

"No matter what Aristotle and all philosophy may say, there's nothing like tobacco." 'Tis the passion of decent folk; he who lives without tobacco isn't worth living."

Mollere, FRENCH DR.

OUR VIEWPOINT

Growth: two visions

While Manatee rolls, is Sarasota trying to reinvent the wheel?

First of two

On paper, it sounds wonderful: relatively small, densely populated but self-contained villages in which people can walk or bike to stores, gather in communal green spaces to play and converse, admire nature and enjoy the good life.

That is the vision of Sarasota 2050, the growth-management plan for the eastern area of Sarasota County now dominated by farms, ranches and suburban-type ranchettes. Close to 20 years behind Manatee County in dealing with growth pressures in its eastern reaches, Sarasota hopes to contain a growth bubble projected to amount to at least 82,000 new homes in a half-dozen carefully controlled zones that concentrate development and preserve natural beauty. Interspersed in the villages will be zones for "rural heritage/estate" homes, along with commercial districts at major road intersections with I-75 and more traditional urban/suburban zones where development is already heavy.

Manatee County, by contrast, long ago adopted the master-planned community concept for growth management in East Manatee. The high demand for new homes in Lakewood Ranch and a dozen or more other communities illustrate the popularity of that traditional approach to growth management. As dozens of similar but older developments in West Manatee prove, people enjoy the suburban amenities of compatible neighborhoods with shopping and cultural facilities clustered nearby on main arteries.

Whether Sarasota 2050 will become a reality remains to be seen. It currently is undergoing review by the state Department of Community Affairs and, if approved at the state level, faces extensive review by county officials and public hearings.

Less than Utopia

Also up in the air is whether it will be an improvement over the traditional concept. Celebration, a Disney development near Orlando, is being built on a somewhat similar village plan, with considerable success. Seaside, in north Florida, also has that old-fashioned village image as its model.

While both have been widely publicized as the new vision for managing growth, they fail to fully deliver on the utopian, small-town promise. Some consider them just another form of suburban sprawl with fancier trimmings. The shopping districts oze charm and nostalgia, but many of the stores are high-priced specialty shops catering to tourists, forcing residents to get in their cars and drive to strip malls for their day-to-day needs. After all, the economy of scale on which Home Depot's or Super Wal-Mart's success is based requires

COMING FRIDAY

■ Two existing villages in Manatee County fight to preserve their quality of life.

thousands of customers from a wide region, not the drop-in patronage of a few hundred village residents.

The closeness of homes to one another to create the central green space doesn't appeal to everyone. And rigidity of deed restrictions in these communities also is a turnoff for many people, who complain of feeling like Stepford Wives.

Huge impact fees

But perhaps the most controversial aspect of Sarasota 2050 is its vision of growth paying for itself. Built into the plan is a "fiscal neutrality" policy that requires new development to pay up front for all the necessary infrastructure to serve it, including roads, sewer, water and schools. That policy no doubt would appeal to many Manateans who complain of having to pay for growth's impact, especially schools. But the impact fees the Sarasota policy dictates will price such growth out of the reach of most middle-class buyers.

That is especially true for utility services. Manatee County long ago made the investment in a water and sewer system capable of serving all areas of the county designated in its comprehensive plan as developable. Sarasota is just beginning to put together a master utility system, whose costs will be astronomical. Forcing growth to pay a full share of those costs will be prohibitively expensive.

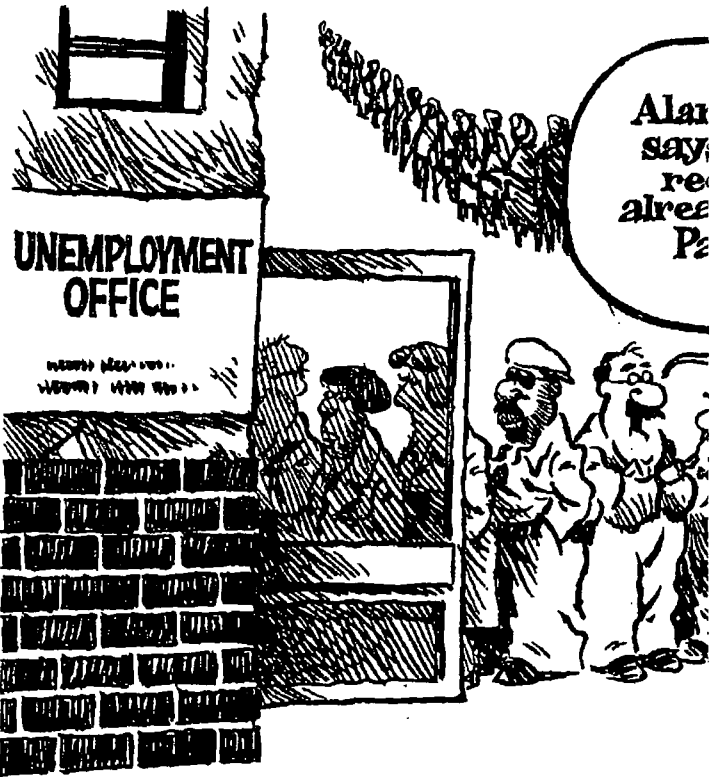
To which many Manateans will doubtless respond: So?

