

Longboat Key News

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InsideLook



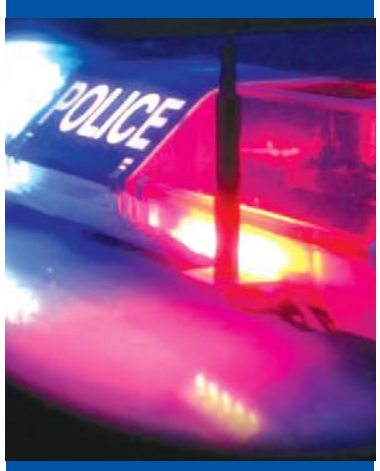
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Sarasota Busy Paving Paradise at Full Throttle

More than 35,000 homes are approved or advancing across Sarasota County and its city core. The roads are already full, the beaches are not getting any bigger, and this week the City Commission erased one of the few times anyone said no.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
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Every great resort town gets one golden hour, and Sarasota is living inside it right now.

Call it a harmonic convergence, the moment when climate, culture, coastline and capital all point at the same dot on the map. Naples had one. Austin had one. Aspen had one and never recovered from it. Sarasota, in the autumn of 2026, is the dot. The money arriving from California, the Northeast and the Midwest is not trickling in. It is arriving in moving vans, wire transfers and all-cash closings, and it has triggered the largest wave of approved residential development in county history.

The question is no longer whether Sarasota is booming. The question is whether anyone is actually steering.

A Second City on the Drawing Board

Longboat Key News went looking for one figure that captures the scale of it all. Here it is: more than 35,000 residential units are approved, entitled or formally advancing through government review across Sarasota County and the City of Sarasota, with buildout horizons stretching to 2056.

That number is not speculation. It is the arithmetic of adopted master plans and site plans sitting in public files right now:

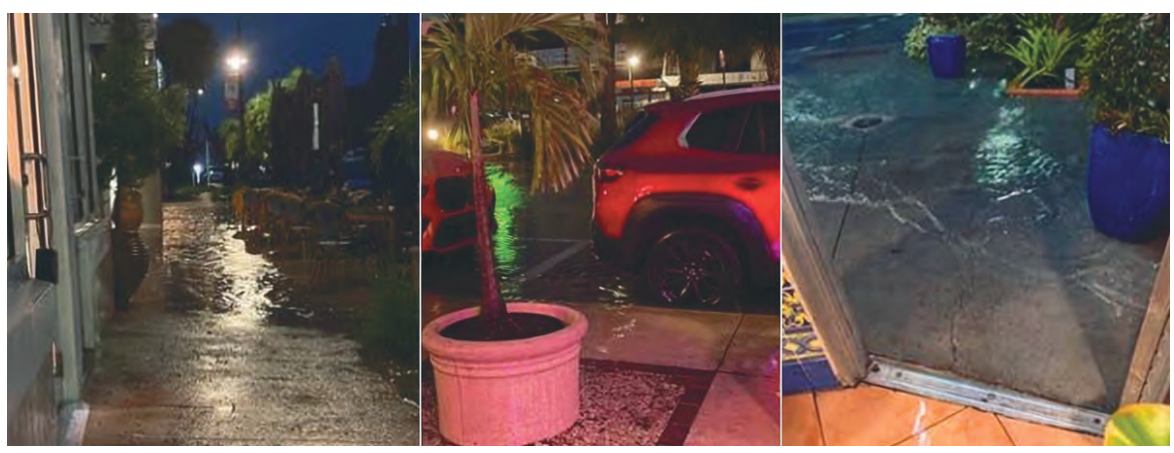
• Hi Hat Ranch, between Fruitville and Clark roads east of Interstate 75, carries a master development order for more than 13,000 homes on nearly 10,000 acres, the largest planned development ever approved in Sarasota County. On Oct. 7, county commissioners approved Village 1, the first 3,000 homes on roughly 2,070 acres.

• 3H Ranch, Pat Neal's 2,727-acre village south of Clark Road, won approval for up to 6,576 homes. The first homes are arriving now.

See Paradise, page 12

St. Armands Floods in a Rainstorm, and the Fix is at least Five Years Out

It took three inches of rain, not a hurricane, to put water through shop doors on St. Armands Circle on Oct. 6. The next day, leaders of Sarasota and Longboat Key learned the $13.5 million fix has not started and has until 2031 to finish. The St. Armands Residents Association is asking for something far smaller in the meantime: a phone number.



Water stands on sidewalks, in parking spaces and at a shop doorway on St. Armands Circle on the evening of Tuesday, Oct. 6, after about three inches of rain. Photo courtesy St. Armands Residents Association

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There is a sign on the way off St. Armands that reads "May Flood."

"Now it does flood," one commissioner told a joint meeting of the Sarasota City Commission and the Longboat Key Town Commission on Oct. 7. "They should change it… It's potentially a safety issue. May flood. It does flood."

Nobody in the room needed convincing. The night before, about three inches of rain on an ordinary Tuesday evening had put the streets of the region's best-known shopping district under water again. Several of the elected officials at the table had driven through it on the way home.

No Hurricane Required

It did not take a named storm, a surge or a king tide. As a stalled front wrung tropical moisture over

See The Circle, page 8

Commission Overturns Planning Board, Approves Midtown Plaza Hotel 3-2



Six weeks after Arlington Park neighbors talked the Planning Board into killing it, the hotel-and-apartment plan for the dead Winn-Dixie is back, approved on appeal by the narrowest possible margin.

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The Midtown Plaza hotel has been raised from the dead.

At the end of a marathon meeting Monday, the Sarasota City Commission granted the owners' appeal and approved the site plan the city's Planning Board rejected in September, reversing that board's 3-2 denial with a 3-2 vote of its own. Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich and Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch voted no.

The project is a six-story, 145-room hotel, a six-story apartment building with 91 units, 23 of them attainable, a parking structure and a sliver of retail on the site of the long-dark Winn-Dixie at U.S. 41 and Bahia Vista Street, directly across the Trail from Sarasota Memorial Hospital.

Same Plan, Friendlier Bench

The owners did not go back to the drawing board after September. They went to a different bench. The plan before the commission was the one the Planning Board voted down, and the development team argued it never needed changing.

Attorney Charles Bailey, consultant Joel Freedman, architect Javier Suarez and ownership partner Gavin Meshad made the same case they made in September: the project is a major improvement over a vacant store and a largely empty parking lot, it meets every requirement of the zoning code, and it is the best version of a site plan that has evolved for years. City staff recommended approval both times.

Meshad pitched the apartments as housing for the people who keep the hospital running, priced for medical staff, first responders and service workers.

See Hotel, page 11

EditorLetters

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

Calling in the City Manager

To: Sequoia Felton

Thanks for sharing and advocating on behalf of this mom. I have copied the City Manager and Deputy City Manager to see if someone from the City's Homeless Response can help connect her with services. I am aware of some programs to help keep folks housed, and that is what I am hopeful might be able to help.

Jen Ahearn-Koch
City Commissioner
City of Sarasota

No Test Drives, No Text, No Time

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

Thanks for sending staff's answers to my Sept. 14 questions on the Transportation Chapter (your email of Oct. 13), and thanks to staff for the work that went into them.

I have quickly reviewed them. Thanks also for offering another 1:1 before the workshop. I think it will be most useful once I have the revised text on which the answers rely, which is the main subject of this letter.

So this is an interim reply, and a full written response, likely with further questions, will follow when I can read that text.

Six things seem worth saying now. Some of them may be as new to you as they were to me.

1. I was surprised to learn there will be no test drives. I asked staff to run the new rules against traffic studies the City has already accepted, so the Commission and community can see the practical effect before adoption. Staff said no, for lack of time: "There is not enough available staff time between now and the adoption schedule to make that commitment" (Q3(b)).

What surprised me is that staff's answers describe a small task. Staff reports "76 studies in past 5 years, high degree of confidence that 100% report a v/c ratio" (Q3(d)), and that the shift "would not cause the need for additional staff resources or training" and vendors "would be able to easily shift" (Q3(c)). Staff also says it already "reviewed several small- and large-scale projects to test the shift" before transmittal (Q3(c)). The Q2 answer works through the Bahia Vista example in two paragraphs. If all of that is accurate, a handful of comparisons is a few hours of work. If it is not, the change is larger than the Commission has understood. Either way, we still have not seen the new rule applied to a real case, which is what I asked for. The pre-transmittal reviews staff mentions already exist. Please share them with the Commission.

2. Many answers depend on text I haven't seen.

The responses repeatedly cite revisions made after transmittal. For example: "This has been revised as part of the Florida Commerce Revision" (Q1(a)) and "Additional language has been included in the latest revision to address this" (Q2(a)). New concurrency language "will be included in the package that is being submitted to Florida Commerce for their secondary review" (Q4), and "Language has been updated to reflect 'roadways within the City'" (Q4(b)). A table row "has been added to T-4 in the latest iteration" (Q7(c)), and a sentence "has been removed and updated with clarifying language" (Q8(a)). The Q10 chart presents numbers keyed to "the proposed V/C Standard," a term that isn't in the transmitted package.

The Department's Sept. 9 letter meant staff had to revise. I appreciate that staff also looked at other parts of the transmitted package; several of the changes address problems my questions raised that the Department's letter did not. That's good. The problem is that the answers can only be checked against a document the Commission has not been given. The same is true of the Evaluation Matrix: the answer to Q9(a) says a provision was "modified to match the evaluation matrix," but the Matrix in the transmitted package reads differently (pp. 24 and 83 of 399), so there must be a revised Matrix too. The adoption package will need the chapter, the conforming amendments, the concurrency text, the tables, and a Matrix that agrees with all of them. Until we have them, no one on the Commission or in the community can tell what the amendment now says.

