



Journal

Save Sarasota County



March 14, 2003 The Growth-restraint and Environmental Organization Vol. 14, No.1

Annual Meeting March 29

**Rejoin
GEO
Today**

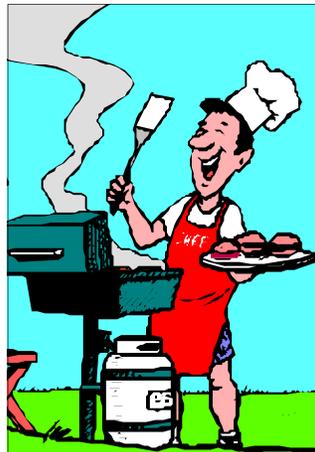
**GEO Member-
ships expire
April 1, 2003**

**Please help us
continue to
help us all by
striving to
control growth
and protect
the environ-
ment in Sara-
sota County**

**Renew your
membership
today!**

**Return
Card
Enclosed**

Should GEO Change Its Name?



**Picnic Precedes
Annual Meeting**

On Saturday, March 29, GEO Members and guests will gather at Oscar Scherer State Park, from 11:30 am to 2 pm, for a free picnic followed by an important annual meeting.

At the annual meeting, members will vote on three amendments to the GEO Bylaws. The first would raise annual dues from \$15 to \$20 (and student dues from \$7 to \$10), the first increase since GEO was formed in 1989. The second amendment would simplify biannual Board election procedures. The third amendment would change GEO's name to "Control Growth Now."

Continued on page 3

Major Issues Face Sarasota County

Sarasota County Commissioners will soon consider major revisions to County ordinances which will either impose reasonable controls on new development or allow rampant growth that threatens our quality of life.

Ordinances to implement Sarasota 2050, if it survives legal challenge (see Page 7), are now being drafted. Public hearings on a complete revision of the Zoning Code are set for April. GEO will seek to influence both processes in the public interest.

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GEO Journal

Is A Publication Of
**The Growth-restraint
and
Environmental
Organization**



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Osprey, FL 34299-0277**

**(941) 364-8777
(Mon-Fri 9-5)**

**Annual Membership Dues
To GEO Are \$15 Per Year**

***Additional Contributions
Are Very Welcome
As Are Contributions
To GEOPAC
GEO's Political Action
Committee***



GEO

Board of Directors

Dan Lobeck - *President*

Judy Johnson - *VP*

Neil Bass - *Treasurer*

Gerri Weinberg - *Sec'y*

Tom Price

Greg Nowaski

Bruce Pitzer

President's Message



Dear Fellow Tree Huggers:

As GEO approaches its 15th anniversary next year, we have much of which to be proud.

We have had an impact on public policy, towards our goals of protecting the environment and neighborhoods, making growth pay its own way and keeping development from overstressing our roads, schools and water supplies.

Much remains to be done.

At our March 29 annual meeting, members will vote whether to change GEO's name to Control Growth Now, to clarify and simplify our message to the public and potential members.

Whether or not the name change is approved, however, our crusade for a better today and tomorrow will remain as it has, a recognition that the natural and human environments are inextricably connected and that as such we all have a duty, as well as a self-interest, to be responsible stewards of God's creation.

Please help us achieve our goals by renewing your membership and participating as you can. Whether GEO or Control Growth Now, Sarasota County needs us, now more than ever.

GEO President

GEO Is *FOR*

- ★ **High Concurrency Standards, To Avoid Overcrowding**
- ★ **Strong Rules on Urban Sprawl and to Protect the Environment and Neighborhoods**
- ★ **Fees And Taxing Districts to Make Growth Pay Its Own Way**

Annual Meeting and Picnic March 29

GEO will pay for free admission to Oscar Scherer State Park for all members and their guests attending the picnic and annual meeting. Members and guest entering the park should advise the entrance guard that they are with the GEO event.

GEO will provide hamburgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers and drinks to those attending the picnic, at no charge. Members and guests are encouraged to bring a side dish or dessert for this “pot luck” picnic.

We’ll fire up the grills and start the picnic around 11:30 am. The annual meeting, in a room adjoining the covered Pavilion by the lake, will run

from about 1 pm to about 2 pm. Reservations are required so that GEO may plan for the food.

