

Longboat Key News

September 25, 2026

Serving Longboat Key, St. Armands, Downtown Sarasota & Anna Maria Island

FREE

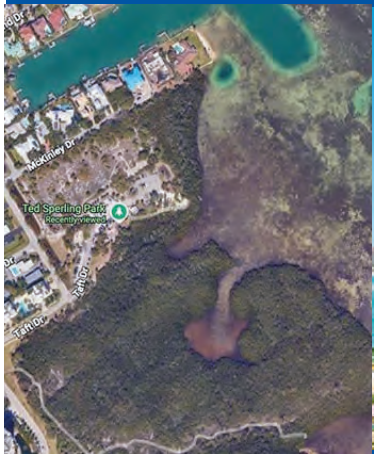
InsideLook



Tax Vote Stirs
Town Hall
...page 2



\$60 Million
in Lido sales
...page 9



City Explains
Park Denial
...page 6



The Phantom
Plumber Strikes
...page 10

Owed \$28 Million and Losing Patience, Longboat Key Takes Its FEMA Fight

With federal reimbursements for the 2024 storms still stalled in a state-and-federal review pipeline, Longboat is asking the region's next state senator to intervene, and the town's Amendment 3 warning letter puts a \$1.4 million hole next to the \$28 million one.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

With federal reimbursements for the 2024 storms still stalled in a state-and-federal review pipeline, Commissioner BJ Bishop is asking the region's next state senator to intervene, and the town's Amendment 3 warning letter puts a \$1.4 million hole right next to the \$28 million one.

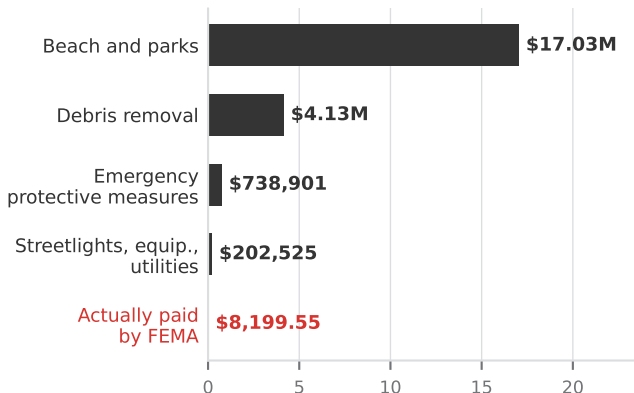
Two years ago this week, Hurricane Helene shoved the Gulf of Mexico across Longboat Key. Two weeks after that, Hurricane Milton finished the job from the other direction. The town spent

See FEMA, page 12

\$28 Million Owed.

\$8,199.55 Paid.

Longboat Key's FEMA claims for Helene and Milton, by category, in millions



Longboat Key Takes Its \$1.4 Million Amendment 3 Case Straight to the Homeowners

Commissioners are drafting HOA mailers on Town letterhead, lobbying Tallahassee and pointing at \$30 million in hurricane bills. Sarasota, where the mayor is already skipping conferences, and Venice and the county are running the same play, each with a bigger number.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Longboat Key has decided how it wants to fight Amendment 3. It is not going to fight it, exactly. It is going to explain it, in writing, to every homeowner it can reach, with

the Town's own figures attached.

That is the strategy that emerges from a stack of Town emails reviewed by Longboat Key News, and it puts Longboat in the same posture as nearly every city and county on the Suncoast. Florida law bars local governments from spend-

ing public money to campaign for or against a ballot question. It does not bar them from telling residents what the question would cost. So the campaign against the largest property tax cut in a generation is being waged one "informational"

See Tax Vote, page 8

City Says No to South Lido's Problem Park, Citing Jet Skis, Trucks and a Battered Budget

Four months after commissioners talked up a takeover of South Lido's most troubled public space, city staff priced it out and said no. The county is now on its third try at slowing the jet skis.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

In May, the Sarasota City Commission sounded ready to take Ted Sperling Park off Sarasota County's hands. Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch argued the city could run it better because it was right

there. Residents who had spent years complaining about jet skis and party boats begged the commission to buy it. The city attorney offered to open talks.

Then somebody ran the numbers.

City staff have now told the

county they will not take over the 150-acre park at the southern tip of Lido Key, or Nora Patterson Bay Island Park at the foot of the Siesta Drive bridge, and the reason is money. Taking on Ted Sperling would cost the city \$663,921 up

See Park, page 13

Shore: Inside the Eight-Bedroom 'Home'



In July, the city told the Shore team to prove the third floor is one home, fix the height math, and add a loading zone. The September resubmittal relabels the first, refuses the second, and produces an email showing the third was erased by staff on a planner's last day. A page-by-page reading of the 44-page response.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Every development fight eventually produces the document that says the quiet part in floor plan. For the Shore redevelopment at 24 and 28 N. Boulevard of the Presidents, that document arrived on Sept. 14, when Kimley-Horn's Bill Waddill filed the applicant's formal responses to the city's July comment letter, along with the revised drawings the Development Review Committee demanded. The parking showdown those papers scheduled for this week is covered separately in this edition. This is the rest of the packet, and the rest of the packet is where the project's ambitions live.

The July hearing ended with the city drawing three lines: prove the third floor is a single home, stop using the flood freeboard to gain height where the lowest floor is not located, and add the loading zone the code requires. The resubmittal's answers, in order, are a relabeling, a refusal, and an email.

One Kitchen, Eight Bedrooms

Start with the promise made at the podium. In July, Kimley-Horn's Emily Griffiths told the committee the third floor "is intended to be a single dwelling unit" and pledged to redraw the plans to show it. The redrawn Sheet A104 has now arrived, and it is something to behold.

The "single dwelling unit" spans 6,508 square feet of air-conditioned space. It contains eight bedrooms,

See Shore, page 15

EditorLetters

Longboat Key News and Sarasota City News encourages Letters to the Editor on timely issues. Please email to: letters@lbknews.com or mail to PO Box 8001, Longboat Key, FL 34228. We also print letters sent to Town Hall that address Longboat Key issues. We reserve the right to edit.

A note on Country Club Shores

To: Longboat Key Assistant to Town Manager Savannah Cobb
Looks great let's send it to the 1,2,3,4, and 5 Country Club Shores Association presidents. They will see that their homeowners receive a copy.
Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

By George, We've Got Edits!

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
I have attached updated version. I already had George review it and included his edits in it.
Thank you!
Savannah Cobb
Assistant to Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Wait, One More Edit (and a Meet-and-Greet Offer)

To: Longboat Key Assistant to Town Manager Savannah Cobb
Thanks, Savannah that looks great. I also want to include George's review before we send it out and also include in the letter that I am available to meet with the associations at their convenience prior to the election November 3rd.
Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Hot Off the Bureaucratic Press

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
I have attached the requested letter. Let me know your thoughts and if you want any changes or need me to do anything further. Thank you!
Savannah Cobb

Assistant to Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Groundhog Day: Yes, Still Include George's Edits

To: Longboat Key Assistant to Town Manager Savannah Cobb
Thanks, Savannah that looks great. I also want to include George's review before we send it out and also include in the letter that I am available to meet with the associations at their convenience prior to the election November 3rd.
Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Amendment 3: A Tale of Taxes, Storms, and Tight Belts

To: Longboat Key Homeowners
As we approach the November 2026 election, I want to share some information and my perspective regarding Amendment 3 and what it could mean for Longboat Key.
Amendment 3 was placed on the ballot by the Florida Legislature and will require approval from at least 60% of voters to pass. If approved, it would significantly increase the homestead exemption for Florida residents who use their property as their primary residence. The exemption would increase to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, with inflationary adjustments beginning in 2029. While this would reduce the taxable value of qualifying homesteaded properties, I believe it is equally important to understand the potential impact on the local services that property taxes support.
Property taxes are the primary source of funding for many essential local government services, including police and fire rescue, emergency management, roads and stormwater infrastructure, parks, libraries, and other community services. Local governments are required to balance their budgets, so when revenues decline, services and expenditures must be

reduced or other sources of revenue must be identified.
For Longboat Key, the Town anticipates approximately \$1.4 million in reduced annual General Fund revenue once the higher exemption is fully implemented. A loss of this size could affect the Town's ability to maintain current service levels and fund future priorities.
Our experience with Hurricanes Helene and Milton is an important example of why maintaining adequate local resources matters. The 2024 storms resulted in nearly \$30 million in costs to the Town, including beach-related expenses. With continued uncertainty surrounding future federal disaster assistance and FEMA reimbursements, com-
See Letters, page 4

Come Find Your Joy...



18 South Blvd. of the Presidents
St. Armands Circle
(941) 388-6402





CREATIVE KITCHENS & BATHS

LUXURY REMODELING PERSONALLY MANAGED

Boutique Kitchen, Bath & Whole Home/Condo Remodeling
From concept through completion, every project is professionally managed with exceptional attention to detail.



941-925-3723

Schedule your Private Design Consultation
4074 N. Washington Blvd. | Sarasota, FL 34234
State Certified General Contractor CG-C-1531837
Serving Longboat Key, Lido Key, Bird Key and St. Armands



www.CreativeKitchenAndBaths.com

A Better Remodeling Experience

At Creative Kitchens & Baths, we believe a successful remodel is built on communication, organization and craftsmanship.

Our boutique approach gives you a dedicated team, expert design guidance, professional project management and exceptional craftsmanship – all working together from concept through completion.

Big enough to manage complex renovations. Boutique enough to know every client by name.

EST. **M** 1922

MIRA MAR
Residences

THE LAST GREAT ADDRESS
ON PALM AVENUE



PRICED FROM THE HIGH \$3 MILLIONS • NOW UNDER CONSTRUCTION
MIRAMARSARASOTA.COM | (941) 390 2955 | 1258 NORTH PALM AVENUE, SARASOTA, FL 34236



ORAL REPRESENTATIONS CANNOT BE RELIED UPON AS CORRECTLY STATING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DEVELOPER. FOR CORRECT REPRESENTATIONS MAKE REFERENCE TO THIS BROCHURE AND TO THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY SECTION 718.503, FLORIDA STATUTES, TO BE FURNISHED BY A SELLER TO A BUYER OR LESSEE. THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN FILED IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA AND NO OTHER STATE. THIS IS NOT AN OFFER TO SELL OR SOLICITATION OF OFFERS TO BUY THE CONDOMINIUM UNITS IN STATES WHERE SUCH OFFER OR SOLICITATION CANNOT BE MADE. PRICES AND AVAILABILITY ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE ANYTIME WITHOUT NOTICE.

EditorLetters



Letters, from page 2

munities may be required to assume a greater share of recovery costs in the future. There may also be impacts to services provided by Sarasota County. County representatives have advised the Town that significant reductions could affect parks and libraries, including the Sarasota County Longboat Key Branch Library. The need for essential services does not disappear when property tax revenue decreases. Local governments may have to consider service reductions, changes to property tax rates, non-ad valorem assessments, or other revenue sources to address funding shortfalls. For that reason, it is important to look not only at the immediate tax reduction but also at how the costs of providing local services may ultimately be funded.

Florida will also convene its constitutionally established Taxation and Budget Reform Commission in 2027. This commission meets every 20 years specifically to review Florida’s tax and budget structure and can recommend changes for consideration by voters. As your Commissioner, I encourage you to learn as much as possible about Amendment 3 and consider both its impact on individual property owners and its potential effect on the services our community relies upon.

I will continue to gather and provide factual information regarding the amendment so residents can make their own informed decisions. I am available to speak with any association prior to the November 3 election and happy to answer any questions you may have.

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

From Beer Distributors to Documentary Dreams

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Steve Branham
Hugh Shields at Gold Coast Eagle Distributing recommended that I connect with you.
My name is Nick Perez, and I run a non-profit for disabled Veterans. I am currently creating a documentary centered on holistic and integrative healing that gives Veterans an alternative to living in pain or ending their lives. I am looking for partners and sponsors to support this venture, and would love to connect to discuss possibilities.

Nick Perez
Ronin Legacy Group LLC

Show Me the Money: The \$28 Million FEMA Mystery

To: James Buchanan
It was great to see you last week. I am sure you will be sitting in the State Senate chair in January, so I wanted to give you a heads up on issues. As President of the Manasota League of Cities we are starting to discuss our legislative priorities for 2027. Much will depend on our ability to defeat Amendment 3 in November, but other issues we will discuss this Thursday at our League meeting include:
Home Rule
State grant funding (resilient FL, water quality improvement, state aid to libraries, FL Recreation Development assistance, local government cybersecurity, beach management, etc.)
Housing/SHIP/Live Local
Sovereign Immunity
Visit FL funding
Public Safety
Economic Development
Short-term vacation rentals
State Appropriations
None of our municipalities have been paid by FEMA for the 2022 and 2024 hurricanes. LBK is owed over \$28 million and we are not seeing any movement from Washington to deal

with these issues. If DC is going to hand FEMA funds to the State, will we be able to have some resolution of these long outstanding debts to our towns?

