

Longboat Key News

June 19, 2026

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InsideLook



My Friends Keep Disappearing ...page 11



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Arch leads to divided Town ...page 8



Which beach are you looking for? ...page 10

Inside Shore's Latest Development to Remake St. Armands Circle

The developer who once tried to put a hotel behind these buildings now owns the buildings. The city that twice rejected him is buying him parking. And the third floor nobody can quite explain is back.



STEVE REID
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There is a particular kind of Sarasota story that arrives wearing the costume of good news. A beloved restaurant is coming home. A blighted corner will be revived. The flood-gutted hulk of an old bank will become something gleaming, resilient and tax-generating. Everyone, the press release assures us, wins.

And then you read the site plan.

On June 16, a development application landed at City Hall proposing to knock together two vacant parcels on the northeastern lip of St. Armands Circle — 24 and 28 N. Boulevard of the Presidents — into a single three-story, mixed-use building. The ground floor would hold more than 7,000 square feet of retail and an 1,820-square-foot café. The second floor would house a roughly 8,500-square-foot fine-dining restaurant under the Shore name. And

See Shore, page 12

A Church, a Law Firm, and a Mailbox Full of Fury: The Letters That Could Blow Up Longboat's Canal Vote

Strip away the engineering reports, the equivalent benefit units, the careful consultant-speak about "proportional allocation frameworks," and what is really on the table at Town Hall on Monday afternoon is the oldest and rawest question in island life: What does it cost to live here — and who gets stuck with the bill?

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For two decades the answer to Longboat Key's silted canals has been to kick the can down a road that, in Public Works Director Charlie Mopps's own words, has gotten "pretty flat; it's not rolling anymore." Now, at 1 p.m. on June 22, seven commissioners will take the final vote on a roughly \$9 million plan to dredge all 88 of them — and on the far more combustible question of how to pay. The dredging was never in dispute. The money is a war. And the letters now stacked in the town's inbox read less like polite public comment than like a community that has finally had enough, picked up a pen, and in several cases, hired a lawyer.

This week, one of those lawyers represents the Catholic Church.

"Prohibited by the US Constitution"

On June 16, a letter landed at Town Hall on the letterhead of Trenam Law — a regional firm with offices in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Sarasota — written by Joseph A. DiVito, Esq., who identifies himself as General Counsel for the Diocese of Venice. He was writing, he said, "to strenuously object" to the assessment on a single parcel: 4280 Gulf of Mexico Drive, the home of St. Mary, Star of the Sea Catholic Church.

This is not a letter about hardship. It is a shot across the bow.

The town's stated purpose, DiVito notes, is "canal navigation maintenance" — purposes "all under navigational

See Canals, page 4

Bronze Stars and a Budget: Longboat Lines Up a Soldier, Administrator to Replace Howard Tipton

Commission set to install St. Lucie County's George Landry on Monday at \$255,000 — without a single outside ad ever being placed.



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There was no national search. There was no headhunting firm with a six-figure retainer, no parade of finalists shuttled in for public auditions, no glossy brochure mailed to city managers from Maine to California. For the most consequential personnel decision a town can make — the choice of the one employee who hires every other employee, writes the budget, runs the storm response and sets the agenda — Longboat Key did something almost unheard of in modern local government.

It asked its departing manager to go find the next one.

On Monday, June 22, at a 1 p.m. special meeting at Town Hall, the Town Commission is expected to ratify that gamble, appointing George Landry, the current St. Lucie County Administrator, as Longboat Key's 12th Town Manager. The recommended action on the agenda is blunt: approve the appointment and approve the contract. Barring a surprise, a retired Army first sergeant who has never run a Gulf-coast barrier-island town will, by Monday afternoon, be its chief executive.

The man who is leaving

To understand the unusual process, you first have to understand the unusual standing of the man it was built around.

