

A Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA) meeting was held on February 15, 2017 at 9:30 a.m. at the Gulf Harbor's Civic Center at 4610 Floramar Terrace, New Port Richey, 34652.

Dominick Scannavino spoke on the highlights of his work in Tallahassee with the Florida Legislature. His fellow lobbyists convinced enough legislators to vote down an Estoppel bill two years ago. At the time, most of the legislators, of whom most are attorneys, did not know that the word "estoppel" was in the English language, let alone what the word meant. A new estoppel bill has been introduced for this legislative season and the "Florida Legislative Alliance (FLA)" intends to lobby against it until it also goes down in defeat. Dominick introduced two civil servants from the Pasco County government who are paid, with our tax money, to make long range plans to beautify Pasco County.

Within the Pasco County Planning and Development Department (PDD) is a division called the Division of Long Range Planning. The Division oversees the County's Comprehensive Plan and the associated goals, objectives, and policies that guide Pasco's future growth. Matthew Armstrong holds the title of Executive Planner within that division, implying that he is the head of that division. Mary Helen Duke, A.I.C.P (American Institute of Certified Planners) also spoke. The first ten minutes was wasted trying to get their large, older laptop to communicate with the projector provided by CONA. An assistant from their office arrived 30 minutes later with a smaller, newer laptop, which communicated perfectly with the projector and showed the audience many pretty pictures of different species of palm trees and colorful flowers.

U.S. Highway covers 20 miles as it passes through Pasco County, of which 1.5 miles is in Port Richey and 3 miles is in New Port Richey. Ignoring the total of 4.5 miles in incorporated municipalities, the Pasco County government is responsible for beautifying 15.5 miles of U.S. 19. Mike Armstrong spoke of a program called the "Harbors Plan." It covers the extreme west of Pasco County, from Little Road to the Gulf Coast and from the Pinellas County Line to the Hernando County Line. About 133 high billboards spoil the view and some of them shall be removed. Pasco County passed an ordinance limiting the height of new signs. The newer communities in Eastern Pasco County, like Wesley Chapel, have signs that conform to the new ordinance and the view along State Road 54 is less cluttered and prettier.

The planners received a grant of 3.5 million dollars and they are looking for more grants from the Florida Highway Beautification Council, the Tourist Development Council, the West Pasco Chamber of Commercial and any other entity with money before resorting to taxing the property owners. The tax assessment districts are shaped like bans running east and west across the county. This will lead to resentment from the newer communities in the east who will pay into the fund, but most of the fund will go to overhauling the aging infrastructure near the Gulf Coast. The alternative would be worse. Assessing only the older neighborhoods in the west that need capital improvement will drive up the sale prices of the older homes which will lead to fewer purchases and send home buyers east to buy newly built homes. The next meeting of CONA will be 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, March 15 and a speaker has yet to be determined.