

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

## “Meaningful Neighborhood Input in the Development Process”

### Committee – The Human Element

#### A Whitepaper – drafted by Jim Ludwig (9/21/2022) with committee input

At a June 21<sup>st</sup> meeting prior to the establishment of the Meaningful Input Committee (Pat Robinson, Lucia Panica, Lou Costa, and Norm Dumaine), Pat stressed the need to take **mistrust out of the process**. The committee recognizes that any discussions on changing and/or refining the development process to make it more meaningful will not be successful without the stakeholders and their subsets resolved **to act in good faith**, with mutual respect and trust. These are incredibly easy words to write, but not so easy to accomplish.

#### Adversaries:

**Developers’ vs Residents:** The development process in the City of Sarasota that exists as we examine this, **promotes an adversarial role** between **Property Owners** and their developers and the **Community** residents. This is counterproductive for the **Property Owner**, the reviewing Board or Commission and the **Community**. One of the stated Committee goals is **“breaking the adversarial role the existing process has created.”**

#### Naysayers:

By its nature the process of public input will always bring out “naysayers”, (my term, not necessarily negative). Those individuals can be and are often very passionate about their topic. In the heat of an argument, logic often gets lost, facts get overstated, and threats of doom and gloom emerge all to make a point. Of course, many **Property Owners** and their developers loath running into these “naysayers” at public workshops and public hearings and many City Commissioners and other Boards and Committees equally dread those aspects of the public hearing process. However, Naysayers play an important role and both the **Community** leadership and the **Property Owners** need to listen and understand the points being made behind the passion, rhetoric and inflated consequences.

#### Public Input is “a Waste of Time”:

Many **Property Owners** have expressed that Public Workshops and Public Hearings are both meaningless and a waste of time translating into delays for project completion and added expense. They do however recognize that the development process requires it. With the “waste of time” attitude, it is understandable why many **Property Owners** and their developers go into public workshops having expended minimal time and expense in the process. Because of this the **Community** is often presented insufficient materials and insufficient lead time to have any understanding of the project and provide meaningful input.

#### Stakeholders:

The notion of ‘stakeholders’ may be the most useful way to address how the **Community, Property Owners** and their financial backers and the City of Sarasota interact in a productive way. Because we all have a stake in what happens to our city the word “stakeholders” puts us on equal footing and not as adversaries. It is easy for the **Property Owner** to assume they have the most to gain and/or the most to lose in the development process. Except in rare cases, the neighborhood of that development has a much larger financial stake in the process. They have the most to gain and the most to lose. Existing **Property Owners** in our neighborhoods are by far more numerous; collectively wealthier and have

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

a much bigger dollar value at stake. They also have an ocean of knowledge, opinions, fears and vision. All our neighborhood and **Community** leaders have experienced this collective intelligence. It takes patience and good listening skills to sort through all that public commentary, but in the end, it is well worth the sound, long vision planning product.

### “Quality of Life” Drives Sarasota:

Sarasota has been recognized in numerous articles ranking “the best” for several years. “One of the top 10 Best Places to Live in the U.S. for 2022-23, #1 in Florida. #3 in Fastest-Growing Places; #7 in Safest Places to Live and #15 in Best Places to Live for Quality of Life” (*US News and World Report*); #6 Best U.S Beach Towns to Live In (*Travel & Leisure, 2021*); World’s greatest places Sarasota, proving itself a vital cultural capital (*Time, 2021*). This list goes on and on.

Every publication or public survey on why people choose Sarasota can be summarized by a higher “**quality of life.**” Restaurants, weather, culture, recreation, shopping, events, music make a rich environment. Neighborliness, friendliness, courtesy, generosity, caring about the community make a nourishing environment. These intangibles are harder to foster but may be the most significant to both the “**quality of life**” and value of Sarasota. Listening to any media, stuck in traffic, talking to other Sarasotans- expecting those qualities in quantity seems laughable. We all have observed small acts of courtesy, if not occasional grand kindness, ripple and be infectious in a good way. “**Quality of life**” is the common ground we collectively must insist on.

