

Naples City Council Forum - 2.1.2024 League of Women Voters Naples City Council Candidate Forum

[Council forum begins 01:29:36]

[01:29:36]

Diane Preston Moore: Good evening and welcome to the candidate forum for Naples City Council. My name is Diane Preston Moore and I'm the president of the League of Women Voters of Collier County. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization, and that means that we don't support or oppose any candidate or any political party. Our mission is to educate voters and to encourage informed and active participation in government. And so, we're proud to be a partner of the Collier County Candidate Forum Coalition, which organized this forum and future forums for the elections in 2024. I want to recognize our fellow members of the Coalition, the League of Women Voters of Collier County, the Naples Area Board of Realtors, Greater Naples Leadership, the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce, Naples Better Government, the Collier Citizens Council, and the Collier Building Industry Association. On behalf of the League of Women Voters and the members of the Coalition, I'm delighted to welcome you to this forum where we will hear from the six candidates for city council in the March 19th election.

So, a few items before we begin, please turn off your cell phones if you haven't done so already. We will be using a timer to ensure that we stay on schedule, so please refrain from clapping or making comments so that we're able to stay within the timeframe allotted. And we will have volunteers collecting index cards where you can write down your questions, and those questions will be used if time permits. The forum is being broadcast live on the Naples City Television Channel and on WGCU.org. It will be later re-broadcast on WGCU's Gulf Coast Life.

Tonight, we will hear from the candidates for city council who are Berne Barton, Garey Cooper, Nicholas Del Rosso, Bill Kramer, Linda Penniman and Tony Perez-Bentona. To all the candidates, I thank you for participating in the public forum. And to the audience, we appreciate your interest and your attention tonight. And I'd like to introduce to you our moderators for the evening. We have Wendy Fullerton Powell, who's the executive editor for Naples Daily News. And John Davis, who's the assistant news director, reporter, and Gulf Coast Life Arts edition host for WGCU public media. And I'll turn the program over to them.

[01:32:26]

John Davis: All right, thanks, everybody. Before we get to the questions, we'll just go over the format a little bit. Every candidate is going to have an opportunity to offer a one-minute opening statement. And then my co-moderator and I will take turns asking questions. Everyone will have the same opportunity to answer the same questions, and there'll be one minute to answer each of the questions. At the conclusion of these prepared questions, we're going to be taking questions that have been submitted by members of the audience here tonight. And you will each have two minutes to respond to those questions. And then at the conclusion, everybody will have an opportunity to offer a two-minute closing statement. And you'll notice the television monitors there will be keeping time for you. When you get down to 30 seconds left, there will be an audible tone, and then there will be multiple tones when your time is up. And if anyone would like a question repeated, that is no problem. We are happy to do that.

And your time does not actually begin until you begin speaking. So, with that, we'll go straight to Berne Barton for your opening statement.

[01:33:33]

Berne Barton: Thank you. [audio cuts out 01:33:34-01:33:39]

[01:33:40]

John Davis: Microphone.

[01:33:42]

Berne Barton: I already messed up. Thank you very much for having us here this evening. It's a great format, and we're looking forward to it. My name is Berne Barton. I am a true native son of Naples, Florida, born at Naples Community Hospital. In fact, the only time I haven't lived here is when I was off at college at Auburn University getting a bachelor of science in operations management. I came back to Naples and started in the insurance industry, and I've been in the insurance industry for the last 30 years. I recently sold my agency to another insurance group, and I'm now holding a position of vice president within the new group that purchased my agency. That experience has helped me a lot, and essentially what I do is I mitigate risk, and I solve problems. And I can take that, and I can use that experience with a position here on the city council. And as I mentioned, I am an insurance agent, which means my people skills are solid, because nobody likes insurance agents. So, most of my clients like me, and I do a good job for them. And I think I'd do a good job for you, as well. Thank you.

[01:34:48]

John Davis: All right. And Garey Cooper, your opening statement.

[01:34:52]

Garey Cooper: Good evening, all. Thanks for coming. My name is Garey Cooper. I came down here from Philadelphia, to One Way. I became a realtor down here. My wife is a realtor and a real estate attorney. I came down for the opportunity not to retire but to participate in this kind of lifestyle that offers so much with leisure plus still the ability to work hard every day and to maybe give back to the community. I'm running, because I think we can add some independent thought to this [inaudible 01:35:35], and I hope to be able to participate in that. Thank you.

[01:35:41]

John Davis: And Mr. Del Rosso, your opening statement.

[01:35:45]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Thank you all very much for being here. Thank you all. My name is Nick Del Rosso. I'm a full-time resident. Before moving here full time in 2022, I lived all around the world, which gave me an exact appreciation for how special this city is compared to a lot of others. I'm a graduate of the University of Virginia where I led the men's division one rugby team and had the Nick Del Rosso Big Brother award created in my honor. I was the youngest guest lecturer there in the history of the Department of English to be invited. I was also awarded the head scholarship for my achievements while battling cancer there. I was the director of a Silicon Valley tech company out in California before realizing

how quickly California was not for me. And I moved to Naples to be close to my grandmother and work in environmental testing and asset management. And I've been involved at the city level everywhere I went. A year ago, I was invited to give a special presentation here on codes that were being ignored, and I passed protective ordinances for the city right here in this same room. Thank you.

[01:36:51]

John Davis: Thank you. And Bill Kramer, your opening statement.

[01:36:53]

William Kramer: Thank you. Thank you, League of Women Voters and Coalition. It's an honor to be here; this is cool. I came here 26 years ago with my bride of 35 years, three girls in tow. We now have four. Our youngest turned 14 yesterday. And we were asked to come and coach football at Naples High School. I hadn't applied for the job, had no interest in it. I played football at Liberty University on scholarship where I received a bachelor's degree in health. I also have a master's degree in computer science and another master's degree in counseling. Our goal was to be part of the fabric of this community. Our goal was to use sport as a tool to build great husbands and fathers, great community leaders, and people that will be impact players in their communities. I want to lead in teaching. And the next natural extension after I quit coaching, of being part of the fabric of the community is how else can I serve? Gary Price asked me to run when he came off council. I started paying attention at that point. And it recently became very clear to me that this is the next step for me.

[01:38:08]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Linda Penniman, your opening statement please.

[01:38:11]

Linda Penniman: Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming, and thanks to everybody that put this together for us tonight. It's so important that we make sure that the electorate is well informed about what it is that we're trying to attempt to do as candidates and hopefully as elected officials, if that should happen. We moved here in 2000, bought our first house on Portside Drive, which is in the Moorings. I got involved with the Moorings Property Owners Association. And as I said a couple of days ago, I think I bent over to tie my shoes, and I stood up, and they said, "We've just made you the chairman." So, I had a wonderful experience as the chair of the MPOA, but it frequently brought me down to city council to advocate for the Moorings. And as a result of that, I learned sort of tangentially that there was an opening on the planning advisory board. I applied for that and was on the planning advisory board for a couple of years at that point in time.

[01:39:16]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[01:39:19]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. Thank you for having us and for being here and being engaged. We will not keep you here for 10 hours. My wife and I moved here three days after we were married in August of 1988. We raised our two children here, Tony and Natalie, 33 and 31, both Naples High grads. My wife is a teacher at Naples High School. I have been a trial attorney in this town for over 35 years. I'm a board-

certified marital and family law attorney. I'm a Supreme Court certified mediator. I've served on boards of directors, YMCA, Safe Children-Strong Families. But really, I decided to get involved in this because of some things I saw happening in the city. And likewise, I was asked. things sort of aligned, and I decided it was time to be more involved. And so, here I am. I'm hoping especially that my mediator skills, when I bring people together to try and solve problems that they really don't think have solutions and we succeed, will be very helpful in this job. Thank you.

[01:40:15]

John Davis: All right, and we'll proceed with our first question. And again, each candidate will have one minute to respond. We're going to do the same order again. But I promise you, by the end of this, it'll all be flipped around, and everybody will have an opportunity to go first and last. So, first question, if you're elected, what will be your top two priorities for the city? And what specific actions will you propose to address these challenges? And again, Mr. Barton, we'll begin with you.