3. Several answers do not match what the Commission was told on Aug. 3.

On Aug. 3, staff said the two measures were "very similar … Instead of giving it a letter grade, we're giving it a numerical grade" (captions, 2:37 PM). The City's consultant, Jason Collins, said the V/C ratio "is already calculated" in the appendices of existing traffic studies (11:33 AM). The Q3 answer now says a comparison would require "V/C results calculated on a comparable basis" and review "to avoid comparing segment and intersection V/C values as if they were interchangeable." So the number already in the studies is apparently not the number the new table uses. I'd like to understand which one is right.

See Letters, page 4

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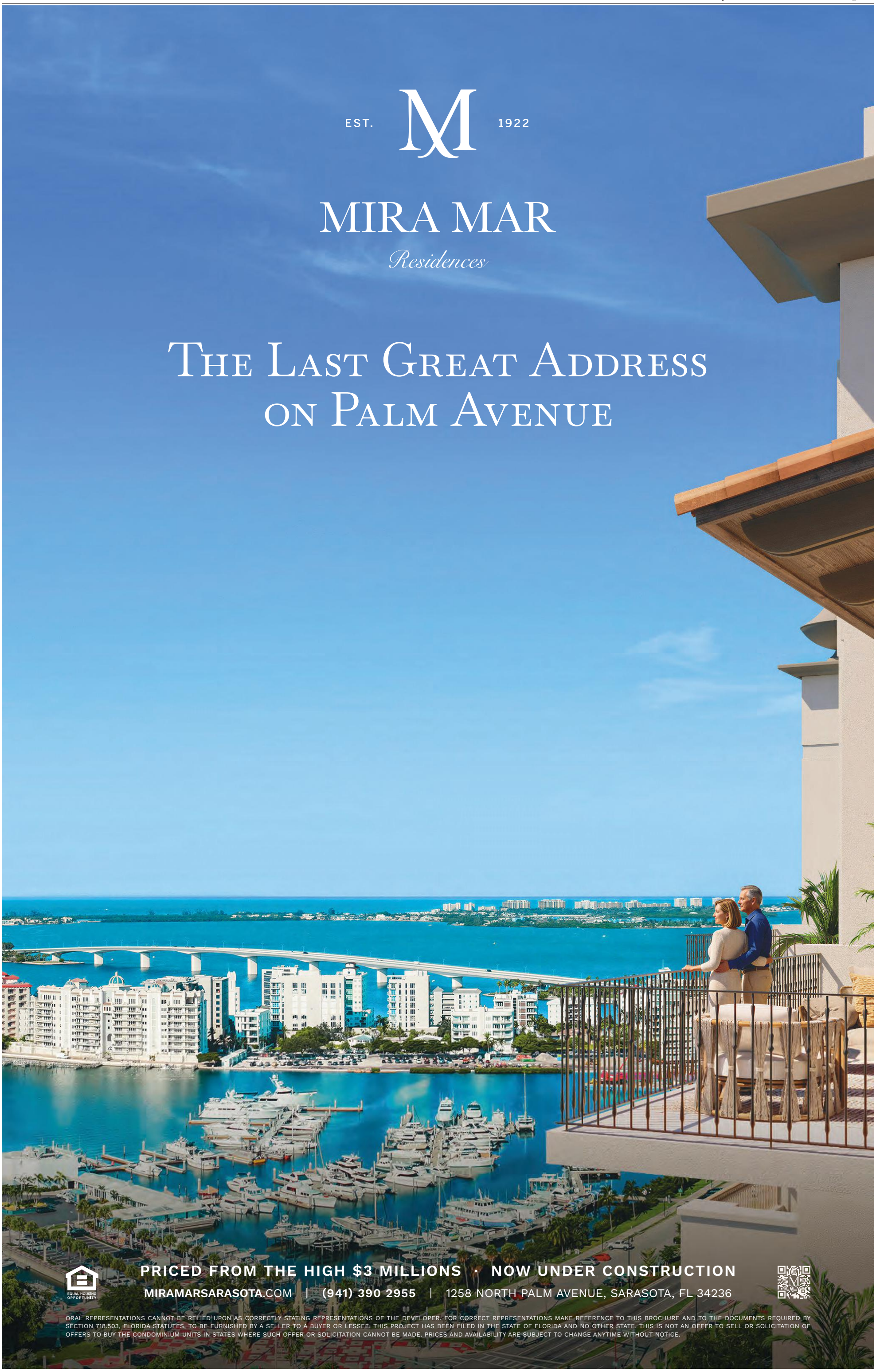
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EditorLetters

Letters, from page 2

On Aug. 3, the Commission saw two pages from existing traffic studies, and one of them was explained as a comparison. The Q3 answer says that staff "reviewed several small- and large-scale projects to test the shift" before transmittal. Those reviews were not shown or mentioned at the hearing. It would have helped to see them.

The staff report says the chapter "does not meet the new state requirement and must be updated" (p. 365 of 399), and staff said the state's coordinated review is "limited for us to the evaluation and appraisal" (2:11 PM). The Q11 and Q12 answers now say "There is not a Florida Statute that specifically requires the update to occur before December 2029" and "This is an elective process." So the schedule and the review process are the City's choices. They may be the right choices, but on Aug. 3 they were presented to us as requirements.

4. Two answers the Commission still needs.

Question 9(b) asked where in the transmitted package the post-vote change to AS 1.18 is disclosed. There is no answer to that one. If it isn't disclosed anywhere, please just say so. Question 10(e) asked whether the legal review the Matrix recommends for AS 1.4 (p. 21 of 399) was completed, and for the document. The answer describes how AS 1.4 came about, but not whether the review was done or what it found. I know that work is continuing with the City Attorney and Florida Commerce. Since it affects whether the amendment can be adopted now, I'd like to know when it will be finished and whether the Commission will see it before the hearing.

5. Two statements that don't match what I've read.

Q9(a) says this about the MMTIF investment-priority language: "The item was not deleted. It is now AS 1.17 and was modified to match the evaluation matrix." The clause I asked about is deleted from the transmitted strategy: "in a balanced manner … with priority given to areas that demonstrate transportation accessibility needs, redevelopment potential, or affordability objectives." And the transmitted Matrix does not match the shortened text: it retains "in a balanced manner" at p. 24 of 399 and the full priority clause at p. 83. If staff means a revised Matrix, the Commission has not been given it, which is the same problem as above.

Q9(c) says the differences since Aug. 3 "ha[ve] been included under Appendix 6." Appendix 6 (pp. 266–314 of 399) is the redline of the Planning Board supplemental, which was finished before the vote. It does not show the post-vote changes; in at least one case it shows the opposite: it still has the Table T-4 Strategic Capacity row (p. 290) that was deleted before transmittal. A list of what changed after the vote, and why, would be a helpful part of the adoption package.

It is entirely possible I have missed a page on either of these. If so, please just point me to it.

6. The schedule question.

The answers raise further questions — about the mitigation trigger, the credit-stacking rules, the concurrency text, the EDCM map — but I can't ask them properly until I have the revised sections. My Sept. 14 questions were answered on Oct. 13, a month later. The workshop is Oct. 26 and the adoption hearing is Nov. 2. This is a dense topic, and I will need time to review the final text to be prepared for a useful workshop. Staff and the consultant have worked on this amendment since the consultant's notice to proceed in February 2025 (according to the City's project page), ran "an entire public engagement effort" on the LOS-to-V/C change alone (captions, 2:38 PM), and describe the result as "a fundamental shift" (Matrix, p. 9 of 399). A change this big needs more than a few days for us to read it.

So, two requests, both about timing:

Please provide the Commission the complete adoption draft — chapter, conforming amendments, concurrency text, tables, and a Matrix that matches — far enough ahead of the Oct. 26 workshop for Commissioners to read it and prepare. For me that means at least a week, but we don't seem to have that, so as soon as possible. If that is not possible, I'd like to discuss at the workshop whether the Nov. 2 date still makes sense.

Please provide the pre-transmittal test reviews staff has described and, before the hearing, a few test drives, which staff's answers suggest is a small task.

I know staff is managing Florida Commerce's comments at the same time, and nothing here asks for new analysis, only for the documents the answers already rely on and the time necessary to read and digest them, please. Thank you all for your patience, your work, and your time on this with me.

Jen Ahearn-Koch
City Commissioner, City of Sarasota

See Letters, page 6









It's Time to Give Your MEDICARE COVERAGE A CHECKUP

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

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

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

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

☑ ORIGINAL MEDICARE ("Traditional")

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SARASOTA MEMORIAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

SARASOTA MEMORIAL FIRST PHYSICIANS GROUP

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

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

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

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

EditorLetters

Letters, from page 4

On It, Pronto

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice
On it. I'm sending to Lucia now.
Karie Friling
City Manager
City of Sarasota

Urgent: Mind the Mira Mar

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

Karie, please look into this. I would hate to discover that the Mira Mar was demolished by mistake. The City made significant concessions to ensure that the two-story front Mira Mar building would be restored. I suspect that this is urgent.

Debbie Trice
Mayor, City of Sarasota

Tear It Down First, Explain Later?