Is “**quality of life**” eroding? Great question, There is no question that Sarasota is being recognized all over the world. With that comes attention from financial backers. One financial real estate consultant told a committee member he has for the last couple years got up to a half dozen calls a week from all over the world (Russia, China, Saudi, South America, etc.) saying we have backers with a lot of money, find us property in Sarasota to invest in and develop. Do they know anything about Sarasota? Do they intend to reside here? Do they want to enhance our unique “**quality of life**”? At best, the answer is “maybe”. Obviously, these investors first choice is waterfront (bay or gulf) property. As the story is related to the committee, that consultant says in the back of his head “get in line”. There just isn’t a lot of available waterfront property to redevelop. Many are suggesting then move inland, i.e., find other space in the community. None of that investment appears interested in anything other than super high end residential or tourist accommodations.

As **Community** leaders we must weigh whether the quality of life we have enjoyed in the past is sustainable? Tons of places have sun; tons of places have sand and sea and daiquiris ... Sarasota has a unique quality of life to offer and If you want to understand the quality of life in a place you have to talk to our full time residents. The neighborhood leadership representing the **Community** residents is a good place to start. We understand that is it a hard task teasing out personal taste and preference from a more universal quality of life way of thinking but that is the heart of why the community of neighborhoods is involved. At this point Sarasota has had an unparalleled “Quality of life”. Our observation is that “quality of live” is fragile and may be quickly eroded from a radical upturn in those things endemic to it. Trust has fled the process. The public is being systematically excluded, having our intelligence insulted with keywords and trigger points like ‘affordable housing’ and ‘progress’. It can be likened to a Trojan Horse. In case you weren’t there, it didn’t turn out well for the Troy.

We think everyone would agree that we have become very polarized. Verifiably, the resulting outrage, entitlement, lying, anger, fear, belligerence we are seeing is unhealthy. Well beyond what these do to the mind, they harm the body at every scale from the meat to the city street. Proliferation of the toxic has killed communities, making them unlivable. Sarasota could become a well-upholstered version of that. Ultimately, if you want to go with bald economics, it’s bad for business and reduces property values in the long run. Do you yearn to live in Fort Lauderdale? Probably not.

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

Land development is not a democracy. It is private landowners building something on their property, ideally to make money. The concern we representing the community is concerned about is how that development impacts the adjacent residential population. It is unreasonable to assume there would be no impact from development and even less reasonable to assume the public should have no say in it. Public participation needs to occur at every level of the process but the greatest impact in this context comes from the zoning code and ordinances. Period. Public workshops the way they exist in Sarasota in 2022 can present community input, but the input has no sponsorship through the remaining of the process, in effect, it's toothless.

### What is the Solution:

A start to the solution is that all parties (the Property Owner, the Community and the City) agree to act 'in good faith'. In 2022, "good faith" is an endangered species concept. Historically we have seen "good faith" used in large developments, real estate transactions, marriage counseling, dealings between friends, commercial partnerships, in art and sports but unfortunately no longer in politics. Unfortunately we have allowed politics to polarize the Community in virtually everything we do. To the committee, the key to "good faith" is having all parties involved to understand and be acceptable to participating effectively. Be very clear. It's not just about us the community acting in good faith but in enforcing the good faith dealings of the other participants as well. Someone needs to step up to the plate and take on this challenge, and we feel no one is better positioned to do that than CCNA. We will get into more specifics in the recommendations section of this report.

### Good Faith:

Good faith embodies the notions of openness, fairness, balance, restraint, empathy, tolerance. From our viewpoint these virtues that seem to be in short order. So what does operate in good faith look like for meaningful input?