[01:40:39]

Berne Barton: Thank you. Yes, probably the top two priorities that we need to deal with here with the city council and the mayor, and the city in general, is we need to address the attrition that we've dealt with in the city staff. We've lost 200 people over the last two years. That institutional knowledge is gone for good. It's going to take a lot to replace that. But most importantly, we need to get the staff back up to full speed. Because without a full staff supporting everything that we want to do here in the community, we cannot run an effective and efficient government. So, it's very, very important that we get that staff filled as quickly as possible. We need to address that immediately. There are a lot of things that need to be addressed immediately. But that is probably the most important thing that we do is get that in there and bring decorum and common sense back to this process. Thank you.

[01:41:45]

John Davis: And Mr. Cooper, same question. I'm happy to repeat it if you'd like.

[01:41:50]

Garey Cooper: That's okay. To me, the two top issues are the wastewater and the water quality. And second is parking in this town, which goes along with all the growth and the development that everybody's talking about. But as the infrastructure obviously gets older and the need and the usage gets stronger, obviously, there's a big need for to fix the current flow and treatment of wastewater. And that deals with quality of life with the properties and the safety and the water quality. And after that is parking, especially in the Fifth Avenue district, because I believe there are a lot of things we can do to improve that, especially with when they gave the county the same privileges as the city.

[01:42:57]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Del Rosso.

[01:43:02]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Two of the biggest things to focus on are to get increasingly sharper and sharper with our financial management of the city. And then to be aggressively proactive with our protection of Naples is small town charm. And so, on the side of finance, I mean, this is a city of incredible abundance.

And so, there's no reason why we shouldn't have first-rate everything. And so, that's something that there's no excuse to have anything less than the best police department, the best facilities, the best infrastructure. We need to cut down on some things when it comes to unnecessary litigation. There needs to be a bit more productivity with projects like the outfall project, not letting that get mismanaged for years and years. And for a small-town charm, we need to be intentional about enforcing codes. Everybody here moved to Naples for a reason. They didn't move to Miami; they could have if they so choose. But they came to Naples, because Naples is the way that it is. And we need to be direct and intentional about protecting that.

[01:44:07]

John Davis: And Mr. Kramer

[01:44:09]

William Kramer: I've said from the outset, my number-one priority is health and safety. I'm a health major. So, it starts there. Our first responders should be the best paid, the best trained, and the best equipped first responders in Florida. And we shouldn't make excuses for that. That should be a great source of pride for us. That's not the case currently. What has happened for years is they talk about competitive compensation. We don't want competitive compensation. We want everybody in the state that's really awesome, that being a firefighter or a police officer, to want to work in Naples. So, first of all, it takes the will to do that. And let's not take a victory lap about if police officers are fully staffed. Talk to the police chief and ask him how many officers he really needs. That's the same thing we've done in the school system. We're fully staffed, because we've cut our staff by 20. We're not playing those games anymore. We're going to take care of our first responders. We're going to commit to them, and our metrics are going to be think about what they're protecting.

[01:45:14]

John Davis: Thank you. And Linda Penniman.

[01:45:16]

Linda Penniman: I'm interested in protecting the investment that you've made in this particular city. And right now, quite frankly, they're under a little bit of jeopardy. The lands of this world are not going to go away. We don't have a resiliency plan at this particular point in time. We need to take a strong look at a resiliency plan in order to protect our shores, in order to protect your property, and get that in motion. We also know that saltwater intrusion is starting to come into our water. So, we need to be looking at an RO plant. RO plants probably, today, run anywhere from \$100 to \$150 million. We haven't put a penny away for anything like that. So, we're ill prepared in that particular regard. The ponds need to be taken care of. That's a project that was started when I was on council back five years ago. We haven't addressed all of those. Those are water treatment ponds. Those need to get done. And don't do them one at a time.

[01:46:21]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Perez-Bentosa.

[01:46:24]

Tony Perez-Bentosa: Thank you. More efficient and effective governance. I joked earlier about we won't keep you here for 10 hours. And that wasn't really a joke. A lot of things happen behind-- I should say closed door-- but out of the view of the public. And council meetings are really the principal way that the citizens get to engage with the people that are running the city. And that engagement is critical. I am not compelled to get up in the morning and come to a 10- or 12-hour meeting. Those meetings can be run more efficiently. They need to be run more efficiently. And I think we can do better if we adhere to the rules that already exist, mind you. The other one is first responders, something that Coach Kramer mentioned earlier. Talk to the firefighters; talk to the police. Ten years ago, we had 55 firefighters in the city of Naples. Do you know how many we have today? 55. That's 10 years. We're not the same as we were. We need to catch up. We're losing them to neighboring agencies, because not the wages necessarily, but the compensation packages. Thank you.

[01:47:32]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: All right, the next question, we're going to start with you Mr. Cooper. Please share your thoughts regarding redevelopment opportunities in the city, particularly in the following areas: NCH Heart Institute, the Naples Beach Hotel, and the Four Corners.

[01:47:49]

Garey Cooper: Well in that order, the NCH, people said they want to have that. I think the demographics here warrant something like that. And if you ever saw an ambulance try to get to Immokalee Road in the traffic, and especially in this season, that's a long route. I know there are some issues about the garage and the height of the building. But as far as the need for that hospital, there's no doubt. Second, is the beach club, I think is a great addition. The family that had that for years, they didn't no longer had it. So, I think that was the best transfer use. Four Seasons is one of the greatest brands in the world. And I think that'd be a big asset. And lastly, the Four Corners, it's an empty lot right now. Something productive has to be done to it.

[01:48:52]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Del Rosso.

[01:48:56]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: I'll start by saying, I think the question is slightly loaded. I don't think there's any league of comparison between something like the proposals with the NCH Heart Institute and a hotel or a resort. There's always room for sensible development in our town. We want to be a prosperous, attractive town. But we're going to remain Naples in the process. There's no doubt about that. And so, there is room for exceptions, but they have to be exceptional. On the other side of things, you have something like NCH that's a league of its own. The community has been abundantly clear that that would be an incredible asset for our town, for the safety and health of our citizens. And something like that needs to be aggressively seized upon. There's no reason to ever let that slip through our fingers. And I, frankly, see that as a completely distinct opportunity from any of the other just profiteering developments that might come across the desk on a day-to-day basis.

[01:49:59]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Kramer.

[01:50:01]

William Kramer: Thanks. The NCH project, it seems like satire when I talk to friends about it around the country. Now it's going to be 250 million philanthropic dollars to build a state-of-the-art stroke and heart center in a spot where the median age is 66.3. And we haven't said, "How can we help? What can we do? We'll help you fill out the paperwork." Those that are opposed to it and want to poke whomever saying, "Well, tell me about the time study. Is it really true that time matters?" I hope you don't have a heart attack while you're lying on the floor, and the doctor says, "Let's just wait a minute here for you." It's absurd. We need to get that done. Here's what else. Go and look at the Porticus share that you're talking about that they spent three meetings on and then kick the can down the road. Just go and look at it. It's painted on the ground. You may hate that whole idea that Mike and Ellen got rid of that and had to sell it. They gave you 100 acres of green space. Can we not facilitate this? Do you think you're going to have one lane into that thing off Gulf Shore Road in July in the rain? It's absurd. Common sense governance.

[01:51:11]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Ms. Penniman.

[01:51:15]

Linda Penniman: I can't disagree, quite frankly, with my colleague up here. I think the hospital absolutely, given the age of this community, is a necessity. It's going to come to fruition. I don't need to spend much more time on that. I think the hotel, again, is a perfect fit for this community. I'm glad they're here. I think they're probably going to add a lot of value to this community. We're going to probably get a lot more tourist trade here. That's for sure. That's probably good for all of the people that have small businesses here. So, I'm okay with that. Four Corners, I'm okay with Four Corners. Obviously, we're going to develop that in some way. I'll be perfectly honest with you. I have a real problem, though, with putting in some sort of a business that's going to compete with the businesses that have been here forever. And the thing that I have in my mind right now is Wynn's Market. I really don't want to see a Whole Foods right there, because I don't want it to compete with the people that have given so much of their time and money to this community.