To: Sarasota City Commission

I am watching the Mira Mar get ripped down right now... not just the parking garage but the actual building. The drone operator said they are only keeping the facade. Is this true? Seems like the developer's promise to renovate the Mira Mar so they could get the 18-story towers was the ploy we all feared. Way too easy to just knock the structure down and say that they tried. Is there anything being done to hold them accountable?

Lorie and Mark Foust
Sarasota

A Public Health Sniff Test

To: Sarasota City Commission

I am reaching out as a local resident, public health professional (MPH, DHSc) and downtown community stakeholder to formally request municipal oversight regarding an active public health and sanitation hazard outside The DeSota Apartments (1415 2nd St.).

The public sidewalks adjacent to this residential complex are heavily saturated with standing pet urine and accumulated waste. This creates severe odors that harm local restaurant foot traffic and, more critically, poses an immediate public safety risk in downtown Sarasota. As documented by municipal safety standards, unmitigated pet waste in Florida's climate serves as a vector breeding ground for E. coli, parasites, and zoonotic diseases like Leptospirosis, while actively drawing rodent infestations to neighboring properties.

I have already engaged local authorities, and a case file has officially been generated:

Active Enforcing Agency: City of Sarasota Code Compliance

Reference Case Number: 2026-CI-044808

This is becoming a chronic structural failure on the part of the property management (DeSota Apartments Property Owner LLC) to regulate tenant pet etiquette and clean their exterior premises. I am urging our elected city leadership and county health officials to monitor this case. We request that the property owners be held strictly accountable to execute immediate concrete bio-sanitation and establish permanent, internal resident controls to stop this public sidewalk contamination. Thank you for your dedication to the health, safety, and commercial accessibility of downtown Sarasota.

Dr. North, MPH, DHSc
Downtown Sarasota Business & Resident Community





Opinion Editorial

Fifteen Rabbits, Six Children, Two Dogs and One Editor Who Has Lost Control of the Narrative

I set out to lead a dignified life of writing and tennis on two of the priciest islands in Florida. My dogs, and my wife's rabbits, had other plans.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

I want to begin by saying that I am a serious journalist.

I spend my days in the sacred scrolls of local government: comprehensive plan amendments, staff comments, municipal finance, and documents that contain the phrase "pursuant to" so often it begins to feel like a religion.



STEVE REID

I publish a newspaper with a staff of two, one of whom is my wife. We also have six children, which makes our editorial meetings less like a newsroom and more like a hostage negotiation conducted entirely in snack requests.

I do all of this on and around some of the most expensive real estate on the West Coast of Florida, places where a modest cottage costs more than the gross domestic product of Liechtenstein. I like to think this puts me on a high intellectual plane.

Instead, my life is a clown show with a dog in every ring.

The Warning Signs I Ignored

My wife loves rabbits. "Loves" is the polite word. A court-appointed psychologist would say "obsession," and a court-appointed psychologist would also want to see the rabbit room.

I should have known. Early in our relationship, when we were in college and grad school in New Mexico, she had a large rabbit named Zoya who lived out back. We lived in an adobe house, where insulation is a rumor and the windows are less installed than suggested. Cooling came from a swamp cooler, which is a machine that blows damp air around so your house smells like a county fair that has given up.

Zoya added a rural note to this atmosphere. She thumped her feet at all hours, which I came to understand was rabbit for "I wish to speak to the manager." And every day, her cage produced a small pyramid of what I will politely call rabbit pellets, which would avalanche onto the ground in quantities that suggested she was running a manufacturing operation.

Did I walk away? I did not. I was young. In New Mexico, you let a lot of things slide, including, apparently, the load-bearing question of what kind of household you are building.

Fifteen Rabbits and a Prison With a View

Long story short: we now have about fifteen rabbits.

Each one has a name tag. I built them a rabbit room, which is a part of our house we converted for them, and it has a stunning view looking out over Siesta Key. The humans in this family pay a premium for that view. The rabbits get it free. Each cage has its own watering and feeding system, which is more than I can say for the children.

My wife has favorites, and the favorites get the attention, the out-of-cage time, the scratching behind the ears. The rest are, let's say, general population. It's like a federal prison, but a nice one. There are bars, sure, but the food is excellent. Minimum security, maximum fiber.

Halloween at the Compound

Once a year, we bring the rabbits out.

Our neighborhood has become known as the place to be on Halloween. Buses park in the Catholic church lot up the street, and families walk in from as far away as Siesta Beach, a migration of small superheroes that rivals the wildebeest. I put out tables. I play the welcoming host. We always have different rabbits for the kids to meet.

I have noticed that a man with a big bowl of candy, a rabbit in his arms, a wife at his side, and a gaggle of children automatically reads as the safest man in America. Anyone who knows me knows I need all the help I can get, and I take it where I can find it.

Which brings me to the dog.

Enter Bandit, Star of White Fang II

We also have a dog named Bandit. He weighs about seventy pounds, looks like he was cast in a wilderness movie, and sleeps on our bed, where he licks our faces. Remember that. It's going to matter.

Bandit has a second talent, and it is teeth. He has an extremely fast, extremely delicate grab, like a surgeon with a mouth. He can snatch a bird or a lizard out of the bushes so instantly that you don't even notice, and he never breaks stride. Then he'll walk into the house, jaw clamped shut like a man guarding a state secret, and next thing you know there is a stick, or a lizard, or a bird, in the living room, and everyone is staring at each other.

This is the dog I decided to take cycling.

The Sled With a Pulse

I own a lightweight bike, carbon fiber or something, and I discovered that if I hold Bandit's leash, he will pull me through the neighborhood at around twenty miles an hour. It's basically an electric bike, but with fur and no battery. I do almost nothing. I get all the credit.

I felt like I was in White Fang. In my head, I was a rugged outdoorsman. In reality, I was a man being towed down a residential street by a wolf lookalike, in the manner of a water skier who has lost the boat, the water, and his nerve.

But I was thrilled. I pictured my wife coming home and seeing me. I pictured the neighbors, nodding approvingly. There goes Steve. Exercising the dog. Look at the wellness. It would be a Hallmark commercial. It would be inspiring.

The Incident

I was probably going fifteen miles an hour, which on a bicycle pulled by a seventy-pound dog is the speed at which you no longer have any say in the matter, when Bandit veered, dipped, and snatched something off the middle of the road without slowing down.

I looked down. Bandit looked up.

In his mouth was a rabbit.

Not a living rabbit. Not even a recently living rabbit. This was a rabbit that had been run over by a car, left to bake in the Florida sun for what I estimate was about a week, and achieved a stable, two-dimensional state. It was completely flat, with the fur still on it, the entire outline intact. A pancake rabbit. It was horrifying, grotesque, and yet somehow almost professional, as though a taxidermist had been told to make a rabbit but was only given enough budget for one side.

Bandit, meanwhile, was beaming. That was no bone. That was bunny jerky. He looked at me the way a retriever looks at his owner when he's brought back the duck, if the duck were a place mat.

And Then the Car

This is when I saw a car coming up the road.

It was my wife and my daughter. They were returning from the store, where they had purchased a bunny costume for Halloween. Think about that. This is a family with fifteen actual rabbits, and they are out buying a costume of one. At some point, you don't have a hobby. You have a theme.

So there they were, driving toward me, and there I was, on a bike, being pulled by a dog. And in the dog's mouth was a flat dead rabbit. And this dog, remember, sleeps on our bed and licks our faces.

I did not know what to do.

I would tell you how this scene ended, but I am an editor, and I know the value of a good cliffhanger. More importantly, I know the value of my marriage, and my wife reads this column before it runs.

A Brief Flashback, Because Therapy Is Expensive

This reminds me of another incident.

Years ago, we lived on Westway Drive in Lido Shores, a lovely neighborhood of architecturally significant homes and retirees who spend their golden years tearing out tile and redoing everything. They treat home renovation the way other people treat cosmetic dentistry and dermatology: as a lifelong calling with no finish line. But that's a different column.

At the time, we had a houseful of teenagers and a small dog named Charlie, whom I called Charlito. Charlie looked like a cross between a Doberman and a Chihuahua, as though someone had negotiated a settlement in which the Chihuahua got the size and the Doberman got the attitude. He was also an escape artist.

One day he got out. He ran, and ran, and ran. I looked everywhere. No Charlie.

The Phone Call

Then my phone rang.

"Are you the owner of Charlie?" said a voice that was tense, angry, and fully in command of the situation.

"Yes, I am," I said, in the tone of a man who suspects he has already lost the argument.

The man informed me that dogs barking in an animal hospital were, in his word, incompatible. I said, in an effort to be a good citizen, "What animal hospital?"

"This is David Pilston," he said. "I'm the CEO of Save Our Seabirds."

It turned out that Charlie had trotted up the boardwalk, entered the bird hospital as though he'd been invited, and begun barking at the injured birds in their cages. Which, Mr. Pilston noted, was counterproductive.

I had two immediate reactions. The first was shame. I was apologetic, mortified, and ready to accept the title of negligent pet owner in perpetuity. The second was a deep, practical fear, because I did not know where my dog was, and I did not know how Mr. Pilston felt about dogs, and I was praying that his love of birds extended to a love of dogs, and maybe even to a love of dog owners.

"I'm so sorry," I said. "I'm so grateful. Where is he?"

"He's in the broom closet," said Mr. Pilston.

The Broom Closet

You have to understand what a broom closet means to a man in my position.

A broom closet is where they keep the bleach.

In about two seconds I had imagined everything. Charlie, a troublemaker by trade, a dog incapable of sitting quietly anywhere, alone in the dark with the cleaning supplies and no supervision. This was not a dog who would sit and reflect. This was a dog who would get into something.

