

CONA Newsletter

The Council of Neighborhood Associations of South Pinellas County

April 2005

President's Message

By Karl Nurse

St. Petersburg and the country is experiencing a building boom not seen since the late 1940's. This is mostly a very good thing. However, it would have helped if we had updated our zoning regulations (LDR's) before the boom got rolling. As a result, neighborhoods around the City are calling asking for help to defend their neighborhoods from inappropriate, large developments in or around their neighborhoods. For example, within 60 days, the Wal-mart on Gandy and a 5 story development proposal in Bahama Shores will go for variances before City Boards.

Please read the notice in this newsletter about the proposed LDR's. Please plan to attend one or more forums in May. The future rules of development for our City are being decided. We can not fight, and win, defensive battles one at a time. If the new LDR's and the variance & appeal systems are done right, we will not have to continually deal with these issues. Imagine how we could spend our time as neighborhood leaders, if the rules fit various kinds of neighborhoods, were clearly written for non-lawyers, and most importantly, variances were rare and based upon hardships unique to a particular property. We could spend our time on neighborhood improvement projects instead of playing defense!

CONA is trying to build a city-wide email list of neighborhood activists to help pass our agenda. Please sign up. Send an email to Steve Plice (steveplice@verizon.net) and ask to be added to the list. Please share your list of neighborhood activists with Steve, who is leading this effort.

By the time you read this, City Council member, Jamie Bennett, will have introduced a resolution to support the "Green Cities" program. This will be before city council within six weeks. We want the ability to provide neighborhood leaders with background information and who to contact when an issue is coming to a head. The issues often require quick action – an email, a phone call, or a meeting at which to speak. Email lists of activists provide us a chance to even the playing field and improve our city.

It is a beautiful spring day and I am going for a kayak ride. Hope to see you at the CONA meeting. Thank you to the several neighborhoods who paid their dues this month. Please help us, help you by sending in your dues.

CONA Board Meeting

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

The SUNSHINE CENTER, 330 5th St. N.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m.; meeting starts at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda Items:

Progress Energy Presentation:

Undergrounding Utilities

Featured Neighborhood:

Old Southeast

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City Trails: Perspective from CONA's Representative

By Eileen O'Sullivan

It's been very enlightening to serve on this committee, and I appreciate CONA's giving me the opportunity. We've received very detailed presentations about the truly exciting developments Mike Frederick's article describes, and our input has been carefully attended to.

One disappointment, however, is what strikes me as inadequate emphasis on the ordinary life concerns of pedestrians -- specifically, sidewalks from home to wherever these wonderful things are happening. I do feel that the committee was skewed in its pro-bike representation (sorry, CONA people who may have thought they'd have an impartial rep!) but I believe we've had some success in making it clear that bicyclists/pedestrians don't always have identical concerns.


A very positive development is the pedestrian crosswalks, and especially the countdown pedestrian signals; we hope to see them extended before too much longer to many more locations.

One of the hard facts I'm coming to accept is that local sidewalks aren't sexy. No one is aggressively seeking grant money for them, there seem to be very few grantors who consider them a worthy investment, and this seems to be perfectly okay with almost everyone.

Of course one goal of the whole City Trails movement is to convince the tourist dollar that St. Pete is the place to come to; there's money for that and it's a very good thing, given how much of our revenue depends on attracting visitors. Local sidewalks just don't bring the kind of return elaborate bike trails may bring -- even though one of the mayor's campaign concerns was sidewalks to every school and playground, and I see us nowhere near sidewalks to the playground in my neighborhood.

Also of interest: I note that when city people can meet requests easily, they're more than happy to do so. (Some of us objected to advisors' comments being last on the agenda; they were promptly moved to first.) But when the bureaucracy has to change, it's pretty hard to stir it to action. (Still cannot find out to whom I should complain -- and who's exercising oversight -- about raggedy pavement edges, a nonissue for motorists but a real anklebreaker for walkers where there are no sidewalks. CanNOT understand why we're paying contractors to leave an irregular 2 or 3 inch ledge where the pavement ends.)

