

Longboat Key News

July 31, 2026

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InsideLook



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Sarasota's Parking Revolt Boils Over as Ahearn-Koch Force a Showdown Vote

Nine speakers, a boycott, a viral video with 435,000 views and a restaurant now paying its customers' parking bills. The July 20 commission meeting turned Sarasota's expanded meter hours into a full civic crisis, and by day's end one commissioner had forced the issue onto Monday's agenda over the objections of her own colleagues and a brand-new city manager pleading for time.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

The revolt over Sarasota's expanded paid-parking program arrived at City Hall on July 20 in two waves. The first came at 9 a.m., when a procession of downtown's best-known merchants, one after another, told the City Commission that the meters now running from breakfast to midnight are strangling their businesses, driving customers

See Parking, page 12



Sarasota Launches \$8 Million Push to Underground Utilities on St. Armands & Lido Keys

Residents could see roughly \$10,000 assessments over 20 years, with the first bills targeted for November 2027.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

The utility poles of St. Armands and Lido Key are now officially on the clock.

At its July 20 meeting, the Sarasota City Commission

voted unanimously to launch the largest infrastructure initiative the city's barrier islands have seen in decades: a program to rip out every overhead electric and communications line from St. Armands Circle to the far reaches of Lido Key and bury the entire system under-

See Underground, page 14

One Page, One Signature, One Century-Old Building converge at Heart of Sarasota's Adagio Fight

City faces Aug. 5 deadline to rule on the Adagio site plan while a circuit court challenge hangs by a thread.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

The fate of one of downtown Sarasota's oldest commercial buildings may come down to a single sheet of paper.

The U.S. Garage building at 330 S. Pineapple Ave., built in 1925 as the first automobile garage in Sarasota and possibly in Florida, stands in the footprint of the Adagio, a proposed two-tower condominium project by Naples-based

See Adagio, page 15



The U.S. Garage building at 330 S. Pineapple Ave., built in 1925 as the first automobile garage in Sarasota and possibly in Florida, faces demolition as a court date nears.

How the Iran War is Shaping Life and Money on Longboat, Lido and Downtown Sarasota

The palm trees are standing. The beaches are open. And nearly everything costs more.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

For two years, the barrier islands measured trouble in storm surge. Helene and Milton tore through in the fall of 2024, the rebuild consumed 2025, and by the time the sand was pumped back onto the beaches, Longboat Key, Lido, St. Armands, Bird Key and downtown Sarasota had earned the right to expect a normal year.

Instead, the islands got a different kind of storm, one that formed 7,500 miles away and never shows up on radar. Since the United States

See War Cost, page 13

Fruitville Cottages Craft an Escape Plan

The Breakfast House has bought its own land, developers are donating cottages, commissioners are cheering from the dais — and a brand-new Sarasota Bungalow Village is taking shape at Fruitville and Tuttle.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

When we last visited the riot of painted cottages at 1899 Fruitville Road in April, the story read like an elegy. Seventeen small businesses, two grand oaks and a block of 1920s bungalows sat under contract to a Tennessee developer planning a five-story, 324-unit apart-

See Fruitville, page 11

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.

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo

As a follow up, the Building Department is coordinating with the contractor to conduct the repair and cleaning starting at 9:00 am on Thursday morning July 29th. Public Works staff will be there to support and answer any questions about the outfall pipe. If for some reason conditions are not conducive that morning, the work will be rescheduled, but all involved are making every effort to conduct this repair on Thursday morning July 29th. Thank you for your patience in this matter.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo

Thank you Helen, that is good information below, and I appreciate you making sure my statements are more accurate on this. We will continue to get a plan of action to proper resolution.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman

Thank you for following up. I do appreciate the city's attention to this matter. However, I feel I must correct some of your statements.

Specifically, regarding your statement that the situation apparently was not called out earlier because the area was in a prolonged drought and the matter probably wasn't evident, I called the city on 5/18/2026 and have pictures of the street flooded on that day, thus prompting my call. Additionally, my husband spoke to the contractors and they were pulling rubber pieces from the old valve out of the pipe at that time.

I reported this to the city. I received a call back from the city telling me that we had to wait for low tide during business hours for the city to observe. Apparently, no action was ever taken by the city after that call. The street flooded again on June 16th, according to my photos, and again last week on July 23. So, I'm not sure why you would make such a statement?

Additionally, counter to your statement As far as a tidal valve at that location is concerned, Public Works cannot install a new valve until the contractor corrects his actions; we cannot get a valve in there under this condition, nor measure for the valve (the WaStops need precise measurements to fit and work), when I spoke to Mark Richardson on July 13th, he explicitly stated that the city was just out here and took measurements for the new valve and the person who measured was out until Tuesday, July 14th, at which time the valve would be ordered. I'm not questioning your statement, Isaac, I am questioning why Mark Richardson would make such an inaccurate statement to me?

Also, regarding this statement that right now, the most important matter is for the contractor to repair the end of the outfall and clean out the pipe, which will help evacuate rainwater better, I must ask, yet again, why it is not the city's responsibility to clean out the pipe to help evacuate rainwater better? The sewer drain is blocked, please don't wait for the contractor. This is hurricane season and rain is flooding the street.

Finally, you stated the PZB team will ensure this happens quickly and effectively to avoid a potential stop work order on the contractor's work. The city must proactively and aggressively coordinate with this contractor exactly how the concrete work around the drain must be completed to accept the new valve. It has been sitting like this for months - was it never inspected during the construction process? The poor construction of the wall around the drain is completely evident and has been since May.

Please get the drain jetted out ASAP. The immediate problem is the rain and the blocked drain. The construction of

the wall and missing valve will be a much longer process and I guess we will continue to pray for no storm surges in the coming months. But opening the drain will at least allow us to drive on our street during a rain.

I don't intend to keep writing to this team, but I do feel that the facts and timeline should be stated correctly. Thank you, again, for your kind attention to this matter.

Helen Elardo
Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo

See Letters, page 4

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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 2

It looks like the contractor overbuilt the seawall in front of an outfall (limiting capacity), damaged part of the outfall pipe, and apparently left some debris in the pipe. The contractor needs to remove the hardened concrete debris and repair the face of the outfall pipe. PZB is going to hold the contractor to swiftly resolve these matters. The situation apparently was not called out earlier because the area was in a prolonged drought and the matter was probably not as evident, or evident at all; I do not believe the seawall was ready for a final inspection. As far as a tidal valve at that location is concerned, Public Works cannot install a new valve until the contractor corrects his actions; we cannot get a valve in there under this condition, nor measure for the valve (the WaStops need precise measurements to fit and work). Also, a valve will not help evacuate rainwater; the valve only helps hold tidal water back – it’s a balancing act. So, right now, the most important matter is for the contractor to repair the end of the outfall and clean out the pipe, which will help evacuate rainwater better, and the PZB team will ensure this happens quickly and effectively to avoid a potential stop work order on the contractor’s work.

As far as the other location is concerned, Public Works can check it, but that is not the kind of valve you want on this outfall. We are phasing those out. All relevant parties have been copied to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo
Seems like Public Works could shoot this out ASAP - we had too much rain today and more coming tomorrow so the backlog is a huge problem.

BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
This is a drain further down with the proper cap that is missing from the seawall in question. So there are two issues and the first can be resolved while we wait for the new cap/valve. Is this PZB or Mark Richardson?

BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo
Thank you for following up on the drainage related concerns associated with seawall construction at Longboat Dr. N. The Town’s Building Official has been in contact with the seawall contractor, who has indicated that he will be addressing impacts right away created from the recent seawall construction. Please feel free to report any additional concerns related

to construction activity in that area to the Planning, Zoning & Building Department (phone # 941-316-1966 or email.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop
Thanks for bringing this to our attention. Let us do some background work to understand the issue and we’ll update you.

Howard Tipton
Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton
This is from a very frustrated resident (full time) in the Village. They have been dealing with this issue since May. I find it hard to understand when there is a potential flooding problem caused by repairable issues that we only look at them if low tide happens between 8 and 4 Monday-Friday. This is the kind of customer service that seems poor. Can you help them? Also, why knowing the problem existed since May did they wait til the end of July to order a new valve? Let me know.

BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop
What follows is my exchange with Mark Richardson regarding the issue I mentioned. Here’s a quick summary:
- 7157 Longboat Dr N installed a new seawall
- The city (Mark) indicated that they buried/destroyed the tidal valve and the tube leading to the valve is blocked (we have no direct proof, but the pipe is plugged)
- The sewer is now blocked at that site and rain causes severe flooding (see picture attached from Thursday)
- I called on May 18th. The city told me they need to wait for low tide during business hours to check it
- I called several more times. Same story.
- When I called on July 13th, Mark Richardson called me back to say that they finally determined that they need to get a new tidal valve. And that they’d be ordering this in a few days and it will take 6-8 weeks to get it.
- I asked why they waited two full months and he claimed there was no low tide during business hours between May and July for them to evaluate! Also funny that they just happened to get to this the day before I called (or so Mark claims).
- I emailed Mark yesterday - see our exchange below!
- The drain is blocked. It needs to be jetted out. Regardless of the valve. Why are we waiting

See Letters, page 6

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Sailing Squadron Secures Future on City Island

Some projects arrive at the Sarasota City Commission trailing lawyers, protesters and overflow seating. The Youth Sailing Center arrived trailing nothing but goodwill, and it showed.

On Monday, July 20, the commission needed just 34 minutes to approve the new building on City Island and execute the lease that anchors the Sarasota Sailing Squadron to the waterfront through 2055. Both votes were unanimous. Not one member of the public rose to speak. The sharpest question of the afternoon concerned a 38-ton fire truck.

The twin approvals close out a five-year regulatory voyage and clear the final municipal hurdle for the approximately \$3 million, privately funded Youth Sailing Center at 1717 Ken Thompson Parkway, a two-story, roughly 4,230-square-foot educational facility that will replace the aging storage building and the motor home that currently serves as the youth program’s office.

What the Commission Approved

The first vote, taken as a quasi-judicial public hearing, approved the full land-use package: Site Plan 24-SP-19, Major Conditional Use 24-CU-04 and Government Zone Waiver 25-GZW-01, the last of which spares the club from paving the crushed shell lot it has parked on since 1958. The motion came from Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich, was seconded by Commissioner Kyle Battie, and passed 5-0 with the conditions in the staff report.

The second vote, five minutes later, authorized Mayor Debbie Trice and City Auditor and Clerk Shayla Griggs to execute the Eighth Amendment and Restated Lease Agreement between the city and Sarasota Sailing Squadron, Inc. That motion came from Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch, was seconded by Ohlrich, and also passed unanimously.

With the deferral of the day’s only other quasi-judicial item, the sailing hearing had the afternoon to itself. It hardly needed it.

A Dais Full of Sailors

Before the hearing could begin, the required ex parte disclosures revealed just how deep this project’s roots run at City Hall.

Ohlrich disclosed a personal history with the site itself: “I used to be a member of the Sailing Squadron,” she told City Attorney Joe Polzak, affirming she could remain impartial. Commissioner Liz Alpert recalled attending an event at the Squadron around 2018, during her first turn as mayor, when members walked her through their hopes for a youth building. “I’m aware of them wanting to do this for a long time,” she said. Ahearn-Koch disclosed site visits both this cycle and when the concept first came before the commission, and Battie had visited during the earlier round as well.

In other words, before a word of testimony was spoken, four of the five commissioners had already walked the shell lot at the end of Ken Thompson Parkway.

The Applicant’s Case: Scholarships, Spectrum Sailing and a Big Miss

Planning consultant Joel Freedman of Freedman Consulting and Development led the applicant’s team, joined by architect Derek Pirozzi of PS Design Workshop, engineer Bobbi Claybrooke of AM Engineering and Sarasota Youth Sailing board president Travis Yates, whom Freedman invited to open with the program’s story.

Yates, who has served six years on the board and a little over two as president, traced the youth program to its founding in the 1970s and its incorporation as a 501(c)(3) in 1980, a timeline that produced the hearing’s biggest laugh when he glanced toward the dais and noted, “Our vice mayor could have been there as a youth, easily.”