Any insight you would like to provide would be greatly appreciated. We are planning a Tallahassee trip early in the session for the Manasota League, hoping it will be a little less crowded and we can provide more information.

Happy to chat on the phone if that is easier on any of these issues.
BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Still Waiting for the Waters (and the Meeting) to Recede

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams
Wanted to follow-up on the meeting request back in June to discuss street flooding.
There has not been any outreach to the group from the Town since the memo below - but also recognize many were out of town for the summer. We would love to take you up on helping to facilitate the meeting/discussion with the 5 neighborhood leaders below.
Maureen Merrigan
Longboat Key

Assembling the Avengers of North Key Flooding

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams
Below and copied above are, as requested, the LBK north reps who should attend your community leader and Town staff meeting related to street flooding.
Most all of them are also their HOA President.
Hideaway Bay: Robert Hanna
Sleepy Lagoon: Blythe Jeffers
St Jude’s/ Tarawit: Paul Cacioppo
Village: Madeleine Stewart

Whitney Beach: Wynn El-Hindi

I believe Dave Bishop is the president of Buttonwood so he needs to be added (I do not have his email).
Robert Hanna can take the lead for LBK North and provide an update at our next meeting.
Madeleine - feel free assign someone from the village in your place if you prefer.
It is an important issue and it is a great opportunity for the Town to get community leadership input on potential solutions/ next steps. Thank you again for your insights.
Maureen Merrigan
LBK North Board

Going Green-ish: Ditching the Blue Sheets for Granicus

To: Sarasota City Clerk Shayla Griggs
Thanks. Shayla, I have been using the notes section of Granicus more. I will no longer need a paper copy of the agenda request sheets, the blue sheets, but I do want a paper copy of the agenda.
Kathy Kelley Ohlrich
Vice Mayor
City of Sarasota

See Letters, page 6

Where locals bring their friends!

LIVE LOBSTER, SEAFOOD & SMILES • SINCE 2009

LAZY LOBSTER
LONGBOAT KEY

DINNER • MON – SAT
4:00 – 8:30 PM
In-House Dining
& Take Out

EARLY DINING & HAPPY HOUR
Mon – Sat • 4:00 to 5:30

FEATURING

Live Maine Lobster • Fresh Fish • Gulf Shrimp
Salads • Seafood Favorites • Ribs, Burgers & More!

Reservations now accepted online! Book a dining room table from our website, or order online for easy pick up.

RESERVE A TABLE

ORDER ONLINE

5350 Gulf of Mexico Dr. • In the Centre Shops • (941) 383-0440
lazylobsteroflongboat.com

A Generous & Joyful Community

Growing in Jesus’ Name

CHRIST CHURCH
OF LONGBOAT KEY
PRESBYTERIAN (U.S.A.)

Dr. Julia Wharff Piermont, Pastor

Join Us For Worship!

Sunday, 10:00 AM

Watch live or livestream:
www.christchurchoflbk.org (follow YouTube link)

6400 Gulf of Mexico Dr. • 941.383.8833 • **www.christchurchoflbk.org**

BREAKFAST • BRUNCH • LUNCH • DINNER • CATERING • GOURMET DELI & BAKERY • CORNER STORE

HARRY'S
Continental Kitchens
EST. 1979
LONGBOAT KEY

WEEKLY SPECIALS

BEST BRUNCH
ON LONGBOAT KEY

20% OFF BOTTLES OF WINE DAILY

RESTAURANT & DELI

HAPPY HOUR 3-6
NIGHTLY DINNER SPECIALS

525 ST. JUDES DRIVE • LONGBOAT KEY, FL 34228 • **HARRYSKITCHEN.COM** • (941) 383-0777

It's Time to Give Your MEDICARE COVERAGE A CHECKUP

To help people with Medicare make informed decisions for the coming year, Sarasota Memorial offers this information about Medicare Open Enrollment, now taking place through December 7.

This year, Medicare's Open Enrollment Period runs from October 15 through December 7. During this time, Medicare recipients can make changes to their health and prescription drug coverage, including:

- ☒ returning to Original Medicare (also known as Traditional Medicare)
- ☒ joining a Medicare Advantage Plan or switching from one plan to another
- ☒ joining or changing prescription drug plans

Health and prescription drug plans can change from year to year, so it's important to review your coverage during Open Enrollment to ensure it meets your needs. Any changes made during Open Enrollment will go into effect on January 1, 2027.



ORIGINAL MEDICARE ("Traditional")

Sarasota Memorial and First Physicians Group (FPG) always accept all Original Medicare and Medicare/Medigap Traditional supplemental plans.

Medicare Advantage Plans (Part C Plans) IN-NETWORK with Sarasota Memorial and FPG as of January 1, 2027.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ☒ Aetna | ☒ Florida Complete Care | ☒ Simply |
| ☒ Florida Blue* | ☒ Freedom Health* | ☒ Wellcare |
| ☒ Florida Blue HMO* | ☒ Optimum Healthcare* | |

*Note: These plans are in-network with SMH and FPG Specialists only

Medicare Advantage Plans (Part C Plans) OUT-OF-NETWORK with Sarasota Memorial and FPG as of January 1, 2027.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ☒ American Health Advantage | ☒ Healthspring | ☒ Ultimate Health |
| ☒ Devoted Health | ☒ Humana | ☒ UnitedHealthcare |
| ☒ Gold Kidney Health | ☒ Longevity Health Plan | |

If you have already made your Medicare selections for the coming year, you can make additional changes through December 7, 2026.



For assistance with health insurance issues, contact SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders), a free program offered by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and the local Area Agency on Aging. Specially trained volunteers can provide one-on-one counseling and information. Call 1-800-963-5337 or visit www.floridashine.org.

This information is not a solicitation and is not intended to persuade you to make any changes to your relationship with any health insurer.

For more information about insurance plans accepted by Sarasota Memorial, go to www.smh.com.

For more information about insurance plans accepted by First Physicians Group, go to www.smhfpg.com.

EditorLetters



Letters, from page 4

: Development Services is on the Case

To: Greg Cestlavie
The Development Services Department would be where this information is filed if we have it. I have asked Director Panica to ask her staff to investigate.
Karie Friling
City Manager
City of Sarasota

Congratulations (But Also, I Have No Idea What You Need)

To: Greg Cestlavie
Thanks for reaching out. I am not crystal clear on what you are looking for but I have copied the City Manager on this email and she will be able to direct you to sources to help (and copy me as well please). Thanks and good luck with the new place!
Jen Ahearn-Koch
City Commissioner
City of Sarasota

Let Them Eat Kouign-Amann (If We Can Find the Occupancy Paperwork)

To: Sarasota Cituy Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch
Hi Jen, we are preparing to open a small cafe on N Trail, across from Ringling College, with Cemantha, and I'm running into a challenge I'm hoping you can help me with.
We are operating with the same footprint and zoning as the previous tenant (Shelf Indulgence - cafe and bookshop). After going to City Hall and trying to locate the Certificate

of Occupancy / Certificate of Use, and then doing a public records request, the only result I'm getting is for Indian Beach Plaza. It's weird that I can't find documentation for the business on its own besides their Certificate of Registration number.
I'd like to apply for renewed certification based on the existing documents. They must have some records, but I can't find them!
Can you please recommend someone who can help us locate the documents we need? Hoping for a soft opening the first weekend in October, and we'll be just a few minutes from you. Please come try our Petit Vendôme sandwich! Or the Kouign-Amann Cake - I think we'll be the first in Sarasota to offer it.
Greg Cestlavie
Sarasota

Flashback to February: The Ted Sperling Park Files

To: Sarasota City Commission
Please find attached and below information that was shared with the City Commission back in February 2026 about the Ted Sperling Park. This came up during the joint City/County Meeting last Friday.
Karie Friling
City Manager
City of Sarasota

Why We're Passing the Ted Sperling Buck

To: Sarasota City Commission
I hope your day is going well. There have been conversations between the City and County regarding the potential for the City to operate and maintain Ted Sperling Park at South Lido

See Letters, page 7



SECUR-ALL INSURANCE AGENCY

Sandra Smith | 941.383.3388

VISIT US ACROSS FROM TOWN HALL! 510 BAY ISLES ROAD SUITE 1, LONGBOAT KEY, FL 34228

CHUBB, AIG, UNIVERSAL, UNITED, SAFECO, PROGRESSIVE, FRONTLINE, VAULT, FLOOD, WE HAVE YOU COVERED!

MEMBERSHIP—*A toast to the good life.*



LONGBOAT•KEY•CLUB





Learn More

Explore several tiers of membership, providing access to exclusive amenities.
Contact membership@longboatkeyclub.com or (941)387-1661.

EditorLetters



Letters, from page 6

& Ted Sperling Nature Park.

Per Mr. Bullock’s direction, staff put together estimated costs for the City to operate and maintain these locations. The attached memo and documents include estimated costs that were put together by the City’s Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works Department, and Sarasota Police Department regarding the operations and maintenance of Ted Sperling Park at South Lido and Ted Sperling Nature Park. The properties are currently owned and operated by Sarasota County.

During our discussion about Ted Sperling Park at South Lido and Ted Sperling Nature Park, Nicole Rissler, Assistant County Administrator (Parks, Recreation, and Natural Resources Director at the time), indicated that the County may propose transitioning Lido Beach and North Lido Beach Park back to the City. The decision is contingent upon whether the City assumes responsibility for the operations and maintenance of both locations, which is still to be determined. Per the Interlocal Agreement, Sarasota County is currently responsible for the operations and maintenance of Lido Beach (from dune to water) and North Lido Beach Park, which are owned by the City. The Interlocal Agreement between Sarasota County and the City became effective October 1, 2018. This agreement is set to expire on September 30, 2028, and may be extended if both parties are mutually agreeable. Either party may terminate this agreement by notifying the other party of its desire no later than December 1 of any given year for an effective termination date of the following October 1.

Per the Interlocal Agreement, the Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources provide Annual Reports to the City of Sarasota pertaining to the estimated net cost for the County to operate and maintain Lido Beach and North Lido Beach Park. Please see the below estimated net cost for the County to operate and maintain Lido Beach and North Lido Beach Park, per the Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Estimated Expenditures:
· FY23 Total Expenditures: \$ 992,473
· FY23 Total Park Fees Collected: \$ 22,234
Estimated Net Cost to County: \$ 970,239
Estimated Expenditures:
* FY24 Total Expenditures: \$1,126,490 - FY24 Total Park Fees Collected:\$ 24,850
Estimated Net Cost to County: \$ 1,101,640
Estimated Expenditures:
* FY25 Total Expenditures: \$ 1,148,762
* FY25 Total Park Fees Collected: \$16,565
Estimated Net Cost to County: \$1,132,197

Over the past three fiscal years, the average estimated annual net cost for the County to operate and maintain Lido Beach and North Lido Beach Park has been approximately \$1,068,025.

The estimated cost for the City to operate and maintain Ted Sperling at South Lido and Ted Sperling Nature Park are:

Estimated Expenditures:
* Year 1- \$2,264,781 (includes \$663,921 start-up costs: Jet Skis/Jet Ski Dock/Police Patrol Vehicles/Trucks/John Deere Gator/Toro Utility Vehicle/Tools/Equipment/Miscellaneous Items)
Estimated Expenditures:
* Year 2- \$1,677,089
Estimated Expenditures:
* Year 3- \$1,719,021
Over the past five years, Sarasota County has reported annual revenues of approximately \$330,000 generated through its Commercial Recreation & Tour Operator (CRTO) Program at Ted Sperling Nature Park. These are agreements with vendors to operate and collect revenue at the Ted Sperling Nature Park from which the County receives payment.
Staff reviewed key considerations, including operational scope, anticipated transition, start-up and ongoing costs, availability of City resources, potentially losing property tax funds, potentially funding stormwater operations, timing, and alignment with current City priorities.
Based on the review, and in light of current budget constraints, staff are unable to recommend moving forward with assuming the operations of Ted Sperling Park at South Lido and Ted Sperling Nature Park at this time. While the concept may have merit, advancing it now will require significant financial and staffing resources that will put additional strain on the City’s budget that continues to recover from the financial impacts of recent storms. Thanks, and enjoy the rest of your week!
Jerry Fogle
Parks and Recreation Director
City of Sarasota