Journalism's Finest Hour

So I did what any responsible dog owner and newspaper publisher would do. I immediately ran two full pages for the Save Our Seabirds gala.

Whether they needed them or not. I wanted them to be the biggest nonprofit in the region. I wanted every person in the county to know about this gala. I was prepared to cover this organization like it was the Super Bowl.

Because in the end, I didn't see Charlie as a dog who had broken into a hospital. I saw him as a rogue Scared Straight program, a tiny guy yelling at the birds in their cages: You think you're tough? Look at where you ended up!

What I Have Learned

After many years as an editor, a husband, and a father, I would like to share some wisdom, hard-won and not at all reliable:

One. If a dog can carry it, a dog will carry it, and eventually it will be in the house.

Two. If a man has fifteen rabbits, he does not have a hobby. He has a theme.

Three. The surest sign that you've lost control of the narrative is when it's in a dog's mouth.

Four. When you've wronged a nonprofit, the correct remedy is two full pages of advertising.

A Final Invitation

If you're in the neighborhood on Halloween night, please stop by. There will be candy. There will be rabbits. There will be a man at a folding table working very, very hard to look safe.

Bandit will be on a leash.

And whatever you do, please do not offer him anything flat.

The Circle, from page 1

the barrier islands on Oct. 6, water came through the doors of businesses on the Circle, with flooding reported near North Boulevard of the Presidents and Madison Drive.

"This has been a repeat problem area," wrote Chris Goglia, president of the St. Armands Residents Association.

Rachel Burns, executive director of the St. Armands Circle Association, the merchants group, emailed city and county officials at 7:50 p.m., as water was entering businesses. Floodwater had overwhelmed the sewer drains and mixed with restaurant grease, she wrote, leaving a foul mess that was damaging property. Leave the stormwater problem unsolved, she warned, and the Circle will close, and the tax revenue it sends to both governments will go with it.

Sixty-Six Minutes

That night, the county's senior stormwater manager, Kari Holmes, reported that every station was by then working as intended. Then came the catch.

"We had a pump 1 failure at PS 7010 at 5:42pm and it was reset at 6:48pm. We have had issues with this specific pump at this station."

A known problem pump. A 66-minute outage. Water in the street.

"Is that what caused the street flooding on St. Armands Circle?" Goglia asked in his bulletin to city and county leaders the next morning. "I don't know."

The County Blames the Rain

Two days later, the county said no. Station 7010's second pump kept running, the stormwater department said, and the station does not serve the part of the Circle near the Columbia where the flooding was reported. The culprit, the county said, was volume: 2.8 to 3.5 inches in a few hours, pouring into a low-lying system all at once.

That is not the comfort it may sound like. The failed pump was back at 6:48. An hour later, water was still coming through shop doors. Either something else in the system is not working, or the system is working as designed and three inches of rain is enough to sink the Circle.

A Sensor in July, a Pump in October

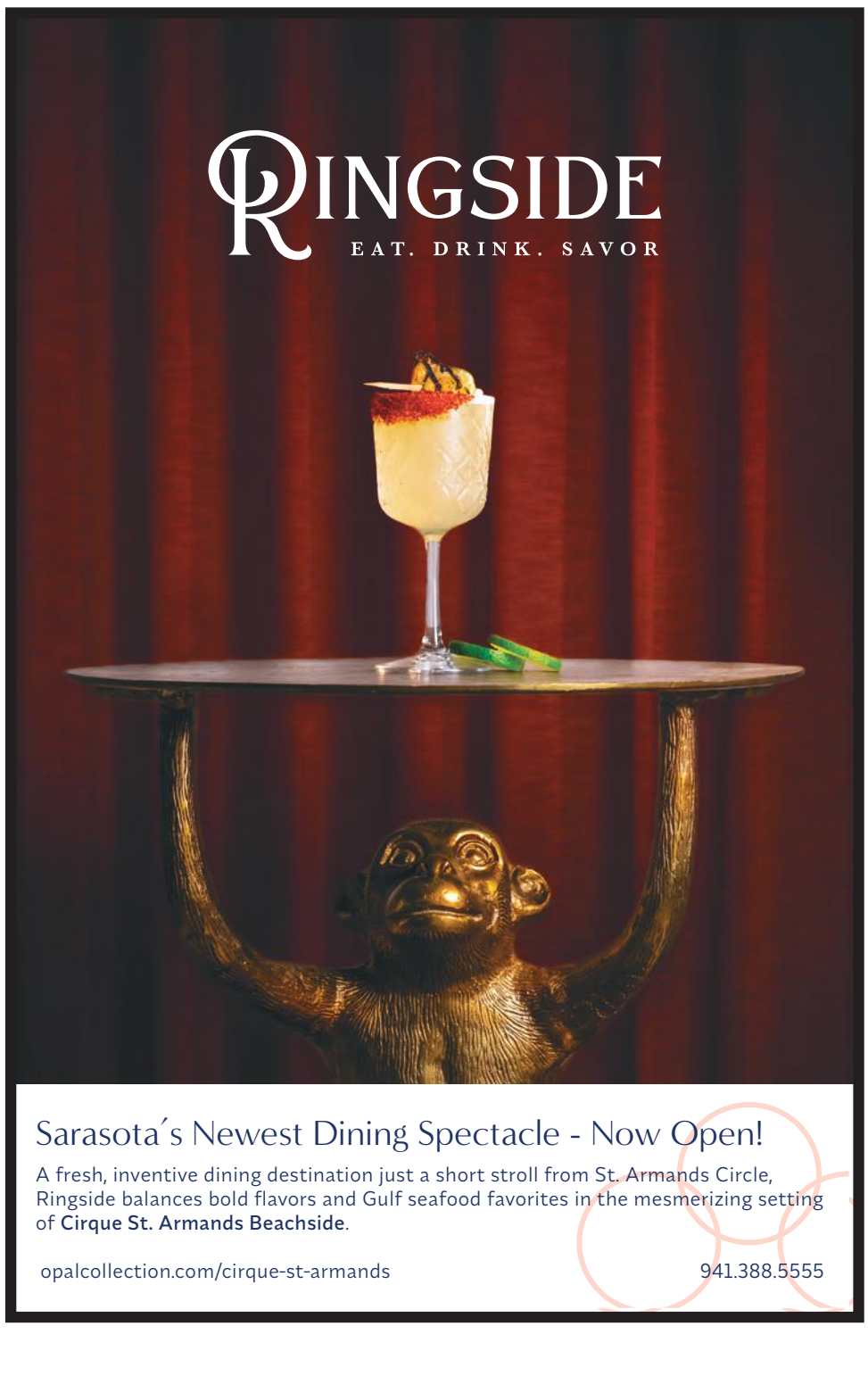
St. Armands has been here before, and recently. On July 23, a thunderstorm dropped about 2.2 inches of rain in two hours at high tide, and the county later said a failed sensor had kept one of the Circle's five pump stations from turning on. The residents association documented street flooding on three separate days that month.

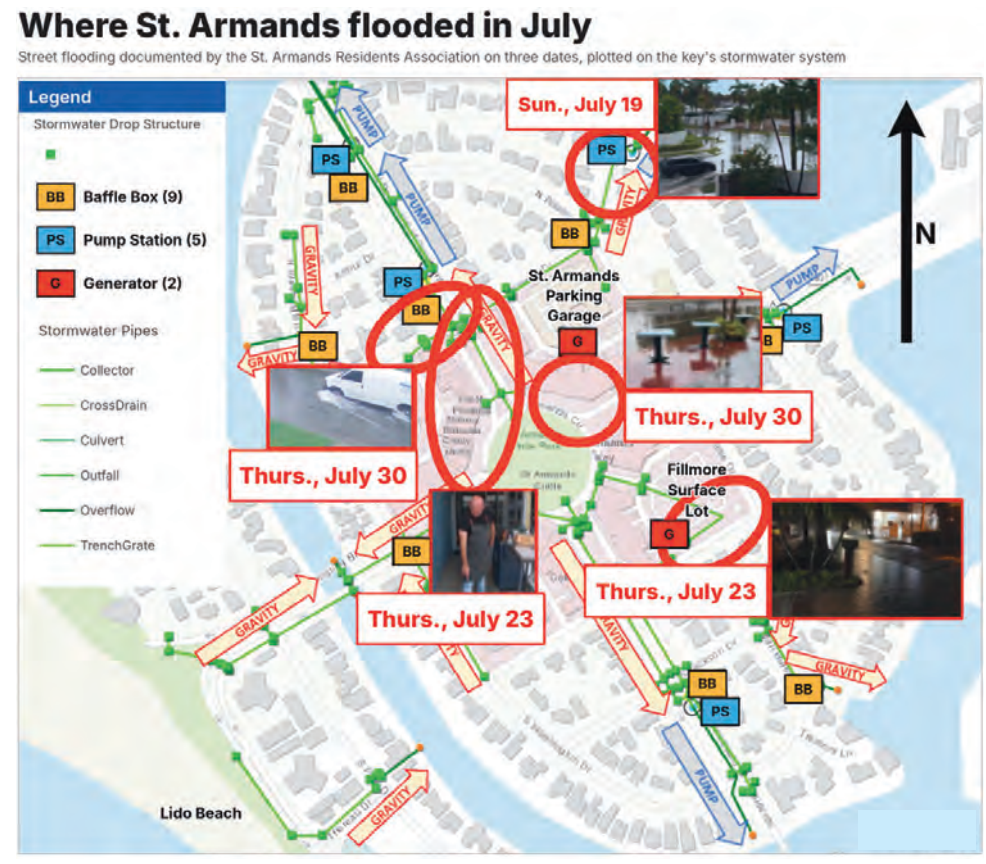
"We see this as clogged drains and faulty sensors," Goglia wrote, "not capital improvements that will require waiting years for the Resilient SRQ funds to be spent."

