

CONA Newsletter

The Council of Neighborhood Associations of South Pinellas County

July 2005

President's Message

By Karl Nurse

CONA scored a major victory at City Council this week! City Council spent 90 minutes debating whether to increase spending for our number one priority – additional community police officers. The issue was contained in the question of how much would the City Council LOWER the millage rate. The Mayor's proposal of 6.95 mills, did not provide for any additional police officers including community police officers or code enforcement officers. The effort at city council was to set the millage at a higher level to provide the funds for community policing and/or additional code enforcement. Each additional 1/100 mill generates \$130,000. 3/100 mills would provide 3 more community police officers (10% increase) and 1 more code officer.

The last time we reported City Council members positions on our agenda, CONA was attacked by name by some City Council members. Realizing the risk we take, it is our duty to let neighbors know who will stand with us on the tough issues. At the July 7th City Council meeting, here is how members voted on funding additional community police officers as explained above:

Consistently voted with us: Bennett, Flowers, Kriseman and Lasita.

Supported the compromise that provided some funds: the 4 above, Bryan and Littrell.

Opposed us consistently: Foster and Williams.

The final budget vote will be in September. Please contact your City Council member and explain why we feel so strongly about this issue. We don't have to always agree. But, we do need to talk to them and them to us.

The Gandy Wal-mart fight will continue at City Council within 45 days. We stood with the neighborhoods of Gandy on this before and we need to before City Council. A speaker from the neighborhood will bring us up to date at the July meeting.

I hope to see you at the next meeting as we continue to stand up for neighborhoods, even when it is tough!

CONA Board Meeting Wednesday, July 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:

City Budget • Crime Rates

New Electrical Meters- Progress Energy

Wal-Mart Update

Featured Neighborhood:

Downtown Neighborhood Association

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Megatrends in Crime: St. Petersburg is falling behind

An Editorial
By Steve Plice

MEGATREND: An economic, technological, demographic, political, or cultural large-scale phenomenon or force that appears to possess long-term staying power. The term "Megatrend" was first coined by the futurist, John Naisbitt in his 1982 book entitled Megatrends.

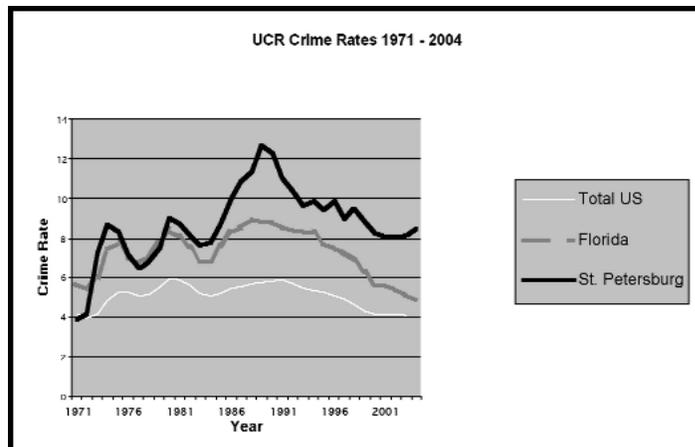
Nation-wide, annual crime rates have been steadily and dramatically declining since the late 1980s. This long-term reduction is a "megatrend" that has changed standards and thinking throughout the country. Community standards for "acceptable" levels of crime have declined along with crime rates. Crime rates that might have been considered "acceptable" or "normal" in 1990 are now considered to be unacceptably high.

Consistent with the national "megatrend", St. Petersburg enjoyed crime rate reductions throughout the decade of the 1990s. Since the year 2000, however, we have made no progress at all. By not improving, we are falling behind. *If current trends continue, St. Petersburg will have the Florida's highest crime rate by the year 2006.*

The problem is not that St. Petersburg is experiencing a new crime wave. In fact, our crime rates have declined dramatically from the dizzying heights of 1990, and they have been fairly stable since 1999. The problem is that everyone else has shown impressive improvements over the past five years while we have remained largely unchanged. We are being left behind as the rest of our nation, state and county find new and improved ways to reduce crime. As of 2004, even Miami has a lower crime rate than St. Petersburg.

