



Longboat Key News

August 14, 2026

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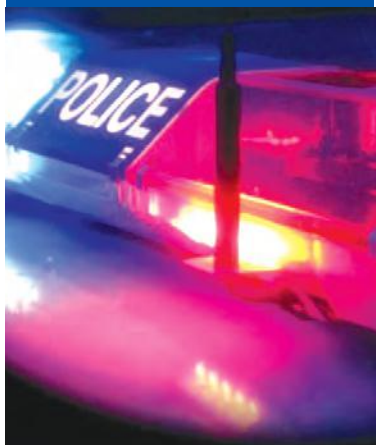
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Inside the Meeting that Rolled Back Sarasota's Parking Expansion

The meters have stood down. Sunday parking downtown is free again, the two-hour spaces are no longer policed after dark, and the midnight enforcement hours that convulsed downtown Sarasota for five weeks are, for now, history.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

It took a nine-hour Aug. 3 marathon of testimony, confession and arithmetic to get there, but at 6:24 p.m., when the Sarasota City

Commission finally voted, it voted 5-0 to suspend the very parking expansion four of its five members had created, and the chamber broke into applause. Only one piece of the ordinance survived the night: the higher fines.

The motion came from Commissioner Kyle Battie, the lone member who voted against the program in the first place. Enforcement of Ordinance 26-5590, which pushed paid parking from 8 a.m. **See Parking, page 14**

Benderson's \$25 Million Bet on Old County Building Reaches City Commission Monday

The most consequential line on Monday's Sarasota City Commission agenda is not a building, a budget or a road. It is a line on a map, and Benderson Development wants it moved about 108 feet to the south.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
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That line is the boundary between the city's Downtown Core and its Downtown Edge, and for two decades it has run straight through the middle of the former Sarasota County Administration Center at 1660 Ringling Blvd. On Aug. 17, commissioners will hold back-to-back public hearings on a pair of ordinances that would erase the split, place the entire hulking 1973 office tower under a single Downtown Core designation, and clear the way for Benderson to strip the building to its steel, wrap it in glass and add up to three stories on top.

If four of the five commissioners say yes, the last

bureaucratic obstacle standing between one of the region's most powerful developers and one of downtown's most conspicuous vacant buildings falls away. If two say no, the whole plan stalls.

A Building Split Down the Middle

The problem Benderson is asking the city to solve is a genuine oddity of Sarasota's zoning history. The six-story, roughly 158,000-square-foot tower was built by GTE Florida in 1973, decades before the city rewrote its zoning code in 2005 and drew the Downtown Core and Downtown Edge districts across the property. The new line did not respect the building. Today about 58

See Downtown, page 13

On a 3-2 vote, Sarasota rewrites the rules of the road — and drops Longboat Key along the way

City strikes to ritten to support planning for a second bridge connecting Longboat Key to the mainland.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

For nearly four hours on Aug. 3, the Sarasota City Commission wrestled with the most sweeping rewrite of its transportation rules in a generation. When it was over, the commission had voted 3-2 to transmit the new Transportation Chapter of the city's comprehensive plan to Tallahassee for state review — over the objections of two of its own members, a parade of angry residents, and a Longboat Key commissioner who drove to City Hall to say her town had been blindsided.

Buried in the hundreds of pages headed to the state is a deletion with generational consequences for the barrier islands: the city's long-standing written commitment to support planning for a second bridge connecting Longboat Key to the mainland.

Policy 6.8 of the current comprehensive plan, titled "Additional Access Serving Longboat Key," states that the city will support planning for an additional bridge to connect Longboat Key to the mainland in order to relieve traffic congestion on the John Ringling Causeway. The rewrite strikes it entirely.

See Rules, page 15

Sarasota School Board Fight Reaches Fever Pitch

The races are nonpartisan, but nobody is pretending, least of all the sign-makers.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

The campaign signs got to the schoolhouse before some of the students did.

They crowd the corners of downtown, stand sentry along the streets around Southside Elementary and Bay Haven, and multiply daily near every school-zone crosswalk in the city. Brandt. DeWitt. Glover. Tennimon. Mayberry. Pozzie.

See School Battle, page 12

Van Wezel Lands \$3.5 Million State Grant While Its Fate Stays Unsettled

A consequential decision on Monday's Sarasota City Commission agenda may be one nobody discusses at all.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
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Tucked into the consent agenda for the Aug. 17 meeting is Resolution 26R-3412, a budget amendment that formally books \$3.5 million in state grant money to flood-proof the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, the purple, seashell-inspired landmark that has sat at the edge of Sarasota Bay since 1970 and, in recent years, has

See Van Wezel, 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.

Summer Break Interrupted: Property Tax Ballot Watch

To: Longboat Key Town Commission
I hope everyone is having a nice summer break. Please see the update below regarding the property tax ballot initiative. We will continue to watch and monitor where this lands!
Maggie Mooney
Town Attorney
Town of Longboat Key

Midnight Ruling: Judge Tosses ‘Biased’ Ballot Language

To: Longboat Key Commission
I am very happy to report that Leon County Circuit Court Judge David Frank entered the attached order last night at 10:54 p.m. finding that the ballot title and ballot statement are biased and inaccurate and enjoining the Secretary of State from putting it on the November ballot. He ordered the Attorney General to rewrite the language to correct the specific defects within 10 days. He agreed with us on all of the substantive issues that we raised. We shall see whether the defendants choose to appeal the decision or comply.
Jamie Alan Cole
WSH Law

Finance Director Gets a Gold Star

To: Longboat Key Finance Director
You are fabulous. Thank you!
BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

The Comp Plan Hot Potato

To: Longboat Key Commission
Just a follow up from Allen Parsons with regards to the City’s Comp Plan Amendment.

See below.
Sue Smith
Finance Director
Town of Longboat Key

Fall Plans: Engaging the Public on Transportation

To: Longboat Key Finance Director Susan Smith
Thanks Sue. You can follow-up with the Commission the email below from the City of Sarasota that there will be a public engagement session related to the City’s Transportation Chapter amendments in the fall. Staff here will also have the opportunity to provide review comments on the amendment as part of the Comprehensive Planning process that includes review by state agencies and adjacent local governments.
Allen Parsons
Planning and Zoning Director
Town of Longboat Key

Squeaking By: City Commission’s 3-2 Comp Plan Vote

To: Town of Longboat Key Planning Manager Elma Glisson
The City Commission voted 3-2 to transmit the document to the State, with one addition: Page 60 of the Resolution, 11.7--Parking, add #5, ‘City will explore the need for parking impact fees.’
Before the adoption hearing later this fall, there will most likely be a City Commission Workshop specific to this item as well as another public engagement session related to the Transportation Chapter updates. Project team is cc’d here in case there are additional questions.
Ryan Chapdelain
Planning Department General Manager
City of Sarasota

Passing the Comp Plan Baton

To: Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen

Parsons
Below is what I sent to BJ and the Commission yesterday. You should be getting the amendment from David Smith.
BJ wrote back this morning: “Touch base with Allen and Elma and see if we can do anything at state level on SRQ’s comp plan amendment. Understand it squeaked thru 3-2.”
Susan Smith
Finance Director
Town of Longboat Key

Comp Plans, Stop Work Orders, and Silt Fences

See Letters, page 4

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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 2

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop
A quick update on City of Sarasota Transportation amendment.
The motion passed 3-2 to submit the transmittal to the State, with the intention that it will continue to be a work in progress and make changes to make it better before adoption. With regards to your public comments regarding our interlocal agreement and coordination efforts, David Smith said they will be forwarding the documents to Allen Parson and LBK for review and comment. They did delete section 6.2, which I believe you may have questioned, because it would be too complex to coordinate and go through two processes.
Also regarding Silt 610 Buttonwood – see message from Allen:
“We have contacted the contractor on the lack of silt fences. Because that was not addressed over the weekend, we have issued a Stop Work Order on the property, which includes a \$500 fee to remove the Stop Work Order. We will continue to follow-up with the contractor on getting those measures in place.”
Susan Smith
Finance Director
Town of Longboat Key

Heads in Beds: June Tourism Numbers Sizzle

To: Longboat Key Commission
I hope you’re having a wonderful summer. We’re pleased to share that Sarasota County’s tourism performance continued its positive momentum in June, with increases in both visitation and visitor spending. Below you’ll find a snapshot of this month’s tourism metrics, along with a brief overview of what we’re seeing across the industry. As always, our team remains committed to strategically investing Tourist Development Tax dollars to generate measurable economic impact for our community, support local businesses, and help sustain jobs throughout Sarasota County.
I’d also like to encourage you to take a moment to nominate an individual for our annual Haley Hall of Fame Awards using the link at the bottom of this email. The nomination process takes just a minute, and it’s a meaningful opportunity to recognize someone who has made a lasting impact on Sarasota County’s tourism and hospitality industry. Award recipients will be honored at our annual Indicators & Insights Summit this fall, where we’ll also welcome nationally recognized speakers who will share the latest trends, research, and best practices to help all of us make more informed decisions as we continue marketing and strengthening our community.
June 2026 Visitor Numbers:
Here are all the numbers comparing 2026 to 2025:
Visitors were 145,900 compared to 130,600 in 2025
Visitor direct expenditures were \$147,875,400 compared to \$138,630,500 in 2025
Lodging occupancy was 61.6% compared to 62.0% in 2025
Lodging average room rate was \$304.78 compared to \$286.81 in 2025
There were 252,900 room nights sold compared to 244,100 in 2025
As always, thank you for your continued partnership and support. If you have any questions about the information below or would like to discuss tourism trends in greater detail, please don’t hesitate to reach out.
Erin Duggan

President
Visit Sarasota County

The Missing Link: Unpacking Deleted Transport Policies

To: Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen Parsons
Narrowing the recipient list as I put my thoughts together. I’ve done a quick review of the policies specifically related to LBK, and my thoughts are below. Allen, we can discuss further after our staff meeting, if you are available.
Policy 5.1 – Joint Planning and Coordination (Retained)
The City has retained Policy 5.1, which continues to recognize the importance of coordinating transportation planning efforts with the Town of Longboat Key, FDOT, the Sarasota-Manatee MPO, Breeze, Sarasota and Manatee Counties.
Policy 6.2 – Interlocal Agreement for Transportation on Barrier Islands (Deleted)
The City proposes to delete Policy 6.2, which encouraged pursuing an interlocal agreement with the Town of Longboat Key to establish an inter-jurisdictional transportation concurrency process for development on Longboat Key. The City’s rationale is that it has moved away from concurrency-based transportation management, has not pursued such an agreement, and believes regional planning is a more appropriate mechanism for addressing barrier island transportation issues.
Because the policy specifically referenced the Town, consultation regarding its removal would have been beneficial. Although the policy was never implemented through an interlocal agreement, coordination on amendments affecting shared planning objectives remains consistent.
Policy 6.8 – Additional Access Serving Longboat Key (Deleted)
The City also proposes to delete Policy 6.8, which supported planning for an additional bridge connection between Longboat Key and the mainland to relieve congestion on the John Ringling Causeway. The City’s rationale is that such a project is not currently supported, would require regional consensus, extensive environmental review, and funding beyond the City’s authority, and is inconsistent with current transportation and resiliency planning priorities.
Although a 1981 referendum supported this project, I do not believe the Town currently supports planning for an additional bridge connection. The deletion of this policy does not appear to conflict with the Town’s current transportation planning direction. While the outcome may not differ, consultation with, or notification to, the Town during the amendment process would have been appropriate.
Elma Glisson
Planning Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Staff Sounds the Alarm on ‘Dangerous’ Transport Rewrite

To: Longboat Key Commission
You should have all received the email from Mr. Lobeck. We have asked Elma and Allen to review the proposed policy changes being considered at the City of Sarasota Commission meeting. Below are Elma’s comments regarding the proposed changes. Elma and Allen are also available to discuss any questions you may have on this topic.
I will also let you know if any additional staff comments are shared.

