



HOWARD TROXLER
htroxler@sptimes.com

TAMPA BAY

» LOCAL
» STATE
» BUSINESS

tampabay.com

★ ★ Thursday, April 30, 2009 | 1B

Yee-hah! Floriduh is open for bidness

If you think that Florida needs to throw out its laws about growth... If you think Florida's best answer to the economy is to open our state to developers wider than we have in decades...

Then you're in luck, because a growth bill passed by the state House on Wednesday does those things. This is probably the biggest thing the Legislature will pass in 2009. If, on the other hand, you remember that Florida choked on wild, sprawling construction from World War II until the 1980s...

That it wasn't until the Growth Management Act of 1985 that we finally lifted a finger to require the roads, schools, water and other services to build a decent state... Then you should be horrified.

What the state House did Wednesday was essentially to gut the Growth Management Act for big chunks of the state.

Big cities and counties could allow growth without worrying about whether roads and other services can handle it.

Small counties would be laid open to entire "new towns" of big development without the usual review.

The name of this bill, the House's revised version of Senate Bill 360, is ironically titled the "Community Renewal Act." It would be better titled the "Katie Bar the Door and Strip Mall Act of 2009."

There are so many loopholes and exemptions that if a developer somewhere in Florida *did* accidentally get stuck under the old rules, he should probably fire his lawyer.

Loopholes for "urban service areas." Loopholes for "community redevelopment areas." Loopholes for "dense urban land areas." Loopholes for anything designated as a "job creation project."

The weirdest part of the House debate was the utter righteousness of the members. This was no sneaky, secret attack on Florida's growth laws — it was a full-frontal act of war, done shamelessly in the open.

The bill passed 76-41, with the Republican majority mostly in favor, and the Democratic minority mostly opposed.

It passed over the objections of Tom Pelham, the secretary of the state Department of Community Affairs, who has held that job under two Republican governors.

Yet the members dripped with contempt for Pelham during the floor debate. When one huffed that a legislator should resign rather than "defer entirely to what a secretary of an agency says," the House floor burst into applause.

It would not be a shock now to see the petulant House renew bills that would abolish Pelham's agency.

This was *not* the deal. It was not the deal struck carefully between the state Senate and the Department of Community Affairs, which allowed for some reasonable loosening of growth rules in "urban infill" areas.

It was not the deal that leaders of the House told me in person they were going to pass just a few weeks ago.

The Senate now gets another chance. It either can stick to the original deal, or it can adopt the House changes. After that, it will be up to the governor to decide whether to veto it.

If this is the future that you want, you should congratulate your state representative. If it is not, then you should call your senator and the governor to stop it — and remember it in next year's election.

The pundits' view

Columnists Howard Troxler and Dan Ruth take on the Legislature at video.tampabay.com.

House rejects stimulus

GOP leaders turn down \$444 million in jobless aid. Democrats call the move callous.

BY ALEX LEARY
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau
TALLAHASSEE — Florida rejected \$444 million in federal stimulus money Wednesday after House Republicans said the unemployment aid would hurt businesses and create new entitlements. "Once government provides

that handout, it never takes it back," said Majority Leader Adam Hasner of Delray Beach. The proposal, already turned down by the Senate, would have, among other things, extended benefits to some part-time workers and to people who quit their jobs out of necessity, such as spousal relocation or domestic

violence. Democrats assailed the move as callous when the state's unemployment rate is at a 30-year high. About 40,000 people would have been eligible under the new rules. "We are playing politics with the pocketbooks of the people we represent back home," said

Rep. Adam Fetterman of Port St. Lucie, which has seen some of the worst job losses. "I'm just shocked. Shocked," said Rep. Scott Randolph of Orlando. The House did unanimously vote to accept nearly \$2 billion in federal stimulus to extend by up to 20 weeks the length of

time that unemployed workers receive assistance. The weekly benefit will also increase by \$25 per week. But a Democratic amendment to accept the \$444 million gave way to a long, bitter debate. By offering the amendment in the face of well-known GOP opposition. See STIMULUS, 8B

Conversation piece goes up



DANIEL WALLACE | Times

Chris Booth, left, Ron Aldrich and Eric Higgs, right, work to secure one panel in Higgs' piece *Conversations*, installed at Element on Franklin Street in Tampa. The art display consists of 120 individual panels bolted to the side of the building, with changing shapes and colors representing the evolution of a conversation. "It's all about form and color," said Higgs. Rollins Fine Art is overseeing the project, with lighting installed by Light Emotions. LEDs will be used to light the installation, requiring only 800 watts of power for the display. Each pair of panels is roughly 4 feet by 10 feet.