CONA and the citizens of St. Petersburg are far ahead of our City leaders. We grasp that new national norms have emerged from the "megatrend" of significantly lower crime rates, and we understand that St. Petersburg is falling behind. We believe it is reasonable to expect our city to do at least as well as other cities in Florida and across the nation.

By contrast, our Police and City leaders appear to be stuck in the past. They continue to use the 1990 "spike" in City crime rates as a basis for arguing that we are doing well from an historical perspective. In many ways, our city is in denial. As the rest of the county, state and country continue to improve, our leaders, at least by their actions, signal their belief that our crime rates are good enough. Neither the Police Department "brass" nor our elected officials have put forth a plan for our city to keep up with the clear mega-



trend sweeping the country. From the rhetoric, I am unable to identify a single elected official who believes that crime reduction should be a priority for St. Petersburg.

It is difficult to believe that anyone at City Hall is actually paying attention. As City Council strenuously debates the need for more Community Police Officers, the City's own website demonstrates how we are losing out to other cities in Florida. (see <http://www.stpete.org/performance/police1.pdf>)

For comparison purposes, the City has chosen to track crime rates in Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami and Orlando as well as St. Petersburg. In 1999, when the comparison started, St. Petersburg had a crime rate lower than any of the other four cities. In 2000, Ft. Lauderdale achieved a crime rate lower than ours and has continued to show impressive improvements. In 2004, Miami also dipped below St. Petersburg. Of the five cities in the comparison, St. Petersburg is unique in that its crime rate is not declining. Everyone else is enjoying dramatic improvements. If the current trends continue, Tampa and Orlando will be lower than St. Petersburg by 2006.

Crime rates in St. Petersburg are defying the national megatrend. As we stagnate, the U.S., the State of Florida and Pinellas County continue to show annual improvements. Year by year, we fall further behind.

Over the years, our elected officials have been good about providing everything the Police Department has requested. They have allocated more manpower, increased pay, and added substantial benefits. The Police Department has all of the tools it has requested from City Hall. Our elected officials have not, however, demanded better results from the Police Department. This lack of leadership from our leaders is the primary reason that our results are not as good as those of other communities.

Megatrends in Crime continued on next page

Megatrends in Crime *continued from previous page*

The citizens of St. Petersburg need to speak up. We need to tell our Council Members that St. Petersburg is better than this. We deserve better than this. This is the 21st Century. Times have changed and standards have changed.

Downtown Buildings Need Not be Huge

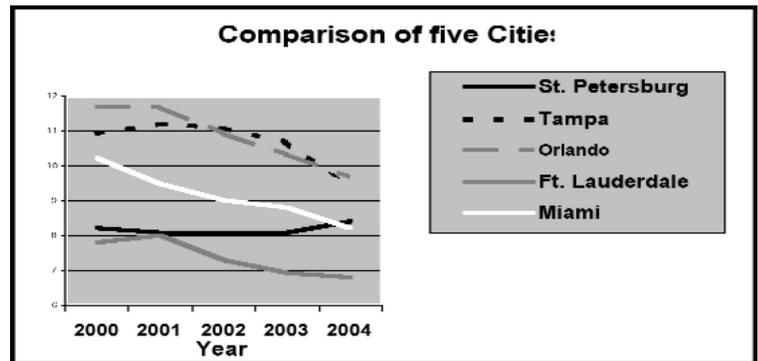
By Tim Baker
President
Downtown Neighborhood Association

Editor's note: Following is an excerpt from the July Issue of the Downtown Neighborhood Association Newsletter. This edition of THE DNA NEWS contains an excellent analysis of downtown height and size issues. Copies will be available at the July 20th CONA meeting. The full text may be found at <http://stpetedna.org>

ST. PETERSBURG CAN ACHIEVE its redevelopment goals for Downtown by writing a new zoning code that caps buildings at a moderate size. It does not need to allow new buildings on the large scale that would be found in the country's major urban center such as New York, Boston and Chicago.