See Letters, page 6

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OpinionEditorial

New York vs. Boston: The Empire Strikes Out

In which a man raised on Phil Rizzuto and righteous hatred of Boston confronts the unthinkable — his best material is 48 years old.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

I grew up in Sag Harbor, New York, the son of a Yankee fan unlike any other, which is to say exactly like every other. My father knew every player, every game, every pitcher's windup, every box score dating back to an era when men wore wool uniforms in August and considered it bracing. I heard Phil Rizzuto's voice more than I heard the voices of actual family members. "Holy cow!" was not an exclamation in our house. It was liturgy. It was our Sunday catechism, delivered with the reverence other families reserved for grace before meals.



STEVE REID

A Word About the Enemy

Every great civilization defines itself against a mortal rival. Athens had Sparta. Rome had Carthage. The United States had the Soviet Union. Poland has Russia, and if you want to understand how Poland feels about Russia, ask a Yankee fan of my generation about the Boston Red Sox and then stand back at a safe distance, which does not exist.

This is what diplomats call an "intractable conflict," meaning a conflict where both sides would rather chew broken glass than concede a single point, and honestly the glass sounds refreshing. Everything Red Sox was horrible, starting with Carl Yastrzemski, a man whose sideburns alone constituted an act of aggression. Later came Pedro Martinez, who threw at hitters' heads as a form of personal expression and once body-slammed a 72-year-old man onto the Fenway lawn, which in Boston is considered a warm greeting. I was not taught to dislike these people. I was taught to understand them, the way one understands a hurricane, from inside a reinforced structure, praying.

October 2, 1978: A Holy Day of Obligation

And then there was Bucky Dent, the light-hitting shortstop who lofted a fly ball over the Green Monster in the 1978 playoff game and single-handedly caused an entire region of the country to require therapy. Boston responded by giving Bucky a permanent middle name that cannot be printed in a family newspaper, or frankly in most non-family newspapers. In our house, October 2 was observed like a religious festival. Candles were not technically lit, but they were lit spiritually.

The Sicario

I grew up with Mickey Rivers loping around center field like a man who had misplaced his car keys but was in no particular hurry to find them, and later I was given Mariano Rivera, the greatest closer who ever lived. Mariano did not "pitch." Mariano entered the game like a sicario walking into a diner. The jukebox stopped. Grown professional athletes looked at one cutter, breaking in on their hands like a subpoena, and began mentally booking tee times. He was the Rafael Nadal of the ninth inning: one weapon, everybody knew it was coming, and nobody on Earth could do anything about it. When Mo came in, the game was not "likely over." The game had already happened. Everyone was just filling out paperwork.

Fabled by the Daughters of Memory

Here is my problem, and it is a serious one, medically speaking. All of these memories are becoming ancient. They are calcifying into legend, like Homer's Odyssey, soon to be chanted by blind poets at Panathenaic festivals: Sing, Muse, of the pinstriped man of many turns. I tell young people about Bucky Dent and they look at me the way you'd look at a man describing the Peloponnesian War from personal experience. My glory is being fabled by the daughters of memory, and the daughters of memory, frankly, are starting to embellish.

The Taunting Gap

Meanwhile, Red Sox fans now come at me armed with actual data. "Winningest team of the century," they announce, referring to their four championships since 2004, and the horrifying part is that this is true, which violates everything I was raised to believe about Boston and truth occupying the same sentence.

So I dig deep. I reach back into their childhoods and unearth horrific memories: 1918 to 2004, an 86-year drought during which the Yankees won 26 titles, several apparently just to be rude. The problem is that my material has a 2004 expiration date, and it is 2026, and my comeback inventory is aging like a boat left on a trailer behind a gas station. I am one bad argument away from telling a 30-year-old Sox fan about Babe Ruth, at which point he is legally permitted to help me across the street.

Meanwhile, in the Front Office

Which brings me to the current administration. Brian Cashman has been general manager of the New York Yankees since 1998, back when people were worried their computers would explode at midnight. He inherited a dynasty built by other men, rode it to glory, and has delivered exactly one championship since, in 2009. That was seventeen years ago. Children born that night are now driving. Some of them are driving to Red Sox games, out of spite.

His contract is finally up after this season, and I am assured the organization is thinking very seriously about thinking about it. His manager, meanwhile, was recently extended through 2027 on the strength of a resume that reads: made the playoffs almost every year, won the World Series never. In the modern Yankee organization this is called "stability." In any organization George Steinbrenner ran, it was called "cleaning out your desk by noon."

George Would Like a Word

Let us remember the sacred Steinbrenner ethos: you win, or you are fired. Possibly both, in the same week. George changed managers roughly 20 times in his first two decades, firing Billy Martin five times and hiring him five times, an arrangement scientists now recognize as baseball's first renewable energy source. He fired Yogi Berra 16 games into a season and did not even do it himself; he dispatched an emissary, the way medieval kings sent ravens, and Yogi refused to set foot in Yankee Stadium for the next 14 years. He publicly branded Dave Winfield



"Mr. May," which by Steinbrenner standards was practically a valentine. He apologized to the entire City of New York for losing a World Series. Losing the World Series. During that same Series, by his own account, he got into a fistfight with two Dodgers fans in a hotel elevator and emerged victorious with a cast on his hand and zero witnesses, which remains the most Yankee injury ever recorded. He was thrown out of baseball twice, once over illegal campaign contributions to Richard Nixon, and returned both times measurably angrier. The man banned beards. He would have banned second place, but the league office wouldn't let him.

Today, losing a Division Series earns you a supportive press conference and a thoughtful discussion of "process." George did not have a process. George had a volcano, and the volcano had a shipping company.

The Current Standings, Which I Am Legally Required to Report

As of this writing, your New York Yankees — payroll roughly the GDP of a coastal nation — sit in second place in the American League East behind the Tampa Bay Rays, a team that spent last season playing in a spring training park and spends money the way retirees spend it at the early-bird special, which is to say carefully, and with coupons. Behind us, breathing directly onto our necks with chowder breath: Boston. If the season ends with the Rays winning the division on a payroll smaller than our infield's, and the Red Sox celebrating anything at all, I want to state for the record that I will be fine, in the sense that Pompeii was fine.

The Compass Is in the Blender

And here, forgive me, is where I get philosophical, because we live, whatever your politics, in the most Trumpian of Trumpian times. Yeats had it wrong for our particular moment. It is not that the center cannot hold. It is that the compass itself — moral, judicial, financial, take your pick — is no longer fixed to anything at all. It simply gets thrown around wherever it needs to go that day. One day we are fighting Iran. The next day the President is hawking artificial intelligence like a rotisserie gadget and putting up a triumphal arch. An arch! The needle spins, the universe wobbles, and the ratings have never been better.

Well. I have arrived at a conclusion that disturbs even me: the New York Yankees need a little of that crazy energy. Not the policies. The attitude. We need winners. We need ratings. We need an organization with zero excuses and zero options other than winning, where winning is not a goal or a hope or a "process" but the foundational, philosophical, load-bearing operating principle of the entire enterprise, the way it was when George walked the earth and every employee in the Bronx kept an updated resume in the glove compartment.

Plato in Pinstripes

Plato taught that we sit chained in a cave, watching shadows flicker on the wall, mistaking reflections for reality. That is the modern Yankee organization: a reflection of a reflection of 1998, projected nightly at premium ticket prices. And it cannot be the reflection anymore. It has to be the original image, the source, the thing itself that casts the shadow. Because in Plato's world there is a highest idea, the form behind all forms, the pure light behind everything that exists, and I am prepared to argue, in a peer-reviewed philosophy journal if necessary, that this form is the interlocking NY, crowning the top of all sporting achievement, throwing the very shadows in which lesser franchises are condemned to live, such as Boston.

Please make it happen, New York. Please make it happen, so we can stop this wobbling universe and get the compass pointing somewhere again. I'm already breathing easier just thinking about it.

I Coulda Been a Contender

Is it too late? Is it over for good? I don't want to be that guy — the one endlessly reliving his college years, cornering strangers at weddings to explain what October 1998 felt like.

Perhaps it ended when ownership tore down the House That Ruth Built — a shrine of victory, a cathedral of memories, a coliseum so feared that opposing teams developed facial tics just reading their schedules. All of it turned to rubble and replaced by a new stadium that resembles less a ballpark than a mid-priced cruise ship, the kind with a lazy river and an \$18 turkey leg. The Legends, meanwhile, were put out to pasture at Legends Field, which sounds majestic but looks more like the corner of a Disney exhibit where they store the animatronic presidents that stopped working.

Do something, Yankees. Win something. Fire someone, hire him back, then fire him again — the old ways, the beautiful ways. And do it soon, before the last of us who heard Rizzuto live are ourselves fabled by the daughters of memory, and some future bard chants our story to a bored and fidgeting crowd: And lo, they waited. And waited. And their waiting was long.

And beneath the chant, if you listen closely, one last voice — fading slowly, softly, into eternity:

Holy cow... did you see that...

EditorLetters

Letters, from page 4

Savannah Cobb
Assistant to Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

The Missing Link: Unpacking Deleted Transport Policies

To: Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen Parsons

Narrowing the recipient list as I put my thoughts together. I've done a quick review of the policies specifically related to LBK, and my thoughts are below. Allen, we can discuss further after our staff meeting, if you are available.

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bridge connection between Longboat Key and the mainland to relieve congestion on the John Ringling Causeway. The City's rationale is that such a project is not currently supported, would require regional consensus, extensive environmental review, and funding beyond the City's authority, and is inconsistent with current transportation and resiliency planning priorities.

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Elma Glisson
Planning Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Gridlock Alert: The Battle Over Sarasota's Streets

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop and Town Manager Howard Tipton

A Sarasota City Commissioner has suggested that I provide my Alert email below to you on a shared concern. On Monday, the Sarasota City Commission will hold a public hearing and vote on a write of the Transportation Chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan that would allow increased traffic congestion on City streets. It would adopt by reference the proposed Transportation Plan that your Town Commission effectively opposed and Sarasota Commissioners rejected in 2020 and would enact even far worse changes.

Those measures include, although inadvertently not mentioned below, deleting a policy which calls for joint transportation planning between Sarasota and the Longboat Key Town Commission.

I know this is short notice, but if you and perhaps others can make your opposition to approval of this rewrite known at or before Monday's meeting, that could make a substantial

See Letters, page 7



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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 6

difference.

In addition to the bad content, there is an issue of timing, which is detailed in another email which I will share with you next. I have asked that if the proposed rewrite is not defeated outright, that the Commission pass a motion to continue it indefinitely, perhaps to be considered at a time of year more proper than the dead of summer and after an opportunity for study and deliberation among the public and Commissioners. Even if the amendment is approved on Monday, it will come back for a final public hearing and vote after state review. It takes a supermajority (at least 4 to 1) vote to be adopted. Thank you very much for your considerations.

Dan Lobeck
Law Offices of Lobeck & Rowe, P.A.
Sarasota

Bumper-to-Bumper: Why the Transportation Rewrite Needs the Brakes

To: Longboat Key Commission

This coming Monday, August 3, at 9 am (following some brief business) the Sarasota City Commission will hold a public hearing and vote on a truly horrible rewrite of the Transportation Chapter of the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

It is designed to repeal or gut requirements on developers that limit traffic congestion. Transportation concurrency would be repealed, and replaced with a new system that deems 100% congestion as acceptable in downtown districts and certain corridors, and close to it (95% and 90%) elsewhere. Levels of service E and D would effectively be replaced with F, sanctioning bumper-to-bumper traffic.

On point after point, developer obligations are changed from “require” to “request” or are deleted entirely. Even parking is attacked, with a new policy requiring the City to research and consider expanding paid parking in the City.

This all relates to a pro-developer bent by City planning and development staff and their decades-long dogma to be hostile to motorists. Back when staff and their consultants were being more transparent in their goals, on April 28, 2015 the Sarasota Herald-Tribune quoted City transportation engineer Alex Davis Shaw (who is now back working for the City) as stating for the City at a workshop on similar policies, which the City Commission then rejected, “It’s going to take some congestion and some discomfort before people make a choice to do something other than get in their car.”

