



# Longboat Key News

September 11, 2026

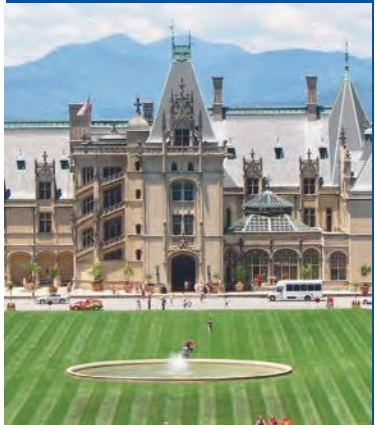
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FREE

## InsideLook



Longboat's  
Flock Problem  
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Downtown tops  
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The Fast and  
the Confused  
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## Jordan-Branded Club Pulls Its Own Application After Parking Plan Collapses

*Facing a board member with a tape measure, 99 angry neighbors and a bombshell phone call to Jupiter, 1000 North retreats to fight another day.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
sreid@lbknews.com

In basketball, when the game starts slipping away, you call time-out. On Wednesday afternoon at Sarasota City Hall, the private club that has draped itself in Michael Jordan's aura did exactly that.

After nearly two hours of withering scrutiny, 1000 North Sarasota, the ultra-exclusive members club built and nearly finished inside the

See Jordan, page 14



## Half the Trees, Double the Fee: Longboat's New Tree Code Cuts Replacement Rule

*When the Town Commission takes up Ordinance 2026-11 at its Sept. 14 meeting, it will be voting on the most sweeping rewrite of Longboat's tree regulations since the code was adopted in 1974.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
sreid@lbknews.com

When the Town Commission takes up Ordinance 2026-11 at its Sept. 14 meeting, it will be voting on the most sweeping rewrite of Longboat Key's tree regulations since the code was first adopted

in 1974. The ordinance arrives wrapped in the language of storm recovery and modernization, and much of it is exactly that. But buried in the middle of a dense staff memo from Planning, Zoning & Building Director Allen Parsons is a change that has nothing to do

with hurricanes and everything to do with how green this island will be in 20 years: the town proposes to cut its tree replacement requirement in half.

Under the current code, anyone who removes a mature tree under a

See Tree Rules, page 15

## Whitney's Plans Tropical Dining Garden Where Longboat Bank Sat Empty for 16 Years

*All food and drink preparation would remain inside the restaurant building. The furniture outdoors would be portable, the lighting minimal, and no new signage for the dining area.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
sreid@lbknews.com

The old bank building at 6960 Gulf of Mexico Drive has not cashed a check since roughly 2010. If Whitney's has its way, the site will soon be serving something far more popular than certificates of deposit.

On Tuesday, Sept. 15, the Longboat Key Planning & Zoning Board will take up a two-part application that would clear the way for Whitney's, the well-loved north-end restaurant at 6990 Gulf of Mexico Drive, to demolish the long-abandoned bank next door and replace it with a lush, tropical outdoor dining garden, a new kitchen and restrooms, and roughly 200 seats of expanded capacity.

The hearing begins at 9:15 a.m. at Town Hall, 501 Bay Isles Road, and Town planning staff is recommending approval.

### What Whitney's wants to build

Whitney LBK LLC, which owns and operates the restaurant, purchased the neighboring 30,105-square-foot bank parcel and now wants the Town to change both its Future Land Use designation and its zoning so the two properties can function as one restaurant campus.

The plan calls for tearing down the approximately 5,401-square-foot former bank building, which the application describes as "a legacy institutional use that is no longer aligned with surrounding development patterns along Gulf of Mexico Drive." In its place would rise about 1,370 square feet of new construction: a 700-square-foot shared commissary kitchen, 280 square feet of storage and cooler space, and 390 square feet of new

See Whitney's, page 13

## Planning Board Rejects Hospital Hotel in Stunning 3-2 Vote

*A furious design critique, a broken road and a neighborhood that refused to be ignored sink the Winn-Dixie redevelopment, for now.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
sreid@lbknews.com

Eight years after Winn-Dixie went dark, Arlington Park's last stand works, as the chair blasts "bad design" and the Midtown Plaza plan goes down at City Hall

The dead Winn-Dixie at Midtown Plaza will stay dead a while longer.

In one of the most consequential votes the Sarasota Planning Board has taken in years, the board on Wednesday denied the long-awaited redevelopment of the vacant supermarket site at U.S. 41 and Bahia Vista Street, rejecting plans for a six-story, 145-room hotel and a 91-unit apartment building directly across the highway from Sarasota Memorial Hospital. The vote was 3-2, it came over the recommendation of city staff, and because the site plan never goes to the City Commission, the denial lands with full force.

It was Arlington Park's day. The  
See Hotel, page 12

# EditorLetters

Longboat Key News and Sarasota City News encourages Letters to the Editor on timely issues. Please email to: [letters@lbknews.com](mailto: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.

## Lawyering Up Over License Plates

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin  
Thank you, Commissioner Coffin, yes, we became aware yesterday afternoon and are working on it. We will be meeting with our attorney's office this week as well as contingency planning, as needed. Please see attached.  
Isaac Brownman  
Assistant Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Forwarding the Neighborhood Panic

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton  
I received this last night from a concerned homeowner.  
Gary Coffin  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Moving the Cameras an Inch Left

To: Longboat Key Commission  
While the state and their respective agencies continue to make broad, sweeping decisions without consideration for those local communities properly using things like this technology, the town staff is working on scheduling a meeting with our town legal counsel to discuss, and we are also contingency planning potential locations just outside state right-of-way, where feasible. We received notification yesterday afternoon, not from FDOT just yet, but from the Florida Police Chiefs Association to Chief Mager. As this is still developing, we will keep you posted as any additional decisions on our part or developments as this makes its way throughout the state.  
Isaac Brownman  
Assistant Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## The State is Plucking Our FLOCK

To: Longboat Key Commission  
This story broke this morning. Without our flock cameras

on the north and south end we would not have promptly caught the murderers from the Zota case.  
Florida is revoking permits for Flock cameras and similar license-plate readers on state roads, dealing a blow to local law enforcement agencies that say they're a critical crime-fighting tool.  
In a memorandum Monday, Florida Department of Transportation Assistant Secretary Will Watts gave agencies 30 days to remove the cameras from state roads, or FDOT will remove them itself. The agency also no longer intends to issue permits for the cameras.  
"The recent exponential increase in deployments along our roadways, coupled with concerning reports of misuse, data privacy concerns and surveillance schemes merit immediate action to preserve Floridians' sovereignty and quality of life," the memo states.  
BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Dropping Our Two Cents on Traffic

To: Longboat Key Commission  
For your information, attached you will find a letter from Allen Parsons that provides feedback to both the City of Sarasota and the Florida Department of Commerce regarding the proposed transportation amendments to their comprehensive plan that was transmitted by the City for expedited state review. Please let either Isaac or I know if you have any questions.  
Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Playing Nice With the Neighbors

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling  
Please see the below input from the Town of Longboat Key per the City's proposed updates to the Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Chapter.

Thank you Commissioner Bishop, Mr. Parsons, and Mr. Tipton for your input. It is crucial that our municipalities continue to work together and coordinate transportation policies and plans in this, and many other arenas.  
Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## ICYMI: We Have Thoughts on Sarasota Traffic

To: Longboat Key Commission  
For your information, attached you will find a letter from  
**See Letters, page 5**

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# OpinionEditorial

## Ozzy Osbourne, Your Fitbit and the Great Longboat Key Flock Camera Shuffle

*Our police love the Flock cameras, and they should. The rest of us are quietly trading away the last great American freedom: the right to be ignored.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
sreid@lbknews.com

Sometimes, we just want to quietly tiptoe through our own life.

I don't think this is an unreasonable request. As a 57-year-old man, I want to wake up, brew an espresso, pull out of the driveway, and head to the courts to hit what I will generously describe as baseline winners. Then I want to come home, pick up my Epiphone twelve-string, and butcher a few acoustic chords into a microphone that deserves better. I want to do all of this silently, anonymously, and without my exact coordinates being logged into a centralized, searchable database like I'm a high-value asset in a Jason Bourne movie.

(Yes, I just published my own pattern of life in one paragraph. The difference: I volunteered it, nobody paid for it, and you'll forget it by Thursday. The database never forgets.)

But apparently tiptoeing is asking too much. Instead, we are all living like Ozzy Osbourne circa 2002: unwitting stars of our own mandatory reality show, broadcast around the clock to servers we will never see, minus the MTV.



STEVE REID



The AI is always listening. Mention to your wife that your left knee feels weird, and within the hour your phone is serving ads for titanium joints and a law firm that specializes in suing your knee. Brake hard on Gulf of Mexico Drive because a snowbird in a rented Buick executes a spontaneous four-lane U-turn, and your own car, the one you're still making payments on, rats you out to your insurance company like a trained informant. Meanwhile your Fitbit files a biological dossier confirming exactly how out of shape you are. Your watch is disappointed in you. Your watch has notified the group.

Add it all up and we have built the unholy trinity of observation: Big Brother, an omniscient Old Testament God, the perpetual guilt of Roman Catholicism, and the most oppressive marriage in recorded history, rolled into one giant piece of state infrastructure. A spouse who never sleeps, never blinks, remembers every sin you've committed since 1994, and cross-references them against your odometer.

Except it is NOT God watching us, and that's the thing this whole column hangs on. God, at least, offers forgiveness. A real spouse eventually falls asleep. The database just adds it to your file.

And now, right here at home, comes the final layer: the Flock cameras.

### First, A Word About Our Police

Before we go one step further, let me say something clearly, so nobody can misquote me at the post office: I love our police. Our officers are excellent. Our chief is doing exactly what a good chief should do, which is squeeze every legal drop out of every tool the law allows, and he's been transparent about it. If my golf cart vanishes at 2 a.m., a professional with a flashlight will materialize before the ice melts in my nightcap.

This column is not about them. It's about the rest of us, and what we are quietly, numbly agreeing to.

### What The Flock Is Happening On Longboat Key?

For those blissfully unaware, our town operates a network of Flock Safety cameras under a five-year contract, positioned so that every vehicle entering or leaving Longboat Key gets its plate, make, model and color captured by Artificial Intelligence, which is a fancy tech-bro way of saying "RoboCop without the cool motorcycle."

The sales pitch is genuinely seductive. The department calls the technology a "force multiplier" doing the work of 20 officers, around the clock, without overtime. And it works: when boat radars vanished in the middle of the night, the cameras helped crack the case. As an insurance policy for a low-crime island, it's a good tool, used by good officers, and I mean that sincerely.

"If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear," we all say, and I've said a version of it myself at cocktail parties, usually while holding a drink and feeling reasonable. It's the logic of letting your neighbor read your mail in case there's a coupon for half off a colonoscopy. And every one of us who says it still closes the blinds at night and would summon attorneys by helicopter if the government proposed photographing our lanai on the hour. We don't believe it. We find it soothing. You don't need something to hide to want something to yourself. Privacy is not the refuge of the guilty. It is the natural habitat of the free.

