



# Longboat Key News

July 3, 2026

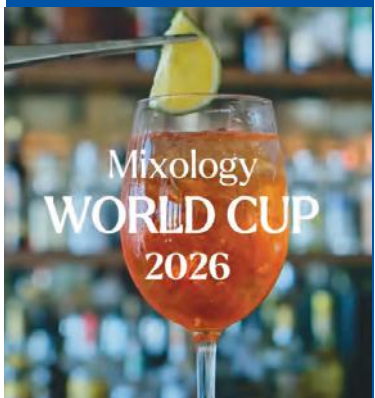
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InsideLook



No. We are the Sane Ones. ...page 11



How to Stay in the Mix in 26 ...page 4



Hop into the Fourth! ...page 11



Case of the floating boat ...page 10

## St. Regis Denies Nearly Every Word of Longboat's Case, Raises Six Defenses, and a Judge Sets the Arch Trial for January 2028

For a year, Chuck Whittall fought the Town of Longboat Key with photographs.

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

He fought it from a Town Hall podium, from the driver's seat of a Ferrari at Sebring, from beneath his own arch on a Sunday afternoon with his arms crossed and his family behind him. He fought it in memos and workshop remarks and one telephone call to a Town Manager. On the afternoon of June 18, 2026, at 3:47 p.m., he began fighting it the only way that will now count. His lawyers filed an Answer.

The document runs nine pages. It is signed not by Brenda Patten — the zoning counsel who spent the winter trying to persuade Longboat Key to rewrite its own sign code around the arch — but by Morgan R. Bentley and Brian D. Goodrich of Bentley Goodrich Kison, P.A., a Sarasota litigation firm. The change of hands is itself a piece of news. The legislative phase, the phase in which Unicorp asked the Town for a favor, is over. The adversarial phase has begun, and the adversarial phase has different lawyers.

See St. Regis, page 12



## St. Armands is Swimming in Seafood

A crab shack for the old Tommy Bahama. Tommy Bahama for the old Shore. And Shore rebuilding itself from the slab up in flood-proof glass.

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

Within roughly a mile of one another, three of the district's marquee restaurant addresses are trading tenants, cuisines and keys in a game of musical chairs played almost entirely in shellfish. Pinchers, the Gulf Coast crab-and-shrimp chain, is moving into the old Tommy Bahama space. Tommy Bahama has already reopened in the old Shore space. And Shore — the home-grown grouper-and-boutique institution the 2024 hurricanes chased off the Circle — has filed to build itself back, this time as a fortified, three-story piece of architecture.

Layer in the flood-proof glass now headed for at least one ground floor, effectively turning a dining room into an inside-out aquarium, and the verdict is hard to miss. A year and a half after Helene and Milton put storm surge over the island not once but twice, the Circle has answered with seafood, sweets and structural engineering.

### Musical Chairs, Played in Shellfish

The reshuffle is easiest to follow as a set of dominoes.

At 300 John Ringling Blvd., on the Gulf-facing end of the commercial district, Tommy Bahama ran its restaurant and store until late 2024, when flooding forced it out. That space is where Pinchers is now headed, with a target opening this fall.

At 465 John Ringling Blvd., at the opposite end of the northeast quadrant, Shore operated until December 2024, when the same back-to-back storms shut it down. Rather than leave the address dark, Tommy Bahama relocated there — less than a mile east — and reopened for the current season.

And at 24 and 28 N. Boulevard of the Presidents, the flood-gutted former bank buildings on the northeastern lip of the Circle, Shore is planning its return: not a re-tenanting of an old shell but a ground-up, mixed-use flagship it hopes to reopen by early 2028.

See St. Armands, page 5

## The Ballot and the Bay: Five Candidates, Two Seats, and a City With Issues

A five-way primary for two at-large seats, an island-defining county race a jurisdiction away, and a November tax question that could quietly reorder the region's finances. A voter's guide to the season ahead — for the people who live where the cranes and the storm surge meet.

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

Sarasota likes to think of itself in superlatives, and it has earned most of them. It is a capital of the arts and a capital of letters — a place where a Renzo Piano concert hall can be debated in the same breath as a barrier-island library, where the season's currency is measured as much in ticket subscriptions as in tee times. It is also, as anyone who watched the water climb over St. Armands twice in thirteen days in the autumn of 2024 can attest, a city that conducts its cultural life at the pleasure of the Gulf of Mexico.

Both of those Sarasotas are on the ballot this year. On Tuesday, Aug. 18, city voters open a municipal season that runs through the November general election and will remake a City Commission that touches every question the region argues about: how tall downtown should grow, whether the bayfront gets its grand new stage, what the islands do about the water, and — the question now looming over all of it — how much property tax the community is prepared to collect from itself.

This is a round-up of what is at stake, who is running, and why the outcome matters as much on Bird Key and Lido as it does on Palm Avenue.

### The mechanics: five for two, in two rounds

Two at-large seats on the five-member Sarasota City Commission are up this cycle. Because more than three candidates qualified, the contest runs in two acts.

Act one — the primary, Aug. 18. Every voter inside the city limits may cast ballots for two of the five candidates. The top three vote-getters advance.

See Candidates, page 15

# Editor Letters



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

## Meeting today

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
 Thanks for your response. Please keep me in mind. Have a wonderful summer break. You all deserve it. Thank you for all that you do for us!  
 Dee Greer  
 Longboat Key

## Meeting today

To: Dedrea Greer  
 Thanks for your email and for your interest in serving the Town. Your application will remain on file with the Clerks office and will be considered for future vacancies on other boards and committees if you wish. As always we welcome and encourage residents to attend our meetings and get involved. We are on recess for July and August, perhaps we'll see you in September.  
 Debra Williams  
 Mayor  
 Town of Longboat Key

## Meeting today

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
 I just watched yesterday's meeting. I had read the document and thought it was well written. Please keep me in mind if I can help on any other committee. Love this island!  
 Dee Greer  
 Longboat Key

## Meeting today

To: Dedrea Greer  
 Thank you for your kind words and for attending yesterday's meeting. Our staff and commissioners are dedicated and focused on serving the community, and your positive feedback is welcomed and appreciated.  
 Your long history on the island, especially after the loss of your condo, speaks volumes about your dedication to our community. We appreciate you volunteering to serve on the charter committee. We will be making the appointments at our next meeting on 6/29.  
 Debra Williams  
 Mayor  
 Town of Longboat Key

## Meeting today

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
 I so enjoyed attending the meeting today. All of our town officials seemed very competent, and it was wonderful to watch you work as a team. The speakers were very prepared and extremely interesting in their presentations.  
 Thank you for considering me to be a part of this. When I sent in my application, I said any way or committee that I can serve on would be an honor. Please know that I am a full-time resident on our beloved island and have owned property on and off since the 1980's. My condo was completely destroyed in the last hurricane, but I survived it all and cherish every day I have here. Thank you and everyone that serves this community for all their hard work!  
 Dedrea (Dee) Greer  
 Longboat Key

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
 Today the Annual Financial Report (AFR) was due to the State of Florida. We have certified this report on your behalf. I have attached a copy. Let me know if you have any questions. Enjoy your summer.  
 Sue Smith  
 Finance Director  
 Town of Longboat Key

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
 Our organization put quite a bit of time into assembling this information. It was initially intended as a briefing book of sorts for incoming City Manager Karie Friling.  
 The briefing book has received some encouraging feedback and has now been shared more broadly, including with County Commissioner Mark Smith. My goal yesterday was to make mention of its existence in the hope there is some helpful information in it.  
 In large part, I assembled the information myself. As I worked on the draft, I kept remembering material I had developed over the past five years that seemed worth including, with updates as needed.  
 One of the overarching goals, as you noted, is that Longboat Key, the City of Sarasota, and Sarasota County share many core priorities, especially during a challenging time. My hope is that, even when there are disagreements over implementation, starting from a largely shared

See Letters, page 6



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# WineTimes



## World Cup 2026 Drinks

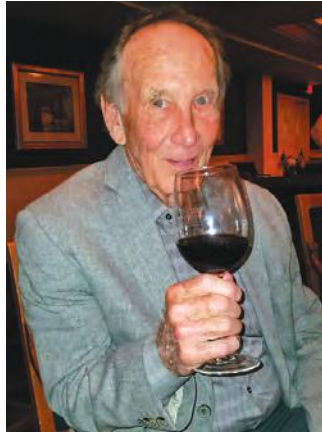
*Now that the USA Men's National Soccer Team has won Group D and secured a spot in the Knockout Round of the 2026 Fútbol World Cup, our attention will shift to the viewing events divided by the nations advancing in the tournament. Beverage advertisers are targeting and bars and shops are stocking the drinks fans prefer. The fans of the favorites for the Cup divide the beverage market into segments that extend across the globe.*

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

Advertisers project their TV ads on LED boards on the perimeter of the pitch. These ads reach the TV audience while play continues. Due to health concerns, the World Cup in 2026 has added a mid-half hydration break, a la the NFL, well appreciated by TV networks. Tik Tok, X, Facebook, and Instagram personalize their notifications and search results to drive pop-up ads to suspected fans of national teams. Collection of small referral fees on the web has become a trillion-dollar industry. The ancient practice of selling newspaper ads to support, among other things, listings of places to watch World Cup matches with like-minded fans continues as a print back-up. By air, cable, or satellite, rectangular displays frame popular culture.

Alcoholic beverage and food ads have a large footprint in the rectangular screen media. Beer and fast food more frequently show up on network or cable TV. Depending on histories of web searches, wine, wine dinners, spirits, and fine dining ads pop-up more frequently when browsing on the web (though more likely for us than many others). During the World Cup, we are seeing more ads from vineyards in nations favored to advance in the Knock-out round.

The association between Fútbol/soccer and wine looks obvious in that four of the five largest producers of wine (France, Spain, USA, Argentina), are advancing to the Knock-Out round. France and Spain eliminated top-producer Italy before the group matches began. The fourth largest producer, the USA, as well as Portugal, the country with the largest per-capita wine consumption, are moving on as well. Other nations likely to move on include Germany,



better known for beer but a producer of many excellent wines as well, and England, another beer country with a more recent stake in sparkling wine. South Africa, a major wine producer, has a good chance of moving up, as does the producer of a smaller volume of high-quality wines, Canada. Mexico, a major producer of beer brands such as Modelo, Carona, and Dos X's, and Brazil are moving to the next level despite their meager wine production.