[01:52:17]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[01:52:19]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. I apologize. I've got a little frog in my throat. NCH - I was in favor of it, am in favor of it, disappointed it has taken so long, disappointed that the PAB only approved 30 feet for the parking garage after all these studies and the monies they spent to determine what the traffic and the impact would be. They requested 40; I think there was a very good reason for it. I think they should have gone with the 40 instead of the 30, because I think traffic could become a problem because of that one less level. As it relates to the hotel, again, I agree with both of my colleagues. My last name starts with a P, so I'm way over here. And by the way, I visited the project, and I saw where the Porticus share is, and they've got it painted on the ground. They've shown renderings of the landscaping. They should let it

happen. It needs to be multi-lane. I'm almost at a time. The Four Corners Fifth Ave. extension, look at the codes, look at the impact, look at the intensity, and don't discount subsurface parking. Thank you.

[01:53:26]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Mr. Barton.

[01:53:28]

Berne Barton: Okay, the NCH situation, it's insane that it hasn't been approved and there aren't shovels in the ground. It's a \$250 million gift horse that our community, right now, is looking in the mouth. It's going to improve health care for our residents. It's going to attract the best physicians in the country and the best medical staff in the country. There's no reason that this thing shouldn't have been approved already. We're arguing about which way the sign is going to face. I mean, it's really, really insane. The Four Seasons is a world-class resort. They've given a lot back to the city so that they could, in turn, develop that. They've been a great partner with the city and worked tirelessly to try to bend over backwards to adhere to what the city has wanted for this. And frankly, the city hasn't treated them very well. They need to be treated better. And we need to get that project underway and finished. The Four Corners, I'd like to see a more pedestrian-friendly downtown. I want a comprehensive plan, and I would love to see that area, that piece of property incorporated into that process. It could be great. And I would like to explore those ideas.

[01:54:34]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you.

[01:54:36]

John Davis: All right. Our next question pertains to the environment. What measures should the city champion to address environmental loss and damage relating to king tides, sunny day flooding, storms, and rising sea levels? Nicholas Del Rosso, we'll begin with you.

[01:54:52]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Thank you. Again, same thing with our charm, we need to be proactive with what we do to protect our environment. I think our environment, I consider it part of our charm and part of our infrastructure. And it's also one that we can't as easily rebuild once we squander it. So, there's particular efforts around the city that we know. We fully are aware of there are more high-impact zones that are more prone to flooding, that are higher risk. And there should just be common sense as far as paying deliberate attention to those. Within the city, we've had really promising environmental protections, treatment options, things show up in different ponds, places affected by the storm. And some of that, for example, with Swan Lake, there's been really promising developments with that. But that follows a similar trend with a lot of issues on the environment of the city, which is why was it the responsibility of the residents of Park Shore, for example, to notice and come up with a solution for their lakes?

[01:55:54]

John Davis: Thank you. And Bill Kramer.



[01:55:57]

William Kramer: We have to move the water; we've got to get that project done. It's all connected. It affects all of us. Swan Lake, in particular, for those that don't know, we're catching water in there from east to 41, so the county is feeding that. So, that brings up another issue. We have to liaison with the county. We need to work in concert with the county. One of the first things I did when I was considering this run last spring was call friends that I knew from council and friends that I knew from the commission and both of them, I asked, "Who's our liaison?" They said, "We don't really have one." We have to formalize that relationship. We have to have a seat at the table. We can't allow the county to dictate to us how this is going to go. Now, having said that, Bob Middleton is a hero in our community that many people don't know about. He's our stormwater guy. He's also our utilities guy. He directs two departments. The reason he does that is because we've lost so much staff. And on one side of those departments, we lost the first and second and maybe the third person. There was no succession. So, he's doing both jobs. And so, what I think is the most important environmental issue, the guy is being crushed, whose task it is to solve it.

[01:57:07]

John Davis: Thank you. Linda Penniman.

[01:57:08]

Linda Penniman: We lost some time with the Corps of Engineers, quite frankly, by probably not trying to cooperate with them a little bit more, but they are coming back with a plan for resiliency. It will have natural solutions for our shores as opposed to what they proposed initially. When they come back in 2025, they're going to come back with a plan that is fully funded. I think we probably need to look at that, because quite frankly, as a city, we haven't set aside any kind of funding in order to make sure that our shores are protected. So, I think we have to hang in there with the Corps on that particular thing. We don't have things in place, necessarily, that mitigate stormwater. We need to look at making brand-new parking lots pervious. We need to do a lot more with driveways, with pool surrounds. Swales - we need to finish the swale project. Those do clean water. We need to finish the ponds. So, there are a lot of projects out there that need to come to fruition, and we need to fast track those.

[01:58:08]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[01:58:10]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. We are the shining city on the beach, and water and weather will always be an issue for us. I do not believe there are 100% solutions to these items for obvious reasons. I think there are ways we can mitigate. Among them, obviously, infrastructure, MTDs, or manufactured treatment devices, there's upstream and downstream filtration devices that are available, permeable surfaces. And then obviously, we have the outfall pipe project on the beach that needs to, now, be re-evaluated, because that cost went from \$30 million to \$90 million. But these are 'must' things, and they're always going to be an issue. And we're always going to be playing catch up, in my opinion, and we need to do more. And we need to not only make the decisions, create the plans, but we need to

execute on those plans, so that we don't have a repeat of the outfall pipe project going down the road. Thank you.

[01:59:04]

John Davis: Thank you. And Berne Barton.

[01:59:07]

Berne Barton: Yes, well, there's going to be something that we're always going to have to deal with here. That's why we're here, frankly, is because of the weather. But unfortunately, the weather is not always cooperative. There are things that we need to do to mitigate this risk. This risk is always going to be here. The stormwater project, it has been delayed and not implemented, but approved. It was approved in 2019 and not implemented, not executed. It was approved for \$30 million then; it's now at \$90 million. Why didn't we go ahead and start this plan? This would be very helpful from a standpoint of helping our community from the standpoint of dealing with these storms and floods. We learned a lot of lessons from Ian. We need to incorporate those lessons into a new stormwater plan. That stormwater plan that we had back in 2018 needs to be re-evaluated and re-address. We need to go back to the drawing board and figure out the right thing for our community - and hopefully not a \$90 million answer. The county is applying a lot of stress to our infrastructure with all of their development. 88% of our tax revenue goes that way. When was the last time we re-evaluated that relationship? They should be helping us pay for things like this, because there are people coming into our community from the county and putting stress on our amenities and our infrastructure. These are all items that need to be addressed so that we can, again, be a safer and happier community. Thank you.

[02:00:17]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Cooper.

[02:00:20]

Garey Cooper: Yes, well, whatever happens to the water, it has to be cleaned. It has to be filtered and has to be clean, and we certainly have to help direct where the water goes. It's vital. Properties have to be at a height, and pervious surfaces have to be increased. And with all the great architects, no matter how much percentage of the land you use with your house, there has to be innovative ways to incorporate more grass into it, whether it's underneath. But certainly, like in New Jersey after Sandy, there's no argument; houses are 15 feet up. And they have to consider this for the long run. It's going to help property values and also ensure that a bad storm isn't going to take over the area like it did before.

[02:01:24]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: All right, the next question. We'll start with you, Mr. Kramer. What is your plan to ensure, at a minimum, a current services budget or better, an enhanced level of city services for the benefit of city taxpayers? And how might your priorities affect property taxes?

[02:01:40]

William Kramer: You're going to have say all that again.

[02:01:43]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Again, the bottom one is how might your priorities affect property taxes? What is the best current level of service?

[02:01:51]

William Kramer: I'm not a guy to say taxes are never going to go up, because I don't know the future. I will tell you this. Like I said on the outset, we should have the best paid, the best equipped, and the best trained first responders in Florida, period. We should stop talking about competitive pay. Gary Price might have mentioned that there are conversations that can be had with the airport authority to create revenue to add to the tax base without making taxpayers pay more. Those conversations are not going to happen with a council who appoints people to their board that are an existential threat to them, who want them moved, who think they shouldn't exist, or go to the Picayune Strand was an option. True, unbelievable. And so, that's just one creative way to help revenue. But I would also say when you're caught in the weeds, you don't have time for creative thinking like that.

[02:02:53]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Ms. Penniman.