See Manager, page 13

Editor Letters



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

Longboat Bridge

To: Bradenton Beach Mayor John Chappie
Did the Bradenton Beach Commission take a position on the proposed Longboat Key Bridge?
James G. Haft
Longboat Key

Longboat Bridge

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop and James Haft
At our next commission meeting, I will be asking the commission if they would like to have an official position on the proposed height of the LBK Bridge.
John R. Chappie
Mayor
Bradenton Beach

Longboat Bridge

To: Bradenton Beach Mayor John Chappie
Residents of north LBK are very concerned about the proposed fixed span bridge. Jim Haft, who co-leads LBK North, has reached out to Bradenton Beach, is hoping you will join our Mayor, Debra Williams, in our request to build a smaller, less intrusive structure.
Thank you John. Hope recovery is continuing on Bradenton Beach. I know you have been swamped.
BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Bridge

To: Bradenton Beach Mayor John Chappie
Just following up on my prior message. Is Bradenton Beach willing to send a letter to FDOT opposing the 78-foot mega bridge at Longboat Pass? If so, can you please send me a copy?
I've attached the letter that the Town of Longboat Key has sent to FDOT opposing the fixed bridge. Tal Siddique was going to send a letter as well, in support of the communities in his jurisdiction. Having a letter from Bradenton Beach would greatly assist our lobbying efforts to oppose the bridge.
James G. Haft
Longboat Key

High water bill

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop
Safe travels, the bill is due I believe on the 24th, I will hold on to it until I hear back. Thanks for taking the time and looking into this. In another development and this is a good thing, a realtor who is trying to get my listing bought to my attention a square footage discrepancy on the county appraisal site, the county came out Monday to look at the property and the square footage was just today reposted to 4,340 square feet, living space previously I had it listed at 3,815. The house is a steal, it was when it was 3,815, now it's 4,340. That's a good thing! Safe travels and thanks again.
Steve Marks
Longboat Key

High water bill

To: Steve Marks
Howard Tipton, our Town Manager is looking into your crazy water bill. I will follow up with him next week. I will be in DC for a lobbying trip so it may be Thursday before things settle down.
BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

High water bill

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop
This is Steve Marks, you recently visited my open house on Pyrula, first and foremost I enjoyed your company. It was a pleasure to meet you both, and I hope your home is finished soon and you enjoy the gift of living in Longboat Key!
I was wondering if I could impose to bend your ear on a matter concerning my property that involves the town of Longboat Key, if you can great, if not I understand in advance, I thought it would be worth my time to run this by you.
A couple of months ago it was brought to my attention that my water utility bill needed to be paid, the company that I used to build the house was getting the bills and they were paying them while the house was being built, and then he stopped forwarding them to me, and I take responsibility for letting the bills pile up, but that is not the issue, I made a payment to rectify the situation as soon as it was brought to my attention in efforts to make the balance current.
While doing so the town was nice enough to contact me and bring this to my attention,

See Letters, page 6



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A Tower Seen by Forty Thousand Chooses to Show Its Art to a Few Hundred

A 23-foot sculpture is coming to one of Sarasota's most-seen towers. But it faces the entrance off the Ritz-Carlton connector road, where residents and Westin guests arrive — not the 40,000 cars rounding the highway

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There is a particular logic to the public sculpture proposed for the Vue, and it is a geographic one — a decision about who, exactly, the art is for.

The Vue is among the most-seen buildings in Sarasota. The 18-story, 141-residence tower stands at the northwest corner of the U.S. 41–Gulfstream roundabout, the busiest intersection in the city — more than 40,000 vehicles a day funnel through it, the sole gateway between downtown and the barrier islands, the road that carries airport arrivals into the city and everyone else out toward St. Armands, Lido and Longboat Key. If you have driven into Sarasota from the north, you have already noticed the Vue. It is, for tens of thousands of drivers daily, the building that announces arrival.

The artwork, however, does not face them.

The 23-foot-4-inch aluminum sculpture by Sarasota artist Chad McGowan — a corner-wrapping abstraction of blue and champagne, lit from behind at night — is proposed not for the prominent face that fronts the roundabout, but for the north flank of the building's parking podium: the side that turns toward the Vue's own entrance. That is the approach off the small connector road leading to the Ritz-Carlton, the drive that carries residents and visitors into the condominium and brings guests to the adjacent Westin. It is, in other words, not a hidden corner. It is the doorstep. Everyone who lives at or comes to the Vue will pass beneath it; so will the steady traffic to the Westin and the cars threading the Ritz approach. What it forgoes is the highway audience — the 40,000 who sweep past without slowing.