While the City should enhance walking, biking and buses (although buses get caught in traffic too), 94% of City trips are made by driving. So that form of transportation should be accommodated as well – an “All of the Above” policy. To do otherwise is harmful to residents and businesses in the City, as no one likes to get caught in traffic gridlock.

Please see my email yesterday to the City Commissioners, below. I know these changes are unbelievable, so if you want to see them yourself, check the backup to Agenda Item X.1 for

the August 3 meeting at <https://www.sarasotafl.gov/City-Services/Meetings-Agendas-Video>.

If you will, send the City Commissioners an email (at their addresses above) and if possible attend and perhaps speak at the hearing on Monday.

It only takes two Commissioners to stop this, under the supermajority requirement for Comprehensive Plan amendments in the City Charter. This is too important not to care.

Thank you for your considerations.

Dan Lobeck, Esq.
Law Offices of Lobeck & Rowe, P.A.
Sarasota

Pool Purgatory: Lido Beach Plunge on Hold Until November

To: Holly Flanagan

Please see attached project briefing information regarding the Lido Beach Pool. I hope this provides the necessary background regarding the challenges that we currently face. At this time, any future decisions regarding next steps and/or improvements to the pool are on hold until after the November referendum results. Thank you for reaching out to the City.

Karie Friling
City Manager
City of Sarasota

Paging Parks: Diving into the Lido Pool Delay

To: Holly Flanagan

Thanks for the email per Lido Pool. I’ve copied the City Manager to direct this to the Parks Department to respond with details of the status of pool repairs and opening (and copy me as well please).

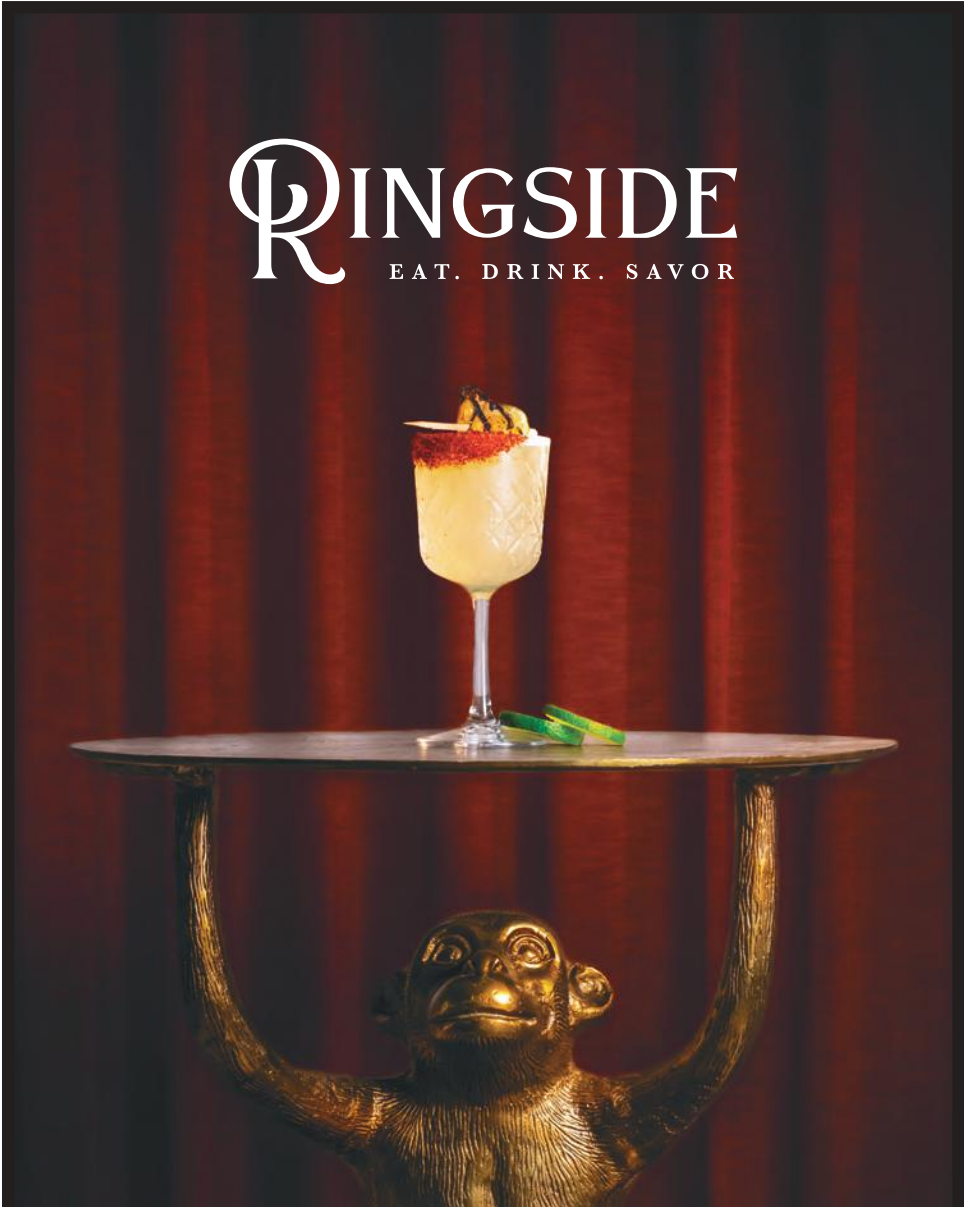
Jen Ahearn-Koch
City Commissioner
City of Sarasota

Sink or Swim: The Call to Re-Open Lido Beach Pool

To: Sarasota City Commission

I am writing to voice my concern regarding the closure of the Lido Beach Pool. This pool has significant historical value and is one of only three public beachfront pools in the area. As a regular user, I consistently see the pool filled with lap swimmers and community members. It is a vital piece of Sarasota’s tourism and community life. I urge you to re-open the Lido Beach Pool.

Holly Flanagan
City of Sarasota Resident



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WineTimes

Our Choice for Best Restaurant in the USA

The Inn at Little Washington received a third Michelin star in 2019, long after the Inn had earned high honors as a top restaurant in the DC vicinity.

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

Dining at the Chef's Table in the storied Inn at Little Washington fully qualifies as a culinary epiphany. Chef Patrick O'Connell, during his 48 years in this bucolic retreat in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains outside Washington DC, has earned all of the accolades and honors that a chef could aspire to receive. His guests make a pilgrimage of dinner in his restaurant and a night in the Inn.

We celebrated a milestone birthday there: Afternoon Tea; drinks in the Edwardian drawing room bar served in crystal glasses; dinner at the inner sanctum Chef's Table in the spacious kitchen; a night in the Colonial Mayor's House; and, homemade yogurt with granola and a flight of fresh juices at breakfast the next day on the way out.

Afternoon Tea

Tea in the solarium amidst a Versailles garden set the mood. Staff members at every turn minister to your experience of royalty. A tower of small serving platters in the center of the table at the tea. Velvety quiches, croissants, fruit tarts, and cheese puffs complement the aromatic teas in China cups and saucers.

The Restaurant

After tea and a stroll through the restored village and grounds around the Inn, we returned to the main dining room bar where our maitre d' escorted us into the expansive kitchen. Chef



Chef Patrick O'Connell

O'Connell greeted us as we entered. He wore an impeccable toque blanche and the distinctive Dalmatian spotted apron, patterned after the coat of the first mascot of the Inn, the Chef's Dalmatian, Rose.

The kitchen buzzed like a beehive as station chefs added their contributions to the trays that shuttled in and out of a kitchen. The counters and walls, replete with hand-painted Portuguese tile, the bronze fixtures, and the stone fireplace completed the showplace kitchen. Diners who had requested tours of the kitchen watched the staff at work. We admired the

upgrades of the kitchen during the some twenty years since our last visit on another special occasion. No home chef could help but envy the equipment and workspaces. Much of the processing of local and imported provisions occurs in or within the immediate vicinity of the working central kitchen.

The experience at the Chef's table unfolds as an operatic eucharist complete with a

faux priest in amise, cincture, and stole vestments waving a censer to cleanse the air with incense. It then settles into a supper of sublime foods and libations. Amuse bouches of potato chip cannoli stuffed with pimento cheese, a parmesan cream in an eggshell, and a seasonal bite, followed by delicate himachi crudo slices. We selected from multiple menus dishes ranging from colossal white asparagus, to poached lobster, to lamb carpaccio, to seared duck breast. The menus include vegan selections as well. We shared desserts somewhat overshadowed by a large serving of birthday cake.

The Inn's Director of Wine, Christine Barr, joined in as our sommelier for the evening. She recommended a perfect wine for our party: a 2015 Henri Gouge Clos des Porrets Nuits-Saint-Georges Premier Cru. This red Burgundy wine had aged beautifully with a deep ruby color and only a faint brick red halo in the glass as the only tell of age. Its dark cherry and black berry and currant aromas and flavors transition into the grip of refined tannins. The pairings with himanshi crudo, drawn butter with lobster, lamb, duck, and birthday cake sealed the case for its choice.



The Inn's lost Michelin Star

The Inn at Little Washington received a third Michelin star in 2019, long after the Inn had earned high honors as a top restaurant in the DC vicinity. Michelin downgraded the Inn to a two star restaurant in 2025, shortly after the Virginia tourism office chose not to pay \$360,000 to Michelin to be included in a Guide for southern USA states. We suspect that the Virginia tourism decision affected the decision to drop the third star, but that the Inn had never really fit the Michelin template for the ideal restaurant. To its credit the Inn continues to perform a theatrical comedy of manners on a little stage where guests enjoy a feast of elegant food and drink. We have experienced Michelin-starred restaurants in Burgundy with none of the joy of a simple meal of beef bourguignon, bread, salad, and a Cote de Beaune Villages from the cellar of a vineyard. In the same way the Inn has a sense of place and a vibe that formal French style often lacks.

The Inn's Director of Wine and curator of perhaps the finest wine list in the USA, Christine Barr, answers our questions



Christine Barr

How do you focus on wines for ILW when you have such a wide range of possibilities? Are the chefs guiding your choices? The regional cuisine?

Christine responded by saying that vineyards producing the wines that everyone wants to buy allocate these wines in advance to importers and distributors world wide. ILW reviews the wines reallocated to ILW by the importers and distributors that we work with and order the quantities we want. (Our question seemed a bit naïve in that we did not take into account the excess demand for highly rated wines.)

What wine and food pairings do you see working particularly well at ILW and what about them appeals to your guests?

Seasonal variation and food choices of guests make good wine pairings with foods a matter of preferences. When asked about the difficult pairing of a wine with asparagus, Christine suggested pairing a Grüner Veltliner from Austria with the Chef's favorite colossal white asparagus.

You moved from Las Vegas to ILW in the Virginia countryside. What differences seem most striking to you?

Imagine going from working as a sommelier in a fast-paced, high-energy resort and casino to an elegant rural retreat in the foothills of the Blue Ridge.

What different varieties of wines do you find similar? Ones drastically different?

During master sommelier class testing, a Gamay red from Beaujolais and a Loire Valley Cabernet Franc tasted much the same. A New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc has a very different taste profile than a California Sauvignon Blanc.

Have your tastes in wine evolved with exposures to premium wines? Are there any bargain wines that you enjoy?

It's definitely difficult to step down from the best wines in the world in perhaps the best wine cellar! I do enjoy shopping for local wines in a local Culpeper Virginia shop. The Linden Vineyard's Petit Manseng and the Crimson Lane Petit Verdot, small berry grapes, grow especially well in the verdant Virginia Blue Ridge region and offer distinctively different tastes.

...Whether two or three Michelin stars, the Inn offers the finest in indigenous foods, accommodations, and an expertly curated wine list: a perfect venue for a celebration of an important event.