At the annual meeting, GEO will present its Environmental Hero of the Year Award to Drs. Allen and Mary Jelks, in recognition of their many years of devotion and service to Sarasota County’s natural environment. Most recently, the retired Sarasota pediatricians donated \$1 million to enable the County to purchase and preserve a 600-acre parcel of undisturbed Florida habitat along the Myakka River.

We also hope to hear from Sarasota City Commissioner Mary Quillin.

The annual meeting will consider the three proposed amendments to the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation. They are recited in full on page 6 of this *GEO Journal*.

A mail survey of GEO members showed strong support for the proposed name change. Most of those opposed favored a name change but suggested a different new name. Those opposed to any change like the present GEO acronym, the use of the word “environment” in the title and the tradition of the present name. Those favoring a change to Control Growth Now believe that it is simpler, catchier and better conveys our message in the organization’s name.



Supports Growth Controls

SCOPE stands for Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence. It is a private group, formed to influence public policy. In light of the fact that many members of the SCOPE Board of Directors are committed pro-growthers (such as Kerry Kirschner of the Argus Foundation), it was surprising that the SCOPE Board unanimously approved a report by its Traffic Flow and Congestion Study Group which strongly endorses GEO’s policies on the subject. GEO President Dan Lobeck served on the Study Group (which was open to all volunteers) and influenced the content of the Study Group’s report. It now remains to be seen how diligent SCOPE will be in actually seeking the implementation of these recommendations.

Excerpts From SCOPE’s Traffic Flow and Congestion Report

Impact Fees – Sarasota County Government should revise its methodology and data as needed to appropriately increase its road impact fees on new development (which for a single family dwelling are now less than 2/3 of what they were ten years ago) in order to pay the full costs of accommodating development impacts. Sarasota County Government should also act as needed to require full road impact fees by its municipalities.

Growth Controls – In order to avoid excessive and premature traffic impacts, the Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan should continue its historic limits on the timing of new growth while at the same time planning long-range growth. “Historic limits on timing” is the status quo and the study group believes that these current limits are valid. The appropriate timing of new growth is integral to maintaining adequate transportation resources. Sarasota County has won awards on its current growth management policies. If we allow more development throughout the county than the roads and intersections are designed to handle, we will have congested roads and intersections. When local governments consider the mixed-use form of development, they should do so in a manner that does not increase traffic impacts by weakening controls on the amount, location, density, intensity and timing of development.

Funding Shortfall – The MPO’s Year 2025 Financially Feasible Transportation Plan projects a billion dollar shortfall for Sarasota County, which must be addressed. Securing alternate sources of revenue and the development of a quality public transportation system and other alternatives that provide competitive options to the use of private vehicles must be examined.

Concurrency— Local government should maintain and adhere to strong concurrency rules and standards when setting up new plans for growth or amending

Finally, A School Impact Fee?

After decades of delay by the School Board, the Sarasota County Commission is considering a school impact fee, to make growth pay its way for the school facilities required by growth.

In December, on a 3 to 2 vote (Kovach, Lewis and Kleinlein for and Benson and Todd against), the Sarasota County School Board recommended the school impact fee to the County Commission.

Carol Todd, whose husband is identified on the Internet as a residential and commercial developer, gave no credible explanation for voting against the school impact fee. Laura Benson stated, against overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that the School District does not need additional funds for capital expenditures.

The proposal is for a school impact fee of \$2,032 for a single family home. This is significantly less than the \$2587.50 school impact fee recently adopted by Manatee County. It would produce an estimated \$7 million a year for school facilities. It has been proposed that the fee be updated every two years.

A 1999 study by School District staff showed a 12-year deficit of \$60 million in funding needed capital facilities. The School Board's consultant painted an even bleaker picture, concluding that the need for new facilities to keep up with growth is less than projected revenues by \$34,803,705 over the next five years. This would be met by the impact fee if there is no "affordable housing" exemption.

Moreover, that 1999 study only showed five projects to provide "new capacity for growth" over 12 years: new elementary schools at Palmer Ranch, North Port and No-

komis, a new middle/high school for North Port and funds for new portables through 2002. No other new schools or expansions of existing facilities are included, although the need is now foreseen.



