

ST. JOHNS COUNTY CIVIC ASSOCIATION ROUNDTABLE

AGENDA FOR
MONDAY – SEPTEMBER 11, 2006
9 – 11 AM

ISSUES OF COUNTY INTEREST – 9:00 AM
FEATURED PROGRAM – 10:00 AM

MAIN COUNTY LIBRARY
U.S. 1 AND SAN CARLOS AVENUE

: *PROGRAM* :
UPDATE ON
ST. JOHNS COUNTY UTILITY DEPARTMENT

PRESENTER:
BILL YOUNG, DIRECTOR
ST. JOHNS COUNTY UTILITIES

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PLUS ONGOING CURRENT ISSUES
COMMITTEE REPORTS
ISSUES OF COUNTY INTEREST
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ROUNDTABLE WEBSITE: www.sjcroundtable.org

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ST. JOHNS COUNTY: www.co.st-johns.fl.us

ST. JOHNS VISION: www.stjohnsvision.com

ROUNDTABLE INFORMATION:

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Chairman: Walter Rohrer (543-9809), Vice Chair: Henry Warner (461-3245)

Treasurer: Barrie Higgins (794-1599), Secretary: Sacha Martin (501-5545)

: **Committee Chairs** :

Membership: Walter Rohrer (543-9809) & Linda Oakley (471-7555)

Growth Management: Marcy Silkebaken (273-8047)

Government & Budget: Dan MacDonald (273-5855)

Education: David Wiles (471-1896)

**ST. JOHNS COUNTY
CIVIC ASSOCIATION ROUNDTABLE
Minutes for August 14, 2006**

Program: **CANDIDATES FORUM**
Candidates for County Commission Districts 2 & 4
School Board Districts 1, 3 & 4

Held at the County Auditorium and televised live by the St. Johns County Government Channel

Rebroadcast: August 15 @ 9am and 7pm, August 19 @9am, September 2 at 9am or 1pm [check listing]

FORMAT: 2 mins opening statement [OS], panel questions, floor questions, 2 mins closing comments [CS]

The Roundtable does not endorse any candidate for office, nor does it certify that what candidates have said is true and accurate. It provides an opportunity for voters to make informed choices.

Questions by: **Peter Guinta, St. Augustine Record,**
Journalist Panel: **Kathy Cramer, Ponte Vedra Recorder/St. Johns Recorder**
Mark Pettus, St. Johns Sun

The Roundtable is known for its ability to ask hard questions. These questions raise concerns of importance to our electorate. As some questions asked resulted in responses to a different question by a different candidate in order to make a point, we are listing all the questions first, and responses to questions under each candidate. Some issues, for example FCAT testing, were of special concern to the School Board candidates. The Roundtable secretary reviewed the tapes of this Forum in great detail to be certain the reporting was as accurate as possible.

SCHOOL BOARD

Q: School Board planners estimate 33,000 new school age children resulting from the 83,000 approved but unbuilt new dwelling units, a factor of 0.4 children per household. A Julington Creek survey indicated something over 1 child per household. At \$30,000 per student seat, such an understatement of capital needs can lead to overcrowding, redistricting and a less than adequate developer participation initially. What would you do about it?

Q: While we are justifiably proud of our public school system, an analysis of the FCAT results indicates strong achievement in the North and parts of the Southeast, but problematic performance elsewhere. Given the student population is likely to triple in the next 20 years, how should we handle this growth while also lifting the sub-par entities in the county?

Q: It appears that explosive growth will be with us for the foreseeable future. Senate Bill 360 dealing with growth management and concurrency includes schools in its requirements. How do you feel this program can best be implemented?

Q: The School Board has had a way to help control growth in the last 4 years, having an appointed a member to the Planning and Zoning Administration (PZA). Could the new member be pro-growth?

Q: In a recent workforce development survey conducted by the County Chamber of Commerce's Economic Development Council, work ethic and "soft skills" such as communication were top concerns of employers when they hire young and entry-level workers. This concern applies not just to high school graduates; I have heard a local engineering company owner express the same concern about young engineers with college degrees. What can the School Board do to ensure that St. Johns County students graduate with employability skills, whether they enter the workforce or pursue higher education?

