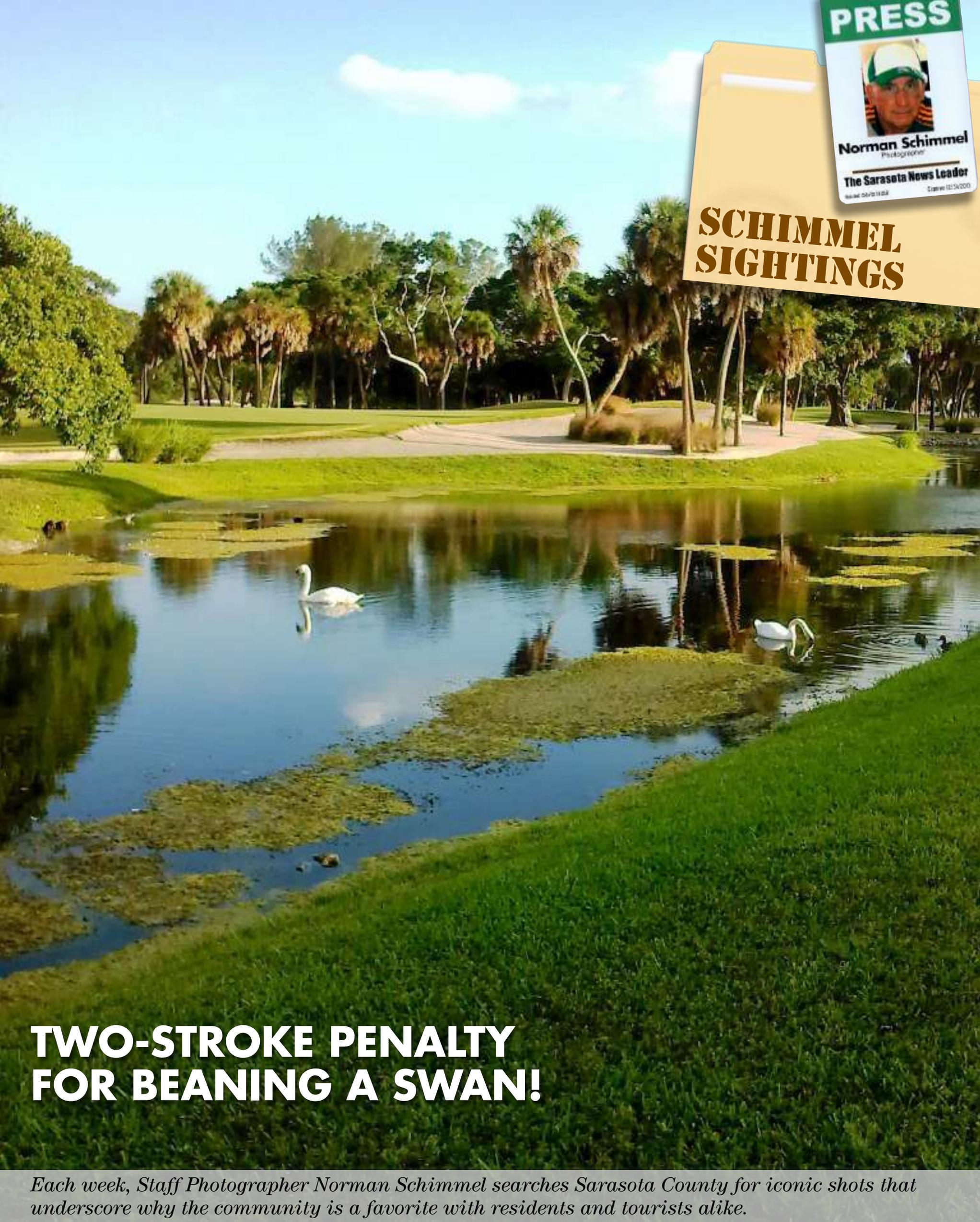
Norman Schimmel
Photographer

The Sarasota News Leader

Phone 941.555.1100

Circle 125/2000

SCHIMMEL SIGHTINGS



TWO-STROKE PENALTY FOR BEANING A SWAN!

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.