That is the conclusion of a study of every parcel of property in Downtown, done for the Downtown Neighborhood Association by Tim Clemmons, an architect and member of the DNA board of directors; and Timothy J. Baker, DNA president. The study was prompted by proposals that the new zoning code allow buildings of a much larger scale than anything built in the past 20 years. The proposals to allow very large-scale buildings are included in a draft version of new zoning codes that have been posted on the city's web site. These draft proposals are still subject to debate and change. The basis of this study was a custom report that DNA commissioned from the Pinellas County property appraiser's office, listing every parcel of property in the area bounded by 5th Avenue North, 5th Avenue South, Tampa Bay and Martin Luther King Jr. St. The report shows the use and total size of all buildings on each parcel. The study also used data from St. Petersburg's Economic Development and Development Services departments.

Go to <http://stpetedna.org> for the full story



Announcing CONA's 2005 All-Neighborhood Block Party

November 5, 2005
at Walter Fuller Park

Hosted by
Jungle Terrace Civic Association

For more information, contact:
Tom Killian 343-2041

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Underground Crime?

By Cathy Wilson

By now, most CONA members and many citizens agree that the crime rate in St. Petersburg is at an unacceptably high level. We've read, in this newsletter and elsewhere, that crime rates nationally and statewide are declining. We know that crime rates in other cities in our state and county are lower than ours. We also know that our city officials are curiously unresponsive to our concerns.

A few years ago, we tried to have the city conduct a management review of the Police Department. Our elected officials decided that take home cars, a salary increase and other perks would solve what we saw as a crisis of morale within the department. In view of our continued difficulty in attracting and retaining competent officers, it is readily apparent that the sops didn't work but there is no backup plan.

What is the net effect of being below strength? 911 responders are stretched thin and CPOs cover special duty task forces. Detectives have unmanageable case loads and technicians are unable to process routine crime scenes that would lead to more charges per criminal and more criminals apprehended.

What does this actually translate to in our neighborhoods, streets, parks and business communities?

- It means that technicians don't take fingerprints for petty burglaries so that burglars can't be convicted of anything beyond where they're caught. It means that 911 responders are pushed so hard to respond to multiple calls that they have little time to investigate or deter crime as it occurs. It means that speeders, red-light runners and other traffic violators can act with little fear of a ticket or worse. It means that CPOs are out of their areas and not actively working on crime concerns where they could be making a dramatic difference.

When criminals are not apprehended, they are loose to commit other crimes. When crime is not deterred it escalates.

- In my neighborhood, it means that a shooting episode remains unsolved with no information to residents. It means that an elderly woman can be beaten to death in her home by a vagrant who was apprehended while his fellows continue to harass residents. It means that we can endure waves of vandalism, auto theft and home burglaries with few or no suspects actually apprehended. It means that my

neighbors now seldom report petty crime, having concluded that reporting is a useless exercise.

Unreported crime is actually a double whammy – not only do the criminals get away with it but the crimes never show up in the statistics so they're not part of the "measure of crime" we use to judge its severity within our community.

When citizens stop believing that their police department can and will protect them, we've taken our first steps on the road to anarchy.

Police personnel are not immune to the demoralizing effects of being unable to make headway in impacting our crime rate. Their frustration comes through clearly in discussing our situation with them. Departmental policies seem to be designed to intensify that frustration. Our 911 responders may not chase suspected felons without permission. CPO duty assignments are changed to broaden their responsibilities to include task forces. Disciplinary action seems arbitrary, capricious and, at times, the result of political pressure from small but vocal minorities.