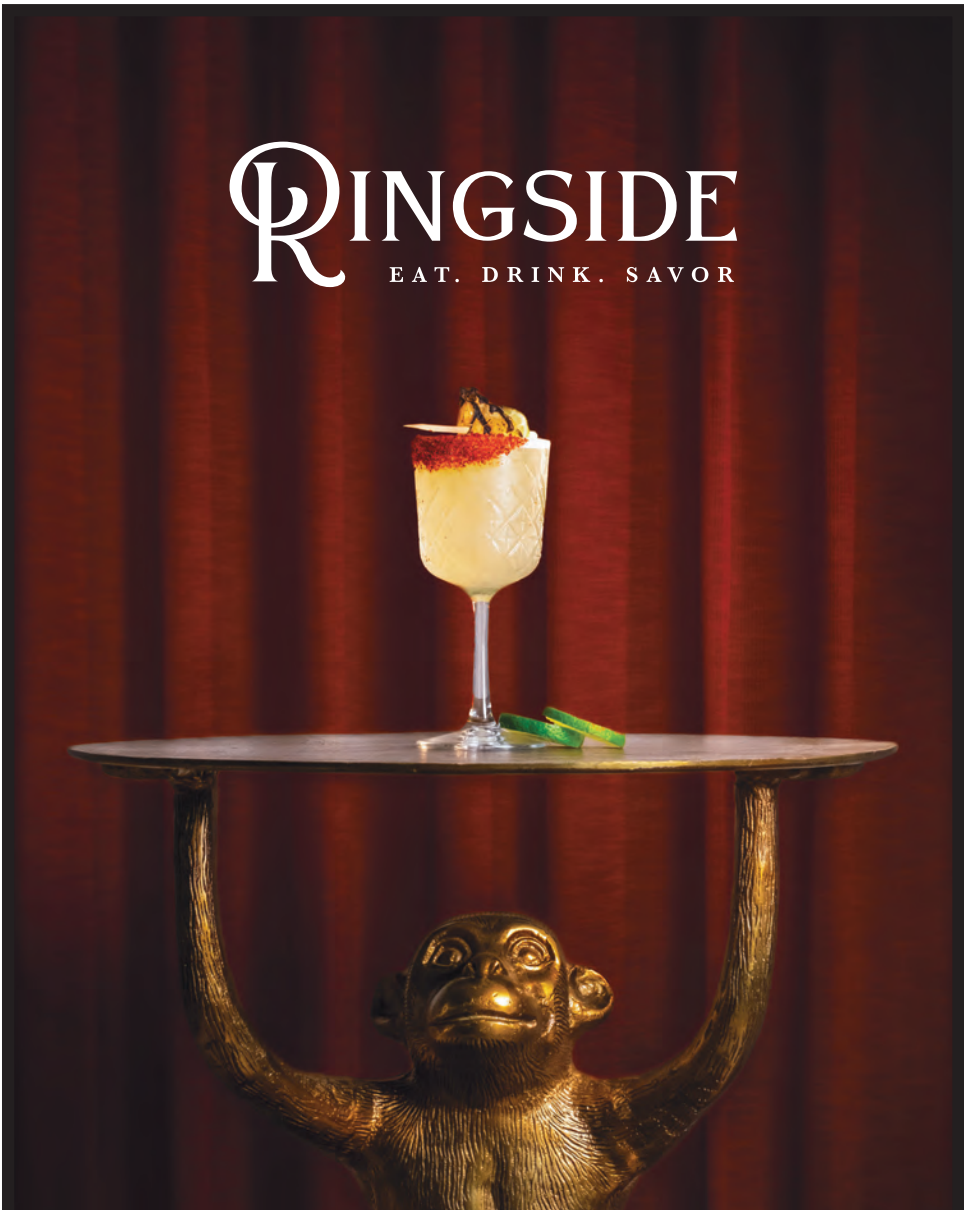
Fixing the DRC Audio

To: Larry Silverman
My apologies that you were not able to hear at the DRC meeting. I have forwarded your email to my staff to see where the issue was and how we can fix it. Thank you for bringing this to our attention.
Shayla Griggs
City Clerk
City of Sarasota

A Day at the Development Review Committee

To: Sarasota City Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich
Hello, I attended this morning’s Development Review Committee meeting, despite there being no input from public allowed. I was reminded that there is also barely any input to the public. Neither from nor to. I can understand the from part but what about the “to”!

See Letters, page 11



RINGSIDE

EAT. DRINK. SAVOR

Sarasota’s Newest Dining Spectacle - Now Open!

A fresh, inventive dining destination just a short stroll from St. Armands Circle, Ringside balances bold flavors and Gulf seafood favorites in the mesmerizing setting of **Cirque St. Armands Beachside**.

opalcollection.com/cirque-st-armands 941.388.5555



DRIFT

KITCHEN & BAR

Top-Ranked for a Reason

Perched on the eighth floor of **Lido Beach Resort**, Drift ranks #1 among 900+ Sarasota restaurants on TripAdvisor for its unrivaled views and unforgettable flavors.

opalcollection.com/lido-beach 941.388.2161

Tax Vote, from page 1

letter, one budget workshop and one town hall at a time, and Longboat Key’s version of it is now landing in Country Club Shores mailboxes.

What the amendment does

Amendment 3, placed on the Nov. 3 ballot by the Legislature during a two-day special session in June, would raise the homestead exemption on non-school property taxes from the current \$50,000 to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, with inflation adjustments after that. It would cut the annual cap on assessment increases for non-homesteaded property, meaning second homes, rentals and commercial buildings, from 10 percent to 5 percent. It would also give a future Legislature the authority to set a schedule for counties and cities to push the exemption all the way to a property’s full assessed value, which is the mechanism critics describe as a path to eliminating non-school property taxes on homesteads entirely.

The amendment needs 60 percent of the vote to pass. State economists put the recurring cost to local governments at roughly \$12 billion a year once the \$250,000 exemption is fully phased in. Nothing in the amendment replaces that money.

The Country Club Shores letter

The Longboat Key end of the effort runs through Commissioner Gary Coffin, whose district takes in Country Club Shores, and Savannah Cobb, the assistant to the Town Manager who drafted the letter he wanted sent.

“Looks great let’s send it to the 1,2,3,4, and 5 Country Club Shores Association presidents,” Coffin wrote to Cobb. “They will see that their homeowners receive a copy.”

Cobb replied that she had already run the draft past new Town Manager George Landry and folded in his edits. Coffin came back with two requests: that Landry’s review be included, and that the letter say he was “available to meet with the associations at their convenience prior to the election November 3rd.” He then sent the identical email a second time, which suggests either an eager commissioner or a very slow Outlook.

The letter itself is careful. It opens by describing the amendment neutrally and acknowledges that it “would reduce the taxable value of qualifying homesteaded properties.” Then it turns to what the Town would lose.

“For Longboat Key, the Town anticipates approximately \$1.4 million in reduced annual General Fund revenue once the higher exemption is fully implemented,” Coffin wrote. “A loss of this size could affect the Town’s ability to maintain current service levels and fund future priorities.”

The leverage is the 2024 hurricane season.

“Our experience with Hurricanes Helene and Milton is an important example of why maintaining adequate local resources matters,” the letter continues. “The 2024 storms resulted in nearly \$30 million in costs to the Town, including beach-related expenses. With continued uncertainty surrounding future federal disaster assistance and FEMA reimbursements, communities may be required to assume a greater share of recovery costs in the future.”

Coffin also passed along a warning from the county that “significant reductions could affect parks and libraries, including the Sarasota County Longboat Key Branch Library,” and noted that local governments facing shortfalls “may have to consider service reductions, changes to property tax rates, non-ad valorem assessments, or other revenue sources.”

Nowhere does the letter tell anyone how to vote. It closes with a promise to “continue to gather and provide factual information regarding the amendment so residents can make their own informed decisions.” That sentence is doing legal work as well as rhetorical work.

Where the \$1.4 million comes from

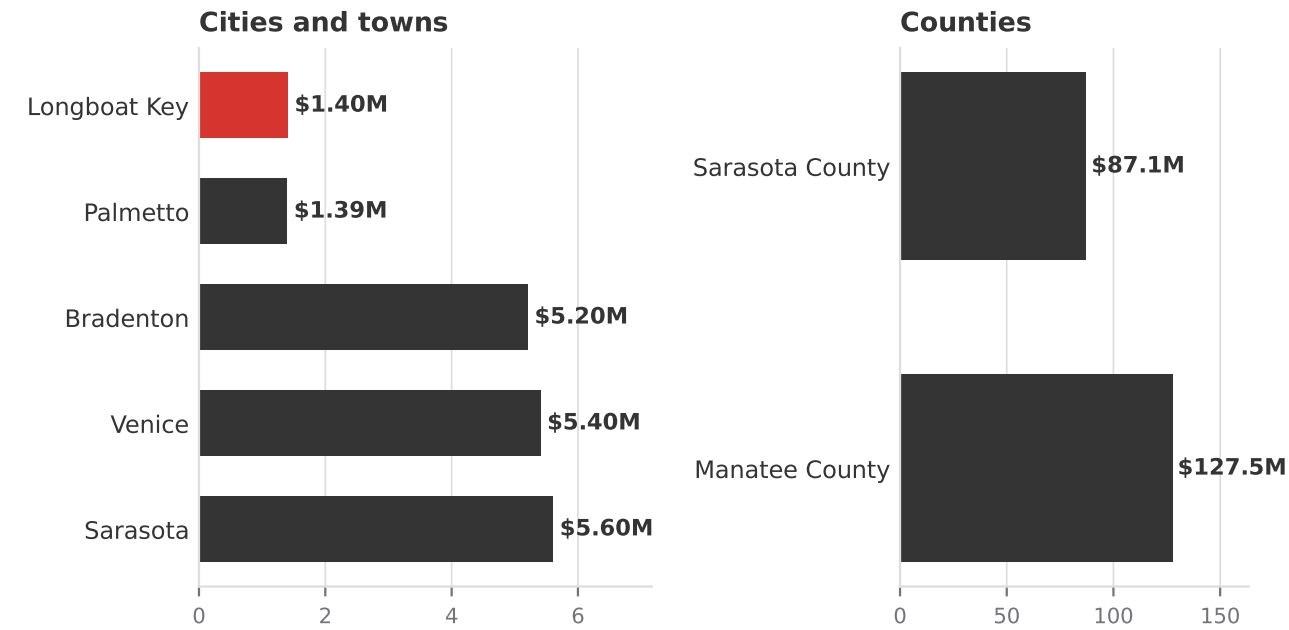
The figure is not new, and it is not Coffin’s. Finance Director Sue Smith calculated it in June, when the Town began building a budget around a revenue picture it could not see. Her estimate was a \$705,000 loss in the first year under a \$150,000 exemption, rising to \$1.4 million in the second year when the exemption reaches \$250,000. The Town’s official Property Tax Facts page rounds the first-year number to \$750,000 and keeps the \$1.4 million.

That page is the clearest statement of the Town’s strategy, and it reads like a template for Coffin’s letter. It lists every General Fund service that property taxes support, from police and fire rescue to parks and planning, and then lists what could give: deferred maintenance, smaller capital budgets, thinner staffing in Public Works and Planning, and “consideration of alternative funding sources, such as special assessments.” It notes that Longboat Key “is still waiting to see the first dollar from FEMA for the 2024 storms,” and that the reserves which let the Town waive storm-repair permit fees for more than a year exist only because of tax revenue. A disclaimer at the bottom says the information is “provided for educational purposes.”

On an island where a great many homes are assessed well into seven figures, an extra \$200,000 of exempt value is a

What Amendment 3 Would Cost, Fully Phased In

Projected annual property tax revenue loss under a \$250,000 homestead exemption, in millions



Second full year of the exemption (FY 2028-29). Longboat Key in red. The amendment needs 60 percent of the vote Nov. 3 and replaces none of the lost revenue.
Sources: Town of Longboat Key; City of Sarasota; City of Venice; Sarasota County; Florida Revenue Estimating Conference.
Graphic: Longboat Key News

modest slice of the tax roll. Former Town Manager Howard Tipton said as much in June, complaining that the state was applying a one-size-fits-all fix to communities that are nothing alike. Longboat’s problem is less the size of the cut than the timing: the Town is simultaneously raising its base millage from 1.960 to 1.999, adding a new canal maintenance levy and rebuilding reserves that Helene and Milton drained. Final adoption of that budget is set for Sept. 28, five weeks before voters decide whether to take \$1.4 million a year back out of it.

Bishop takes it to Tallahassee

While Coffin works the HOAs, Commissioner BJ Bishop is working the Legislature. As president of the Manasota League of Cities, she wrote to state Rep. James Buchanan, whom she expects to be “sitting in the State Senate chair in January,” to preview the League’s 2027 priorities. She did not bother with the informational framing.

“Much will depend on our ability to defeat Amendment 3 in November,” Bishop wrote, before listing home rule, state grant funding, sovereign immunity and short-term rentals as the issues the League would take up at its meeting this week.

Then she raised the number that sits underneath the whole Longboat argument. “None of our municipalities have been paid by FEMA for the 2022 and 2024 hurricanes. LBK is owed over \$28 million and we are not seeing any movement from Washington to deal with these issues,” she wrote. “If DC is going to hand FEMA funds to the State, will we be able to have some resolution of these long outstanding debts to our towns?”

That is the case in one paragraph: the Town fronted \$30 million for storm recovery, is still waiting on \$28 million of it, and is being asked to give up \$1.4 million a year in the revenue that made fronting the money possible.