A Seat Cushion in the Baffle Box

The association has evidence for that theory, and it is hard to forget. At a Sept. 18 joint meeting of the City and County commissions, a board member displayed a photo of what had been pulled from one of St. Armands' underground baffle boxes: a floral patio seat cushion and a wad of carpet padding, likely lodged there since Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Next door on Lido Key, Goglia noted, the county finally scoped clogged storm drains on Ben Franklin Drive this spring. Clearing them took two days and four truckloads of debris. The county says crews have since inspected 181 stormwater structures around St. Armands and completed more than 80 cleanings. If the Circle floods like this after 80 cleanings, what is still down there?





Two Governments, One Drain

The joint meeting the next day exposed the structural oddity at the heart of the problem. Inside the City of Sarasota, stormwater is managed by Sarasota County.

Longboat Key Commissioner B.J. Bishop, noting that forecasts called for more heavy rain, asked whether emergency pumps were staged near St. Armands. The answer led straight back to the county. "That's unfortunate," came the response from the dais.

City Manager Karie Friling described herself, Public Works Director Nikesh Patel and the police chief working the night of the flood for hours with county counterparts as roads became impassable. The city has proposed a year-or-two evaluation of the stormwater system inside city limits, with the possible goal of taking it over from the county.

"We recognize it is not the best situation," Friling said.

$13.5 Million, Not One Shovel

The long-term fix is real money. In December, the County Commission approved $13.5 million in federal disaster recovery funds through its Resilient SRQ program for high-capacity pumps, backup generators, discharge piping and hardened outfalls with check valves, plus $479,000 from the city. The city had asked for about $24.5 million. Underground storage vaults and deployable flood barriers were left out.

Ten months later, the two governments cannot even describe the project's status the same way. Patel told the joint meeting the county was still selecting a consultant. The county's stormwater director, Ben Quartermaine, had told the Sept. 18 meeting a contractor was chosen and the scope was being negotiated. Either way, nothing is built, and the grant allows until the end of 2031 to finish.

Band-Aid or Cure

Sarasota Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch questioned whether even that money is equal to the problem.

"Thirteen and a half million dollars is no small amount of money, but in the big picture it seems a little bit like it's a band-aid as opposed to a solution," she said.

Patel insisted it is more than that, and urged patience. "Rushing through the project is a little bit short-sighted, in my opinion," he said.

Another commissioner put the politics plainly: residents who call every time the Circle floods "want to know that they're going to be able to get out of their home tomorrow."

Three Crews, One Small Island

The fix must also be choreographed with two other projects on the same few streets: the city's utility undergrounding of St. Armands, targeted for the January 2028 tax roll, and $1.48 million in state money for the corridor itself, all scheduled so one crew does not dig up another's finished work.

Longboat Key Town Manager George Landry offered the bluntest diagnosis. On a barrier island, he said, there is nowhere to put the water: no room for big ponds, no dumping it in the bay, and the state does not want pipes on its bridges. "It's going to be near impossible for the local folks to try to figure it out," he said, urging a push for changes in Tallahassee.

A Machine on the Emergency Line

What St. Armands once had, Goglia wrote, was a person. After Hurricane Idalia in 2023, residents had the cell number of the county's stormwater operations manager, who often already knew about a pump problem from remote monitoring, would come out with a rake to clear a blocked drain, and pre-staged a trailer pump before storms.

That manager is gone and the position has apparently been vacant since 2025. On Oct. 6, Burns tried the county's after-hours stormwater line and reached a fully automated AI system. "This is unacceptable for an emergency line," she wrote.

County Administrator Jonathan Lewis told her that night that a call to 311 will reach the right staff, and that the county now sends a team member to check whenever flooding is reported or heavy rain falls.

"We don't know who receives the 'SCADA' reports and how quickly they are acted on," Goglia wrote. "We don't know if a temporary pump on a trailer is still being pre-staged in advance of storms."

What St. Armands Is Asking For

Strip away the questions and Goglia's request is modest. He is not asking for $24.5 million this month.

"We'd like to have a more collaborative relationship, or at the minimum, someone we can call directly, after hours, when there is flooding," he wrote.

The Circle's busiest months are just ahead, and the sign at the edge of the island still says "May."

"Let's fix this," Goglia wrote, "or at least make things better than what we've got today."

Key Real Estate

Bird Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key latest sales

WEEKS ENDING OCTOBER 16 AND 23, 2026



The top sale of the past two weeks: Penthouse 1101 at Rosewood Residences Lido Key, 1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., sold for $14,500,000, one of five Rosewood closings in two weeks totaling $56.6 million.

ADDRESS	SQ. FT.	LIST PRICE	BED/BATH/ HALF BATH	DAYS ON MARKET	SALE PRICE
Longboat Key					
705 Jungle Queen Way	3,083	$2,795,000	4/3/1	101	**$2,685,000**
1241 Gulf of Mexico Dr., #608	2,965	$2,200,000	2/4/0	15	**$2,033,000**
340 Gulf of Mexico Dr., #115	2,314	$2,345,000	3/2/1	232	**$1,900,000**
3481 Bayou Sound	3,391	$1,950,000	5/3/1	167	**$1,790,000**
1906 Harbourside Dr., #304	2,135	$1,195,000	3/3/0	47	**$1,150,000**
4540 Gulf of Mexico Dr., #204	1,312	$595,000	2/2/0	14	**$595,000**
847 Evergreen Way	1,440	$599,000	2/2/1	332	**$585,000**
1095 Gulf of Mexico Dr., #104	1,503	$599,000	2/2/0	17	**$575,000**
602 Spanish Dr. S., #115	1,427	$359,900	2/2/0	86	**$315,340**
3710 Gulf of Mexico Dr., #D19	684	$99,000	2/1/0	511	**$81,985**
Bird Key, Lido Key					
1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #PH 1101	4,942	$15,450,000	4/4/1	441	**$14,500,000**
1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #1001	4,942	$13,400,000	4/4/1	1	**$13,400,000**
1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #801	4,942	$13,000,000	4/4/1	0	**$13,000,000**
1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #707	4,482	$8,500,000	4/4/1	556	**$8,500,000**
1000 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #403	4,081	$7,200,000	3/3/1	1	**$7,200,000**
1800 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #B207	1,980	$1,549,000	3/3/0	237	**$1,350,000**
797 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #9	1,522	$999,000	3/2/1	7	**$999,000**
1212 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #508	1,421	$875,000	2/2/0	309	**$830,000**
1212 Benjamin Franklin Dr., #1003	1,421	$790,000	2/2/0	11	**$740,000**
Downtown Sarasota					
464 Golden Gate Pt., #702	3,377	$4,245,000	3/4/1	291	**$4,000,000**
515 S. Osprey Ave.	2,798	$2,425,000	4/4/1	6	**$2,375,000**
1041 Citrus Ave.	2,063	$1,590,000	3/2/0	1	**$1,500,000**
111 S. Pineapple Ave., #716	1,688	$1,249,000	2/2/1	10	**$1,185,000**
101 Sunset Dr., #103	1,693	$1,195,000	2/2/0	32	**$1,100,000**
1771 Ringling Blvd., #1001	1,808	$785,000	3/2/0	55	**$750,000**
411 Burns Court	1,345	$875,000	3/2/0	110	**$715,000**
1771 Ringling Blvd., #1205	1,483	$699,900	2/2/0	47	**$668,000**
1221 N. Palm Ave., #305	676	$399,000	1/1/0	1	**$370,000**
671 N. Orange Ave., #308	784	$309,900	2/2/0	315	**$309,900**

Source: Stellar MLS closed sales for ZIP codes 34228 and 34236.

OnPatrol

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

Saturday, Oct. 10
Happy landing

5:01 p.m.

Officer Albert Miano and Sgt. Adam Montfort responded to a report of a possible kite-glider struggling to stay afloat in the Gulf off the 2400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. Sgt. Montfort advised that the person made it to shore without any issue, and Officer Miano saw the swimmer out of the water with nothing to report. No further police action was needed. Case clear.



Sunday, Oct. 11
Key issues

10:46 a.m.

Officer Miano was sent to a home on Gunwale Lane for a burglary alarm. While he was on his way, dispatch advised that the homeowner had asked to cancel the response. The officer reached the homeowner by cell phone, and he said the keypad was having issues and there was no emergency at the home. Case clear.

Monday, Oct. 12
Fall alarm

9:12 a.m.

Officer Jorge Castro Agis was sent to a home on Tarawitt Drive after ADT Security reported a burglary alarm from a window at the rear of the house. Sgt. Michael Mathis and Officer Simon Maple also responded. Officer Castro Agis checked the outside of the house and found all doors and windows secure, with no sign of forced entry or attempted burglary. Through the doorbell camera, he spoke with a man who identified himself as the listed property owner and said a window sensor had fallen and set off the alarm. The officer tried calling the owner at the number in the call notes, got no answer and left a voicemail. A vehicle parked in the driveway was registered to the address. Case clear.

Tuesday, Oct. 13
Foreclosed, not burgled

2:38 p.m.