The answers are easy: Jobs. Business opportunities. Economic prosperity. Growth generates the job and business opportunities that our community needs to remain economically prosperous. Without it, the tax base would be shrinking, as would property values and overall quality of life for everyone.

And, according to a study by the respected research firm of Fishkind and Associates, growth does pay its own way, over time. The taxes paid by those new residents and merchants, along with the impact and user fees paid by the developers, more than compensate for the new infrastructure costs they create. And always, there are the jobs, the lifeblood of any community.

Manatee County, we feel, is on the right track with its master-plan approach to growth. A drive through Lakewood Ranch, Greenfield Plantation, Cypress Creek, Tara, Rosedale, University Park or any number of gleaming new communities provides plenty of evidence of its success.

As for Sarasota 2050, the jury is still out.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kids unwelcome at historical park?

I am a kindergarten teacher at Blackburn Elementary School who took my 27 students on a trip to the Manatee Village Historical Park March 6 as part of our three-week study of the olden days. I have done this for six years, but in the last two the new supervisor has no longer allowed me to conduct my own tour and teach, to support our classroom learning. I am now required to follow her limited, inflexible program presented by volunteers who, while sincere in effort, do not seem to understand how young children learn and communicate, or what we in particular are trying to learn.

Our field trip money was eliminated along with the school budget cuts, so the children had to pay for this bus themselves, and I don't think they got nearly the quality experience that they could have. What made it worse, the volunteer who greeted us with no smile made it clear he was unhappy to have young children around, and told me I was not allowed to take my students inside any of the other buildings — the schoolhouse, church, courthouse, general store, or boat building shop. Even the wonderful children's hands-on room is no longer available.

I am a nationally certified teacher with 25 years' experience and have never had a problem with my students misbehaving or causing damage on a field trip. This experience made me feel very disrespected, unwelcome and frustrated. Even one of my six parent chaperones commented that it seemed the park caters to older people who already know about the olden days, rather than children who want to learn. That would be a shame, because the Historical Park is a wonderful place with so much to offer as an educational facility.

Unless the policy changes, I am planning to take my class next year to the Pinellas Heritage Park in Largo. The director there is more than willing to let me teach and guide my class through the experience I want them to have, and

offered to support me in any way. That would be worth the one-hour drive and extra bus cost.

Nancy McC
Braden

Bush: treaty-breaker

For some time now the Bush administration has consistently tacked, ignored or just plain brooked the rules and laws that existed before its inauguration. It ignores and ridicules the environmental protection laws it doesn't like and cautions the international Kyoto Agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (read coal and oil money here) as unscientific, and therefore refuses to cooperate with the rest of the world's governments. Nuclear power plants we don't need are its favorites.

So, against all independent scientific advice and the wishes of tens of millions of people placed at greater risk of injury from its actions, the administration approves the ill-considered Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump site. The hard-work and time-honored effective measure for international peace, the ABM Treaty, interferes with its plans for world military domination and so is labeled "out of date." Its goal of being able to dictate terms to the rest of the world is blocked by the World Treaty Banning Space-based Weapons, so it wants to violate the sanctity of a weapons-free space by launching orbital weapons platforms, using catchy names like "High Frontier" and "Defense in the 21st Century." It caters to the extreme right wing of its party by wasting tax dollars to cover up the statue of the "Spirit of Justice" so as to not offend the prudish sensibilities of the religious zealots who support this administration.

What is hopefully the last straw that breaks the general public's acceptance of this dangerous course of bully-like behavior is the revelation against Iran, (ya?) and geloveued ad
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