The Manasota League has been on this since summer. On July 9, in Longboat Key, Florida League of Cities lobbyist Matt Singer told League members that 85 of Florida’s 411 municipalities could not fund public safety at current levels under a \$250,000 exemption, and that a state trust fund to backfill lost revenue had been discussed in Tallahassee and dropped. “One person’s tax exemption is another person’s tax increase,” Singer said. The statewide League’s slogan, repeated on its Amendment 3 resource page, is that the measure is not a tax cut but a tax shift.

The line every local government is walking

Gov. Ron DeSantis, who spent more than a year touring the state describing property taxes as “paying rent to the government,” said in June it would be “totally inappropriate” for local governments to spend taxpayer money opposing the amendment. Florida law already prohibits it. What the law allows is the factual presentation of impacts, and that is the space in which every local government is now operating.

Sarasota County Administrator Jonathan Lewis walked the line in public at an August budget workshop, telling commissioners “it’s not my job to tell people how to vote” moments after laying out \$46.85 million in lost revenue in fiscal 2028 and \$87.09 million in fiscal 2029. His presentation applied the cut proportionally across departments to show what it would look like: about \$35 million from the Sheriff’s Office, \$17.5 million from Emergency Services over two years, \$8.6 million from the environmentally sensitive lands program. He was careful to say no such cuts had been decided. He was equally careful to say that a \$350,000 homestead would save about \$1,000 a year, or roughly \$80 a month.

The county’s own Amendment 3 web page goes further

than Longboat’s, warning residents that lost revenue could mean “park fees, library fees, or increases to the bus system,” higher taxes on rentals that get passed to tenants, and a lower credit rating that raises borrowing costs. It names all four municipalities, Sarasota Memorial Hospital and the water management district as taxing authorities that would take a hit alongside the county.

The City of Sarasota: 37 police officers

The City of Sarasota has put its loss at \$5.5 million to \$5.6 million by fiscal 2029, and its staff report translates that into a unit residents understand: 37 police officers. City Manager Karie Friiling, who arrived this spring just as the special session convened, has called her first three months on the job a “doozy,” and the city has already declined a county offer to take over Ted Sperling Park and Nora Patterson Bay Island Park “for now,” in part because it cannot see its revenue two years out. The city and county commissions met jointly on Sept. 18 at the county’s new Fruitville Commons headquarters, the first time in 18 months they had shared a room, with Amendment 3 on the agenda alongside stormwater, transit and parks.

The chill has already arrived at City Hall

The amendment has not passed, and may not, but inside Sarasota City Hall it is already spending money that has not been lost yet.

Mayor Debbie Trice came home from last year’s National League of Cities summit enthusiastic about The Other Side Village, a Salt Lake City program for chronic homelessness, and this month the group’s leadership institute invited her and Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch to a spring 2027 symposium in Utah to compare approaches from around the country. Trice did not forward the invitation to staff. She forwarded it to a nonprofit.

“I know that sending someone from the City to attend this conference is impossible with the looming shadow of Amendment 3,” Trice wrote to City Manager Karie Friiling. “Rather than miss the opportunity to bring more valuable knowledge and ideas to Sarasota, I passed the conference information along to Erin Minor of Gulf Coast Community Foundation.” Minor is also part of the Harvest House family, which Trice called “one of the most successful programs in our area ending chronic homelessness.”

That is what a \$5.6 million shadow looks like in practice: a conference the city will not attend, outsourced to a foundation that can. It is a small line item, and that is the point. Nobody at City Hall is waiting for Nov. 3 to start behaving as if the money is gone.

The same shadow falls on the parks district the commission has been discussing since spring. City Attorney Joe Polzak sent Commissioner Kyle Battie a draft ordinance establishing a City of Sarasota Parks and Recreation District along with a legal memo from special counsel Chris Roe that, by Polzak’s description, covers the statutory process, the implications for millage allocation under the city’s ten-mill cap, and “the potential impact of Amendment 3.” The district was conceived as a way to give parks their own funding stream. Under Amendment 3, the exemption would apply to that levy too.

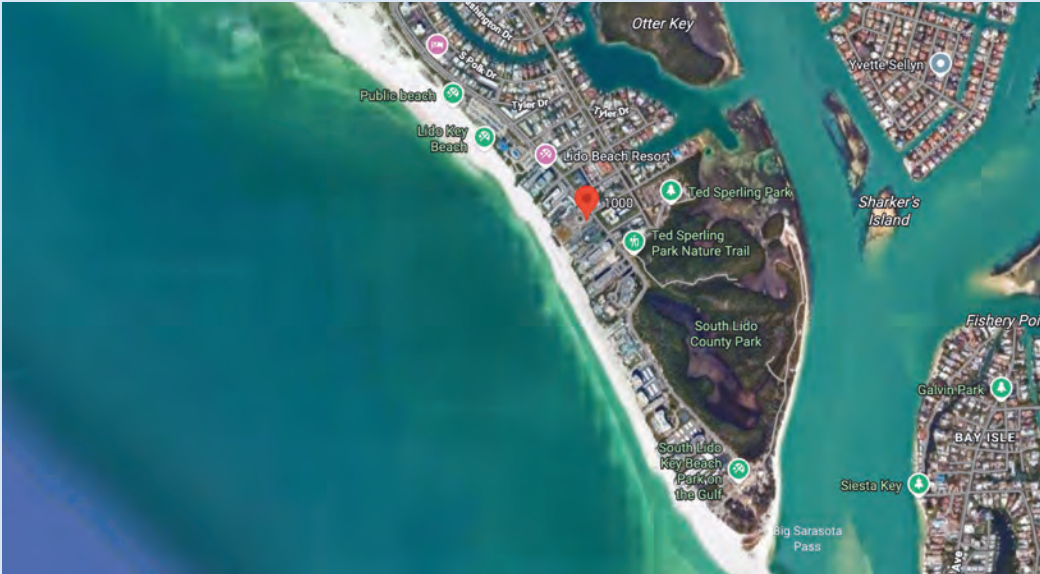
Meanwhile the city has been rehearsing. Trice thanked Friiling and staff for turning out to a Friday “dry run” of the city’s Amendment 3 presentation, a dress rehearsal in which, as she put it, everyone played two roles: a member of the public gathering information before voting, and a member of the city team. She and a colleague she identified only as Jennifer

See Tax Vote, page 9

KeyRealEstate

Downtown Sarasota, Bird Key, Lido Key & Longboat Key latest sales

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath			Days On Market	Sale Price
2425 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#1A	1,513	\$1,475,000	2	2	0	114	\$1,475,000
552 JUAN ANASCO DRIVE	1,846	\$900,000	3	3	1	478	\$900,000
350 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#213	2,378	\$845,000	3	2	1	43	\$845,000
2326 HARBOUR OAKS DR	2,282	\$775,000	3	2	1	166	\$775,000
225 SANDS POINT RD Unit#6103	642	\$510,000	1	1	0	368	\$510,000
1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#702	4,942	\$13,750,000	4	4	1	0	\$13,750,000
1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#1102	4,942	\$13,750,000	4	4	1	0	\$13,750,000
1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#701	4,942	\$11,700,000	4	4	1	0	\$11,700,000
1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#402	4,942	\$11,550,000	4	4	1	1	\$11,550,000
1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#401	4,942	\$11,500,000	4	4	1	1	\$11,500,000
1155 N GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#306	1,770	\$1,695,000	3	2	1	122	\$1,625,000
340 S PALM AVE Unit#11	2,075	\$1,435,000	2	2	0	207	\$1,400,000
101 SUNSET DR Unit#301	1,778	\$1,290,000	2	2	0	152	\$1,200,000
800 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#607	1,150	\$849,000	2	2	0	278	\$825,000
235 COCOANUT AVE Unit#117C	2,649	\$899,900	3	3	1	86	\$749,000
101 S GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#4J	963	\$529,900	1	2	0	8	\$505,000
33 S GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#704	590	\$429,000	0	1	0	32	\$429,000



1000 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#702

Tax Vote, from page 8

are incorporating the feedback. The polished version is the one that will go before residents in the weeks before the vote, on the same education-not-advocacy footing as Longboat’s letter to Country Club Shores.

Trice, who is counting down her final seven and a half weeks in office, put it plainly to staff: “I’ve got a lot to do over the next 7 and a half weeks.”

Venice, North Port and across the bridge

Venice estimates a \$5.4 million cut, about 10 percent of its general fund, and has posted an FAQ explaining why it cannot simply raid utility or impact-fee accounts to cover the gap, since each fund is legally restricted to its purpose.

North Port, a largely residential city with a thin commercial base, stands to lose a bigger share of its budget than Sarasota does. Fire Chief Scott Titus told a League of Women Voters forum at Selby Library on Sept. 22 that in some jurisdictions public safety alone could consume most of what property tax revenue remains, leaving almost nothing for parks, libraries or animal control, and he faulted the state for never running a fiscal analysis of how the cut would land community by community.

Across the bridge, the numbers are larger still. The state Revenue Estimating Conference projects Manatee County losing nearly \$68 million in fiscal 2027-28 and \$127.5 million the following year, Bradenton \$5.2 million and Palmetto \$1.39 million. The three Anna Maria Island cities and the Manatee County portion of Longboat Key would lose close to \$647,000 combined.

The other side of the argument

The forum at Selby Library had one wrinkle worth noting for Longboat readers. Organizers could not find an Amendment 3 supporter willing to sit on the panel, so the job of making the case for it fell to Dave Bullock, the former Longboat Key town manager who retired this year after a stint as Sarasota’s interim city manager.

Bullock argued that the amendment is a reaction to local governments that grew accustomed to spending increases as pandemic-era property values jumped as much as 20 percent in a single year. Sarasota and Manatee county spending, he said, is up somewhere between 85 and 100 percent since 2021. “Somebody doesn’t have their hand on the controller,” he said. He then joined the rest of the panel in doubting that a constitutional amendment was the right tool for the job.

DeSantis has made the same point with bigger numbers, asking whether local governments that ran on \$31 billion in 2019 truly need \$61 billion now. Florida Realtors, which frames the measure as housing affordability, put \$10 million into the Vote Yes on 3 committee at the start of September. The opposition committee, chaired by former Leon County Commissioner

Bryan Desloge, had raised under \$150,000 as of that week, with the Florida Association of Special Districts as its largest donor. Sheriffs, fire chiefs, the Fraternal Order of Police, the library association, the League of Women Voters and 1000 Friends of Florida have all lined up against the amendment or formally raised concerns about it.

The governor himself has cooled. The Legislature stripped out his proposal to include school taxes, dropped a state fund for fiscally constrained counties and deleted a \$5.5 million line for his office to mail promotional flyers. He has said he will vote for the amendment but will not campaign for it, and on Sept. 18 he told an audience in Alabama he did not know whether it would clear 60 percent. A St. Pete Polls survey released this month put support at 45 percent, down from 63 and 64 percent in Sachs Media polls in June and July. Polling has consistently shown support dropping sharply once voters are told what the local shortfall would be, which is exactly why the letters keep going out.

The ballot language fight

There is one more reason the Town can point to its own numbers with some confidence that voters will not be reading a rebuttal on the ballot. On Aug. 3, Leon County Circuit Judge David Frank threw out the Legislature’s ballot title and summary, ruling that “Save Our Homes from Excessive Property Taxes” was “akin to a political slogan” and that phrases promising to benefit taxpayers, protect small businesses and ensure funding for core services were argument rather than description. He gave Attorney General James Uthmeier 10 days to rewrite it. The amendment itself survived; the marketing did not. The Town has posted the ruling on its Property Tax Facts page.

What happens on Longboat Key

Coffin’s letter tells Country Club Shores homeowners that Florida will convene its Taxation and Budget Reform Commission in 2027, a body that meets every 20 years and could recommend a more considered overhaul. That is the Town’s implicit pitch: relief is coming through a better process, and this is not it.

Whether homeowners agree will depend on how they weigh a few hundred dollars a year against the Town’s account of what it spent after Helene and Milton and what Washington has not yet paid back. The Town Commission will adopt its budget Sept. 28. The voters will adopt or reject the Town’s revenue picture on Nov. 3. Between those two dates, Coffin has offered to meet with any association that will have him, and the Town’s Property Tax Facts page promises more updates “as they become available.” Longboat Key is not going to tell you how to vote. It has simply made sure you know what it thinks the vote will cost.

OnPatrol

The following are actual police reports as written by Longboat Key Police Officers. They are edited for length, punctuation and to protect privacy.