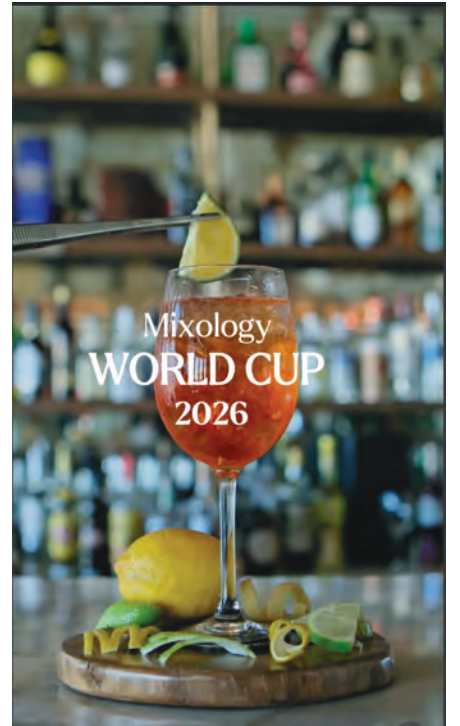
Why are the major wine producing nations favorites for winning the World Cup in 2026? It seems likely to us that the rich premier leagues in Europe and England have drawn superior athletes from all over the world for several generations and have developed a pipeline of elite talent. The French star Kylian Mbappé, born in Paris, followed in the footsteps of his fútbol coach father from Cameroon. Spain's 18-year-old star Lamine Yamal was born in Barcelona to an immigrant family. Both of these second-generation athletes joined training programs sponsored by prestigious fútbol clubs at early ages. This pattern has repeated across national teams.

World Cup viewing parties offer a unique time for exploring obscure wines from the major wine producing nations. Consider a couple of examples. From Spain we have a 2020 Consentino Monastrell Barrica. This inky dark red wine has a black fruit intensity and the heft of a robust Cabernet Sauvignon. The French call this grape Mourvèdre. From Portugal we have the 2024 Aveleda Fonte Vinho Verde. This low alcohol wine (9.5% ABV) has a mild fresh fruit with a touch of sweetness.

We feel fortunate to have found this place during the first five months of its opening. We shall return.

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

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



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## St. Armands, from page 1

One district. Three addresses. A near-complete turnover of tenants — and a menu that keeps coming back to the water.

### Pinchers Drops Anchor at 300 John Ringling

The newest arrival is also the most straightforward. Pinchers has signed a long-term lease for more than 8,000 square feet at 300 John Ringling Blvd. and is aiming to open in October.

The restaurant plans to occupy both floors, with around 200 seats and a staff of roughly 75 to 100. A small portion of the space is set aside for retail — branded shirts and the like — but the emphasis is squarely on crab, shrimp and a relaxed, family-friendly, flip-flops-welcome atmosphere a short walk from Lido Beach.

Pinchers is the flagship concept of Phelan Family Brands, a portfolio of more than a dozen restaurant concepts that began in 1997 with the original Pinchers Crab Shack in Bonita Springs and has since grown to include names like Deep Lagoon and Texas Tony's Rib & Brewhouse. The St. Armands location will push the group to 27 restaurants along the Gulf Coast. Of the chain's 10 existing Pinchers, from Naples to Wesley Chapel, the closest to the Circle are in Lakewood Ranch and Venice, roughly 14 and 20 miles away.

The property at 300 John Ringling is held by a group of Michigan-based LLCs that paid \$8 million for it in 2022, according to Sarasota County records. Ripco Real Estate represented the ownership in the deal. The company's founder is said to be personally assembling the coastal art and crabbing paraphernalia that will line the walls, and there is talk of enlarging one of the building's two bars so the levels match.

### Shore's Return, Reengineered

If Pinchers is a lease, Shore is a construction project — and the newest filing spells out just how ambitious.

The plan knits 24 and 28 N. Boulevard of the Presidents into a single three-story, mixed-use building of roughly 17,000 square feet. The ground floor would hold more than 7,000 square feet of retail plus a café of about 1,820 square feet. The second floor would house a Shore restaurant of roughly 8,500 square feet. The buildings have already been gutted, and crews are fortifying the infrastructure underneath.

The third floor is drawn as about 4,580 square feet of residential space wrapped around a central pool, with four rooms labeled as suites and a gym in the southwest corner. For now, the plan is to build that top level as a dried-in shell — walls, doors and windows to seal it, but the interior finished later depending on timing and budget. The likely sequence: open the retail and café first, the restaurant shortly after, and leave the top floor for another day.

The ownership structure has come into sharper focus, too. The land is held by Kauffman Shore Properties LLC, a partnership between restaurateur Tom Leonard and the Sarasota development family led by Mark Kauffman and his daughter, Mindy Kauffman. The conceptual design is mid-century modern, pitched as a deliberate complement to the Circle's eclectic mix of older façades.

Shore, it's worth remembering, never fully left the barrier islands: it continues to run its bay-front restaurant and boutique at 800 Broadway on the north end of Longboat Key, a 400-foot stretch of waterfront with stadium seating and a retractable roof.

### The Inside-Out Aquarium

The most interesting part of the Shore plan isn't the menu. It's the glass.

To keep the building operational through the next storm — and to satisfy the federal flood rules that govern any major rebuild on the island — the ground floor is slated for flood-proof glass, roughly 10 feet tall and running on the order of \$5,000 per linear foot. A structural slab some 20 inches thick would run the length of the building. Total cost, the developer will say only, runs into the millions.

Done right, it makes the corner one of the first buildings on the Circle engineered as an inside-out aquarium: water can rise against the glass, and the space inside stays dry. The logic is as much fiscal as architectural. If a building survives a surge without flooding, the owner isn't waiting on a federal recovery check afterward — and the barrier island isn't watching another gutted storefront sit dark for two years. On a Circle that took two floods in a single season, resilience has quietly become a design philosophy.

### The Third Floor Waits for July 15

The Shore project makes its first stop before the city's Development Review Committee on July 15, and the third floor is the piece neighbors and merchants will watch most closely.

St. Armands sits in the city's Commercial Tourist zoning district, which does not currently

permit hotels on the Circle. The filing describes the top floor as residential, with the long-discussed possibility that it could one day operate as a boutique hotel if the code ever changes — a prospect residents have consistently opposed and one that would require a separate, uphill approval. For the moment, the plans call for a single residence and a shell. That debate will play out at City Hall over the coming months; the rest of the Circle's revival is already underway.

### A Quadrant Rebuilt, Storefront by Storefront

Shore and Pinchers are the headline acts, but the fuller story is how much of the storm-battered Circle has already come back.

On the south side of Boulevard of the Presidents — one of the district's hardest-hit blocks — a three-unit retail building at 28 S. Boulevard of the Presidents that took heavy flood damage in 2024 has been renovated and is now fully leased. The new tenant mix reads like a snapshot of the Circle's next chapter:

Le Shop, an aesthetic wine-and-coffee bar pouring handcrafted coffee and tea and a selection of natural wines, with fresh pastries from local bakers and a tidy market of global snacks. It sits across from The Met and is open daily except Monday.

Acadia Jewels, which opened in January 2026 as the first Florida location of the Maine-based jeweler.

Flambo, a Caribbean restaurant that opened in

late 2025 at 40 S. Boulevard of the Presidents.

Nönnö Umberto, a newly opened Italian spot rounding out the district's dining bench.

Vacancies that gaped after the hurricanes are filling with national chains, first-to-Florida boutiques and homegrown names alike.

### The Sweet Finish

The capstone on that rebuilt quadrant is a sweet one. Chocolate Emporium, the popular Anna Maria Island chocolatier, opened its first Sarasota shop on the Circle in June — a 1,446-square-foot store of handmade chocolates, fresh fudge and, in a nod to the setting, saltwater taffy, all within walking distance of Lido Beach.

The shop is an offshoot of the original on Anna Maria Island, opened by a European candy maker who decided, after a single successful year up the coast, that St. Armands had exactly the clientele for high-end confection. It was the final tenant to fill the once-battered block — the last light switched back on.

### The Bottom Line

Strip away the individual leases and a single trend line emerges: capital is flowing back onto the most protected — and most storm-exposed — commercial acre in Sarasota, and it is betting real money that the Circle is worth not just reopening but reengineering.

Pinchers is wagering on 200 seats and a fall opening. Shore is wagering millions on flood-proof glass and a 2028 return. A rebuilt south block is wagering on wine, jewelry, chocolate and a mix of cuisines from Caribbean to Italian. Each of them is a vote of confidence in the same fundamentals — Lido Beach next door, foot traffic that never really left, and a clientele that has the means to spend.

Real questions remain, and they'll be argued at City Hall well into the fall: how high, how dense, and whether "residential" stays residential. But the direction of travel is no longer in doubt. The Circle took two floods in one season and answered with crab shacks, chocolate, flood-proof glass and a table set for 200.

It is, unmistakably, back in the water.

*Done right, it makes the corner one of the first buildings on the Circle engineered as an inside-out aquarium: water can rise against the glass, and the space inside stays dry. The logic is as much fiscal as architectural.*

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# Editor Letters



## Letters, from page 2

vision and set of facts can make those conversations much easier.

I did leave a hard copy of the briefing book with Allen Parsons. I'm sure it would be available for you to borrow and share. It is much easier to thumb through in hard copy, including the approximately 70-page appendix.

I did note that one commissioner mentioned there is already close cooperation between City staff, commissioners, and Longboat Key. I agree that there is ongoing dialogue on transportation, including through the MPO process. But as you will see, my Sarasota 101 effort is about much more than transportation. That is where I personally see room for more communication, particularly with both municipalities having new incoming city/town managers. In this regard, I look forward to the tentatively planned joint city/town commission meeting in late September.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

David Lough  
Sarasota

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: David Lough

Thank you again for speaking at our Longboat Key Town Commission meeting yesterday. Our Town Manager shared the DSCA Downtown Sarasota 101 briefing book you referenced, and we appreciate having that resource. As you noted, we share core priorities - protecting quality of life and strengthening storm resiliency among them - which makes this information especially relevant to us.

Debra Williams

Mayor  
Town of Longboat Key

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop

David is a wonderfully active, informed, and an engaged resident in the downtown of the City of Sarasota but also the City in general. We don't always see eye-to-eye, which is beside the point, but he cares about the community, he does his homework (and then some), and is respectful. We can agree, disagree, discuss, debate, and walk away respectfully. Let me know if you want to chat more. PS - As a side note, during Covid, he was an invaluable help in accumulating statistics for us. I'll never forget that.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

This gentleman came to LBK today - briefing book he brought is attached. Do you know him? Is this accurate info?

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Longboat Key Commission

Here's the link to the resource that Mr. Lough referenced in his remarks today. While I haven't read it cover to cover, there is some excellent data and observations that are worth your

**See Letters, page 7**



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# EditorLetters



## Letters, from page 6

time to review in advance of the joint meeting with the City of Sarasota in late September.

Howard N. Tipton  
Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## DSCA Data Briefing Book

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton  
The data related briefing book, referenced by David Lough who spoke at the Open to the Public portion of the commission meeting this morning, is linked-to here in case the Commission is interested in viewing it.

Allen Parsons  
Director Planning, Zoning & Building Department  
Town of Longboat Key

## Thank you

To: Omar Franco  
Do you have the contact info for the FEMA rep who spoke to us? His card vanished from my bag.