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And one of the most unstimulable bureaucracies, as we all know, is the Police Department, so I hope Mike's description of "special enforcement details" won't turn out to be whistling in the wind. The planners are really working hard to provide information and to make personal presentations to police details, so if enforcement isn't what we'd like, it won't be for lack of trying by the civilian contingent.

It might be helpful if, in our contacts with police officials, we continue to emphasize that enforcement of ALL traffic safety regulations is of great importance to us. It would also be very useful, I believe, to sponsor/encourage attendance at bike rodeos, which the city is very actively promoting -- bicycles differ from other vehicles in that children receive them as toys at a very early age. The attitudinal transition from toy to road vehicle doesn't happen automatically, and our children's safety can very much depend on it happening successfully.

Comments and suggestions will be promptly brought to the committee; do let me know what you think.

Eileen O'Sullivan
821-2140 (eikonow@aol.com)

City Trails:

Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan Progress Report

By Mike Fredrick

It's been almost a year and a half since the CityTrails Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan was approved by City Council in September of 2003. We are now well underway with over twenty separate planning, designing and constructing projects to help improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.

To date we have secured federal grants of over \$14 million dollars to fund these projects over the next five years. This fiscal year alone over \$1 million dollars will be spent to install new sidewalks on collector and arterial roadways, 8 - SMART Pedestrian Crosswalks, 62 - Enhanced mid-block crosswalks, 17 intersections with



Rio Vista Trail under construction and being used before its open.

Countdown Pedestrian Signals, special enforcement details and educational materials. In addition, we plan to add to our exist 10 miles of dedicated bicycle facilities and have over 31 miles of bicycle lanes and trails completed by the end of the month.

One of our first projects just completed is the Rio Vista Trail which included the construction of almost a mile of separated trail and the widening of the foot bridge at the end of 1st Street to accommodate both bicycles and pedestrians. This trail will connect the North Bay Trail at 1st Street / 77th Avenue to 83rd Avenue NE where the State and County will continue with a side path project out to the Friendship Trail.

Another exciting project that has just come about with the help and support of Congressman C.W. Bill Young is the extension of the Pinellas Trail into the City's down-

town. This year \$5.6 million was appropriated to buy the CSX Rail corridor, which had previously been unavailable. This has been a major goal for the City to complete this



New bridge on Rio Vista Trail

regional facility, connecting the downtown and continuing northerly along the North Bay Trail, ultimately to the Friendship Trail and Tampa.

Along with these two important projects the City has under design two major new trail projects along Clam Bayou and the waterfront parks area of downtown. Combined with our efforts to restripe our major roadways to include bicycle lanes and to add sidewalks where appropriate, the City is well on its way to becoming one of the most bicycle and pedestrian friendly facilities in the United States.

Stay tuned for more details as the CityTrails program continues to grow.



Bicycle Lanes on 1st Avenue N east of 34th Street

Check out our web page at:

<http://www.stpete.org/bikeped.htm> or for more information call the City's Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator - Troy Salisbury at 892-5328. ■

LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS (LDR'S) UPDATE

By Bob Jeffrey

Staff has completed the initial editing and revisions to the proposed Land Development Regulations (LDR's). City staff will be rolling out the revised districts and the proposed location of the new districts so that the community can review the proposed LDR's. Now is the time to review these proposed regulations so that you know what they will mean to your property and your neighborhood. To do this, we will work in conjunction with the Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) to help spread the word. There are several meetings that will be occurring in the near future which are important to the residents of Our City. These meetings will go over the basic regulations as they relate to neighborhoods and to the corridors which surround them.

At each meeting we will provide an overview of the regulations being proposed. We will also address how each district will be different for the existing regulations. We will provide time for you to ask any questions you may have.

To prepare for the meeting, please visit our web site <http://www.stpete.org/LDRproposed.htm> to read the latest edited versions. You can also view the map indicating the location of the new designations.