The result is a quietly revealing choice. The most-trafficked corner in the city is about to acquire a substantial work of sculpture, and the building has aimed it not at the crowd rushing by, but at the people actually arriving.

A Half-Percent of the Skyline

How the piece came to exist at all is a small lesson in how a city of considerable cultural ambition pays for the art that decorates it.

Sarasota, like a growing number of American cities, runs a “percent for art” program: developers building at scale must set aside a fraction of construction cost for public art, either by commissioning a piece for their own site or paying into a city fund that places art elsewhere. The idea, imported from a 1960s federal model, rests on a simple bargain — private development imposes itself on the public realm, and in exchange contributes something to it.

In Sarasota, the requirement applies to projects exceeding \$1 million in construction value, set at one-half of one percent. That percentage is the key to the numbers attached to the Vue. The two building permits driving the proposal — 2024-002686 and 2025-012313 — carry public-art obligations of \$8,384.05 and \$6,560.63, a combined \$14,944.68, with roughly \$17,000 placed in escrow. Run the half-percent in reverse and the permits imply something close to \$3 million in associated construction value. The art contribution is, by design, a rounding error against the cost of the work that triggered it.

That is the tension the figure exposes. For a building of the Vue's stature — residences that trade well above \$2 million, a tower that has been one of the defining shapes of the downtown skyline since the Kolter Group completed it in 2017 — a five-figure art set-aside can look less like a civic gesture than a toll. The sum does not, on its face, seem commensurate with either the building or the corner it commands.

Why So Little — and Why It May Soon Be More

The modesty of the number is not an oversight. It is the ordinance working as written, and the city has noticed the gap.

City planners who oversee the public-art program have argued for some time that a half-percent no longer stretches as far as it once did. Construction costs have climbed; so has the cost of fabricating serious sculpture. As the city's public-art manager has put it, the same steel that raises buildings also raises art, and a fund built on yesterday's percentages cannot commission tomorrow's centerpieces. The city's public-art fund has at times hovered around \$150,000 — a sum, officials concede, that does not buy much monumental work in the current market.

That reasoning drove the city's Public Art Plan 2030, under which the commission approved doubling the developer contribution from 0.5 percent to 1 percent for qualifying projects — an effort to bring Sarasota in line with peer jurisdictions and to sustain a collection that now numbers well over 90 works. Notably, the increase drew little organized opposition from developers, a fact commissioners read as evidence that the fee was never the burden critics imagined. The Vue's contribution reflects the older, lower figure — a snapshot of the program as it was, even as the city moves toward a more demanding standard.

It is worth being precise about what the ordinance does and does not do. Individual condominium units and attainable-housing components are excluded from the calculation, which is part of why a luxury tower's headline value does not translate dollar-for-dollar into an art obligation. The contribution is pegged to qualifying construction value — not to sale prices, not to views, and certainly not to traffic counts.

The Difference Between a Fund and a Façade

There is a second choice buried in the proposal, and it matters more than the dollar amount — and bears directly on where the piece will sit.

Developers may satisfy the requirement two ways: write a check to the city's fund, or commission an approved work for their own property. The Vue has chosen the latter — bringing forward an actual object, by a named artist, fixed to the building, rather than feeding an anonymous pool. And because the work lives on the Vue's own walls, the placement is the building's call as much as the city's: the sculpture goes where the architecture and the association want it, which is how a major piece ends up over the entrance rather than the highway face.

For years the city leaned toward in-kind art of exactly this sort, and for years it discovered the catch: developer-placed work, once installed, was not always maintained. Pieces languished. The city's more recent thinking has tilted toward cash contributions precisely so that the program — not a condominium board — controls placement and upkeep in perpetuity. Seen against that backdrop, the Vue's decision to mount its own sculpture is the more old-fashioned path, and one that places the burden of maintaining a 23-foot aluminum work, in salt air, at the foot of a bay bridge, squarely on the association — and one that also let the building decide the work would mark its own front door.

What the city gets in return is site-specificity — art made for this corner rather than parked on it. That is the case McGowan's proposal makes for itself.

The Work Itself

McGowan, a Ringling College graduate who has built sculpture for two decades and whose recent work appears in the Ritz-Carlton Residences, the BLVD, Epoch and the St. Regis, describes the piece as an abstraction of Sarasota's own landscape — lush foliage and fluid motion rendered in metal, a form that does not merely decorate the wall but “engages the corner, the street, and the night.”