The substance of his pitch was access. “25 to 30 percent of our students are there on scholarship,” Yates told commissioners. “We aim to extend that.” The program serves more than 400 students a year, high school age and below, through teen programs, an advanced competitive track and community outreach partnerships including Spectrum Sailing, which brings sailing to children on the autism spectrum.

Yates also planted a seed for the future, telling commissioners he sees untapped potential in connecting the program to the city’s own recreation offerings. “There is a big miss right now for us to access the city summer programs,” he said, describing his hope to “provide more opportunity for kids to get out in the water in this lovely bay at an early age so they get bonded with the city, bonded with the environment and hopefully become great citizens of our county, state and city.”

“I Still Love This Building”

Pirozzi kept his design presentation brief, but the enthusiasm in the room needed no slides. “I still love this building,” Freedman volunteered as he handed off to his architect, later adding, “Personally, I think this is one of the best buildings I’ve seen. It’s still low scale.”

The new structure rises on the footprint of the existing building slated for demolition, with boat and equipment storage on the easily accessed ground floor and offices, meeting rooms and mixed-use space above. The design, Pirozzi noted, has already collected two American Institute of Architects awards before a shovel has turned, “something that we can all be proud of.”

Its signature roofs, long a topic of conversation through the review process, are shaped to throw ample shade and harvest rainwater, which is collected for washing salt off the boats. Solar panels top the structure. And for anyone worried that the sculptural form implies fragility, Pirozzi offered reassurance: the building “is actually a steel structure, very rigid,” clad in composite wood materials that give it its look, engineered to meet all current hurricane and flood standards.

Trice, who otherwise let the presentation speak for itself, had one question and one verdict. “Beautiful building. I applaud you,” she said, before asking whether the second floor is ADA accessible. Told there is an elevator, the mayor allowed herself a dry aside about coastal reality: “Which if the area gets flooded may be a problem, but we’ll keep our fingers crossed.”

The Shell Lot and the 38-Ton Fire Truck

The one genuinely contested question of the entire five-year process, whether the club must pave its historic crushed shell lot, resolved into the afternoon’s most memorable condition of approval.

Freedman was blunt about the stakes. Without the waiver, the cost of paving and its cascading design consequences “will probably make this project not feasible and create tremendous design issues out there,” he said. Claybrooke explained that the site’s stormwater strategy depends on the opposite approach: “One of the main ways we’re addressing a lot of the stormwater issues is by trying to minimize the impervious area. We do not exceed the existing

thresholds that were already on site.” Elevations are being held at existing levels, she added, and rooftop runoff will be captured and reused for boat wash-downs.

City Planner Camden Jenkins, presenting the staff recommendation, agreed on both counts, telling commissioners that paving the lot with asphalt “not only could arguably decrease the perviousness of the property, but also creates an expense that could potentially limit the applicant’s ability to succeed in this project.”

The safeguard, Jenkins explained, came from a conversation between city staff and the Sarasota County fire departments, who blessed the shell surface with one ironclad string attached, written directly into the conditions of approval: “The roadway must be able to support a 38-ton fire truck.” If any inspection ever finds the crushed shell broken down or washed away, the club must restore the surface to fire-code compliance at its own expense.

The Amusement Park That Wasn’t

Freedman’s recap of the project’s community outreach doubled as a reminder of how quiet this file has been, with one strange exception. The lone attendee at the April 2024 community workshop, he recalled, showed up not because of the sailing center but because of a rumored amusement park on City Island. “He wanted to make sure we weren’t in favor of that,” Freedman said. “He didn’t have any problems with the project.” The second workshop, in August 2025, drew no one at all.

The numbers backed up the serenity: seven parking spaces required, seven provided; a 30-foot waterfront setback met; a traffic impact deemed de minimis; and, as Freedman put it, “We’re not touching one tree.”

Ohlrich Reads the Fine Print

If the hearing had a working skeptic, it was Ohlrich, though her skepticism ran entirely toward procedural precision. The vice mayor pressed Jenkins to read every condition of approval into the record, then caught what appeared to be a missing condition on page 30 of the 153-page packet.

The exchange prompted a clarification from the city attorney’s office: the conditional use resolution, with its site plan condition, had already been approved by the Planning Board, meaning the commission was technically affirming it, while the G-Zone waiver resolution, carrying the fire truck condition, required the commission’s own formal approval. Satisfied that all three conditions were accounted for, Ohlrich moved approval minutes later.

Ahearn-Koch added a final statement for the quasi-judicial record before the vote: “I read the materials and find that this does comply with all the standards for review.”

Five Minutes Later, a Lease to 2055

The lease item that followed was, by design, anticlimactic. Julie Ryan of the city’s Economic Development and Real Estate office explained that the Eighth Amendment attaches the newly approved site plan to the lease as Exhibit C, while the restatement sweeps the 2010 agreement and its seven prior amendments into a single clean document, stripping outdated language and clarifying the rules for new construction.

“None of the terms or conditions changed,” Ryan assured commissioners. “They still have the same lease term, same lease revenue.”

That term runs to November 28, 2055. The revenue includes the lease’s signature fiscal mechanism: non-resident members must be charged base membership and initiation fees 50 percent higher than city residents, with the differential remitted to the city quarterly. The club also carries every cost of occupying the island, from taxes and insurance to grounds maintenance, and every improvement built on the leasehold ultimately becomes city property.

Ahearn-Koch Checks the City’s Homework

Before the lease vote, Ahearn-Koch put the city’s own oversight under the lamp, walking Ryan through the document page by page. Does the city actually conduct the periodic compliance reviews the lease authorizes? “We do,” Ryan answered. “We get an annual report as well as quarterly reports to see what the activity is.” Does the city see the actual membership and initiation fee schedules behind the differential? Yes, Ryan said, noting, “We do get 50 percent of the non-Sarasota resident fee,” though she did not have the figures at hand. “I would be interested in those numbers,” Ahearn-Koch replied.

The commissioner confirmed that any sublease must clear City Attorney review before the City Manager signs off, and learned the Squadron’s annual financial disclosure, due each year by July 30, is expected within weeks of the club closing its books July 31. She even flagged two clerical errors for correction, a missing street address in the notices section and a missing item in a list, before moving approval of the lease itself.

Loose Ends: A Radio Tower and a Question About Shell

The sailing items produced two ripples that outlasted the votes, both surfacing in Ahearn-Koch’s remarks at the end of the meeting.

The first was the radio tower standing on a parcel carved out of the leasehold, which caught her eye during her site visit. “I was really taken aback by the radio tower that’s out there,” she said. “I would love to see inspections that have been done on it to make sure that it’s in good shape and it has been inspected,” she added, inviting staff to take a look at the structure’s condition and history.

The second was a policy idea born directly from the afternoon’s waiver: if crushed shell works on City Island, why should applicants have to fight for special permission to use it? Recalling a city code requirement that forced asphalt on the airport’s new cell phone lots when a permeable surface might have served, she suggested the commission consider identifying situations where shell and other permeable surfaces could be allowed outright. “The idea being to not encourage asphalt, but to encourage other permeable surfaces when it makes sense to allow it,” she said, asking staff to bring the concept back for discussion.

What Happens Next

With the land-use approvals in hand and the lease executed, the Squadron and Sarasota Youth Sailing move into permitting and the final stretch of a private capital campaign, part of a broader investment plan estimated at roughly \$4.1 million that also includes replacing the shoreline wave fence destroyed in the 2024 hurricane season. Construction of the center is expected to take 12 to 18 months once fundraising targets are met, with not a dollar drawn from city coffers.

For the more than 400 children a year who learn to sail off the northern tip of City Island, the practical translation is simpler than any of it. The program that has taught three generations of Sarasota and Longboat Key kids to read the wind now has its ground secured to mid-century, its building approved and applauded from the dais, and nothing left between it and a real roof but fundraising and permits. As Monday’s hearing made clear, this is one project the entire city seems content to watch sail through.

EditorLetters

Letters, from page 4

for the inept contractor who caused this problem to fix it?

- The city needs to jet out the drain asap, regardless of any other actions.
- We've been here 6 years and the street has not flooded like this from rain ever.
- Please have a look; any help or guidance would be most appreciated!

Helen Elardo
Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Parks and Recreation Director Mark Richardson

Thank you for responding, Mark. So I'm hearing that the street is flooding into our drive-ways and yards and potentially into our homes as we near the peak of hurricane season and we are all just sitting and waiting for the whim of a contractor to fix the damage they caused? Are you telling me that the city can't intervene and require that this be rectified immediately? Or alternatively the city can't hire a contractor to fix this drain damage caused by the seawall and bill the homeowner?

This has been known for months now. This response does not sound reasonable on any level.

Helen Elardo
Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Helen Elardo

We are still waiting on the seawall contractor to remove the excess cement, seawall panel, damaged tidal valve and jet the pipe. This is being handled by the PZB Department. I have reached out to PZB to check to see if they have an estimated time for their work.

Please be aware that tidal valves are installed to hopefully keep salt water from backing up

onto the roads but are not for alleviating rainwater from the road. During high tides and heavy rainfall, the draining process will always be much slower as the tides do not allow the valves to open as much.

Mark Richardson
Streets, Facilities, Parks & Recreation Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Drive North

To: Longboat Key Parks and Recreation Director Mark Richardson

Where is the town with the new drain valve for Longboat Drive North? Rain last night caused major flooding all the way up driveways. This is unacceptable as hurricane season intensifies. I called on this months ago, as you are aware. Please provide an update and ETA for the fix.

Hele Elardo
Longboat Key

FEMA

To: Florida League of Cities Allison Payne

We have been monitoring the FEMA issues. LBK is owed over \$24 million in reimbursements from past hurricanes with no funds yet received. Below is a review of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. I strongly believe this must be a major focus on the FL League of Cities priorities next year.

This was monitored by our lobbyist - Adam Cross

Last week, the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on poten-tial FEMA reforms that may be of interest. The bottom line is that both parties are dissatisfied

See Letters, page 7



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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 6

with FEMA's performance in delivering aid to communities, and there is a bipartisan desire for reforms that would help communities like yours prepare for (and respond to) disasters like hurricanes.

There is little optimism that the FEMA Act will pass this session, but it is good news that there is bipartisan agreement that the difficulties the town has been experiencing originate at the federal level and therefore need to be resolved soon. Here is a quick summary of the hearing and some of the discussions regarding FEMA and the need to protect communities from disasters.

Executive Summary:

Support for H.R. 9497 - FEMA Act of 2025 amongst members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee was strong on both sides of the aisle. If enacted, the FEMA Act would reestablish FEMA as an independent, cabinet-level agency and make changes to the Public Assistance, Individual Assistance, and mitigation programs. Republicans and Democrats alike feel that this act provides necessary reforms for FEMA that would allow the agency to work toward becoming more effective for the nation and its citizens. The most commonly talked about reforms focused on:

- Removing FEMA from DHS
- Cutting back regulations and laws that cause lengthy approval periods and prevent quick aid from being provided to communities under distress
- Giving local governments the ability to decide how disaster relief is spent and what areas within their communities need assistance to best help their constituents

Republicans tended to push the conversation towards the necessity of cutting back red tape to allow local governments and states to make decisions regarding disaster recovery.

Democrats focused on the importance of removing FEMA from DHS to allow aid to be distributed more quickly without waiting for DHS approval.

Professional witnesses who appeared in front of the committee had similar views on the act and FEMA.

Former FEMA Administrator Fugate testified that he felt the regulations caused unnecessary hardship for FEMA to adequately help support communities.

NACo Representative Sheng testified on the importance of building intergovernmental relations to help local governments provide effective aid while maintaining backing from the federal level.

NRECA CEO Matheson spoke about how he believes the FEMA Act will increase agency efficiency and provide necessary reforms.

NAMIC VP Waller focused on the concept that prioritizing preparedness for disasters will protect families from losing money and their homes.