Because the cameras don't just capture bad guys. They capture EVERYONE. Every pharmacy run, every visit to a friend, every aimless drive to clear your head. SNAP. SNAP. SNAP. The Fourth Amendment nerds call what happens next the Mosaic Theory: one snapshot of your car on a public road is nothing, but thousands of them, run through an algorithm, become a portrait of your doctor visits, your friendships, your 3 a.m. Tylenol runs. The software learns your "pattern of life." It knows your normal, it holds a backstage pass to your life that you never authorized, and its entire job is to notice when you deviate.

Twenty years ago, that portrait required a detective, a sedan, a thermos of bad coffee and a judge's eventual curiosity. Today it requires a login, wired into networks nationwide, one query away from a government employee you will never meet, in a state you have never visited. That is not a security moat. That is a dragnet with a homeowners' association.

### How Numb Have We Become?

This is the part I actually want you to sit with, more than any joke in this column.

Human beings are not built to be watched all the time. Watched people perform. Watched people edit themselves. Watched people drive past the turn they were going to take, for no articulable reason, because some small ancient part of the brain whispers: this will go in the file. There used to be a word for the feeling of being followed everywhere, monitored, logged,

your patterns studied by an unseen intelligence. The word was paranoia, and we medicated it. Now it's just the terms of service.

And look how fast we adjusted. Twenty years ago all of this was dystopian science fiction; today it's a Tuesday. We are the frog in the pot, except the frog at least had the dignity of not knowing. We know perfectly well, and we've decided the water is fine because it arrived one comfortable degree at a time, each degree marketed as a pragmatic positive.

The freedom to be anonymous, to tiptoe through your own life unremarked upon and unindexed, was never written down anywhere because nobody imagined it could be taken. It was the default setting of being alive. You were allowed to drive to the store at midnight for an embarrassing quantity of discounted cheese and have the whole transaction remain between you and God. You were allowed to be uninteresting. You were allowed to be ignored. That freedom is quietly leaving the building while we argue about camera poles, and the eeriest part is how little we feel it. Numbness is not the same as consent, but from a distance it looks identical.

### The Sarasota Scandal, Or: Systems Are Run By Humans

Every department in America defends these systems with the same national script: strict protocols, full audit trails, and any misuse is just "a few bad apples." It's in the brochure.

So let's inspect the apples. Across the bay in Sarasota, a now-former police officer was recently fired and charged with felonies after investigators say he used the Flock system to run one particular license plate 355 times over five months with no investigation attached, including 121 searches of that single plate in one day. One hundred twenty-one times. In a day. I don't check on my own children that often, and one of them owes me money. Unless that woman was driving a stolen nuclear warhead strapped to a panda, this was not police work. It was stalking, high-tech and taxpayer-funded. And it's not isolated: an officer up in Haines City allegedly ran his estranged wife's plate 717 times using invented justifications, with similar arrests recently in Kentucky and Kansas.

To be crystal clear: none of these men wear a Longboat Key uniform, and our officers deserve zero guilt by association. That's precisely the point. The problem was never the local cops. The problem is that a database of everyone's movements will always, eventually, prove irresistible to some human with a login, and the vaunted audit trail doesn't prevent it. The audit trail is not a shield. It's a receipt: it faithfully records the stalking while it happens, then hands prosecutors a beautifully formatted spreadsheet afterward. Build the orchard, and somewhere in it, an apple goes bad. That's not cynicism about police. That's realism about databases.

### The DeSantis Smackdown

Here's the plot twist: the pushback didn't come from the usual suspects. On August 31st the DeSantis administration, through FDOT, revoked every permit for license plate readers on state road rights of way, citing misuse, data privacy concerns and surveillance schemes, and gave everyone 30 days to take them down. The governor declared that Florida should not become a "digital AI surveillance state" and called for laws to keep us out of a "digital prison."

Let that sink in. Ron DeSantis, a man never once accused of being squishy on law enforcement, looked at these cameras and flinched. When this administration says a surveillance program goes too far, that is Keith Richards telling you to slow down at the bar.

### The Three-Foot Shell Game

So how is our town responding to the state's clear intent? By playing legal hopscotch. The plan under evaluation is to move the cameras just off the state right of way, onto a patch of municipal crabgrass, or a palm tree, or perhaps duct-taped to an exceptionally sturdy pelican, while keeping them pointed at the exact same road, feeding the exact same database.

The state says, "You cannot indiscriminately track citizens on this road." And the town answers, "Understood. But what if we stand three feet to the left and squint at the EXACT SAME ROAD?" It is the municipal equivalent of a kid holding his finger one inch from his sister's face chanting, "I'M NOT TOUCHING YOU." Adorable at age eight in a station wagon. Less adorable when performed by a government, with attorneys billing by the hour to determine the precise metaphysical boundary of a swale.

And there's a sequel nobody's discussing: if suitable municipal dirt runs out, Flock happily sells to HOAs and condo associations, with the feed still flowing to police, at which point the

OpinionEditorial

Cameras, from page 4

whole operation slides beyond public records laws and every oversight lever you thought you had. If you think your HOA is drunk on power over mailbox colors, wait until it operates the checkpoint.

The Monetization Of Our Freedom

One more layer, the one we flee into toxic denial to avoid. As my far more radical, and frankly far smarter, daughter puts it: this is the monetization of our freedom. Flock is a venture-backed tech company. The product is a catalog of human movement, and the raw material is you, driving to Publix. Every logged trip is inventory. You were born a person. You are being archived as an asset class.

A Eulogy For The Tiptoe

So here’s where I land, and I’ll own it as one man’s opinion. Personally? I’d take them down. A free people should get to cross their own bridge without being catalogued.

But I’m not asking the town to agree with me. I’m asking for two things no reasonable person, in uniform or out, can argue with. First, honor the spirit of the state’s order, not just its lettering: if the cameras are worth keeping, make that case in the sunshine at a commis-sion meeting, not by relocating poles via memo. Second, show us the data. Word is out, and no fugitive with a functioning GPS drives into the most photographed lion’s den on the Gulf

Coast. So of the Flock alerts our officers act on, how many are violent felons and stolen cars, and how many are expired tags? If it’s mostly felons, say so proudly. If it’s mostly paperwork, then we haven’t increased our safety, we’ve automated our harassment, converting a great police force into an armed DMV pulling over pool cleaners on an island where the most pressing emergency most afternoons is a seagull committing grand theft croissant. Every hour an officer spends answering a tablet ping is an hour not spent on the policing that built trust here: the bike rodeos, the door checks for snowbirds, the officer who knew your name. Our cops are better than the beep. Let them be cops.

Because there is profound beauty in being unnoticed. We were not meant to live watched. We were not meant to perform our errands for an audience of servers. Being ignored was the default setting of American life, and it has become the anomaly, and I remind you this system was specifically trained to flag anomalies. Left unchecked, this is the final victory of the Worst Marriage Ever: the state is your spouse, the AI is your mother-in-law, and both of them are checking your odometer while asking why you never call.

So keep strumming those acoustic guitars in your living rooms, Longboat. You may think you’re playing a solo, but Ozzy and the state are always listening.

And for the love of God, stop looking at my license plate. The registration is up next month. I’ll get to it when I get to it. Allegedly.

Letters, from page 2

Allen Parsons that provides feedback to both the City of Sarasota and the Florida Department of Commerce regarding the proposed transportation amendments to their comprehensive plan that was transmitted by the City for expedited state review. Please let either Isaac or I know if you have any questions.

Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

Sarasota Amendment Edition

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop  
Commissioner, please give me a call when you can. I’m concerned that what appeared to be a LBK planner at the September 1 staff “Workshop” left there confused and supportive of what staff and their consultant are trying to do.  
Dan Lobeck  
Law Offices of Lobeck & Rowe, P.A.

Damage Control: Checking the “Rotten Remarks” Roster  
To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton

Did he stray from our house rotten remarks?

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

Investigating the Alleged Deviation from Rottenness

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop  
Not that I’m aware of but will check it out.  
Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

G501 General Harris Hits the Auction Block

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton  
Quick update on the 501 General Harris foreclosure matter. The Plaintiff filed their notice of sale, so I am taking it as a sign that their newspaper advertisements will be timely. Sale is still set for September 24th. I calendared the sale date, and I will continue to monitor and update you all as needed.  
Daniel P. Lewis  
Town Attorney  
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Pass Gets a Makeover

To: Longboat Key Commission  
Manatee County will be dredging Longboat Pass as part of their Hurricane Idalia Storm Damage Repair Project. What can be expected is the same type of dredging activity the Town experienced when we dredged the pass, to successfully complete our Gulfside Road Segment nourishment project in 2024-2025. The Dredge should arrive in the pass and work is antici-pated to start this week The project should be complete within 90 days.  
Charles Mopps  
Public Works Director  
Town of Longboat Key Public Works

See Letters, page 6

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# EditorLetters



**Letters, from page 4**

**PSA: Stop Yelling at the Parking Staff**

To: Sarasota City Government staff

Yesterday, one of our Parking Division employees was assaulted while performing their job. This morning, I met with our Parking team alongside Police Chief Troche to talk about what occurred, their safety, and the support available to them.

I want every City employee to hear directly from me: We will not tolerate anyone threatening, intimidating, harassing, or putting their hands on a City employee who is simply doing their job.

We recognize that members of our community may disagree with City policies and decisions. They have every right to express those concerns, question our decisions, and advocate for change. This is part of serving in local government. But disagreement with a City policy never gives someone the right to mistreat the employee responsible for carrying it out.

Our Parking employees have been on the front lines of an issue that has generated significant public attention and strong emotions in recent weeks. Through it all, they continue to come to work and serve our community professionally. They deserve our support, respect, and most importantly, a safe environment in which to do their jobs.

Our Police Department and City administration are aligned on this issue. Threatening or assaulting one of our employees will be taken seriously, and we will respond appropriately.

I am also asking all our employees who work throughout the community – particularly those in the field - to look out for one another. If you see a fellow employee in a situation that appears confrontational or unsafe, do not ignore it. Be aware, offer assistance when it is safe to do so, contact a supervisor, and involve law enforcement when appropriate. And please if you just happen to see them in the field, please wave or say hello. We are one City team, and taking care of one another is part of what that means.

At the same time, I want us to remember why we are here. Public service is not always

easy. We encounter people on their best days and sometimes on their worst. We can enforce our rules, do our jobs professionally, and still lead with patience, respect, and kindness. Those values are not signs of weakness – they are part of what it means to be a public servant. I will also ask the same of our community. Debate the policy. Question a decision. Tell us when you believe we can do better. But please treat the people who serve this City with dignity and respect.

To our Parking team, I want you to know that I see the work you are doing and you have the full support of this administration and the Sarasota Police Department.

And to all of our employees, please continue to look out for one another. No one who comes to work each day to serve this community should ever have to wonder whether the City will stand behind them when their safety is threatened. We will. Thank you all for everything that you do for the City of Sarasota and for one another.

Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

**To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling**

I have had a number of constituents recently ask me (including today) specifically about the repairs needed at Whitaker Park, when it will open and what the holdup is specifically to Whitaker Park. The questions generally go like this: “It looks to be completely repaired from the water side and land side. The Sewell is completed. What work specifically needs to be done that needs FEMA’s approval or other permitting (aside from the dock) or what is the specific hold up to reopening Whitaker Park.” Thank you so much in advance for providing me with a detailed response when you are able.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner

See Letters, page 7



## SECUR-ALL INSURANCE AGENCY

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*Sandra Smith* | 941.383.3388

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# EditorLetters



**Letters, from page 6**  
City of Sarasota

**Everything But the Parking**

To: Sarasota City Planner Steve Cover

Where are we at with the JB Turner house project? The last time that we met with the developer, we shared we would get an appraisal of our land and get back together with them to discuss next steps and options. Have we received the appraisal? The survey is expected to be received this week. The developer just paid the invoice for the appraisal, which is now expected to be finished in roughly four weeks. The developer has offered to relocate the house and fix it up to meet whatever needs there may be for a future tenant, but would still like the air rights at no cost.