[02:02:55]

Linda Penniman: I'm going to give you a personal experience. When I was on council, we were talking about the budget obviously, and I suggested that perhaps maybe we start to set aside money, because we might eventually need an RO plant. And the question to me was, "Well, why would we do that?" And I said, "Saltwater intrusion." Well, guess what? We've got saltwater intrusion. And probably that plant that was going to cost \$90 to \$100 million then is now probably going to cost us \$150 to \$200 million. So, we've got to face the reality that we are what we are. There are forces out there that we have absolutely no control over, but we have ways to control mitigation. And we need to decide that those mitigating factors should be paid for and put into place and get it done. Time is money. It's just that simple. I think we sit on decisions much too long, and we can't afford that luxury any longer. It's over. We've got to make decisions, act on them, and start to protect your property rights.

[02:04:00]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[02:04:04]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: I hope I understood the question. I like to have a chat with whoever drafted that one. But property taxes, we raised the property taxes here recently. I'm not in favor of that. I think property values took care of that. They've been raised. Revenue reserves, I should say, are good. We have the money. How we utilize it, in terms of the level of services, we go back to some of these things in terms of city staff, first responders, firefighters, and giving them the packages that allowed - and I'm talking about comp packages - that want them to stay so that we don't lose them to Bonita and Estero and all these places, because they're doing better than we are in terms of providing for these folks who I want them to do the best job they can do, because they're doing it for us. And I think that's critical. And in terms of revenue, the airport, right now, pays \$1 a year. They're willing to pay in excess of \$2 million a year. That creates a lot of revenue so that we can get creative, we can increase the level of service. And like Bill

said, when you've got money in the coffers, and you're not up to your throat, you can get creative and create some solutions. Thank you.

[02:05:11]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Barton.

[02:05:14]

Berne Barton: My understanding is we're talking about services for the city and not the increasing taxes. So, based on that understanding of this question, we do need to have the best paid emergency services. There's no reason that we shouldn't have it. We're a very affluent community. And frankly, it's shameful that we are losing firefighters to Cape Coral and Estero. We're losing firefighters to the county, because they've got a better health insurance package than we do. It's shameful that we don't treat our emergency services better and pay them better and have better packages for them. Now with that, how do we pay for it? Services are provided by the city. And they are provided for all people that use the city. And I'm going to go back to a point I made a second ago. That includes people coming from the county. They buy their \$2 million home in the county; the county gets tax revenue from that purchase. We don't. We turn around give the 88% of our tax revenue to the county. What are they giving back to us? That person that just bought that home, that's coming into Naples, they're driving through our communities, using our roads, using our facilities. The county and the city need to have a liaison between the two of them, a permanent position where they can communicate regularly and have an open line of communication, specifically for these purposes. Thank you.

[02:06:24]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Cooper.

[02:06:27]

Garey Cooper: I think one of the things that's lacking is there's a lot of empty lots around. We talk about development, but I don't think empty lots are productive. And I think that the 10th Street district and the design district is vital to making the city more robust, giving more options, having more space to enjoy, instead of just Fifth Avenue. And I think they have some great opportunities. Also, parking, as I mentioned before, I think there's a way to get revenue out of parking, which we get none. And garages that are free and parking, it's all day; it's free. And like they said, other people coming in from the county having the same privileges as the residents in Naples. I think there's some great ways to raise a lot of money and contribute those funds to things besides just raising property taxes.

[02:07:27]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you, Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:07:31]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Everybody's on the same page. Our services need to be completely first rate. As far as how we get there and how property value tax factors into this conversation, it could work. It could be a band aid, but it's a little bit of, I think, a red herring. And the reality is if you have to look at that, then you're probably skipping over some better options that we could have approached in the process. If we had things like more proactive management of, again, things like the outfall project, you wouldn't

have numbers running up across the city where we run up bills and hemorrhage money left and right. And we have incredibly robust property values here. They will take care of us if we take care of our city. Our property values went up in a hurricane. They will take care of us if we can take care of them, and so, that go goes back to protecting the charm and safety of the city.

[02:08:31]

John Davis: All right, and our next question pertains to quality of life, and we'll start with Linda Penniman. Which upgrades do you feel are highest priority? And what specific actions will you take to support those parts of the Vision 2021 plan?

[02:08:46]

Linda Penniman: There's a tremendous amount of pressure on this little town, and it's for a reason. Because we've got a gem here that nobody else can duplicate. It's very simple. People come here, they love this, they visit here. So do the people in the county come to visit here. And I agree with this gentleman over here. I don't know why we're not charging those people for parking. I think that residents should be able to park for free. And we charge people that are from the county or wherever; they should be charged for parking. I'm sorry. This is our town, and I think we need to make it abundantly clear that there are people that live here. We smack, 100%, like some sort of a resort town now. We need to let people know, "Hey, there are people that live here every day." And our quality of life needs to be upheld. So, however we can do that, mitigate those impacts, I think we need to do that sooner as opposed to later.

[02:09:51]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[02:09:54]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. Regarding quality of life-- and I know you folks are probably getting tired of hearing the same thing from all of us. I think a lot of us agree. And I would say to you that aesthetics and the beauty become useless if we don't have the safety. And obviously, being here since 1988, I've seen Naples change. And I don't want Naples to become Miami or Fort Myers. Growth is inevitable. And I'm going to come back to safety, because that's what gives us a good feeling. The aesthetics are here. But I want to feel safe and things that we're seeing in some big cities, the smash and grabs and the crash and grabs and all that stuff, that's coming. Naples is a target-rich environment - elderly and wealthy. And so, if you're a thief, where do you go? You come here. And so, this is why I go back to the police department and talk to Chief Dominguez. He's a great guy. We need to find out what he needs and try and give it to him in the hopes of creating deterrence, so that we can stay ahead of it and not play catch up on that issue. I'm out of time.

[02:10:59]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Barton.

[02:11:04]

Berne Barton: In the past, we've had a good plan to maintain our way of life here in Naples, and we've done a good job of it. We've got codes in place that that kept us in check when it came to development

and building. It's important we follow those codes. And they're there, because everybody wants Naples to be a unique and charming place to live. And that's why we're all here, frankly. It's naive to think that we can stop the growth or stifle it. What we need to do is we need to make sure that we've got planned and controlled growth, a community that's going to meet all of our standards. But the growth is going to happen because we live in a very desirable place. It's that simple. People want to come here and they want to live here and they want to visit here. It's important that we keep that in check and we manage that properly. And it's important that we have the services necessary to help the people that are here, that live here. And again, it goes back to we need to have the best equipped, and we need to have the best people taking care of us and making sure that we're staying healthy and safe. Thank you.

[02:12:06]

John Davis: Thank you. And Garey Cooper.

[02:12:12]

Garey Cooper: I think the quality of life is unmatched here. But again, it has to keep pace with the growth, manage development. But when I hear all the people that want to come down to Fifth Avenue, and they're residents in Naples, and they stay away, I'm thinking maybe their quality of life has to be improved. Obviously, people come from the county to enjoy it here. And they bring their friends. But it just seems like there needs to be a way to make it available for everyone. And again, that's where these developmental areas that are nearby here and, on the fringe, I think that's a big answer. And I think that improves everybody's quality of life, because they don't feel like every time, they don't come, because, well, we can't park and now, there's no seats. I think there needs to be expansion that everyone can enjoy, but not the kind of an expansion that people aren't used to, but the kind that they can all participate in.

[02:13:18]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:13:22]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Could you repeat the question please?

[02:13:24]

John Davis: Sure. Pertaining to quality of life, which upgrades do you feel are highest priority? And what specific actions will you take to support those parts of the Vision 2021 plan?

[02:13:35]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: We could just get a bingo score card for the word 'safety'. It is paramount. But I think beyond that, again, looking holistically at what the city is, why is it so attractive? Why do we have amazing property values? Why were we just voted the safest city in America? What makes it such a popular destination that fuels all levels of commerce and income? The things that will be proactive in protecting that is, as others have said, there needs to be aggressive, proactive management of what's coming into our city. The future is here. And people aren't going to stop trying to turn this into West Miami. And we need to be confident within our own city apparatus to strongly enforce the codes that

are here, and even improve them where need be, and have a strict culture around protecting what it is that you all have made very clear that you value in this city and the reasons that brought you here.

[02:14:39]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Kramer.