What can we do about it? Call, write letters or email the Mayor and City Council. Write letters to the editors of both local papers. Show up at candidate forums and ask the uncomfortable questions...

- 1) Why is petty crime unimportant in our city and who decided that?
- 2) Why is our crime rate acceptable to city leaders?
- 3) Why has the management of our Police Department never embraced and utilized the Community Policing concept to its fullest or Comstat at all?
- 4) Why can't SPPD management admit that the department is understaffed and work on solutions instead of finding ways to cover it up?
- 5) Why do our leaders allow management issues at the SPPD to alienate and drive away our officers?
- 6) Why isn't funding for more CPOs with smaller areas of responsibility important enough to have the agreement of ALL members of City Council?

Do it and KEEP DOING IT!!! The city you save could be our own!

City to submit Land Development Regulations in July

By Bob Jeffery

After considerable work to draft the new Land Development Regulations, (LDRs); the City will initiate the process later this month. The process will take 8 to 10 months to complete. There is still plenty of time to revise, edit and refine the regulations and procedures that will be taken forward for adoption.

The first phase of the application will involve the more technical aspects of the proposed regulations. It will establish the densities and intensities of each zoning district (how many housing units per acre, maximum floor area ratios, etc.) and the types of uses allowed within each district. The application will also establish maximum impervious surface ratios. (How much green space is required). A second and concurrent process will address what changes will be required to the City's Comprehensive Plan. A revised Future land use map will be generated as well as a Zoning map indicating where the new zoning districts will be applied.

However you may ask, is there still time to have input and can things continue to be adjusted. The simple answer is absolutely! This initial application begins the public process of review and approval of the Draft document. While much work has been accomplished with the participation of many groups and interested parties over the past year there is still a great deal of work to accomplish. Property owners, neighborhood and business groups, City departments, County agencies, City Council, the State Department of Community Affairs, all will be looking at the draft and offering input, edits and refinements. What cannot change after the Draft is submitted would be to increase densities or add additional uses to the zoning categories. However, reducing densities, removing uses and refining design guidelines and standards will still be possible

By the first of August, The City's Web site will be updated with a complete DRAFT of the document including all the maps associated with the application. You are encouraged to review these documents and provide input. A series of workshops and public hearings will be set up beginning in September and running thru March. These meetings will be announced in advance and your participation is encouraged.

For additional information visit the City's web site.
<http://www.stpete.org/LDRproposed.htm>

New automated meters are less intrusive for residential customers

In July, Progress Energy will begin installing automated meters in Pinellas County, as part of a project to replace 2.7 million meters in Florida and the Carolinas. The technology will provide a less-intrusive meter-reading process for customers, more accurate bills and fewer estimated bills. Customers will not be charged for the new meters, nor do they need to be home during installation.

The new meters will be less intrusive because meter readers will no longer need to enter customer property. Customers won't need to unlock their gates or keep their pets indoors on meter-reading days. The new meters also will reduce human error, which means customers will receive fewer estimated bills.

The new high-tech meters will have digital displays, instead of dials, and will use secure radio frequency transmissions. Meter readers will be able to gather information by driving near a home in a vehicle equipped with a computer and a radio receiver.

Progress Energy representatives will attend the July 20th CONA meeting to talk about the new meter project.

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A good slogan for the Downtown Neighborhood Association might be: "Downtown is a neighborhood, too."

But just does such a slogan mean?

First, it means that Downtown is a place that many people call home, which makes it very much like the other neighborhoods that make up St. Petersburg. As of the 2000 Census, there were 4,714 residents within the association's boundaries of 5th Avenue North, 5th Avenue South, Tampa Bay and ML King Street, making Downtown one of the most densely populated of the city's neighborhoods. Given the new development that has taken place, the population now is surely above 5,000. That's 5,000 people who share many concerns with the people in other neighborhoods. They worry about crime, about traffic and parking, and about new development changing the character of the place in which they live.