The proposal calls for marine-grade 6061-T6 architectural aluminum, finished in a durable powder coat that pairs vibrant blue with champagne tones chosen for color depth and reflectivity, and engineered to survive the tropical exterior. The composition wraps the podium corner, trading sharp edges against rolling curves, with negative space and cast shadow treated as compositional elements in their own right. At night, backlit 4000–5000K LED illumination is meant to shift the work from sculpture to something closer to luminous architecture — a transformation staged, fittingly, for the people arriving home and the guests pulling up to the door.

It is engineered like a building, because at that scale it effectively is one. The structural connection to the Vue's existing masonry has been signed and sealed by a licensed engineer; the design accounts for a 150-mph basic wind speed, the standard for a coastal structure of its risk category. The total artist fee, per the proposal, is \$18,000 — more than the public-art contribution that nominally triggered it, the gap covered by the association, along with additional sums the city requires for architectural drawings and sealed engineering.

A Small Piece of a Larger Puzzle

It would be easy to file the Vue sculpture as a minor item — a five-figure line on a meeting agenda, a single object on the side of a single building. That reading misses what the program is for.

Sarasota's identity as an arts city is not the product of a few monumental commissions. It is the accumulation of dozens of modest decisions like this one — a copper sculpture outside City Hall since the 1960s, a string of works tucked into the roundabouts along U.S. 41, the slow assembly of a public collection that a half-percent at a time has grown past 90 pieces. The city's cultural reputation, the thing that helps sell the very towers that fund the art, is built from exactly these small, individually unremarkable contributions.

Which makes the placement its own kind of statement. A more calculating developer might have angled the piece toward the highway, claiming 40,000 daily impressions as a marketing dividend. The Vue has instead set its sculpture over the entrance, where the people who live there, the guests who visit, and the traffic to the Westin and the Ritz approach will meet it at eye level and at a human pace — art for the threshold rather than the billboard. It is a quieter ambition, but not a smaller one: a piece meant to be lived with rather than glimpsed at speed. Fifteen thousand dollars does not seem like much. Placed at the front door of one of the most-seen buildings in Sarasota, it may turn out to be among the best-positioned \$15,000 in the city.



A rendering of the proposed Chad McGowan sculpture shown installed on the Vue at 1155 N. Gulfstream Avenue. The 23-foot aluminum work, finished in blue and champagne and lit from behind at night, is positioned over the building's entrance off the connector road to the Ritz-Carlton — facing residents, condominium visitors and Westin guests rather than the U.S. 41–Gulfstream roundabout. Rendering courtesy of the artist / developer public art proposal.]

Canals, from page 1

use of the canal." And there, he argues, the whole edifice cracks on a single fact: "the church property is not even on a canal and can make no use of it for navigational purposes which is the reason for the assessment or any other purpose for that matter."

From there he builds the legal case the town's lawyers will be losing sleep over. "For an assessment to be proper," DiVito writes, "it must have a reasonable nexus to the purpose of the assessment, otherwise it is a tax." A special assessment is lawful in Florida only when it delivers a special benefit to the property being charged. A landlocked church gets none — and an assessment with no nexus, in his telling, is not an assessment at all, but an illegal tax slapped on a tax-exempt ministry. The church is a 501(c)(3), he adds, whose funds "cannot be used to support private uses of the canal for navigation."

Then he reaches for the First Amendment itself. The assessment "will create a substantial burden on the church which will impact the free exercise of religion by St. Mary Star of the Sea, and such burden is prohibited by the US Constitution." His demand is the same one a dozen ordinary homeowners have been making in plainer words for months: "limit the assessment to parcels that are located on the canals and use them for navigational purposes."

Copies went to St. Mary, Star of the Sea and to the Diocese of Venice. Whatever else it does, that letter changes the math in the room. The town no longer faces a grumbling mailbox. It faces a represented institution, a constitutional theory, and a diocese standing behind both — daring the commission to charge a church for water it cannot touch.

The homeowner who came lawyered up

The church is not alone in arriving with case citations and constitutional language. Timothy and Elena Radabaugh, homesteaded at 7160 Gulf of Mexico Drive on Canal #01, hand-delivered a two-page objection that reads like a brief.