Officer Maple and Sgt. Mathis were sent to a home on General Harris Street for a possible residential burglary. A man said that over the previous two weeks numerous items had been stolen or gone missing from the family's home, which was going through foreclosure. He said his partner had gone to the home, which is uninhabitable because of hurricane damage, on the evening of Oct. 12 and found the rear sliding door open and items missing, including fishing nets, an end table, tools, a washer and dryer and a small ice maker. She said she believed she knew who had some of the items. The officers walked through the house but, because of its poor condition, could not tell whether a crime had occurred. The home had not been lived in full time for two years, was scattered with personal belongings, construction materials, tools and furnishings, and had evidently not been cared for since the two hurricanes. A locksmith hired to change the locks then put Officer Maple on the phone with the representative handling the foreclosure for the bank, who said the home had been sold in foreclosure Sept. 24 and the man had been given a 10-day redemption period to pay what was owed and regain the property. The 10 days passed without word from him, and the foreclosure date covered the date of the reported theft. After the department's detectives were briefed, it was determined the property had been transferred through legal proceedings and the man was not a victim. The bank's office said the remaining belongings were of no value to the bank and it would prefer the former owners remove them, and the man was told the bank would give him more time to get what is left and provide some financial support. The couple filled out witness statements, and the case was filed as an information report. Case clear.

Uber-suspicious

10:49 p.m.

Officer David Martinson was sent to a condominium in the 5000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a suspicious incident call. The caller did not want to meet with police, so the officer phoned her. She said she and her friends had taken a multiple-stop Uber ride from IMG to her condo, and that on Cortez Road the driver said his app was not working and pulled over to reset it, which they found suspicious, before driving on. When they reached the condo, all of her friends got out with her, planning to order a different ride home because they no longer felt safe in the car. They walked to the elevator but held off going to her unit so the driver would not see which one she lived in. They watched him drive through the parking lot to the stop sign at Gulf of Mexico Drive, turn around, come back and park near the elevator for about 10 minutes before abruptly peeling out and heading north on Gulf of Mexico Drive in a gray Volkswagen. She said the driver did nothing criminal, but she believed he was acting suspiciously and feared he was trying to see which unit they went into. They had reported it to Uber, and she wanted it documented. The officer drove north on Gulf of Mexico Drive to North Shore Road but did not find the car. Case clear.



Wednesday, Oct. 14
Not a peep

7:48 a.m.

Officer Miano was sent to the 5900 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a complaint of construction starting before 8 a.m. He saw no power equipment in use and heard no construction noise before 8 a.m. The project manager said he was aware of the town ordinance and had been following it. Case clear.

Signs of a camp

2:06 p.m.

Officer Dallas Troyer was sent to a condominium in the 1700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a report of a transient person living behind bushes on the property. A condo employee said that about an hour earlier, workers at a neighboring condominium reported seeing signs of someone living on the property, and he found them in the bushes on the right side of the entrance: a blanket, bed sheets and a cardboard box. No one was there at the time. The employee said he believed the person might return during the night and that he, or another person with authority at the community, would sign a trespass form. The information was passed on to other shifts. Case clear.

Hose-tile driving

2:41 p.m.

Officer Miano interviewed a woman at the Longboat Key Police Department about a suspicious incident. She said that at about 10:58 a.m. she was southbound on Gulf of Mexico Drive behind a white Chevy pickup when water appeared to shoot out of the truck bed in what she described as a direct and purposeful spray. The water never reached her car because of the distance between them. She said the truck tried to turn left into the Cannon's Marina parking lot but did not make it, kept going south and then turned right into a driveway, and a few minutes later it was traveling south behind her. She reported no further trouble with the truck and said she did not know anyone with that vehicle. She asked for a report because she has had several suspicious incidents in other jurisdictions and may need to refer to it later. Case clear.

Thursday, Oct. 15
Pink slip at Sips

6:39 a.m.

Officer Troyer was sent to Sips, 6828 Gulf of Mexico Drive, on a suspicious person call. The owner had reported that he fired an employee the day before, and the former employee was making suggestive comments about showing up at the business even though he had been told not to come back. An employee at Sips said the man was not there and there were no problems. By phone, the owner told the officer the former employee had been texting him that he was owed money and was going to show up because he wanted to work. The owner said he had told him not to come, did not want him at the business and had paid him. The officer advised the owner of the trespass laws that apply if the man shows up. Case clear.

Spring-loaded

9:28 a.m.

Officer Castro Agis was sent to a home on Buttonwood Drive on a civil dispute. The homeowner said his garage door stopped working, so he searched online and called the first company listed. On Oct. 13, a technician told him several parts needed replacing. He asked about the cost before the work began, and the technician said he would provide it after assessing the repairs. The technician replaced several parts, including a new roller, two springs rated for 70,000 cycles, two drums and a middle bracket, and also did maintenance on the door. The bill came to $3,818. The homeowner agreed to the charges and paid by credit card, but later felt the amount was excessive. He tried calling the company and got no answer, and he had opened a dispute with his credit card company. He confirmed the technician explained the repairs before he agreed to pay. The officer found no evidence that a crime had been committed and advised him to keep trying to reach the company and to send an email documenting his efforts. While the officer was there, the homeowner reached someone at the company, who said a manager would call him back. Case clear.

Finders keepers?

10:03 a.m.

Officer Troyer went to a home on Bogey Lane after a resident submitted an online inquiry

See On Patrol, page 11

OnPatrol

about a kayak she had found. She said that on Oct. 8 or 9 she was on the beach when she spotted a blue Pelican fishing kayak in the water, pulled it onto the beach and left it for its owner. When it was still there later in the day, she took it home. She said she would like to keep it but wanted it to go through the proper channels first. The officer took the kayak, logged it into property and evidence as found property and ran a search that turned up no owner. Case clear.



Friday, Oct. 16

Flat-out stuck

3:44 p.m.

Officer Simon Maple was on patrol in the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he saw a black Toyota car on the side of the road with its hazard lights on and a woman inside. The driver told him she had a flat tire, was stuck in the bike lane and was uncomfortably close to passing traffic. She was physically unable to make the emergency repairs needed to move the car out of the bike lane, and her tow request was more than an hour and a half away. Officer Maple determined the car was in an unsafe spot for the driver, the vehicle and passing traffic, so he helped her repair the tire and move the car out of the area without incident. Case clear.

Saturday, Oct. 17

Lights out

2:40 p.m.

Officer Maple was on patrol in the 5700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he saw a gray Toyota SUV driving in the rain without its headlights on. He stopped the SUV, and the driver said he did not have a valid Florida driver's license and handed over a Florida ID card. The driver said he knew he was not allowed to drive, but his girlfriend, who was in the passenger seat, was unable to drive herself, and he had no other options and had to get her to an urgent care facility. A records check showed his license had been revoked in 2025 for being a habitual traffic violator. He was also on probation for shoplifting but was not in direct violation of it, and Officer Maple tried to contact his probation officer. The man said he was due to get his license back next month and had received a letter from the state explaining that. He was issued a criminal citation for knowingly driving with a revoked license, with a Manatee County court date of Nov. 24, and a warning for the headlight violation. Officer Maple gave the couple a courtesy ride to Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota so she could be evaluated. The stop was recorded on the in-car camera. Case clear.

Sunday, Oct. 18

HOA, no

8:44 a.m.

Officer Dallas Troyer was sent to the 2400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a disturbance that had already happened. The complainant had called the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office dispatch center to report that his homeowners association president had threatened to batter him. He told the officer he had been having continuing problems with the HOA president, whom he knew, and that the trouble began when he confronted the man about his hurricane cleanup efforts in 2024. Since then, he said, the man had been giving him trouble and threatening to beat him up. About a year ago, the man got in his face and threatened to beat him up, and another board member had to step in and break it up. The latest episode came the previous Wednesday, when the complainant, who said he was in a good mood, smiled at the man as he passed him in the parking lot while the man was walking to his vehicle. The complainant said he heard the man say, "What are you looking at? I'll kick your a--." He said the man did not clench his fists or come toward him. Based on his statement, the threat was not coupled with an apparent ability to carry it out, so the incident did not appear to be criminal. The complainant said he wanted it documented because he is tired of the man threatening him and walking around like a tough guy. Officer Troyer explained the applicable Florida laws and advised him not to engage with the man. Case clear.

License to find

10:19 a.m.

Officer Jorge Castro Agis was on patrol in the area of Longboat Drive North when a resident flagged him down and said he had found a driver's license while walking on the Longboat Pass Bridge that day. The officer told him the license would be secured in the police department's property and evidence room. Case clear.

My brother's keeper

8:24 p.m.

Officer Gregory Tillman was sent to Marbury Lane after a woman told dispatch she was worried about her brother drinking alcohol and had no one in town to check on him. The man answered the front door within seconds of the officers' knock and said he had been drinking and was fine. He was advised to call his sister, and Officer Tillman also called her and reached her voicemail. Case clear.

Monday, Oct. 19

Dock of the bay

10:39 a.m.

Officer James Barrett responded to Buttonwood Cove on a report of an abandoned vessel. A resident had reported what might be a piece of dock that had broken loose and a possibly submerged abandoned boat in the waterway north of her home. Officer Barrett found a floating dock, securely anchored, with a small boat secured on top of it and a sign reading "Private property, no trespassing." The dock did not appear to violate any state laws or town ordinances, and Officer Barrett let the resident know what he found. Case clear.

Wednesday, Oct. 21

Scam I am

11:09 a.m.