Opening Statements:

Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO): In his opening statement, Chairman Graves talked about how he believes FEMA is broken and continues to be swallowed up by red tape and bureaucracy that control the agency. He said that focusing on preparedness tactics is a method that

works to speed up the overall process and urged his colleagues to pass the FEMA Act.

Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-WA): In his opening statement, Larsen talked about how he believes that FEMA did not have the authority that they needed to help communities post-disaster in the best way possible. He said that FEMA needs to facilitate investment in damage prevention and make it an independent agency again.

Former FEMA Administrator Fugate (Obama):In his opening statement, Fugate spoke on his experience being the former FEMA administrator under the Obama administration. He discussed how many existing regulations make it hard for FEMA to properly help communities, such as OMB's ruling on double assistance. This prevented FEMA from providing aid to many individuals, as they may have received assistance from insurance and were unable to provide necessary aid.

National Association of Counties Representative Sheng: In her opening statement, Sheng spoke about how she feels the FEMA Act will provide a bipartisan framework to modernize the nation's disaster response and recovery system. Additionally, she talked about how streamlining the review process and building strong intergovernmental relations are two key steps to increasing response times and fixing FEMA.

National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association CEO Matheson: In his opening statement, Matheson talked about how he believes the FEMA Act will make the agency more effective. He brought up various reasons as to why he feels that way, including how it will better account for localized but costly rural damage and reduce the time required to receive public assistance.

National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies VP Waller: In his opening statement, Waller talks about how he believes the FEMA Act is a step in the right direction. He feels that a reworked FEMA should prioritize preparedness, building, and rebuilding more resiliency, including common sense.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce VP Chaitovitz: In his opening statement, Chaitovitz began by arguing that preparedness is a pro-growth framework, stating, "we can pay less before disasters happen, or we can pay far more after they do." Furthermore, he spoke about how resilience is tied to housing affordability and familial wealth, and that preserving affordable housing protects families from losing money.

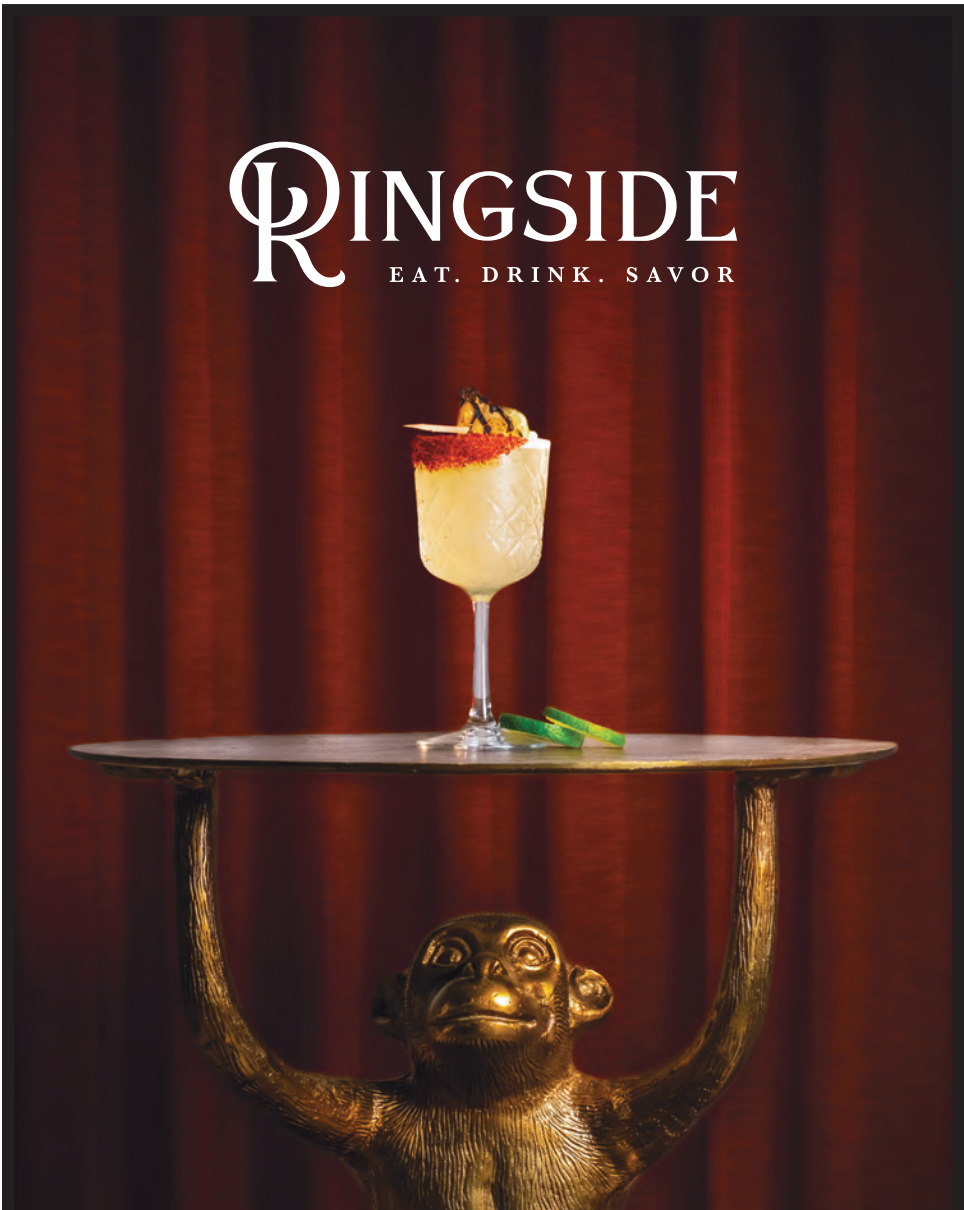
BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Bay Isles question

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Steve Branham

I hope you and Susan are doing well. I wanted to introduce you to my new neighbor, Tim Bello, who recently purchased in the Harbor section of Bay Isles. Tim is working through the process of removing and replacing the pilings on his dock, as well as removing his boat lift to

See Letters, page 8



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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 7

accommodate his boat.

I mentioned to Tim that you and Susan have been neighbors with my parents, Bill and Cathy Bishop, for many years, and that I work with you all on the Longboat Key Garden Club.

Tim, Steve is our LBK Town Commissioner and retired from the United States Coast Guard, as the Commander of the Seventh Coast Guard District. Steve, I thought you might be able to offer Tim some guidance or point him in the right direction, so I wanted to introduce you both. I'll leave it to the two of you to find a convenient time to connect.

Jen Shimek
Longboat Key

Records request

To: Sarasota City Clerk Shayla Griggs

I'm aware that you can only respond when staff pass the information back to you. That said it doesn't take a genius to figure out that someone is sitting on a simple request which obstructs Florida sunshine law. I asked for a total of the new parking enforcement vehicles, their cost, and when they were purchased. An absolutely simple request and one that would take maybe 5 minutes to answer.

The lack of response which is not my typical experience with your office suggests someone doesn't want me to have the information. That though isn't an option. If I don't get what I asked for by close of business Thursday July 30th I'll have no choice but to consider my options.

Martin Hyde
Sarasota

Records request

To: Martin Hyde

Thank you Mr. Hyde. My staff is currently waiting on response from corresponding departments. Once we receive those records we will get them to you. Thank you.

Shayla Griggs
City Auditor and Clerk
City of Sarasota

You are likely in violation of Florida Law

To: Sarasota City Commission

You are likely in violation of Florida Law and I am seeking an investigation and fines. Years of local government sanctioned unbridled, poorly planned at often lightly regulated growth without consideration of how most of the Nation gets from home to business has resulted in densely populated cities with heavily limited parking for the vehicles that deliver customers to business. This was at best poor planning by government and perhaps at worse political corruption. Tell all public parking facilities government owned or privately run they must obey the State Law or face legal consequences.

David R. Kraner
Sarasota

Hawk light going on and off

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

This is Virginia Stephens in Jefferson Center. I live in an apartment facing North and look at the hawk light (crossing light) for the crosswalk that goes from the northeast corner of 10th and Tamiami Trail to the northwest corner by the boat ramp. It keeps going off when no one

is crossing, at all hours of the day and night. I checked with Jude Levy to see if she thought you might be able to help address this issue with FDOT, and she said she thought you might.

I see cars going through it when it is double red now, and am concerned that someone may get hit when they are actually crossing.

Do you have any connections at FDOT with someone who may be able to get this corrected?

Virginia Stephens
Sarasota

Hawk light going on and off

To: Virginia Stephens

Thanks for the email, and always feel free to contact me about anything at any time. The Hawk signals at 10th and 14th that seem to break at the first strong wind and sprinkle that hits, so thank you for the email. This is under the authority of FDOT but I've copied the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, and Public Works Director to communicate with FDOT.

Jen Ahearn-Koch
City Commissioner
City of Sarasota

Business Owners' Issues with Expanded Hours/Parking

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

See business owner suggestion regarding providing explanatory publicity re: parking, based on my reply to her initial comments.

Debbie Trice
Mayor
City of Sarasota

Business Owners' Issues with Expanded Hours/Parking

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice

Thank you for your explanation. I wish that you would've said that in your comments at the meeting because it would've made much more sense. Maybe you could reiterate that to the business owners. And also put it in the Newspaper. That would be really helpful. Also, you could help the business owners by putting together a summary of what you have said here and giving that to all of the business owners, so they can post it in their restaurants or their shops so customers would understand. Because certainly I didn't understand.

Kathy Kelley
Sarasota

Business Owners' Issues with Expanded Hours/Parking

To: Kathy Kelley

Thank you, Ms. Kelley, for your thoughts. Many people don't realize that someone has to pay for the parking. Right now, City taxpayers are making up the difference between the expense of providing and maintaining City parking and the revenue generated by parking fees and fines. The objective of the changes we implemented recently was to place the all costs on people who use the parking spaces, and not require City taxpayers (some of whom don't drive or even own cars) to subsidize the parking.

Quite a few complaints have come from people who say they will go to UTC to shop and dine rather than pay to park in the City. What they don't realize is that the businesses in UTC pay fees to UTC Management — and those fees include the expense of parking. As a result, the

See Letters, page 9

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KeyRealEstate

Bird Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key latest sales

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath			Days On Market	Sale Price
440 MEADOW LARK DR	6,880	\$11,300,000	4	5	2	201	\$10,600,000
316 W ROYAL FLAMINGO DR	4,070	\$4,975,000	3	3	1	71	\$4,350,000
33 S PALM AVE Unit#1601	3,407	\$3,950,000	3	3	1	427	\$3,600,000
340 S PALM AVE Unit#63	2,437	\$2,125,000	2	2	1	0	\$2,125,000
906 BLVD OF THE ARTS Unit#3	1,904	\$2,000,000	3	3	1	0	\$2,000,000
301 QUAY COMMONS Unit#1210	2,184	\$1,850,000	3	3	0	77	\$1,850,000
800 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#1603	2,471	\$1,795,000	2	3	1	191	\$1,750,000
153 N ADAMS DR	1,500	\$1,197,000	3	2	1	273	\$1,100,000
730 GOODRICH AVE	1,368	\$825,000	2	2	1	0	\$825,000
235 COCOANUT AVE Unit#113C	2,310	\$799,000	3	4	1	112	\$710,000
435 S GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#1103	1,424	\$635,000	2	2	0	455	\$600,000
1350 MAIN ST Unit#502	705	\$462,000	1	1	0	124	\$420,000
612 JUAN ANASCO DR	9,243	\$22,500,000	6	7	2	433	\$18,990,000
510 PUTTER LN	2,253	\$2,875,000	3	2	0	305	\$2,600,000
2425 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#14E	1,470	\$1,675,000	2	2	0	55	\$1,600,625
3060 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#155	2,250	\$1,145,000	3	3	1	71	\$1,080,000
3040 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#234	2,550	\$1,150,000	3	3	1	184	\$1,000,000
1211 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#109	1,827	\$975,000	2	2	0	37	\$900,000
528 FOREST WAY	1,440	\$585,000	2	2	1	160	\$575,000
4390 EXETER DR Unit#206	1,152	\$529,000	2	2	0	212	\$525,000
6700 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#117	1,449	\$550,000	2	2	0	86	\$490,000
669 SPANISH DR N Unit#21	1,087	\$335,000	2	2	0	271	\$300,000



612 JUAN ANASCO DR

Letters, from page 8

cost of parking is reflected in the prices charged at UTC — but the customer/diner is unaware. Downtown restaurants may find that offering rebates is good marketing — especially \$2 or \$3 on a \$100+ meal.
Debbie Trice
Mayor
City of Sarasota

Business Owners’ Issues with Expanded Hours/Parking

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice
Why won’t commissioners listen to the dilemma the business owners are finding themselves in with the expanded parking hours? Many businesses are losing customers and two restaurants are giving ‘give-backs’ to their customers to defray the cost of that parking. That is Awful...and Cheesy! What’s going on?
And as the Mayor, I was Totally floored by your comments about owners giving ‘Rebates’ to their customers!! You go into business to Make money; not to have to figure out ways to ‘bribe’ your customers to stay. Why didn’t you just tell the commissioners to rethink this issue, and give their constituents what they Need?? Switch the hours back to how they were. (I thought your comments were actually heartless.)
Kathleen Kelley
Sarasota

Proposed Gas Line Flags

To: Sarasota City Building Official Larry Murphy
What are these non English speaking ass hats doing in my front yard with shovels? I’m away until Wednesday evening. Apparently there was a robbery across the street from us last evening. Why are there dudes in orange vests in my front yard with shovels! I was told numerous times that no ground would be broken related to the gas line install on our street. I tried to address this proactively and in advance with my email on May 5. What the hell is going on here? I need someone to call me at (312) 735-9559. This shit show of a circus on our street needs to be addressed by an adult who represents the city.