[02:14:41]

William Kramer: Thanks. In terms of redevelopment, I'd like to talk about that more than development. Because the fact is, there's very little to develop. There's not a lot of green space in Naples. We have rules in place. We just need to enforce the rules in place. Any petitioner that comes in front of the council, if you are a citizen, if you own a business, if you work in the city of Naples, and you follow the rules, we serve you. We serve you. I'm a football coach. If you don't follow the rules, you should be penalized. So, beyond, yes, we should have paid parking. I agree it's a revenue source, and it treats our citizens like the special people they are. If you were to break that rule, then the fine would have to be painful. And for people with a lot of money, 50 bucks is a valet. You've got to have some hammer with the carrot. And so, I say, as we move forward with growth, we can manage it if we just follow what exists.

[02:15:51]

John Davis: Thank you.

[02:15:54]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: The next question, I assure you, is a lot easier than the last one I asked. Please share with us your community involvement to date and how this made a difference in our community. Mr. Perez-Bentoa, we're going to start with you.

[02:16:10]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. Obviously, there are many ways to be involved in our community, whether it be being engaged in these meetings, serving on various boards. But I feel like I have served my community in probably one of the best possible ways I could have ever done that. And that is I have been coaching my entire adult life. And I have been coaching at Naples High since 1991. So, I'm dealing with the kids and the parents sometimes, much to my chagrin, occasionally. But working with kids is extremely rewarding. And I'm sure many of you have played sports when you were young. I've coached football, soccer, golf, martial arts. I do a bowling program on Saturday mornings for kids over at Beacon. A coach can make a huge difference in a kid's life. And I'd like to think that I've touched a lot of lives. I've served my community in many ways. But the most important, aside from the boards of directors and all, of the Heart Association and cancer, YMCA, where the rubber meets the road is really our kids, and it's our future.

[02:17:21]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you.

[02:17:22]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: I didn't see it. It was black.

[02:17:26]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Is it? Oh, I thought it went off and then.

[02:17:30]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: No. I apologize.

[02:17:33]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: No worries.

[02:17:34]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: I've been watching his screen.

[02:17:37]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Mr. Barton.

[02:17:40]

Berne Barton: Well, you know, I'm going to go something that's probably very fresh here and on everybody's mind, and it's specifically Hurricane Ian. As I mentioned, I grew up here. I was born and raised here. And we've never seen anything like that. Hurricane Donna, I heard, was about that bad. But that was nine years before I was born. That was 1960. We had a lot more to damage this time around with that type of floodwater, and that was just devastating. With that said, as I also mentioned, I'm in insurance, and flood insurance is one of those things that I have to deal with. Fortunately, my wife and I-- she's sitting right there-- we were very lucky with our home. Even though it's a 1966 home, and it sits very low, we were not damaged. And I was able to devote 100% of my time to my clients and community members, residents that were not so fortunate, with the assistance of my wife. Or vice versa, with me assisting her, we were able to get out and get a lot of volunteers active and get donations of not only money to help but supplies, and we were able to get in there and really help our community out after that devastating event.

[02:18:45]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Cooper.

[02:18:49]

Garey Cooper: I came to Naples to work at Moorings Park. And it was right at the time when all the restaurants were closed and everything had to be packed up for them. I was in the service, part of that. And there were a lot of different habits that people had to get into, and different ways of serving. But it got done. And then I decided to become a realtor, because my wife had been in it a long time. And way back, she kept a lot of people in their homes in the foreclosure market. And I admired that. She helped a lot of people out. So, in real estate, we're just trying to make it better for people, to give them opportunities that they deserve, and especially with new people coming in, to inform them, about all the things that we've been talking about to really give them the full story of what their opportunity is.

[02:19:54]



Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:19:58]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: I've already had a trial run of the position. I have glowing reviews about our city government, because I was able to relentlessly walk up to that same podium day after day and complain and say that, "Hey, I noticed that you guys aren't doing stuff that you could." Property values, environmental protections, and human safety were all at risk for codes that weren't being enforced. And I brought that to the attention of the council, to the mayor, and was relentless here. And now it's all on public record. You guys can go watch. Apart from Ms. Penniman, I think I probably have the award for the most time spent in this exact room. I've already done it. I was responsible for, with help of lots of others, co-authoring protective ordinances that are on the books right here. I did that in my first year of living here. I didn't need to wait decades for people to ask me to get involved. I just did it. Thank you.

[02:21:01]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Kramer.

[02:21:03]

William Kramer: Yes, well, we came here to serve. It was a family affair. And if any of you were here before we came, you know how crappy the job was that we took. And I was in a really good position that didn't make sense, but we were on a mission. And my home was where kids come after school, if you needed a place. My wife would cook a pregame meal for every football game. She cooked for swimming, softball, whatever sport. My little girls, since they could hold a roll, they're serving. Our community service has been recognized. In fact, one year, NBC Sports during the NFL playoffs, two weekends in a row, did a feature on Naples High School football's community service, whether it's Habitat for Humanity, our mentoring program, our partnering with special needs program. Any way that we can, we want to help and serve. In fact, I had kids out mucking houses when the first meeting was held, when they were going to shrink lot coverage. We were still taking out drywall. And I'm like, shrink lot coverage. These people just want their house back.

[02:22:09]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Ms. Penniman.

[02:22:10]

Linda Penniman: I think I mentioned earlier that I had the good fortune to be the chair of the Moorings Property Owners Association. I was, at that point, going to go on to say that that oftentimes took me to city hall. So, I did apply for a position on the planning advisory board. I was on that board for a number of years before I, then, ran for city council. I was also on the coastal advisory committee, in the county, that dealt with issues having to do with the coastline. And while I was on there, I managed to, I think, convince people that we needed to go from just nourishment to some sort of resiliency planning at that particular point in time. I was, when I was on city council, I was the city's designee to the metropolitan planning organization that has to do with traffic. You have to work with FDOT in order to try to solve those problems. So, I would have to say that in terms of my involvement, it has been almost 100% civic, because I think that's the only way you can really get things done that are going to affect your quality of life here in this particular city. Thank you.

[02:23:19]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you.

[02:23:21]

John Davis: All right, and we're now going to transition into questions that have been submitted by folks who have come here tonight to see the forum. The difference with these questions is everyone will have two minutes to speak, to respond. And we're going to start back with Mr. Barton here. And the question is, with people moving here to work in emergency services, schools, etc., there grows the need for workforce housing initiatives. What is your position on workforce housing?

[02:23:54]

Berne Barton: Great question. And it's a very big problem. As I'd mentioned, and one of my answers to one of my earlier questions, there needs to be a permanent position of a liaison between the city and the county. Right now, if you were to ask, they would say it's informal. I would say it doesn't exist. It exists only when it has to, which is unfortunate and not good enough. The likelihood of us putting affordable housing within the city is not very likely, because it's only 16 square miles, and the property is extremely expensive. So, what we need to do is we need to be looking at the possibility of affordable housing in conjunction with the county, in a location in the county. And we need to explore those options for that, because it's going to be more affordable out there. We've got a situation where it's not just emergency services; it's all services. It's our waiters, our boat hands, people that run our day-to-day lives, or help us run our day-to-day lives. They can't afford to be in Naples and live in Naples, and they're traveling from Estero or Bonito to try to get downtown to their job every day. The way to go about finding a solution there is, again, an open line of dialogue and communication with the county, finding a location that is suitable in the county and helping in conjunction with the county helping us pay for that housing out there for the people that need it. Thank you.

[02:25:26]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Cooper.

[02:25:31]

Garey Cooper: There's no doubt that it would be great to be able to move the people from wherever they are, closer in. Most likely it's going to be in the county. But there's a lot of development out in the county. And the developers I believe, from the beginning, when they develop the plans for these things, they don't want to do it, but they have to be able to have a certain percentage of this new development in these homes to be used and useful for regular workers - teachers, all kinds of people - and still make it a good place to live for everybody. So that has to be done in the beginning in the planning. Or there have to be incentives for them to do it. But they can't build junkier houses. The houses are all the same; just, they're not going to get the same return. But this is what these people, who develop, have to be willing to do, I believe. There are innovative ways to introduce this and, little by little, the percentages change. And then that's the incentive to get people closer in where they don't get tired of the commutes and everything, and then they're more reliable workers, and they have a better lifestyle. Other than that, there has to be the types of jobs, when they increase these areas to work and there's more workers. I think that there are going to be more options for the employers to hire people and to encourage them to

give them good jobs, and hopefully, give them a wage and enough work that they can eventually afford to live in some places that they previously didn't.