Sept. 12 The Phantom Plumber

10:33 a.m.
Officer Van Dyke responded to St. Judes Drive in reference to a traffic crash with property damage. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke observed a damaged backflow preventer with water spraying toward the residence approximately ten feet in length. A tire mark leading to the backflow preventer was observed in the shell scattered throughout the front yard. Officer Van Dyke was unable to determine the direction of travel. The homeowner was aware of the incident, his agent notified him before contacting law enforcement. According to the complainant, the crash likely occurred between 10:42 a.m. and 10:53 a.m. The complainant said no video footage is available from the Ring doorbell. The residence directly across the street has a Ring doorbell but no occupants were home neither did they answer the doorbell. Officer Van Dyke canvassed the area in search of a vehicle with damage near the bottom of the vehicle consistent with the backflow preventer, yielding negative results. Officer Van Dyke canvassed the area in search of a vehicle with damage near the bottom of the vehicle consistent with the backflow preventer, yielding negative results. No witnesses, driver/ vehicle descriptions or direction of travel were able to be ascertained. The complainant was provided a case number, and a traffic crash form was completed. Public Works was notified to respond in an effort to shut off the water pressure. Leaving the scene of a traffic crash with property damage is a misdemeanor under Florida Statute, therefore the case will remain open, pending further investigation. Case clear.

One Headlight, Zero Licenses

8:08 p.m.
Officer Troyer while on patrol, observed a silver Toyota Corolla pass him driving southbound on Gulf of Mexico Drive. He observed the vehicle's passenger headlight was defective and there was no illumination coming from the headlight bulb. The only light emitting was from the daytime running light. Officer Troyer conducted a traffic stop on the car in the 6800 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and introduced himself to the driver and explained the reason for the stop. The driver did not speak English, and Officer Troyer asked the driver for a license, which he said he didn't have and presented a Mexican passport to identify himself. There was a small child in the back passenger seat of the vehicle not wearing a seatbelt. Officer Troyer walked back to his vehicle and conducted a warrants and license check for the driver. Officer Troyer did not locate any license for the driver and the driver said he would be able to get a licensed driver to come drive him. Officer Troyer had the driver move the vehicle to a nearby parking lot so the officer could process the traffic stop. Once completed with the processing of paperwork, the driver explained he couldn't locate anyone to assist him with removing the vehicle. The driver indicated he was staying at a resort on Longboat Key. The driver did not know the name of the resort nor did he know the address. The driver finally contacted his friend who was able to provide the officer with the address and name of the resort. Officer Troyer explained to the driver, due to him not being licensed and unable to contact a licensed operator, his vehicle would be towed. Officer Troyer contacted the Sarasota County Dispatch Center and requested the vehicle be towed. Officer Troyer inventoried the vehicle and completed the tow sheet and the towing company responded and removed the vehicle. Officer Troyer spoke with the driver and he agreed to be given a ride to the resort. Officer Troyer found probable cause to believe the driver was in violation of Driving With No License. Case clear.

Sept. 14 Georgia Peach of a Porsche

9:54 a.m.
Officer Zunz met with the complainant in the police department for assistance with a Vin verification on a 1989 Porsche 911 convertible with a Georgia temporary tag. She advised the vehicle had belonged to her father in Georgia and she wished to title and register it to her Longboat Key address. Officer Zunz ran the Vin for wants and warrants with a negative result before stamping her DMV form. Case clear.



Sept. 15 All Quiet on the Construction Front

3:15 a.m.
Officer Castro Agis while on patrol in the 6300 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he saw a white Jeep Cherokee parked in an empty lot. The vehicle was unoccupied and contained various construction equipment. It was parked near a residence currently under construction. A registration check revealed the owner who was based in Venice. Officer Castro Agis canvassed the construction site and surrounding area with negative results. The residence under construction appeared secure and undisturbed. Case clear.

Girlfriend Takes the Wheel

7:52 p.m.
Officer Castro Agis received an alert from a license plate reader regarding a black Audi. The alert indicated that the registered owner's license was suspended. As a vehicle passed the officer, Officer Castro Agis observed that the driver matched the registered owner's description. Officer Castro Agis then initiated a traffic stop in the 1000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. The owner said he was unaware his license was suspended. Officer Castro Agis issued a citation for operating a motor vehicle with a suspended license. The man's driver's license was seized and placed in the Longboat Key Police Department property and evidence room for proper disposal. The man's driver's license was suspended on Aug. 11, 2026. The driver was accompanied by his girlfriend who possessed a valid driver's license. Case clear.

Sept. 17 Busted by the Beep

8:03 a.m.
Officer Pescuma received a target alert service hit for a license plate image captured from the Longboat Key South site license plate reader camera. The vehicle was traveling northbound and the alert was for an expired tag. Officer Pescuma queried the FCIC/NCIC database and confirmed that the tag expired on May 17, 2026. The vehicle was located and a traffic stop was conducted on a 2014 Gray Nissan. Officer Pescuma made contact with the driver and introduced himself and provided the reason for the traffic stop. Officer Pescuma advised the driver that the tag was expired on May 17, 2026. Officer Pescuma asked the driver for his driver's license, registration and current proof of insurance. The driver handed the officer a Nicaraguan Identification. Officer Pescuma asked the driver how long he lived in Florida and he said four years. Officer Pescuma conducted a FCIC/NCIC check with her name and date of birth which confirmed he was never issued a driver's license. The driver said that he was driving to work painting houses on Longboat Key. He was not driving due to an emergency. Officer Pescuma issued a criminal citation of No valid Driver's License nor was ever issued one. An additional citation was issued for an expired tag less than six months. Officer Pescuma advised that the driver could not drive and he made arrangements for transportation. Case clear.

The Business Card Shuffle

10:07 p.m.
Officer Castro Agis responded to the 7000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive to assist Officer Nazareno with a traffic stop. Upon arrival, Officer Nazareno advised that he had initiated a traffic stop on a Jeep Wrangler after observing the vehicle traveling the wrong direction in the southbound lane of Gulf of Mexico Drive for five blocks. Officer Nazareno further stated he suspected the driver was under the influence, as she exhibited glassy eyes, unsteadiness on her feet, and erratic behavior. Based on the information, Officer Castro Agis initiated a DUI investigation. Officer Castro Agis spoke to the driver and observed glassy eyes and unsteadiness on her feet. The woman's statements were incoherent from the start of the interaction and she appeared confused and disoriented, stating she did not know her location and was lost. Officer Castro Agis confirmed she was the sole occupant of the vehicle. While speaking with her, Officer Castro Agis detected the odor of alcoholic beverages emanating from her person. The woman admitted to consuming a glass of wine at an undisclosed location in Sarasota. When asked to produce her driver's license, the driver raised her hands and requested permission to search her vehicle, stating she was scared and did not want to get shot. Officer Castro Agis reassured her and instructed her to locate her driver's license. She was unable to produce her license after fumbling through her wallet and purse, instead retrieving and subsequently dropping multiple business cards onto the ground and driver's seat. Officer Castro Agis requested the driver voluntarily submit to standardized field sobriety exercises, which she refused. Based on Officer Castro Agis' observations, training and experience, he arrested her for Driving Under the Influence. Officer Castro Agis handcuffed her without incident. After her arrest, the woman became belligerent. She was transported to the Holmes Beach Police Department for the administration of a breath alcohol test. During transport, the woman complained that her wrists were bleeding. Manatee County EMS responded to the station and confirmed that the driver was not bleeding and had sustained no injuries. At the police station, Sgt. Betts and Officer Castro Agis, who were present for the breath test. The driver refused to provide a breath sample, Officer Castro Agis read her implied consent but she continued to refuse. Officer Castro Agis then transported her to the Manatee County Jail where custody was transferred to Manatee Sheriff's Office intake deputies. All arrest paperwork was provided to booking personnel. The driver was charged with DUI Alcohol, refusal to submit breath test, reckless driving, driving on the wrong side of divided highway. Case clear.

Sept. 18 Suspended Animation

9:18 p.m.
Officer Castro Agis received a license plate reader alert for a northbound vehicle whose reg-

See On Patrol, page 11

LBK

Liquors

941.953.1835

The Island's largest selection of Beer, Wine & Spirits

Come check out our competitive prices!

Discounts on cases of wine | Special orders welcome

Locally owned & operated

Whitney Beach Plaza

6854 Gulf of Mexico Drive | Longboat Key, FL

OnPatrol

istered owner's license was suspended. Officer Castro Agis confirmed the registered owner's license status. The vehicle passed Officer Castro Agis in the 6400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and Officer Castro Agis spoke with the driver, who it was confirmed was the registered owner of the vehicle. Officer Castro informed him that his license had been suspended since November of 2025. The driver appeared surprised and said he was unaware of the suspension. Officer Castro Agis notified him that the vehicle was under a seized tag order. Officer Castro Agis seized the man's driver's license and the vehicle's license plate, placing them into property for proper disposal. The man will arrange for a tow truck for his vehicle. Case clear.

Sept. 19 Musical Chairs

1:13 a.m.
Officer Castro Agis while on patrol in the 5600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, observed a vehicle traveling southbound approaching with its high-beam headlights activated. The driver failed to dim his high beams upon approaching oncoming traffic. The glare from the headlights impaired both Officer Castro Agis ability and Sgt. Montfort's ability to see the roadway ahead. Sgt. Montfort conducted a U-turn and initiated a traffic stop on the defendant's vehicle. Officer Castro followed to assist. As the vehicle came to a stop, Sgt. Montfort observed a man in the vehicle move from the driver's seat to the driver's side rear seat. A female passenger switched to the driver's seat. The man was asked to exit the vehicle. Once he was outside the vehicle, Sgt. Montfort observed signs of impairment and advised Officer Castro of the findings while he was on scene. Based on this information, Officer Castro initiated a DUI investigation. While speaking to the man, Officer Castro detected the distinct odor of an alcoholic beverage emanating from his person. Officer Castro observed that his eyes were bloodshot, his speech was slurred and he was unsteady on his feet. The man denied operating the vehicle, however the woman admitted that she and the man had switched seats after the vehicle was stopped. Her statement confirmed that the defendant was the driver of the vehicle at the time of the traf-



fic stop. The man stated he was visiting from Texas for the birth of his grandchild. When asked about his alcohol consumption, the man initially stated he had consumed one beer and later changed his account and stated he had consumed one glass of wine. These inconsistent statements regarding his alcohol consumption were noted. Officer Castro asked the man to voluntarily perform the Standardized Field Sobriety Exercises to ensure he was safe to operate a motor vehicle. The man refused to perform the exercises. Based on the totality of the circumstances, Officer Castro developed probable cause to believe the defendant was driving under the influence of alcoholic beverages to the extent his normal faculties were impaired. The man was placed under arrest for DUI. He was handcuffed, and the handcuffs were checked for proper fit and double locked. He was transported to the Manatee County Jail where Manatee County Sheriff's Office intake deputies assumed custody. All arrest paperwork was turned into MSO booking. After his arrest, Officer Castro asked the defendant to submit to a lawful test of his breath and he refused. Officer Castro then read Florida's Implied Consent warning to the defendant, advising him of the consequences of his refusal. After hearing Implied Consent, the defendant continued to refuse to submit a breath sample. Case clear.

Sept. 20 Catch and Release

12:46 a.m.
Officer Castro while on patrol in the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive observed a pickup truck parked in the lot. Officer Castro made contact with the driver who had a Florida Driver's License and he said that he was preparing to fish and believed it was permitted. Officer Castro informed him that the marina is private property and fishing is not allowed. The man acknowledged the information and left the area without incident. A warrant check on the man yielded negative results. Case clear.

Letters, from page 7

To explain: I could barely hear the proceedings, so moved to the front row. No improvement, the loudspeaker was on for less than 5 seconds the whole time. And the participants were talking very quietly. Like a private conversation in a library. Not that amplification would improve things; I have been to Commission meetings where the way the loudspeaker is used is inadequate to pick up what participants are saying.
I have normal hearing and am actually bothered when it is too loud, but inaudible is certainly not acceptable. So I mentioned to a colleague that maybe I can just stay home and listen online? Her reply—the online broadcasts is often no better.
Larry Silverman
Sarasota

Great Ideas We Can't Afford: Passing the Baton on Homelessness Solutions

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling
I came away from last year's National League of Cities Summit excited by The Other Side Village and its approach to ending homelessness. I know that sending someone from the City to attend this conference is impossible with the looming shadow of Amendment 3. Rather than miss the opportunity to bring more valuable knowledge and ideas to Sarasota, I passed the conference information along to Erin Minor of Gulf Coast Community Foundation (and member of the Harvest House family). Harvest House is one of the most successful programs in our area ending chronic homelessness.
Debbie Trice
Mayor
City of Sarasota

You Up for Utah? Scouting Attendees for the Solutions Summit

To: Gulf Coast Community Foundation Erin Minor
This is the organization that I brought to your attention last year. I wasn't sure if you were now on their distribution list and received a notice about this conference. Just passing the information along in case you know of someone in Sarasota who would likely be interested in attending.
Debbie Trice
Mayor
City of Sarasota

Let's Agree to Disagree in Utah: An Invitation to Innovate

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice
Approaches to homelessness vary radically across the country. We're exploring bringing leaders from those different models together at The Other Side Village in Salt Lake City, Utah.
This would be a symposium of ideas: a safe space for people to analyze different approaches honestly, think critically, challenge assumptions, and disagree.
The goal is simple: to learn from one another and improve how we approach chronic homelessness nationwide.
We're currently gauging interest for a Spring 2027 gathering in Salt Lake City. I've attached a one-pager with more info. Would you or someone from your organization be interested in participating?
Hyrum Grenny
Director The Other Side Leadership Institute
Salt Lake City, UT

Send
Your Thoughts
letters@lbknews.com

Let us 'Bringle' the Showroom to You
CALL BRINGLES BLINDS TODAY

SALE! \$500 OFF all Custom Interior Shutters & Shades



Longboat residents
and business owners
Chris & Dana Bringle

Bringles Blinds provides affordable blinds, shutters, shades,
and master installation services to the Longboat Key,
Sarasota, Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch and surrounding areas.