Q: Given the advantage that economic and cultural experience can bring to academic achievement, what can we do to offset economic disadvantages where schools are failing and what type of programs might be developed to lift those where a gap might exist?

Diane Lovell (incumbent, District 3). [OS] As a foster mother to over 100, with 3 children and 5 grandchildren of her own, "Children are our future and character and integrity count". She has served hands-on and has attended and enjoyed every school event. She has a master school board certification with the state. When she took office, the school system was operating at a deficit and is now in the black. [CS] I have worked hard with the Board over the last 4 years and have done a good job asking the community and teachers what their needs and the needs of our students are. The responses came back to me 7 days a week. We can continue to improve some of the things we are already working on. We have already made a positive difference, and I look forward to more accomplishments and improvements in the future.

A: Developers should have to help fund educational needs. The \$30,000 amount is not an average per child county-wide as it depends what part of the county you live in. In the Northwest it may be 0.79 but 0.39 where I live. Our staff is aware of this and we have to be prepared to keep up.

A: A lot has changed in the past few years. Some kids are not prepared to pass FCAT tests and never will be. Teachers and students dread these tests. Legislature needs to find a different way to judge our schools and students. I am organizing a trip to Tallahassee for people to have the opportunity to speak out to those who can make the changes.

A: The results of the pilot concurrency program are hopeful, but won't result in a new law until 2008, but we will have a bigger voice. Up to now the State has told us when we could build schools, and this didn't match when or where we needed them.

A: For the new PZA rep, the top 3 candidates were brought before the board for an interview, and I think the person chosen will be fair and do a good job.

A: We know communications skills need to be better. The newly created academies (10 new ones this year) will provide skills. We need good teachers. The staff at Orange Street has offered to mentor the lowest 25% with troubled skills.

A: We need to challenge children, not just in an economically disadvantaged District. Let's find out what the problems are and go to Tallahassee as a community to tell them what we need.

Bill Mignon (District 3). [OS] *A resident of the county since 1952, I am a proven educator for over 40 years as Teacher at Hastings and St. Augustine High Schools for 7 years, Principal at St. Augustine Technical, 1 yr, R.B. Hunt, 14 yrs, Nease High 13 yrs, Menendez 5 years, and now Educational Intern Supervisor at Flagler College 2 years. I have a "dedication and passion for education, and even though retired want to continue to be part of the education process." His wife is a drama teacher and daughter is an extended day care teacher. [CS] He brought Fact Sheets which show the increase in the operating budget approaching almost \$30mm to the \$190mm level over last year's. 65% of the funding comes from local sources, 34% from state and 1% from federal, but 90% of the requirements we have to follow come from the state and feds. The state could have a bigger funding role. He wants to continue to play a major role in our county education programs.*

A: The County needs to update studies. As a School Board member you cannot control growth, but you should have the task of providing quality education. Let's use planned concurrency where developers carry a fair share in providing necessary infrastructure to properly support the school system.

A: I was responsible for the opening of Pedro Menendez High School in 2000. Menendez was a B school for its first 4 years and now is at C. We are putting so much emphasis on FCAT testing we are losing sight of educating the child.

A: State law + School Board + BCC need to work together as to what developers provide the schools, what we need, and how much it will cost to maintain. A \$169mm capital outlay budget can have \$71mm in maintenance. 60% comes from the local taxpayer.

A: I sat in on the selection workshops. The decision was unanimous to appoint Mr. Wheeler to the PZA. I'm sure the School Board will monitor his activities and make sure he represents the goals of the school system. He seems to be a good candidate.

A: At Nease it was obvious we had to develop programs for marketable skills and started an internal baccalaureate program for college-bound students and Academies were started for others. Part of the learning experience should be Ethics.

A: We need to be student oriented. FCAT is a now a measure that is threatening. Tests should analyze strengths and weaknesses. We need to build reading and comprehension skills to meet the needs of all students.