Robert Sheesley
Sarasota

Proposed Gas Line Flags

To: Sarasota City Building Official Larry Murphy
More stupidity happening here. The contractor Nautilus should be fined for creating this. One of the concrete Forman just told me the GC is trying to put 50 lbs. of crap in a 10 lb. bag. So, even he sees the problem on this street.
Robert Sheesley
Sarasota

Proposed Gas Line Flags

To: Sarasota City Building Official Larry Murphy
Hello Larry. I spoke with Mike Taylor in mid May and also received a voice message from Ed Brower around the same time explaining this process. At the time I was satisfied with our discussion and my understanding of the process.
We were away from our Sarasota home from May 25 until last Tuesday, July 14. The circus (nicer word for shit show) continues on our street with the ongoing build of the Indian Beach Taj Mahal at the end of Indian Beach Circle. The construction crews seem to think it’s okay to make the front of our home their work area. See pictures attached. Who can I address this with? My lawn guy is coming today to cut our lawn this afternoon. I’m going to ask the drivers of all of these vehicles to move. I have had to take time out of my work day to walk down to the end of the street, conduct an investigation of who I need to talk with about having vehicles moved. And now I’m having to do it again. My billable rate per hour is \$300. Hopefully they will comply with my request. As for the new pretty orange flags now in my yard (see picture attached) who is coming here to remove them (and the white ones) so my lawn guy can properly cut our lawn this afternoon? There was a much better way of joining the neighborhood.
Robert Sheesley
Sarasota

OnPatrol



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

July 24 Alarm

12:33 a.m.
Officer Troyer was dispatched to Firehouse Lane in reference to a burglary alarm with living room motion. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer observed an upstairs light on inside of the residence. Officer Troyer knocked on the front door but did not receive an answer. Officer Troyer also observed the house was for sale as there was listing information visible through front door glass. Officer Troyer walked around the property, checking for doors and windows. Officer Troyer located an unlocked garage door. Upon entering the garage, Officer Troyer observed an interior door unlocked, which led to the inside residence backed out and held the perimeter until backup arrived. Sgt. Mathis arrived and officers cleared the residence. Officer Troyer was able to secure the unlocked the garage door also and attempted to contact the homeowner by phone but did not receive an answer.



taking on water. The caller reported they had one occupant from the vessel on board their boat but the captain was still on the sailboat. Officer Troyer asked Sgt. Butler if he could assist and the Sarasota Police Department supervisor also requested Longboat Key assistance as they did not appear to have an immediate marine unit available. Officer Troyer responded with the scene and was unable to make contact with anyone on board due to not having a capable vessel to get int he shallow area where the vessel was located. Sarasota Police Marine units also arrived on scene and were able to get approximately 20 away, but not able to make contact with anyone. Police units confirmed the vessel was not capsized, but not able to make contact with anyone. Sarasota police

units confirmed the vessel was not capsized but was grounded and kept swaying back and forth. Eventually phone contact was made with the captain of the vessel who did not wish to leave the vessel. When Officer Troyer arrived on scene, he made an attempt to get to the vessel, however, the breakers were too strong to get through into the vessel. Officer Troyer observed the sailboat appeared to be beached on the keel and was taking breakers on the starboard side almost causing a capsize. Officer Troyer met with Officer Dixon and met with land units to come up with a better plan and speak to the captain. Officer Dixon and Officer Troyer came up with a plan to approach the vessel as the breakers coming into Big Pass were the biggest obstacle along with water depth as the area was shoaled out. Officer Troyer requested Air 1 to assist with providing spotlight over the vessel to guide us as well. Officer Dixon and Officer Troyer were able to approach the vessel, however the breakers became too much for the patrol vessel, therefore Officer Troyer hung back and let Officer Dixon approach due to having a due to having a larger vessel. Officer Dixon was able to get the captain off the vessel and he safely made it to the Sarasota Police vessel. Officer Dixon transported the man back to land and the vessel was left anchored in the pass. Case clear.

July 25 Incident

2:12 a.m.
Sgt. Mathis by cell phone in regard to several people on the beach at Gulfside Beach access and requested backup. Upon his arrival, Sgt. Mathis spoke to several men at the beach access in regards to the reason they were present after 11 p.m. Sgt. Mathis observed two piles of clothes, two cell phones, a watch and some empty bottles. During the conversation, a white male approached from the south wearing only dark colored shorts. The man said he ran with several other people when he saw the police car approach the beach access. The man also said he did not know the other people, had arrived via an uber and showed up to relax and pray. During the conversation, the man made several conflicting statements as to who owned the other clothes and the keys found in the pile. After repeated request clarification, the man said he did not know the other people and was trying to claim the keys to help out the driver. The man was issued a town ordinance citation for being on the beach after 11 p.m. and was allowed to depart. Sgt. Mathis collected the abandoned property which consisted of jeans, cell phone, keys, pair of socks, white tennis shoes, underwear and a t-shirt. During his investigation, a black Honda Accord was located in the church parking lot. The vehicle had a Florida license plate, and while canvassing the area, the owner located his vehicle. The man was issued a violation for being on the beach after 11 p.m. Case clear.

July 26 Persons

11:05 p.m.
Officer Castro was dispatched to Bogey Lane in reference to a report of suspicious persons. The property owner at the address and reported to the police that a man and woman were observed walking behind the house. Upon arrival, Officer Castro was unable to locate anyone in the area. Officer Castro contacted the property owner by phone and he said that he was out of town but had been alerted by his security cameras to suspicious activity. He stated that the video showed the subjects walking behind his residence near the seawall, then toward his neighbor's backyard. The owner shared the video footage with Officer Castro. The video depicted what appeared to be a young adult white man and woman. The man was wearing a red t-shirt and the woman was wearing a black tank top. The video did not provide a clear image of their faces. The subjects appeared in the video for approximately 25 seconds before leaving the area. The video was attached to this report. A thorough canvass of the entire neighborhood was conducted with negative results. Case clear.

July 28 Marine rescue

8:13 p.m.
Officer Troyer while on marine patrol in Big Pass, overheard on the radio the Sarasota Police Department was dispatched to a marine rescue in the area. A sailboat was capsized and

July 29 Vehicle

3:13 a.m.
Officer Troyer while on patrol observed a silver Nissan SUV traveling southbound onto Longboat Key. Shortly after, Officer Troyer pulled out onto Gulf of Mexico Drive simply traveling southbound. Officer Troyer eventually caught up to the vehicle as they appeared to be driving slowly. Once Officer Troyer caught up to the vehicle, the vehicle quickly made a right turn into an address at the 6200 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. Officer Troyer drove past the address and made a U-turn to see what the driver was possibly doing. Officer Troyer observed the vehicle pulled up to a closed gate. The vehicle was off and all lights to the vehicle were turned off. Officer Troyer also observed the vehicle was not occupied and there were open containers of twisted tea alcoholic beverages and bottles of sealed corona alcoholic beverages int eh vehicle. Officer Troyer rung the gate phone and spoke with the homeowner. The homeowner told Officer Troyer she was not expecting anyone and no one had permission to be on the property. The homeowner gave permission to the officer to check the property. Officer Troyer canvassed the property for a while but did not locate anyone. As Officer Troyer was walking past the gate entrance on the property, observed a Hispanic female walking out of the bushes on the property with her hands in the air. Officer Troyer detained her for further investigation. Officer Troyer read her Miranda rights and said she had been at a restaurant drinking and met a guy who was the driver of the vehicle. The driver was giving her a ride home to her house in Sarasota and they decided to go for a drive. The woman said the driver told her there was a cop behind them so he pulled into the driveway. Once in the driveway, the woman told the driver not to be there because it was suspicious. The driver then told her to run and to follow him. the woman said she did not follow him because she was fearful because her kids were at their father's house and he would eventually be leaving. Officer Troyer learned she had an active warrant for her arrest out of Hillsborough County for DUI. Officer Troyer contacted the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office and confirmed the active warrant for her arrest. Officer Troyer contacted the homeowner and asked if she wished to pursue criminal charges against the woman for trespassing, however the homeowner refused and only wished for her to be warned. Based on investigation, Officer Troyer found probable cause for Loitering and Prowling and was arrested and transported to the Manatee County Jail. Due to the driver not being able to be located and the vehicle in a private driveway, the vehicle was towed. Upon returning later, Officer Troyer observed a man appearing to be registered owner of the vehicle walking northbound on the sidewalk wearing a black shirt and flowery shorts. Officer Troyer pulled over and made contact with the man. Officer Troyer called the man and he turned around. Officer Troyer asked the man why he was walking and where his vehicle was. The man said he was walking on the beach and his girl took his car for a spin. Officer Troyer asked him why he ran which he said he did not run. The man said he was walking on the beach and his girl was taking his car for a spin again. The man repeated this statement multiple times and he was sweating. Officer Troyer informed him his car was impounded and his girl was arrested. Based on the circumstances, Officer Troyer did not have probable cause to arrest the man. Case clear.

Fishing

9:00 p.m.
Officer Castro while on patrol in Russel Street was approached by a juvenile who reported witnessing two unidentified men fishing behind an unoccupied lot. The juvenile subsequently guided the man to the location. Upon arrival at the address, Officer Castro confirmed the presence of two adult men actively fishing behind the vacant lot. Officer Castro initiated contact with the individuals. Both people said they were unaware fishing was prohibited in the area. A routine warrant check was conducted on both subjects yielding negative results. The individuals were formally advised of the legal implications and potential consequences associated with entering private property, particularly when it constitutes an active or designated construction site. At the time of contact, the parcel in question was devoid of construction equipment, building materials or any standing structure. Both individuals departed the premises voluntarily and without further incident following the advertisement. Case clear.

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Whitney Beach Plaza

6854 Gulf of Mexico Drive | Longboat Key, FL







Fruitville, from page 1

ment complex with a six-level parking garage. No rezoning required. No public vote. No obvious way out.

Three months later, the tenants of that block walked into Sarasota City Hall and delivered an update nobody saw coming: they are not simply mourning the block. They are moving it.

The Announcement at City Hall

Tammy Hauser, owner of Discover Sarasota Tours, stepped to the podium at the July 20 City Commission meeting speaking not just for herself but, as she told commissioners, for “the other four businesses at the 1899 Fruitville location, which is Siegfried’s German Restaurant, The Breakfast House, Cookie Cottage, and The Artful Giraffe.”

Then came the headline.