The following meetings are scheduled:

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS:

Monday, May 9th at 7:00 pm. City Hall 175 5th Street North

SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOODS :

Monday, May 16th at 7:00 pm. City Hall 175 5th Street North

BOARDS COMMISSIONS AND PROCEDURES:

Tuesday, June 14th at 7:00 pm. City Hall 175 5th Street North

These meetings are being held in City Council Chambers so that they can be rebroadcast on the City's television station, Channel 35. Additional meetings will be announced.

The adoption process of the new LDRs will commence in late summer. A series of public hearings will be scheduled to review draft documents with the Planning Commission and City Council beginning in August. These dates will be provided to CONA for publication future newsletters. ■

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Land Development Regulation Re-Write: Remembering the VISION

By Tim Baker

While city officials (with some help from the public) rewrite the zoning regulations for the City of St. Petersburg, they need to ask themselves this question: What do people want to change in their city, and what do they want to stay the same?

During the Vision 20/20 meetings that preceded the effort to write new codes, some answers to this question were made clear:

- Most people like their neighborhoods pretty much as they are. Those who live in the newer parts of the city generally like the suburban character of their neighborhoods, with low-slung houses and large yards and absence of commercial activity. Similarly, those who live in the older parts of town generally like the more compact feel and urban bustle of their neighborhoods.

- While people are happy with their own neighborhoods, they are not so happy with those busy streets that connect neighborhoods with each other, and which generally define neighborhood boundaries. They want something better of these corridors than shopping centers connected by traffic jams.

- People would like to see the city's three activity centers - downtown, the Tyrone area and the Gateway area - develop the character of urban villages, with mixed-use development that is user friendly and oriented to pedestrians and bicyclists, and not just automobiles.

With these ideas in mind, it is reasonable to ask what we can expect from the new zoning codes.

- In the suburban residential areas the existing rules and development are generally in sync, which means that new development would fit in well with what's already there. Since people like what's already there, no major changes in the rules should be expected or tolerated. That doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement, or that some tweaking isn't needed. It would be silly to believe that the rules we have now are perfect, and can't be improved.

- The situation in the older neighborhoods that encircle downtown is very different. There, the existing rules are often in conflict with reality. These rules were written more than two decades ago, and apparently envisioned a gradual transformation of existing urban neighborhoods into something much more suburban. When these rules were enacted, many of the existing lots were labeled as "non-conforming," usually because they were too small. In recent years, at least some officials have come full circle on this. Now, the viewpoint is that the neighborhoods are fine, but the rules are

non-conforming. So, the idea here is to rewrite those rules to conform with the neighborhood. If that can be done in a sensitive way, then new construction in the older neighborhoods would fit right in. If the current rules are left in place and actually followed, then the older neighborhoods would gradually morph into something entirely different.

- The corridors - busy thoroughfares such as 4th Street North - might also see considerable change. If Vision 20/20 is used as the guide, then St. Petersburg residents would like to see a mixture of uses along these corridors, rather than just more strip shopping centers with too much pavement. They would like higher-quality architecture and construction, and something that is more visually appealing than the current norm. New zoning rules can address these concerns by, among other things, allowing a greater variety of uses, by lowering parking requirements and by adding rules related to quality rather than just quantity.

- The city's three centers - downtown, Gateway and Tyrone - have very individual characters and are being treated individually in the new rules. But, the goal in each case is to create areas that have the character of an "urban village," with walkable streets and a mixture of uses. Downtown already has this ambience, so the rule changes there will largely be aimed at strengthening the existing character. Given the recent surge in activity downtown, residents there are also concerned that the rules not encourage over-development. Tyrone is dominated by automobile-oriented retail and restaurant uses, while Gateway is dominated by office parks. In both cases, new rules can be expected to encourage a greater variety of uses, including relatively high-density housing.

- Of course, it doesn't matter what rules are adopted if those rules aren't followed. The current system of enforcing the rules doesn't seem to satisfy anybody. Builders often complain that the rules are too restrictive and so they apply for variances and re-zonings. Residents object when too many variances are allowed, making it seem as if the rules just don't matter. City staff is burdened with reviewing too many such requests, and the volunteer boards that must make the final decisions have agendas that are too long.