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Thank you

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop  
Hey BJ – it was great spending time with all of you as well. And yes – Shannon is a big part of our team. I thought it was a great trip as well and am happy to hear you thought so too. Please let me know how we can ever be of any help.

Omar Franco  
Senior Director, Chair Government Law and Lobbying Practice Group  
Washington, DC

## Thank You

To: Senior Director Omar Franco  
It was wonderful to get to know you a bit better on this trip. Loved our time at dinner Tuesday night. Shannon was fabulous with us. I hope we see more of her. I believe this was one of our most successful fly-ins and your team was a great part of that. If I can ever be of any help please do not hesitate to contact me.

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner

Town of Longboat Key

## Sarasota Chamber of Commerce

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams  
As artificial intelligence continues to reshape industries across the globe, understanding its impact on creativity, innovation, and the workforce has never been more important.

On Tuesday, July 14 from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce will host our next State of the Community luncheon featuring Dr. Davis Schneiderman, President of Ringling College of Art and Design. Dr. Schneiderman is a nationally recognized leader at the intersection of artificial intelligence, higher education, the arts, and creative practice.

His presentation, What Happens When Creativity Meets Artificial Intelligence?, will explore how AI is transforming art, design, and creative professions while highlighting the critical role of human judgment, ethics, and ingenuity in navigating this rapidly evolving landscape.

Dr. Schneiderman brings decades of leadership experience in higher education and has emerged as a national voice on the ethical, creative, and educational implications of AI. As Principal Investigator of HUMAN (Humanities Understanding of the Machine-Assisted Nexus), a \$1.2 million Mellon Foundation initiative, he has helped shape conversations around preparing students, professionals, and organizations for an AI-driven future.

In addition to this timely discussion, attendees will enjoy lunch from The Carlisle Inn and the opportunity to connect with fellow business and community leaders.

I hope you'll consider taking part in this important conversation as we explore one of the most significant forces shaping our future.

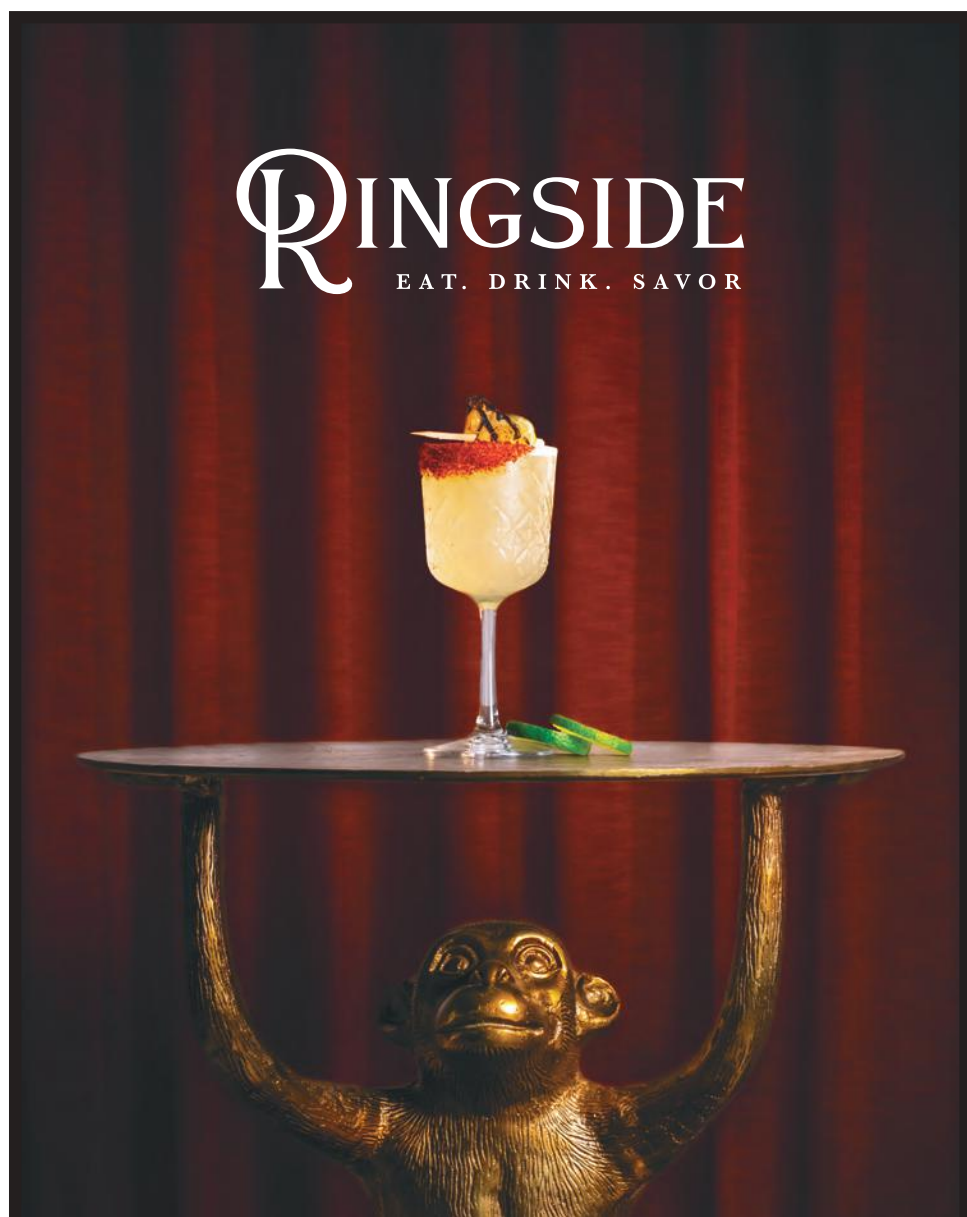
Ed Hill  
Vice President  
The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Permit

To: Longboat Key Plans Examiner Neal Mazzei  
Thank you for the quick response and for your support!  
Sam McCarter  
Director Finance and Business Operations  
Sea Horse Beach Resort

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Permit

To: Sea Horse Finance Director Sam McCarter  
Given the site-specific safety related balcony situation of your project, I consider your revision request to revise your existing permit scope of work to include as an acceptable proposal.  
**See Letters, page 8**



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# EditorLetters



## Letters, from page 7

Please have your design professional of record for this project, in concert with your contractor of record, officially revise your job description scope for the existing permitted plans to include incidental siding repair/replacement to facilitate the completions of your project that is obviously necessary I consider incidental to your project. I've copied in Marie, our Permitting Manager, as well as our two Permit Technicians Kevin and YaYa so we are all on the same page moving forward with the permit revision to your project. Please remember to also send your plan revision request to Roalando Gomez with the FDEP Office. Let me know if you have any questions.

Neal Mazzei  
Chief Plans Examiner & Floodplain Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Permit

To: Longboat Key Plans Examiner Neal Mazzei

As you may recall, the Sea Horse recently completed the first stage of a permitted balcony replacement. We will continue to replace balcony sections as occupancy and finances allow. Your offices advised us that the permit (BC-ALT-26-0015).

Sam McCarter  
Director Finance and Business Operations  
Sea Horse Beach Resort

## Sea Horse Beach Resort Permit

To: Longboat Key Plans Examiner Neal Mazzei

As you may recall, the Sea Horse recently completed the first stage of a permitted balcony replacement. We will continue to replace balcony sections as occupancy and finances allow. Your offices advised us that the permit (BC-ALT-26-0015) may remain open for the duration of the project as long as the proper steps are taken to keep it "active".

In the course of the balcony project, we found it necessary to add some Hardie board siding to the exterior of the building around the balcony area to aesthetically address the balcony brackets and areas marred by the balcony installation. Since the siding is integral to the completion of the balcony project, we would like to amend the original project to include the siding.

Could we please work with your office to do this? Amending the permit (rather than opening a new one) will allow us to coordinate the reviews and approvals of both workstreams, be more cost efficient, and likely save us considerable time. The time factor is especially important as hurricane season progresses. Not only will we have to work around potential storms, but the Hardie board siding provides an additional layer of protection from the driving rain, wind, and potential storm surge. Thank you for your consideration.

Sam McCarter  
Director Finance and Business Operations  
Sea Horse Beach Resort

To: Todd Rhoad

I would not be the best person to talk to about this. I'm not sure how big an issue this is in our City. So, I am copying the city manager and deputy city manager with this response. That way if there is any interest, they can have the appropriate staff respond.

Liz Alpert  
Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Non-tax revenue stream

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Liz Alpert

The city's budget can get beat up by damages from traffic crashes. Inflation has been brutal over the past few years, where material costs have increased 35-60 percent and city labor costs have grown by 40 percent. For some signalized intersections, repair costs have increased by 100 percent. Now, consider that many of the damages are caused by non-residents (i.e., people who do not pay local taxes), the city's budget absorbs all of the costs of the damages, repairs, emergency services, traffic control, etc.

The only way to offset these costs are to review 100 percent of the crash reports to find all damages and file the claims against the responsible driver. The city doesn't have the resources or the process to do this.

Would you consider outsourcing this effort to a company that doesn't use your budget (i.e., contingency fee), doesn't use city personnel, data or other resources?

We review 100 percent of the crash reports and file all claims on behalf of the city. We recover all funds, keep our contingency fee and remit the remaining funds to the city monthly.

There is never a loss of focus on capturing these funds and evaluating the data to identify trends that present future risk to the city. Would you have a few minutes to discuss this?

Monthly revenue. Safer streets. No cost. No effort.  
Todd Rhoad  
CFO  
Peachtree Recovery Services, Inc.

## Orange and Laurel Crosswalk

To: Todd Rhoad

Yes, I remember. Very sad. Hopefully it will never happen again.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Orange and Laurel Crosswalk

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

This is absolutely fantastic news. As you know that was the site of terrible injury and a safety concern of Laurel Park for years.

Ron Kashden  
Sarasota

## Orange and Laurel Crosswalk

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

Thank you! This is great news for the neighborhood! Thank you again!

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Orange and Laurel Crosswalk

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

You inquired about the crosswalk at Orange and Laurel that needed to be restriped. Staff has shared this crosswalk was removed because of installing a new one nearby, several years back. Regardless of this history, the City has budgeted funds in our existing CIP to reinstall this crosswalk, including sidewalk work, ADA ramps, and thermoplastic striping. This work should be completed by the end of this calendar year. Please let me know if you have any additional questions. Thanks!

Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

## The Transfer and Development Rights program's Restrictive Covenant Agreement

To: Danielle Benjamin

Thank you so much for your email. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss your concerns and suggestions and have copied Christina on this email to arrange a meeting at your convenience.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## The Transfer and Development Rights program's Restrictive Covenant Agreement

To: Sarasota City Commission

I write to you on behalf of my client, the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation, otherwise known as "SAHP". My client seeks to raise some points for consideration by the City Commission regarding the City's Transfer and Development Rights program's ("TDR") preservation restrictive covenant agreement.