Officer Maple was sent to the 5400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a possible fraud. A man said he had been receiving texts telling him to take care of a situation, and that the caller cursed at him and hung up. No money changed hands, and he gave no personal or financial information to the scammer. At Officer Maple's suggestion, the man looked up the scam online to verify it, and the officer also told him to call the courthouse at its published number to confirm. The man was not a victim, and the report was filed for information only. Case clear.

Return to sender

11:57 a.m.

Officer Castro Agis responded to Yawl Lane on a property damage report. A resident said that as she was pulling out of her driveway, she saw a moving company truck using her driveway to turn around, and the driver struck her mailbox, causing minor damage to its side. She said the driver and passenger got out and told her to contact the company to file a complaint. While the officer was there, she called the company and spoke with the owner, who accepted responsibility for the damage and gave her the information she needed. She then declined to pursue a formal police report and agreed to let the company pay for the mailbox repairs. Case clear.

Hotel, from page 1

Compactor on the Corner

The objections that sank the project in September did not go away. Arlington Park residents and the two dissenting commissioners zeroed in on the trash compactor planned near the corner of East Avenue and Prospect Street to serve the hotel, the apartments and the shops, and on sidewalks of varying widths along East, Prospect and U.S. 41.

The new driveway onto East Avenue, which Planning Board members warned would become the project's real front door, remains in the plan.

A Project the Code Was Written For

In a sense, the commission was ruling on its own handiwork. The 2020 Commercial General rewrite that a divided commission passed for exactly this kind of aging plaza is what allows the 65-foot hotel, the residential density and the attainable-housing trade. The hotel's height bonus calls for a $150,000 payment into the city's affordable housing trust fund. Under the conditions city staff recommended and the developer accepted, the attainable apartments would stay priced for households at or below 120 percent of area median income for at least 30 years.

The Buck Stopped Here

The approval clears the way for the dead supermarket to finally come down. For Arlington Park, what remains is the courthouse, and whether neighbors take that route is the next question.

In September, the neighborhood asked who was paying attention and got three votes for an answer. On Monday, the question went to five people the whole city elected, and the answer came back the other way.

LONGBOAT KEY TENNIS CENTER
Join the fun!
10 OPEN COURTS | TOURNAMENT PLAY | LESSONS
FULL SERVICE TENNIS PRO SHOP
ROUND ROBIN LEAGUE
CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS AND CLINICS
OPEN MON-FRI 7:30 AM - 5:00 PM
SAT-SUN 7:30 AM - 1200 PM
SEASONAL AND ANNUAL PASSES ENJOY UNLIMITED FREE PLAY!
590 BAY ISLES ROAD | LONGBOAT KEY, FL
941.316.8367

Paradise, from page 1

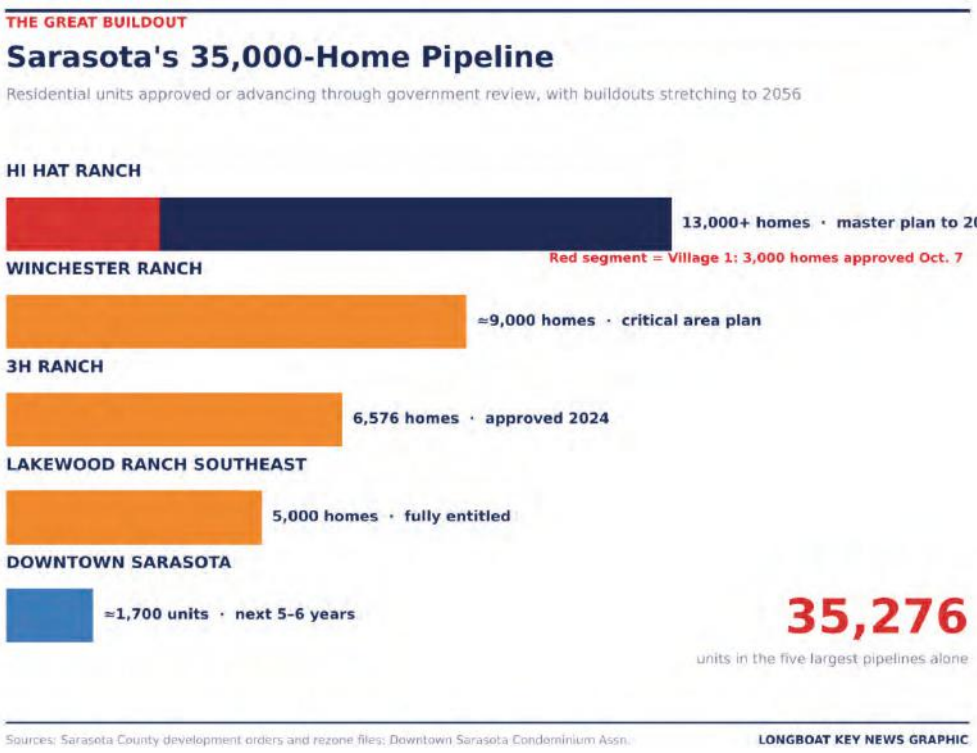
• Lakewood Ranch Southeast, 4,100 acres of Old Miakka pastureland, is fully entitled for up to 5,000 homes, with Pulte, Taylor Morrison, Toll Brothers and Neal already assigned their tracts.

• Winchester Ranch, along River Road in South County, holds an approved critical area plan anticipating some 9,000 homes over the coming decades.

• Downtown Sarasota is tracking roughly 1,700 new units over the next five to six years, with more than 1,000 more in the city's review pipeline at any given moment.

Add the smaller villages, the Fruitville Initiative parcels, the infill rezones and towers such as the 282-unit Saravela approved this summer on North Tamiami Trail, and the total pushes well past 35,000.

At Florida's average household size, that pipeline is a future population the size of a second City of Sarasota, dropped onto the county's eastern flank and its downtown core.



More than 35,000 residential units are approved or advancing across Sarasota County and downtown Sarasota.

The 2050 Plan Becomes a Conveyor Belt

The foundation for all of it is the Sarasota 2050 Plan, adopted in 2002 as an enlightened compromise. Instead of sprawl creeping east one strip mall at a time, growth would be channeled into compact villages with homes, shops, jobs and schools knitted together, ringed by 500-foot greenbelts, each one paying its own way.

A quarter-century later, the villages are coming. The fine print keeps getting amended on the way to the dais.

Greenbelts on Request

At 3H Ranch, the required 500-foot greenbelt was trimmed to 50 feet on two sides and waived to zero on two others. At Hi Hat Village 1, county planning staff found the rezoning inconsistent with the county's own rules because the village arrived without a village center, the very shops meant to keep residents from driving everywhere. Commissioners approved it anyway. The roughly 450 affordable units that earned Hi Hat's builders their density bonus come with no income verification, and the affordable rentals stay affordable for one year instead of five.

When Saying No Is 'Illegal'

One commissioner, during a Lakewood Ranch Southeast vote, confessed he did not believe he had the ability to vote no. Lakewood Ranch chief Rex Jensen was blunter still, telling the Herald-Tribune it would have been "illegal" for commissioners to deny his rezone.

He may well be right under Florida's property-rights regime, which is precisely the point. The discretion residents assume their elected boards possess has been narrowed, waiver by waiver, into something closer to a ratification ceremony.

The Flicker That Went Out Monday

There have been flickers of resistance. Commissioner Tom Knight voted against Lakewood Ranch Southeast, telling constituents the county was not ready for it. Residents fill hearing rooms chanting a four-word creed: keep the country country.

And in September, the City of Sarasota's Planning Board stunned observers by denying the Midtown Plaza hotel-and-apartment project at U.S. 41 and Bahia Vista on a 3-2 vote, siding with Arlington Park neighbors over traffic, a trash compactor and a new driveway onto East Avenue.

That flicker lasted six weeks. On Monday, the City Commission granted the developer's appeal and approved the project 3-2. (See story, this page.)

The conveyor belt, meanwhile, never stopped. In the last 26 months, the three largest land-use decisions in county history, 3H Ranch, Lakewood Ranch Southeast and Hi Hat Village 1, all won approval.

The Vertical City

While the county grows outward, the city grows upward. Downtown now accounts for roughly 60 percent of the city's population growth over the past decade, a staggering number for a place that spent most of the 20th century as a low-rise winter colony. Some 12,000 people live in the core today.

Penthouses and the Live Local Crowbar

The product mix tells you who Sarasota is being built for. The median list price in the 34236 ZIP code hovers around $1.2 million. Bayfront towers at The Quay trade north of $1.5 million, and pre-construction at One Park averages past $4 million.

Beneath the penthouses, a quieter shift: roughly 42 percent of the units in the city's review pipeline are now planned as rentals, most tagged affordable or attainable under density bonuses and the state's Live Local Act, the statute developers wield as both carrot and crowbar.

A Magnet Asked to Carry Triple the Iron

The skyline is changing faster than the sidewalk. The Van Wezel, the opera, the theaters and the galleries that made downtown worth wanting have not grown alongside the unit counts. The city is still arguing over its purple performing arts hall, still fighting over art in its roundabouts, still trying to open a first restaurant at The Bay. On festival weekends, downtown's daily population already swells toward 100,000.

The amenities are the magnet. The magnet is being asked to carry triple the iron.

Homes in 2026, Roads in 2029

Here is where the celebration collides with the ledger.

Hi Hat Village 1 was approved this month. The Lorraine Road extension that Hi Hat's own traffic study says it will significantly impact is still in design and not scheduled to finish until winter 2029. The widening of Fruitville Road from Debrecen to Lorraine runs on the same clock. East of Lorraine, the county's comprehensive plan prohibits widening Fruitville at all, so the two-lane country road serving as front door to the largest development in county history is, by policy, two lanes forever.

