

# Advocate urges televising Council meetings

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The Committee of the Islands (COTI) has long supported live audio streaming of our city council meetings - not only to enable Sanibel citizens to follow the proceedings, but also to alert them to what subject is under discussion if they want to attend the meeting to address that issue in person.

At COTI's recent annual meeting, keynote speaker Ralf Brookes, noted land-use attorney and environmental advocate, took it a step further, urging that city council meetings be televised, as they are in many Florida cities.

Brookes made this suggestion in the context of remarks focused on strong citizen involvement to ensure environmental protections and to guard against overdevelopment.

## Article Photos



COTI guest speaker Ralf Brookes visits with Mariel and Porter Goss.

A resident of Cape Coral, Brookes is a passionate advocate of controlled growth. A graduate of the University of Florida Law School, he is board-certified in city, county and local government. He represents Florida cities like Bradenton Beach and Yankeetown, as well as private clients in seemingly hard-to-win cases where the common thread is sensible development vs. overdevelopment.

In his remarks, he pointed to recent state legislation dismantling the state's oversight of local amendments to land development codes. Environmental community leaders, he said, are now often outvoted on governing boards, with no state or federal recourse. Brookes moved into several "war stories" where he was involved in mitigating or reversing some potentially disastrous planning projects. Specific examples covered Boca Raton, Delray Beach, and Yankeetown.

#### Menu for citizen involvement

In addition to calling for televised council meetings, Brooke presented this menu to citizens seeking to guard against overdevelopment:

- \* Organize early and raise funds to hire a lawyer.
- \* Fight on many fronts, appeal adverse decisions.
- \* Encourage new applicants to apply for public office.
- \* Seek wide citizen support, since developers and realtors have deep pockets.
- \* Acquire lands for the best protection.

A lively question-and-answer session followed the presentation. It was noted that Sanibel citizens, directly and through groups like COTI, had indeed followed these steps in the long and successful effort to protect the environment and maintain the sanctuary character of our barrier island community.

#### Board members, officers elected

In other business at the meeting, the following members of the board of directors were reelected to serve two-year terms: Jim Beauchamp, Phyllis Gresham, Martin Packard, Wayne Ponader, Ruth Woodham and Mike Cuscaden. Carolyn Swiney was elected to her first term on the board.

The board subsequently elected the following officers for 2013-14: Barbara Joy Cooley, president; Mike Gillespie,

vice president; Bud Reinhold, treasurer; and Martin Packard, secretary.

COTI was founded in 1975 by those who helped incorporate Sanibel as an independent, self-governing city within Lee County. Guided by the mission of these founders, the Committee seeks to ensure the continuity of good local government, to protect the environment, and to preserve the sanctuary character of our barrier island community.

More information is available on the COTI website at [www.coti.org](http://www.coti.org), or by emailing [coti@coti.org](mailto:coti@coti.org); or visit COTI on Facebook.

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