

COUNCIL OF CIVIC ASSOCIATIONS, INC.

NEWSLETTER _____ MAY-JUNE, 2001

"When spiders unite, they can tie-down a lion"...Ethiopian proverb

MEETING Thursday, June 14, 2001, 4-6 p.m., South County Regional Library, Three Oaks Parkway near Corkscrew Road, Estero. Call 283-3762 if you have an issue to be addressed. Public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

SPEAKER will be Former State Rep. Ralph Livingston who will give us insight into what transpires in Tallahassee and tips on how to get involved.

Due to vacation schedules, no May meeting was held.

CCA Director Lyle Danielson underwent open-heart surgery and had a triple-bypass in late April. Lyle is one of three people who conceived the idea for Conservation 2020, the Lee County land acquisition program and acts as a "watchdog" attending most meetings and keeping the CCA Board informed. He is recovering nicely and we all wish him well.

POLITICALLY SPEAKING: Frank Mann, lobbyist, former Lee County Commissioner, former State Rep. and candidate for Lt. Governor, has changed his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican. Insiders believe Mann is positioning himself for a run at the soon-to-be-vacant congressional seat held by Porter Goss. Frank is well known statewide and has to be considered a front runner for the seat. Reapportionment is the hot topic now. With the creation of two additional congressional seats for Florida, many believe that Collier County and Miami Dade will be combined into one seat thusly putting State Senator Burt Saunders out of the race for the Goss seat. Burt had better practice his "Free Elian" speech to woo the Miami crowd. Albion, Coy and Mazurkiewicz are still positioning, however, Mann should leave them far behind in the race.

From all appearances there is no strong candidate to challenge incumbent Governor Jeb Bush. He has distanced himself significantly from George W. on the Gulf oil drilling issue and with strong backing from the South Florida Spanish speaking electorate, he will be hard to defeat.

Locally it appears the 2002 County Commission election could change the face of Lee County. Candidates for the District 4 seat held by Andy Coy are still emerging. Clyde Bowles, Bayshore Fire District Commissioner, is being urged to run by many of his supporters and has confirmed that he is seriously considering running for the seat. We remind all that commissioner John Albion will be resigning to run for the Goss Seat, as will Commissioner Coy and these two are the most pro-development Commissioners we have. It is the responsibility of civic and environmental groups to encourage citizens to run for these two offices. Interested persons should contact the Council of Civic Associations to learn more. Although civic groups cannot support candidates, there is a lot we can do to encourage and educate candidates. Remember the Commissioners now earn close to \$75,000 per year, plus benefits so it is more than just a part-time job. Contact any of our Directors for further information.

SMART GROWTH UPDATE: The News-Press recently expressed, through an editorial, their belief that our Board decision to remain outside of the process was "shortsighted". While we welcome criticism we should remind ourselves that the new publisher of the NP is a member of the Smart Growth Task Force. She and the executive editor are newcomers to our area, although the publisher was here for a short time 10 years ago. They were not here last year when the Horizon Council and the Economic Development director initiated the now infamous One-Cent Sales Tax issue. They were not here when those two entities

approached the Industrial Development Authority (a commission appointed advisory board) voted to give over \$200,000 of what many contend was taxpayer funds, to the political action committee formed by those entities and the Chamber of Commerce. Now these two groups, on June 4th, will ask the Commission for \$275,00 to \$330,000 for the task force.

Talk about Deja vu! Remember the Charter Review Committee appointed by our Commissioners in 1998. This group of 15 citizens met for 18 months. They were provided with paid consultants and whatever staff was needed. Support included sandwiches, drinks and cookies for each of their meetings. They reviewed the Lee County Charter and proposed four changes for the Commissioners to approve placing on the ballot. After all their hard work and vigorous debate the Commissioners decided they did not like the citizens suggestions and voted against three of the four proposed changes. The only one okayed was an innocuous change which called for a supra-majority vote (instead of a simple majority) to cancel any citizen sponsored initiative that succeeded at the ballot.