To address some of these problems, city staff is considering a re-alignment of the enforcement structure - the Board of Adjustment, the Planning Commission and the Environmental Development Commission. The neighborhoods need to keep a sharp eye on this, to ensure that the public doesn't lose its voice in the process. ■

Progress Energy to discuss getting utility wires underground at April 20 Meeting

By Eileen O'Sullivan

You'll remember that after last summer's storms, CONA passed a resolution urging state legislators to require a start on the process of getting utility wires underground.

As part of informing ourselves about the process, we've invited Progress Energy to address us; at the April 20 meeting Jay Oliver (Distribution Operations Manager, St. Petersburg), will make a PowerPoint presentation, after which he and Nancy Loehr (Community Relations Manager), Rick Janka (Corporate Communications) and Melissa Seixas (Regional Customer Service Manager AND member of the 2005 CONA Leadership Training Class) will be available to answer questions.

Some years ago, then Florida Power spoke to a CONA meeting; Gulf Blvd was under reconstruction at the time and we asked why utility lines weren't put underground while the road was dug up. Response was that it's hugely expensive.

We've sporadically pursued the issue since then, and remain puzzled because in areas of new construction, utility lines are routinely undergrounded, and they seem to cope with what we're told are more difficult repairs as well as flooding and lightning problems.

Our next meeting is an opportunity to find out how we'd like legislators to pursue this issue, as it clearly has to be decided by legislative action -- retrofitting is always expensive; no one utility company can undertake that kind of expense unless all do it, and if not in response to legislative mandate it could be considered imprudent use of company funds. Of course legislative action will also be necessary to allocate these costs fairly and manageably.

In fact, this issue may require legislative action on the federal level, which we'll also have to gear up for. I'm reminded of a recent article about how refrigerator manufacturers insisted there was NO way to build them so a child locked inside could get out before suffocating; then Congress mandated that they find a way, and in a very short time it was done.

Similarly, we'll need to network with other neighborhoods (the upcoming conference in Lakeland presents a major opportunity), and we should be able to find out from this month's speakers just what needs to be done to start this process. Who should be doing/paying for research to solve the problems (rather than just leaving them unsolved)? Do we have any measure of the TRUE cost of not undergrounding? (If FEMA pays for rebuilding all those downed poles, taxpayers are paying for it! What about businesses shut down while the power's off?) Do they envision ANY time in the foreseeable future when undergrounding will become the norm, or are they intending to have lines and poles define our landscapes for hundreds of years?

Please think of additional questions, and come prepared to seek answers to them!

**Eileen O'Sullivan
821-2140 (eikonow@aol.com)**

Amenities/character/etc.

The Old Southeast Neighborhood is proud of its rich ethnic and cultural diversity. The focal point and eastern boundary of the neighborhood is Lassing Park, 12.5 acres, fronting Tampa Bay from 16th to 22nd Avenues Southeast. Few city parks offer such spectacular water scenery coupled with the tranquility of a residential backdrop. Its landscaping has recently been upgraded with many palms and native plants clustered at the ends of avenues. It is a beacon for any who seek the delight of fishing, the space for games and walking or the solace to contemplate while seabirds and sailboats grace the waters. Another showplace of the neighborhood is Bayboro House on Beach Drive SE, a bed & breakfast, which the City designated a historical landmark in 1994. It was the home of the area's developer, C.A. Harvey.

History

The Old Southeast Neighborhood began in mid-1950 when C.A. Harvey and A.F. Freeman's Bayboro Investment Co. bought the land east of 4th Street between 7th and 19th Avenues South around Booker and Salt Creeks as well as Bayboro Harbor. Mr. Henry built a home, what is now Bayboro Bed & Breakfast, and resided there while the company continued to develop the area. Another early resident, Judge Robert B. Lassing, donated waterfront land to the City in 1924, with the proviso that it and any structures on it are to be used only for park purposes. The City acquired additional land in 1926, 1944, and 1945 for the park. On January 8, 1942, Lassing Park was dedicated and has continued to provide solace, enjoyment and beauty to the neighborhood residents and visitors.