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4995 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#500	3,344	\$5,695,000	4	3	1	169	\$5,350,000
3030 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#PH3101	4,413	\$7,999,000	3	3	1	74	\$5,000,000
1241 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#408	2,965	\$3,200,000	3	3	0	20	\$3,100,000
1281 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#708	3,273	\$3,275,000	3	4	1	151	\$2,975,000
455 LONGBOAT CLUB RD Unit#PH8	2,780	\$2,700,900	3	3	1	191	\$2,625,000
1241 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#804	3,045	\$2,745,000	3	4	0	231	\$2,575,000
775 LONGBOAT CLUB RD Unit#807	1,842	\$1,995,000	3	3	0	253	\$1,890,000
100 SANDS POINT RD Unit#225	1,492	\$899,000	2	2	0	164	\$850,000
541 DE NARVAEZ DR	1,704	\$830,000	3	2	0	0	\$820,000
660 LINLEY ST	1,564	\$799,000	3	3	0	32	\$740,000
4440 EXETER DR Unit#301	1,376	\$535,000	2	2	0	135	\$500,000
2800 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#F-06	N/A	\$339,000				131	\$295,000



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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.

July 31 Suspended Animation

1:01 p.m.
Officer Van Dyke responded to a traffic stop near the 1000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. Sgt. Butler, while on patrol, conducted a traffic stop on a 2018 white Dodge Ram. It was the same violation the driver had been pulled over for previously. The driver stated he recently had visited the DMV in Manatee County and reinstated his driver's license, therefore he's unsure whether his driver's license is currently suspended. Although ELVIS indicated that there was no insurance on file, documentation was provided by the driver with the policy number. The driver was issued a citation for Driving While License Suspended with Knowledge. The driver was advised that he cannot drive until his driver's license is valid, and the officer followed him to his job site nearby to find a licensed employee. Case clear.



the garage door open. Officer Martinson did not locate anyone inside the garage so he walked up to the front door and knocked. The door was answered by a man who stated he was the previous owner of the home and had sold it to his son. The man said his son was not home but he would call him. Officer Martinson then spoke to the homeowner over the cell phone. The son said that he and his ex-girlfriend both own 50 percent of the property. The homeowner said they're currently going through a breakup but he gave permission for his father to be at his property. The homeowner said he requested his father come by the home while some work was being done and a pool table was being disassembled and moved. Officer Martinson then spoke to the caller, who confirmed she was the ex-girlfriend and that the two were going through a breakup. Officer Martinson explained to the ex-girlfriend that since both she and the son own the property, he cannot remove the father from the home if he has permission from the son to be there. Officer Martinson explained that if she believes any property that belongs to her is missing from the home it would be a civil matter and she would have to hire an attorney. The ex-girlfriend advised that she already has an attorney and was advised by them that this is a civil matter. The ex-girlfriend stated she just wanted to make sure the incident was documented for a future civil lawsuit. Officer Martinson provided her with the case number. Case clear.

Aug. 1 A Reel Misunderstanding

11:19 p.m.
Officer Troyer while on patrol was dispatched to Longboat Drive East for a trespass. The complainant contacted dispatch to report a burglary at his home where he observed two subjects enter into his gated property. The caller reported that it was on camera. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer entered through the front gate with his department issued firearm drawn to clear the residence. Officer Troyer also heard male voices talking that were coming from the back side of the property. As he came around the side of the residence, he quickly observed two subjects, and shouted loud and clear verbal commands, "Police, hands up." The subjects complied and Officer Troyer holstered his weapon. The subjects were holding fishing poles and quickly said they were fishing but this was a misunderstanding. The subjects were identified and said they had permission to be on the property and fish. One of the men said he had the same contractor as the homeowner and the contractor told the man he spoke with that it was okay to fish at night on the property. Officer Troyer brought the man to his patrol vehicle so they could wait until Officer Troyer contacted the homeowner. Officer Troyer spoke with the homeowner and informed him of the situation so far, and what the men said. The homeowner asked who they were and where they lived. The homeowner said he had no idea who the men were nor did he ever give them permission to fish on the property. The homeowner was upset about the contractor telling someone else he could fish because he only told the contractor he could fish there. In the end, the homeowner did not wish to prosecute and told Officer Troyer he only wanted him trespassed from the property. Officer Troyer checked the property out and did not observe any signs of damage or suspicious activity. The residence appeared to be under construction and the homeowner said he did not believe they actually took anything. Case clear.

Aug. 2 Withdrawal Symptoms

9:29 a.m. S
gt. Butler while on patrol was approached by an 80-year-old man who reported finding a debit card left inside the ATM at the Bank of America across the street. Sgt. Butler responded to the ATM and recovered the debit card, which displayed a name. A DAVID inquiry identified the cardholder as a Longboat Key resident. The debit card was secured for safekeeping and return to its owner. No further police action was taken at that time. Case clear.

Aug. 3 Behind the Eight Ball

12:32 p.m.
Officer Martinson was dispatched to Putter Lane on a call of a family disturbance. Upon arrival, Officer Martinson observed a white SUV parked in the driveway of the residence with

Drink and Dash

6:03 p.m.
Officer Castro was dispatched to Yawl Lane in reference to a report of a suspicious person. Upon arrival, Officer Castro made contact with the complainant and property owner. The owner said that a white man wearing a blue shirt and blue jeans approached her while she was gardening in her front flower bed. The owner reported that the man requested water and she said that she went inside her residence to retrieve a bottle of water, which she then provided to the individual. The man left the area immediately. The homeowner's doorbell camera captured the man and she provided Officer Castro with the image of the individual. The homeowner contacted law enforcement approximately one hour after the encounter because she was concerned that the man could be inside a home under construction across from her residence. After viewing the image of the man from the doorbell camera, Officer Castro recognized the man walking northbound on Gulf of Mexico Drive as he was en route to the residence. Officer Castro made contact with the man in the 2300 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and he willingly stopped to speak to Officer Castro. The man identified himself but was unable to produce identification. The man appeared to be homeless and he said he was staying with a friend a few blocks away but could not provide an address. Initially, the man provided a date of birth and then changed the date. A person and warrant check was conducted; however, his name did not return any results in available databases. The man refused to provide any additional information and then fled the area on foot. Attempts to locate him were unsuccessful. Case clear.

Aug. 5 Catch and Release 6:05 p.m.

Officer Nazareno was dispatched to Bay Isles Parkway for a trespassing call regarding four male subjects fishing in the Bay Isles Association area at the golf course who were not authorized to be in the area. Upon arrival, Officer Nazareno made contact with the complainant who trespassed the individuals from the property. FCIC/NCIC checks for wants, warrants, and previous trespass warnings were all negative. All male subjects agreed and signed the Trespass Warnings, which ban them from all Bay Isles Association property including the golf course, moorings and residential areas behind the security gates. Case clear.

Running on Empty

10:35 p.m.
Officer Troyer was dispatched to Broadway Street in reference to a suspicious incident regarding possible fuel being siphoned out of a vehicle. The caller reported diesel fuel was possibly taken from his truck while dining in the restaurant. The caller originally only wanted to speak with an officer via phone to see if it were an issue, however due to the nature, Officer Troyer responded. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer met with the caller who explained he had a dinner reservation at the restaurant and he had three-quarters of a tank of fuel and had refueled approximately four days prior. When the caller went to leave the restaurant, his truck was out of fuel, and he believed the fuel had been siphoned out of his truck because he knew he had three-quarters of a tank when he arrived at the restaurant. The caller spoke with restaurant staff and they showed him video footage, but he didn't have time to wait around for the whole video and he didn't initially see any fuel being siphoned from his truck on the video footage. The caller said the truck was valet parked directly against the building on the west side, notably in view of the cameras mounted on the building. The caller did not believe there was an issue with the fuel tank on his truck, as the truck was fairly new and when he started the truck, the fuel gauge moved as it should have. The caller left the truck behind as he did not want to run out of fuel on the road attempting to get to a fuel station. The caller did not wish to pursue charges against anyone and he only wished to report it to make law enforcement aware in case there was a fuel thief. There was no video footage reviewed while the truck was left at the restaurant, and follow up will be conducted to review the footage. Officer Troyer looked under the vehicle while it was in the parking lot. Officer Troyer did not see any apparent fuel leakage coming from the truck. At the time, even though the caller didn't want to prosecute, follow up will be conducted to determine if the crime of theft was committed. The caller told Officer Troyer he would report back if he discovered there was an issue with his vehicle. Based on Officer Troyer's investigation, he did not observe any fuel being taken from the truck. Case clear.

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OnPatrol

Aug. 7 The Phantom Tollbooth Tag

11:52 a.m.
Officer Tillman responded to the police lobby for a person who said that she received a payment from FDOT implying her vehicle with Florida registration tag was recorded running a toll without paying a \$3.36 toll. Officers were shown the photo from the FDOT camera and it did not appear to be the license plate and possibly a black Florida specialty tag. The complainant advised that the license plate was a normal Florida tag. The complainant has also said that the tag was left on a donated vehicle seven years ago. Case clear.



No Free Samples for Scammers

2:25 p.m.
Officer Tillman responded to the police lobby. Upon arrival, Officer Tillman spoke with the complainant who stated that on August 6, a woman identifying a Costco employee, said she had some Costco purchases that needed to be verified. The caller was attempting to retrieve the remaining account number with CVV code. The complainant called Costco and reported the incident. Costco confirmed that this is a recent scam and there is no activity on her card. The complainant did not release any information and is not out any money. The number that was showing up on caller ID in which the scam was coming from. Case clear.

The Accidental Apple Heist

10:03 p.m.
Officer Castro was dispatched to a restaurant at the 400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive regarding a theft. The manager of the restaurant contacted the police department to report that his green iPhone 18 had been taken from the restaurant bar. The manager stated that he placed his phone on top of the bar and left it there while working throughout the restaurant. Around 7 p.m. he returned to retrieve the phone but found it missing. The manager believed a patron

may have taken the phone by mistake. The manager was able to log into the find my iPhone app and reported that the phone was pinging at Grand Bay Boulevard. Officer Castro responded to the area and attempted to locate the phone. While at Grand Bay Boulevard, the manager informed that he believed a customer may have taken the phone by mistake and provided a contact number of the person. An on-duty security officer confirmed that the man was listed as a guest for one of the apartment units. Officers contacted the man by phone and he confirmed that he had dined at the restaurant but said he did not have the phone. He also said that he was currently in Venice, not in the apartment complex. The manager was unable to provide video footage from the security cameras because only the general manager had access. The manager said that he would contact the general manager to obtain the video footage. The manager later advised that he wished to wait until the following day to file a report in case someone returned his phone. He said he would contact the police to file a report if the phone was not returned. The following day, the manager called police to inform that a customer had returned the phone, the customer had accidentally taken the phone while at the restaurant. Case clear.

Aug. 8 A Midnight Kentucky Stroll

11:51 p.m.
Officer Castro while on patrol in the 3400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive observed a 2026 GMC Sierra parked after hours in the beach parking lot. Upon approaching the vehicle, Officer Castro observed a man standing nearby. The individual was identified by his Kentucky driver's license and he said he was enroute to Bradenton Beach when he noticed the beach access and decided to stop for a walk. A warrant check on the man returned negative results. The man was informed of the town ordinances and beach hours. He left the area without incident. Case clear.

Van Wezel, from page 1

increasingly found the bay sitting inside it. The money comes from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection under a grant agreement the city signed June 15. The state requires no local match, and every dollar the city spends, up to the \$3.5 million cap, will be reimbursed. Monday's vote does not award the grant. That is already done. It simply establishes the revenue and expense lines in the city's Van Wezel Capital Fund so the work can be billed and paid.

A Consent Item With a Long Backstory

Consent agendas are where routine business goes to pass without debate, and on paper this item qualifies. Adopt the resolution, amend the budget, move on. But nothing about the Van Wezel is routine anymore. The grant lands in the middle of one of the longest-running and most emotionally charged civic arguments in Sarasota: whether the city should pour money into a beloved but flood-prone hall, or let it yield to a new Sarasota Performing Arts Center that has been promised, redesigned, delayed and debated since 2018.