They give the town its one concession up front — "we agree Canal #01 needs to be better maintained, especially at the mouth of Longboat Pass Bay where a shoal has built up" — and then go for the throat of the funding scheme. Their opening weapon is the Submerged Lands Act of 1953: these are navigable public waterways, the water cannot be privately owned, and while the State of Florida holds title to the muck beneath them, it conveniently "exempts itself from maintenance." Their verdict drips: "What a deal for the State." Their challenge to their own town: "Why doesn't the Town push back on the State for help? Where is our State Representative?"

Then they pile on. They invoke the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' own 2020 dredging proposal for the canals (Permit Application No. SAJ-2000-00050) and ask pointedly how that was going to be paid for. They cite Florida case law — Lake County v. Water Oak Management — for the rule that a special assessment is legal "only if the burden is fairly apportioned and matches a special measurable benefit." And they offer the town a deal with a blade in it: if canal-front owners alone must maintain what are legally public rights-of-way, then fine — bar the public from using them and deed the submerged lands to the riparian owners outright.

Their conclusion is a closing argument. Because the submerged lands are sovereign and state-owned and the waterways are "legally open to the general public for navigation, commerce, and recreation," the town's plan "forcing a small subset of private waterfront property owners to fund 100% of the maintenance of state-owned, publicly accessible waters represents an

unconstitutional shift of a public burden onto a small subset of private citizens."

Two letters. Two constitutional theories. And the vote is Monday.

More than the taxes themselves

If the lawyers supply the artillery, the rest of the file supplies the shrapnel — and it is the human arithmetic that will sting.

The cruelest number belongs to Susan Rinehart, of 253 Bird Key Drive, who owns ten boat-slip units at the Boathouse on Longboat — indoor, dry-storage marina units that, she insists, "are not homes, do not contain residences, and should not be treated in the same manner as waterfront residential properties." At \$620 a unit, her ten slips would be assessed at least \$6,200 a year. Her total property taxes this year on all ten? \$5,205.35. The dredging fee alone, she wrote, "would equal approximately 119% of my current total property tax bill — more than the taxes themselves. This would more than double my annual carrying cost for these marina units." She called it what it is: "a significant and disproportionate financial burden," and invited officials to come stand inside the building and see that they are taxing dry concrete racks as if they were canal estates.

The man billed twice, and the office with no water

Then there is Don Marshall, of 3510 Mistletoe Lane — 77 years old, "several joint replacements," a boat he launches "two to three times a year." The town wants to charge him twice: once for his canal home, once for the boat sitting on a rack at the Boathouse. "This is completely unfair," he wrote, and his canal, he noted with some justice, "is used far more for non Longboat Key residents cruising by than my 2 times a year." His parting shot could be the headline over the whole revolt: "Longboat Key property owners already pay more than their share in property taxes and now we are asked to get charged TWO times for dredging canals that are used by everyone, more from people off the island than residents. There has to be a more equitable way of doing this."

Peter Snyder, president of the Boathouse association, found his own slice of the absurd. The town hit his small second-floor office — landlocked, dry, no dock — with 2.25 EBUs, or \$1,395 a year, while the actual wet slips downstairs drew a single EBU at \$620. "I have no access or benefit to the water," he wrote. "To say that the proposed assessment to my office is out of line is an understatement." The internal emails show the town's own consultants scrambling through condo bylaws to untangle the mess; by June 9, staff conceded the point and

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Canals, from page 4

agreed to strip the assessment off Snyder's office — a quiet admission that the methodology was generating bills nobody could defend with a straight face.

Mark and Terri Fishman supplied perhaps the most surreal entry. They were assessed because they own a dock at the LBK Club Moorings marina — except, as Mark wrote, the marina “is not adjacent to any canals,” and they don't own the dock structure or the dry land beneath it. What they own, he explained, is “the land under the water.” The town's logic for taxing the submerged ground beneath a bay-access marina struck them as so strained that the only justification they could even imagine was a plan to dredge the marked channel leading in. The town later confirmed essentially that — Canal 32A, the wide, deep channel feeding the marina, is in the program — but the exchange laid bare how far the assessment net has been cast: all the way to the dirt at the bottom of the bay.