The School Board faces a shortfall not only in the facilities required to keep up with growth but also in meeting needs for repairs and other expenses to serve existing students. A December 5, 2000 report by School District staff showed a combined facility funding deficit of \$112,398,608 from 2001 through 2005. A very recent report shows the need to be much greater, including a need to completely replace several schools with worn and failing buildings and facilities, including River-view High School.

Further, the School District's current capital projects budget shows

\$74.4 million in unfunded capital facility needs through 2007, plus additional unfunded needs (with amounts not yet determined) for a technical high school and future school site purchases.

The fact is that without a school impact fee, the School Board faces only two choices. The first is inadequate facilities. The second is higher taxes, making property owners to pay even more to subsidize the expenses of growth. Because voter approval is required for a substantial increase in taxes for school facilities, that option is problematic.

The new state constitutional amendment requiring reduced class sizes increases the need for the school impact fee. Without it, the School District will have even more trouble providing adequate new facilities to meet the demands of growth while at the same time repairing and maintaining existing facilities with current revenues.

Further, the School District faces an imminent state mandate to replace portables with permanent classrooms, thereby increasing the facility funding crisis even further. The higher costs of new stricter building code requirements will increase the facility funding deficit even more.

Seventeen other counties have school impact fees. There is no evidence that they have had an adverse effect on the development

Continued on page 5

controlgrowth.com

Check out GEO's Web Site !

industry or have contributed to any perceived lack of "affordable" housing. Indeed, many of those counties are high-growth counties with an abundance of housing in all price ranges. Orange County (the Orlando area), for example, charges a school impact fee of \$2,828, as does adjoining Osceola County (the Seminole area).

Although the School Board members recommended an impact fee exemption for housing selling for less than \$125,000, to accommodate "affordable housing", that should be rejected for two reasons.

The first is that it would cost over \$2 million a year, causing the fee to produce less revenue than needed to pay the costs of growth. The second is that the exemption would be clearly illegal because it would violate court rulings which state that there must be a "rational nexus" (or reasonable connection) between the impact fees and the facility impacts of the construction charged the fee, countywide.

According to a recent SCOPE report, 43% of all houses sold in Sarasota County (unincorporated and cities together) in 2001 sold for less than \$120,000. 79% of the homes sold in North Port were below that price. Although new homes generally sell for more than the average of all new and used homes together, which this report reflects, the percentage of new homes at or below \$125,000 will still be very substantial.

The SCOPE report states that the average price for a new home in North Port was \$114,967 in August 2001. Also consider that according to a recent Englewood Sun-Herald article, 69% of all single-family residential permits issued in 2002 to date in Sarasota County are in North Port, where new homes cost the least. That also (it

seems relevant) is where new school construction is needed the most.

According to the School Board's consultant, a school impact fee of up to \$4,885 would be justified if the School Board spent all of its facility revenues on existing needs rather than for new growth.

Although the School Board's consultant concluded that "historically" the School District has on average spent 11% of its capital facility revenues on new growth, in the current year that percentage is more than twice that, at 23.5%! If the School District had a school impact fee, it could both keep up with growth and use the freed-up revenue for unmet current facility needs. The fact is that too much of the District's capital funds are planned to be used to keep up with growth while existing facilities are planned to fall into disrepair, deterioration and other inadequacy due to insufficient funding.

In any event, a school impact fee of even only \$2,032 would be a start. It would still leave Sarasota County's total impact fees significantly lower than many other counties. As calculated by the Sarasota County administration (for what they describe as an "average house"), Manatee County's total impact fees are now \$6,395.71, compared to only \$2,790.00 in Sarasota County. With the proposed \$2,032 school impact fee, Sarasota County's total impact fees would still be far less than Manatee's, at \$4,822.

Sarasota County now has impact fees for roads, parks and recreation, libraries and fire and rescue. Are not schools just as important? Do we keep up with asphalt for our cars but not classrooms for our children?



Mary's In A Runoff

Sarasota City Commissioner and former GEO President Mary Quillin is in an April 8 runoff for reelection. The election is against real estate agent Danny Bilyeau, who Mary led in the first vote.