“We’re moving forward with our plans to create the Sarasota Bungalow Village a mile east at Fruitville and Tuttle Road,” Hauser announced.

The concept is as audacious as it is charming: rather than watch the historic cottages fall to the wrecking ball, the businesses intend to physically relocate them — jack them up, roll them down Fruitville Road and cluster them into a new village where the pancakes, the biergarten, the trolley tours and the art gallery can carry on together.

Cottages Coming Out of the Woodwork

What began as a survival plan has started attracting donations of an unusual kind: entire houses.

“People are coming out of the woodwork and wanting to donate cottages to us that are part of another development, which is exciting,” Hauser told the commission.

One of those cottages sits in the Rosemary District, on land slated for a new auto club project. Rather than raze it, the developer offered it up — and then some.

“The developer has said we can have the cottage and he’ll even contribute the cost of the demolition towards our moving of the cottage,” Hauser said. “And it’s a really nice cottage from the 1920s. That’s exciting.”

In other words, the money a developer would have spent tearing a historic house down is instead being redirected to hauling it to safety. It is the kind of arithmetic that almost never happens in Florida real estate — demolition budgets converted into preservation budgets, one bungalow at a time.

A Breakthrough With the Fruitville Developer

Perhaps the most consequential news Hauser delivered was about the developer holding the fate of the 1899 Fruitville block itself. After months of uncertainty, the two sides have finally connected.

“We have finally spoken to the developer. He was gracious enough to contact with us,” Hauser said. “He has agreed to sell us our current cottages once the development starts.”

Then she made the ask, right there in open session.

“We are trying to negotiate that he might also consider doing what the other generous developers have done and help us with the costs that are going to cost him to demolish it, certainly with the asbestos abatement and all the other things involved with that,” she said. “If you would consider giving us that money that we can use towards moving those cottages.”

It was a public invitation, delivered with the developer certainly listening: match the Rosemary District’s gesture. Put your demolition dollars toward relocation instead.

The Fundraising Push Begins

Moving houses is not cheap, and the village effort now has a price tag and a public campaign. Hauser told commissioners the group’s website had just launched — SarasotaBungalowVillage.com, designed by Tess Craig at The Artful Giraffe — with a QR code for donations in the works.

She was candid about the fine print.

“We are not a nonprofit,” Hauser said. “These would not be tax deductible donations, but they would go toward the cost of the moving project which are quite extensive.”

The campaign materials lay out a total goal of \$2.43 million in three stages: an initial \$250,000 for project development and entitlements, then engineering and site preparation, and finally the moving, restoration and reopening of the bungalows themselves.

The group also put out a very specific help-wanted notice from the podium.

“We could really use a great real estate attorney who might provide some pro bono support for us because we have a lot of real estate issues related to the moving of the cottages and the creation of this new village,” Hauser said, inviting interested attorneys to reach her directly.

Commissioners in the Cheering Section

If the village effort needed a sign that City Hall is paying attention, it got one — twice in the same meeting.

Hauser closed her remarks with gratitude for two commissioners in particular: “Very publicly say thank you to Commissioner Koch and Ohlrich who have stopped by weekly, kept us in the loop, helped us with resources. We’re very grateful for that.”



Business owners in the colorful corridor came together, along with the community, to develop a campaign for both fundraising and strategizing a plan.

Hours later, during commissioner reports, Jen Ahearn-Koch returned the favor. Fresh from a community workshop on the new auto club planned for the Gillespie Park area, she shared what she called good news from the neighborhood — carefully noting she was “not expressing an opinion whether I like it or not” on the project itself.

“They did hear of the Fruitville Road bungalows, and them needing historic structures and there is historic structure on their property,” Ahearn-Koch told her colleagues. “So they are not only donating the historic structure, they are also giving them the money that they would use to demolish it towards moving that building.”

“I thought that was a very positive community effort that was nice to share,” she added.

Read that back slowly: a sitting city commissioner, on the record, celebrating developers who redirect demolition money into saving old Sarasota. If the Bungalow Village succeeds, that July 20 exchange may be remembered as the moment the model got its official blessing.

The Breakfast House Buys Its Freedom

While the collective village takes shape, the block’s most beloved tenant has already made its move — with a mortgage.

The Breakfast House, the family restaurant that has served pancakes from a Fruitville bungalow for 17 years, has purchased roughly an acre at 128 N. Briggs Ave., just off Fruitville near Tuttle Avenue, for \$1.15 million. Owner Wendy Goldberg is now asking the city to rezone the two parcels from Residential Single Family 2 to Urban Mixed-Use 1, so the modest 1956 house on the property can be renovated into the restaurant’s new home.

The required community workshop — the first formal step in the rezoning process — was held Tuesday evening, July 28, at Selby Library, drawing neighbors, supporters and even the auto club founder donating a bungalow to the cause.

“We want to be in a house,” Goldberg told the crowd, distilling the entire philosophy of the enterprise into seven words. Not a plaza. Not a strip center. A house.

The plans she described are a love letter to the original with the pain points fixed: seating growing from 78 to about 110, the cramped 300-square-foot kitchen replaced with room for a dedicated six-foot pancake griddle, a coffee and juice bar, a covered veranda converted from the carport so customers can wait out the rain, four bathrooms instead of two, and a circular drop-off drive so customers with walkers and wheelchairs can be delivered right to an accessible entrance.

The timeline is aggressive. Goldberg hopes to close the original location Jan. 2 and reopen on Briggs Avenue around Jan. 15 — a schedule that depends entirely on a rezoning she estimates could take four to six months. She plans to shepherd much of the application herself rather than hire a big land-use firm, with the city’s initial rezoning fee running about \$9,128 for a property this size.

And unlike the bungalow the family has rented for nearly two decades, this one comes with a guarantee no landlord can revoke. The new building, Goldberg noted, cannot be torn down out from under them — as long as the family keeps paying the mortgage, they own it.

The Village Question

The tantalizing part of the Briggs Avenue purchase is what it makes possible. The property totals about 1.04 acres, and most of it — a 32,009-square-foot vacant parcel — sits empty next to the future restaurant. That open land is the envisioned home of the Sarasota Bungalow Village itself: Siegfried’s, The Artful Giraffe, Discover Sarasota Tours and the Cookie Cottage arranged around a community green with shaded walkways and mature trees.

At Tuesday’s workshop, Goldberg was careful not to oversell it. The rezone application covers the restaurant; the village remains a hope, not a filing. She told attendees the group would love for it to happen but cannot yet promise that it will, and that her immediate priority is simply getting the property zoned for the restaurant.

The first test case is already in motion. Sarasota Motor Club founder Scott Stevenson — the auto club developer Ahearn-Koch praised from the dais — attended the workshop and confirmed his plan to donate the 1920s bungalow at 1716 10th Way, along with his demolition budget, toward the move. The remaining question is delightfully practical: crews still need to measure the cottage’s attic height to confirm it can survive the journey down Fruitville Road.

Why This Matters

Step back and consider what is actually happening here. Sarasota has spent a generation watching its cracker cottages and quirky small businesses vanish beneath mid-rise math — land cost, density bonuses, construction financing. The 1899 Fruitville block was supposed to be the next casualty, and its 324-unit replacement is still grinding through administrative review, still aiming for construction in early 2027.

But for the first time in memory, the displaced are not scattering. They are executing an organized, funded, developer-assisted, commissioner-applauded plan to pick up the physical fabric of old Sarasota and set it down somewhere it can survive — together, intact, still serving pancakes.

If it works, Sarasota gets something no rendering can deliver: a living village of century-old buildings, saved not by ordinance but by neighbors, customers and a few developers willing to turn demolition checks into moving checks.

What Comes Next

The road ahead runs through paperwork. Goldberg’s formal rezone application follows the July 28 workshop, then winds through the Planning Board and ultimately the City Commission — a public process, with public hearings, unlike the administrative review carrying the apartment project. Property owners and neighborhood associations within 500 feet will be notified as hearings are scheduled.

Meanwhile, the Bungalow Village campaign needs its first \$250,000, its pro bono real estate attorney, an answer on one cottage’s attic height and, if Hauser’s open-session invitation lands, a demolition-budget pledge from the Fruitville developer himself.

The cottages are still there. The oaks are still giving shade. And for the first time since the “under contract” news broke, the people inside those bungalows are not waiting to find out what happens to them. They are building what happens next.

Parking, from page 1

to UTC and Lakewood Ranch, and emptying the very streets the program was supposed to monetize. The second came nearly seven hours later, at the tail end of the meeting, when the commissioners themselves fractured over what to do about it.

By adjournment, Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch had unilaterally placed the parking program on the Aug. 3 agenda for a formal public discussion, exercising a prerogative that requires no one’s consent but her own. She did it over the polite but unmistakable resistance of Mayor Debbie Trice, who spent the afternoon defending the program, and of new City Manager Karie Friling, who all but begged the commission to wait for a full month of data before touching anything.

The result is that Monday’s commission meeting, Aug. 3, is now the first official venue where the city will confront the question downtown has been shouting for a month: roll it back, or ride it out.

What lit the fuse

The numbers behind the anger have not changed. Effective June 29, paid on-street parking on Main Street and Palm Avenue runs from 8 a.m. to midnight Monday through Saturday, with Sunday enforcement starting at 1 p.m. City garages and lots now charge 24 hours a day except Sunday mornings. That replaced a 10 a.m.-to-8 p.m. enforcement window, adding two hours to the morning, four to the night, and folding in Sundays. Citation fines rose \$5 across the board. The hourly rate stayed at \$1.50.

The commission chose that package in March as the gentler alternative to a 50 percent rate hike, a way to close a parking enterprise fund shortfall projected to reach roughly \$2.8 million by 2028. Four weeks into the new hours, almost no one who spoke on July 20 was calling it gentle.

“Strangling us”: the sandwich-shop math

Chip Beeman, who has owned the Main Bar Sandwich Shop for 22 years and Pastry Art on Main Street for eight, opened the assault with the most granular profit-and-loss statement of the morning. In the first two months after the city implemented the downtown parking program, he told commissioners, his business lost \$10,000 in sales month over month, year over year, and he has cut his staff from 18 employees to 15.

“We are the golden goose of downtown, yet we’re being treated without consideration,” Beeman said, describing policies “that are strangling us.”

Then he did the arithmetic out loud. A customer today faces a minimum parking charge of \$2.50, plus another 35 cents if they use the app. Stack a mandatory \$2.85 minimum parking charge on a \$12.50 sandwich, Beeman said, and the city has imposed “an immediate 23% tax” on top of the 7 percent sales tax. His sandwich sales have dropped by 75 sandwiches a day, and the customers, he said, are being driven “straight to the arms of places like UTC,” where parking is free and ticket anxiety does not exist.

Beeman saved a shot for the city’s separate proposal to remove more than a hundred angled spaces on Main Street in favor of parallel parking and wider sidewalks. “A wider sidewalk does not sell me one more sandwich,” he said.

The video the whole region watched

Katherine Hermes, who owns a wellness practice downtown and lives on Cocoanut Avenue, told the commission her morning trade has simply evaporated. Until a month ago, she said, 10 to 15 clients came in every morning between 9 and 10 a.m. for treatments and left before parking cost anything. Under the new 8 a.m. start, with an enforcement officer stationed nearby, that business “is gone. It’s completely dried up.”

So Hermes walked outside with her phone, filmed a completely empty street, and posted it with a simple message: look what happened, you drove everybody away. That video, she told the commission, has drawn 435,000 views, in a city of roughly 58,000 residents.

She also came with a forensic accounting question. In 2017, she said, the city ran a \$700,000 operating deficit on its roughly 3,000 managed parking spaces. By 2022 the operation had swung to a \$700,000 surplus. By 2025, the cost of managing those same 3,000 spaces had climbed 40 percent, with staffing up 22 percent, ticketing up 22 percent and rates up more than 25 percent. Hermes asked the commission to appoint a fully independent citizens’ commission to answer one question: what happened between 2017 and 2025 that drove the cost of running the same spaces up 40 percent?

