

Michael Saunders & Company[®]

Licensed Real Estate Broker

EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE, PROPERTIES & SERVICE

THE UPSIDE OF THE DOWNSIDE

If the cloud that has rained woe on the region's real estate market has any sort of silver lining, it's this: The slowed pace of the market allows us to stand back, catch our breath, and build genuine consensus on where we need to go next as a community committed to responsible development where growth is inevitable.

Finding that sort of consensus in a community still wincing from its most recent growing pains can be an elusive proposition, especially when there are so many opposing voices attempting to rule the day. Too often of late, attempts to arrive at a harmonious vision for growth and redevelopment have dissolved into bitter and contentious discourse when one side or another digs in its heels and refuses to budge. That's why we agree with the Sarasota Herald-Tribune when it thoughtfully pleads for new ways to conduct the public dialogue that will result in constructive change with unanimity of purpose.

We applaud and support the newspaper's appeal for neighborhoods, developers and the community to refrain from business as usual and go forward engaging in civil and constructive discussions that create a shared vision. Their appeal has already elicited the first in what we hope will be many "charrettes," a process of open workshops that focuses on what the broadest swath of citizens want in their community, rather than simply acting as a venue for special interests to openly war with one another.

The first charrette will be a three-day affair designed to build consensus in the community for the scope of redevelopment at an abandoned warehouse tract on School Avenue in Sarasota, across from the new Payne Park. But we see the

process working on many different fronts in such a dynamic and changing community. For example, a charrette could empower one of our performing arts organizations to proactively assess the pulse of the community with respect to program preferences. It was a charrette, in fact, that finally persuaded many of those who opposed the new Ringling Bridge to do a major about-face and embrace the project. Clearly, the results of building consensus can be as stunning as the sleek new bridge.

The School Avenue Charrette will be the next laboratory for building broad-based public consensus on an important land-use issue. Every contributing voice — and we hope there will be many — will add a building block to the shared vision of how a new residential community along the Avenue's eastern boundary will reshape the dilapidated warehouse properties, that now occupy the site, while best articulating with Payne Park and the neighborhoods surrounding it. The event will be facilitated by EDAW, Inc., one of the world's leading architecture and design firms that specializes in building such community-wide consensus on important land-use issues. We encourage all interested citizens to attend, observe the proceedings and add as many voices as possible to the process of constructive change. For more information about the School Avenue Charrette, and a complete schedule of the three-day session, visit SchoolAvenueCharrette.com.

Growth in Florida is inevitable. Contentious dialogue need not be. Kudos to the Sarasota Herald-Tribune for advocating for more inclusive public dialogues and insisting on a change in their tone and tenor. We add our voice to their plea for more civility in our civil discourse.

What's Your Opinion?

Log on to our blog at michaelsaunders.com to share your perspective on a range of topics.