Organizations/programs

The Old Southeast Neighborhood Association is an active organization meeting monthly to discuss and plan projects in and adjacent to the neighborhood. The Old Southeast Gazette, which is the association's newsletter, is supported by dues and commercial advertising. The Association sponsors holiday activities (ie. Christmas and the 4th of July parties in the park) and city organized home tours. The Association joined the City's Neighborhood Planning Program in 1991, prepared a neighborhood plan which was adopted by the City in 1993, and has been, to date, nearly fully implemented. The Association participated in the City's Certificate of Inspection Program (CIP) and the neighborhood has been adopted by NationsBank for the Working to Improve Neighborhoods (WIN) program.

Neighborhood grant projects

The neighborhood received a grant of \$9,000 in October 1997, for construction of a nine-foot tall neighborhood identity marker, designed by a resident, to identify the neighborhood. It will be placed at 3rd Street South and 22nd Avenue South. Construction, to begin by mid-1998, will be shared by City experts and resident volunteers.

In 1993, the neighborhood received \$100,000 for implementing the neighborhood plan. The Association elected to spend the funds for the old-style "theme" street lighting on 3rd Street between 17th and 22nd Avenues South, trees to be planted on these same streets and installation of street signs with the Association's logo throughout the neighborhood. The following projects were identified in the neighborhood plan and have been completed: rerouting all commercial traffic through the marine district by creating cul-de-sacs, hex-block rehabilitation, expanding reclaimed water service and landscaping Lassing Park.

Boundaries

4th Street to Tampa Bay from Salt Creek to 25th Avenue South. ■

Continued from the Back Page

- Wal-Mart has widely mailed supportive flyers urging mail in cards approving the planned new storebut not to Gandy area!
- Wal-Mart has agreed to pay for remedies of the environmental impacts.
- Petitions supporting the neighborhood's efforts to resist the imposition of the Wal-Mart store were available hoping for wide spread distribution, (and response) from our CONA members. Steve promised to post their petition for download on our CONA website.
- Crucial plans to widen Brighton Bay Boulevard are currently blocked by adjacent neighborhood landowners.
- The Sierra Club is actively supporting the neighborhood protest.
- Moved, (Plice), CONA supports the "Concerned Citizens for Gandy Boulevard, Inc." in their campaign to preserve the quality of life in their neighborhood. [Approved]
- It was suggested that the Audubon Society could also be called upon to protect the threatened wetlands area.
- We were reminded that in cases of appeal to our St. Petersburg City Council, mailed letters have been responded to more frequently than requests sent by e-mail.
- We were urged to wear green as a symbol of our environmental concern, (rather than a celebration of St. Patrick's Day), if planning to attend the City Council hearing on the Wal-Mart proposal.
- ◆ Travis Jarman, (Bayway Isles), made a presentation of a highway signage issue asking our support.
 - The 1965 federal highway construction legislation required that highway billboards that violated local codes, (size, location, etc.), could not be rebuilt if destroyed.
 - The storms of 2004 destroyed 263 Florida highway billboards.
 - The Florida Department of Transportation negotiated an approval, (rather than face a lawsuit from the billboard advertisers industry), to rebuild 2/3 of the storm damaged sign.....that were non-compliant with local signage codes.
 - The Florida Scenic Beauty Council has requested assistance from the Federal Department of Transportation to enforce the 1965 regulations on these non-compliant sign restorations.
- ◆ Moved, (MacDonald), CONA will draft a letter to the Governor and to our local area legislators in Tallahassee urging enforcement of the federal prohibition of restoring highway billboards that are non-compliant with local Florida signage codes. [Approved]
- ◆ Moved, (Jarman), To amend the resolution to address our CONA appeal to the Governor and all Florida legislators. [Approved]
- ◆ It was suggested that CONA could sponsor large notices in the St. Petersburg Times stating our "Official" position on specific major topics of concern, (e.g. Wal-Mart construction, highway billboard restoration).
- ◆ We heard, again, the concern that 30% of the city property owners are currently exempt from property tax thus making no contribution to the city public services born by the remainder of the taxpayers.
- ◆ We then heard an impressive report from our featured member neighborhood for March: The North Kenwood Neighborhood Association.
- ◆ Old Southeast will be our featured member neighborhood in April.
- ◆ Libby Steele gave her Treasurer's Reported balance of \$5,025 with a current paid membership of 36 associations.
- ◆ Tom Killian, (Jungle Terrace), offered to address monthly meetings of local neighborhood associations to promote CONA membership and enrollment in our CONA Leadership Program.
- ◆ We learned that the EDC had approved a car wash building application that the local neighborhoods had objected to.
- ◆ Our meeting adjourned at 8:32 P.M. ■