A boycott, three struggling storefronts and a plea

Darci Jacob, who owns a women’s clothing store on Main Street and sits on the board of the Downtown Merchant Group alongside Ron Soto and Harmoni Krusing, described a summer that has curdled from mediocre to alarming. Since the parking changes, she said, online reaction “has exploded with negativity,” and the locals who keep downtown alive through the off-season “are now boycotting downtown.” She knows of one store closing on Palm Avenue, another on Pineapple, and a Main Street owner who has taken a second job to supplement his income. She brought roughly a hundred of the online boycott comments with her.

The open house scheduled for Aug. 24 and the workshop on Aug. 31 are too far away, she said: “Our businesses cannot wait until the end of August. I’m here today to beg this commission to please go back to the old parking program until this is further discussed.”

Café Amici starts paying its customers’ parking

The most dramatic announcement of the morning came from Nicholas DiIelsi, manager of Café Amici, the downtown institution of 27 years. Since the midnight enforcement began, he said, the restaurant has lost its night crowd, with longtime clients telling him directly they will no longer come downtown and would “rather go to UTC Mall, Lakewood Ranch, where there is free parking.”

So the restaurant is taking the city’s cost onto its own books. “As of today, Café Amici will be paying three hours of parking for anybody that dines with us,” DiIelsi announced, casting it as a survival move to pull locals back into town. “We’ll take the hit as much as you’re hitting us right now.”

He coupled it with a warning aimed squarely at the city’s revenue projections: “Empty businesses means empty parking spots. Empty parking spots means no money in your pockets.” And he layered on a grievance about the city’s treatment of the restaurant generally, saying Café Amici gave up its outdoor street dining after being told it would cost \$4,000 a month to keep seating on parking spaces while other restaurants were grandfathered in.

The economists of Main Street

Chris Voelker, the commercial property owner who helped lead the July 6 charge, returned with a sharper frame. He thanked the commission for scheduling the workshop and open house, then asked it to judge the program by a single test: “Have these parking changes made downtown more attractive of a place to visit, or less attractive?” Downtown no longer exists in a vacuum, he said, and now competes with regional districts offering good restaurants, attrac-

tive retail and free parking. “Parking is no longer just a transportation issue. It’s an economic and human issue.”

His ask was specific: if the evidence shows the program is discouraging visitors while the review is underway, grant temporary relief by restoring two hours of free parking, free Sundays and the previous enforcement hours until a final plan exists. “Parking should be a tool that supports downtown,” he said, “not an obstacle that keeps people away.”

Brian Mattison, who operates Mattison’s City Grill at Lemon and Main, said the announcement of expanded enforcement backfired before the first ticket was written, because it “chased people away from coming down in the first place.” He pronounced himself baffled that the city is still pursuing the parallel-parking conversion downtown, noting Florida dropped parallel parking from its driver’s test years ago, and that the demographics of Sarasota do not favor asking patrons to park on the third floor of a garage in disrepair and walk several blocks after dusk. His prescription: “at least a moratorium on whatever things have just changed recently until workshops can be completed.”

“Light a fire underneath them”

John Harshman, the commercial real estate broker now running for City Commission, distilled the political moment in one line: “If you ever want to wake people up this summer, light a fire underneath them, talk about parking. Better yet, change the rules on parking. Obviously, you’ve done that. You’ve gotten everybody’s attention. Unfortunately, it is not the positive kind of attention you want to get.”

His fix matched the letter he sent commissioners three days earlier: roll back the ordinance now, restore the status quo, and use the workshop process to build something the public will actually support. The sight of open parking spaces at 8 and 9 in the morning, spaces once filled by coffee-shop customers, “really is disheartening,” he said.

The morning’s final word went to Ross McGaw, a downtown resident on Cocoanut Avenue whose work truck does not fit in his garage. For years he parked it on the street. Under the new rules, with two-hour limits now enforced until midnight, he cannot. “My options are buy another vehicle that won’t suit my business, or move out of the city,” he said, suggesting a monthly residential permit, “because I can’t go out at 9:00, 10:00 and move my truck to another parking spot, because I’m asleep.”

Seven hours later, the dais cracks open

The commission absorbed all of it in the morning and said almost nothing until the meeting’s final minutes, when Commissioner Liz Alpert pulled the pin during commissioners’ comments.

“I wanted to talk about actually some of the suggestions about the parking, to roll it back to our previous parking ordinance until we resolve how we’re going to handle this,” Alpert said. “Is that something that we could put on another agenda?”

The answer from City Auditor and Clerk Shayla Griggs was that the Aug. 3 agenda deadline had already passed. Ahearn-Koch pushed back immediately: “Why would that be too soon? I don’t think it’s that complicated. Backup material are the comments from today.”

The new city manager pumps the brakes

That drew a lengthy, careful intervention from Friling, presiding over one of her first meetings as city manager. Her first concern was practical: “We just replaced all the signs and everything in the actual built environment.” Her second was empirical. The Aug. 24 open house and the tentative Aug. 31 workshop, she explained, were deliberately timed so staff could collect a full month of real data, from the city’s GIS system and visitor-tracking software, on what the extended hours are actually doing on the ground.

“My only word of caution would be to not move too quickly to roll this back yet,” Friling said. “I understand the concerns we heard today at the commission meeting, but I really wanted time to really get a full month of impacts.” She noted that she has 18 separate items in motion with staff to prepare for the workshop and open house, none of which will be complete by Aug. 3, and closed with a line that framed the whole exchange: “Again, I don’t set policy. You guys do. But those are just my recommendations.”

There was one more complication she disclosed near the meeting’s end: Broxton Harvey, the Parking Division general manager who designed and championed the extended hours, has resigned and is moving home to Atlanta, leaving the division without its chief just as the program he built goes on trial.

The mayor isn’t buying the outrage

If Ahearn-Koch spent the afternoon channeling the merchants, Mayor Trice spent it cross-examining them in absentia. When Ahearn-Koch described theatergoers who park in a free two-hour space at 7 p.m., go to dinner and a show, and now must leave mid-performance to move the car, Trice’s answer was blunt: they could park in the garage. “They would pay the three dollars and they wouldn’t have to leave the show,” she said, adding later, “If you’re spending \$200 on a meal, why are you quibbling over \$2 parking fee?”

The mayor argued the deeper problem is a public that refuses to acknowledge the free options. “What I’m hearing in the e-mails is people are not acknowledging that there are free spots,” she said. “It’s like, just walk around the corner and it’s free.” She noted two downtown restaurants are already offering customers \$3 to \$4 rebates off their checks for showing a parking charge, evidence, in her telling, that the actual dollars at stake are small. And she vented about the quality of the complaints themselves, citing a letter from someone ticketed for over-staying in the Whole Foods customers-only garage, a private facility, “and they are blaming us because they got a ticket. Potshots at the city now.”

Ahearn-Koch’s rebuttal drew the line the two sides will fight over Monday: “I don’t think it’s quibbling over the parking fee. I think it’s the inconvenience of the two-hour parking being enforced before 10 a.m. and after 8 p.m. I think that’s where a lot of suffering is happening.” “She can add it if she wants it. I tried.”

The exchange grew testy enough that Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich twice tried to gavel it down, reminding her colleagues, “Folks, we are not here to discuss parking. This is commissioners’ comments.” From the dais came a push to hold the item until Friling could compile real backup material rather than have information “foisted” on the commission at the meeting.

Ahearn-Koch was unmoved. Sarasota’s rules give any single commissioner the power to place an item on the agenda, and after briefly saying “I’ll think about it,” she used it. “I would like to add it to August 3rd for a discussion,” she said, “so that this discussion that we just had, we can have officially announced.” Her reasoning was as political as it was procedural: “We would also show our businesses downtown that we hear them. We know that summer is tough, and we’ve just made it even harder for them. It’s like salt in the wound.”

Griggs closed the matter with the driest line of the day: “She can add it if she wants it. I tried.”

The item now sits on Monday’s agenda as New Business XII.1, presented by Ahearn-Koch herself, with the administration recommending a discussion of the purpose behind the extend-

Parking, from page 12

ed hours and the citation fee increases that took effect June 29. The backup packet attached to it contains the stack of protest letters this newspaper detailed last week, from the Gonzmart family of the Columbia Restaurant, the Sarasota Opera’s Richard Russell, the Southside Village Business District, chef Paul Mattison, Harshman and aggrieved residents, along with something more pointed: a step-by-step legal guide to repealing a Sarasota parking ordinance.

What the commission actually can and cannot do Monday

That repeal guide is the sleeper document of the week, because it defines the battlefield. The extended hours were enacted by Ordinance 26-5590, and in Sarasota an ordinance generally can only be undone by another ordinance. The clean path runs through commission direction at a public meeting, legal review, a drafted amending or repealing ordinance, a state-required business impact estimate, newspaper notice at least ten days before adoption, two advertised readings on separate days, a recorded majority vote, and a ten-day wait before the change takes effect. Even moving at maximum speed, a rollback launched Monday would take well over a month to reach the street.

There is one potential shortcut. If the original ordinance delegated details such as enforcement hours to administrative control or rates to resolution, those pieces could move faster. But the city cannot use a resolution or administrative act to contradict what the code itself says, which means the commission’s real room to maneuver Monday depends on exactly how 26-5590 was drafted. Any repeal would also have to decide what happens to citations already issued, appeals pending and fees already collected.

And behind all of it sits the constraint commissioners aired on July 6: the city’s contractual obligation to charge for parking on St. Armands to service the roughly \$16 million bond on the Circle’s garage, an arrangement built on the understanding that downtown would charge too. Simply shutting the meters off is not just a policy choice. Commissioners have warned it is a lawsuit.

The stakes on both sides of the ledger

What makes Monday genuinely hard is that both sides are holding real numbers. The mer-

chants have theirs: a sandwich shop down \$10,000 a month and three employees, a wellness practice that lost its entire morning clientele, store closings on Palm and Pineapple, a 27-year-old restaurant paying its customers’ parking to stop the bleeding, and a boycott movement with six-figure social media reach in a city of 58,000.

The city has its own: a parking fund that lost \$270,784 this budget year and is projected to fall roughly \$2.8 million short by 2028, elevator replacements at the State Street and Palm Avenue garages priced at \$750,000 apiece, a \$650,000 meter overhaul, and a free Bay Runner trolley the parking fund has been carrying at more than \$924,000 a year. Roll back the hours, and that math reverts to the March menu the commission already rejected: raise the rate 50 percent, or let the general fund eat the loss.

Three dates that will decide it

The calendar now runs like this. Monday, Aug. 3, the commission holds its first formal public discussion of the program under Ahearn-Koch’s agenda item, with the letters in the backup and the merchants certain to fill the chamber again, but with Friling on record that she will not have complete data and cannot support an informed vote that day. Aug. 24 at 5:30 p.m., the city hosts its parking open house in the commission chambers. And Aug. 31, the commission convenes the dedicated parking workshop where staff will finally present the full month of revenue figures, citation counts and utilization data, along with responses to the validation, signage and garage-incentive ideas floated in July.

Between now and then, the pressure machine keeps running. Ronnie Shugar’s threatened petition of commercial property owners remains in the wings. Harshman’s citizen advisory committee proposal, with its Oct. 15 report deadline, offers the commission a ready-made structure if it wants one. Café Amici is paying parking tabs. The videos keep circulating. And the commission that chose extended hours in March precisely because it seemed like the option that would hurt less now must decide, on the record and in front of the people it is hurting, whether to hold the line for four more weeks of data or hand downtown the rollback it came to City Hall to demand.

Monday, the meters will still run to midnight. The only question is for how much longer.

War Cost, from page 1

and Israel began striking Iran in late February, and Tehran answered by choking the Strait of Hormuz, the ripple effects have rolled ashore here with the reliability of a Gulf tide: at the gas pump, in the mortgage market, on restaurant patios, at the fuel dock, and in the brokerage statements of a retiree population that watches its portfolio the way boaters watch the marine forecast.

The palm trees are standing. The beaches are open. And nearly everything costs more.