The \$3.5 million says, in effect, that whatever the long game turns out to be, the state and the city are not prepared to let the building drown in the meantime.

What the Money Buys

The grant agreement, DEP Agreement No. L0337, is blunt about the problem. Built in 1969, the document states, the Van Wezel lacks modern flood defenses and experiences recurrent coastal flooding, compromised stormwater conveyance and exposure to wind-driven wave action because of its low elevation and proximity to tidal waters. The funded work list reads like a field manual for keeping a theater dry:

- Elevating utilities out of the flood zone
- Installing flood barrier systems
- Waterproofing lower-level mechanical systems
- Enhancing perimeter drainage and tide control features
- Integrating wave-resilient construction elements

All of it falls under a single construction task in the grant work plan, with a budget of \$3.5 million in contractual services and a completion deadline of June 30, 2029. The agreement itself runs through Dec. 31, 2029, and its reimbursement window reaches back to July 1, 2025, meaning eligible work already underway can be billed against it.

Why the Building Needs It

The Van Wezel's vulnerability is not theoretical. Its lowest point, the orchestra pit, sits roughly six feet below sea level. When Hurricane Milton's storm surge rolled across the bay-front in October 2024, water poured into the lower levels, submerged a basement transformer, wrecked the German-

made spiral lift that moves sets and grand pianos to the stage, and reached into the Grand Foyer. Damage estimates ran as high as \$10 million, and the hall lost roughly half of its 2024-25 season. Engineers hired by the city delivered an equally sobering assessment afterward. The building is non-conforming under modern flood standards: it is neither elevated to minimum flood requirements nor dry-waterproofed to keep water out. The breakwater in front of it, consultants found, was simply not stout enough to absorb Milton's wave energy. The full bill to repair, shore up and protect the hall was pegged at roughly \$17 million.

Against that number, \$3.5 million in state money that requires nothing from city taxpayers is a meaningful down payment.

The Purple Ribbon Prescription

The grant also gives financial muscle to a plan the city already adopted. The Purple Ribbon Committee, the citizen panel that spent two years studying the hall's future, wrestled openly with whether it made sense to put a single dollar into a building that sits 15 feet from the water. In the end it recommended a list of must-do improvements to keep the Van Wezel operating for at least the seven or so years it projected a new performing arts center might take to open. The City Commission accepted that report last August, and then-Commissioner Debbie Trice, now the mayor whose signature line appears on Monday's resolution, attached a pointed condition: do not put this report on a shelf. City staff answered with a comprehensive resilience and mitigation action plan targeting completion in about three years, organized in three tracks covering immediate flood mitigation, shoreline and structural systems, and theatrical and life-safety infrastructure.

Some of that work is already visible. Barriers have been installed to block water from seeping under doors, pump systems and backflow protection have been in the pipeline, and the roof is being structurally reinforced. The DEP grant slots directly into that effort, and its June 2029 construction deadline lines up almost exactly with the window the Purple Ribbon Committee said the hall must survive.

Meanwhile, the New Hall Still Isn't a Deal

The awkward context for all this hardening is that the replacement project remains stuck at the starting line. The Sarasota Performing Arts Foundation unveiled its slimmed-down Concept 2.0 in January: a roughly 2,200-seat main hall designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, plus a 300-seat multipurpose room and two parking decks, positioned at the corner of the current Van Wezel parking lot in The Bay park. Commissioners accepted the concept report in March, but the implementation agreement that would actually advance the project into schematic design, and commit the city to its half

of the funding, still has no vote scheduled. The step is now roughly two years behind the original timetable. That leaves the Van Wezel carrying the full weight of Sarasota's big-hall performing arts calendar for the foreseeable future, with a Broadway season already announced into 2027. Preservationists, who won the hall a spot on the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation's list of the state's most threatened historic buildings, argue that every dollar of hardening strengthens the case that the William Wesley Peters-designed landmark deserves a permanent future, not a stay of execution.

The Fine Print

Like all state grants, this one comes with strings. It is a cost-reimbursement agreement, so the city fronts the money and bills the state, no more than monthly, with documentation for every dollar. Advance payment is not authorized. Missed deliverable deadlines trigger an automatic 1 percent invoice reduction for each day of delay unless the state grants an extension in writing. Quarterly progress reports are required, and the city must also report the project's expected return on investment to the Governor's Office of Policy and Budget. The funding flows from a state fiscal year 2025-26 legislative line item through the Water Protection and Sustainability Program Trust Fund, administered by DEP's Division of Water Restoration Assistance. And in a clause worth remembering in Tallahassee's current budget climate, the state's obligation to pay is contingent on annual appropriation by the Legislature.

What's at Stake

For patrons, the stakes are practical: whether the region's premier touring house can make it through the next storm season without another lost half-year. For taxpayers, the grant shifts a slice of a \$17 million problem onto the state's books. For the preservation camp, every flood barrier and elevated transformer is an argument that the hall can be saved. For backers of the new center, the same work is merely a bridge, keeping the show running until something better rises next door. Monday's vote will likely take seconds. The argument it feeds will run for years.

What Happens Next

The commission meets Monday, Aug. 17, at City Hall. Unless a commissioner pulls the item for discussion, Resolution 26R-3412 will pass with the rest of the consent agenda, the budget lines will open, and the slow, unglamorous work of keeping Sarasota Bay on the correct side of the Van Wezel's purple walls will continue, funded through the summer of 2029, which may or may not be long enough for Sarasota to decide what it actually wants to do with the building it keeps saving.

School Battle, from page 1

Names that in any ordinary August would mean nothing to a family fighting the morning carpool line. Not this August. Sarasota’s public schools have just finished the first week of the 2026-27 school year, and on Tuesday, Aug. 18, the county decides who will govern them.

The collision of those two calendars gives this opening a charge no first week in recent memory has carried. The celebration is easy to find: Sarasota County Schools has just posted its 23rd consecutive “A” grade from the state of Florida, a streak unmatched on the Gulf Coast, and every single district-managed school earned an “A” or a “B.” The consequence is harder to miss: the district opened the year having eliminated hundreds of positions, trimmed teacher supplements, tightened health benefits and absorbed the expiration of \$115 million in federal pandemic relief. And now, with backpacks unzipped and the new bell times already reshaping island mornings, voters will settle a school board election with three open seats, seven candidates and the ideological direction of Florida’s most decorated district hanging in the balance.

Here is the full picture as the second week of school begins on the barrier islands and the mainland, and the final ballots come due.

Still the Pride of the Suncoast: 23 Straight Years of ‘A’

Start with the number that defines this district. When the Florida Department of Education released school grades this summer, Sarasota County Schools earned an overall “A” for the 23rd year in a row, a run that stretches back to the first years of the state’s accountability system. One hundred percent of district-managed schools received an “A” or “B” grade, a distinction few large Florida districts can claim.

That academic pedigree is not an abstraction for island families. It is baked into real estate values from Longbeach Village to Bird Key, cited in every relocation brochure and repeated by every Realtor walking a prospect through a St. Armands listing. The district serves roughly 44,000 students across more than 50 schools countywide when charter schools are included, with about 36,600 students expected in traditional district-run classrooms this year.

The schools that serve the island communities, including Southside Elementary, Bay Haven School of Basics Plus, Booker High and Sarasota High, all sit inside that A-and-B universe, and the district’s magnet and specialty programs, from Pine View to the Sarasota High MaST Research Institute, continue to collect statewide honors. A Sarasota High teacher, MaST director Andy Harshman, was named the county’s 2026 Teacher of the Year and is Sarasota’s nominee for Florida Teacher of the Year.

Terry Connor: The Steady Hand Steering Through the Storm

Superintendent Terry Connor begins his fourth school year at the helm, and by most measures the former Hillsborough County deputy superintendent has become one of the more secure figures in Sarasota public life, no small feat in a county where school politics has chewed up administrators and dominated cable news.

Connor arrived in July 2023 after a career that began in a science classroom and ran through principalships and the chief academic officer’s post in Clay County. He inherited a board famous for shouting matches over masks, library books and inclusion policies, and he has largely kept the district’s academic machine humming while the political weather raged around him.

His standing is notable across the spectrum. Board conservatives have praised his budget discipline in recent cycles, while the board’s more progressive members credit him with protecting classrooms during painful cuts. When the district faced criticism this spring over staffing reductions, Connor took the presentations himself, framing the situation in a March workshop with a phrase that has since become the district’s fiscal mantra: this is a “financial correction, not a crisis.”

He has also shown a willingness to fight. Connor has publicly sparred with Sarasota County Tax Collector Mike Moran over Moran’s claim, first raised last summer, that the district owes collection fees on its voter-approved millage dating back more than two decades. More than \$2 million has been withheld during the dispute, money Connor insists belongs in classrooms. The standoff remains unresolved as the new year opens.

Is he popular? By the standards of Florida superintendents in 2026, remarkably so. Parents’ groups on both ends of the political divide have found reasons to grumble, but no organized effort to unseat him exists, and his contract extensions have come without drama.

The 7:30 Bell: A New Morning Rhythm for Island Families

The change island families felt most immediately this week was on the clock. To comply with Florida’s school start time law, the district adopted new bell schedules approved by the board in February. High schools now begin at 7:30 a.m., elementary and K-8 schools at 8:30 a.m., and middle schools at 9:30 a.m., with limited exceptions.

For Longboat and Lido parents making the drive over the Ringling Bridge, that means high schoolers leave in the dark-early hours while middle schoolers get a comparatively leisurely morning. The district spent months surveying families and running community workshops before landing on the schedule and filed its compliance documentation with the state in April.

Paired with the new bell times is a new transportation platform called My Ride K-12, an app the district is urging every bus family to download. It shows a child’s bus assignment and stop, tracks the bus in real time and pushes alerts about delays or substitute buses, a welcome upgrade for parents who have spent years squinting down Gulf of Mexico Drive wondering where the bus went. Transportation requests run through the Focus Parent Portal; the guarantee deadline for first-day routes has passed, but the district continues processing applications.

Four Elementaries Become K-8s, and Brookside Is Reborn as an AI Academy

Structurally, this is the most ambitious reshuffling of Sarasota’s school portfolio in years. Four elementary schools, Brentwood, Gulf Gate, Wilkinson and Alta Vista, are converting from K-5 to K-8 campuses, adding sixth grade this year and a grade each year after. Connor has said the conversions answer parent demand for educational continuity and put underused buildings back to work; the four campuses had been hovering around half capacity.

Meanwhile, Brookside Middle School, a familiar name to generations of Sarasota families, has been reinvented as the Gulf Coast Academy of Innovation and Technology, with a curriculum built around artificial intelligence and cybersecurity at the middle school level, feeding students into the district’s expanding high school STEM pathways.

In South County, the district cut the ribbon on Wellen Park High School in Venice just weeks before opening day, part of a building program that has also delivered the Skye Ranch K-8 east of Interstate 75, the district’s first new schools in more than 15 years.

Athletics expand too. Middle school boys and girls soccer launches this fall, boys and girls flag football arrives at middle schools in spring 2027, and girls flag football will be offered at every district-managed high school beginning next spring. The district continues its partnership providing \$20 ECG heart screenings for student-athletes, with financial help available.

The Budget: A Correction With Teeth

Now the harder arithmetic. The school board approved a tentative 2026-27 budget in late

July totaling roughly \$1.3 billion, with an operating budget about 2.2 percent smaller than last year’s. The final budget and millage adoption comes at a September public hearing.

The revenue structure explains why Sarasota’s district behaves differently from most in Florida. About 86 cents of every dollar the district spends comes from local property taxes, with only about 10 cents from the state and 4 cents from Washington. That heavy local funding, driven by the county’s formidable property values, including the assessments on Longboat Key, Lido and downtown’s condominium towers, is precisely what has insulated Sarasota schools for decades. It is also why the voter-approved supplemental millage, renewed by referendum every four years since 2002, remains the district’s crown jewel and why the fee fight with the tax collector over collecting that millage has drawn such a sharp response.