Marilyn Wiles (District 3). [OS] *"Elections are about the future." We have over 1200 new students just this year. We must be prepared for unprecedented increases in student population that jeopardize the quality of education." She has a Bachelor in Education from Florida State University, a Masters in Political Science from University of Florida and a Doctorate of Education from Virginia Tech. [CS] "As a lifelong educator, business executive, policy analyst and community volunteer in St. Johns County, eg. Guardian ad Litem and Chair, SJC Community Health Improvement Partnership, as well as a mother and recently grandmother of three, I will bring my management skills, educational experience and energy to the School Board with fresh, innovative approaches in tackling problems confronting our schools today."*

A: Our biggest challenge is maintaining quality education. School concurrency has not been used in the current approval process for growth. I feel the School Board should be the first step for development approval. We need to adjust the formula for projecting student enrollments – it is too low. We need to work with our legislative delegations to increase per pupil expenditures as well as for capital construction.

A: St. Johns County can become a leader. The School Board needs to provide adequate data to the BCC for decision making on concurrency and vice versa. I strongly support School Concurrency 2008.

A: I have been a business owner. What do employers want? More employable graduates with basic skills in reading and math along with good work ethics. It is difficult to provide these hands on tools, and the Board needs to recognize this and work with teachers and the business community. We need to make sure that work ethics begin with school ethics: no tardiness, no unexcused absences with school administrative support.

A: Not only do we need to emphasize basic education but offer students a global perspective. Working with others in the community, establish an International Center bringing together existing programs as well as new ones. We must expand our after-school programs to involve volunteers from the community to work one-on-one with students needing remedial help – eg. reading, math, science.

A: Other PZA candidates who were highly qualified were eliminated. The Board must remain informed and the Board's PZA rep needs to ask questions.

A: We must fully examine the real costs of FCAT and how it is draining needed human, fiscal, and educational resources from where they should be – teaching as a continuous, learning process not taking a test. We must focus on improvement of individual performance from PreK – 12. We need to institute a "Green Energy Policy" to reduce the costs of energy and put that money back into our instructional programs.

The School budget exploded from 8% in energy costs in 2004 to over 44% in 2005. We need this money back in the classroom.

Beverly Slough (candidate unopposed, District 1) Her District, the Northwest Sector, is the fastest growing part of St. Johns County. It has been a privilege and honor to serve children and parents as a member of the School Board, to provide open communications with parents, and to keep the public informed, involved and proud of what we are doing. Our Academies should provide real world experience, and this year we will begin to provide Internships. FCATS are a diagnostic tool and allow us to identify subgroups for a remedial experience.

Bill Fehling (candidate unopposed, District 4) As current Chairman of the Board, I am pleased with the turnaround of our negative deficit of four years ago. We had computer and technology problems, communications problems and a retiring superintendent, and needed to start a School to Work Program, all of which have been solved. The Board oversees policies and the budget, but, most importantly, we are your advocates for children, parents and the community going forward in the future. We have one of the best school systems in the State.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION (BCC)

Q: DRIs [Developments of Regional Impact] often provide infrastructure and school concurrency but not PUDs [Planned Unit Developments], where the majority of the growth is. The BCC works hard to get concessions from DRIs, but seem to get little or nothing at all from PUDs except more traffic, school kids and density. What can the BCC do to get more from PUDs?

Q: Given the timing difference between negotiated developer contributions and their realization, how would you protect against future shortfall as costs escalate beyond those projected? Should these commitments be indexed? In the long run, who pays for development?

Q: Challengers for office are keeping a distance from those who make campaign contributions. Incumbents are saying that dollars do not influence how they vote on issues.

Q: Next year's Capital Improvement Plan will total over \$200 mm, up from \$80mm in fiscal '06. How do you feel investments of this magnitude should be prioritized. Amenity enhancements such as pools, parks and recreation, and/or infrastructure, and/or protective service safety issues?

Q: Elections are about representation. As many as 62,000 voters are not Republicans, and therefore cannot vote in a partisan election for Republican candidates in the primary. How can you represent these people?

Q: Will a Charter Government increase participation? If elected, will you vote to support a resolution by the BCC to request that county legislative delegates adopt, by special act, the Citizens Charter Government, subject to voter approval in 2008?