A Fifth of the World’s Oil, and All of Ours

The mechanics are brutally simple. Roughly a fifth to a quarter of the world’s seaborne oil normally passes through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow throat between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. When the shooting started at the end of February, tanker traffic through the strait ground toward a halt, crude oil posted its largest weekly jump in two decades, and at points this spring traded above \$100 a barrel. Iranian officials have taunted Washington with talk of \$200 oil.

Florida drivers felt it almost immediately. The statewide average for regular gasoline sat at \$2.88 a gallon at the beginning of March. By the end of that month it had blown past \$3.95, the highest daily average in the state since July 2022, adding roughly \$16 to the cost of filling a 15-gallon tank. A ceasefire brought brief relief; its collapse in July sent prices right back up. As of mid-July, Florida regular averaged around \$3.95 a gallon, about 84 cents more than a year ago, with diesel touching \$5. AAA’s Mark Jenkins put it plainly: “Oil prices are doing most of the driving right now.”

For an island chain where nearly everything, from the grouper to the landscaping crew, arrives by truck over a bridge, that number is not an abstraction. It is a surcharge on daily life.

Tourism: The Engine Sputters

Tourism was supposed to be the comeback story of 2026. Visit Sarasota County’s own forecast last December called for a “flat” year, which, after two straight years of declining visitation from the COVID-era highs, counted as optimism. Fiscal 2025 had closed with 2.71 million visitors, down 6.3 percent, spending \$2.37 billion, down 7.1 percent.

Then came the war. In January, before the first missile flew, the county drew 68,900 visitors, down 12.7 percent from the prior year, with direct spending falling to \$132.1 million from \$144.5 million. By April, with the conflict raging and airfares climbing, visitation slipped again to 113,400 from 115,700, and lodging occupancy fell to 64.2 percent from 68 percent a year earlier. Fiscal year to date, visitation is off 4 percent.

The saving grace, so far, is that the visitors who do come are spending more. Average room rates in April hit \$376.81, up from \$348.60, and April spending actually rose to \$189.5 million. The islands are trading volume for price, a formula familiar to anyone who has watched Longboat’s hotel market drift steadily upscale.

The statewide picture is darker. Florida TaxWatch’s latest forecast tracked what it called a severe shift in the state’s short-term outlook, with expectations for tourism growth over the next decade shrinking by more than 45 percent and 2027 projected at a decade-low 0.8 percent growth rate. Energy is the culprit: fuel is the raw material of tourism, and every dollar added to a barrel of crude eventually lands on an airline ticket, a rental car, a charter, a hotel bill.

There is one perverse silver lining. With the Middle East’s tourism sector collapsing, arrivals to the region fell 14 percent in the first quarter and Gulf hotel occupancy cratered, global travel demand is being rerouted toward destinations perceived as safe. Sarasota qualifies. The question is whether visitors can afford to get here: average American trip costs hit a record above \$7,250 in the first quarter, and the shutdown of ultra-low-cost carrier Spirit Airlines removed one of the cheapest doors into Florida.

On the Islands: A Quiet Season That Wasn’t Supposed to Be

Talk to merchants from the Centre Shops to St. Armands Circle and the phrase that keeps surfacing is “quiet.” Not dead, not disaster, just quiet, the sound of discretionary spending being reconsidered. Island restaurateurs report single-digit to low-double-digit revenue declines for the year, softer weeknights, and a happy-hour crowd nursing its drinks a little longer. One longtime Longboat institution pegged its annual revenue drop at roughly 12.5 percent, a number its ownership described as better than feared, which may be the unofficial motto of the entire 2026 season.

The pattern fits the storm-then-war arc of the islands’ decade. Businesses that survived the bridge-clogging rebuild years of 2024 and 2025 finally have their roofs, their docks and their dining rooms back. What they don’t have is the free-spending visitor of 2022.

Real Estate: The Rebound That Got Ambushed

Nowhere is the war’s fingerprint clearer than in the mortgage market. In late February, before the first strikes, the 30-year conforming rate stood at 6.23 percent, and national brokers were openly predicting the long-awaited breakout year, with sales up 10 to 12 percent. Then oil spiked, inflation expectations reignited, the bond market sold off, and rates lurched to 6.94 percent by late July. National estimates suggest the war and its rate shock will erase at least 400,000 home sales in the United States this year.

Locally, the numbers tell a split-screen story. Sarasota County’s single-family median price has softened to roughly \$475,000, down about 5 percent year over year, with homes taking around 59 days to go under contract and price reductions increasingly standard equipment on a listing. Condos, the lifeblood of the barrier islands, are the surprise: closed condo and town-home sales jumped more than 35 percent year over year in February, the largest such leap in recent Realtor Association of Sarasota and Manatee history, and kept climbing through May. Bargain hunters, it turns out, read the same headlines as everyone else, and post-Milton, post-surfside-reform condo pricing has drawn them off the sidelines.

The islands also enjoy a structural shock absorber the rest of the country lacks: cash. In May alone, 355 single-family homes and 228 condos in Sarasota County were bought without a mortgage. On Longboat, Bird Key and Lido, where equity-rich buyers arrive with the proceeds of a sold northern house, the Fed matters less than the ferry schedule. The ultra-luxury market is, in the words of one South Florida broker, tuning out the war. The merely affluent are watching and waiting, and waiting is the one thing a real estate market cannot monetize.

The Boating Life, at \$600 a Fill-Up

If the war has a uniquely island-flavored casualty, it is the fuel dock. Marine gas has climbed a dollar to a dollar and a half per gallon since February, and captains around the state report that a day’s fuel for a working charter fleet now runs \$500 to \$600. Filling the tanks on a typical recreational boat that cost \$250 to \$300 before the war can now approach double that. Charter operators say the casual sunset-cruise customer is the first to vanish, and some captains have quietly taken up side work to bridge the slow months. In a community where the boat is not a luxury but a limb, that stings.

Retirees, Portfolios and the “War Cloud”

Then there is the money nobody sees: the retirement accounts that fund a large share of island life. The war triggered global stock and bond selloffs in March, and while markets have partially recovered, the volatility has rattled a region where portfolio income buys the groceries. Local advisors report clients staying largely calm and treating the swings as temporary, but the anxiety is real, and it shows up in restaurant checks and charter bookings before it ever shows up in a brokerage statement.

Economist Sean Snaith, director of UCF’s Institute for Economic Forecasting, delivered the sobering version to Sarasota County commissioners at a May budget workshop: the longer the war grinds on, the greater the damage and the greater the odds of recession. His broader diagnosis was blunt. “Forget tariffs. The war with Iran is shaping the path of Florida’s economy,” he has argued, with energy costs rippling through tourism, agriculture and health care. The labor market, meanwhile, has settled into what national economists call low-hire, low-fire, a hiring freeze without layoffs, an economy holding its breath.

The Bottom Line for the Islands

Add it up and mid-2026 on the barrier islands looks like this: gasoline near four dollars, diesel at five, mortgages near seven percent, visitation down 4 percent, hotel rates up, condo sales booming, single-family prices sagging, boats staying tied to the dock, and a retiree class watching CNBC with one eye and the Gulf with the other.

The islands have spent the better part of a decade absorbing shocks: a pandemic, an inflation wave, back-to-back hurricanes, an insurance crisis. The Iran war is the first one that arrived without wind or water, and in some ways it is the hardest to plan for. You can shutter a window against a Category 3. There is no plywood for the Strait of Hormuz.

What happens next depends on a waterway most residents will never see. If the strait reopens and oil retreats, forecasters expect Florida’s growth to rebound as soon as 2028. If it doesn’t, the “war cloud,” as economists have taken to calling it, will hang over season 2027 the way the storm clouds hung over 2025. Either way, the islands will do what they have always done between disasters: open the doors, pour the drinks, and wait for the visitors to come back over the bridge.

Undergrounding, from page 1

ground, financed by the property owners who would benefit from it.

Two separate votes made it real. First, commissioners approved a \$7.95 million professional services agreement with Utility Consultants of Florida, Inc., the Largo-based firm that beat out national heavyweights Kimley-Horn and Bowman Consulting for the work. Second, they adopted Resolution 26R-3408, authorizing an \$8 million tax-exempt line of credit with Regions Capital Advantage to front the money until special assessments can repay it.

Both passed 5-0. Neither vote buries a single wire. What they do is set in motion an 18-month sprint of engineering, surveying and public persuasion that will end with a question put to the roughly 3,500 homes, condos and businesses on the islands: are you willing to pay about \$10,000 per property, spread over two decades, to never again watch a hurricane take down your power lines?

What Exactly the City Approved

Public Works Director Nikesh Patel was careful to frame the July 20 actions narrowly. “Today’s actions do not create an assessment district,” Patel told commissioners. “They do not impose an assessment, and do not authorize construction.”

Instead, the agreement is split into two distinct phases. Phase one, the “required services” priced at \$3.17 million, begins immediately. It covers the unglamorous foundation work: topographic and boundary surveys of the entire barrier island chain, subsurface utility mapping, 30% preliminary engineering design, coordination with Florida Power & Light and the communications carriers, a defensible assessment methodology under Florida law, and an aggressive public outreach campaign that includes a program website where every property owner will be able to click on their own parcel and see their estimated assessment.

“Essentially, we’re going to have a GIS layer for the public to access,” Patel explained, “and they will be able to click on a specific property and be able to know what the assessment would be.”

Phase two, the remaining \$4.77 million in “optional services,” is where the real construction machinery lives: final design, bid documents, easement acquisition, construction inspection, utility cutovers and the moment residents are actually waiting for, when FPL’s poles come out of the ground. None of that can proceed without a future vote of both the affected property owners and the City Commission.

The consultant agreement was signed for Utility Consultants of Florida by Mark Porter, a name that will ring familiar across the New Pass bridge. Porter briefed Longboat Key residents on that town’s undergrounding rollout back in 2019, and his firm’s team for the Sarasota program includes CDM Smith on engineering, Wildan on assessment methodology and Valerin on public outreach.

Born in the Floodwaters of 2024

Ask why this is happening now and every answer at City Hall leads back to the same season. In 2024, six separate weather events flooded the barrier islands, capped by the one-two punch of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which left parts of Lido and St. Armands dark for extraordinary stretches.

“I’d say about a week, some about a month, roughly,” Patel said when Vice Mayor Debbie Trice pressed him on how long residents went without power. “There were contractors trying to get out there to get the work done and couldn’t get it done because they had no power out there.”

The islands watched something else that season, too. Longboat Key, their neighbor to the north, was in the final stages of its own decade-long undergrounding project, and when Helene and Milton hit, Longboat’s new buried system held. The outages the town did experience were traced to FPL failures off the island, at mainland substations and subaqueous feeder lines, and power came back comparatively fast once those were fixed.

The utility’s own data from that season is striking: FPL reported that its underground neighborhood lines performed roughly five to 14 times better than overhead lines during Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton, and about 50 percent better on ordinary days, when the leading cause of outages remains trees and debris hitting wires. The company has now buried some 2,000 miles of line statewide under the Storm Secure program it launched after Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Barrier island residents did the math and came to City Hall. “People have been through a lot with these storms, and they know they need resiliency with their electricity,” said Chuck Haff, vice president of the St. Armands Residents Association, who told commissioners the association’s annual survey put support for undergrounding above 80 percent.

Carl Shoffstall, president of the Lido Key Residents Association and a 24-year Lido resident, put his neighborhood’s number even higher. “From Lido Key, we were well over 90 percent,” he said. “It’s got to be done. It’s got to get done. It’s going to save money with storms on the back end of things, too.”

What the Islands Would Actually Look Like

Picture the drive over the Ringling Bridge and around the Circle without a single wooden pole, crossarm or sagging bundle of cable in the frame. That is the end state the program describes: three proposed districts covering the St. Armands business area, the St. Armands residential streets and all of Lido Key, including Lido Shores, City Island’s Ken Thompson Park and Ted Sperling Park.

Every primary feeder, lateral circuit and communications line would move below grade, served by pad-mounted transformers and switch cabinets. In their place would come new street lighting built to dark-sky and sea-turtle-protection standards, the amber, shielded fixtures required near nesting beaches, along with full restoration of pavement, sidewalks and landscaping torn up by the work. The recently installed, federally funded streetlights on St. Armands Circle itself would stay; the residential streets would get the new environmentally friendly fixtures.