The pressures stacking up against that local wealth are real and compounding. The \$115 million in federal COVID-19 relief that propped up staffing and programs has fully expired. District officials estimate Florida’s universal school voucher program, which no longer carries income limits, siphoned roughly \$45 million from district revenue this year alone as scholarship dollars follow students to private and home schooling. Enrollment in traditional schools is flat to declining, squeezed by falling birth rates, the county’s punishing housing costs for young families and the growth of charter and private options. State per-student funding has stagnated. And operational costs, from health insurance premiums to fuel, food and utilities, keep climbing.

Connor’s own framing is telling: a decade ago the district educated almost exactly the same number of students it expects this year, roughly 36,600, but with nearly 500 fewer employees. The correction, in his telling, is about realigning staffing to the students the district actually generates.

Teacher Cuts, a Surplus List and a Softer Landing Than Feared

The human cost of that correction dominated the spring. In April, the district announced it was cutting 136 teaching positions, part of a broader plan that at one point contemplated eliminating 180 instructional positions and 79 classified jobs. Teachers on the “surplus list” faced a summer of uncertainty, and the Sarasota Classified Teachers Association described heartbreak at not being able to protect everyone.

The compensation changes stung as well. The district’s top-tier PPO health plan, previously free to teachers, now costs \$200 a month, though the HMO and lower-tier PPO remain free. Supplemental pay for teachers in high-need assignments was slashed: the annual boost for Title I school teachers dropped from \$3,000 to \$1,200, and teachers of exceptional student education students at Title I schools saw their supplement fall from \$6,000 to \$1,500.

The good news arrived just before opening day. Connor said the surplus list, once 136 names long, has been whittled down as retirements and resignations opened slots. Speaking days before the first bell, he said the district has “gotten that number down into the teens,” with nearly every displaced teacher finding a landing spot for this year.

That distinguishes Sarasota from the national teacher-shortage narrative in an ironic way: while districts elsewhere scramble to fill empty classrooms, Sarasota’s problem this year was too many teachers for its funded positions. Still, hiring continues in chronic shortage areas, including exceptional student education, and the district opens the year with dozens of posted vacancies across instructional and support roles.

Tuesday: Three Open Seats, Seven Candidates and a Majority in Play

Which brings us to the ballots, some already returned by mail, the rest due by 7 p.m. Tuesday. The Aug. 18 school board election is the most consequential in years, and every voter in the county, regardless of where they live, votes in all three races.

None of the three conservative incumbents whose seats are open, Bridget Ziegler in District 1, Karen Rose in District 4 and Robyn Marinelli in District 5, is on the ballot. Their departures end an era in which a reliable conservative majority steered the board through fights over masks, book challenges, an ICE cooperation resolution and penalties for student walkout protests, often before packed and raucous chambers.

The races are officially nonpartisan, but nobody is pretending, least of all the sign-makers. The Republican Party of Sarasota County has endorsed a slate, the Democratic Party has endorsed its own, and the money, mailers and forums have taken on the flavor of a full partisan campaign. If the Democratic-aligned candidates sweep, the board flips outright, joining sitting members Tom Edwards and Liz Barker. If the Republican-endorsed slate holds all three seats, the conservative majority survives the incumbents’ exit.

For all the polarization, the candidates broadly agree on the diagnosis: the district’s finances, declining enrollment and early literacy are the urgent issues. They diverge sharply on the cure, especially on Florida’s voucher program.

District 1: The Coastal Seat, and the Race Closest to Home

District 1 is our district, the coastal north county seat that covers the barrier islands and much of the city of Sarasota, and it has drawn the most crowded field.

Heidi Brandt carries the Republican Party endorsement along with backing from state Rep. Fiona McFarland and state Sen. Joe Gruters. A Southside Elementary PTO president with an elementary-age child, Brandt has made early literacy her signature, proposing low-cost volunteer reading mentorship programs. Notably, she has broken with the outgoing board majority, saying she would have voted against both the ICE cooperation resolution and the student protest penalties, arguing the ICE measure accomplished nothing except stirring fear. She supports vouchers in principle but calls the current system broken and favors income-based sliding scales. She has raised more than \$66,000.

Teresa DeWitt, a therapist endorsed by U.S. Rep. Greg Steube and Sheriff Kurt Hoffman, has ties to Moms for Liberty activism and conservative training organizations. Declining most media interviews, she has campaigned on literacy, financial stability, televising the district’s financial and audit committee meetings, campus security cameras and volunteer programs to ease staffing gaps. She has raised about \$19,000.

Jimmy Glover, the lone registered Democrat in the race and the only African American candidate countywide, would be the first Black member ever elected to the Sarasota County School Board. A 30-year United Airlines flight attendant who raised his children in district schools and chairs the board of the Star Lab Montessori-style school, Glover emphasizes college and career readiness and mentorship for underserved students, and wants the district to lobby Tallahassee to restore income caps on vouchers. He is the race’s fundraising leader at more than \$118,000, with endorsements from the county Democratic Party, Equality Florida and board members Edwards and Barker.

District 4: The Entrepreneur vs. the Teacher

In northeast county’s District 4, insurance agency owner Frank DiCicco, Republican-endorsed and backed by Sheriff Hoffman, has campaigned on rooting out budget bloat, publishing a more detailed district budget and bulk-purchasing school supplies for families. He acknowledges he currently lives outside the district following a divorce and says he will move

School Battle, from page 12

in if elected, as the law requires. He opposes the state’s Schools of Hope charter co-location law and has raised about \$18,000.

Megan Tennimon, a former elementary teacher and mother of three district students, runs on academic achievement, teacher support and transparency, framing herself as the rare candidate who has stood on both sides of the classroom door. She blames the voucher program’s uncapped expansion for much of the district’s financial strain and wants income limits restored and the district rejoined to the statewide school boards association for lobbying muscle. She has raised more than \$51,500 with endorsements including board member Barker.

District 5: The Retired Teacher vs. the Firebrand, and the Race’s Biggest Controversy

The south county District 5 contest has produced the campaign’s sharpest fireworks. Beth Mayberry, who retired in 2025 after more than 13 years teaching math and science in the district, has raised more than \$71,600 with Democratic Party, Edwards and Barker endorsements. She calls chronic underfunding the central threat, wants arts programs strengthened to attract and retain families, and has criticized the outgoing majority for spending its energy on resolutions she considers distracting and damaging.

Her opponent, Michelle Pozzie, is a longtime conservative activist, Turning Point USA chapter director and conservative media host who has spoken at board meetings for years. Republican-endorsed alongside Steube and Hoffman, she has focused on student discipline

and literacy and argues the district should out-compete vouchers through aggressive marketing rather than reform.

Pozzie has also generated the race’s defining controversies. She drew broad condemnation in June for comparing unmasked students during the pandemic to Jews persecuted by the Nazis. Then investigative reporting revealed she had claimed at a public forum to have been executive director of a Sarasota Family YMCA branch overseeing a multimillion-dollar budget; archived YMCA records and former colleagues identified her role as recreational gymnastics director, and she subsequently revised her own description of the job. She has raised about \$15,900 and stopped responding to interview requests.

What Tuesday Means on the Islands

So the second week begins with a paradox worthy of this singular school district: academically triumphant, financially squeezed, politically contested. Island families feel it in small ways, a 7:30 a.m. high school bell, a bus-tracking app, a forest of campaign signs on the morning drive, and in one large way that never changes. The A-rated Sarasota school system remains among the most powerful engines of this community’s prosperity, the quiet justification behind every property value from the Village to Bird Key.

Twenty-three straight years of excellence bought this district enormous goodwill. Tuesday’s ballots, and the nine months that follow, will test how it spends it.

Downtown, from page 1

percent of the structure sits in Downtown Core, where 10 stories are allowed, and 42 percent sits in Downtown Edge, where the limit is five stories, meaning nearly half of the existing building is technically too tall for its own zoning.

The county’s use was grandfathered in, so nobody noticed for 20 years. But a nonconforming building cannot be meaningfully expanded, raised or in some respects even renovated, and that is precisely what Benderson wants to do.

The fix comes in two parts. Comprehensive Plan Amendment 26-PA-01 would change the Future Land Use Map for one acre of the 2.88-acre parcel from Urban Edge to Downtown Core, and companion rezone 26-REN-03 would shift the same acre from Downtown Edge to Downtown Core zoning. The change moves the district boundary just under 108 feet south, far enough to capture the full building footprint plus room for what the application calls a modest expansion. The southernmost 92 feet of the parcel along Morrill Street, about 0.86 acre, would remain Urban Edge and Downtown Edge as a buffer for the Laurel Park neighborhood on the other side of the street.

The \$25 Million Backstory

Benderson’s subsidiary CCB Associates 1 LLC bought the administration center and two adjacent Morrill Street parking lots, 5.3 acres in all, from Sarasota County in December 2021 for \$25 million. Six developers had bid between \$20 million and \$23.5 million before Benderson raised its offer by \$5 million and dropped an early condition that the county relocate to Benderson’s own University Town Center area.

The deal was not without its skeptics on the County Commission. Then-Commissioner Nancy Detert objected that the county was selling low, noting the main parcel alone carried a 2021 market value of more than \$38 million and predicting the buyer would eventually reap far more once the land was rezoned. Her colleagues countered with staff projections of roughly \$49 million in maintenance and renovation costs over 20 years if the county stayed put.

The county leased the building back for \$1 million a year while its new administration center rose on Apex Road east of Interstate 75. The 2024 hurricanes extended the county’s stay, and government workers did not fully vacate 1660 Ringling until October 2025. Within months, the county branding came off the walls and Benderson’s land-use applications went in.

What Benderson Says It Will Build

Benderson has been unusually specific about its intentions for a company that has filed no site plan. Todd Mathes, the company’s director of real estate investment, has told the Planning Board and neighborhood audiences that Benderson intends to keep the building’s primary structure, take the exterior down to the steel, replace its monolithic concrete walls with windows, rebuild the interior and market it as Class A office space with small-scale retail and restaurant space activating the ground floor along Ringling Boulevard.

The building was engineered from the start to carry three additional floors, and Benderson wants the zoning latitude to add them, which would bring the tower to nine stories, one below the Downtown Core maximum. At the December community workshop, the development team estimated the vertical addition at roughly 60,000 square feet or less, and said the existing landscaped setback and mature trees along Ringling Boulevard would stay, with room for a restaurant patio out front.

At that same workshop, Benderson’s representatives were blunt about the alternative. The company could tear the building down, they said, as others downtown are doing, but demolition does not fit the firm’s approach to this site.

The surface parking lots south of Morrill Street at 1646 and

1703 Morrill are not part of this request. Benderson says they will be refreshed and will continue serving the building for now, though the company has made no long-term commitments about the rest of its 5.3-acre holding, and that silence remains the deepest source of neighborhood anxiety.

What the Zoning Would Actually Allow

The gap between what Benderson says it will build and what Downtown Core zoning permits is the crux of the matter, and it is substantial. Urban Edge allows 25 dwelling units per acre and five stories; Downtown Core doubles both, to 50 units per acre and 10 stories, with zero-lot-line construction. On the one-acre amendment area, the theoretical building envelope grows from roughly 218,000 square feet to roughly 436,000 square feet.

Three voluntary proffers written into the rezone ordinance narrow that envelope considerably:

- Retail space on the site is capped at 38,000 square feet.
- Only non-residential uses are allowed within the footprint of the existing building on the newly rezoned Downtown Core portion, a condition the Planning Board added at its July hearing.
- The rezone itself is void unless the comprehensive plan amendment passes first.

The proffers run with the land, and changing them later would require new public hearings before the Planning Board and City Commission. Still, they leave the door open to residential, hotel or other uses in a future second structure elsewhere on the property, something the development team has openly acknowledged could come if market conditions warrant.

Laurel Park Draws Its Line

The path to Monday’s hearing runs through one of the most contentious neighborhood fights in recent city memory, and the story of how it cooled is as revealing as the fight itself.