To that end, please find our letter to you which details the specific points for the City's consideration along with the suggested revisions. Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to discussing with you further.

Danielle Benjamin, Esq.  
Miami

## Parking Violation

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

I have forwarded to Steve's staff to give me some more background information.

Karie Friling  
City Manager  
City of Sarasota

## Parking Violation

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

See below. Please let me know your response when you can. We seem to be getting a lot of these emails about excessive enforcement.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Parking Violation

To: Sarasota City Mayor Debbie Trice

In December, 2025, I received a Palm Avenue Garage parking violation. My appeal was denied with the explanation that I should have known of the "New" cell phone payment system, despite the fact that scant information was displayed at the garage entrance and the public was not informed of the new system. I paid the \$25 fine and the additional \$25 dispute charge. I informed the entire City Commissioners of my concerns: only Vice-Mayor Ohlrich replied. A related Letter-to-the-Editor was published in the Herald-Tribune.

Subsequently I used the cell-phone system on a number of occasions without a problem. However this afternoon, June 20, 2026, upon parking at 1:50 p.m. and attending a 2 p.m. FST performance I returned to my car at 2:45 p.m. and found a parking violation. I used my cell phone as previously, entered the 2,274 area, entered the 2-hour time period, and the cell screen said that I would be charged \$2.75. A subsequent screen was blank. I am totally mystified as to what went wrong. I'm returning this ticket to you as I refuse to pay for system errors, in addition to the \$2.75.

In my Dec. 2025 correspondence with Vice Mayor Ohlrich, I mentioned that various parking garages across the country have abandoned their cell phone system because at certain locations within their garages, cell phones were inoperable. Attenuation of cell phone signals are caused by thick concrete floors and walls, along with iron rebars within the concrete. I don't know if this is a problem within the Palm garage, but I know that attenuation is certain.

I am asking that the \$50 I paid in Dec. 2025 be refunded and that this new citation be eliminated. I take pride in being a law-abiding citizen, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to patronize events and restaurants in the city with these parking issues.

Robert Herickhoff  
Nokomis

# KeyRealEstate

## Bird Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key latest sales

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath	Days On Market	Sale Price
581 HIBISCUS WAY	3,235	\$3,850,000	4 4 1	1	\$3,664,311
5005 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#5	4,044	\$3,995,000	4 4 1	738	\$3,500,000
600 DE NARVAEZ DR	1,971	\$2,750,000	3 3 0	97	\$2,590,000
7149 LONGBOAT DR N	3,230	\$2,399,000	4 3 0	60	\$2,250,000
2410 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#131	3,825	\$1,849,000	3 3 1	28	\$1,700,000
3040 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#283	2,550	\$1,799,000	3 3 0	198	\$1,650,000
2341 HARBOUR OAKS DR	2,282	\$1,399,990	3 3 0	8	\$1,410,000
3511 FAIR OAKS CT	2,579	\$1,399,999	3 2 1	82	\$1,325,000
2675 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#303	1,896	\$1,295,000	2 2 0	2	\$1,320,000
580 RUSSELL ST	2,716	\$950,000	5 3 1	87	\$914,750
535 DE NARVAEZ DR	1,556	\$750,000	2 2 0	4	\$750,000
2110 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#536	2,031	\$749,000	3 2 0	29	\$725,000
706 BAYPORT WAY Unit#706	1,601	\$739,000	2 2 0	68	\$700,000
5055 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#435	1,484	\$599,900	2 2 0	181	\$575,000
1975 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#G4-206	1,068	\$449,000	2 2 0	232	\$430,000
4360 CHATHAM DR Unit#305	747	\$320,000	1 1 0	134	\$290,000
408 JACKSON DR	2,585	\$2,998,000	4 4 0	59	\$2,750,000
111 S PINEAPPLE AVE Unit#1204	2,845	\$2,950,000	3 3 1	289	\$2,600,000
325 GOLDEN GATE PT Unit#502	2,263	\$2,420,000	3 3 1	0	\$2,420,000
301 QUAY COMMONS Unit#1703	1,828	\$1,795,000	2 3 0	206	\$1,600,000
800 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#1217	1,830	\$1,300,000	2 2 1	76	\$1,180,000
1350 5TH ST Unit#306	1,836	\$950,000	3 3 1	121	\$960,000
226 GOLDEN GATE PT Unit#32	1,454	\$799,000	2 2 0	179	\$775,000
800 S BLVD OF THE PRESIDENTS Unit#5	1,090	\$520,000	3 2 0	356	\$470,000
750 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#307	810	\$400,000	1 1 0	106	\$390,000
1064 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#1212	1,137	\$368,000	1 2 0	145	\$340,000
850 S TAMIAMI TRL Unit#308	876	\$349,000	2 2 0	9	\$330,000

### Letters, from page 8

#### Beach Renourishment at 2110 Benjamin Franklin Drive

To: Gloria Bork

Thanks for contacting us with your concern about the extent of the beach renourishment. I am copying the city manager and deputy city manager with this response so that the appropriate staff can respond.

Liz Alpert

Commissioner

City of Sarasota

#### Beach Renourishment at 2110 Benjamin Franklin Drive

To: Sarasota City Commission

As a homeowner at 2110 Benjamin Franklin Drive, Unit 202, on Lido Key, I am respectfully writing to address some concerns I have regarding the recent beach renourishment project. I am deeply concerned for the safety of our condominium complex. I am not a qualified engineer to assess the exact measurement of how much farther the beach was extended west along our shore as well as our neighbors Sarasota Sands and The Orchid, but a visual inspection, in my opinion, reveals that the beach renourishment for our properties was not extended enough.

I walked north past the public beach to view the amount of extension that was made along the shore, and it appears that in most cases the properties are now sitting well east of the shoreline. Unfortunately, it does not appear that there was much extension added to our shore. Already almost half of the groin rocks are exposed just north of our property and almost all the groin rocks to our south are exposed in just the few months since the project. I am a FEMA Contract Inspector, and for the past 10 years I have seen how much beach erosion occurs from even a tropical storm, not to mention what a Cat 5 hurricane can surely do. Our recent experience with Hurricane Helene is a testament to how much sand will erode during such an event. We easily lost as much sand as currently is between our seawall and the shore. I have seen the destruction of hurricanes at every level, and I believe that our complex is in a dangerous position.

I greatly respect and am very thankful for what hard work you have done to successfully add beach nourishment to the majority of the western shore of Lido Key. I know you care about the safety of all your homeowners and take every precaution possible to protect our properties. Therefore I am asking that you please reassess the amount of extension that was afforded to the last three properties to the south of the island. I hope that you will come to the conclusion that the job was not completed correctly and that the necessary corrections will be made.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gloria Bork

Sarasota

### A problem this morning

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

Thanks so much! I appreciate it.

Jen Ahearn-Koch

City Commissioner At-Large

City of Sarasota

### A problem this morning

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

Welcome back. Yes, I will ask staff to compile the information.

Karie Friling

City Manager

City of Sarasota

### A problem this morning

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling

Hope you are well. Please see the below correspondence I received from two constituents.

At our "one-on-one meeting" next week, in addition to our Agenda Review, I would like to respectfully request to see the documents allowing for the removal of these trees; specifically: a tree survey, the state's approval documents, the arborist's report, the state statutes that allow for this and how that statute applies to this situation, and any other back up info.

Jen Ahearn-Koch

City Commissioner

City of Sarasota

### A problem this morning

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

I was able to read the city ordinances on the start of noise; they are allowed to start after 7 a.m.

The only thing I can read into these ordinances is he escaped having to pay a great fee to cut these down. Not sure when he submits his survey with the trees on it and where the structure will go. He will not be asked to save these trees by moving his structure. As now that they are cut they cannot be saved. He will also argue that the roots will be cut so the tree will die. The only tree that could have been considered as not a healthy tree was the mango. Even with the split tree trunk for years it has been producing mangoes. Maybe something can be added to these ordinances to prevent this from happening again.

Mary Ciner

Sarasota

### A problem this morning

To: Mary Ciner

Can you send me the address of the house where the trees were and the name of the person you spoke with at the City?

Jen Ahearn-Koch

City Commissioner

City of Sarasota

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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.

## June 26

### Found property

11:33 a.m.

Officer Zunz responded to the police lobby for a vacationer who wanted to turn in an Apple wrist-watch he found on the beach near his condominium this morning. He advised he had been walking on the beach during sunrise this morning at the 5400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he looked down and saw the watch in the sand. The watch is charged and appears to be in excellent working and cosmetic condition, though it is password protected and cannot be accessed. The watch has been placed into a locker.



made phone contact with the complainant who said there was a group of juveniles being loud at the pool, which prevented her from sleeping. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer made contact with the three juvenile male parties. The juveniles were not being loud but admitted to yelling and such. The juveniles told Officer Troyer they lived at Companion Way and their parents were aware of them being at the pool. Officer Troyer advised the juveniles of the noise ordinance, to which they apologized for and left the area without incident. Case clear.

## June 27

### Found property

4:00 p.m.

Officer Maple was dispatched to Halyard Lane in Sarasota for a report of a found boat. The complainant did not want to meet. Upon his arrival, Officer Maple located the 15-foot white vessel, tied with one line from the bow to the seawall behind a home under construction. One of the sponsons was partially deflated and the boat had 3-4 inches of water on deck. Officer Maple boarded the vessel and located the registration in the glove compartment. The boat was shown as being registered to someone from Ocala. However, a local search showed the homeowner lived at Halyard Lane, and Officer Maple attempted to locate the owner. With no one being home, Officer Maple completed a more thorough internet search through public information and was able to get the cell phone number and contact the owner. The owner stated they had just left this morning and the boat must have gotten free from its slip. The owner stated she would make arrangements to move the boat back to her property right away and thanked Officer Maple for his efforts. Case clear.

## June 28

### Vehicle

9:29 a.m.

Officer Maple while on patrol in the 5500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive when he observed a blue Toyota Avalon parked perpendicular to the handicapped parking space with both occupants and two bystanders standing alongside the vehicle. Upon his arrival, Officer Maple spoke to the driver who stated she had backed out of the handicap parking and the underside of her car caught the concrete parking stop and tear the plastic underside of her front valance and she was unable to drive the vehicle. Damaged plastic was secured and the driver and her husband departed the area without incident. Case clear.

## June 29

### Vehicle

10:29 a.m.

Officer Miano while on patrol, received a tag alert for a silver Ford sedan traveling southbound in the area of Gulf of Mexico Drive near North Shore Road. A vehicle inquiry was conducted through law enforcement databases and showed the driving privileges were suspended. Officer Miano located the vehicle in the 5600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive and conducted a traffic stop. Upon contact with the male driver, he confirmed there was no emergency and knew his Florida Driver's License was suspended and he currently possesses a Florida ID only. Based on the investigation, the driver was issued a non-custodial arrest for violation of Driving while License Suspended, Canceled, or Revoked with knowledge. The driver was released from the scene on a non-custodial arrest. Case clear.