Has there been conversations at the Commission level about doing a workshop on accessory dwelling units/small cottages, etc. in our residential areas? If so, Is this something that is on our radar? This was discussed extensively with the Community/Commission, ultimately leading up to an ordinance adopted August 17, 2021 (Ordinance No. 20-5337) that allows accessory dwelling units citywide, except for the barrier islands, with a maximum size of 650 sq. ft.

The condo/hotel zoning classification is going to be heating up. Please provide me with your plan for this project, including outreach efforts planned. Kelly Brown reached out to me and indicated the CCNA is going to be forming an ad-hoc group to work on this. Staff is researching this issue and would look to start outreach efforts later this fall. It should be noted that the two development projects that were previously proposing the condo/hotel model are no longer doing so. To date there are no applications developing condo hotels.

Shell verses Asphalt ZTA - is this underway or being considered to make this change and allow? Shell is not allowed in city rights-of-way (driveway aprons connecting to a street) due to washout into the storm drainage system. Pursuant to Sec. VII-203 of the Zoning Code, all off-street parking areas shall be surfaced with asphalt, bituminous or concrete material, clay brick or concrete paving units, or permeable pavement surfaces and maintained in a smooth, well-graded condition. This standard ensures ADA compliance is met and shell does not meet that standard due to its lack of compaction and level grading.

ZTA amendment to allow larger setbacks to protect trees – is this under consideration. It was brought up at a commission meeting last month. Due to the conflict of SB180 in creating a more restrictive standard by increasing the minimum setback here, this item would need to wait until October of 2027 when SB180 is scheduled to sunset.

In addition, staff is currently working on the Batch ZTA for 2026, with a total of 17 items scheduled for public hearing before the Planning Board next Wednesday, as well as the Composting ZTA and Bay Park ZTA items that are tentatively scheduled to go to the Planning Board next month. Planning and Development Services staff just met today and are researching information related to a future elevated houses ZTA.

Lastly, staff is working on updating the Commercial Shopping Center (CSC) Zone District to be consistent with the related Future Land Use Classification (Metropolitan Regional No.

9) for the 33.95-acre former Southgate Mall site. The Commission, on November 4, 2024, amended the Future Land Use Classification for this site to allow for residential and mixed-use development. This zone district is only applicable to this site.

Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

**The Fast and the Confused**

To: Linda Kitsch

Thanks Linda. I understand better now. I don't know the answer but I have copied the City Manager and Chief of Police and am guessing they will be able to respond.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

**The Fast and the Confused**

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

Perhaps I am groggy from working outside in the garden in the heat, or perhaps senility is beginning to set in for me, but let me try to clarify my issue.

There are two signs on Hatton St eastbound right before Shade; one says Traffic Camera Enforcement all day, one says 15mph during morning & evening schooldays.

But there is one sign on Shade, southbound, that says 15mph 7am - 3.45pm (all day). (Northbound on Shade, just north of Bahia Vista, is a flashing 15mph sign, but that does not flash all day from 7 a.m.-3:45 p.m.; correct me if I'm wrong here.)

So I suppose my question is: we are all used to seeing school slow zones for mornings and evenings. Is Shade speed limit an anomaly, that is, is it the except to the normal, is it really supposed to be 15mph All Day (as opposed to the usual mornings & afternoons)?

If that is the case, I have no objection but you must understand how this would be confusing to people, not only to me.

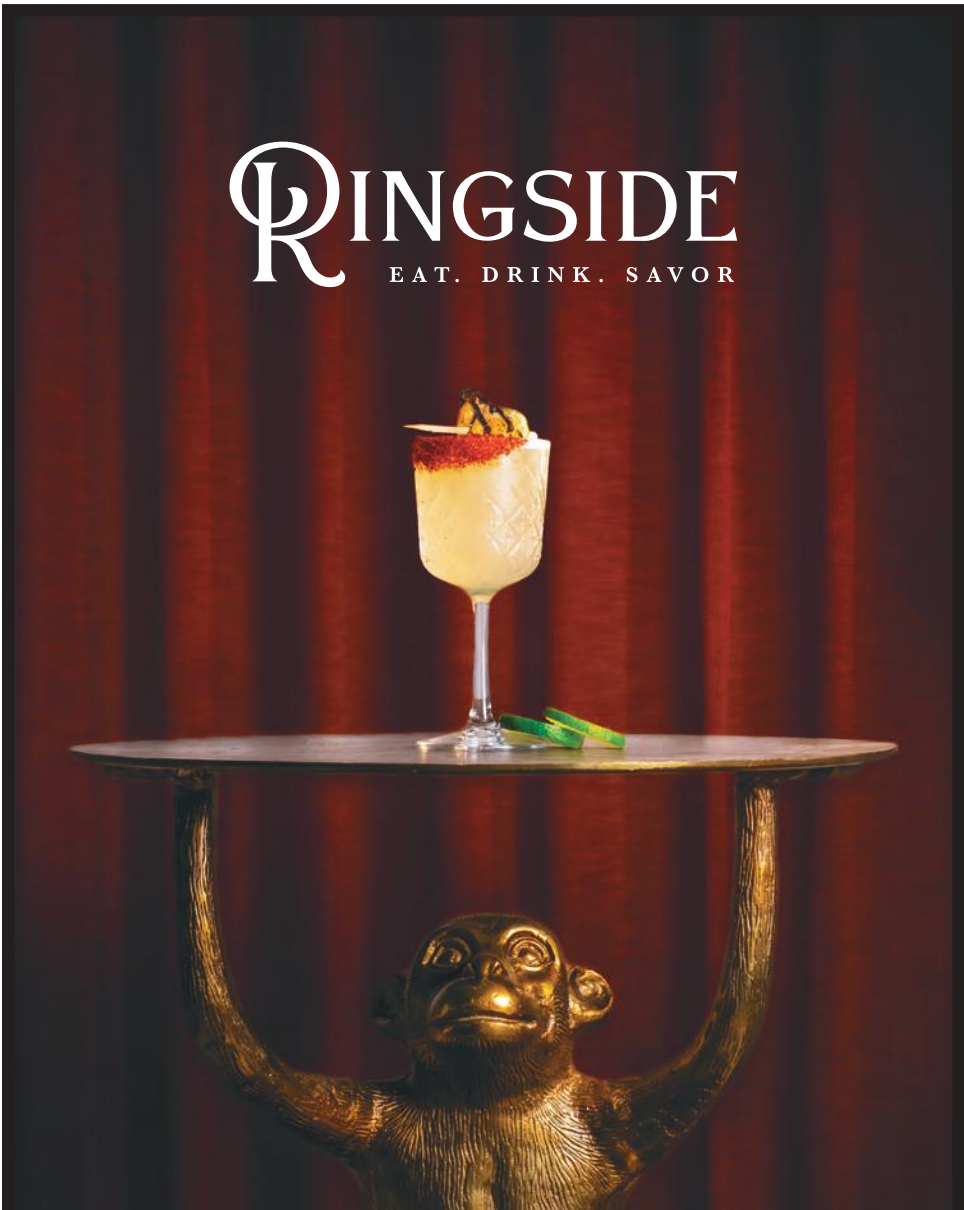
Linda Kitch  
Sarasota

**The Fast and the Confused**

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

I know Steve has been in touch regarding the long-running speeding issue on Tamisola St abutting Sarasota High. We are both Alta Vista residents who have long been pushing on several issues in our neighborhood abutting SHS, as the Alta Vista Neighborhood Assn has been generally, um, let's say "uninspired" to deal with such matters.

See Letters, page 11



## RINGSIDE

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# WineTimes

## Exploring the History, Wine and Unexpected Warmth of the Biltmore

*It does not have rides or waterslides or cartoon characters. Instead, it has French chateau architecture, interiors, and lush and manicured gardens reminiscent of Versailles, vineyards, a winery, a creamery, sheepherding, stables and more to see.*

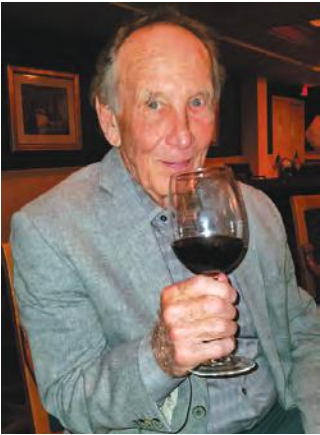
**S.W. and Rich Hermansen**  
Guest Writers  
wine@lbknews.com

Concluding a series of articles about summer getaways in the Mid-Atlantic region, we review a brief stay at the Biltmore Estates resort in Asheville NC. This quick jaunt into the Appalachian Mountains usually, but not always we found, escapes the hot and muggy climate of Florida and the Georgia, Carolinas, and Virginia coasts. Having moved from the cities and suburbs of the East Coast and the Midwest to hot and muggy areas on the Coasts, ex-snowbirds are now renting or buying summer residences in the mountains. So now we have summer beach-birds in the Appalachians.

Asheville has developed a reputation as a welcoming place for East Coast summer tourists and residents. Its arts and antiques scene has expanded into music, chic bars and restaurants, and community events. For families and touring seniors, the Biltmore Estates has become central to Asheville. This sprawling resort and Gilded Age theme park occupy 8,000 acres in an area very close to the center of Asheville. It does not have rides or waterslides or cartoon characters. Instead, it has French chateau architecture, interiors, and lush and manicured gardens reminiscent of Versailles, vineyards, a winery, a creamery, sheepherding, stables and more to see. Touring the winding roads and exploring wooded trails helps us appreciate the expanse of the Estate. The stone buildings and walls endure as monuments to the Vanderbilt dynasty during the late 19th Century. The stone structures remain; the dynasty has crumbled.

The driving force behind the Biltmore Estate, George Washington Vanderbilt II, the youngest grandson of the tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt, had a vision of a vast farming and forestry estate. He acquired using agents some 125,000 acres of land and managed his holdings to create sustainable crops and lumber production. After his death, his widow sold 86,000 acres to the federal government for the Pisgah National Forest. The Estate in Asheville dwindled to the current 8,000 acre tract. Around it has grown a village and a large community of residents with showplace homes and gardens.

At the Biltmore Estate, the schedule of events and activities includes much more than time allows during a day or two visit. It seems to work best to stay at least one night in an Estate lodging and buy the tour packages that give you access to what you want to see during the evening before and morning after your stay. Reservations in the main house have a minimum stay of two nights. A typical package includes the Luminere light show and access to the Main House and Village. The Luminere package also includes informal wine tastings at the Antler Village Winery and in the lobby of the Village Hotel. In the lobby, the staff poured only one of the Biltmore Estate wines, an odd blend of grapes. They did not have the best of the Biltmore wines, a Gewürztraminer. The Estate grows this grape in a relatively small plot and may have sold out of the current vintage. Music played at the lobby tasting delighted us. Local banjo and guitar player Kevin Scanlon, with his son Kayden on violin, performed a series of oldtime Appalachian Highland and newer Bluegrass tunes. This distinctive style of music has evolved



over many generations in the small villages that dot the winding roads through mountain passes and along creek beds in the Highlands west and north of Asheville. Kayden played the violin in the plain oldtime style. When his father took a break, he switched to a classical style with vibrato and a more delicate touch of the bow. We asked what college he attended. He told us he was fourteen and in high school.