CALL FOR A FREE QOUTE — 941-320-7019
BRINGLEBLINDS.LBK@GMAIL.COM
BRINGLESBLINDS.COM
*Offer valid with minimum purchase of three

FEMA, from page 1

millions it did not have budgeted to haul away the debris, replace the electrical panels, rebuild the docks and put the island back together, and it did so on the same understanding every coastal Florida community operates under: pay now, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency pays you back.

Longboat Key is still waiting for the second half of that bargain.

In a letter this month to state Rep. James Buchanan, the Republican who is all but certain to take the region's open state Senate seat in November, Commissioner BJ Bishop put the frustration in plain terms.

"None of our municipalities have been paid by FEMA for the 2022 and 2024 hurricanes," Bishop wrote. "LBK is owed over \$28 million and we are not seeing any movement from Washington to deal with these issues. If DC is going to hand FEMA funds to the State, will we be able to have some resolution of these long outstanding debts to our towns?"

It is the clearest signal yet that the town's patience with the federal process has run out, and that Longboat Key's elected officials are now looking to Tallahassee, not Washington, to break the logjam.

A Number That Keeps Growing

The size of Longboat Key's claim has climbed steadily over the past year and a half as the town has refined its paperwork and the cost of restoring its beach has come into focus.

In May, Accounting Manager Ronica Jackson gave commissioners a category-by-category breakdown of what the town had submitted to FEMA for Helene and Milton. At that point there were 14 projects pending review and a total federal cost share of \$22,103,053.32. The lion's share, \$17,028,756.55, sat in Category G, Parks and Recreation, the category that includes beach renourishment. Debris removal accounted for another \$4,132,870.22. Emergency protective measures added \$738,900.77. Streetlights, building equipment and utilities rounded out the rest.

By early June, then-Town Manager Howard Tipton was describing the outstanding balance as "more than \$20 million" and calling the process "very slow." By the end of July, Bishop was telling the Florida League of Cities the town was owed "over \$24 million in reimbursements from past hurricanes with no funds yet received." Tipton, in one of his last public accountings before retiring, put the town's total expectation at \$29.7 million. Bishop's September letter to Buchanan uses \$28 million.

The exact figure matters less than the direction. Whatever the number, it is a large fraction of a town whose entire general fund runs about \$67,000 a day, and it has been sitting on the wrong side of the ledger for two full hurricane seasons.

What \$28 Million Buys on Longboat Key

To understand why the delay is causing anxiety at Town Hall, it helps to walk the cost of the two storms.

By the town's accounting a year after the hurricanes, the 2024 cleanup ran roughly \$7.7 million in direct expenses: \$4.3 million for debris removal, \$738,000 to replace electrical panels, \$705,475 for parks rehabilitation and \$218,000 for vehicle replacements, among other line items. The town's finance department had received about \$1.7 million from insurance by last fall and nothing from FEMA for Helene or Milton. The one FEMA check that did arrive was for Idalia and Debby, the much smaller 2023 and 2024 events.

Then there is the beach. Longboat Key's coastal engineers estimate the storms stripped roughly 629,000 cubic yards of sand from the island's shoreline. The town filed a FEMA claim for 407,300 of those cubic yards, and staff have said that reimbursement, if it comes, would give the island a running start on its next major renourishment, an 800,000-cubic-yard project scheduled for late 2027 or 2028. That project is the single largest item in the town's five-year capital plan, and depending on how the state and federal shares shake out, local taxpayers could be responsible for anywhere from \$5.1 million to \$12.7 million of it.

In other words, the FEMA money is not an abstraction. It is the difference between a beach project the town can afford and one it will have to borrow for, at a moment when Longboat is already paying \$3.6 million a year to retire the loan on the last renourishment.

Reserves Drained, Reserves Rebuilt on Paper

The most immediate casualty of the delay has been the town's savings.

Longboat Key entered the 2024 hurricane season with about \$3.7 million set aside specifically for extreme events, enough to cover roughly 60 days of operations. Helene and Milton drew down close to \$3 million of that within weeks. By the spring of 2025, Bishop was warning colleagues that the town was "much lower in our reserves than we're ever comfortable being." Staff later estimated the two storms had depleted the town's fund balance by roughly \$8 million.

The town has since clawed its way back to within policy guidelines, helped by a favorable audit and by booking anticipated FEMA reimbursements as receivables. But that is money on paper, not money in the bank, and Tipton spent much of his final year as manager warning that a town without real cash reserves is a town that will be forced to borrow the next time a storm hits.

His description of the process, delivered to commissioners this summer, has become something of a rallying cry among staff: the FEMA representatives assigned to the town turn over so often that the town ends up retelling its entire recovery story to a new person who has no record of the previous conversations.

Inside the Pipeline: Ten of 22

FEMA's own account of where things stand, delivered to the commission in August in response to Bishop's inquiries, does not dispute that the money has not arrived. It describes a process.

According to Josefina "Josie" Genao of FEMA's Florida Recovery Office, the agency has obligated 10 of 22 Longboat Key projects for Helene and Milton. The town, for its part, counts 26 eligible projects. Among the specifics FEMA offered as of Aug. 10:

The Helene debris removal project and one of two Milton debris removal projects both cleared the state's application review on July 9, only to be sent back to the town for additional information. The second Milton debris project was sitting with FEMA's program delivery manager, who was reviewing documentation to confirm it was ready to advance. The beach renourishment project, the \$17 million claim, was undergoing legally required environmental and historic preservation reviews. A water booster station pump replacement was stalled while FEMA staff reviewed insurance documentation, because the agency cannot duplicate assistance already provided by an insurer.

And one project had actually been obligated: a water booster station, for which FEMA approved \$8,199.55 on July 28.

Genao's letter framed FEMA's Public Assistance program as "locally led, state-managed, and federally supported," and said the most efficient path to obligation "remains the timely submission and review of complete documentation." The town's FEMA point of contact, Koree Hughes, separately assured staff the claims were a priority for his team.

Mayor Debra Williams has said publicly she is concerned about the delay as the beach project approaches on the calendar, but that the town intends to proceed with renourishment whether or not the federal money materializes, because Longboat Key maintains an engineered shoreline and cannot afford to let it go.

'Broken at Many Levels'

If FEMA's letter describes a process, the town's finance director describes a maze.

Responding to Bishop's questions in August, Finance Director Susan Smith explained that because the State of Florida manages federal disaster funds, a Longboat Key claim does not simply move from FEMA to payment. "It goes through a multi-tiered review pipeline between State and Federal portals," she wrote. The debris removal claim, the town's second-largest, was "pending State application review," meaning the Florida Division of Emergency Management had it after FEMA's review and was either going to ask more questions or move it along. The town, Smith said, had answered every question put to it.

Some of the smaller projects were hung up on something even more mundane: the town was still waiting for a final insurance payment it had been told was on the way, and FEMA will not advance a project until proof of that payment is in hand.

Bishop's response to the update was four words: "Can you get on top of this?"

The 2022 Claim Nobody Can Find

Buried in the same exchange is a detail that explains why Bishop's letter to Buchanan refers to hurricanes in 2022 as well as 2024.

Tipton had told commissioners the town still had a pending request from 2022. When Bishop asked whether that claim was still in the queue and on track, Smith traced it to the Town Hall Hardening project, a hazard mitigation grant, and reported that the delay in that case was not FEMA's. "This claim is currently delayed by FDEM, not FEMA," she wrote. "As mentioned previously, the State manages the Federal funds, and the process appears to be stalled at the State level."

Then she added the line that may be the most honest summary of the whole affair: "The system seems to be broken at many levels."

That admission cuts to the heart of Bishop's question to Buchanan. If the federal government is intent on pushing disaster money down to the states to manage, and a claim from four years ago is stuck at the state, then the state is precisely where the pressure needs to be applied.

Washington's \$17 Billion Traffic Jam

Longboat Key's experience is not unique, and its timing has been terrible.

In June 2025, then-Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem instituted a requirement that she personally sign off on any FEMA expenditure of \$100,000 or more. The result, by early 2026, was a backlog that The New York Times estimated at \$17 billion in disaster funds already approved by regional FEMA offices but held up awaiting review in Washington. Rep. Jared Moskowitz of Florida, the only former state emergency management director in Congress, testified in January that FEMA had postponed roughly \$11 billion in reimbursements owed to 45 states, shifting payments planned for fiscal 2025 into fiscal 2026. By late February the hold-up still exceeded \$14 billion.

Former Sen. Markwayne Mullin replaced Noem at DHS in late March and has reversed some of the policies blamed for slowing the agency. FEMA has since announced a string of large obligations, including more than \$2 billion nationwide in late August, and Florida's congressional delegation has trumpeted the recovery of \$1.8 billion in delayed reimbursements statewide, with Rep. Greg Steube and Sen. Ashley Moody announcing \$64 million for Charlotte County in July.

None of that has reached Longboat Key's general fund.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's FEMA Review Council delivered its final report on May 7 with 10 recommendations to shift more disaster response and recovery responsibility onto states and local governments, including raising the per-capita damage threshold a state must hit before it qualifies for a federal declaration at all. That is the policy shift behind Bishop's phrase about DC handing FEMA funds to the state, and it is the reason the town's lobbyist, Adam Cross, has been monitoring the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's FEMA hearings on the town's behalf.

Bishop shared his summary with the League this summer. The bipartisan takeaway, he reported, was that both parties are dissatisfied with FEMA's performance, that the FEMA Act of 2025 to restore the agency's independence and streamline Public Assistance has strong support on the committee, and that there is "little optimism" it passes this session.

The Beach Is the Big One

For all the paperwork on debris and pump stations, the fate of the town's finances turns on a single claim: the \$17 million for sand.

Public Works Director Charlie Mopps told the commission in July that the town had a productive mid-July meeting with FEMA's beach specialists and that he expected them to approve the town's beach request and send it up the chain. In May, Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman reported that the FEMA representative on the beach claim had scheduled a site visit, calling it "a good sign." As of August, the project was in environmental and historic preservation review.

A site visit in May and an environmental review in August, for a claim first filed in 2025, is roughly on pace with what Sarasota County officials describe as a typical FEMA timeline: up to three years. That would put Longboat Key's beach money somewhere around the time the dredges are supposed to arrive.

Not Alone: The County's \$268 Million

Longboat Key's \$28 million looks almost modest beside its neighbor's ledger. Sarasota County has tallied seven declared disasters since Hurricane Hermine in 2016, including COVID, with \$352 million in needed expenditures and an outstanding balance of \$268.5 million in FEMA and state recovery funds. Hurricane Milton alone left the county with 140 identified recovery projects at an estimated \$152 million. A decade after Hermine, the county is still waiting on \$3.38 million from that storm.

The City of Sarasota, for its part, pulled money out of planned capital projects to cover its 2024 cleanup. The ManaSota League of Cities, which Bishop leads as president, represents all of them, and Bishop told Buchanan the League would be discussing its 2027 legislative priorities at its meeting this week, with FEMA reimbursement alongside home rule, state grant funding, short-term rentals and sovereign immunity. The League is planning an early-session trip to Tallahassee.

Amendment 3: The Second Shoe

The FEMA standoff would be a serious problem for Longboat Key on its own. It is arriving at the same moment the town is bracing for a self-inflicted revenue cut.

Park, from page 1

front and more than \$1.7 million a year after that, according to a review by Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Fogle. The city, still digging out from the 2024 hurricanes and staring at a possible \$5.6 million hit from Amendment 3, decided it could not afford a park the county itself had ranked as its worst.

The memo that ended it

Fogle’s conclusion was unambiguous. “Based on the review, and in light of current budget constraints, staff are unable to recommend moving forward with assuming the operations,” he wrote. “While the concept may have merit, advancing it now will require significant financial and staffing resources that will put additional strain on the City’s budget that continues to recover from the financial impacts of recent storms.”

The start-up figure covers what the city would need to buy before it could manage a beach and mangrove preserve it has never operated: personal watercraft for marine patrol, trucks and police vehicles. The recurring cost reflects staffing, maintenance and enforcement for a park that generates hundreds of police calls a year and sits where the Gulf, Big Sarasota Pass, Sarasota Bay and Brushy Bayou converge.