Random Acts of Kindness | An occasional feature

In tough spot, they find there's aid

Young people spill out of an Arby's to help an elderly couple struggling with their car.

BY PATRICK FARNAN
Times Staff Writer
SEMINOLE — The car wouldn't start. The last time this happened, the elderly couple's Mercury Grand Marquis was parked on a slight incline in an Arby's parking lot. They eventually got it started. This time, same Arby's, same incline. So Jean Mary Arnold, 83, and Christopher Pacifico, 90, got out and started pushing the car to a flat spot. One young man would have

none of that. "Out of nowhere he comes and helps us push it," recalled Arnold. Within moments, a horde of young people spilled out of Arby's. "I couldn't believe this," she said. "They were all interested in helping us, and they were pushing it near the parking lot entrance, and we might be endangering ourselves." But the help didn't stop there. "One young woman uses" See ACTS, 8B



DIRK SHADD | Times

Jean Mary Arnold, 83, and Chris Pacifico, 90, "were very touched by the whole thing," she said of the experience.

Talk of the bay

LETTER WITH POWDER WAS INTENDED FOR JUDGE

The suspicious white powder that prompted an evacuation of a Tampa courthouse Monday was sent by an inmate in a threatening letter to a judge, Hillsborough Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Debbie Carter said. She would not identify the inmate or the judge, or provide details about the letter. Authorities do not know what the powder was, but preliminary tests show that it contained "no harmful agents," Carter said. The letter did not get to the judge and was instead opened by an employee with the Hillsborough County Clerk's Office. The discovery of the powder led to an evacuation of about 50 people from the second floor of the downtown Tampa courthouse at Kennedy Boulevard and Jefferson Street.

Sheriff aims to avoid job cuts

Despite county officials' warning that as many as 1,000 jobs need to be eliminated, Hillsborough Sheriff David Gee says he hopes to achieve needed budget cuts in his department by freezing pay, reducing costs and leaving vacant positions unfilled. Gee told employees in a memo Tuesday that he opposes any effort to cut jobs, reduce salaries and benefits, or require his employees to take unpaid furlough days. Instead, he hopes to achieve the needed savings in part by forgoing annual raises for every employee — civilians, deputies and command staff. "I believe that an attempt to pursue pay raises would fail, and that the attempt would support a negative, and false, perception that the HCSO is not adjusting our budget to current economic realities," he wrote.

Swiftmud fines animal park

Safari Wild, the Polk County exotic animal park owned by former Lowry Park Zoo president Lex Salisbury, will have to pay an \$8,863 fine for unauthorized construction. The Southwest Florida Water Management District initially proposed a fine five times higher for excavation, dredging and filling in areas without permits, but agreed that much of the land was being used for agricultural purposes and did not need permits. The fines are for the rest. Swiftmud told officials they have 10 days to pay.

Correction



Victor Clavizzao, 46, convicted of bilking millions of dollars in a mortgage fraud scandal, was sentenced Tuesday to five years in prison. A story Tuesday included the wrong photo.

School's sports theme a nice fit

Steinbrenner High opens in August and plans to offer a career track for sports.

BY TOM MARSHALL
Times Staff Writer

LUTZ — Name a school after the right guy, get a little World Series magic.

The Hillsborough County School Board may not have realized the potency of naming a new school after the headline-making owner of the New York Yankees. But it's becoming clear that George Steinbrenner High School will be far more than a mere namesake.

School officials say they're planning to offer a sports-themed career track this fall for every student who wants it. Think sports medicine, marketing, agents, turf management — just about anything connected to the behind-the-scenes world of professional sports.

And the Bronx Bombers are vowing to step up to the plate with internships, job shadowing, or mentors at their Tampa spring training facility.

"There's a thousand different fields you can go into that are related to sports in one way or another," said senior vice president Felix Lopez. "If they love" See STEINBRENNER, 8B

Seminole Heights in uproar over foundation

A group of neighbors accuses a foundation of stealing its ideas.

BY ALEXANDRA ZAYAS
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — In Old Seminole Heights, a neighborhood of historic bungalows and oak-shaded streets, accusations and alliances are ripping at the community. Residents are filling blogs with anonymous comments. They're speaking out at meetings, using words like "secrecy" and "snakes."

They're hiring lawyers. All because three neighbors formed a nonprofit foundation, hoping to solicit tax-deductible donations to plant trees and install historic streetlights and build sidewalks.

And because a larger group of neighbors, which also wants to plant trees and install historic streetlights and build sidewalks, says it had been planning on starting that same foundation.

Its plans were stolen, it thinks, by the very people with whom it was planning.

See SEMINOLE HEIGHTS, 7