Q: On 3/1/06, 220 people attended a homeownership program in this auditorium, demonstrating a strong interest in affordable workforce housing in this county. 5 weeks later, the BCC voted unanimously to allow the North Ridge Lakes Planned Unit Development (PUD) to reduce its previously approved number of affordable housing units from 452 to 114 in the 632 unit development. What can the BCC do to ensure that developers meet their obligations, and that affordable workforce housing is available in the county for sheriff's deputies, fire fighters, teachers and others who serve our growing population?

Q: How do you keep a respectful distance between those who contribute to your campaign and the decisions you make? Given the 99% voting record for development, how can you say contributions you get don't influence these votes?

Q: The county's financial advisor, PFM, forecasts a general fund deficit by 2011 of \$35mm. Economist Henry Fishkind predicts a shortfall of \$20 million. And the former director of management and budget agrees the county's expenditures are outstripping its revenues. How do we fix it: cut expenses or increase taxes and fees?
[*This was a question proposed to be asked by the panel, but was not.*]

Q: At a candidate's forum sponsored by the Northwest Coalition, you were asked to take a definite position on an increased sales tax. There were differing views on the desirability of an increase in sales tax. What is your position now?

Q: Are you in favor of a Neighborhood Bill of Rights ordinance, and what protections and powers for citizens do you think should be incorporated into it? Challengers: Do you understand what it is and that it may give less power to the BCC? Incumbents: It was presented by Commissioner Rich. Is this the reason for no real commitment yet? Why did this never take off?

Q: (audience question) In the long term who really pays for development?

Bruce Maquire (incumbent, Republican, District 4) [OS] *It is important for you to know and trust your candidate. My family has been here for 4 generations. I try my best to follow the law and make the best decisions, even though some may not agree with them. Since my opponent is attacking my credibility, I ask that his background come under scrutiny, his many addresses and business relationships, and ties to the gambling industry. [CS] I have lived here 50 years and have invested a lot in this community and have spent my time in office earning your trust. Our county has one of the best reputations in Florida. I have publicly released my financial records and commercial associations, and all candidates should. In the future, with emphasis on character and quality, I would like to see better safety, road systems and recreation.*

A: PUDs have more rights under state laws. The new Growth Management Act will correct a lot of problems because of required concurrency. Even so, we have negotiated with PUDs to provide infrastructure. We also have to be certain that private property rights are not violated.

A: Our bond rating is one of the highest in Florida. We do have a special transportation fund. The real issue is prioritizing. Safety is a paramount issue. Transportation is one of the most important.

A: In the primary, the voting is not universal, but to choose a party candidate. After the primary, you can represent all of the voters.

A: No one buys votes. Senior citizens are those who have the most influence here. You should make decisions using your beliefs and values for the whole community.

A: Re North Ridge, it is a bonus program and difficult to take any single element out of a development. We have worked long and hard in the county to get an affordable housing program with incentive packages.

A: The real issue on funding a new communications system is, "Do we need it"? The answer is yes, We will get financial support whatever way we can for prioritized needs such as this.

A: The Bill of Rights has not been turned down by the BCC. The final form has not come up for a vote.

A: Developers pass costs on to buyers. Payment for growth is usually not done up front but afterwards. New people who move here contribute a lot of new tax funding because of residing in a new project.

Tom Manuel (Republican, District 4) [OS] *I came here in 2001 very ill, to a place to give my family the best quality of life. When I received a new heart I vowed to give back to the community. I was proud to be the very first appointee by the School Board to the PZA in September 2002. I feel the voting records of the PZA at 58% approval rate could have slowed growth, but the BCC then approved almost all of the development projects. The purpose of the PZA is to advise the BCC, and they are not listening. [CS] This county is a battleground of growth. I don't fear failure and can take on complicated issues. I am good at making decisions and planning. I will use all my energy to do what is right for the community.*

A: It is possible to "just say no" to approving a development request, especially when it changes the natural zoning rights of the property. The number of households required to be a PUD has increased now from 599 to 999, done by a developer driven lobby to require less contributions to the community welfare. In addition, requests continue to come in for variances to these rights such as higher density or no provision for new schools.