Our Board decision was to stay out of the Smart Growth process and serve instead as a monitor. A lot of effort is going into holding town hall type meetings throughout the County. One minor problem is that the public is not attending. One meeting drew 5 people, the Estero meeting 8 people. When citizens did attend in number (25 persons) in North Ft. Myers and 50 attendees at Pine Island, many attendees spoke against the task force or were concerned this group would preempt their community vision plans. We have attended a few town hall meetings and will continue to monitor this process. The meetings are held during business hours, which restricts citizen involvement. The development and building industries have paid persons attending the meetings. The public must miss work or give up their time without remuneration just to attend. We feel that these day meetings will cause the citizens attending to "fall out" and at the end only the paid development staff will be around for final "consensus".

We are not discouraging anyone from joining Smart Growth but suggest that civic associations send representatives as individuals and not as representatives of an organization and here's why. If the information gathered does eventually get transmitted to government agencies in one form or another, these agencies have to respond to citizen groups. They do not have to respond to special interest groups. That's why you are seeing so many special interests forming groups in partnership with the public. The opinion you share at these meetings may not be the final opinion passed along to government agencies. The "executive committee" determines what happens with the final package once the information is gathered. They only have to indicate that the following groups participated in the discussion process during public input. The final package could look nothing like what was discussed by the public. This is similar to what transpired with the Community Redevelopment Agency. Citizens participated in the process at the local level, gave their input on what they thought was best for their community. The input was taken downtown to the CRA Oversight Committee and then came back to the community. The most numerous complaint we heard about the CRA process was that what the community asked for was not what was finally proposed. We already reported on the "consensus group" in a previous newsletter where the above scenario is exactly what happened. Smart Growth was born of the same parents as the consensus group and the one-cent sales tax, the Horizon Council and the Economic Development Coalition. Two groups of other than the average citizen who look for creative ways to use taxpayer dollars. Often to further their special interests or feather their own nests. The groups proposing "Smart Growth" out of concern for Lee County's future are pushing for development east of I-75 in our drinking water re-charge area. Does that make sense? "If you want to predict the future, look to the past". We realize the need to all sit down at the same table and discuss solutions to our common problems and we hope that will happen, but is developer controlled Smart Growth the right vehicle? We'll wait and see. Trust has to be earned.

GREENWAYS COMMITTEE: We have previously reported on this committee championed by Commissioner Ray Judah. Reading down the list of members makes many pundits wonder if they should not refer to this committee as the "Fairways Committee" as it appears the committee emphasis is to explore more golf courses, commercial and gated community developments in East Lee County. Some of our networkers have been attending the now-advertised meetings of this group and are asking questions that are making committee

members quite uncomfortable. The committee recently announced that upon completion of their discussions they will forward their recommendations to the Smart Growth Task Force. It is further interesting to note that our County Attorney has determined that this committee does not have to complete financial disclosure as do most other Commissioner appointed committees and community planning groups.

Also, consider that residents of gated communities are isolated from the surrounding community, do not feel the need to participate in community activities or local elections outside of their gates and are not supportive of community issues outside their walls. Conversely, residents of gated communities are largely at the mercy of the developer should something within the walls go amiss. The surrounding community feels no affinity for a gated community and considers them to be a separate entity responsible for handling their own affairs. You cannot "wall" people out without "walling" yourselves in. The most homogenous communities in Lee County such as Pine Island fight to keep walls from going up. "Divide and conquer".

C-PAC: Community Public Access Cable (formerly FreePAT) has been re-organized to continue the effort to obtain public access TV in Lee County. The group has produced a 10 minute video presentation that starts out with former Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan reading the first amendment, followed by video clips from public access TV productions around the country. It is representative of what we could expect from a local community public TV station and is both informative and entertaining. C-PAC hopes to encourage our County Commissioners to revisit this issue or, at a minimum, have the Commissioners include a caveat in their 10 year contract with the cable companies that would allow the contract to be re-opened anytime during that 10 year period if the commissioners change their mind on public access TV. Please try to include this presentation in your fall schedule. Communities need to meet the energetic C-PAC group and hear their side of the story. Besides, civic association members love video presentations. Contact Ernesto Lasso de la Vega via e-mail at www.ernesto@peganet.com. Or write C-PAC, Box 345, Estero, 33928.