[02:27:32]

Thank you, Mr. Cooper. And Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:27:36]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Unless I'm mistaken, I might be the only person up here who rents and doesn't own a house in Naples. I'd love to. I'm waiting for the next housing collapse. So, I can speak with very fresh experience. It's the first of the month; rent was due. It's painful, genuinely painful. I live it every day. It's worth it to me, because this is an incredible city, and I would gladly pay even more to enjoy the way that it is. But everybody here is spot on - that it's a problem. Again, going back to what I've said previously, what makes this place so special? What drives the lifeblood of how is it so prosperous, so attractive, so safe? And the backbone of that is workforce housing. The fact that when you go sit down at a restaurant on Fifth, somebody's serving you, or your grocery store, your mechanic everywhere around it. Those folks have to live and exist somewhere. I think everybody is aware of that. There's the obvious step of there's only so many square inches available in Naples. And we need to work with the county to think about what is practical in terms of into the future and solving some of these issues. I've heard that echoed from a lot of folks, and I'm happy to hear that. But I'd like to get even more specific, which is how do you intend to do that with the county? Are you just going to drop off folks and say, "Hey, figure it out. House them." There has been a lot of kind of contentious back and forth already at the county level, with the housing commissions. And I've already been proactive in that. I've had the pleasure of meeting with our county commissioners. I'm proud to say that I'm endorsed by Chris Hall. Those relationships are important. I've already taken steps in that, because we need to be able to work closely with them if we want to genuinely make a dent in some of these issues.

[02:29:26]

John Davis: Thank you very much. And Mr. Kramer.

[02:29:30]

William Kramer: Somebody saw a report that came out from a foundation recently that we had focus groups with leadership throughout Collier County. And it was basically, what are our priorities? What's the number one issue? And the number one issue is workforce housing. I can tell you, when I came to Naples High School, in 1998, we had a whole bunch of faculty, who were alumni, and lived in the city. That is a game changer. They are so invested in the success of what you're doing. The same is true for employees in the city. And one of the problems with the turnover we've had in the city with employees, those folks didn't live in Port Royal. Most of them lived in the Lake Park neighborhood or north of the high school. Many of them are friends of mine. And so, they're in this conundrum where they felt as though the culture was exceedingly stressful for them, and they can take their talent elsewhere. And all of a sudden, their property value is through the roof. Like, why not move to fill-in-the-blank? Right? And so, obviously, this is a huge issue. And obviously, the benefits of having people local are enormous. We've got to get, like everyone said, with the county, have a seat at the table, leverage our tax dollars. And the truth is I think the county wants to work with us. I think they'd be willing. They have the same stress on them that we do. But like that thing that's going up on the triangle at Davis, how much

workforce housing is in that? I'm just asking. I mean, it seems like anything that is being built, moving forward, if everyone agrees that's our top priority, then why don't we act like it? Why aren't we proactive with that. And it has to go a step further. We can't just give them cheap housing where they'll never own a home. They've got to be able to sock away enough to actually put a down payment for their own home so that then someone else can move in.

[02:31:35]

John Davis: Thank you. And Linda Penniman.

[02:31:38]

Linda Penniman: The city has a five-acre piece of property actually over off of Solana Road that could possibly be looked at for some affordable housing. The school district owns one heck of a lot of land. I think perhaps rather than working with the county, maybe we need to work with the school district, to be perfectly honest with you. I don't think we've even scratched the surface as to where this affordable housing thing could go, because we haven't gotten organized enough. But there is an organization right now. There is a coalition that has formed. They've met once. It's being chaired by the head of the Affordable Housing Committee for the county, Steve Ruby, who also serves here.

So, I think we put our faith and put our muscle behind them, and hopefully, they can solve the problem and find the money and see if we can find some creative ways of creating affordable housing in this particular area. The George Washington Carver and the Jasmine Cay apartments can take a little bit more density. There is an opportunity there. Again, we have a small parcel. Go back to the ULI study. It's not that old. Dust it off. It was 2017; it's seven years old. Look at adding housing, for instance, on strip malls. That was one of the recommendations. The best parks in the world are parks that have eyes on them. Why does Cambier do so well? There are eyes on that particular park. There are eyes on Baker Park. It seems like there's something buzzing all the time. So, as a community, we haven't explored a lot of the opportunities that are out there. So, I think we need to sit down and dust off the ULI study, see what they recommended, and see if maybe there isn't some viable way to do it. We don't have to revisit as to what this city is going to look like if we can't have the help that we need in order to get things done around here. We don't need to revisit; we need to move on now.

[02:33:42]

Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[02:33:44]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. I think the question referenced workforce housing specifically. And I want to be clear, because I work for a living. And as I look around the room and look here, I'm part of the workforce. We're talking about affordable housing. I don't know that, in today's day and age, after practicing law over 35 years, and my wife being a teacher, that I can actually afford to buy, right now, the house that I currently own, between 41 and Goodlette. All right, Naples is 16 square miles. Linda mentioned a couple of parcels, and yes. There's not a whole lot of room for us to be doing this on our own. And I think it's critical that we not ask but demand that some of the 88 cents on the dollar that we're providing the county go to affordable housing, because they do have the space. The school district is another source. But in terms of us solving the problem on our own or within the city limits, it's a

virtual impossibility. I have a daughter who's 31, grew up here, graduated from Naples High like I said. She and her, I guess, fiancé had to buy a house in Bonito. New construction, still expensive. What's their hope? The price is going to go up, price is going to go up. They're going to be able to sell and then they want to move back into Naples. When they do that, they're going to buy a quarter of what they have just to be back here. So, I think partnering with the county - and the word partnering is a little soft; I think we need to be a little bit more aggressive than just partnering, and the same with the school district - and start exploring these lands that are available and require that a certain percentage of these developments be affordable housing. Thank you.

[02:35:39]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Next question from the audience. There has been a lot of mention of over development. Define what overdevelopment means and how you propose to protect the city. We're going to start with you, Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[02:35:53]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. Excuse me. So, let's talk about the phrase first - over development. We have codes and we have ordinances. And I take issue with the phrase a little bit. Because if you really look back, variances aren't granted as often, I think, as people think. Rezoning is not done as often, I think, as people think. We have houses, and Berne talked about his house being built in the 60s. My house was built in the 60s in this corridor between Goodlette and 41. And I'll use that as an example. There are a lot older homes there. And people are paying millions of dollars for these homes. My house is nicknamed 'the shack', just to give you an idea. It's a teardown, and they're telling me it's worth over a million dollars. And I'm thinking to myself, "What?"

Well, do you think that when they tear it down, they're going to put up one like the one that's on there now? No. But if you do it within code, then you're good. Now if you want to say that the house that replaces mine is three times bigger, and that's over development, you're welcome to say that. But if you're doing it within code, proper setbacks, proper elevation heights, it's not over development. It's redevelopment. And I think people are entitled to do that. And I'm not going to go and infringe on people's property rights and say, "Well, listen, if you buy my house for a million dollars, and I'm on city council, you can't build anything bigger than what's there right now." That's not right. And commercial development, there has to be a compelling reason for variances to be granted. Rezoning, hospital, NCH Heart and Stroke is a prime example. So, I think that those terms get thrown around a little loosely. And if we follow the rules, we should be fine. We can manage the growth. Thank you.

[02:37:44]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Barton.

[02:37:47]

Berne Barton: Yes, over development. That term gets thrown around quite a bit, and it loves to be wielded like a hammer by many. But really what we're talking about is redevelopment. And it depends on whether we're talking about the city or if we're talking about the county. The city redevelopment plan has actually been going fairly well from the standpoint that we actually have less residents in the city than we did two years ago, which means our density has gone down. Now if you asked a lot of people

that question, they would say, "No, it's gone up. We've got overdevelopment happening." No, we don't. We have redevelopment happening. We have a 40-unit building that was built in 1960 getting torn down for a 22-unit building. Guess what? That's less people. They're bigger units, nicer units built to code so they don't flood. It's actually a positive thing. Where we want to talk about the over development, and where we're not being prudent with the planning process, is the over developments taking place on our border with the county. They are building these monstrosities, and they're building hotels. And what they're not doing is they're not preparing our city, or helping us prepare our city, for the influx of use from those people.