A: Government is charged with health, safety and welfare. These items take the highest priority for the CIP [Capital Improvement Plan]. The number one driver for controlling growth should be the quality of our school system. Providing a new north-south Route 9B transportation route should be a priority. I would like to see separate transportation funds and have district priorities and show how these dollars are being spent.

A: The form of government is less important than the individual you chose to vote for. I believe in the empowerment of the community. Charter Government is an evolution of government and could add non-partisan elections.

A: I have asked for a maximum campaign contribution of \$200 as don't want any inference of impropriety.

A: North Ridge Lakes' proposal was turned down by the PZA. The affordable housing units were initially presented as a major selling point for the development. If you enter a contract, you should not be able to change it. We have a dramatic need for affordable housing.

A: Look at where you spend money now and look at the prioritization. An additional sales tax must be short term, single purpose, for a high priority project.

A: I strongly believe in the empowerment of communities. Developers come in asking for a Major Modification-- so the original plan sold to new residents that was approved can be changed just like that.

A: A developer, after project approval, fronts out the development quickly to sub-developers and others. Little money comes to the county. It is easier to tax someone who is not here yet. In the long term, we all pay.

Richard Olszewski (District 4, Libertarian, write-in) [OS] I have a Bachelor in Science in Mechanical Engineering and Design . I have been a 25 year resident here and have owned 3 businesses in the county. I believe in Property Rights and that contractors should pay for the privilege to develop. [CS] I believe growth will still continue, but it needs to be managed with a plan. I am a write-in candidate and ask you to write my name on the ballot in November. I will respond to the needs of the people and work for fiscal responsibility and school concurrency.

A: Zoning is what governments do. You need to study the code.

A: People would like to see roads and better services. All infrastructure needs to be there. Developments should come with new roads adequate to handle traffic.

A: Government should be of, for, and by the people. Communication of issues is most important. I have been here 20 years and have a right to become involved in how we are governed.

A: I haven't had anyone contribute to my campaign and would welcome contributions. I don't think contributions should buy votes.

A: I built my house years ago for \$69,000. We need more affordable housing. Salaries have not kept pace with the cost of living.

A: Once a contract is set, it should stay that way.

A: If a surtax is added for a specified period of time only and only for purchase of certain equipment, keeping in mind the equipment has to be maintained. The surtax should not last forever.

A: I believe in the Bill of Rights for people to have a greater voice in government.

A: Although the developer has a right to get his investment back, the source of development funding should be traced. Developers could be asked to put in schools and roads.

Karen Stern (incumbent, Republican, District 2) [OS] I have been here 20 years. I have served on our School Board and been in public service for 10 years. I pledge to continue to address the important issues facing our county, to work on Infrastructure needs and Economic Development opportunities, as well as affordable and obtainable housing and maintaining a high quality of life. [CS] Thank you for these Candidate Forums, which show our citizens have an interest in their local government. The revenue stream should not be decreased. Instead of listening to what are considered attacks, we need to focus on continuing to maintain and improve our quality of life that is so special to this county.

A: We do get some infrastructure needs from PUDs, such as Mirabella (S.R.16)—transportation, and running sewer and water to the new Veterans Administration Nursing Home.

A: All the issues we talk about are within the areas of health, safety and welfare, including affordable housing.

A: In November, you will be able to vote to return to 7 vs. 5 members of the BCC, with 2 at large. Voting for Candidates-at-Large is a more difficult system. I am not certain that the Charter Government addresses all the needs.

A: I feel integrity is being questioned. I have contributions from a very broad range of donors and tremendous support from everyone throughout the county. They are not buying my votes.

A: North Ridge had other issues beyond the control of the developer. As President of the Northeast Florida Regional Planning Council, I formed a task force to look at the lack of affordable housing and what to do about this.

A: The issue of an addition to the sales tax has been brought up a number of times. Solving the issues to be funding should be our primary responsibility and not an additional tax. An add-on tax should be for a specific need and for a specific amount of time.