## June 30

### Noise

9:11 p.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to Cedars Street regarding a noise complaint. Officer Troyer

## July 1

### Alarm

12:18 a.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to Harbor Cove Circle regarding a burglary alarm with pool door entry. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer checked all doors and windows to the residence. All appeared secure and no signs of forced entry were observed. Officer Troyer contacted the homeowner and advised them of the incident. Case clear.

## July 2

### Vehicle

11:58 a.m.

Officer Martinson while on patrol at the intersection of Gulf of Mexico Drive and Bay Isles Parkway when he observed a blue Chevy Equinox traveling northbound on Gulf of Mexico Drive and fail to stop for a solid red light before making a right turn onto Bay Isles Parkway. Officer Martinson conducted a traffic stop in the parking lot of CVS located at Bay Isles Parkway. Officer Martinson made contact with the male driver who was later identified via a photo, and Officer Martinson explained to him why he had been pulled over. The man apologized for running the red light and stated he was just tired and hungry and on his way to Publix to get lunch. When Officer Martinson asked him for his driver's license he said he did not have one, but showed his ID card on his cell phone. The man also would later say he knew his license was suspended. Officer Martinson ran the vehicle and driver through NCIC/FCIC and both came back clear of any wants or warrants. The man was given a criminal citation with a court date for operating a vehicle while Driver's License Suspended/Canceled/Revoked, and a moving citation for failure to stop at a steady red-light signal before making a right turn. Case clear.

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# OpinionEditorial

## 90 Minutes, One Goal, and a Nation Weirdly at Peace

*We are a Nation of Contradictions, Buffering at 4K. There is an aspect of cultural schizophrenia to the World Cup. To feel it properly, you have to scroll back through the sheer spectacle of mass culture we have been served over the last twelve months — the whole psychotic slideshow.*

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

First there was Kristi Noem, out on horseback, talking tough about illegal immigration like a character who wandered off the set of Yellowstone and forgot to return the horse.

Then there was Pam Bondi, issuing directives putting sanctuary cities — and the “aliens” within them — formally On Notice. Then came the nighttime round-ups on the evening news, shot with the hushed, urgent camerawork of a nature documentary.

Then Jeffrey Epstein came bobbing back up into the national consciousness, as he periodically does, like a ball you keep shoving underwater that keeps surfacing on the far side of the pool.

Then there was an actual shooting war with Iran — a real one, with the Strait of Hormuz and everything, a body of water roughly 100 percent of Americans could not have located on a map the previous Tuesday.

And then the whole deranged pageant reached what felt like its natural crescendo: a professional cage fight — a genuine MMA title bout — staged on the front lawn of the White House, beneath an 87-foot octagon and an overhead lighting rig that a grown adult, in a meeting, with a straight face, named “The Claw.”

But then, in a final and most improbable twist, every bit of it was wiped off our screens and replaced by the one force still capable of reuniting a shattered republic. Dominating the television once again, washing over the entire culture like a rinse cycle: FIFA World Cup soccer. Full circle. We had come all the way around, from a nation rounding people up to a nation getting weepy over Ecuador.

Which is how you find yourself, on this and every summer evening, in a living room from Longboat Key to Longmont, watching an entire country that spent a year starring in its own fever dream now settle in with a cold drink to watch grown men from distant nations kick a ball approximately nowhere.

Only in a deconstructed America — a country held together almost entirely by streaming services and the collective fear of losing one’s password — could those two things follow one another so seamlessly, on adjacent tabs.



STEVE REID

### FIFA Trumps Ice

Here is the part that would keep me up at night. We spent the last half of last year and the first half of this one rounding up more or less anyone who had claimed asylum for any reason other than a sports scholarship, a math scholarship, or a short and grateful turn in the hospitality industry. Whole planeloads of people were returned to the very countries we had decided, on reflection, we had no room for.

And now every single one of those countries has come roaring back — through FIFA, of all agencies — onto the World Cup stage. We are, at this exact moment, hosting them. The United States is co-hosting the whole spectacle with Canada and Mexico across eleven American cities, which means we deported the world in the spring and mailed it a stadium in the summer. Senegal is here. Ecuador is here. Ivory Coast, Morocco, Egypt, Iran — all here, all sponsored, all with commemorative merchandise. It is the largest and most awkward family reunion in recorded history, and remarkably, no one has brought it up.

### Amnesty: The Subjective Sport Nobody Medals In

I have come to believe that amnesty is itself a kind of sport — a purely subjective, point-of-view game played mostly in immigration holding cells. There are two ways to play. You can take the liberal position, which is to hear a person’s story and say, that sounds horrible, why on earth would you go back, please, stay. Or you can take the hard-ass position, which is to say, well, life is tough everywhere, pal, and if we took in every poor, repressed, politically inconvenient soul on the planet, we would eventually become the exact country you were so desperate to leave.

Both sides are, in their own way, entirely certain they are the reasonable one. This is what makes it a sport. There is no referee, no instant replay, and no VAR review that has ever once caused a single American to change his position on the subject at Thanksgiving dinner.

There Is No Longer One Television. There Are Nine Hundred Million Televisions.

And here is why all of this is landing so strangely: we no longer have a country that watches things together. We used to have a centralized, claustrophobic, top-down American broadcasting apparatus — three networks, one Cronkite, everybody herded into the same living room to feel the same feeling at the same time. That is gone. Now everybody watches everything, all the time, in a million different ways, on a million different glowing rectangles.

So these World Cup matches are simply on — everywhere, always, humming in the background of the entire nation like a benevolent low-grade fever. And it was somewhere inside that ambient haze, around the ninth match, that I finally, at long last, understood soccer.

### In Which I Finally, Genuinely Understand Soccer

Follow me here, because this took decades.

For most of my life, soccer struck me as the slowest-paced game on Earth that human beings nonetheless got wildly excited about. Unlike hockey, it never seemed to build to anything. Nobody fought. Nobody got checked into the boards hard enough to matter. And goals



— actual points, the entire ostensible purpose of the exercise — arrived roughly as often as Halley’s Comet. I was genuinely shocked at the sheer volume of enthusiasm being generated on behalf of so little scoring. You can watch an entire match, all ninety minutes plus the mysterious bonus minutes they seem to invent at the end, and everyone in the stadium is perfectly, radiantly content with a 1–0 final. One goal. For the whole thing.

This makes tennis look frantic. It makes a pitcher’s duel look like a fireworks accident. People say baseball is slow; baseball is a car chase next to this.

### The Overly Excited Petri Dish of Humanity

And then it clicked. Soccer is not slow. Soccer is a slow burn.

What you are actually watching is an overly excited petri dish of humanity — a living specimen under glass, half the organisms swimming and shifting frantically one direction, the other half swimming and shifting frantically the other, back and forth, back and forth, for a solid hour, until at some unpredictable moment one side finally breaks through and the whole stadium erupts as though a new element has been discovered. (Overly Excited Petri Dish, incidentally, would be an excellent name for a band.)

### Achieving a Zen-Like State of Crazy

The genius of it — and I say this as a man who has left a golf tournament because it was too stimulating — is that it forces you to stay in the moment. You cannot look away, because the one thing that matters might happen in any of the ten thousand seconds during which nothing is happening. It is a Zen-like state of craziness: total serenity and total anticipation, suspended in perfect balance, following the play-by-play, waiting for the moment.

There is none of the one-on-one tension of golf, or of singles tennis, or even of a good pitcher’s duel. It is almost the opposite of basketball. In basketball, you fully expect the shot to go in; scoring is assumed, routine, practically rude. Soccer is defined by the absence of scoring — it makes a chess match look fast-paced — and yet, crucially, and this is the part American culture has at last cracked wide open, there is an enormous quantity of alcohol one can comfortably consume while so very little is happening.

### Gratifying, Life-Affirming, and Completely Bizarre

Which brings us back to the sofa, and to the strange, gratifying, life-affirming, thoroughly bizarre summer we are all living through together but separately.

We are a nation that put a cage fight on the White House lawn, spent a year deciding the world was too full to admit anyone else, and then turned around and invited that same world over for the biggest party we have thrown since 1994 — and we are watching every bit of it at once, drunk and delighted, on nine hundred million different screens. There is something almost unbearably American about the whole arrangement: the contradiction, the spectacle, the streaming, and the deep, sincere, beer-scented joy of a room full of strangers erupting, in unison, over a single goal.

And then my favorite part of it all is just before any World Cup commercial break comes on a little glowing trophy says, “Brought to you by FIFA.”

I feel reassured by the order of the world.

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## St. Regis, from page 1

What those lawyers filed is close to a total denial. Paragraph by paragraph, the Answer concedes almost nothing. It admits the Town's boundaries "for jurisdictional purposes only." It admits that the Town issued a building permit in 2022 and again in 2024, but denies the Town's characterization of what those permits authorized. It admits that Unicorp removed the faux greenery that had covered the sign. Beyond that narrow band of admissions, the recurring refrain of the Answer is a single word — denied — or its lawyerly cousin, the assertion that a quoted document "speaks for itself."

Then, past the denials, come the six affirmative defenses. These are the argument. This is what Whittall intends to take to a Sarasota County judge, and, he has promised, well beyond one.

### The Word That Does Not Appear

Buried in the Second Affirmative Defense is the sentence Unicorp's lawyers most want a judge to remember. It is not about permits or plans or the mean-high-water line. It is about a gap.

"The words 'groins' and 'jetties,'" the Answer states, "do not appear at all in any part of the Code of Ordinances."

That is the whole defense compressed into fifteen words. The Town has built its complaint on four numbered code sections — two from the Zoning Code, two from the Sign Code — and asked a court to find that a fourteen-foot marine-stainless arch violates all four. Unicorp's reply is that none of those sections was written for a structure standing on a rock groin in sovereign Gulf waters, because the Town never wrote such a section at all. You cannot violate a rule that was never enacted, the argument runs. And the Town, on the arch, never enacted one.

The First Affirmative Defense sets up the same point as a fork, and it is worth reading closely, because it is the architecture of everything that follows. Either, the defense argues, the arch and sign sit outside the Town's territorial boundaries entirely — on state sovereign submerged land, beyond the reach of any municipal code — or, even if a judge finds the groin technically within the Town line, "the Town has not enacted regulation to implement its jurisdiction over the arch and sign on the groin and therefore cannot prohibit the arch and sign."

Heads, the Town has no jurisdiction. Tails, the Town has jurisdiction it never bothered to exercise. Unicorp asks the court to pick either.

### The State Permit, and a Certification Nobody Had Mentioned

Whittall's public argument, for a year, has been four words: it's in sovereign waters. The Second Affirmative Defense turns that instinct into a statute and adds a fact that has not been part of the public record until now.