There is an economic argument buried in the aesthetics. Real estate research consistently finds that overhead lines cost property owners money: homes near visible power lines typically sell at discounts of 2 to 10 percent, while one of the most rigorous hedonic studies of undergrounding, examining neighborhoods in Canberra, Australia, found buried networks added about 2.9 percent to home prices, with utility-sponsored estimates running as high as 10 percent. On barrier islands where a modest home starts at seven figures, even the low end of that range would exceed the assessment many times over.

Commissioner Kyle Battie tied the program directly to the islands’ commercial health, noting the struggle to fill storefronts on the Circle while Lido families are still rebuilding. “We’re

trying to find people to lease space out there on St. Armands Circle, and there’s people on Lido still recovering from those storms,” Battie said. “They need it, not just that they want it. And it behooves us as a commission to go ahead and move this forward.”

Who Pays, and How Much

The honest answer to the question every property owner will ask is that nobody knows yet. Producing that number is precisely what the \$3.17 million phase one buys.

But a working figure has been circulating in association meetings for months. “The numbers that have been floated during these meetings is approximately \$10,000, maybe a little higher,” Haff told commissioners, adding that residents surveyed were told to expect that cost spread over roughly 20 years. On a per-year basis that lands in the neighborhood of \$500 to \$600 per property, collected as a non-ad valorem assessment on the annual tax bill, the same mechanism Longboat Key used.

Mayor Trice pressed staff on whether the \$10,000 figure was realistic or whether residents should brace for another zero. Patel declined to speculate, saying only that the floated numbers “are comparable to the Town of Longboat Key.”

The Longboat comparison is instructive. That town’s project, approved by voter referendum in 2015 and 2016, cost \$49.1 million split between \$25.25 million for Gulf of Mexico Drive and \$23.85 million for the neighborhoods, repaid through 30-year assessments that varied by property. Construction began in 2019 and the island has been running entirely on its buried system since last year, with the town tracking a surplus of several million dollars against its original budget.

Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch, who admitted to “sticker shock” when she first saw Sarasota’s consultant price, said she ran the numbers past Longboat Key’s town manager, Howard Tipton. “He did say that this is in line with what they had done,” she reported, adding that Longboat’s biggest headaches were permitting and interagency coordination, not construction. “What they projected and what they actually ended up with was very close.”

One structural difference: Longboat ran two separate assessments, one for Gulf of Mexico Drive and one for the neighborhoods. Sarasota’s initial intent is a single, holistic barrier-island assessment, partly because government properties on City Island complicate a piecemeal approach, though Patel said the consultant will evaluate splitting the districts. Trice pushed to keep that option open so that if, say, Lido votes yes and St. Armands votes no, the city could proceed with one and prorate its recovery of the upfront costs.

The Catch: If the Islands Say No, the City Pays

The \$8 million line of credit is the financial engine, and it comes with real risk. The city can draw funds through July 2028 at a floating tax-exempt rate currently estimated around 3.4 percent; whatever balance remains converts that August to a term loan maturing in 2038 at an estimated 3.9 percent. The intended repayment source is the special assessment revenue. But if property owners or a future commission kill the project after phase one, the assessments never materialize, and the city remains on the hook for up to \$3.17 million plus interest, payable from non-ad valorem revenues.

That prospect gave Commissioner Liz Alpert pause even as she voted yes. “I really want this to happen. I want the undergrounding,” Alpert said. “But \$3 million to just explore it seems a lot of debt for the city to take on. If it gets rejected, we just spent \$3 million for nothing.”

Finance Director Kelly Strickland acknowledged the exposure. The city’s five-year capital plan sets aside \$1.3 million in Penny surtax funding for undergrounding as a partial backstop, she said, but a failed district would force the city to “look at the general fund” and other sources for the balance. She noted the city’s debt capacity is comfortable, with non-ad valorem revenues covering maximum annual debt service at more than seven times the two-times coverage its own policy requires, and that the note carries no pledge of property taxes and no lien on city property.

Patel offered a consolation prize: even in a worst case, the city would own a complete survey and subsurface utility map of its barrier islands, an asset for every future road, drainage and infrastructure project out there.

The Flooding Question

Undergrounding will not stop the water. Nothing about burying electric lines lowers storm surge on Ben Franklin Drive, and residents should not confuse the two. In fact, saltwater inundation is the one environment where buried systems face their own vulnerabilities, which is why modern designs like FPL’s rely on submersible transformers and flood-rated equipment, and why some utilities elsewhere reported mixed underground performance in surge zones during Helene.

What the program does address is what happens after the water recedes: the weeks of darkness while crews rebuild pole lines, the contractors who cannot work in powerless neighborhoods, the restaurants on the Circle throwing out inventory. And the city is explicitly trying to avoid digging up the islands twice. Ahearn-Koch pressed staff to synchronize the undergrounding with the separate St. Armands drainage improvements now advancing through Sarasota County and a new state appropriation via FDOT, and Patel confirmed the consultant’s job includes coordinating all of it. “I want to make sure we’re not digging up, filling in and digging up again,” Ahearn-Koch said.

What Happens Next

The clock starts immediately. Stakeholder engagement is required to begin the moment the agreement is executed, and over the summer and fall the consultant will refine district boundaries, build planning-level cost estimates and stand up the program website with its parcel-by-parcel assessment lookup.

By the winter of 2026-27, staff expects to return to the commission with detailed parcel-level assessment ranges, at which point the community support process begins in earnest. There is no statutory minimum for how much support is required. “It’s up to the commission to decide on the amount of support, but a minimum 60 percent,” Patel said. “The commission can decide if they want 75 percent support or 60 percent.”

If the islands say yes and the commission concurs, statutory assessment resolutions, mailed notices and public hearings would follow through 2027, with permanent financing arranged that year and the first assessments targeted for the November 2027 tax bill. The program’s working schedule calls for contractor procurement in late 2027 and construction rolling across the islands in three segments beginning in early 2028, with the final segment starting in 2030. Earlier city estimates put full completion as much as seven years out.

For the residents who pushed this program into existence, the timeline is almost beside the point. As Shoffstall told the commission before the vote: “It’s got to get done.”

Adagio, from page 1

Lutgert Companies. To clear the site, the city issued a demolition permit for the building through an administrative process, with no public hearing and no review by the city’s Historic Preservation Board.

The city’s justification for that shortcut is now the subject of a lawsuit, a pending motion in circuit court, and pointed accusations from preservation advocates that staff approved the demolition of a Florida Master Site File structure based on a document that does not support the weight placed upon it.

The Single Page

Because the U.S. Garage is listed on the Florida Master Site File, the state’s inventory of historic and cultural resources, city code requires a historic review before staff can authorize demolition. Under Zoning Code Section IV-823(a), the Neighborhood and Development Services Director may approve demolition of a non-contributing Master Site File structure “once the historic review has been completed.”

The document the city has produced as evidence of that review is a one-page City of Sarasota form titled “Application Package: Demolition of Florida Master Site File Structures,” attributed to Dr. Clifford Smith, the city’s longtime senior planner for historic preservation, and bearing a handwritten date of July 5, 2023.

A copy of the form reviewed by Longboat Key News is almost entirely blank. The lines for the applicant’s name, the FMSF demolition application number, the building or demolition permit number, and the application date are empty. The only handwritten entries are the Pineapple Avenue property address, the words “Demolition of Building” as the proposed action, and the July 2023 date on which a historic review was purportedly completed.

Dr. Smith died in 2024, making it impossible to ask him what review, if any, stood behind the form.

Ronald Kashden, a board member of the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation and a candidate for Sarasota City Commission, has been among the most vocal critics of the city’s reliance on the document. In correspondence with Longboat Key News, Kashden contends that the city’s description of its documentary evidence “bears little resemblance” to the document itself, and that staff has treated the single page as though it were the historic review the code requires.

“They have offered no evidence that any review was actually performed,” Kashden wrote, saying the city has relied on verbal assurances from former Development Services Director Steve Cover rather than any written analysis. When the Alliance asked staff to conduct an actual review, Kashden said, staff refused.

The timeline raises a further procedural question. The July 2023 form predates the current demolition effort by more than two years. According to a March 20, 2026, technical review memorandum from Acting Development Review Chief Planner Rebecca Webster and Historic Preservation Senior Planner Susan Dodd, the demolition application the city actually received arrived on Nov. 4, 2025, and is catalogued in city records as 26-FMSF-10. Lorrie Muldowney, a past Alliance president who sits on the city’s Historic Preservation Board, has argued publicly that city processes require a fresh review each time a demolition permit is requested, meaning a new review should have occurred in late 2025. No documentation of such a review has surfaced in public records.

The City and Developer Response

City officials maintain that proper procedures were followed. Staff points to previous consultant surveys in 2003 and 2010 that found the U.S. Garage ineligible for local or national historic designation, largely because of alterations to its facade during a 1982 adaptive reuse renovation, an irony not lost on preservationists, since that renovation was performed by celebrated Sarasota architect Frank Folsom Smith, who converted the old garage into the office and retail building that remains fully occupied today.

Robert K. Lincoln, the Sarasota attorney representing the developer, has defended the permit, telling the nonprofit newsroom Suncoast Searchlight that Dr. Smith reviewed the property’s history, visited the building and met with representatives of the buyer before the purchase, and that his determination was consistent with the earlier survey findings. Lincoln has argued that allowing the Alliance to force a historic designation review would set a precedent affecting property owners citywide.

Shut Out at the Board of Adjustment

The Alliance appealed the demolition permit, No. 2026-000658, to the city’s Board of Adjustment. On April 29, after more than an hour of legal argument from Alliance representatives, the board voted unanimously that the group lacked standing to bring the appeal. The merits of the case, whether the historic review actually occurred and whether the building deserves protection, were never heard.

The Alliance then took the fight to the 12th Judicial Circuit Court, filing suit in June and asking the court to review the Board of Adjustment’s standing decision. A circuit judge granted the city’s motion to dismiss. The Alliance responded with a 34-page motion for relief asking the judge to reconsider, and



that motion, still pending, is what keeps the legal challenge alive. If the judge denies it, the preservation effort likely ends. If the judge grants it, the question of whether the city followed its own demolition procedures could finally get a hearing.

The Adagio Marches On

While the court fight continues, the Adagio itself keeps advancing through the city’s administrative pipeline. The project received partial sign-off from the Development Review Committee on May 20, with staff still pressing the development team on unresolved items, including a city code requirement that the attainable housing units be indistinguishable in exterior appearance from the market-rate units. Webster herself flagged differences between the two towers, noting aluminum railings on the attainable building’s balconies versus glass on the market-rate tower.

The project proposes an 18-story tower with 113 market-rate condominiums and a 9-story building with 76 attainable units, 189 residences in all, plus roughly 31,315 square feet of commercial space on about 2.24 acres bounded by Ringling Boulevard, Palm Avenue and Pineapple Avenue. The developer is using the state’s Live Local Act to exceed the Downtown Core district’s 10-story height limit, paired with the city’s downtown attainable housing density bonus. Of the 76 attainable units, only eight would be priced for renters earning below the area median income; the remaining 68 would serve households earning up to 120 percent of it, roughly \$130,000 for a family of four.

Under a fourth extension agreement signed in May, the city must approve, approve with conditions, or deny the Adagio’s administrative site plan and administrative adjustments on or before Aug. 5. Because the project is proceeding administratively, it requires no City Commission approval and no public hearing.

Which brings the dispute back to where it started. For opponents, the issue was never simply the height of the towers or the loss of a beloved building. It is that a century-old landmark, one the Alliance placed on its Six to Save list and that remains structurally sound and fully occupied, can be cleared for demolition on the strength of a nearly blank form filled out by a man who can no longer be asked about it, with no public process at any step along the way. Whether that is lawful is now a question for a circuit judge. Whether it is good government is a question Sarasota voters may weigh themselves, with Kashden’s name on the commission ballot.

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