The county’s own accounting of the episode, presented at the Sept. 18 joint meeting of the city and county commissions, is brief. The County Commission put the transfer of both parks into its 2026 Strategic Plan on Jan. 13. County staff researched deed restrictions, acquisition history, operating costs and revenues, and met with city staff early in the year. In March, the city sent the county a memo recommending against proceeding with either transfer “at that time.”

That March memo predates the May 18 City Commission meeting at which the takeover idea was discussed as if it were still alive. Commissioners talked about local control, occupancy caps and shorter hours. Nobody mentioned that staff had already told the county no.

Amendment 3 hangs over everything

At the joint meeting, county parks director Shawn Yeager told both commissions the city had declined the initiative “for now,” and pointed to the fiscal uncertainty of Amendment 3 as part of the reason. If the homestead exemption increase passes in November, the city estimates it will lose \$5.5 million to \$5.6 million a year by fiscal 2029, a sum its staff report translates into 37 police officers. Adding a \$1.7 million park to that ledger was never going to survive a budget season in which City Manager Karie Friiling described her first three months as a “doozy.”

The county has a deadline of its own. The interlocal agreement that governs shared oversight of the two parks expires Sept. 30, 2028. Some decision about who runs Ted Sperling Park has to be made within two years, whether or not the city wants it.

Why the county wanted out

The pitch for a transfer was never really about efficiency. It was about enforcement. Because the park is county property inside city limits, the county has no police force of its own to send there. It depends on the Sarasota Police Department, the Sheriff’s Office and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and for years none of them treated a county beach on the city’s edge as a priority.

The result, as former Orchid Beach resident David Rayner told the City Commission in May, was more than 360 substantive police complaints in 2022 and 2023 alone. Rayner said the county’s own staff had listed Ted Sperling first among 16 problem parks. Mayor Debbie Trice repeated that ranking twice as a caution. It turns out the caution was well placed.

The tragedy that drove the issue was the June 2025 death of Luis Guevara, a 19-year-old Baltimore Orioles minor leaguer killed in a head-on jet ski collision off South Lido Beach. Both governments responded with ordinances. Only the county’s has gone anywhere, and it has not gone far.

Three strikes with the state

The county’s first plan was a 300-foot exclusion zone barring motorboats from the shoreline. The FWC signaled it would not approve one without “substantial competent evidence,” and the West Coast Inland Navigation District opposed any restriction on access. In November 2025, the county retreated to an idle speed, no wake zone within 300 feet of the park and adopted an ordinance to that effect.

The FWC rejected that application in December. County staff resubmitted in April with more documentation. The FWC turned it down again in May, noting the county had not shown a blind corner obstructing visibility, the kind of physical hazard the state wants to see. Staff sent video of jet ski activity. In June, the FWC said no a third time, but suggested a slow speed, minimum wake zone might qualify.

On Sept. 22, the County Commission took the hint and directed staff to apply for that lesser restriction, which requires motorboats to travel off plane with minimal wake. If the FWC approves, the county will still have to advertise and hold public hearings before adopting a new ordinance. Nobody has said how long the state review will take. The ordinance the county already adopted cannot be enforced until permitting from the FWC, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Coast Guard and the state environmental agency is complete and signage is installed.

Enforcement in the meantime

What has changed is policing. The Sarasota Police Department’s Marine Unit, which the city would have needed to expand had it taken the park, has issued 17 citations at South Lido this year, most for careless operation. In the spring the department released body camera video of an officer confronting an 18-year-old on the beach over an unlicensed rental, the kind of operation Rayner and others blame for the worst of the weekend chaos. County Commissioner Tom Knight has said the operators are largely from the Orlando area, not local.

That enforcement is happening under the existing arrangement, with the city policing a county park it does not own. Ahearn-Koch’s argument in May was that ownership would make the city’s job easier. Fogle’s review found it would mostly make it more expensive.

What’s next

The handoff is dead for now but not forever. The 2028 expiration of the interlocal agreement guarantees the question returns, and the county’s strategic plan still lists the transfer as a goal. If Amendment 3 fails on Nov. 3, the city’s budget picture improves and the conversation could revive. If it passes, the county will have its own \$87 million problem and may be less inclined to keep subsidizing a park inside another government’s boundaries.

The larger idea that framed the May discussion, a citywide parks district with its own funding stream, was also on the joint meeting agenda as a long-term plan. A district with dedicated revenue is the only realistic mechanism under which the city could absorb a \$1.7 million park without cutting something else. That is a multi-year project.

For South Lido residents, the practical answer to years of complaints is now the same one it was in 2025: wait for the FWC. The county will submit a slow speed application. The state will review it on its own schedule. The city will keep sending marine officers to a beach it decided not to buy. And Ted Sperling Park, the region’s most contested stretch of sand, will remain exactly what it has been all along, a county park in the city that neither government is quite sure it wants.

FEMA, from page 12

In a letter to island homeowners drafted this month with staff and circulated to the Country Club Shores associations, Commissioner Gary Coffin lays out what Amendment 3 would do if 60 percent of Florida voters approve it on Nov. 3: raise the homestead exemption to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, with inflation adjustments thereafter. For Longboat Key, Coffin writes, the town anticipates approximately \$1.4 million in reduced annual General Fund revenue once the higher exemption is fully implemented.

Then he ties it directly to the storms. “Our experience with Hurricanes Helene and Milton is an important example of why maintaining adequate local resources matters,” Coffin writes. “The 2024 storms resulted in nearly \$30 million in costs to the Town, including beach-related expenses. With continued uncertainty surrounding future federal disaster assistance and FEMA reimbursements, communities may be required to assume a greater share of recovery costs in the future.”

Coffin notes that Sarasota County has warned the town that significant reductions could affect parks and libraries, including the Longboat Key branch library, and that the town may have to weigh service cuts, tax rate changes or new non-ad valorem assessments to close the gap. He is offering to meet with any association before the election.

The Florida Policy Institute made the same point statewide in August, describing FEMA’s retreat and Amendment 3 as a “one-two punch.” Property taxes fund the local half of disaster response, the think tank noted, including the reserves that front costs while a community waits on FEMA. Cut the property tax base and stretch the FEMA wait at the same time, and the reserves that carried Longboat Key through October 2024 are the first thing to go.

Bishop, in his letter to Buchanan, was blunt about the connection. Much of what the League will ask for in 2027, he wrote, “will depend on our ability to defeat Amendment 3 in November.”

A New Manager Inherits the Wait

The person who will carry the town’s FEMA file into its third year is new to the building. George Landry began work as town manager this month, succeeding Tipton, and used his first-day message to staff to promise a smooth transition and a listening tour. He did not mention FEMA. He will not have that luxury for long.

The commission that hired him has made clear the reimbursement fight is now a political priority, not a back-office accounting task. Bishop has been pressing the Florida League of Cities to make FEMA reform a top statewide priority for the coming session, has directed the town’s lobbyists to identify newly elected legislators with local government backgrounds, and has now asked the region’s incoming senator directly for help.

What Happens Next

Buchanan, the son of Longboat Key’s own congressman, Vern Buchanan, won the Aug. 18 Republican primary for Senate District 22 with nearly 78 percent of the vote and faces the general election Nov. 3 in a district the Florida Chamber rates as solidly Republican. Bishop’s letter offered him a phone call on any of the League’s issues and a heads-up that the coalition of local governments he will represent is coming to Tallahassee early in the session with a list.

Whether a freshman state senator can pry loose money sitting in a federal-state review portal is an open question. What is not in question is the arithmetic the town is staring at: a \$1.4 million annual revenue cut on the ballot, a \$17 million beach claim in environmental review, a debris claim bounced back for more paperwork, a 2022 grant stalled at the state, a reserve fund rebuilt on receivables, and a hurricane season that does not end until Nov. 30.

Two years after Helene, Longboat Key has learned how to survive a storm. It is still learning how to survive the paperwork.

Ads that work...
ads@Lbknews.com or 941.387.2200

LONGBOAT KEY TENNIS CENTER
Join the fun!

10 OPEN COURTS | TOURNAMENT PLAY | LESSONS
FULL SERVICE TENNIS PRO SHOP
ROUND ROBIN LEAGUE
CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS AND CLINICS

OPEN MON-FRI 7:30 AM - 5:00 PM
SAT-SUN 7:30 AM - 1200 PM

SEASONAL AND ANNUAL PASSES ENJOY
UNLIMITED FREE PLAY!

590 BAY ISLES ROAD | LONGBOAT KEY, FL
941.316.8367

Business Directory





Dr. Nathalia Mesa, MD
Board-Certified Family Medicine Physician
Your health, held with care

NOW ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS!
SAME-DAY APPOINTMENTS
941-251-0600

Primary Care • Wellness • Medicare Accepted
Medical Weight Management
Hydrafacial • Botox • Skin Care

Email: Hello@MesaPrimaryWellness.com
3645 Cortez Rd., W I Ste. 110, Bradenton, FL 34210

MesaPrimaryWellness.com

L♥**ved again**
Boutique
UPSCALE WOMEN'S CONSIGNMENT STORE



HIGH END CLOTHING, SHOES, AND ACCESSORIES
• JOHNNY WAS • CHANEL
• HERMES • JIMMY CHOO

4141 S. Tamiami Trail #8 • Sarasota
BESIDE TRADER JOE'S
941.702.8159



GREENWICH INTERIORS, LLC

*Creating beautiful, functional
residential and commercial spaces.*

- New construction
- Remodeling
- Project management

We bring your vision to life.

NANCY O'ROURKE, Principal
(941) 279-7500
nancy@greenwichinteriors.com
Greenwichinteriors.com

**YOU MAY BE MISSING
MEDICARE BENEFITS**

- ★ • Turning 65 Soon?
- ★ • Save on Doctor Visits
- ★ • Get Grocery Benefits

CALL NOW
941-225-8411



KENNETH ZUMBA
Licensed Medicare Specialist

FREE MEDICARE PLAN REVIEWS
Serving Sarasota and the Islands

Cortez Bait & Seafood



Fresher than Fresh!
Local Florida Seafood
Oysters • Shrimp • Clams
Fish Spread • Smoked Mullet

MON - SAT: 10 AM TO 6:30PM | SUN: 10AM TO 5PM
941.794.1547 **12110 Cortez Road West**
www.cortezbaitandseafood.com **Cortez, FL**
SEE US ON FACEBOOK



**Call for a
FREE Evaluation!**

SERVICES

- Personal Care
- Respite Care
- Alzheimer's Care
- Light Cleaning
- Med Administration
- Meal Preparation
- Errands & More

ROSA TORRES, OWNER
941-536-6372
epichomecareprovider@gmail.com

See and be Seen
ads@Lbknews.com
941.387.2200

KAREN & ANGELO POMPETTI
Two Generations of Master Barbers

Traditional & Cutting Edge Barbering
38 Years in Business



200 CENTRAL AVE. SUITE 11
ACROSS FROM WHOLE FOODS
484-889-8991 • menshaircutsarasota.com

Steff's Stuff

ANTIQUES AND TREASURES
ESTATES & CONSIGNMENTS ARRIVING DAILY

5380 GULF OF MEXICO DRIVE
IN THE CENTRE SHOPS • 941.383.1901
SteffsStuffLBK.com

Transform Your Interior
*Specializing in Window Covering
Design and Installation*



**Blinds
& Designs**
of Florida

- Blinds
- Shutters
- Drapes & More

941-360-9200

Visit our Showroom
4201 N. Washington Blvd. Sarasota
Mon-Fri 9 am to 5 pm & Sat 10 am to 2 pm
www.blindsanddesignsofflorida.com

**DESIGN
DESIGN
DESIGN
DESIGN** **2000**

*Celebrating 27 years
on the island!*

EXCELLENCE
AND EXPERIENCE
IN HAIR AND NAIL DESIGN

941-387-9807

**Welcoming the clients and
stylists after the closing of
David Gregory Salon!**

6840 GULF OF MEXICO DRIVE
AT WHITNEY BEACH PLAZA
www.design2000longboatkeyfl.com

THE FISH HOLE
ADVENTURE GOLF

18 HOLES
OPEN 9am-9pm
7 days a week
**COME PLAY
a ROUND!**

115 BRIDGE STREET
BRADENTON BEACH, FL
34217
PHONE: (941) 778-3388 www.THEFISHHOLE.com

ANTIQUE ORIENTAL RUGS.COM



FOR OVER 40 YEARS...
ALL HAND CHOSEN
ALL ONE-OF-A-KIND
BOUGHT • SOLD • APPRAISED

Visit our Sarasota Gallery
Call Robert Mosby
941.925.1025
By appointment only

Ads that work...
ads@Lbknews.com or 941.387.2200

Shore, from page 1

each with its own bathroom and its own private open-air deck, arranged in two wings, four bedrooms totaling 2,024 square feet along the north side, four more totaling 2,500 square feet along the south. Between the wings sits a 41-foot swimming pool open to the sky. On the west side, a single kitchen, a living room and a 600-square-foot study complete the residence.