The Davis Corner over here, that condo building going in, their marketing pieces say it's walking distance to Fifth Avenue. It is. It's great. It's probably a great place to live. You get to walk down to Fifth Avenue. Did the developer do anything about making those sidewalks larger, by making the pedestrian area more usable, friendlier, safer? Have you ever tried to walk from that corner, down to Fifth Avenue? It's a nightmare. You don't know whether you should be going across to this side, to the north side of East 41, or staying on the south side. And then there might be sidewalks that actually go nowhere, and you have to turn around and go back to the last light. The development and the planning is what we're missing on that over development taking place on our border. So, if we really want to talk about over development, that's again - and I keep hammering this point - where we need to have an open line of dialogue with our county, so that we have a plan in place. The toothpaste is out of the tube on that development. There's not a whole lot we can do there besides try to put band aids on it. But we need to have a plan moving forward with developments like that.

[02:40:00]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Cooper.

[02:40:06]

Garey Cooper: Yeah, you get into the semantics of the over development and redevelopment. That's true. The opportunities to do the right thing with the codes and to build beautiful buildings that people can appreciate to keep the scenery the way it is, it's like a country club here. When you go along 41 there and that district are right between the Four Corners and going north, there's a lot of dilapidated buildings there. And it's underutilized. I think that when they talk about the three-story height, it's great. Those buildings were never like that, and they could put housing in there; they could put offices; it helps the density. But it improves the look of things. I think that they need to use some colors, facings of some of these buildings, the stark white, to go in with the great palm trees and the beautiful scenery that we have here. But that, to me is great opportunities, and it carries over into the district. They have those hotels there, and they want to put a convention center, maybe. The revenue, maybe it gets shared into Naples, but there are problematic issues. If they can't solve some of the parking in Naples, they're never going to deal with it over there. So, there's no doubt that there has to be some handshakes with the county in these things. But I don't know how they get developed to that point where then everybody says, "I can't believe they're building that." Where were the conversations up to that point? So, I just think that there's some good opportunities to do the development, to keep some lots productive, and keep it being great the way it is now.

[02:42:01]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:42:06]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: If a 30-story casino got dropped in the middle of Fifth Avenue right now, I don't think any of us would really care if it was classified as over development or redevelopment. This is a pretty clear-cut issue. You folks, the voters that empower us with the powers of city officials that pay our salaries, you make it incredibly clear about what you do or don't want in your community. Over development are things that are outside of that, outside of the city vision, outside of your will, as sovereign voters, and outside of the responsibility that we have to protect and preserve the town as you all have created it. And so, maybe generations from now, the will of the people is wildly different, and they're going to get that casino and that's on somebody else's shoulders.

As for right now, there's no complication to this issue. You guys make this actually very easy to distinguish what is or is not irresponsible development. There is no catch all of variants here, variants there. We have codes for an absolute reason, and we'll bring it back to what others have said. NCH, that's why we have exceptions, is exactly things like that. Outside of that, it's easy to pay lip service to codes and how they should be enforced. There's a practical element to that, that anybody who's done work through the city channels knows that it's not always that clear cut. And there needs to be a massive amount of intentionality, within our staff and within our leadership, to make sure that we are empowered to catch codes, to know exactly what they are. Especially as times are changing, and things get a little bit more blurred, technology comes, things like that, we need to have a first-rate council that is proactive on those things.

[02:43:58]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Mr. Kramer.

[02:44:00]

William Kramer: Yes. I think that that term is also used as a political bludgeon a lot, this over development. The code is clear. And if you follow the rules, if you're doing a remodel on your home and you follow the rules, we should facilitate that, help you. And you have the very best and brightest city employees to help you get that done. If you are trying to build something, whatever it is, and you're not following the rules, then no, there would have to be some sort of compelling something. And in my case, I don't know what it is. I will tell you this; if it is a variance, there are two things about that. It would have to be exceedingly compelling. And also, it does not set precedent.

For whatever has happened at the hospital, that does not set precedent. If they are granted whatever variants, if you want to describe it as that, then that's a one off. I would also say that, if we can fully staff, get everybody up to speed-- and it's not just widgets where you pull one out and replace the other-- that there's the historical knowledge that leaves with the person. There's the ergonomics of our daily routine that goes with the person. So, it takes a lot of time for people to get up to speed with that stuff. Our plan is, in the next four years, to get a staff that is state of the art. As buildings get distressed, as the next storm comes, there's always going to be redevelopment. And the best in the business, fully staffed, will help us do that redevelopment as efficiently and effectively as possible.

If you're talking about the commercial side of it, those same truths still exist. There are still old buildings that are going to get distressed and are going to get wrecked. We still have to fix them under the code that exists. And I would also say if we're going to change the code, then let's do that in advance and not move goal posts in the midst of things and not require new commitments in the midst of things. We have to follow rules as they exist when we begin projects.

[02:46:07]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you. Ms. Penniman.

[02:46:09]

Linda Penniman: I agree that we need to sit down with the county and have a little dialogue. But I'll tell you who else needs to be at the table, and that's FDOT. We've got five roads that go east and west in this county: Immokalee, Vanderbilt, Golden Gate, Pine Ridge, and 41 East. How can anybody with any good conscience not think about that in terms of, if nothing else, hurricanes, the amount of time that people spend on the roads? What if there's a fire? How are you going to get police there? How are you going to get fire there when people are literally sitting in parking lots, starting almost at Goodlette, trying to get as far east as they can possibly get? So, we've got to have FDOT at the table. They're making some decisions for us that make absolutely no sense. So, I agree. We need to sit down with the county. Carrying capacity is a very difficult thing to do. But my definition of carrying capacity, quite frankly, because there really doesn't seem to be a salient definition for it, is just how miserable are you at a certain point, when you're sitting there for 45 minutes, or you're driving for two hours, to and from work, and washing dishes all day? Come on, folks. So, that's my answer. We need to sit down with the county, but we've got to have FDOT at the table and say how can you, in all good consciousness, put that many people on the road if there's any kind of a catastrophe? That's my answer.

[02:47:49]

Wendy Fullerton Powell: Thank you.

[02:47:52]

John Davis: All right. And in the interest of time, this is going to be our final question before closing statements. This is from one of our folks who's in here tonight. Kind of a point of clarification. They write, is your data current on staff? It's my understanding we are fully staffed per the city manager. Ms. Penniman, would you like to start that?

[02:48:13]

Linda Penniman: Yeah. I frankly haven't run those numbers particularly. My sense is that we have a city manager that everyone respects, has great regard for. I think that he's probably brought in some good people. I think, as I understand it, he understands what each person can bring to the table in terms of their particular talent relative to the employees. I don't have a sense that people are not being recognized here, particularly. I'm sorry. I'm just not familiar with that particular problem. So, I don't know that I can really give you a good answer on that. But this man seems to have brought some real talent with him. And my hope would be that people want to work for someone that has great talent. And so, therefore, if there seems to be a problem here, people will obviously come here and apply for jobs. I don't know. I don't sense the problem.



[02:49:15]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentosa. And just a reminder to our timekeepers, this is a 30-second answer, just to keep things up.

[02:49:26]

Tony Perez-Bentosa: I'm sorry; I missed that. And yes, I think that my data is current, to answer the question. And it's not so much of are we fully staffed; it's a retention issue. I said earlier, we had 55 firefighters 10 years ago; that's what we have now. Obviously, that's an issue. I talked to Chief Dominguez who-- by the way, great hire; I think he's going to do a great job for us-- 72 is what's on the books as fully staffed. He only has 62 operational, and he's still short by 10 as to what he needs. So, I think it's more of a retention issue, because you can always adjust the numbers to say you're fully staffed. But the retention is a problem. We've already talked about wages and comp packages and the like. This thing is still green. I'm going to keep talking until it turns red. [beeping 02:50:20] Well done. And I will abide.

[02:50:32]

John Davis: Mr. Barton.