Dinner in the Main House gave us a chance to take a quick look at the grand halls and curated sitting and meeting rooms. The main dining room featured an extensive wine list and a thoughtful though limited menu.

### A precautionary note:

We expected daytime temperatures to be less than 80F during our visit in August. Temperatures actually reached the low 90's. Fortunately we had packed hot weather clothes for our return to the coast.



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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  |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-------------|--------------------|---|---|----------------|-------------|
| 401 QUAY COMMONS Unit#1501        | 3,798   | \$7,250,000 | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 205            | \$6,762,500 |
| 465 E ROYAL FLAMINGO DR           | 2,846   | \$4,650,000 | 4                  | 4 | 0 | 51             | \$4,512,500 |
| 35 WATERGATE DR Unit#502          | 3,751   | \$2,875,000 | 4                  | 4 | 0 | 90             | \$2,700,000 |
| 1155 N GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#908    | 1,770   | \$1,900,000 | 2                  | 2 | 1 | 0              | \$1,900,000 |
| 888 BLVD OF THE ARTS Unit#104     | 1,729   | \$1,400,000 | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 12             | \$1,125,000 |
| 555 N ORANGE AVE Unit#306         | 1,138   | \$1,025,000 | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 0              | \$900,000   |
| 800 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#509 | 1,150   | \$899,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 84             | \$895,000   |
| 33 S PALM AVE Unit#902            | 1,397   | \$929,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 199            | \$875,000   |
| 1750 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#6F | 2,035   | \$800,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 2              | \$795,000   |
| 770 S PALM AVE Unit#1501          | 1,408   | \$789,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 85             | \$750,000   |
| 825 S OSPREY AVE Unit#101         | 1,260   | \$499,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 139            | \$450,000   |
| 1268 11TH ST Unit#2403            | 867     | \$390,000   | 1                  | 1 | 1 | 176            | \$370,000   |
| 415 L AMBIANCE DR Unit#A301       | 3,380   | \$6,100,000 | 3                  | 3 | 2 | 108            | \$5,450,000 |
| 701 MARBURY LANE                  | 2,246   | \$1,350,000 | 3                  | 2 | 0 | 337            | \$1,225,000 |
| 3460 WINDING OAKS DR Unit#38      | 2,608   | \$1,150,000 | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 37             | \$1,135,000 |
| 4485 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#804   | 1,175   | \$1,025,000 | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 69             | \$960,000   |
| 3030 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#312      | 2,143   | \$995,000   | 3                  | 3 | 1 | 33             | \$910,000   |
| 5757 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#205   | 1,561   | \$895,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 4              | \$875,000   |
| 615 DREAM ISLAND PL Unit#210      | 1,509   | \$949,900   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 110            | \$870,000   |
| 521 BAYPORT WAY Unit#521          | 1,260   | \$619,900   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 48             | \$615,000   |
| 600 SUTTON PL Unit#B302           | 1,132   | \$449,000   | 2                  | 2 | 0 | 105            | \$439,000   |
| 2600 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#H-05     |         | \$200,000   |                    |   |   | 88             | \$137,500   |



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# OnPatrol

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

## Aug. 30 Ghost Ships Seeking Seafood

11:18 a.m.  
Officer Van Dyke responded to Broadway in reference to a suspicious vessel. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke spoke with the complainant and she advised that two vessels were inching close tot he restaurant's docks in the back of the property and possibly derelict. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke observed two sailboats and saw they appeared to be derelict due to minor exterior damage and no indication of occupan-cy. The vessels appeared to be anchored properly, no anchor dragging was observed. Per internal database, the vessels are registered to different people and they were contacted via phone. Case clear.



residential burglary alarm. Upon arrival, officers heard the alarm sounding and found the door lead-ing from the garage into the residence unsecured. A second-floor door leading into the residence was also unsecured. Officers conducted a search of the resi-dence and found no persons inside, signs of forced entry, or evidence of criminal activity. A review of the residence's security cameras also yielded negative results. The homeowner was contacted and advised that no one was authorized to be at the residence because the homeowners were out of state. The com-plainant stated that painters had been working inside the residence the previous day and likely left the doors unlocked. He advised that he would contact someone to respond and secure the residence.

## Lights Out, License Expired

9:33 p.m.  
Officer Troyer while on patrol in the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive observed a black Honda Accord traveling northbound with a defective headlight. Officer Troyer did not observe any light being emitted from the driver side headlight bulb. Officer Troyer conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle in the area of Schooner Lane. Officer Troyer explained to the driver the reason for the traffic stop. The driver handed his Louisiana driver's license, and said he knew his license was expired due to paperwork. Officer Troyer observed the expiration date on his license as Aug. 27, 2024. Based on his investigation, Officer Troyer found probable cause to issue the man a criminal citation in violation of Driving with Expired License more than Six Months. The driver parked the vehicle and contacted a friend to assist him with removing it later. Case clear.

## Aug. 31 FLOCKed Around and Found Out

8:00 p.m.  
Officer Castro Agis while on patrol in the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, received a flock camera alert regarding a vehicle whose registered owner had a suspended driver's license. Officer Castro Agis initiated a traffic stop on the vehicle, and approached the driver and explained the reason for the stop. The driver who was the vehicle owner, provided her Florida Driver's License and stated she was unaware her license was suspended. The woman's driver's license was suspended on Jan. 5, 2026 in reference to a financial responsibility case. The woman also had a seized tag order. Additionally, records indicated she had no insurance information on file. The driver was issued a citation for operating a vehicle with a suspended license and failure to provide proof of insurance. Officer Castro Agis seized her license and plate and placed them into property. The driver's vehicle was left in the parking lot and will retrieve it after resolving the issue with the DMV. Case clear.

## Sept. 1 Call Me Maybe... From China

11:33 a.m.  
Officer Tillman responded to the police department lobby regarding a suspicious incident. The complainant stated he received a long text message from a China phone number stating that his cellular phone was sold on the black market and is now in China. The complainant stated that he did lose his cellular phone while at the hospital in May, and had it replaced. The complainant stated that he was going to report the incident to Verizon in case this is an issue with the cell provider. No secure information was stored on the phone and no money was lost. The complainant wanted a report in case future activity was to arise. Case clear.

## Sept. 3 The Case of the Phantom Painters

5:58 a.m.  
Officer Pescuma responded to the 2900 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive regarding an audible

## Door vs. Machine: Access Denied

9:30 a.m.  
Officer Van Dyke responded to Bay Isles Parkway in reference to property damage. Upon arrival, Officr Van Dyke spoke with the front gate security manager. He advised that a white male driving a white pickup truck unintentionally damaged the card reader as he was travel-ing through the community the previous day at 4:49 p.m. The vehicle plate was unable to be deciphered. The scanned card determined who the card belongs to. The complainant plans to follow up with the marina to gather contact information for the slip owners. The actions of the driver didn't appear intentional based on the video footage provided. The driver appears to backup after missing his initial opportunity to pass through the open gate. Upon attempting to reach out of the vehicle and re-scan the card reader, the vehicle door struck the card reader. The security manager requested a case number for documentation purposes. Case clear.

## Big Brother is Watching You Fish

10:42 a.m.  
Officer Van Dyke responded to Hibiscus Way in reference to a suspicious incident. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke spoke to the property manager who said that the homeowner has been watching his property's camera footage from out of state. According to the homeowner, he saw several teenagers fishing on his property, specifically his dock, several times over an unknown timeframe. Officer Van Dyke educated the man on the trespass laws for future incidents. Case clear.

## Peace Out, Pew Pews

11:13 a.m.  
Officer Van Dyke responded to the 4600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to property. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke met with the complainant who advised that since both her parents had passed away, she inherited the residence and everything within it, and wanted to surrender their firearms. One was a shotgun and the other was a rifle. The firearms were safely cleared, packaged and submitted into property for safekeeping. Case clear.

## Sept. 4 Can You Hear Me Now?

6:44 p.m.  
Officer Castro Agis was dispatched to Bayou Road regarding a report of a suspicious person. Prior to being dispatched to this incident, Officer Castro Agis was approached by a man at the intersection of Bay Isles Parkway and Bay Isles Road. The man wearing a Verizon polo shirt and later identified via his Washington driver's license, and advised he wanted to report an alterca-tion with another man inside Bay Isles. The man said the verbal altercation arose due to his presence in the community and that he was there for an appointment with a resident on Bayou Road. Officer Castro Agis proceeded to the security guardhouse at Bay Isles and requested the security officer on duty to contact the other man who subsequently arrived at the loca-tion. The security officer confirmed that the man had been granted permission by a resident to enter the community. The man said that while riding his bike on Bayou Road, he saw the other man walking away from the driveway of a woman on Bayou Sound. The man reported that the woman told him she was frightened when the man came to her home attempting to sell Frontier and Verizon services. The man then approached the other man and informed him of the community's no soliciting rule. The man began to walk away, he allegedly bumped into the other man prompting him to grab the man's arm in response. Officer Castro Agis explained the rules to the man, advising that he is only permitted by appointment. The officer further warned that if he returned to solicit, he would be trespassed from the community. The man acknowledged the warning and left the area without further incident. Case clear.

## Sept. 6 Steel Your Motivation

6:27 p.m.  
Officer Maple while on patrol in the 5400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive was flagged down by the complainant who said he had found a wallet in the parking lot of the 5700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. Upon receiving the wallet, Officer Maple inventoried the contents and located five credit cards and Florida Driver's License. The brown leather wallet contained two \$100 bills and two \$1 bills and a stainless steel credit card sized personal motivational quotes. Using an online search, Officer Maple was able to locate the owner of the wallet and he agreed to a meeting with police after he verified the contents of the wallet. At approximately 10:10 p.m., Officer Maple met with the owner at the hardware store and turned over his belongings once he filled out a property receipt. The owner departed the area after collecting his property and withott incident. Case clear.

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# OnPatrol

## Pirates of the Marina

7:00 p.m.  
Officer Castro Agis was dispatched to the 3700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive regarding a suspicious incident. The complainant called police to report that an unknown boat had entered the community's private marina. The complainant said that the boat, which he described as a white center console approximately 21 feet in length, was occupied by two white males with beards and long hair. He advised that he had spoken with the occupants of the boat, who asked whether there were any properties for rent. The complainant said that after he confronted the men, they left the area, he also said the men were towing a small dinghy, which they have left anchored east of the marina. The complainant expressed concern that the men may have been casing the area. Officer Castro Agis advised the complainant to contact the police department if the boat returns. Case clear.



## Sept. 7 Calling Shotgun

3:45 a.m.