When Benderson unveiled its original concept at an August 2023 community workshop, the proposal covered all three parcels and included rezoning the parking lot south of Morrill Street, inside Laurel Park’s protective RSM-9 boundary. The historic neighborhood packed the room and pushed back hard. Residents warned of a domino effect if the first incursion into Laurel Park’s zoning were allowed, raised alarms that mixed-use designations could invite the state’s Live Local Act and its density bonuses to their doorstep, and gathered more than 148 petition signatures in two weeks of summer heat. One resident put it starkly: if the neighborhood’s boundary falls, “Goodbye Laurel Park.” Another closed the meeting with a warning that the residents of Laurel Park “are smart, we are passionate and we are loud.”

Benderson responded by slowing down rather than bulldozing ahead. The company held a three-day design charrette with the neighborhood in October 2023, presented results to the Laurel Park Neighborhood Association in early 2024, and then, after the hurricanes extended the county’s lease, came back with a dramatically scaled-down request touching only the single acre under the existing building, leaving the Morrill Street parking lots and the neighborhood’s RSM-9 zoning untouched.

A Cooler Room in December

The December 2025 workshop on the revised plan drew 49 people and a noticeably different temperature. Traffic and construction impacts still dominated the questions. One resident said that during season it is already nearly impossible to pull out of a driveway onto Ringling Boulevard since the road diet added protected bicycle lanes. Others pressed on why the zoning must change before a building design exists, and were told a rejected site plan after full design would cost millions and a year of work.

But several attendees spoke in favor of finally seeing the vacant building renovated, and one theme drew something close to consensus: almost nobody defends the building’s current appearance. When one skeptic noted that residents bought their properties based on existing zoning, the development team’s answer captured the whole debate in a sentence: the zoning allows far more than what is being proposed.

Whatever remained of organized opposition did not materialize at the Planning Board on July 8. No affected persons registered. No citizens spoke. The board voted 5-0 to recommend approval of both the plan amendment and the rezone, adding the non-residential proffer for the existing building footprint.

The Traffic Math

Because the request was not deemed minimal, the city required a full traffic study, which analyzed a deliberately worst-case scenario: the maximum theoretical buildout under the new designation, modeled as 70,300 square feet of office plus nearly 150,000 square feet of retail anchored by a supermarket. Even that phantom project, generating more than 18,400 daily trips on paper, passed the city’s concurrency review. After crediting the trips the site could already generate under existing entitlements, the study found a net addition of 427 evening peak-hour trips to the surrounding network, with all study intersections continuing to operate acceptably and no mitigation required. The study did recommend that future development fill existing sidewalk gaps along Rawls Avenue and Morrill Street.

Skeptics will note the irony that a study built on a hypothetical supermarket blesses a project whose actual retail is capped at 38,000 square feet. Supporters will note it means the real project sits comfortably inside the traffic envelope.

The Fine Print That Matters Monday

Two procedural details give Monday’s hearings their edge. First, the comprehensive plan amendment requires a supermajority, four of the five commissioners, so two no votes from Mayor Debbie Trice, Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich, and Commissioners Jen Ahearn-Koch, Kyle Scott Battie and Liz Alpert would sink it, and the contingent rezone with it.

Second, because this is a rezone without a site plan, the actual building design, if the zoning passes, will be approved administratively by city staff, with no further public hearing on what the tower will look like. Residents flagged exactly this at the December workshop, and Benderson’s team said Mathes would be willing to hold a voluntary workshop when a site plan is ready, though nothing requires it. Monday, in other words, is likely the public’s last binding word on 1660 Ringling.

What’s Next

The plan amendment qualifies as a small-scale amendment under Florida law, meaning it skips state review and takes effect 31 days after adoption on second reading unless challenged. If both ordinances pass first reading Monday, a second reading follows at a subsequent meeting, after which Benderson can proceed to an administrative site plan, permits and construction. The development team has previously suggested interior work would proceed one floor at a time, with total construction possibly stretching two years.

And somewhere beyond that horizon sits the rest of Benderson’s 5.3 acres, the parking lots that Laurel Park watches the way a coastal town watches the tide. Monday’s vote settles one acre. It does not settle the question the neighborhood has been asking since 2023: what comes next across Morrill Street.

The City Commission meets Monday, Aug. 17, at Sarasota City Hall, 1565 First St. The plan amendment is Item X.2 under legislative public hearings; the rezone is Item XI.1 under quasi-judicial hearings.

Parking, from page 1

to midnight, extended policing of the free two-hour spaces into the night and folded Sundays into the enforcement calendar, is suspended until the city completes a public town hall and a dedicated commission workshop and returns with what Battie called “empirical data.”

The only survivor was the fine schedule. On a 3-2 amendment from Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich, the increased citation charges will remain in force, a concession to new City Manager Karie Friling, who argued that people who still break the rules under the restored hours “deserve to get a ticket.”

Everything else goes back to the way it was before June 29. And the meeting that got it there was one of the most remarkable displays of merchant power City Hall has seen in decades.

The Sandwich Maker Fires First

The day opened with Chip Beeman of the Main Bar Sandwich Shop at the podium doing math the city did not want to hear. Beeman spoke at 9:43 a.m. because, as he told commissioners, he hoped to be selling sandwiches by the time they reached the parking item. He was off by roughly seven hours.

Mayor Debbie Trice’s now-famous July line, that anyone spending \$200 on a meal should not quibble over a \$2 parking fee, was waiting for him like a hanging curveball.

“Mrs. Mayor, you have lost the plot,” Beeman said. “We are not selling \$200 items at my place.”

He accused a previous city manager of selling the program to the commission “as a financial cash cow” while failing to mention “the critical fact that it be funded entirely at the expense of the local merchants.” His verdict: “The chickens have come home to roost.” He offered a eulogy for the storefronts already lost, “Rest in peace to the toy store and Fork in Hand,” and a behavioral theory the city’s consultants never modeled.

“Think about the psychology of a parking ticket,” Beeman said. “Giving someone a fine is a punishment. A punishment is designed to stop a behavior from happening again. You get a speeding ticket, you slow down. You get a parking ticket downtown, you stop coming downtown.”

His closing plea set the tone for everything that followed: “Save the soul of downtown Sarasota before more storefronts go dark.”

Three Votes Was All It Took

When Item XII.1 finally arrived at 4:41 p.m., Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch, who forced it onto the agenda over the objections of her colleagues, asked City Attorney Joseph Polzak to spell out exactly what the commission could legally do that night.

Polzak’s answer detonated the central excuse for delay. “If all you want to do is suspend enforcement of certain provisions, you can do that today.” A suspension needed nothing but three votes.

Friling then put the first real numbers on the program’s performance. In a little over three weeks of actual enforcement, the extended hours had generated \$62,078. Sunday collections brought in \$23,064. Citations added roughly \$20,270. Just over \$105,000, in other words, was the entire haul from a program that had provoked a boycott movement, a viral video and a petition drive, and the city could not yet say which streets any of it came from.

Then Trice looked at her stack of speaker cards. Twenty people had signed up. “So that’s about an hour,” she said. “Get ready.”

A Budget Grown 79 Percent

Kirk Voelker, city resident and business owner, opened the public comment with the budget autopsy the commission has never performed on itself. The Parking Division’s budget, he said, has swollen from \$3.7 million actual in 2025 to \$6.7 million proposed, a 79 percent increase achieved without adding a single parking space, paid for by increasing parking-ticket revenue roughly 71 percent, to \$2.2 million.

“This accounts for about 33 percent of their proposed budget,” Voelker said. “If you look at other cities like Tampa, Fort Myers, Greenville, it’s about 8 percent.”

His closing line was addressed to five elected officials: “Leadership isn’t accepting the status quo. Leadership is having a vision in whether a policy is working. And having the courage to change it when it’s not.”

A Petition With 124 Signatures

The rawest testimony came from James Reese, who has cut hair at Salon 41 on Main Street for more than 30 years. He came with a petition he carried personally into 122 downtown businesses, gathering 124 merchant signatures demanding the removal of the meters and a return to the old hours with free Sundays.

“I’ve lost half of my business,” Reese said. “I used to be behind my chair for six days a week. I’m there three days a week. I lost three clients last week. Those are 20 and 30-year-old clients, because of the parking meters.”

Jeremy Thayer of Thayer Jewelers sent a statement that was not a plea but a legal warning: “Mark my words, they will be removed. One way or another, either by you, our elected representatives, doing what you’re elected for, which is representing the will of the people who elected you, or by a court of law.” Paid parking, the statement concluded, must go before the coming high season “or the citizens of Sarasota and Palm Avenue and Main Street merchants will see you in court.”

Down 40 Percent, With Employees Working One Day a Week

Darci Jacob, who has run her women’s clothing store in the 1400 block of Main Street for 11 years, gave the commission the most complete picture of the damage. “Since the new parking program has started, my business is down 40 percent to last year’s numbers,” she said. “I have cut my employees’ hours. Each one is working one day a week, and they were working four and five.”

And she delivered a casualty report: a Main Street store 25 years in business is closing, its owner walking into her shop Monday to say goodbye. “Sarasota has spoken. Toy Lab will close at the end of August.”

Richard Russell, general and artistic director of the Sarasota Opera, flagged the free timed spaces around the Opera House and Florida Studio Theatre, now policed until midnight with no meters and no way to buy more time: “A typical performance plus arrival and departure time and maybe a meal before exceeds two hours.” Hours later, Trice would identify that extended enforcement as the ordinance’s central blunder, citing Russell by name.

Katherine Hermes, the downtown wellness practitioner whose empty-street video became the movement’s signature artifact, returned with an update: the video has now been shared more than 1.5 million times in a city of roughly 58,000 people. Her business is down 25 percent, and she laid off an employee last week. Listening to departed parking general manager Broxton Harvey present the division’s budget, she said, “it kind of had a tone of a man with an anvil around his neck.”

Martin Hyde supplied the acid, noting “a certain irony that the four of you that voted for

this are presently sat parked in a taxpayer-funded free parking space,” and characterizing the administration’s wait-for-data posture as “watching flames licking the drapes in your offices and saying nonchalantly, maybe it will go out on its own.” His prescription: suspend the hours immediately and raise the meter rate 50 cents. “Or if you prefer, and I would, start looking for new jobs.”

St. Armands Hits Its Limit

Rachel Burns, executive director of the St. Armands Circle Association, widened the lens beyond downtown. The Circle’s merchants, she reminded the commission, are assessed nearly \$275,000 annually for city parking. “We do have a stake in the game, and we have hit our limit.”

Her survey numbers were blunt: 90 percent of St. Armands merchants say parking is a significant issue for their customers, and 68 percent report a direct negative effect on their businesses. Her warning was blunter still: “Once a guest finds a new destination, they will not return.”

Commission candidate Yevgeny Khodorkovsky closed the public comment with an image that needed no statistics. “You guys invented the time machine,” he said. “I went outside on Main Street, and it’s like 2020. There’s zero people. Well, I ran into two.”

‘We Talked to Ourselves’

Friling, two months into the job and inheriting a crisis she had no hand in creating, walked the narrowest line of the night. “I truly believe in the premise of do no harm first,” she said, predicting a hybrid solution in which everyone gives something. The city, she said with a laugh, would have to “split the baby.”

The commissioners’ deliberation opened with Battie claiming vindication: “I’m the lone person up here that didn’t vote for the damn thing. Okay. That’s that. I knew we would be here.”

Then came the confession that reframed the entire night, from Ohlrich, who voted for the program. “We had the best of intentions, and we thought extending the hours and keeping the rates low would be the solution. We didn’t talk to our stakeholders. We didn’t talk to the restaurateurs, the retailers, our residents, or our tourists. We talked to ourselves, and we thought we did the right thing. Clearly, it wasn’t the right thing.” Her coda was the shortest sentence of the meeting, and maybe the most important: “We didn’t, but we will.”

And Trice, who spent July defending the program, performed a public autopsy on it, conceding the extended enforcement of the free timed spaces was the fatal piece: “That’s where we came up with the unintended consequences.” Her warning about what comes next was the fund’s entire dilemma in nine words: “Who is going to pay for the parking? Somebody is going to pay.”