Interstate 75 Becomes Main Street

The county's public works director concedes that drivers now treat Interstate 75 as a local road, with severe congestion between State Road 681 and the Manatee River. The county's busiest stretches include Fruitville at the interstate and University Parkway, exactly where the new villages will empty.

Congestion, Codified

The city's answer to its own congestion is even more revealing. Its Transportation Chapter rewrite abandons level-of-service grades for a volume-to-capacity ratio and sets the downtown ceiling at a V/C of 1.0, a road running at 100 percent of its theoretical capacity.

Pressed this fall on how those ceilings were chosen, the city's own consultant allowed that it is more art than mathematical formula. Congestion is no longer a problem to be solved. It is a condition to be codified.

The Bridge That Vanished

For the barrier islands, the same rewrite carried one more quiet detonation: the deletion of the decades-old policy supporting planning for a second bridge to Longboat Key.

Every one of those 35,000 pipeline households that wants a beach day will funnel over the same drawbridges and causeways that served the county at half its current population. St. Armands Circle, the pinch point, already floods in a thunderstorm and wages trench warfare over parking. The islands are the prize at the end of everyone's drive, and the drive is the one thing no master plan has mastered.

Building Into a Split Tape

Strangest of all, this entitlement wave crested during the softest resale market the region has seen since the late 2000s.

The county entered 2026 with prices falling in both segments. Then the single-family market snapped back hard: June's median hit roughly $492,000, up more than 8 percent, as detached inventory collapsed 27 percent to about four months of supply, firmly a seller's market.

Condos Never Got the Memo

Condos, battered by insurance premiums, milestone inspections and assessment shock, stayed down. The condo and townhome median hovered between $330,000 and $345,000, off as much as 7.5 percent year-over-year, with cash buyers, a remarkable two-thirds of closings, setting the terms. Meanwhile national builders sitting on freshly entitled east-county lots are moving product with rate buy-downs that compete head-on with resale homes in the $400,000-to-$600,000 band.

Read together, the data describe two Sarasotas: a luxury coast where bayfront product holds value against gravity itself, and a mass-production inland market where volume, not scarcity, is the business model. The pipeline is a bet that both can run at once for 30 years. Florida real estate rarely runs in a straight line for 30 months.

Finite Sand, Infinite Demand

Underneath every spreadsheet sits the asset that cannot be manufactured: roughly 40 miles of Gulf coastline strung across six barrier keys. Tourism pumps more than $3 billion a year through the county economy, nearly all of it leveraged against beaches that must be renourished just to stay the same size.

The ecosystem absorbing this boom is not an abstraction. Stormwater from 3H Ranch drains toward Little Sarasota and Dona bays. Lakewood Ranch Southeast wraps around lands near the city's drinking water sources. Hi Hat's neighbors pleaded about fragmented wetlands and floodplain math drawn before the 2024 hurricanes. And with deaths outnumbering births here for years, every new unit is imported demand placed on a fixed coast.

That is the structural tension no commission vote resolves. The thing being sold, Gulf light, open water, an uncrowded paradise, is diluted by the act of selling it.

Triumph or Trespass?

An honest analysis refuses the easy answer, because both answers are true.

The case for celebration is real. The buildout brings billions in investment, a downtown more alive at 9 p.m. than it has been in a century and, for the first time, meaningful numbers of attainable units riding in on the density bonuses. Master-planned communities, whatever their sins, beat the ranchette sprawl they replaced, with half their acreage held as open space. Growth is not a conspiracy. It is a compliment.

The case for alarm is equally real, and it is not really about the houses. It is about sequence. Homes approved on a 2026 calendar, roads arriving on a 2029 calendar, if then. Greenbelts that shrink on request. A fiscal-neutrality promise resting on studies that predate the villages. A congestion yardstick swapped out the moment it would have started flashing red. A government genuinely planning for this moment would build the Lorraine extension before Hi Hat's first rooftop and treat a staff finding of "inconsistent" as a stop sign, not a speed bump.

Who Laid the Rails

Sarasota is not overdevelopment off the rails. Not yet. It is something more precarious: a boom running exactly on the rails its builders were allowed to lay for themselves, through a landscape with a hard physical limit and a government apparatus that has, piece by piece, bargained away its own brakes.

Golden hours, by definition, do not last. The light making Sarasota the most wanted address on the Gulf Coast is the same light by which, 30 years from now, residents of 35,000 new homes will judge whether this generation of leaders planned a city or merely permitted one. The paperwork for that verdict was filed this month, between Fruitville and Clark roads, east of the interstate, where the cattle still graze for a little while longer.

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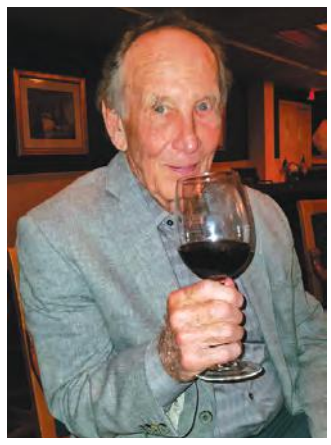
Columbia Group's Tampa Eatery a Delight

The Columbia Restaurant group and the Gonzmart family group that owns it have demonstrated how to make restaurants on barrier islands resilient to storms.

S.W. and Rich Hermansen
Guest Writers
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On the eve of the day when a tidal wave deluged St. Armand's Circle in Sarasota, we reflect on what happened and did not happen.

The eye of the hurricane named Helene lurked 80 miles offshore yet threw a band into Lido Beach that pushed an estimated 12.5-foot tidal wave into the center of the Circle. It flooded the lowest point on the Circle, the Columbia Restaurant anchor of the commercial district. We worried that the Columbia would close.



In a show of the resilience of the Circle the Columbia and its neighbor Venezia swept out the water, dried out the floors, and in short order reopened for business. This turning point marked the beginning of a revival from a weather disaster of a famous destination for visitors. The Columbia Restaurant group and the Gonzmart family group that owns it have demonstrated how to make restaurants on barrier islands resilient to storms.

We located the Columbia Group's Ulele Restaurant on the Hillsborough River flood plain in the historic Tampa Heights neighborhood of Tampa. Once the Water Works pumping station in a riverfront industrial zone, it has now evolved into the focal point of a chic parkland of an aquatic park and a neighboring Armature Works food court. This urban oasis invites visitors to stroll through cast bronze hyperrealist and cartoon sculpture gardens and small spaces ideal for contemplation over morning coffee, leisurely lunches, and romantic evenings. The novel setting continues naturally past an outdoor bar, into the floor of the interior of the main restaurant and then re-emerges outside in the park.

A massive bronze bust and a seven-foot-tall bronze statue of Princess Ulele dominate the path to the restaurant. A 16th-century Native American woman of the Tocobaga tribe in Florida, legend has it that Princess Ulele (you-lay-lee) saved the life of a young captive Spanish sailor who had been condemned to die by her father, the chief of the tribe. Gonzmart's commissioned Arizona sculptor Vala Ola to create these works. The Native American theme of Ulele carries over to its menu featuring Native Chili with Alligator, wild boar, venison, duck, ground chuck, cranberry beans and chili spices, and vegan Native Sauté, a mix of freshly sautéed portobello mushrooms, red onions, zucchini, squash, green beans, white wine and our house-made sauce of chopped vine-ripened tomato, garlic, lemon and basil, served over wild rice blend. With its proximity to Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, one would expect great seafood and Ulele delivers charbroiled oysters, soft-shell crabs, fresh fish, and a special spiny Florida lobster. Ulele's oversized barbacoa grill not only broils oysters, but it also grills fish, steaks, chops, chicken, and a special meatloaf.

The Native American and nautical themes carry over to the furnishings, décor, and artwork. "The Laughing Horse" bronze sculpture by Peruvian Victor Delfin towers over the ground floor dining room. The large "In the Garden" painting by Dutch artist Erick Renssen reprises the Picasso Cubist style and his work fits neatly into the rich wood panels and bronze statuary around it. Visiting Ulele is like walking into an art gallery in a Matisse garden.



The integration of Ulele into the gardens of Water Works would seem at first glance to pose a flood risk in a coast plagued by violent storms. Ulele has a higher elevation and distance from the coastlines where a tidal surge peaks. It also sits on the natural Ulele Spring where the spring has an established drainage path that clears tidal surges and heavy rainfall quickly. When flooding does occur, the open layout of Ulele makes it easier to sweep storm waters outside and dry the floors. The University of South Florida in Tampa has studied the damage caused by hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024 and has recommended enhancing the passive barriers of beaches, sand dunes, and drainage paths among other alternatives to sea walls and levees. The lessons Gonzmart's have learned since their 1905 Columba Restaurant opening in 1905 seem particularly relevant today.

S. W. Hermansen has used his expertise in econometrics, data science and epidemiology to help develop research databases for the Pentagon, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Agriculture, and Health Resources and Services. He has visited premier vineyards and taste wines from major appellations in California, Oregon, New York State, and internationally from Tuscany and the Piedmont in Italy, the Ribera del Duero in Spain, the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale in Australia, and the Otego Valley in New Zealand. Currently he splits time between residences in Chevy Chase, Maryland and St. Armand's Circle in Florida.

Rich Hermansen selected has first wine list for a restaurant shortly after graduating from college with a degree in Mathematics. He has extensive service and management experience in the food and wine industry. Family and friends rate him as their favorite chef, bartender, and wine steward. He lives in Severna Park, Maryland.

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