WATER WOES: North Fort Myers residents are experiencing foul tasting water due to the drought. The water drawn from the Caloosahatchee River is experiencing Algae blooms. The same situation exists in Punta Gorda and parts of Port Charlotte due to similar conditions in the Peace River. Some North Fort Myers hotel/motel businesses are forced to issue bottled water to guests. Several restaurants in the area are using bottled water for coffee and iced tea due to the high number of complaints from their patrons. While we all agree that every drop of water that was on the Earth a million years ago is still here in one form or another, the quality of our water remains a paramount issue for all, as well as the cost of making water drinkable through reverse osmosis. Compounding this problem is the attitude of the Lee County Commission and other permitting agencies who are allowing golf course development in Drinking Water Re-charge (DRGR) areas.

SCHOOL IMPACT FEES: It appears almost certain that school impact fees will be approved by both the Lee County Commission and the School Board. One of the main opponents of impact fees is former Lee County teacher, now Commissioner, Andy Coy. In recent remarks he appears to have conceded that these fees will be necessary to accommodate the growth needed for continued development of Lee County. The building industry has successfully delayed the process by introducing affordable housing issues into the discussions. The consultants advised the Commission that this subject does not belong in the study but it now appears that the study will not be released until October. Is it just coincidental that our fiscal year starts at that time so if approved, the development industry will enjoy another year (as we predicted) without paying their fair share. Once the study is completed there will be public hearings. The first hearings will occur at the School Board level, and then the final okay will come from the Lee Commission. We will keep you advised as to hearing dates, etc. A further interesting note is the recent tax roll estimates just released. Collier County, which has had a new school construction impact fee for years, has 41.2 billion in taxable property while Lee County, which has a higher population, has 38.7 billion. Appears the Collier school impact fee has not affected growth. Opponents of the tax in Lee County (BIA) contend our construction industry will fail due to the tax. Some residents think this might not be a bad idea.

DEAR OLD GOLDEN SCHOOL DAYS: It appears that the "gold" has disappeared as Lee County is laying off staffers left and right. Charlotte County announced this past week that they are laying-off ten teachers due to budget constraints. Many of the Lee County layoffs are also teachers. For years we have heard about classrooms being overcrowded and these cutbacks will just add to such problems. Much of our school budgets are going to pay for building new schools and completely remodeling existing schools so the development community is benefiting, by delaying new impact fees, while our students suffer.

PLAUDITS: We appreciate the plaudits we receive for our newsletter content. At our April Board meeting, Jeff Lytle, Executive Editor of the Naples Daily News spoke to our group and was generous in his praise of the CCA newsletter and the in-depth research done on our technical papers. We were invited to post our newsletter on the NDN website, click on the left sidebar "community", then "civic" or "search" Council of Civic Associations. The praise was not one-sided however. Many board members expressed appreciation for the excellent job done by the NDN and the Bonita Banner of reporting Lee County news. In areas where you cannot buy this paper, you can read it on-line. We encourage you to check out their website at www.naplesnews.com or go directly to www.bonitanews.com. The website is very well designed and the archive is excellent. Often you will get a different perspective on important issues by checking this website.

We have also been invited to post our newsletter on the North Fort Myers Civic Association website. This new, very active, organization has a well-designed website at www.NFMCivic.org.

VIRUS ALERT: W32.Matcher is a new e-mail worm that arrives via e-mail with the subject Matcher. When executed, the worm will e-mail itself to everyone in the Microsoft Outlook Address book. The worm will continue to send e-mails while the process is running in the background.

There is also a new e-mail hoax called Sulfnbk.EXE which advises the e-mail recipient to delete this file. DO NOT DELETE THIS FILE! The file is part of some Windows installations and provides support for backing up long file names, and should not be deleted.

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