That slogan also means that Downtown is more than a residential neighborhood. It is also a business center, an arts and culture center, a government center and an educational center. This rich mix of different facets makes Downtown different than any other neighborhood in the city. It is true that other neighborhoods contain a mix of elements. Tyrone, for example, is the retail center of St. Petersburg, and the Gateway area is an employment center. But only in Downtown do all the different elements of city life come together so intimately, sometimes in a single building. Consider the block that used to contain the Maas Brothers Department Store. When the new projects that are scheduled for that block are realized, the block will include the regional headquarters of a major corporation, a five-star hotel, about 100 condominiums, a college, a museum, retail stores and restaurants, mixed together in five separate buildings.

A third meaning of that sentence is to recognize that there are

competing interests Downtown, to a greater extent than in other neighborhoods. As an example of what this means in practice, the Mayor recently put together a task force to discuss the future of Williams Park. In most parts of the city, a discussion about a small park would largely involve neighborhood residents. But when the park in question is downtown, the discussion involves 50 representatives of government, business, cultural institutions, social service agencies, schools, churches, and so on. The neighborhood association has to work hard to be heard among this sea of voices. Sometimes, the association must raise its figurative hand and say, don't forget, this isn't just a business district or a government district, it's a neighborhood, too.

For the past decade or so, cities around the country have been looking to revive their core areas by attracting new residents. St. Petersburg is truly fortunate in that its Downtown has always had a major residential element. Certainly there have been ups and downs, but outside of the corridor between 1st Avenue North and 1st Avenue South, Downtown has stuck to its residential roots. There have, however, been major changes in the past 20 years, and those changes seem to be accelerating. For example, in 2000 the median age of Downtown residents was about 55. That's higher than the city as a whole, but is a major drop from 20 years earlier, when the median age Downtown was close to 75. Another major trend is an increase in owner-occupied units, compared with rental units. In 1990, 15.3 percent of housing units Downtown were owner-occupied. As of 2000, that had increased to 20.14 percent. With the number of condominiums and townhouses that have been built or converted from rental in the past 5 years, that number has already increased by a good margin.

So when you think of Downtown, remember this: It's a neighborhood, too.

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- ◆ Our meeting was interrupted, at 7:40 p.m., for an announcement by Darden Rice, of the Sierra Club, that the EDC [Environmental Defense Commission] Meeting in progress at City Hall had denied approval for the proposed Wal-Mart on Gandy Boulevard. [There was enthusiastic applause and cheering.]
- ◆ It was pointed out that the two legally mandated City Budget hearings are called too late....after the millage has been established, thus capping the budget.
 - We heard that the previous Mayor Fischer called for earlier budget hearings assuring an impact on the budget finalization.
 - There was an appeal for scheduling Council hearings in the evenings when working residents would be free to participate.
- ◆ Responding to a message fro the Neighborhood Partnership Office announcing grants for neighborhoods incorporated under 501C3 provisions, Karl invited the three CONA members reporting this not-for-profit status to meet with him, to coordinate filing for such a grant prior to June 30th
- ◆ Police protection at the Baywalk Entertainment Center was the next issue for discussion.
 - Tim Baker, (Downtown Neighborhood Assoc.), pointed out that this area of the city has a much higher reported crime rate and therefore need a greater police presence.
 - It was questioned as to how many officers patrolling Baywalk are on regular assignment as opposed to voluntary overtime duty paid for by the property owners?
 - Several neighborhoods expressed their concern that their CPOs were frequently reassigned to patrol the Baywalk Complex.
- ◆ Our members were alerted to emerging new e-mail bank frauds, (phishing), that have all visual appearances of a legitimate bank web site.
- ◆ Recycling of collected trash was the following focus of our discussion.
 - Attorney Edward Helm made an impassioned appeal for support of the waste recycling concept that was recently defeated at City Council. He urged that every neighborhood appoint a representative to visit our incinerator and waste site in order to become familiar with the current situation and projected problems if waste collection

without recycling is continued. A hurricane could overwhelm our landfill capacity.