[02:50:38]

Berne Barton: I have not seen the staff role. So, I'm not going to sit here and tell you I am 100% sure that we're not fully staff. What I have been told is that we've lost 20% of our staff year-over-year over the last two years. Now, have we brought staff back in to maybe bring it back up to what might be considered fully staff? Maybe. But what we have lost, absolutely, 100% is the institutional knowledge of the people that are no longer here. We had that turnover, and they are now gone, and our city is being affected because of it. Why did that happen? I wasn't here. I wasn't in the middle of it. But I can tell you it did happen. So, are we fully staffed now? Maybe. Are we fully staffed with the same people that were here for the last 20 years? No, we are not.

[02:51:20]

John Davis: Mr. Cooper.

[02:51:23]

Garey Cooper: Yeah, it would be hard to know all those statistics if you weren't already involved, every day, in it. But I'm sure it's an elastic issue. And if there's growth, there's going to be need for more staff. So, the fundamentals that they develop in the hiring now are going to help to ensure that they can handle the growth and the right type of people. And all those issues we talked about all night about housing, I think that goes along with it. But I couldn't really say about the numbers.

[02:51:58]

John Davis: Mr. Del Rosso.

[02:52:00]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: Let's remember that council is not here to dictate or control staff. That's simply not what we exist for. We have a city manager for that. And we got a very good one, as I understand it.

Again, I've had the pleasure of having plenty of meetings with him and working with him. It was mostly a pleasure for me. I think it was mostly me bugging him. But I've seen him get work done. I've heard glowing reviews from everybody that was involved in his hiring and everybody who gets regular work done with him. He came in at an incredibly difficult time in the city. And he needs to just be listened to as far as the staff and what exactly the numbers are and what the needs are.

[02:52:40]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Kramer.

[02:52:42]

William Kramer: Yes, I have to agree with what Coach Perez-Bentona said in terms of if you talk to the police chief, he'll tell you that we need 40 more officers. So, whatever the FTE is for that we need more. I can give you specifics here, if you'll bear with me for looking down. For example, our call volume for firefighters in 2014 was 5,308. In 2023, it's 7,440. We still have 18 FTE positions staffed for that. The same number we had with 5,308 calls, we have with 7,440 calls. Is that understaffed? I don't know. You tell me. How about this one? Our dispatchers who work police and fire, we had 13 fully trained in 2014; we have eight today. That's fact. Talk to our fire chief if you think it's not.

[02:53:31]

John Davis: Thank you, thank you. We're now going to go to closing statements. And again, because we're running short on time, I apologize; I initially told you there would be two-minute closing statements; those are going to be one minute. I'm just doing as I'm told. I apologize. Mr. Cooper, let's start with you. Let's wait one moment.

[02:54:03]

Garey Cooper: I'm for managed growth, water quality, better lifestyle, and continued good lifestyle for the residents of Naples. And I'm running to add common sense civics, civic-minded decisions to make everybody's life better every day, daily habits that people get into and the bad habits they get into when things get inconvenient. And I think that the greatest thing that could happen here is to just have independent thinking to solve some of these problems that are going to be mutually beneficial for everybody. Thank you.

[02:54:53]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Del Rosso, your one-minute closing statement.

[02:54:57]

Nicholas M. Del Rosso: I'm overjoyed to be here and for the opportunity that you've given me. And I'm also overjoyed and thankful for the city that you've given me, which is why I brought myself to get involved and to do something for my generation standpoint, to make sure that it's being left in good hands, and that what we inherit is the same thing as what you left us. And having lived around the world and been in incredibly prosperous cities as they've gone down the drain in real time, I've seen it happen; it can happen anywhere. And there are folks that are comfortable watching this city decline or turn into something else. That's not me. I represent your issues. Nobody had to drag me here, convince me here, or twist my arm here. I brought myself here. And I've been bringing myself here for a year and a half. And

I'm not running on special interest issues or donor issues. I'm running on your issues, and I'm looking forward for the opportunity to serve you. Thank you.

[02:55:50]

John Davis: Thank you. Bill Kramer.

[02:55:52]

William Kramer: Yes. Again, it's an honor to be here, and I appreciate everybody hanging in there this late. The fact that you care that much to be here is admirable. I love Naples. I've had lots of opportunity to go other places, and there's nothing like Naples. And I'm in an interesting position, because I still have a 14-year-old at home. And I have a grandchild in town. And so, I'm compelled that John Titus has an awesome place to raise his kids and grandchildren. I will tell you; I think we have a great city manager. And he's right. We don't deal with his people. We deal with city manager, the city attorney, and the city clerk. We need to empower them, give them what they need, and turn them loose to do their jobs. And then we can come together and, hopefully, develop some creative solutions for all the priorities that we've been given. We are beyond blessed to be here with all the amenities that we have. We have to remember, our number one amenity is our people, people that work and serve the public here in the city of Naples.

[02:56:55]

John Davis: Thank you. Linda Penniman.

[02:56:57]

Linda Penniman: Yeah, thank you all for being here tonight. And I, frankly, look forward to serving you all again. I would say that my time on city council was probably the best time I've ever had in my entire life, frankly, in terms of time allocation, because you're working for people that do care about their quality of life. The charge to you is pretty clear that you're here to work for them. They're not here to work for you. And working with people in Naples can be, quite frankly, very rewarding. They know exactly what it is that they have on their mind. They know what it is that they're looking for. It's a great job. There's nothing higher that you could possibly do in your life than serving the people that you live and work with. So, I look forward to having that opportunity again. Vote for Linda.

[02:57:59]

John Davis: Thank you. Mr. Perez-Bentoa.

[02:58:01]

Tony Perez-Bentoa: Thank you. And thank you for staying as long as you have and listening to us. I know it can get a little repetitive, and I guess that's really a good thing. I mean, there are a lot of great people up here. I think a lot of us are of like mind. But I think a lot of us are also a little different than what we have now. And that's where I think we need a little bit of change in direction in terms of the city. And yes, I'd like to have the job. Vote for me. I'm sure I'm preaching to the choir, because, look, it's past 8:00, and you're here, and I know you're going to go vote on March 19th. Talk to people. Get them to go out and vote. This is your ability, and all of us, is our chance to have a voice. And it's such an important right that we all have, that we should utilize. And by the way, life is complicated. March 19th is one day, and

you've got probably about 12 hours or whatever, 16 hours to get out and vote. You can use a mail-in ballot. There are other ways just in case that's the day that you don't feel well, there's an accident, you have to take somebody to the hospital, whatever it is, and you're like, "I didn't get a chance to vote." So, spread the word and get out and vote. Thank you.

[02:59:08]

John Davis: Thank you. And Mr. Barton.

[02:59:11]

Berne Barton: I was born here in Naples, was raised in Naples, met my wife of 29 years here in Naples, raised my children here in Naples, who are both graduates of Naples High, grown. They don't live here right now. One is a civil engineer who lives in Tampa, because he couldn't afford to live in Naples. This gives me a very unique perspective of this community. I love it dearly. I cherish it. Naples has given so much to our family. And it's my opportunity to potentially give back. I look forward to the opportunity to serving the people here of Naples. I understand the trials, tribulations, and joy of being here. I understand the charm that we all want to preserve. When I grew up, the charm was riding my bike down Fifth Avenue, not having to worry about any cars. That doesn't exist anymore. We've got a new charm that we're focusing on and we're embracing. And we have the ability to do that. And I look forward to the opportunity to helping Naples move forward in a positive direction. So, please consider me when March 19th rolls around. I appreciate your time here today. Thank you.

[03:00:12]

John Davis: Thank you. We'll turn it over to Diane Preston Moore.

[03:00:14]

Diane Preston Moore: We've gotten a lot of information here tonight. And the League of Women Voters knows the importance of informed voters. And so, we thank all the candidates for city council here tonight for participating and for sharing your views. We also thank the members of the Candidate Forum Coalition, who co-sponsored this event. And we thank the many volunteers - the timers, the greeters, the planners - who made this forum possible. We couldn't do it without you. And many thanks to Wendy Fullerton Powell and to John Davis for moderating the forum and sharing their time so generously. And finally, we thank all of you, the public, for staying here, for being engaged, and for watching and listening tonight. Election day is Tuesday, March 19th. The final date to register to vote in this election is February 20th. So, if you're not registered to vote yet, the supervisor of elections, I believe, is still outside. If not, there's a number on your screen that you can call, and they can help you register. So, please remember to vote, and we look forward to seeing you at the polls. Have a great night.

[Council forum ends 03:01:26]