“Insult and injury”: the mobile-home families

The sharpest equity wound comes from the island's least likely waterfront address. Daniel B. and Lisa A. Dexter, of the Gulf Shore mobile home community, hand-delivered a formal appeal stamped by the town clerk at 11:12 a.m. on June 4.

“A mobile home on Longboat Key is an oddity, and does not benefit from canal dredging costs as other properties on the island,” they wrote. Gulf Shore and Twin Shores, they reminded the commission, “are the only ‘affordable’ housing on the island,” home to retirees who “are being taxed and assessed out of their homes.” The 8 percent collection fee piled on top “adds even more insult and injury.” Their request was almost gentle in its modesty: “A minor gesture of fairness is in order.”

Here is what makes it land like a gut punch. According to the town's own figures, circulated internally by Charlie Mopps, the Dexters' regular annual tax bill on that parcel is \$585.66 — meaning the dredging assessment would exceed their entire property tax. And the internal response from Finance Director Susan L. Smith, captured in the email chain, was chillingly matter-of-fact: “They may have to start getting used to that if that's what we have to move toward.” A retiree in a mobile home, told to get used to an assessment bigger than her tax bill, to dredge canals she will never put a boat in. That sentence may be the most quoted line of Monday's hearing.

“Where did the \$6 million go?”

If the Dexters supply the heart, Nancy and John Gornto supply the accountability bomb. In a pointed exchange with the town's financial analyst, they asked the questions every taxpayer is thinking and few put in writing: Why isn't Sarasota County chipping in the way it does for Phillippi Creek? What grants has the town actually chased? Will assessments drop if the federal money comes through?

And then the one with teeth: the underground utility project, they noted, “publicized a \$6 million cost savings in 2025 and there has been no publicized information on where the \$6 million funds were eventually budgeted.” In other words — before you reach into our pockets again, account for the last windfall you told us about. It is the kind of question that turns a funding debate into a trust debate, and trust, on an island already wary of how its government spends, is the currency that matters most.

The principle of the thing

Some objections aren't about money at all. They're about fairness as a matter of principle — and these are the most dangerous to the town, because they attack the logic, not the price.

Carla and Pete Rowan, of Broadway, dismantled the 80/20 split line by line. Of the six benefits the town advertises, they wrote, “we think there is really only one — ‘access for recreational boaters’ by the canal front parcels. The next 5 stated benefits seem spurious and not relevant.” They threw the town's own undergrounding project back at it, where “we measured the distance to the nearest telephone pole to get a .5 EBU” — granular, parcel-by-parcel fairness — against the canal program's lazy “simple 80/20.” They pressed the value logic to its breaking point: if dredging lifts a \$2 million home's worth more than a \$1 million home's, why should both pay an identical flat fee? And even where the bill is “only about \$30 per year,” they wrote, “it is the principle that is the point here.”

Thomas and Robyn Choate, of 598 Lyons Lane, sharpened that principle into a trap the commission will struggle to escape — because it uses the town's own framework as the noose. The town concedes its canals deliver “community appeal, environmental stewardship, recreation, navigation, and property values” island-wide, “not just those directly located on canals.” Fine, say the Choates: then the cost “should be shared broadly among all residents who benefit from it.” And here is the hook — if canal owners must bear the direct cost of a community-wide amenity, the identical logic must apply to the beach. “Beach-front property owners should likewise bear the direct costs associated with beach restoration,” they wrote. “Canal-front property owners should not be required to subsidize beach refurbishment efforts if they are being separately assessed for canal maintenance.” Translation: you cannot run 80/20 on the canals and 80/20 on the beaches and expect the same homeowners to keep paying the lion's share of both. Pick one.

Andy Forstenzer, who lives in Fairway Bay across a small canal, accepts paying his share but pointed to the gap nobody on the dais wants to discuss — the people who actually use the canals. He floated “a user fee for anyone with a vessel which has access to and may use the canal waterways,” noting that nowhere in the town's materials did he find “the idea of a contribution from those who actually use the canals.” His sign-off was disarmingly mild: “Just adding our voice to the discussion.”