A: The Neighborhood Bill of Rights is an important issue. We have not seen a final draft for approval yet. Our attorney is working on it. We are now asking developers of PUDs and those with Major Modifications to meet with nearby neighborhoods before coming before the BCC. For example, this worked for Bartram Walk West in Julington Creek.

A: Look at your tax bill to see money being used to pay for development. 50+% of the funds go to the Sheriff's Office. Taxes do not go directly to a developer.

Ron Sanchez (Republican, District 2) [OS] I was born here. I have had 11 years experience on government boards County Fire Advisory Board, Code Enforcement Officer and Commissioner for St. Augustine Beach]. My wife is the Assistant Principal at Bartram Trail High School. The County needs to address growth and financial problems. I was concerned that the BCC approved a water bottling plant in a water caution area. I have been endorsed by Commissioner Rich and former Commissioner Meiszer. [CS] We must have a change in county government, away from special interests, spending what we cannot afford, with a strain on our protection system and outgrowing infrastructure. Growth must be slowed down.

A: The 99% approval rate for development supports the developer and not the people. The BCC is not listening to the PZA. Developers come in knowing they don't have to give up anything. It is possible to slow growth down.

A: Let's protect the people, not special interests. Some capital outlay is being made out of the general fund. Revenue shortfall is a problem. We must count on following operating costs. Developers are creating Community Development Districts (CDDs) where payment for infrastructure is passed to the new homeowners.

A: You must try to please all of the people even though there are some who can't vote for you. A Charter Government and Neighborhood Bill of Rights gives people more representation. 5+2 commissioners at large gives better representation.

A: Growth is 3-4 times faster than it should be. A candidate has a right to receive contributions, but you have to look at the past 99% approval rate from the BCC.

A: On North Ridge, I would tell the contractor he could not build and would need a new application. This scenario with other demands has been played over and over again.

A: I would want to know from the public before putting additional sales tax up for a referendum. It would have to be stated what the money would be used for and for a required period of time.

A: The Bill of Rights has been used in other counties. We can learn from their experience what works. One important right is that developers must sit down with nearby residents before their request can be presented to the BCC. It was watered down after it first came before the BCC.

A: New people moving in pay what they are asked to pay. Again, let's prioritize the budget.

Ken Bryan (Democrat, District 2) [OS] After retiring from 36 years in the Justice Department, I moved here two years ago because of the quality of life. I have the education, training and management experience needed. My experience has given me the ability to apply integrity, honesty to maintain our Quality of Life, and observation to what's right and what's wrong. A Commissioner must be a voice of the people. We are growing too fast. [CS] I am running for Commissioner because I believe current commissioners are out of touch with the county's real needs. The records speak for themselves. I will insist on fiscal responsibility, representation, school concurrency.

A: Growth is the controlling issue. We cannot be afraid to say no. There are infrastructure needs other than roads and schools, such as emergency management and law enforcement.

A: We need basic, smart, planned growth, and we need to look at fiscal responsibility and correct what is not working.

A: We are not talking partisan issues, but what is right or wrong. Charter Government is being presented because people feel they are not being properly represented.

A: It's possible that there is an element of influence here. My contributions come from average people who ask me to represent them. I do not accept contributions from developers because of the way it looks.

A: Re North Ridge, bait and switch tactics have been used for years and should not be permitted. In such a rich county we should be able to have more affordable housing.

A: I support the Bill of Rights. It gives individuals a voice in the decision making process. It is an outcry that citizens are not able to be properly represented. Now a citizen has 3 minutes to speak with no right of rebuttal, but the developer has unlimited time.

A: Choosing sales tax for funding is part of our fiscal responsibility. There is a request for \$15 mm for emergency communications equipment which is very much needed. Where will this money come from? A 1% tax would have to be specifically for this use and for a specified time.

A: It appears developers pay for development, but it is the taxpayers who ultimately pay for roads, schools and a lot of other things.

Luis Bustamante, a candidate for the new office of Circuit Judge, 7th District, asked to be introduced. He has been a State prosecutor for 13 years. He would like to have the opportunity to make a difference and innovative changes to the system. He has specialized in prosecution of complex white collar crime, racketeering, narcotics trafficking, computer crimes against children and crimes against the elderly.