The statute is Section 161.041(1), Florida Statutes, which the Answer quotes at length. It requires a permit from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for "any coastal construction or reconstruction or change of existing structures ... including groins, jetties ... upon state sovereignty lands below the mean-high-water line of any tidal water of the state." The Answer's point is structural: the Legislature, when it wanted to regulate what gets built on a groin below the high-water line, assigned that job to the state. It named groins specifically. Longboat Key's code never did.

And the state, Unicorp says, said yes. DEP issued Permit No. 8031535 to SR LBK II, LLC "to install post, rope and sign per the approved plans" on the groin. The Answer asserts that "the approved plans showed an arch with an embedded sign" — a direct, head-on collision with the Town's central factual claim that the engineering plans showed only posts and ropes, and that the arch appeared nowhere but in an artistic rendering.

Then the new fact. After construction was finished, the Answer states, DEP issued a Final Certification. That certification, according to the defense, certified that the "handrail and signage" was "inspected ... and was found to be acceptable and satisfactory in accordance with the approved plans and project description and with all conditions of the permit."

Read that again, because the Town's entire complaint is built on the premise that the sign was never approved by anyone. Whittall now says the opposite — that the state did not merely permit the sign in the abstract but sent an inspector, looked at the finished "signage," and blessed it in writing. In May, standing under the arch on Mother's Day weekend, Whittall told this newspaper the state had "confirmed" the previous week that "the sign was permitted correctly." At the time, that read as bravado. The Answer suggests he was describing a document.

Whether that document says what Unicorp says it says is now one of the central factual questions of the case. The Town has not yet had its chance to reply to it.

### The Yard That Runs the Wrong Way

The Third Affirmative Defense is the most technical, and the most quietly clever. It takes the Town's marquee zoning citation — Section 158.094(C) — and argues that the provision points landward, away from the arch.

Section 158.094(C) governs "Waterfront yard requirements." It requires every lot fronting the Gulf to maintain a "required gulf waterfront yard" a minimum of 150 feet deep, measured landward from the mean-high-water line or, where one exists, from the Erosion Control Line. The Town's theory is that the arch, sitting seaward of the Erosion Control Line, violates this setback.

Unicorp's answer is that a setback is a distance measured from a line, in a direction, and the direction is inland. The waterfront yard, the defense argues, "runs 150' landward of the ECL. It does not run backwards into the Gulf." A yard, under the Town's own definitions in Section

158.144, is "an open space on the same lot with a building." A lot is "a parcel of land ... occupied or intended for occupancy by a building." The Gulf of Mexico, the defense continues, is none of these things. It is not a lot. It is not land intended to be occupied by a building. It sits in no zoning district and carries no minimum zoning requirements. "Therefore," the Answer concludes, "the Gulf of Mexico cannot be a 'yard.'"

If there is no yard seaward of the Erosion Control Line, the argument goes, there is no waterfront-yard setback for the arch to violate. The Town's strongest zoning citation, in Unicorp's telling, measures a yard that stops at the beach and never reaches the water.

### Estoppel: Turning the Town's Own Permit Around

The single most powerful paragraph in the Town's complaint — the one this newspaper called "the trapdoor" — was about Whittall's own permits. By applying to Longboat Key for a building permit in 2022 and again in 2024, the Town argued, Whittall himself conceded that the groin was within the Town's jurisdiction. His signature admitted the very thing he now denies.

The Fourth Affirmative Defense grabs that same 2024 permit and swings it in the opposite direction.

If the Town issued Permit PB24-0117 in 2024 for the construction of handrails — timber posts, aluminum boots, ropes — on the groin, the defense reasons, then the Town necessarily believed that Section 158.099(A), the "structure over water" provision, did not prohibit structures

on the groin. Otherwise it could not have issued the permit. "The Town issued a permit for construction of these structures on the groin," the Answer states, "because section 158.099(A) does not prohibit such structures on the groin." Having permitted structures on the groin once, Unicorp argues, the Town is estopped — legally barred — from now claiming its code prohibits structures on the groin.

Both sides, in other words, now build their case on the same 2024 handrail permit. The Town says it proves Whittall accepted its jurisdiction. Whittall says it proves the Town's code permits what he built. A judge will read one permit two ways.

### The Sign Code That Stops at the Zoning Line

The Fifth Affirmative Defense does to the Sign Code what the third did to the Zoning Code: it argues geography. The Town's two sign citations — Sections 156.05 and 156.07 — must be read, the defense says, in pari materia, alongside the rest of Chapter 156. And the rest of Chapter 156, Unicorp argues, is written entirely around land and buildings inside zoning districts.

Section 156.07 lays out detailed sign specifications district by district — residential districts, then the commercial and institutional districts: INS, OI, C-1, C-2, C-3, M-1, T-3, T-6. Every specification is keyed to a zoning designation. The Gulf, the defense argues, "does not lie within a Zoning District and it has no zoning designation." A code that regulates signs by district cannot reach a structure standing in water that belongs to no district at all. "Since the Gulf does not lie within a Zoning District," the Answer states, "the criteria of section 156.07 does not apply

to the groin, arch or sign."

### No Survey, and a Thumb on the Scale for the Owner

The Sixth Affirmative Defense adds two things the first five had left implied. First, a burden: "The Town has not produced a survey proving that the groin lies within the territorial boundaries of the Town." The Town filed an aerial boundary map as Exhibit 1 to its complaint. Unicorp's position is that a map marked in red is not a survey, and that the party asking a court to tear down a structure bears the burden of proving, with precision, that the structure sits on land it can regulate.

Second, a rule of interpretation — and a citation. Florida law, the defense argues, resolves ambiguity in zoning against the government and in favor of the property owner. It quotes Rinker Materials Corporation v. City of North Miami: "Since zoning regulations are in derogation of private rights of ownership, words used in a zoning ordinance should be given their broadest meaning when there is no definition or clear intent to the contrary and the ordinance should be interpreted in favor of the property owner."

That canon is Unicorp's answer to every gap it has identified. Where the code is silent on groins, silent on jetties, silent on structures in the Gulf — the silence, Unicorp argues, must be read for Whittall, not against him.

### Two Readings of One Permit

Strip the case to its spine and it is a fight over a single eight-page state document, which both sides have filed and both sides quote.

The Town reads the fine print. The DEP Field Permit, on its face, was "valid only after all applicable federal, state and local permits are obtained," and it "does not authorize contravention of local setback requirements or zoning or building codes." A special condition adds: "Structure should be installed per local governmental ordinances." And Whittall, signing the application in February 2024, personally certified that he "shall obtain any applicable licenses or permits which may be required by federal, state, county or municipal law." The Town's argument is a closed loop: the state permit itself told Whittall to go get a Town permit, and

**See St. Regis, page 13**

*The arch stands where it has stood since August 2025 — no longer draped, no longer the subject of a favor Unicorp is asking, but the subject of a lawsuit that a judge has now promised to decide. It took generations of tennis and generations of litigation to build the ground this arch stands on. It will take, by the Court's own calendar, at least until the winter of 2028 to learn whether it stays.*

## St. Regis, from page 12

for the arch, he never did.

Unicorp reads the authorization and the certification. The same permit's project description says the permittee "is authorized to install post, rope and sign per the approved plans." A special condition contemplates "installation of sign, post and rope." And after the work was done, Unicorp says, the state came back and certified the "signage" as acceptable. If the state owns the submerged land, permitted the sign, and certified the sign, Whittall asks, what is left for a barrier-island town to prohibit?

The document is the same. The case is the distance between those two readings.

### And Then, the Court Set a Date

If the Answer was Whittall's move, the Court made one of its own. On July 2, 2026 — the same day this account went to press — Circuit Judge Dana Moss entered a six-page order that quietly reframes the entire fight. It sets the case for trial. It sets it a long way off.

The order designates Town of Longboat Key v. SR LBK, LLC and SR LBK II, LLC, Case No. 2026-CA-002703-NC, to the court's General Track and sets it for a nonjury trial — no jury, a judge deciding both the facts and the law. Docket sounding is scheduled for January 13, 2028. The three-week trial period opens January 24, 2028, in Courtroom 7-C of the Lynn N. Silvertooth Judicial Center on Ringling Boulevard in Sarasota.

That is roughly nineteen months from now. And it carries an irony that sits at the heart of this case. The Town's complaint leans on *Ware v. Polk County*, the 2005 decision holding that in a code-enforcement injunction suit, irreparable harm is presumed — the Town need not prove the arch is causing measurable damage, only that it violates the code. The legal theory is built for speed. The docket is not. Absent an earlier ruling, an earlier trial, or a settlement, the arch that the Town says causes irreparable harm will stand, undraped, through two more winter seasons.

The order does leave the Town a faster lane if it wants one. Paragraph 10 provides that a party may seek an earlier trial period, free of the usual strict requirements, if it moves within 30 days of the last defendant being served. Whether the Town pushes for that — or whether it is content to let the case ripen — is now a strategic choice with real consequences for Longboat Key taxpayers, who are financing the litigation.

Two other features of the order matter. First, it refers the case to mediation, with a deadline of November 23, 2027. Before any trial, both sides will be required to sit in a room with a neutral and attempt to settle. Given a defendant who has said the fight "could take years" and a Town Attorney who has warned commissioners she cannot guarantee recovery of the Town's costs even in victory, that mediation deadline may prove to be the most consequential date on the calendar.

Second, the order refers all discovery motions and all motions directed to the pleadings to a magistrate, the Honorable Medisa M. Turner — meaning the early trench warfare of the case, the fights over depositions and documents and the sufficiency of Whittall's defenses, will be argued in front of the magistrate rather than the judge, unless a party objects to the reference. The order also holds each side to a single expert witness per specialty, and lays down a cascade of 2027 deadlines: pleadings amended by May, fact and expert discovery closed by late September, summary-judgment motions heard by late October.

The practical translation: this is now a slow, fully litigated circuit-court case with a 2028 trial, a 2027 mediation, and a magistrate riding herd on the paperwork in between. The phone call to the Town Manager was in May. The reckoning is scheduled for the winter of 2028.

### What the Town Quietly Amended

Between the original complaint and Whittall's Answer, the Town filed a second version of its lawsuit — and it is worth being precise about what changed, because the answer is: almost nothing.

On June 11, 2026, special counsel Martin Garcia filed an Amended Complaint for Mandatory Injunctive Relief. A footnote explains why. The original complaint, filed May 15, "contained two Paragraph 34s and two Paragraph 52s." The amendment corrects the numbering. It is housekeeping — a scrivener's fix, not a change in strategy or substance. The four alleged code violations are identical. The exhibits are identical. The theory is identical.

Two small things did travel with the renumbering. The amended complaint now refers throughout to the "Gulf of America, f/k/a Gulf of Mexico," adopting the federal relabeling. And it resets the procedural clock: because a defendant answers the operative complaint, it was this amended version, not the May original, that Whittall's lawyers answered on June 18. The substance of the Town's case did not move an inch. But the pleading that now governs the lawsuit is the June 11 version, and the Answer on file responds to it.