Officer Maple while on patrol in the 5000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, observed an SUV parked in the middle of Gulf of Mexico Drive facing south-bound with hazard lights on and both occupants out of the car. Upon arrival, Officer Maple energized his emergency lights and observed the occupants trying to catch a large black and brown German Shepard. As Officer Maple exited the vehicle to assist in corraling the energetic dog. The dog jumped into the front seat of the patrol car. Officer Maple questioned the driver of the white Ford SUV about the status of the dog and he said that it was running free on Gulf of Mexico Drive and he almost hit it. The area in question is very dark and a large loose dog presented a traffic hazard. The driver departed the area while Officer Maple commenced a search for the owner with the dog now relocated to the back seat of the patrol car. Contacting dispatch revealed an earlier call from the complainant about an escaped dog had matched the description. The dog was reunited with the owner without incident. Case clear.

## Cowabunga, Pool Crashers!

9:06 p.m.  
Officer Maple was dispatched to Gulfside Road for an animal problem call. The call was in reference to seven sea turtle hatchlings trapped in a swimming pool. Dispatch notified the officer that the complainant had attempted to contact Mote Marine and was unsuccessful in gaining access to a live operator to make a report. The complainant didn't want to see any harm come to the hatchlings and contacted dispatch for assistance. Prior to Officer Maple's arrival, he located the phone number for the Longboat Key Turtle Watch point of contact to explain the situation and seek guidance. The woman responded to the scene and met with the officer. The complainant and her three acquaintances directed the woman and Officer Maple to the pool. The woman collected the turtles from the pool and relocated five of them back to the ocean without incident. Two of the seven were cold to the touch and appeared to need some medical attention. The two hatchlings were retained by Turtle Watch for transfer to Mote Marine in the morning. During the release of the five healthy hatchlings, the woman put on an informal education lecture for the complainant and her friends. Case clear.

## Wrong Kind of Water Hazard

7:39 p.m.  
Officer Troyer was dispatched to Harbourside Drive in reference to a trespass. The complainant advised he worked security and had a man trespassing and was fishing on private property. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer met with the complainant on the golf course and witnessed the trespassing occur. The complainant advised he did not believe the subject had any permission to be on the property and requested he be formally written trespassed. Officer Troyer made contact with the subject and advised he needed to leave the property. The security guard explained to the man he was trespassed. Officer Troyer issued him a formal written trespass warning and he vacated the property without incident. Officer Troyer further provided the trespassing information to the Sarasota County Dispatch.

## Letters, from page 7

I am forwarding this long email thread to you re my asking the City to correct the School Zone signs on nearby Shade & Hatton, which show inconsistent reduced 15mph times. This hasn't been clarified/resolved. (I'm Pro-traffic-enforcement.)  
I'm not asking anything of you here, just sending this as additional context, because it's related to the speeding issues around SHS.  
Linda Kitch  
Sarasota

These should be consistent! Please have that fixed.  
Linda Kitch  
Sarasota

## Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Confusing Sign

To: Cory Holding  
did u ever follow up with me on this confusing school zone sign issue (as Sage asked in email earlier in August)? Hatton Street sign says 15 mph 7 – 8:45 and 3 – 3:45 and additional (new) sign on Hatton (just before that sign, somewhat tree-obsured) says “speed limit photo enforced” 7 – 3:45. But Shade Avenue sign says 15 mph 7 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.  
I understood that the photo enforcement is valid at any time based on the speed limit at that time, that's not my question. My question is: is Shade supposed to be 15 mph all day, or just morning and evening, like it used to be? The two 15 mph signs are inconsistent as to hours.  
Personally i wish we could install another camera on Hatton, where especially at night, joyriders certainly exceed the “usual” 25 mph by 10, 20, 30 mph!  
Thanks for any clarification you can give. Yes i do plan to attend a traffic calming open house, but they don't seem to deal with these special school safety zones.  
Linda Kitch  
Sarasota

## Keep Your Hands to Yourself

To: Sarasota City Commission  
Yesterday, one of our Parking Division employees was assaulted while performing their job. This morning, I met with our Parking team alongside Police Chief Troche to talk about what occurred, their safety, and the support available to them.  
I want every City employee to hear directly from me: We will not tolerate anyone threatening, intimidating, harassing, or putting their hands on a City employee who is simply doing their job.  
We recognize that members of our community may disagree with City policies and decisions. They have every right to express those concerns, question our decisions, and advocate for change. This is part of serving in local government. But disagreement with a City policy never gives someone the right to mistreat the employee responsible for carrying it out.  
Our Parking employees have been on the front lines of an issue that has generated significant public attention and strong emotions in recent weeks. Through it all, they continue to come to work and serve our community professionally. They deserve our support, respect, and most importantly, a safe environment in which to do their jobs.  
Our Police Department and City administration are aligned on this issue. Threatening or assaulting one of our employees will be taken seriously, and we will respond appropriately.  
I am also asking all our employees who work throughout the community – particularly those in the field - to look out for one another. If you see a fellow employee in a situation that appears confrontational or unsafe, do not ignore it. Be aware, offer assistance when it is safe to do so, contact a supervisor, and involve law enforcement when appropriate. And please if you just happen to see them in the field, please wave or say hello. We are one City team, and taking care of one another is part of what that means.

## The Fast and the Confused: School Zone Edition

To: Sarasota City Engineer Sage Kamiya  
Well, school starts next Monday; I wondered if you folks have an update regarding that school zone sign (with camera) on Shade Ave, the one that shows a whopping “7 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.” speed restriction? If I recall, your dept was working on these issues this summer.  
Linda Kitch  
Sarasota

At the same time, I want us to remember why we are here. Public service is not always easy. We encounter people on their best days and sometimes on their worst. We can enforce our rules, do our jobs professionally, and still lead with patience, respect, and kindness. Those values are not signs of weakness – they are part of what it means to be a public servant. I will also ask the same of our community. Debate the policy. Question a decision. Tell us when you believe we can do better. But please treat the people who serve this City with dignity and respect.  
To our Parking team, I want you to know that I see the work you are doing and you have the full support of this administration and the Sarasota Police Department.  
And to all of our employees, please continue to look out for one another. No one who comes to work each day to serve this community should ever have to wonder whether the City will stand behind them when their safety is threatened. We will. Thank you all for everything that you do for the City of Sarasota and for one another.  
Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

## Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Confusing Sign

To: Linda Kitch  
Appreciate your patience for us to review this. As you've mentioned we have a city-wide issue that we need to improve. Regarding different times, though, this is acceptable as the statute is based on the school times for which the school zone covers.  
We annually receive school times from the schools for flashing beacons, signage, etc. During this summer when we get these, we will review specifically if the times posted need to be updated. Thanks again for your interest in traffic and school safety.  
Sage Kamiya  
City Engineer  
City of Sarasota

## Consistency? Not on These Speed Limit Signs

To: Sarasota City Commission  
In our AltaVista neighborhood there are some school zone reduced speed limit signs, which are inconsistent. Near Hatton/Shade intersection, one on Hatton says 15 mph Monday-Friday 7 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. & 3 - 3:45 p.m., as do most. But the one on shade av says Monday-Friday 7 a.m. - 3:45 p.m., essentially all day. (the one near the Camera). That's just wrong, is it not?

## Coming Soon: Less Sidewalk, More Ninjas

To: Jody Geiger  
I hope your day is going well.  
Just wanted to provide an update for North Water Tower Park.



**Hotel, from page 1**

neighborhood that has spent eight years staring at a 45,860-square-foot corpse of the super-market wars showed up to fight the thing meant to replace it, armed with dumpster photographs, helicopter flight paths and a 27-year resident’s plea for someone, anyone, to look at the big picture. By evening, three board members had done exactly that, and they did not like what they saw.

“There’s so much potential for it, and it could have been done so many different ways,” Chair Shane LaMay said before casting the deciding vote. “We could do so much better than this.”

**The Plan That Died**

The proposal, seven years in the making, came from longtime plaza owner Midtown Associates and principal Gavin Meshad. It would have demolished the grocery box that Winn-Dixie abandoned in 2018 and raised in its place a six-story hotel at Tamiami Trail and Prospect Street, an L-shaped six-story apartment building, a parking structure along East Avenue and a sliver of retail. The Starbucks stays either way. So does Michael’s On East, the plaza’s famous anchor next door.

The numbers all worked on paper. Twenty-three of the 91 apartments, roughly one in four, would have been attainable units for households at or below 120 percent of area median income, evenly distributed through a building that is three-quarters one-bedroom units, 68 of them, alongside 23 two-bedrooms. Parking came in at 264 spaces against 231 required. The six-story buildings sat 198 feet from the nearest residential zoning, nearly double the 100-foot minimum. The traffic study came back de minimis. Staff recommended approval with conditions.

And none of it was enough.

**The Hospital Hotel**

Nobody on the board disputed the project’s central economic logic, because it has only grown stronger since the Meshad family first pitched it to the City Commission in 2020: Sarasota Memorial has become a regional medical destination, drawing cardiac, cancer and orthopedic patients from across Florida, and those patients arrive with spouses and caregivers who need somewhere to sleep. The medical-stay economy is no longer theoretical on this stretch of the Trail. It is the market.

Joel Freedman, the veteran development consultant presenting for the owner, made the point personally. “A hotel right there across the street from the hospital, I have personal experience with that,” he told the board. “That is a very much needed use for the hospital. It’ll be heavily used by visitors of the hospital.”

Even Dan Clermont, the project’s strongest defender on the board, framed his support in hospital terms. “We need a hotel near the hospital,” he said. “We have two hotels that have closed down there, probably because of their own abuse by the owner, because they just weren’t maintained. And this is a nice hotel.” He added that he believed the flag would be a Courtyard.

The board did not vote against the idea of a hospital hotel. It voted against this one.

**Arlington Park Answers**

The neighborhood’s case was cumulative, and it was personal. The Arlington Park Neighborhood Association’s board entered a formal statement opposing approval until essential modifications are made, zeroing in on the lack of safe pedestrian and vehicular pathways around the site.

Then came the receipts. Testimony read into the record catalogued a history of what residents described as bad-neighbor behavior on this very block: Michael’s On East delivery trucks parked at the Midtown Medical Center behind residents’ bedroom windows, then as many as six Wolf Roofing construction dumpsters stationed there for more than a year. The same ownership, residents noted, controls both Midtown Plaza and the Medical Center, and they predicted the new garage’s overflow would land next door around the clock. “The high density parking will be 24/7,” the statement warned, “and not the limited Michael’s On East valet accommodation.”

The testimony even went airborne. Sarasota Memorial runs an emergency helicopter pad, and residents asked what a new six-story hotel and apartment block would do to flight paths that already avoid the hospital’s own towers by cutting over the one-story homes of Arlington Park. Build the towers, the argument went, and the helicopters concentrate over the neighborhood’s bedrooms permanently, perhaps with the same red rooftop warning lights now appearing at the hospital.

Dale Wolfson of Floyd Street described lanes so narrow a trash truck effectively closes them, and predicted hotel guests and displaced high school pickup traffic would flood them. And Flow Entler, a 37-year city resident, 27 of them on Floyd Street, stacked up the arithmetic: 233 units at the Bay Vista apartments, 270 more coming at the Temple site under the Live Local Act, roughly 240 more here, some 740 units ringing Arlington Park, with the shuttered Baymont next door being marketed for its “highest and best use.”