Bilyeau is being bankrolled heavily by developers and other pro-growth interests, including those who backed the unsuccessful referendum for a strong "boss" City Mayor.



Mary Quillin

Mary has worked hard and effectively to serve the public and deserves reelection.

Please help Mary Quillin by volunteering for her campaign (by calling her at 951-2661) or by mailing a check to:

Mary Quillin Campaign Fund
2304 Ringling Blvd #213
Sarasota, FL 34237

The maximum contribution is \$500, although any amount will be greatly appreciated.

Please help Mary's reelection. Please do it today.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

**BYLAWS AND
ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
OF
GROWTH-RESTRAINT AND ENVIRONMENTAL
ORGANIZATION (GEO), INC.**

[Additions are indicated by underline; deletions by *italics*]

1) DUES

**BYLAWS
ARTICLE II
MEMBERSHIP**

Section 2. The dues for the membership year shall be a minimum of twenty fifteen dollars per person, except for students, who may join for a minimum of ten seven dollars each. Members shall, however, be encouraged to contribute greater financial resources to GEO, and in return shall be granted special membership titles, as follows — Fifty dollars to ninety-nine dollars: “Heron”; One hundred dollars to four hundred and ninety-nine dollars: “Panther”; Five hundred dollars or more: “Eagle”.

2) BOARD ELECTIONS

**BYLAWS
ARTICLE IV
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Section 3. *Not less than 60 days* Before each annual membership meeting at which Directors are to be elected, the Board of Directors shall *elect a Nominating Committee consisting of five Directors, by plurality vote. In accordance with Robert’s Rules of Order, the President may not be a member of the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee shall, not less than 45 days before the annual meeting, submit to the Board of Directors a recommendation for the number of members to constitute the next Board, together with the names of proposed nominees in that number. Not less than 30 days before the annual meeting, the Board of Directors shall determine the size of the next Board and the names of its nominees for election to the Board, and shall mail to all members notice of those nominations, together with a first notice of the date of the annual meeting and notice of an opportunity for additional nominations as provided herein. Upon such notice being mailed At the annual meeting, any member of GEO may nominate one or more additional candidates for Director, provided that written notice of that nomination, signed by the member, together with a written and signed statement of willingness to serve by the candidate, is filed with or post-marked to the GEO Secretary not less than 20 days before the annual meeting. Not less than ten 14 days before the annual meeting, the GEO Secretary shall then mail a second notice of the annual meeting shall be mailed to all members, which shall list all candidates in the notice and in a proposed proxy form, identifying as such those candidates nominated by the Board and those candidates nominated by individual members, with an opportunity for voting instructions on the proxy. The second notice shall be as provided in Article III.3 of these By-Laws.*

3) NAME CHANGE

**ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
ARTICLE I
NAME**

The name of the corporation is Control Growth Now *Growth-restraint and Environmental Organization (GEO), Inc.*

**BYLAWS
ARTICLE I
NAME AND PURPOSE**

Section 1. The name of the corporation is Control Growth Now *Growth-restraint and Environmental Organization (GEO), Inc.*, which shall be referred to in these By-Laws as “Control Growth Now *GEO.*”

Throughout the balance of the Bylaws, “GEO” shall be replaced with “Control Growth Now”.

Bits and Pieces

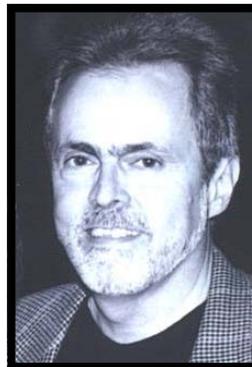
Credit Where Credit Is Due - Politicians in two South County municipalities deserve credit for recent actions favoring the public interest over growth interests. The Venice City Council voted to explore turning Venice Island's Beach Wastewater Treatment Plant into a public park and beach rather than allowing it to fall to a commercial or residential developer. The North Port City Commission voted (with Commissioners Fink and Lockhart opposed) to reject legislation proposed by the owners of the Taylor Ranch to turn their property into an Improvement District with its own municipal powers, outside of controls and limits on development which North Port may otherwise impose. Stay tuned, however. Neither of these stories are over and the developers may still win the day.