### The Parcel Made of Lawsuits

None of this — not the arch, not the six defenses, not the promise to fight to the Florida Supreme Court — is a departure from the history of the eighteen acres on which the St. Regis stands. It is the continuation of it. On this parcel, litigation is not an interruption. It is the bedrock. Strip away the porte-cochère and the wedding lawn and the boardwalk and the groin, and what you find underneath is three-quarters of a century of Longboat Key trying to decide what may exist on its most contested piece of sand.

The story begins gently. In 1952, Sarasota developer Herb Field opened a collection of beach cottages on the site, with a nine-hole golf course and, at first, no tennis at all. Then, in 1969, a Buffalo orthodontist named Dr. Murray "Murf" Klauber — who had detoured to Longboat Key on a whim and fallen for the island — bought the place with a partner for a reported \$3.5 million and set out to build America's first "tennis-centric resort." He succeeded beyond any reasonable expectation. Tennis magazine named the Colony Beach & Tennis Resort the number-one tennis resort in the United States eight years running. Nick Bollettieri launched his academy on its courts. Bud Collins hosted his Hackers tournament there for the better part of two decades. President George W. Bush spent the night of September 10, 2001, at the Colony; the next morning he was reading with schoolchildren in Sarasota when the towers fell, and for the following day the resort became an impromptu national command post.

It was, for forty years, the thing that put Longboat Key on the world map — the reason a certain kind of affluent visitor came, played, and bought a house nearby. And then it came apart, in court, exactly the way it is coming apart again now.

The unraveling began with money for repairs. Between 2004 and 2006, Klauber asked the condominium owners who held the individual units to fund a renovation the aging resort badly needed. Three times they refused. In 2007, an angry ownership faction seized control of the association board and stopped paying operating costs. Klauber sued the owners to force the assessments. The association filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Klauber, eventually, threw his own Colony companies into Chapter 11 as well. In 2009, Bank of America filed to foreclose on Klauber and a string of his corporations. In August 2010, the Colony closed its doors. Its bankruptcy was converted to a Chapter 7 liquidation, the Klauber partnership was dissolved, and the family's four-decade grip on the property was pried loose by a federal judge who, by

several accounts, had lost patience with the whole convoluted war.

Klauber had tangled with the Town, too — and won. In an earlier era, after Longboat Key pulled his building permit for a luxury spa-condominium project, Klauber sued the Town for civil-rights violations. A federal jury awarded him nearly \$9 million, and in 1997 the Town settled for \$6.5 million in cash. The lesson of that verdict has never entirely left Town Hall: this parcel has taken Longboat Key to court before, and the last time it did, the Town wrote a very large check. Town Attorney Maggie Mooney's careful, repeated warnings this spring that she "cannot guarantee" recovery of the Town's costs are the words of an institution that remembers.

Then came Whittall. Unicorp National Developments bought the shuttered recreational property in August 2016 for \$22 million and inherited the parcel's genius for conflict. To assemble clean title, Whittall spent roughly five years at war with a Tennessee developer, Andy Adams, who controlled a bloc of holdout units and would not sell at Whittall's price — a fight the local press dubbed the Colony's "Battle of Gettysburg." Other unit owners filed their own claims and their own threats to challenge the Town's approvals. A Sarasota judge spent years untangling the mess before the condominium association was judicially terminated in 2021. By the time Whittall settled with Adams that spring, he estimated his total outlay on acquisition and demolition — before a single new wall rose — at roughly \$80 million.

What rose, finally, was the St. Regis Longboat Key: a roughly \$800 million resort-and-residential complex on some 17.6 acres, with a 168-room hotel and 69 luxury residences, that broke ground in 2021 and opened on August 16, 2024 — fourteen years, almost to the week, after the Colony closed. It has been, by the measures its owner cares about, an extraordinary success. One combined condominium at the property sold for \$21.24 million, the largest residential sale in Sarasota County history. Whittall calls it a "half-billion-dollar" investment and points, not without justification, to the jobs, the tax base, and the business it has pushed up and down St. Armands Circle and Gulf of Mexico Drive. He is not wrong that he built something remarkable. That is precisely what makes the current fight so hard for the community to resolve: two true things, a preserved island and a transformative resort, pulling against each other on the same beach.

### How the Arch Got to Court

The groin itself is a relic of the Colony — a rock structure the old resort built in the 1960s to fight beach erosion, and the only privately owned groin in the entire Town. Whittall rebuilt it, permitted the repair with the Town in 2022, added a boardwalk and rope railings under a 2024 Town permit, and then, in August 2025, crowned it with something no Town permit covered: a gleaming, roughly fourteen-foot arch of welded marine-grade stainless steel, bearing the St. Regis crown medallion and the words "ST. REGIS — LONGBOAT KEY," framing an open view to the horizon. He has said it cost about \$16,000, that it is rated for 150-mile-an-hour winds, and that it was "built to outlast my lifetime."

Longboat Key told him to take it down. What followed was a year of escalating civic theater. Unicorp asked the Town to amend its sign code to permit the arch. In November 2025, the Commission declined. In December, after Whittall came to Town Hall and made his case in person, the Commission reversed itself and voted 4-3 to have staff draft two ordinances — 2026-07, amending the Zoning Code, and 2026-08, amending the Sign Code — that would legalize the structure. On March 17, 2026, the Planning and Zoning Board recommended denying both. The hearing turned combustible: board members dismissed Unicorp's claim that the arch served a "public safety" wayfinding purpose as "legal gymnastics" and worse, and they fact-checked, from the dais, a sworn application statement that the arch had "withstood hurricanes Milton and Helene" — storms that struck in September 2024, nearly a year before the arch was built. Whittall apologized and said his team had misinformed him. The false claim remains in the Town's permanent record.

On the Friday before the Commission's scheduled May 4 vote on the ordinances, Unicorp's counsel abruptly withdrew the application altogether — closing the legislative door the company had spent six months prying open. Mayor Debra Williams announced the withdrawal to a half-emptied meeting room. The Town Manager, Howard Tipton, gave Unicorp until 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 8, to remove the arch. At 5:00 p.m., Whittall called Tipton and said he would not. Over Mother's Day weekend, he posed beneath the structure for a photograph, arms crossed, and told this newspaper he was prepared "to litigate to whatever extent necessary." On Friday, May 15, at 2:19 p.m., the Town filed suit. On June 11, it amended the complaint. On June 18, Whittall answered. On July 2, a judge set the trial.

Each step narrowed the room for anything but a courtroom. There is no room left.

### What Happens Next

The case now moves onto a track measured in seasons. Discovery will open, and the early motion fights — over documents, over depositions, over whether Whittall's six defenses are legally sufficient — will be argued before Magistrate Medisa Turner. Expect the paper to reach deep: into Unicorp's correspondence with DEP, into the "approved plans" both sides describe so differently, into whatever the state's Final Certification actually says, into the file at K&G Marine of Davie, which drew the arch in April 2025, months before it was installed and, the Town notes, never submitted for Town review.

Somewhere in that stretch, before the November 2027 deadline, the parties will be ordered to mediate. That is the off-ramp, if one exists. A developer who has framed this as a matter of principle and a Town that has framed it as a matter of code do not obviously meet in the middle — but mediation has settled less likely cases than this one, and the alternative is a three-week nonjury trial in January 2028, followed, if Whittall keeps his word, by an appeal to Florida's Second District Court of Appeal and a run at the Florida Supreme Court beyond that.

For now, the pleadings are joined. The Town says the arch violates four sections of its code and must come down. Whittall says the code never reached the groin, the state already approved the sign, and the Town cannot even prove the structure sits on land it governs. Both positions are on file, under oath, in the Twelfth Judicial Circuit. The arch stands where it has stood since August 2025 — no longer draped, no longer the subject of a favor Unicorp is asking, but the subject of a lawsuit that a judge has now promised to decide.

It took generations of tennis and generations of litigation to build the ground this arch stands on. It will take, by the Court's own calendar, at least until the winter of 2028 to learn whether it stays.

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## Candidates, from page 1

Act two — the general, Nov. 3. The three finalists face the full electorate again, and the two who draw a majority are sworn in Nov. 6 to serve four-year terms.

A crucial fact frames the whole race: at least one new commissioner is guaranteed. One-term commissioner and current mayor Debbie Trice is not seeking re-election, leaving her seat open. That makes incumbent Jen Ahearn-Koch — first elected in 2017 and now pursuing a third term — the only sitting member in the field, and the only name most voters will already know.

The at-large seats are, by charter, nonpartisan. As we will see, the candidates' choice of campaign treasurers tells a more textured story.

## The field: five names, five theories of Sarasota

### Jen Ahearn-Koch — the neighborhoods' incumbent

If there is a through-line to Ahearn-Koch's near quarter-century in civic life, it is the neighborhood. She came up through the Tahiti Park Neighborhood Association and the Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations, spent six years on the Planning Board, and entered politics in opposition to a development — a fact she wears as a credential, not a footnote. A former art director at the Asolo who founded her own marketing firm, she has served as mayor and vice mayor and casts herself as the voice residents send to the dais when they fear being "left out" of the room where decisions get made.

Her record supplies the sharpest policy contrast in the race. She has been the commission's most pointed skeptic of the proposed bayfront performing arts center, calling its price tag "exorbitant" and questioning whether the city can afford to build it, let alone operate it. On downtown growth she has consistently pressed to preserve older buildings and to keep public hearings — rather than staff-level "administrative review" — in the path of larger projects. She leads the field in money raised.

### Flo Entler — the activist from Arlington Park

A Long Islander who has called Sarasota home for some thirty-seven years, Entler is the current president of the Arlington Park Neighborhood Association and a former second vice president of the CCNA, a post she gave up to run. She is a fixture at the public-comment microphone, and her pitch is fluency in the quality-of-life issues that cut across every neighborhood — flooding, traffic, construction, affordability, parks. A small-business owner who works as a fitness instructor and personal trainer, she has kept her campaign local, right down to her Sarasota-based CPA treasurer.

### John Harshman — the downtown businessman

Harshman's is the classic Sarasota arrival story, which he tells often: he says he came to town at eighteen with twenty dollars and built a life, founding the commercial brokerage Harshman & Co. in 1989. Four decades of downtown business and a long roster of civic boards — the chamber, the Downtown Sarasota Alliance, arts and environmental panels — underwrite a platform organized around workforce affordability, the arts as an economic engine, fiscal responsibility, and a "clean and safe" downtown. His treasurer, a West Palm Beach political operative who also handles a statewide political committee, signals a campaign built with an eye beyond the county line.