“At every development project I speak at, I ask who is paying attention to the big picture?” Entler said. “It doesn’t seem like anyone’s paying attention.” Then she reminded the board of the fact that gave the afternoon its weight: because the property was rezoned years ago, this site plan never reaches the City Commission. “The buck stops with you. Please do not approve this project as presented today.”

Three members were listening.

**The Traffic Ledger**

The city’s traffic math became the hearing’s fault line. Alexandria DavisShaw, the acting assistant city engineer, explained that because the site once housed a supermarket, the project receives credit for the traffic the grocery store used to generate. Run through that formula, the redevelopment adds a net 16 new evening peak-hour trips, comfortably de minimis. Pressed by Clermont for the raw number, DavisShaw acknowledged the site will actually generate about 129 peak-hour trips, and that East Avenue, as a mere local road, is not evaluated by the city’s

methodology at all.

“I can tell you I live right around the corner from East Avenue,” Clermont said, “and it is a broken road.”

LaMay bore down on the plan’s most contested feature, a new second access point dumping traffic directly onto that broken road, when an earlier version of the plan kept everything on Prospect. Why no pushback from the city? DavisShaw allowed that, generally speaking, “we try to have fewer driveway cuts if possible.”

**A Rebuttal That Did Not Land**

The project team came out swinging in rebuttal, and Freedman opened with a needle: “It’s interesting, on a few projects not too long ago you guys were talking about we’re providing too much parking. It’s never the way you want it to be.”

He reminded the board that under the comprehensive plan’s own consistency rule, a code-compliant project in an implementing zone district is consistent, period. He noted the site could legally seek up to 75 units per acre, far beyond what was proposed. Landscape architect Phil Smith unveiled the plan’s olive branch to East Avenue: a brand-new eight-foot-wide sidewalk separated from the curb by a planting strip, street trees, ornamental lights and an eight-foot podocarpus hedge running the length of the property, “kind of that green wall.” The design team also corrected the record on the garage residents kept calling three stories: two stories at its highest point, one story at the corner of Prospect and East.

Then came the theory that sank the ship. The team argued the East Avenue cut actually helps the neighborhood by “diluting” traffic across four access points, sparing drivers the nightmarish left turn onto Bay Vista near the traffic light.

Board member Douglas Christy took the theory apart like a watch. Anyone parking in the garage, he reasoned, sits in the back quadrant of the site, and the East Avenue cut is the closest exit. “You’re going to want to take the right out, which effectively makes East the entrance,” Christy said. “I know you’re thinking of it as a back door, but living in the apartment building, that will be the primary in and out.” When the team insisted otherwise, he answered simply: “The apartment parking is off of East.”

**The Chair Unloads**

Whatever suspense remained ended when LaMay, an architect by profession, opened the board’s deliberation. He wanted to like the project, he said. Something needs to happen on the property. And then he took the site plan apart on design grounds with a candor rarely heard from the dais.

The buildings, he said, turn their backs to almost every street around them, inwardly focused, with the street-facing frontage of the apartment building given over to a vault room, a pump room and pool storage behind louvered walls. “Frankly, I’m getting tired of it,” LaMay said. “I think it’s bad design, it’s just poor planning. You drive down these buildings and they’re these awful louvers with mechanical vents blowing hot air out. We can do better. We can face the street, we can make a nicer walking environment for people that live in this neighborhood.”

The real driver of the layout, he argued, was the 100-foot height setback from the single-family homes, which shoved the towers away from the neighborhood and left the garage and the trash enclosure to fill the gap. “That should not be driving why a parking garage and the trash are put there instead,” he said.

Alexander Neihaus, who had spent the entire day interrogating parking plans, supplied the legal spine for a denial. The zoning code requires adequate provisions for vehicular and pedestrian access, safety and circulation, and the neighbors’ testimony about East Avenue, he said, amounted to competent substantial evidence of safety problems the plan did not answer. “Despite my best efforts to try and understand the logic of the site plan circulation, it just doesn’t make sense to me,” he said.

**The Defense, and the Vote**

Clermont made the case for yes, and it was not a rubber stamp. The project meets the code at nearly every turn, he argued: height, setbacks doubled, parking exceeded, three grand trees protected, attainable units included. “There is no perfect project,” he said. “Some of the things are emotional, some of them are imagined, some of them are suppositions that aren’t supported necessarily by any hard fact. And that’s what we’re always charged with here.”

He moved to approve site plan 25-SP-10 with staff’s conditions. Tiffany Nisbet seconded. The roll call: Nisbet yes, Neihaus no, Clermont yes, Christy no, LaMay no. The motion failed, 3-2.

LaMay then offered the counter-motion, finding the site plan does not meet the zoning code’s criteria for approval, and moved to deny. Christy seconded. Nisbet no, Neihaus yes, Clermont no, Christy yes, LaMay yes. Denied, 3-2.

**What Happens Now**

The Meshads are not out of options. The denial can be appealed to the City Commission, or the team can go back to the drawing board and return with a reconfigured plan, and the board practically wrote the punch list for them from the dais: face the buildings to the street, rethink the East Avenue access, move the trash off the neighborhood’s corner.

But the message of Wednesday’s vote carries well beyond one shopping center. A Planning Board that spent the same afternoon forcing a Michael Jordan-branded private club into full retreat downtown showed it is done accepting projects that merely pencil. Code compliance, three members effectively said, is the floor, not the finish line.

Meanwhile, the ironies pile up at 41 and Bahia Vista. Sarasota Memorial keeps expanding across the street, minting demand for exactly the hotel this project promised. The Baymont next door is being shopped for redevelopment. Live Local towers are circling the corridor. And the Winn-Dixie, dead since 2018, begins its ninth year as the most valuable vacant building in Sarasota, waiting for a plan good enough to replace it.

Arlington Park asked who was paying attention. On Wednesday, by the narrowest of margins, someone finally was.

Letters, from page 11

equipment, and the other pertains to site preparation. Upon approval of the Purchase Orders, we will proceed with ordering the equipment. A permit will be required before we can advance with the site preparation activities.

North Water Tower Park Improvements:

- Order 2 new custom play systems for kids ages 2-5 years and kids ages 5-12 years
- Order Ninja Training Ground Outdoor Fitness for teens and adults
- Removal/demo of existing playground structure
- Removal of sidewalk per plans
- Form and pour replacement sidewalks
- Site grading of playgrounds and dog park areas
- Install fencing, irrigation, and landscaping at dog park area
- Installation of site furnishings
- Installation of playground equipment and fitness equipment

We will provide a tentative construction schedule once it is received from the contractor. Please feel free to share the update. We will keep you updated. Thanks, and enjoy the rest of your week!

Jerry Fogle  
Parks and Recreation Director  
City of Sarasota

Keep Your Hands to Yourself

To: Sarasota City Commission

Yesterday afternoon, one of our parking employees was assaulted in the St. Armand’s area. The police were called and the individual was arrested. Our employee was treated and she is doing ok. This morning, I along with Jennifer Jorgensen, the Police Chief, Deputy Police Chief, Steve Cover, and Pat Polzak met with the parking division to listen to their concerns, answer any questions they had, and to show our support to them during this difficult time. I was clear on this - there is zero tolerance for anyone in the public putting their hands on our employees or even threatening our employees. The Police Department will be conducting additional training and providing additional support to them, as well.

My simple request of the Commission currently is this - please continue to support our staff and when engaging with your constituents - please be proactive in turning down the rhetoric and emotions.

Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

Wood Street is Now an Unintentional Waterfront Property

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

Please forward this information to whoever you think might be able to address an ongoing residential flooding situation that occurs at Wood St Sarasota 34237.

Next door to the east of there is a double lot that was just cleared of a house. Next door to the east of the recently cleared double lot are two newer, two-story houses built up on mounds & when they were built the occupant of the house that used to be on the double lot complained about his house flooding inside. This had been an issue for him even before the two newer houses were built but it seemed to get worse after the new houses were built.

The owner of 2535 Wood St also has flooding issues that she feels will be exacerbated by two more houses being built up on mounds on the recently-cleared double lot next door to her.

She notices how the speed bump table seems to corral and send water towards her house & apparently, despite there being a somewhat nearby drain, water floods her front yard.

Anyone standing on the sidewalk across the street will notice how her house sits lower than the new houses to the east of her so naturally water will run downhill.

I am hoping that someone appropriate and capable could take a look at how water drains in that area and address this ongoing drainage issue.

She is a single parent and I am sure she would appreciate any effort to address this. Thank you so much for your assistance with this.

James Portman  
Zachos Realty & Design Group  
Sarasota

Whitney’s, from page 1

restrooms.

The centerpiece, though, is roughly 2,900 square feet of new outdoor dining integrated with tropical landscaping, pervious pavers and the existing restaurant. Conceptual renderings in the application show a white pergola structure shading open-air tables amid palms and dense plantings. The applicant points to Mar Vista and The Shore as proof that outdoor dining venues “can become memorable destinations” on Longboat Key, and pitches the project as squarely in that tradition.

All food and drink preparation would remain inside the restaurant building. The furniture outdoors would be portable, the lighting minimal, and there would be no new signage for the dining area.

A \$1.2 million bet on the Village

The expansion rests on a real estate transaction that closed late last year. On Nov. 19, 2025, Whitney LBK LLC took title to the bank property from Anthony J. and Roxanne Marterie, individually and as trustees of the Marterie Family Trust. Documentary stamp taxes recorded with the deed indicate a purchase price of \$1.2 million.

The buyer behind the LLC is Tampa-based Joseph V. Chillura, who signed the applications in February. His authorized agent on the project is architect Robert Rokop of Robert Rokop Architect, LLC in Venice.

Town staff notes the bank site had been “vacant and for sale for an extended period of time” and concludes that an office use simply is not conducive to current market conditions on that stretch of Gulf of Mexico Drive. The rezone application is more blunt, describing the parcel as home to “an unsightly, long vacant and incompatible structure.”

There is a certain symmetry to the plan. Before Whitney’s transformed its own site into a dining destination, that property was an abandoned gas station that sat empty for years. The restaurant now proposes to work the same magic one door to the south.

From 70 seats to 200

When Whitney’s was originally permitted, parking calculations under the old code capped the restaurant at 70 seats. Under the Town’s current formula, the combined project would total approximately 7,650 square feet of interior restaurant and outdoor dining space, which works out to a requirement of 51 parking spaces at one space per 150 square feet.

With those 51 spaces provided across the joined properties, the venue would be planned for roughly 200 total seats, nearly triple the original approval. One version of the application materials calculates the number at 225 seats, a discrepancy the board may want to pin down Tuesday.

Parking would be predominantly permeable, as it is at the existing restaurant, and the site would be heavily landscaped with native and Florida-friendly plantings chosen for drought, wind and salt tolerance. Bicycle racks are included, and the application says the project will be designed to coordinate with the roundabout proposed nearby.

The legal path: two ordinances, then more hearings

What the Planning & Zoning Board actually votes on Tuesday is narrower than the pretty renderings. Two ordinances are on the table.

Ordinance 2027-01 would amend the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map for the 0.69-acre bank parcel from Office Institutional to Commercial Highway. Because the site is under 50 acres, it qualifies as a “small-scale” amendment under Florida law, meaning it skips the lengthy state review process. The Town Commission holds a single adoption hearing, then transmits the amendment to FloridaCommerce and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council as notice only. Affected persons have 30 days after adoption to challenge; if no one does, the amendment becomes effective 31 days after adoption.