Sarasota 2050 Faces May 13 hearing - The legal challenge to Sarasota County's radical pro-growth "Sarasota 2050" plan, by ManaSota-88, environmental leader Becky Aych and Taylor Ranch, is scheduled for a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge on May 13 at 9 am at the Terrace Building. Sarasota 2050 would open up the County's rural lands east of I-75 and in Englewood to the equivalent of nine Palmer Ranches, without any meaningful control on timing, and would also intensify development in existing urban areas.

Fight On, Palmer Ranchers! - Residents of several subdivisions in the Palmer Ranch are up in arms over proposals for excessive commercial development in their neighborhoods (including inadequate setbacks) and a proposed I-75 Interchange which would bring massive traffic through their community. Although criticized by pro-growthers as NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) reactionaries, GEO believes there are fewer imperatives more legitimate than concern about what goes on in one's back yard. Palmer Ranchers should also be concerned, however, about the commercial megadevelopment planned east of the proposed Interchange under Sarasota 2050.

Water Water Everywhere? Not Really - At a March 6 meeting of the Sarasota Tiger Bay Club, regional water managers projected that with planned expansions of withdrawals from the Peace River, aquifer storage, groundwater sources and increased conservation, Sarasota County will have enough water to serve projected growth for the next ten (according to one speaker) or twenty (according to a more optimistic one) years. When asked by GEO President Dan Lobeck how Sarasota County could then open up rural lands equal to over fifty years of growth without assurances of adequate water supply, none of the speakers (including County Commissioner Jon Thaxton) offered a reply. The only response came from water utility spokesman and former County Commissioner Ray Pilon, who said with a smile, "Dan, I'm just glad I don't have to answer your growth questions anymore."

Pro-Growthers Gun For Barbetta - Sarasota County Planning Commissioner Joe Barbetta is up



Joe Barbetta

for reappointment in April. Pro-growthers are lobbying for his removal in reprisal for his record of voting to protect the environment, neighborhoods and the public interest. That record earned Barbetta GEO's 2002 Environmental Hero of the Year Award. Jon Thaxton is said to favor Barbetta's reappointment, as does Paul Mercier, who apparently respects the intelligence, experience and balance which Joe Barbetta brings to the Planning Commission. David Mills reportedly favors Barbetta's ouster as does Shannon Staub. Although Staub says she disfavors Planning Commissioners on either side of the growth debate, she is a supporter of reliably pro-growth Planning Commissioner John Fellin. Nora Patterson says she's on the fence, although she joined Mills and Staub to oust Becky Aych last year in a very similar situation. Contact her today.

Send Them A Message

Your Voice *Can* Make A Difference

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Saturday

March 29

11:30-2:00

Join Us for Our

GEO

Picnic

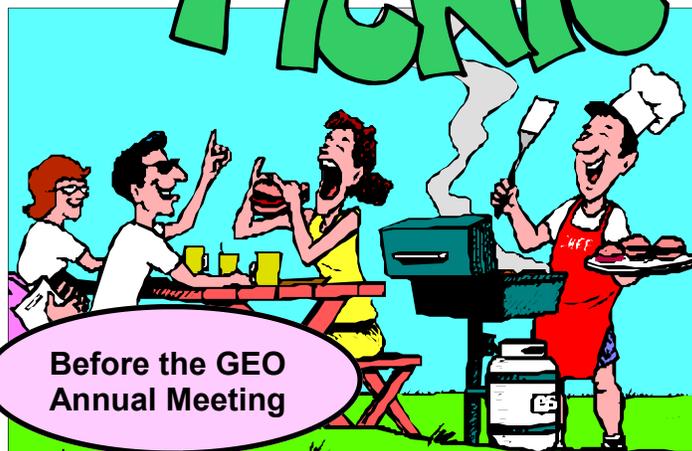
**Free To GEO
Members
And Their Guests**

**At Oscar Scherer
State Park**

Off US 41 in Osprey

**At the Pavilion by
The Lake**

**Free Park Entry—
(Tell Them You're
Here For The GEO
Picnic)**



**We Provide The
Burgers, Hot Dogs,
Veggie Burgers
and Drinks.**



**Bring a Side Dish
or Dessert to
Share, If You Can**

Reservations Required — Please Fill Out And Return The Enclosed Card Or Call 364-8777