### Yevgeny Khodorkovsky — the last-minute technologist

"Yev" Khodorkovsky filed on June 11, one day before qualifying closed — late enough that he missed the neighborhood-association forum entirely and had no fundraising to report. A software engineer who has built teams for Cisco, Salesforce and the Apache Software Foundation and chose Sarasota in 2019, he runs as the anti-overdevelopment insurgent. His language is the most combative in the field: he warns against a "Tampa-style" downtown and "concrete mountains" that strain infrastructure without adding real housing, and against what he calls parking-fee "cash grabs." His remedies are granular and quality-of-life — better-timed traffic signals, streamlined dealings with City Hall, public art and green space, and a reminder that "there's more to the city than Downtown and the Key."

### Rob Rominiecki — the arts-world newcomer

Rominiecki carries one of the more recognizable surnames in local culture as the husband of Marie Selby Botanical Gardens president and CEO Jennifer Rominiecki. A Brooklyn native who spent fifteen years at the Guggenheim, rising to director of security and safety before the family moved to Sarasota, he has since consulted pro bono for Selby's transformation into a "living museum." His priorities read as consensus-friendly: attainable housing, a stronger creative economy, coastal preservation, less traffic, and a "future-ready" city. His treasurer is a Tallahassee firm long associated with Republican campaigns across Florida — a tell, in a non-partisan race, about where his organizational support originates.

## The field that was: one door closes, another opens late

Worth noting for the record: the June 6 candidate forum featured a sixth contender, physical therapist and clinic owner Jaime Loomis, a 2022 transplant who did not ultimately qualify by the deadline. The candidate voters actually got instead — Khodorkovsky — never appeared at that forum, having filed five days later. The season's opening act, in other words, has already swapped a cast member.

## The race the islands are really watching

Here is where readers on Longboat Key, Lido, St. Armands and Bird Key should pay close attention, because the most consequential contest for the barrier islands is not, strictly speaking, a city race at all.

The Sarasota County Commission's District 2 seat is on the same August ballot, and District 2 is the islands' district. Its boundaries run from University Parkway down to Stickney Point Road and out across the sand — from roughly the southern half of Longboat Key, through Lido, St. Armands and Bird Key, to the northern half of Siesta. It is the seat that most directly represents the coastal corridor across the jurisdictional lines that otherwise divide these communities, and it commands the levers islanders care about most: beach renourishment, stormwater, the tax-increment financing that underwrites downtown's cultural ambitions, and the county's posture toward island hotel development.

Two Republicans are contesting it. Incumbent Mark Smith — a Siesta Key architect, founder of Smith Architects, and the current commission vice chair — has built an island-friendly record: he has opposed major hotel projects on Siesta Key and has publicly resisted committing county dollars to the bayfront performing arts center, citing a "fiduciary responsibility" for the money. His challenger, Kristina Sargent, is a Pinecraft-based attorney and former prosecutor who served fifteen years in the Army National Guard; she argues the current board has spent unwisely and lets growth outrun infrastructure, and she has made stormwater and the flooding of 2024 the spine of her campaign.

The twist that should concentrate island minds: after both Democratic candidates fell off the

ballot, the seat is now set to be decided in the Republican primary on Aug. 18. For a barrier-island electorate that skews fiscally conservative, this is the ballgame — and it is being played in August, when turnout is thin and a few hundred votes on the islands can carry real weight.

For clarity, because the geography confuses even longtime residents: St. Armands, Lido and Bird Key sit inside the city, so those voters get both the five-way at-large race and the District 2 county race. Longboat Key, as its own town, votes in neither the city contest — but its Sarasota County residents very much have a say in District 2. It is the one seat on which the whole island chain, city and town alike, speaks together.

## Issues to watch, community by community

### St. Armands and Lido: the water comes first, and everything else waits on it

If the visioning sessions held this spring at Mote produced a single verdict, it was this: until the flooding is solved, nothing else on St. Armands really matters. The Circle and the key were inundated twice in 2024, first by Helene's four-to-six-foot surge and then, less than two weeks later, by Milton. A six-plus-foot dune line is due along Lido Beach, and roughly \$13.5 million in federal Resilient SRQ money — matched by the city — is in the earliest stages of being programmed against freshwater flooding that, in a best case, is years from a fix. Storm surge that crests those defenses remains, as everyone acknowledges, nearly impossible to stop.

That uncertainty drives a second, quieter fight: whether to raise heights and densities on the Circle. A long-simmering push to lift the Commercial Tourism height cap from thirty-five to forty-five feet and to allow denser hotel and residential development has resurfaced through the visioning process, and it alarms the residents' associations, who see traffic, evacuation risk and the erosion of the Circle's very charm on the other side of it. Underneath sits an awkward dynamic that one island leader has named aloud — that aging, un-reinvested buildings may become the argument for tearing down and building higher.

And then there is parking, the island's perennial. The paid-parking program on St. Armands and Lido — first hour free, modest hourly rates, free on Sundays — was knocked offline by the 2024 storms and restored in January 2025 because the bonds that built the garage do not pause for hurricanes. Merchants, residents and City Hall have never fully agreed on it, and no barrier-island commissioner will avoid the subject for long.

### Bird Key: a quiet island with a traffic problem it did not create

Bird Key's concerns are the concerns of a serene residential enclave astride a causeway: the through-traffic that funnels across it toward St. Armands and Lido, the resilience of the John Ringling corridor, and the same rising-water anxieties that shadow every low-lying address on the bay. What happens to density on the Circle and to the flow across the causeway is felt here first, even though Bird Key itself is not where the arguments are staged.

### Downtown Sarasota: growth, the state, and a half-billion-dollar stage

Downtown's defining fight is now a fight with Tallahassee as much as with any developer. Using the state's Live Local Act to bypass the city's downtown height limits — while stacking the city's own density bonuses on top — a Naples developer has advanced a nearly 190-unit project on barely two acres at the century-old U.S. Garage building, marketed as The Adagio, with only a handful of its units truly affordable. Preservationists, denied a hearing, are headed to circuit court. It is the sharpest local expression yet of the Home Rule-versus-state-preemption tension, and it will shadow every candidate's answer on how tall and how dense downtown should become.

Looming over the same blocks is the Sarasota Performing Arts Center — the roughly \$300 million successor to the aging Van Wezel, envisioned within The Bay park to a Renzo Piano design. After commissioners sent it back to the drawing board, a scaled-down "Concept 2.0" won a favorable nod in March: fewer seats, a site shifted south of the boat canal, resilience achieved by raising the grade. But the money remains the question. The public half leans on the city-county TIF, and the county has shown little appetite to pay its share — which is precisely why Ahearn-Koch's affordability objections, and District 2's Mark Smith's reluctance, sit at the center of the project's fate. Add the unresolved matter of where audiences will park once the Van Wezel lot becomes green space, and the bayfront's grandest idea is, for now, a decision deferred.

## The question that binds them all: the November tax vote

Every one of these debates — the library, the concert hall, the dune, the flood project, the services that keep an upscale city upscale — runs on the same fuel: the property tax. And on the November ballot sits a state measure, HJR 1F, that would change the arithmetic.

Passed by the Legislature in June, the amendment would raise the homestead exemption from \$50,000 to \$150,000 in 2027 and to \$250,000 in 2028, with a constitutional path toward eliminating non-school homestead taxes altogether. To a homeowner, it reads as relief. To a city and county treasury — and to the TIF that underwrites the performing arts center and the revenue that would operate a new island library — it reads as a slow-acting solvent on the very base that funds the region's ambitions.

For the fiscally conservative property owners who populate the islands, the measure carries a particular double edge. Many barrier-island homes are second homes rather than homesteads, so the exemption's direct relief would fall unevenly — even as the erosion of the broader tax base threatens the beach, stormwater and cultural projects those same owners prize. It is the rare question on which "cut my taxes" and "protect my island" do not point in the same direction, and it will test every candidate's ability to speak honestly to both instincts. No one in local government wrote it, and no one in local government can stop it. But whoever wins these seats will have to govern in its aftermath.

## What to watch, and when

- July 20 — voter-registration books close for the primary.
- Aug. 18 — the at-large primary (top three advance) and the effectively decisive District 2 county primary.
- Oct. 5 — books close for the general.
- Nov. 3 — the general election; the two at-large finalists with a majority win, and the same ballot carries the property-tax question.
- Nov. 6 — the new commissioners are sworn in.

### The season's real stakes

Strip away the forums and the finance reports and this cycle asks Sarasota to decide what kind of place it intends to remain: how much growth it will trade for how much charm, whether it will build the cultural monuments it keeps designing, and how it will pay for the ordinary competence — clean streets, dry ground, a beach that stays put — that an extraordinary city takes for granted right up until the water arrives. The candidates offer five different answers. The islands, watching from across the causeway, have every reason to insist on being heard.



**Read My Words - Be Vigilant  
Watch Decisions**

**Do Not Give Our Powers To Foreign Foes Manipulating Our Growth  
To Limit Or Destroy Our Future Choices**

**Decisions and Actions Are To Support  
that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with  
certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit  
of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among  
Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That  
whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends,**

**SOCIETY HAS NEEDS**

**Ya Might be wrong  
Ya night be right  
But if ya believe  
Ya gotta fight with all your might**

You go to the grocery store - the cashier is not there just to see you; The stocker is not there just to see you; the truck driver did not make the delivery just for you;  
You go to the restaurant - the hostess is not there just to seat you; the chef is not there just to feed you; the dish washer is not there just to wash a plate for you; the Bar Girl is not there just to smile for you

They all have lives for their independence- All of us have needs for our independence. Cars, Trucks, Roads, Health Care, Food, Water, Sanitation, Land, Housing, Utilities, We need empty land for food production. We need individual land for homes. We need fuel, doctors, roads for going to work....

Years Have Gone By - Government Overhead - And the Farms Were Taken  
And The Farms Were Taken ...

The years have gone by - the production may not be corn or soybeans - but all the costs and fundamentals are the same now as from the beginning.

There exist real fears Society is losing sight of the dangers of Society's Strengthening Demands and using a government to over-bear on the production side of the nature of society. The "needs" of the public are producing a vision showing a leading to the collapse of a system which has helped to build equity, build assets, and ownership. Equity builds independence and liberty.

Way back when - the farmer owned his land, and then it started - he gave up his land for the first roads - and the business man kept being demanded to give more --- and give more --- and give more...

On the production endeavors there is the drawing card of the mom and pop business - the yearn to build, create, be who one is meant to be - and struggle for the rights to pursue those goals, the rights to pursue living who one is meant to be and become independent in the pursuit's success.

**Dangers of Foreign Adversaries Controlling American Decisions**

Foreign adversaries must have no control of America nor its resources. Our land, the resources below the surface, the air spaces above the surface must remain America and Who We Are. The first independence battle was to recognize those rights to America and Rights For the Workers and Builders Who Are American. The battle is now one of vigilance to keep our ownership and our original rights as workers and builders. Fight with all our vigilance and our might.

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**Secure your financial future today.**

**CONTACT BOB PARRISH TODAY:**

\* Address: 12 Date Avenue | Bradenton, FL \*

Voice or Text: 941-302-2926 \* Email: BobParrishbk@gmail.com