Ordinance 2027-02 would rezone the parcel from Office-Institutional to Highway-Oriented Commercial (C-3), the same zoning Whitney’s already holds. The rezone requires two readings before the Town Commission and is expressly contingent on the comprehensive plan amendment being approved first. The ordinance’s signature block anticipates a second reading in 2027.

Importantly, neither change increases density. Both land use designations carry zero residential density under the 1984 Comprehensive Plan, so the applications do not trigger Longboat Key’s referendum requirement.

Even if both ordinances pass, Whitney’s is not done at Town Hall. The actual Site Development Plan, with the final layout, landscaping and parking details, would come back to the Planning & Zoning Board at a separate quasi-judicial public hearing at a future date.

Ground rules: last call for the patio is 10 p.m.

Because the property sits within 250 feet of residential property, the Town’s outdoor dining code limits the new dining area’s hours to 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. The applicant has committed to a list of conditions under Section 158.110 of the zoning code, including no music or amplified voices in the outdoor dining area, minimal lighting, landscape screening, and a delineated perimeter of continuous improved walking surface.

Ten vacant, unimproved residential lots sit to the east of Palm Drive, and the broader neighborhood mixes commercial parcels with single-family and mixed residential zoning. Those quiet-hours conditions are likely to matter to Village-area residents weighing the trade between a livelier corner and a long-vacant eyesore.

Traffic, measured by the cash register

In an unusually granular touch, the traffic analysis is built on Whitney’s own point-of-sale receipts. According to the application, the restaurant served 67,817 diners in calendar year 2025, an average of 185.8 diners a day. At 2.4 diners per vehicle, that translates to about 77 vehicle trips per day for the existing 3,400-square-foot operation.

Applying that same rate to the roughly 4,250 square feet of new indoor and outdoor area, the applicant estimates the expansion would generate about 96 additional trips per day. That figure lands just under the 100-trip threshold in the Town code that would require a full traffic impact analysis. The application argues the estimate is conservative because it ignores pass-by traffic and the pedestrians and cyclists who already roll up to the restaurant from the surrounding Village.

Sharp-eyed readers will note the outdoor dining square footage floats a bit across the application, cited as 2,900 square feet in the project description, 2,927 in the outdoor dining conditions, and 3,470 in the traffic math. None of the versions changes the bottom line, but it is the kind of loose thread planning boards like to tug.

Storm history and site conditions

The property sits in FEMA flood zones AE 8 and AE 9, landward of the state’s Coastal Construction Control Line, and in the highest evacuation category on the National Hurricane Center’s storm surge risk map. The application discloses that during the 2024 hurricanes, the existing restaurant took approximately 2 to 3 inches of water on its floor.

The bank site contains no wetlands and no protected species, though two existing storm-water detention areas would be reconfigured as part of the project. The Town’s Public Works Department has confirmed adequate potable water and sewer capacity to serve the expansion.

What staff says, and what to watch

Staff’s assessment is favorable across the board. The report finds the change compatible with the surrounding mix of commercial and residential uses, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and beneficial in that it “encourages the redevelopment and productive reuse of vacant or underutilized properties” along a non-residential stretch of the Gulf of Mexico Drive corridor.

One point worth understanding: the rezone runs with the land, not with the restaurant. Staff notes that if the dining garden never materializes, a bank or office would still be allowed under C-3 zoning, but so would the broader menu of highway-commercial uses that district permits. The board’s recommendation Tuesday shapes what can happen on that corner for decades, whatever Whitney’s ultimately builds.

Also on Tuesday’s agenda

The Whitney’s items share the morning with two other significant matters: Sarasota County’s application to amend the Town Center planned unit development for the new Longboat Key library at 600 Bay Isles Road, and a workshop discussion on the zoning obstacles facing homeowners who elevate their houses to meet FEMA flood requirements on smaller, non-conforming lots.

Both Whitney’s hearings are public, and residents can address the board on the applications Tuesday morning. Whatever the board recommends heads next to the Town Commission, where the final decision on the land use change and rezone will be made in the coming months.

**Jordan, from page 14**

BLVD condominium tower at Tamiami Trail and Boulevard of the Arts, asked the Planning Board to continue its own application indefinitely rather than risk a vote. The board granted the retreat 5-0, sending the club, its valet plan and its feuding neighbors off to a date uncertain, to be re-advertised and re-noticed whenever the applicant is ready to try again.

For a club that has been selling \$60,000-a-year memberships, offering hard-hat tours and running a countdown clock toward a fall opening, the timeout is a stunning turn. The space is built. The walnut is hung. The wine lockers gleam. What 1000 North still does not have is the city approval that makes any of it legal to operate.

“We’ve heard the residents, and I finally got in touch with Mr. Daves, and he agrees, let’s take a breather,” the applicant’s planner, Joel Freedman, told the board, referring to developer Kevin Daves, who built the BLVD and owns its commercial units. “It’s going to take some time. Let’s figure all this out. Get the condo attorneys looking at it, get the off-site parking agreement established officially, and let’s go on from there.”

**A Board Member Brings a Tape Measure**

The hearing was supposed to be a cleanup operation. The club’s first appearance on Aug. 19 had collapsed over typographical errors and a parking count that did not add up, and Wednesday was framed narrowly: fix the paperwork, prove the parking. The paperwork got fixed. The parking got worse.

Board member Alexander Neihaus arrived having done something rare in the annals of advisory boards: homework with a tape measure. He disclosed that he had visited the BLVD’s parking garage himself, walked the second level with the building’s general manager, and measured the spaces on the applicant’s shiny new valet plan.

The results were not kind. The zoning code, Neihaus established with city planner Camden Jenkins, defines a parking space as eight and a half feet wide by 18 feet deep. The revised plan proposes stacking two cars nose-to-tail in certain spots, which requires 36 feet of depth. Neihaus measured one of those tandem runs at 29 feet, 6 inches.

“Do we check the site plans to see whether things will actually fit?” he asked the city, in what may have been the afternoon’s most quietly devastating question.

It got worse from there. The club needs 27 spaces by code. Its revised plan claims 32, including eight spaces on the garage’s second floor, behind a gate. But the legal document the applicant itself submitted to justify those spaces, an amendment to the condominium’s declaration, says those second-floor valet spots are limited to visitors of the residential units, and that the association can restrict their use. There is no agreement with the association. The club’s theory, Freedman explained, is that resident members’ dinner guests count as residential visitors.

Neihaus was unmoved, noting the space numbers on the applicant’s plan do not even match the exhibit in the condo documents. “I’m confused about where these spots actually are,” he said.

By the time the board reached open discussion, the frustration was general. “It seems like we’re just kind of like, well, we’ve got the parking spaces here somewhere, we can jam the cars in someplace, everything will be fine,” one board member said. “I’m just not sure that I’m comfortable with that.”

Neihaus delivered the closing verdict directly to the applicant’s table: “This plan was fun-gible. Well, if you don’t like this, we’ll put this in front of you. That was the message from last time. Give us something we can evaluate according to the standards for review that’s definitive, compliant and, frankly, acceptable.”

**Ninety-Nine Residents and One Baby**

Upstairs from the future dining room live the people who bought into the BLVD, and they came down to City Hall in force. Brenda Dunn told the board she was speaking for 99 residents “and one baby,” and her testimony reframed the entire fight.

The residents, she said, are not anti-club. “We expected the Beach Bistro when we moved in, and we’d welcome a compatible neighbor that respects residents’ rights and our governing documents,” Dunn said. But 1000 North, at more than 13,000 square feet, is roughly twice the size of the restaurant the building was designed around, “and that’s why they’re short of parking.”

She walked the board through a typical club evening as residents see it coming: valets sprinting, cars stacking, Ubers idling, delivery trucks squeezing past, all funneled into the same confined ground floor that contains the residents’ lobby stairs, their handicapped ramp and their pedestrian walkway to Fifth Street. “They plan to cram 24 vehicles into an 11-space lot,” she said, “leaving no space for this vital pathway.”

Then came the accusation that landed hardest. Many residents, Dunn said, initially welcomed the club and joined it. “As soon as the board challenged the unauthorized takeover, the applicant canceled club memberships for all enrolled Boulevard residents.”

**The Call to Jupiter**

The afternoon’s true bombshell belonged to Patrick McNamee, a member of the BLVD’s condominium board who also serves as president of the Downtown Sarasota Condominium Association. By the time he reached the podium, Dr. Abraham Morgentaler, a BLVD resident and former president of its condominium association, had already methodically dismantled the parking plan, spot by disputed spot, noting that the condo amendment the applicant cited as a “2023 amendment” was actually recorded in 2021 and says the opposite of what the applicant claims. McNamee went after the club’s most valuable asset: its name.

He told the board he personally telephoned Ira Fenton, the managing partner of the original 1000 North in Jupiter, the storied club whose founding partners include Jordan, golf legend Ernie Els and former New York Giant Tucker Frederickson. According to McNamee’s sworn testimony, Fenton was unaware of the Sarasota property dispute and asked to be copied on future correspondence. What arrived instead was an email from 1000 North Jupiter to the association’s attorney stating that it “has no ownership interest in either 1000 North Sarasota or the referenced premises” and asking to be removed from all future notices.

And McNamee did not merely describe the email. He put it up on the screen in the commission chambers, displaying it for the board and the audience to read and entering it into the public record of the hearing.

“So this isn’t backed by Michael Jordan,” McNamee told the board, “and I don’t know why it’s being presented that way.”

The club’s representatives did not respond to that claim during the hearing. The distinction may ultimately be one of ownership versus brand: 1000 North Sarasota has always described itself as modeled after and associated with the Jupiter flagship, an expansion of the brand rather than a subsidiary of the club. But for a project whose marketing, its press coverage and its waiting list have leaned hard on the wattage of His Airness, a written disclaimer of ownership from Jupiter, projected onto a City Hall screen and read into a public record under oath, is not the kind of assist the club was looking for.

The residents’ ask was simple. “Why approve a plan that cannot be implemented?” Morgentaler said. “What’s the harm in waiting until these questions are answered?”



By day’s end, the applicant agreed with him.

**The City Draws Its Line**

City staff, for the record, never wavered. Jenkins told the board the corrected application and the 32-space valet plan still exceed the 27-space requirement, and staff still recommended approval. Lucia Panica, the city’s director of development services, noted that the building’s original 2017 site plan showed the second-floor spaces as plain valet spaces, no strings attached, though board members countered that the applicant’s own subsequent condo amendment attached the strings itself.

Deputy City Attorney John Shamsey spent the afternoon patrolling the line between what the board can decide and what it cannot. Whether the parking physically works is the board’s business, he said. Who actually controls the garage is not.

“The city is not going to solve this private condo dispute,” Shamsey said. “It doesn’t matter if the Planning Board votes to approve it or votes to deny it, that private dispute is probably going to live on.” The club could win approval and lose in court, he noted, or lose at the board and win in court. Either way, the lawyers eat.

**A Sip of Consolation**

The day was not a total shutout for the Daves camp. Minutes after the club’s retreat, the board took up the companion application for the Wine Concierge, a 484-square-foot appointment-only wine shop planned for the small corner office space at 1224 Boulevard of the Arts, in the same building. Freedman pitched it as the rarest of retail animals: a store selling “very unique, expensive wines,” open weekdays 9 to 5, by appointment only, with purchases delivered to the buyer’s home rather than carried out the door, and a discreet decal on the window in lieu of signage.