#### The Community's Good faith Standard

- Grind our axes in private and come out with a sharp axe in public.
- Informed participation.
- Understanding the Context: economic, code, cultural, state law, etc.
- Access to information treated with respect and-
- Cherry picking not allowed
- Applying logic and reasoning
- Substantiate arguments
- Reasonable expectations or at least honesty about expectations in general
- Be clear about expectations of our elected and appointed officials
- Try to understand trends; change what you can and maximize what you cannot change.
- Understand that sometimes there is not a win-win

#### The City's Good Faith Standard.

- Neutral, seeking the balance of profit and impact on the neighborhoods
- Come to an understanding of who, in the final analysis, you are working for.
- Commit to quality design standards
- Enforcing what we all agreed to in the form of deed restrictions, proffers and conditions accepted and enacted.
- No administrative "backsies".
- Provide a reasonable amount of time to process significant agenda items

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

- Show your work: big sweeping proposals are suspect unless there is substantial evidence and supporting research to back it up. Our community are not morons, a significant portion of our residents are highly educated retirees from corporate management and leadership in other venues and communities. Their collective understanding far exceeds most municipalities.
- A reasonable amount of transparency. Some worthwhile things are delicate and may not be served to openly share early. For the bulk of issues, don't hide information, obfuscate it or make it inaccessible
- Present the case, pro and con. You are not there for advocacy of any project. That should come from someplace else, primarily from the applicant and ideally with the community offering an endorsement. A project should be able to sell itself functioning under the code.

#### **The Property Owner's Good Faith Standard:**

- Honor the promises and proffers made throughout the approval process
- Independently of any required public input, meet with local stakeholders and neighborhood associations seek out and listen to their concerns; if we are operating in good faith the concerns and issues should be reasonable and will in result in a better project.
- Understand that no development is an island (unless of course it is an island), i.e.; what you do impacts the value of the immediate surroundings, that neighborhood and in many cases the entire city. Make this important in your thinking
- Respect the fabric/context of the community. Green field is different from urban is different from neighborhood, a la Form Based Code.
- Remember that the bulk of the infrastructure enjoyed by the project is owned by the community as is the bulk of the real estate. The cumulative ownership values of surrounding neighbors, the neighborhood and the community far exceed what you are investing.
- Commit to right-sizing projects, compatible in scope and design with the surrounding structures and their use.
- Commit to quality design; a weak argument is that design is subjective- taste and style are subjective- but there are basics of design that are demonstrably NOT subjective. Put a bad building next to a good one and most reasonable people will recognize the better building every time.
- Create a relationship where the neighborhood leaders welcome you to the community

The **Community** needs to require full and complete context and information from both the City and **Property Owners** and their developers, but we must be mature enough to process it correctly. That maturity is in part our acting in good faith and having the mind power to do this. CCNA can and should take a leadership role in this process.

#### **Multimillion Dollar Talent Pool**

One of the interesting assets of Sarasota is its demographics. Our unique "quality of life" has attracted a multitude of retirees that in their working careers were at the top of their profession. We are blessed with teachers, college professors, lawyers, doctors, architects, corporate executives, businessmen, and the list and their professions go on and on. These people come with deep life experiences and practical working knowledge. Some are engaging through our neighborhood associations or volunteer in community projects, not ready to call it quits but others don't want to waste their time or deal with what they feel is incompetence in our Community. One of the keys to keeping Sarasota's "Quality of Life" is tapping into this incredible multimillion dollar talent base.

This paper is the 9/21/2022 draft work in progress. The Meaningful Neighborhood Input committee is sharing it to begin the discussion process with the CCNA EC.

## The Human Element

We can come up with lots of solutions on paper, but those are just words unless we can bring the Stakeholders and the City together and mutually agree to analyze the problems and design a better solution that will work for Sarasota. That can only happen if we agree from the onset **to act in good faith**, with mutual respect and trust.

-----  
Note: This is intended to be a setup for the set of recommendations regarding how to tackle the idea of good faith.

Anticipate possible recommendations like (just a representative list):

- Designating a CCNA EC representative to meet with each developer (could be different per project)
- Conduct CCNA workshops for neighborhood leadership (perhaps in conjunction with the City) on “acting in good faith”
- Setting up the Neighborhoods to encourage and accommodate the developers to present plans and discuss issues with mutual respect and trust.
- Consistently bring known developers into the CCNA communication loop, i.e. educate them on the importance and benefits of meaningful input and listen and understand the issues and challenges they experience. i.e. develop and maintain an open line of communication between the Neighborhoods (through CCNA) and the developers.