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Frequently Called Numbers

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892-5141
Mayor's Action Line: 893-7111
Codes Office: 893-7373

CONA Newsletter Deadlines

Copy Deadline: 30th of each month.
Publication: 2nd Wednesday of month.
Mailing: 2nd Friday of month.

Editor: Steve Plice 344-3120

CONA BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S MEETING MINUTES The Sunshine Multi-Service Center - March 16, 2005

Our joint meeting with The League of Women Voters opened at 7:00 p.m.

- ◆ President Karl Nurse called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., introducing to our meeting Katie Wilson the St. Petersburg Times Reporter who will gather and publish neighborhood news as did her predecessor Andy Meacham. She can be e-mailed your meeting information at ktwils@aol.com
- ◆ Karl then invited members of the new CONA Leadership Class as well as any first time visitors to rise and introduce themselves.
- ◆ Our next speaker was Andy Garr of the Neighborhood Partnership Office.
 - Andy distributed flyers about the Honda Grand Prix Races offering 4 free tickets to every member association.
 - We also heard of the exceptional opportunity for youth intern opportunities at the Boley Centers this Summer. Applications for youths of age 14 to 23 were available but must be completed by March 31st.
 - He also distributed flyers of a Treasury Department program seeking to identify individuals who have unclaimed tax refunds available.
 - Hand fans were also distributed advertising the annual Florida Neighborhood Associations Convention October 20-22.
- ◆ Karl then introduced our V.P. and Newsletter Editor, Steve Plice, as the "Chief Technology Officer" announcing the program to expand the flow of information to the neighborhood activists in our city.
 - Citing Howard Dean's national political campaign efforts founded on an e-mail subscriber list of 4 million addresses, Steve solicited our help to compile an e-mail mailing list of 5,000 local neighborhood addressees.
 - Our CONA News postings will funnel readers to our website "Blog" offering our neighbors an interactive opportunity to share and respond to the issues posted.
 - Steve reminded us of how effective mass e-mail responses have been influencing the County Commissioners decisions.
 - Our members present were asked to provide Steve with e-mail addresses of interested, active neighborhood workers.
 - Steve will request that our CONA News service be listed on the city's Fast Fax news release system.
 - As an alternative to posting local issues as "Attachments" to e-mail, Steve suggested using URL links to the stories displayed on our CONA News site.
- ◆ With the approval hearings for the dramatic proposed revisions to the Land Development Regulations (LDR) scheduled in April, there has been a flood of zoning waiver applications hoping to win approval, (and "Grandfather exemptions"}, before the new rules are applied.
- ◆ We then heard a presentation by two residents of the Gandy Boulevard area in north St. Petersburg, Tarey Franxman and Rob Kappes describing their efforts to prevent the construction of a Wal-Mart Center in their neighborhood.
 - Traffic congestion on Gandy Boulevard and an 8 acre wet lands landfill for a parking lot are their major objections.
 - They have established a web site to advertise their position - www.tampbay.rr.com/craig
 - The group has engaged a Land Use Attorney as well as a team of traffic engineering consultants that challenge the congestion data presented by Wal-Mart.
 - They will carry their appeal to City Council tomorrow, (3/17/05).

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