The board, visibly relieved to consider something that required exactly one parking space, approved it 5-0, with Neihaus amending the conditions to lock in the appointment-only operation. Board member Douglas Christy summed up the market positioning: “I’m not buying wine there,” he said. “Things I can’t afford, either way.”

Board member Tiffany Nisbet, the panel’s newest member, got the day’s biggest laugh when she opened her questioning of the wine shop with, “How wide is your parking spot? Just kidding.”

**What Happens Now**

The club leaves City Hall with homework. Freedman said the team will bring in condominium attorneys to sort out who controls what in the garage, convert its handshake parking deals into a formal off-site parking agreement, and return with a plan the board can actually verify. Those handshake deals, disclosed for the first time Wednesday, include 15 spaces at the voco hotel across the street, 10 spaces at Rosemary District entrepreneur Anand Pallegar’s lot at 1370 Boulevard of the Arts, and an informal understanding with The Sarasota Modern hotel, none of which currently satisfies the letter of the code. City staff confirmed the club is not required to park itself entirely on site, but a formal off-site agreement must follow the city’s rules. As one official dryly noted, the parking cannot be in Bradenton.

Hanging over it all is the question no one at the applicant’s table would put a date on: when does the club actually open? The buildout is essentially complete. The membership rolls have been growing since spring. The adjacent 10,500-square-foot parcel the club bought, which residents pointedly noted could hold a parking structure, sits waiting. And somewhere between the walnut bar and the wine lockers, a countdown clock is now counting toward a date no one can name.

In this town, even His Airness has to find a parking spot.

Tree Rules, from page 1

town permit must plant two in its place. Under Ordinance 2026-11, the minimum drops to one. Permanently. For every permitted removal, storm or no storm.

That single sentence deserves more scrutiny than the entire rest of the ordinance combined.

What the ordinance actually does

The package, recommended unanimously by the Planning & Zoning Board on June 16 after more than a year of workshops, touches nearly every section of Chapter 98. The honest inventory looks like this.

The everyday replacement ratio falls from 2:1 to a minimum of 1:1, with the actual ratio to be set by species type. The fee a property owner pays into the town’s Tree Fund when replacement trees will not fit on site more than doubles, from \$300 to \$700 per tree, the first increase since 2010. A new section requires that trees destroyed by a declared natural disaster be replaced at 1:1 within three years on every property in town, including single-family homes that have been exempt from the tree code for 52 years. New definitions arrive for terms like Critical Root Zone and Hazardous Tree. Construction sites must now erect durable, highly visible tree protection barriers around root zones. The strangler fig, a Florida native long misfiled among the invasives, comes off the prohibited plantings list. And a new hazardous-tree section lets the town order removal of dead or diseased trees that threaten life or property, then do the work and bill the owner if the owner refuses.

Some of this is unambiguously good housekeeping. The protection barriers, the updated species tables with salt tolerance and cold hardiness data, and the hazardous-tree enforcement authority all strengthen the code. The question is whether the good housekeeping is providing cover for the one change that weakens it.

The math of a shrinking canopy

Here is why the ratio matters more than anything else in the ordinance. A 2:1 replacement requirement is not punitive excess; it is the engine that grows a canopy back. Every permitted removal under the current code produces a net gain of one tree. Over decades, that compounding is how a barrier island recovers from the losses that hurricanes, salt intrusion and disease inflict between permits.

A 1:1 ratio, by contrast, is a treadmill. At absolute best, the canopy holds level. In the real world it shrinks, because young replacement trees die at meaningful rates in coastal conditions, and a two-inch caliper sapling delivers a tiny fraction of the shade, stormwater absorption and habitat value of the mature tree it replaces. Plant one small tree for every large one removed and the canopy declines by definition, even with perfect compliance.

The staff memo presents the change as flexibility, paired with language “encouraging” owners to replace removed trees with comparable species and size categories. Encouragement is not a requirement. The requirement is being halved.

And the timing is the part that should give commissioners pause. The town is proposing to reduce its canopy-rebuilding mechanism at precisely the moment the canopy is at its thinnest in a generation, after successive storm seasons stripped the island. Recovery arithmetic runs the other direction: after major losses, communities that want their trees back plant more than they lost, not the same number.

The \$700 question

The fee increase, from \$300 to \$700 per mature replacement tree, looks like a toughening measure and was framed as one, pegged to current nursery costs. Look closer and it cuts both ways.

The fee is what an owner pays to not plant a tree when replacements will not fit on site. It is a buyout. And \$700 per tree, on an island where the median single-family sale routinely clears several million dollars, is not a deterrent. It is a rounding error on a landscaping invoice. Tampa officials recently acknowledged that the true cost of getting one tree actually planted, established and maintained through its first year runs three to four times the nursery sticker price. If Longboat’s fee is meant to make the Tree Fund whole for a lost tree, \$700 is likely still short of the real number. If it is meant to discourage cashing out instead of replanting, it does not come close.

The P&Z Board did recommend, and staff supports, revisiting the fee every three years rather than letting it sit frozen for another 16. That is genuine progress.

The part that actually tightens

To be fair to the P&Z Board, one piece of this ordinance imposes an obligation where none has ever existed. New Section 98.10 requires that trees removed, destroyed or irreparably damaged by a declared natural disaster be replaced at 1:1 within three years, and for the first time since 1974, that duty lands on developed single-family properties, which have otherwise enjoyed a blanket exemption from the tree code since its adoption.

That is a real change, and homeowners should understand it. Lose a tree to the next declared storm and you owe the island a tree, on your dime, within three years.

But the provision contains its own escape hatch. If another declared disaster strikes during the three-year window, the clock resets from the most recent declaration. On a barrier island that has seen declared storm events in repeated years, the replanting deadline could roll forward indefinitely, storm after storm, with the replacement obligation perpetually deferred and the canopy perpetually waiting. A hard backstop, some outer limit past which replanting is due regardless of intervening declarations, would close that loop. The ordinance does not have one.

Who is being given the break, exactly

The staff memo’s origin story for this entire effort is sympathy for storm-battered property owners, particularly condominiums, which occupy roughly a quarter of the town’s land and were not covered by the old single-family exemption. Ordinance 2025-04 already solved that acute problem last year by exempting disaster-killed trees from permitting.

What remains in this ordinance is a permanent, economy-wide reduction in replacement obligations that applies to condominium associations, commercial properties and developers on every ordinary, non-disaster removal from now on. The affordability argument is genuinely thin here. This is one of the wealthiest ZIP codes in Florida, a community whose property owners chose the island in no small part for its tunnel-of-green character along Gulf of Mexico Drive, and whose associations maintain seven-figure reserve accounts. The cost of planting a second replacement tree has never been what stands between Longboat Key and its canopy. What stands between them now would be this ordinance.

The Tree City USA snub

Then there is the recommendation the Town Commission is being asked to quietly decline. After a year of study, the P&Z Board recommended the town pursue Tree City USA designation, the Arbor Day Foundation program that has recognized committed urban forestry communities since 1976. Staff recommends against it, citing budgetary impacts.

Consider what the town would be declining, and what it would cost. The program’s four

standards are a tree board or department, a tree ordinance, an Arbor Day observance with a proclamation, and a community forestry program spending at least \$2 per capita annually. Longboat Key already has the ordinance. With a year-round population around 7,500, the spending threshold works out to roughly \$15,000 a year, and the program counts staff time, contracted tree work and even volunteer hours toward that figure, meaning the town almost certainly spends multiples of the threshold already through its existing landscaping and tree operations. The tree board could be as simple as assigning the function to an existing advisory committee.

Meanwhile, look around. Sarasota County has held the designation for 42 consecutive years. The City of Sarasota holds it. So do Manatee County, Bradenton and Venice. Florida counts roughly 150 Tree City USA communities. Longboat Key, the barrier island that markets its lush residential character in every real estate listing and tourism brochure, would be a conspicuous green-branded holdout declining a designation its far less affluent neighbors find worth the paperwork.

Staff calls the recognition well-intentioned but not worth the cost. The P&Z Board, which spent a year immersed in this subject, disagreed. The Commission will have to pick a side.

What other storm-struck communities did instead

Longboat is not the first Gulf Coast community to rewrite tree rules after hurricanes, and the comparisons are unflattering to the direction of this ordinance.

Tampa, after Helene and Milton shaved roughly 5% off its canopy and erased four years of planting gains, responded by expanding its ReLeaf program, launching 11 canopy projects expected to plant more than 3,000 trees, and debating how to spend a \$6 million tree trust fund on restoration, not by cutting its mitigation requirements. St. Petersburg, which by some estimates lost a staggering 20% of its canopy to Milton, threw its weight behind community replanting drives. The Arbor Day Foundation pledged 10 million trees across six states to replace what those storms took.

Sanibel offers the closest analogue to Longboat’s situation: a wealthy barrier island whose vegetation was devastated by a direct hit. Sanibel’s answer after Ian was to temporarily streamline emergency removals through mayoral proclamation while leaving its underlying standards intact, including its requirement that landscaping remain 75% native vegetation. The island eased the crisis-moment paperwork. It did not lower the bar for what must grow back.

And when it comes to everyday replacement standards, Longboat’s proposed 1:1 minimum would slide toward the permissive end of the Florida spectrum. Orlando requires mitigation at three replacement inches for every inch removed, and up to five-to-one for its oldest specimens. Jacksonville requires inch-for-inch replacement of live oaks, the signature canopy species of this coast. Against that backdrop, Longboat would be moving from a middle-of-the-pack standard to one of the softer ones on the Gulf Coast, at the exact moment its peers are moving the other way.

A revealing footnote on state law

One more detail in the staff memo rewards a careful read. In declining the P&Z Board’s separate request to study folding landscaping standards into the tree code, staff cites recent state legislation that freezes local governments from adopting more restrictive land development regulations until October 2027. Yet the same memo, two pages earlier, reports the Town Attorney’s guidance that the tree code itself is not subject to that prohibition, which is precisely why this ordinance can proceed at all.

In other words, the town has a rare and legally confirmed lane to strengthen tree protection right now, while most land development tightening is frozen statewide. Ordinance 2026-11 uses that lane to loosen the code’s central requirement instead.

The bottom line

There is much to like in this ordinance: real protections during construction, teeth for hazardous trees, honest species science, a first-ever replanting duty for single-family homes after disasters, and a fee finally dragged out of 2010. The P&Z Board and staff did serious work, and it shows.

But the headline change runs the wrong direction. Halving the replacement ratio is a permanent structural decision that will outlast every storm that prompted it, and it converts a code designed to grow the canopy back into one that, at best, manages its decline. Before the Nov. 9 second reading, commissioners should be able to answer three questions on the record. Why is a ratio cut that applies to every ordinary removal being justified by disaster hardship the town already addressed last year? What is the projected canopy trajectory under 1:1 replacement with realistic sapling mortality? And why should the greenest-branded town on this coast be the only jurisdiction in the neighborhood that decides Tree City USA is not worth \$2 a head?

Longboat Key’s canopy took decades to grow and two storm seasons to thin. The code that rebuilds it is being written right now. This is the moment to plant more, not less.

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