The Vote, and the One Piece That Survived

At 6:14 p.m., Battie read the motion he had drafted before the meeting began: temporarily suspend the changes until the commission holds a public town hall and a dedicated workshop, then decide, on empirical data, whether to affirm, modify or repeal. Ahearn-Koch pressed for precision: did that include the Sunday hours and the fine increases? “Yes,” Battie answered. “The entirety.”

That was one entirety too many for Friling, and Ohlrich’s amendment to keep the increased fines squeaked through 3-2 over the objections of Alpert and Ahearn-Koch, who warned it would muddy the public message. The amended motion then passed unanimously. The chamber, still holding the merchants who had waited nine hours, broke into applause.

“The people have spoken,” Battie said. “We’ve heard them and listened to them.” He closed, with a grin, in four words: “I have a dream.”

Hovering over it all: the man who designed the program no longer works for the city. Broxton Harvey, the parking general manager who recommended the extended hours, resigned July 9, three days after the backlash first erupted. His exit leaves the division without its architect at precisely the moment the commission has ordered the program he built rebuilt from the ground up.

What Happens Now

The suspension opens a 60-day negotiation over what replaces the program. Staff must reprogram every pay station, revisit the roughly 800 signs changed in June, and get the word out that Sundays are free again, work Planning Director Steve Cover believes can be done in as little as three or four days.

Then come the dates that will decide the permanent outcome: an Aug. 24 parking open house in the commission chambers, an Aug. 31 commission workshop where staff will finally deliver the full data set the commission never had, and the Sept. 7 meeting, the first opportunity to convert workshop direction into action.

And underneath it all, the arithmetic that started this war has not moved an inch. The enterprise fund still faces a projected \$2.8 million shortfall by 2028. The garage elevators still need \$750,000 apiece. The St. Armands bond still requires the city to charge for parking on the Circle. What remains is the question Trice put on the record before she voted to suspend the program anyway. Somebody is going to pay for the parking. Sarasota has 60 days to decide who.

Read the complete report on the parking meeting, including the full public testimony, at lbknews.com.

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Rules, from page 1
‘Imagine my shock’

Longboat Key At-Large Commissioner BJ Bishop stepped to the podium during the public hearing and delivered the sharpest rebuke of the day.

“One of the most important things that has happened in my seven years on the commission is the much improved working relationship that we have with all of you,” Bishop told the Sarasota board, noting the two governments’ next joint meeting is scheduled for October. “So imagine my shock when I received a document over the weekend that vastly changed the transportation comprehensive plan and specifically eliminated three items that all relate directly to Longboat Key.”

“We would hope that those items would have been discussed at our joint meeting, that our staff would have had the opportunity to weigh in on those issues, that our commission and our town manager would have had that opportunity,” Bishop said. “But none of that was afforded.”

Bishop, a former mayor of Leesburg, Virginia, dismissed suggestions that the island simply take its concerns to the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, recalling the “paralysis” of regional councils when an issue involves just two jurisdictions.

“We have to come through Sarasota city streets to get to the hospital, to get to doctors, to get to performances at the Van Wezel and other places. So it’s not a luxury,” she said. “And quite honestly, while I am a serious cyclist, when I was recently hospitalized, I don’t ride my bicycle to the hospital.”

Her plea: “Please, please give us an opportunity to have this on our October agenda and give our staff adequate opportunity to provide your staff with what I think would be some very important comments.”

The commission transmitted the document anyway, roughly three and a half hours later.

What got cut, and why

After lunch, Capital Projects Manager Alvimarie Corales walked the commission through the three Longboat-related provisions Bishop flagged. Action Strategy 5.1, covering joint planning and coordination with the town, survives. The other two do not.

Action Strategy 6.2, which encouraged the city to pursue an interlocal agreement with Longboat Key creating a joint traffic concurrency review process for development on the barrier islands, was deleted because, Corales said, “it would be too complex, because we would be subjecting developments to go through two concurrency processes.”

Then came Policy 6.8 and the bridge. Corales acknowledged what the current plan says, then explained the deletion: “In order for us to do this, it needs to be a commission direction and a coordination among you and the Longboat Key commission. There hasn’t been any coordination so far that actually tells us, put this in the transportation chapter.”

Planning Manager David Smith offered a modest olive branch, saying that with transmittal approved, “I will be also sending the document to Longboat Key, Allen Parsons,” referring to the town’s Planning, Zoning and Building director. Adoption hearings are expected this fall, likely October — the same month as the long-scheduled joint meeting between the two commissions.

‘The dog days of summer’

The bridge deletion was one grievance among many in a public hearing that drew eight speakers, none in support.

Martin Hyde set the tone. “In the middle of the dog days of summer, on a work day, when the obvious hope is that nobody is watching, an important issue is being hidden in plain sight here,” he said, arguing that once the state signs off, “the green — or perhaps more accurately greed — light would be on for developers to make more money” while city streets are “turned into a car park through gridlock.”

“A supermajority is needed here to pass this love note to developers,” Hyde said. “Whoever puts their name to it should be aware that elections come around quickly, and traffic is the number one concern of citizens.”

At the heart of the rewrite is a technical change with enormous practical stakes: scrapping the familiar A-through-F “level of service” grading system for roads in favor of a volume-to-capacity ratio. Dan Lobeck, speaking for Control Growth Now, called it “a paradigm shift the consultant has said to basically embrace traffic congestion” on the theory that misery will force people out of their cars.

The new standard, Lobeck said, would allow a volume-to-capacity ratio of 1.0 downtown. “That is total and complete traffic congestion,” he said. “They are asking you to approve a document that would say the maximum traffic congestion a developer could put on a road in the downtown area is a hundred percent, bumper to bumper gridlock.”

Lobeck and resident John Simon, who read portions of the Control Growth Now analysis that Lobeck ran out of time to deliver, catalogued the casualties of the rewrite: a policy requiring that coastal high-hazard development not cause excessive hurricane evacuation times, deleted; the comprehensive plan’s residential speed limit language, deleted; eight justifications for building and repairing sidewalks, reduced to two; a dozen specific requirements on developers to reduce cut-through neighborhood traffic, deleted; required staff presentations to neighborhood associations on transportation changes, deleted; the Newtown transportation concurrency management area, deleted; and the word “require” swapped for “request” when it comes to developers dedicating right-of-way.

“It screws over Newtown, by the way, Commissioner Battie,” Lobeck called out as he left the podium. His parting judgment on the whole document: “It is a big deal and not ready for prime time.”

Simon summed up the mood of the room. “You go to the meetings, and you get a lecture from city staff about why what they want to do is right. They take some public input, and then they do what they want to do anyway,” he said. “The public is not heard.”

Resident Yevgeny Khodorkovsky, a self-described avid cyclist and systems engineer, put it more bluntly: “Basically, you want to plan an entire Orlando in the middle of a largely single-story suburbia. The claim it is not a road diet is a big fat lie.” Even the city’s marquee multi-modal project got no love from him: “I hate the Ringling cycle lanes.”

Longtime downtown property owner John Harshman challenged the philosophical premise. “If you create congestion, then it’s going to force people to find alternate sources of transportation. That may work in a college town where you have a lot of kids that don’t mind getting out and running and dodging raindrops,” he said, “but not in a community like Sarasota, and not in an area where we’re competing with UTC and some other places that have easy access and easy parking.”

And 37-year resident Flo Entler warned that the whole exercise is being rushed past the people who will live with it. “This policy will likely be implemented by a future commission, not this one,” she said. “That makes it even more important that the intent you are approving today is unambiguous and closes any loopholes, because you won’t be here to interpret it later.”

The meeting that may never have happened

Resident Ron Collins raised a different kind of alarm: whether the public engagement record

itself can be trusted.

The backup material, Collins told the commission, contains a detailed account of a Feb. 3 public meeting at the City Hall annex, complete with findings presented, goals reviewed and written comments accepted. But a public records request, he said, produced a response from the city’s development applications coordinator stating that no community workshop or other public meeting was held before the Planning Board took up the chapter.

“I’m a little confused why we have such a detailed narrative about public input in the record from staff about a meeting that, as far as I can tell, never occurred,” Collins said. “I have a little question about what else in the report may or may not be supported by actual facts.”

Staff pushed back hard after lunch. Corales said the Feb. 3 workshop was advertised beginning Jan. 23 on the city’s website, Facebook, Instagram and X, promoted through the city’s email newsletter on Jan. 30, and held at the SRQ Media Studio next to City Hall — and she pointed to a photograph from the session in the staff presentation. Smith displayed the email chain behind the records request and suggested the response had answered a narrower question than the one residents believed was asked.

Collins had a second objection with legal teeth: the Planning Board, sitting as the city’s state-designated Local Planning Agency, directed staff to bring forward the zoning code regulations that would implement the new chapter. Staff declined, calling it out of scope. “Staff can’t turn away their directions. That direction was just ignored,” Collins said. “That alone is enough to say don’t transmit this.”

A divided dais

Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch opened the afternoon with a broadside at the process itself. “This is being put forth and has been advertised as an update, and in my mind, this is not an update. This is a major revision to our transportation chapter,” she said. “This did not follow the appropriate process.”

She also came armed with the plan’s own demographic data: roughly 40 percent of city residents are either disabled or 65 and older, and the share of households without vehicles has declined from 13 percent to 7 percent. “Those are serious numbers that we need to be thinking about and discussing” before designing a system around walking and cycling, she said. Pressed by the consultant on whether she wanted policy geared toward more cars and parking, she answered that she wanted policy geared toward “the population that we have here in the City of Sarasota.”

Even Mayor Debbie Trice, who chaired the marathon hearing, confessed she wasn’t ready. “Between the commission meeting two weeks ago and the budget hearings last week, I really haven’t had time to really study the documents, certainly not to my satisfaction,” Trice said. “I would love for us to say let’s continue this until maybe a meeting in September.”

Ahearn-Koch and Vice Mayor Kathy Kelley Ohlrich said they would support a continuance. Commissioner Liz Alpert shut the door: “I would not be supportive of that.”

Alpert argued the chapter “is so out of date” and “so inconsistent” with the city’s other criteria “that I think it does everyone a disservice,” adding, “It’s been ongoing for a couple of years now. To keep delaying it, I think, doesn’t help us.”

Commissioner Kyle Battie sided with her, framing transmittal as harmless because adoption comes later. “It gives the commission and the community another bite at the apple,” he said. As for the drumbeat of demands for delay: “This death by a thousand paper cuts type stuff, man, I’m not down with it.”

Ohlrich, who peppered staff with process questions, ultimately backed the change in traffic measurement itself: “Our city is practically built out. I don’t see us widening some of those streets like Bahia Vista.”

The city’s consultant, Dr. Jason Collins, acknowledged the political weather while urging the board forward. Asked about the new state growth law, Senate Bill 180, he conceded, “There is a cloud from Tallahassee hanging over this whole process.” But, he said, “there might not ever be a perfect time,” and further delay would just “keep putting it to the curb.”

What passed, and what comes next

The final motion, by Alpert and seconded by Battie, passed 3-2, with Trice and Ahearn-Koch dissenting — a split vote on what Ahearn-Koch called “the biggest document this city commission adopts.”

“It should be a stronger vote than a split vote,” she said moments before the roll call.

Before voting, the commission unanimously added two sweeteners. Ohlrich’s amendment inserts a fifth item into the plan’s parking study directive: examining “the need for parking impact fees,” which would charge developers who receive reduced parking requirements. And the board voted unanimously to fold the Planning Board’s supplemental recommendations into the transmittal, covering heat resiliency, developer accountability, safety and the zoning code implementation analysis residents demanded.

Trice closed the item by directing City Manager Karie Friling to arrange sit-downs between transportation staff and individual commissioners “to address questions or provide explanations that we did not really have the time to do today.”

The state’s review agencies now have 30 days to comment. Adoption hearings are expected this fall — setting up a potential collision with the October joint meeting where Longboat Key intends to ask, on the record, why its bridge disappeared.

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