- ◆ We then enjoyed a PowerPoint presentation by President John Bagg of Greater Pinellas Point Civic Association, our featured CONA neighborhood for the month of June.
- ◆ Our Newsletter Editor, Steve Plice, solicited volunteers to be our featured neighborhood for July. Steve also solicited volunteers for our CONA Nominations Committee.
- ◆ Theresa McEachern, (Harbordale), encouraged visits to our recently renovated historic Shuffleboard Club next door.
- ◆ Tom Killian, (Jungle Terrace), urged all neighborhoods to sell and promote \$3.00 tickets for the baseball game on Friday July 22nd. between our Devil Rays and the Baltimore Orioles. He suggested inviting neighborhood Little League teams to go as guests of your neighborhood association.
- ◆ Tom also invited everyone to the joint picnic by CONA and Jungle Terrace to be held on Saturday November 5th.

Our meeting closed at 8:45 p.m. ■

CONA Has a New and Improved Website

Please note the new web address:
<http://www.conastpete.org>

Mo Eppley has created a new website for CONA. Enhanced features include a **BLOG** and a **COMMUNITY FORUM**. These features can become a great way for us to discuss issues and ideas, as well as have an ongoing public discussion about matters of concern to St. Petersburg residents. We hope that everyone will visit the website. It is still a work in progress so we will greatly appreciate your comments and suggestions.

Please check the **NEIGHBORHOODS** section of the website. If your neighborhood is not listed, let us know. If you have a neighborhood website, we would like to include a link to your site. Click on **Contact the Webmaster** at the bottom of the home page and send us your information.

Mo Eppley has provided design and hosting for our new website. Don't forget to thank her for providing this great service!



2005 Officers

President

Karl Nurse
Old Southeast
572-9311 Ext. 24
karl@baytechlabel.com

First Vice President

Steve Plice
Jungle Terrace
344-3120
Steveplice@verizon.net

Second Vice President

Theresa McEachern
Harbordale
823-6390
terre66@aol.com

Secretary

Conrad Weiser
Edgemoor
522-5008
MAOAI999@aol.com

Treasurer

Libby Steele
Lakewood Estates
867-6916
MPH56@aol.com

Frequently Called Numbers

Neighborhood Partnership Office:
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 - June 15, 2005** **Minutes by Conrad Weiser**

President Karl Nurse called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- ◆ We heard, at some length, of the City Council Workshop that discussed the efforts to win recognition under the "Green Cities Program". Karl described how he had recently lobbied, with Darden Rice of the Sierra Club, each of the Council members, winning at least tentative support, after some persuasion, from each one.
- ◆ Steve Plice, Editor of our Newsletter, reported that he was developing a new web page for CONA. He hopes to include URL links to each of the web pages currently supported by CONA member neighborhoods.
- ◆ On the theme of "Cops and Codes", several appreciative comments were voiced praising the letter our President sent to City Council. Karl acknowledged the collaboration of Cathy Wilson in drafting that letter.
 - Karl reported that only the mobile laptop computers have as yet been added to the promised improvements for the Codes Enforcement Staff. Hoped for software capabilities were ordered only this week.
 - It was emphasized how important it is for neighborhoods to report lack of CPO response to the Mayor and their City Councilmen. We were reminded that e-mail have proven effective in promoting Council support for neighborhood problems. [council@stpete.org]
 - Requests for Codes Enforcement support should be addressed to Sally Eichler with copies to Mayor Baker and/or Vice Mayor Dove.
- ◆ We were reminded of the Council's July 6th meeting at which the budget and the corresponding millage rate will be approved. CONA members were urged to voice their concerns to Council regarding budget provisions to address the quality of life issues so important to our neighborhoods.

**The Council of Neighborhood
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