What changed from the version staff rejected? The word “suites” is gone from the labels. And the open corridors connecting the wings are now drawn as an “enclosed covered walk way,” which is the load-bearing phrase of the entire submittal. The zoning code’s definition of a dwelling unit, which staff read into the record in July, requires no more than one primary kitchen and “complete internal access to all rooms in the unit.” Enclose the hallway and the test is met. The bones of the floor plan, eight en-suite rooms with private decks strung along a corridor around a pool, are unchanged. The hallway got a roof, and the suites got a new noun.

Follow the arithmetic of this project across nine months and one number never moves. The concept Shore unveiled last December carried roughly eight residential units and, in the brand’s own words, could evolve into a boutique hotel. The city answered that the site’s density supports about four units and that hotels are barred. The July filing answered back with one unit whose floor plan showed spaces “labeled as suites,” in staff’s words. The September filing answers with one unit containing eight en-suite bedrooms. Eight units became eight suites became eight bedrooms. The count survived every revision. Only the labels evolved.

Why Eight Is the Loaded Number

The number matters because of how the code defines the thing this district was written to prohibit. A hotel, under Sarasota’s zoning, is a building with six or more guest rooms rented to travelers on a daily or weekly basis. The floor now drawn above the Circle holds eight rentable-shaped rooms, each with its own bath and deck, reachable from a common corridor, sharing a pool. Nothing but the use label, and the single kitchen, separates the drawing from the definition.

That is the fear residents have articulated since December, and it deserves to be stated plainly rather than darkly implied. Nobody can rent those bedrooms tomorrow; doing so would be illegal. The concern is about the day after tomorrow. The City Commission is, at this very moment, weighing whether to define and create standards for “condo hotel” and “apartment hotel” uses, a definitional project this newspaper has covered and one that residents fear could eventually crack open a lodging pathway on commercial parcels where hotels are barred today. If that door ever opens, by text amendment, by definitional creep, by a future commission’s sympathy for a “financially struggling” landmark, the structure will already be standing, purpose-built, needing nothing but a change of paperwork. The building is the Trojan horse; the zoning fight comes later, once the horse is inside the walls.

The precedent mechanism has been named repeatedly by St. Armands Residents Association president Chris Goglia, and it bears repeating with the new floor plan in view. “If this concept is financially successful for this one developer, why won’t more and more commercial properties on St. Armands do the same thing?” he has asked. “Once zoning changes are made for this one property, they then apply to all properties.” Once you allow it, in his words, you can never take it away. A community that rejected hotels on the Circle by a 5-0 commission vote in 2022 and by lopsided margins at two public visioning sessions this year is being asked to approve, as a single-family home, a floor with the exact bone structure of the thing it rejected three times.

One more consequence hangs on the unit count. The Sarasota County School Board’s letter of exemption from school concurrency holds only if there are no changes in residential units. Eight bedrooms filed as one unit keeps the exemption intact. Any future reclassification reopens it.

The Height the City Ordered Fixed, and the Answer That Refused

The second line the city drew in July concerned height, and the resubmittal’s response is the packet’s most direct act of defiance.

Staff’s July comment was unambiguous: the elevations use the optional four feet of flood freeboard to gain building height, “however, it does not appear this is where the lowest floor is located. Please revise.” The September response revises nothing. Instead, it argues. Citing the code’s height definition, Kimley-Horn asserts that because FEMA establishes a base flood elevation of 8 feet on this site, and the code allows up to 4 feet of freeboard, height is measured from the 12-foot line, and the building, at 31 feet 11 inches above that line, sits comfortably under the 35-foot cap.

The revised drawings then show exactly what staff was objecting to. The new building height section places the ground floor slab at 3.5 feet, essentially at sidewalk grade of about 3.25 feet, which is 4.5 feet below the base flood elevation and 8.5 feet below the line from which the applicant measures the building’s height. The top of the structure sits

at 43 feet 11 inches, which is more than 40 feet of building above the sidewalk a pedestrian actually stands on. The applicant’s own cover sheet lists the proposed height, without apparent embarrassment, as “3 stories (40 ft)” in a district capped at 35.

The freeboard allowance exists for one reason, spelled out in the code definition staff quoted in July: it is extra height granted as a safety factor for elevating a structure’s lowest floor above the flood line. The bargain is height in exchange for elevation. The Shore plans take the height and skip the elevation, keeping the ground floor at grade, protected instead by floodproofing whose specifics, the response says twice, “are still in coordination and will be solidified at building permit.” The finished floor elevations themselves, the numbers on which the entire height finding turns, are likewise deferred to building permit. The city asked the applicant to stop measuring from a floor that does not exist. The applicant answered that the code lets him measure from it anyway, and that the details will follow after approval.

This is the same economic engine this newspaper identified in June. FEMA’s 50% Rule forces a gut-and-elevate once improvements cross half the buildings’ roughly \$1.2 million value, the construction cost remains listed as TBD, and the only way to recover a code-mandated cost is to build up. Every foot of height claimed from the freeboard line is a foot of third-floor value, and the third floor is the return on the whole project.

The Awning That Became a Balcony

The July comments flagged the front overhang three separate times under the code section barring new awnings, canopies and marquees from encroaching into the public right-of-way, and asked for materials compliance on “the retractable awning, planter, and overhang balcony.” The September response answers all three comments with the same sentence: the encroachment “is for a balcony not an awning, canopy, marquee, or similar feature,” projecting no more than 4 feet under Chapter 32 of the Florida Building Code. Even the comment that asked the applicant to dimension “the retractable awning” receives the reply that dimensions have been added to “the proposed balcony.” Between July and September, the awning was renamed out of existence.

The maneuver swaps the zoning code, which prohibits the encroachment, for the building code, which tolerates one. Whether the city accepts the swap is an open question, and the packet’s own engineering section supplies the counterweight, quoting the zoning code’s blunt command that every part of the public right-of-way “shall be open and unobstructed from below the ground to the sky” and requiring a dimensioned encroachment exhibit and a written justification. There is a further wrinkle: Boulevard of the Presidents is State Road 789, and the city’s traffic reviewer notes the frontage is FDOT right-of-way requiring state consultation. A 4-foot concrete overhang projecting over state right-of-way is the kind of detail a state agency can decide it cares about, as Longboat Key learned this summer when FDOT ordered an entire camera network out of its right-of-way with 60 days’ notice.

The Loading Zone That Vanished by Email

The third line from July, the code-required loading zone, no longer exists, and the paper trail explaining why is attached to the back of the resubmittal.

The city’s July 13 comment letter stated it flatly: pursuant to the code, one loading zone is required, label it on the site plan. The resubmittal’s answer is that “it was determined that a loading zone will not be required,” citing attached email correspondence. The attached email, dated Aug. 12 from Development Review Planner Devynn Glanz, reverses the requirement “after further due diligence and discussion with management,” reasoning that because the structures are being refurbished and the building’s square footage stays within the 20,000-to-50,000-square-foot threshold, the requirement “is not triggered.”

Read that reasoning twice, because it runs backwards. The existing buildings total 15,402 square feet, below the 20,000-square-foot threshold. The proposed building totals 20,644 square feet, crossing into the bracket. A project that grows into a loading-space bracket would ordinarily trigger the requirement, which is presumably why the city’s own comment letter said one was required just a month earlier. Who “management” is, and what the discussion consisted of, the email does not say.

The email does say one other thing. “On another note, today (August 12, 2026) is my last day with the City,” Glanz writes, handing the file to Senior Planner Cristian Toellner. The planner who had shepherded the project from its first submittal waived a code requirement and departed city employment in the same message.

The practical question lands on an island already at war over delivery trucks. The finished building will hold a fine-dining restaurant, a café and retail across 20,644 square feet, served by a one-way alley, with no loading space, and a site plan whose signage legend includes a “no truck” sign. Where the beer trucks, linen trucks and food-service trucks stage is now, officially, nobody’s required problem.

The Numbers That Keep Moving

Threaded through the packet are figures that shift each time they are examined. The net commercial increase was 2,264 square feet in June, recalculated by staff at 1,904 in July, and now stands at 5,242 in September, nearly tripling the original claim and driving the parking requirement from roughly seven spaces to 17. The utility demand form classifies the entire 20,644 square feet as “retail,” with the form’s lines for restaurant square footage and number of seats left blank, in a project whose centerpiece is a restaurant, and restaurant water and sewer demand runs far heavier than the retail rates used. The same form lists the project address as 30 N. Boulevard of the Presidents; the project is at 24 and 28. And the cover sheet identifies Shore Food Group LLC, the Leonards’ operating entity, as “developer/contract purchaser,” a phrase worth lingering on, since the parcels’ owner of record has been Kauffman Shore Properties LLC, the Kauffman family entity that acquired them in January for \$100 apiece. A contract purchaser is a buyer in waiting. Whether the restaurant family is now under contract to take title from the landlord family is a question the packet raises without answering.

A Resubmittal That Argues Back

The smaller items complete the portrait of a filing that negotiates with its reviewers as often as it complies. Utilities staff required the master water meter in a dedicated meter room with double garage doors; the response puts it outside, under a stairwell. Staff specified a ductile-iron replacement water main; the plans propose PVC. Staff directed that an old 2-inch galvanized water line be identified and capped if inactive; the response says its origin cannot be confirmed and “it will remain.” Engineering required 20 feet of separation between the Madison Drive crosswalk and the nearest parking space; the response declares the requirement “does not apply to this situation.” And in the packet’s one moment of unintentional comedy, staff conditioned demolition on protecting “the existing large Royal Palms along Madison Drive,” to which the response drily notes that there are no royal palms on Madison. The city wrote conditions for trees that do not exist; the applicant is measuring height from a floor that does not exist. Both sides, it seems, are capable of describing a St. Armands that isn’t there.

What Comes Next

Because the project claims no rezoning, no formal height variance and one residential unit, its path runs through another Development Review Committee round to the Planning Board, with no City Commission vote required, which is exactly why these technical documents are where the fight actually happens. In July, staff drew three lines: no stretched freeboard, no unexamined suites, no missing loading zone. Two months later, the freeboard argument has been formally refused rather than fixed, the suites have been relabeled rather than removed, and the loading zone has been dissolved by an email the public was never meant to notice.

The lines the city draws only matter if the city holds them. The September packet is the first test of whether it will, and this week’s parking negotiation, covered separately in this edition, is the second. The corner remains a gutted box, the restaurant remains beloved, and the third floor remains, as it has been since December, the most closely watched 6,508 square feet in Sarasota.

Longboat Key News
Sarasota City News

PO Box 8001
Longboat Key, FL 34228
941-387-2200
www.lbknews.com

Steve Reid, Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Associate Publisher
Melissa Reid

Sales
Lillian Sands
Steve Reid
ads@lbknews.com

Graphic Production
Dottie Rutledge

Letters to the Editor
letters@lbknews.com

UNITEDHEALTHCARE MEDICARE ADVANTAGE ALERT

YOUR MEDICARE PLAN SHOULDN'T STAND BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CARE.

Three years ago, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System and First Physicians Group made difficult concessions to remain in **UnitedHealthcare's** Medicare Advantage network and protect our patients' access to care.

But now, as we near the end of that agreement, changes to key provisions are making our continued partnership with **UnitedHealthcare** unsustainable, and **UnitedHealthcare** refuses to adequately address these concerns.

SMH cannot keep moving backward. Our community deserves fair treatment — and reliable access to the doctors, hospitals and health care our seniors know and trust.

Medicare Advantage plans have faced growing scrutiny over policies and practices that delay or deny medically necessary care. Despite efforts to address these concerns, government reports continue to raise serious questions about **UnitedHealthcare's** use of prior authorization and other restrictions that create barriers between patients and the care their doctors recommend.

SMH is fighting for **fair, sustainable terms that protect access to the doctors, hospitals, specialists, treatments and services our community depends on.**

Our agreement with **UnitedHealthcare** remains in effect through Dec. 31, 2026, **but we expect UnitedHealthcare to remove Sarasota Memorial and First Physicians Group from its Medicare Advantage network on Jan. 1, 2027.**

YOU HAVE A VOICE — AND A CHOICE.

We encourage you to review your options during Medicare Open Enrollment, Oct. 15 - Dec. 7. Before choosing a plan for 2027, check whether your specific plan will include SMH and FPG as in-network providers. Information about which Medicare Advantage plans SMH and FPG will accept as of Jan. 1, 2027 is on our website at www.smh.com/Medicare.

You may also wish to consider **Traditional/Original Medicare** and a standard **Medicare Supplement plan**. **Sarasota Memorial and FPG always accept all original Medicare and standard Medicare supplement plans.**

DON'T LET YOUR MEDICARE PLAN LIMIT WHERE YOU GET YOUR CARE.

For more information and future updates, visit smh.com/united or scan the QR code below:



This information is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to recommend or solicit enrollment in any particular health plan.