Susan Fradkin, who doesn't even own a boat, took aim at the calendar itself. “Holding a meeting of this importance during the summer when people are away does not allow for a fair representation of the population,” she wrote — a barbed reminder that the most consequential vote in years is being held in June, when half the island is up north. The canals “are not private

property,” she argued; boats whose owners live nowhere near them “travel through the canals whenever they like.” The benefit, she added, runs to everyone who gets to say “we live on an island with navigable waterways.” Spread the cost across all residents, she wrote, and “it would be much more manageable and fair.”

The fairness map: free passes and gerrymandered benefit

A quieter line of attack questions the boundaries — who the town quietly decided not to charge. James G. Haft, of 761 Lands End Drive, accused the town of handing Jewfish Key owners “a free pass.” Jewfish is excluded on the theory that its owners reach it by boat from canal-fronting mainland lots they also own, which already carry the assessment — so charging Jewfish too would be “a duplication of benefit.” Haft wasn't buying it: “Why then was it determined that the ‘mainland’ parcels along ‘01P’ were considered to receive a direct benefit when they share the exact same waterway?”

And on the collection fee, Patrick and Christy Gaughan, of 500 Spinnaker Lane, were blunt: 8 percent is “beyond reasonableness... Totally outrageous.” Their jab had a modern edge: “One could write an AI program to simply and easily and cost efficiently deal with the collection and disbursements of these funds. The town's administration should have more respect for the taxpayers than to try to gouge us for 8% more.”

The voices for it

For all the fury, the opposition is not unanimous — and the loudest yes comes, tellingly, from the island's prime boating neighborhood. James S. LeBaron, president of the Country Club Shores I & II Homeowners Association, wrote of his community's “strong support.” Over weeks of conversations the response was “overwhelmingly positive”: residents “have lived along these canals for years and have watched water depths diminish, navigability decline, and the overall health of the waterway suffer as a result of accumulated sediment.” Canal access and water quality, he wrote, “are not abstract concerns for our residents — they are central to the lifestyle and property values that drew them to Longboat Key in the first place.”

A second, emphatic yes came from Scott L. Petersen, who built a lawyerly case for approval: maintaining navigable waterways is part of the town's duty to preserve shared infrastructure; dredging cuts liability from shallow-water accidents; waterfront access drives the home values the town is obligated to protect; and sediment buildup invites real environmental and regulatory trouble. Acting now, he argued, is cheaper than waiting — and lowers the odds of homeowners suing the town down the road.

What the town says back

Through all of it, the record shows an administration absorbing blows and holding its line. Financial analyst Jamie Thomas walked resident after resident through the math and through why Longboat can't simply tap its neighbors' funding sources: the federal Resilient SRQ dollars flowing to Phillippi Creek require benefit to low-to-moderate-income areas — a bar an island of multimillion-dollar homes can't clear — and the 88 canals are legally “upland-cut residential canals” that fail the West Coast Inland Navigation District's threshold for a public navigation project. The town's pitch rests on three promises: the \$620 is front-loaded and drops to about \$314.68 once the program shifts to maintenance in year six; the methodology is “scalable” and can be recalculated each year if grants arrive; and this is “a program, not a project,” built so the island never again wakes up to a 23-year backlog. To soften the blow it is chasing a \$3 million federal appropriation through the Water Resource Development Act of 2026, backed by Congressman Vern Buchanan and Representative Greg Steube.

On procedure, Town Attorney Maggie Mooney has been precise about Monday's stakes: any noticed owner “has a right to appear and be heard... and/or file written objections within 20 days,” and the commission “will decide whether such objections warrant a modification or adjustment.” If it deems the objections unsupported, the program “will likely remain as presented.”

But that careful language sidesteps the harder thing now sitting in the town's inbox. The Choate beach-parallel, the Radabaughs' submerged-lands theory and the Diocese of Venice's First Amendment claim are not pleas for a smaller bill. They are assaults on the legal foundation of the assessment itself — the “reasonable nexus” between charge and benefit that, under Florida law, is the only thing separating a valid special assessment from an unconstitutional tax. The town's consultants built an elaborate, parcel-by-parcel methodology precisely to manufacture that nexus. On Monday, a church with a law firm will stand up and argue that for a building with no canal, no methodology on earth can.

What happens Monday

If the commission grants final approval, the first assessments hit November 2026 tax bills and the recurring annual charge begins — landing, by no small irony, in the same mailbox, in the same season, that voters will use to decide a statewide measure promising to slash their property taxes. Relief on one line, a brand-new burden on another.

If the weight of the letters moves even one or two commissioners toward a more granular, benefit-by-benefit formula — or if the legal objections give the town's own attorney pause — the timeline slips and Longboat returns to the drawing board it has been standing at, in one form or another, since the 1990s.

Either way, the correspondence file has settled one thing for good. After a quarter-century, nobody on this island still needs convincing that the canals must be fixed. The fight now is the harder, more human, and — as of this week — more lawyered one: whether Longboat Key can find a fair, and legal, way to split the bill for the very thing that made it Longboat Key in the first place.

The special meeting begins at 1 p.m. Monday, June 22, in the Town Commission Chambers at Town Hall, 501 Bay Isles Road. Bring your tax bill.

“For an assessment to be proper, it must have a reasonable nexus to the purpose of the assessment, otherwise it is a tax.” — Joseph A. DiVito, Esq., General Counsel, Diocese of Venice (Trenam Law), for St. Mary, Star of the Sea

“Many retirees live there and are being taxed and assessed out of their homes. And to charge an 8% collection fee on top of it adds even more insult and injury. A minor gesture of fairness is in order.” — Daniel B. & Lisa A. Dexter, Gulf Shore mobile home community

“Failing to maintain adequate depth could be viewed as neglect of that responsibility.” — Scott L. Petersen (in support)

“We've been kicking this can down the road quite a bit. It's pretty flat; it's not rolling anymore.” — Public Works Director Charlie Mopps

Editor Letters



Letters, from page 2

when they did so and now comes the issue, they asked me if there was a malfunction on my sprinkling system. Naturally I asked why, there response was that my usage for the months of February, as well as March, dwarfed the usage of previous months, I believe up until February of 2025, my water bill would be less then a couple of hundred dollars and now I was being charged over \$3,000 for one month.

I was told that the town reading of my meter shows the irrigation system for instance was on from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. everyday, this is what I was told, that is simply not accurate in any way shape or form, but the town insists that this is factual.

I met a lady I believe her name was Sabrina, she was very kind, she said to me have your landscaper check the system and bring back his invoice with what he found wrong on the system, suggesting this is probably a leak issue and if that was the case perhaps a next step to adjust the bill would take place. Well the landscaper found no issue, and I told Sabrina that, and at that point the communication from the town got aggressive and defensive.

What was told to me is that your readings are accurate, I am wrong. The system had to be functioning the way the meter read; again suggesting that the meter for instance was on. I believe they said everyday from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. I am living in the house, why in the world would I have that taking place? The usage is like filling up two swimming pools, which I have never done.

To make matters more interesting my neighbor who lives on Neptune, during the same window of time got a monthly bill from the town for \$180,000 dollars that's not a misprint, \$180,000!

So I don't know how I can be told with confidence that I'm crazy and the meter reads are factual. I believe I was told that the town actually replaced the meter just to see if there was an issue, and they found no issue, I am not positive of that but I think I recall being told that, my point would be if in fact that was the case you don't replace something unless you think you

have a problem, certainly the gent on Neptune had a legitimate issue.

The only thing I can say is I have a bill for these two months in excess of \$6,000 dollars I paid \$3,200 of the over \$6,000 so far. My bill for this month is \$83.47, that's a big cry from \$3,000! And prior to February and March that was closer to the norm.

So, I wanted to bend your ear to see if you think I have a beef, the water folks are dug in that this is on me that the meters don't lie, so that means I do; which I don't.

Like I said from the opening sentence, either way I loved meeting you both, just figured quite frankly you should know about this one way or the other.

Steve Marks
Longboat Key

Trash collection at Broadway beach access

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams

Mayor Williams, we will continue to monitor the situation at that and other beach access points and adjust accordingly. These get emptied three times a week and we pick up any trash outside the can every day during the work week. Over major holiday weekends we also empty them on Sunday. I included Mark on this as well, in case he wants to add anything. I hope this helps.

Charles Mopps
Public Works Director
Town of Longboat Key Public Works

Trash collection at Broadway beach access

To: Longboat Key Public Works Director Charlie Mopps

I just had a conversation with LBK North representatives regarding trash collection at the

See Letters, page 7



SECUR-ALL INSURANCE AGENCY

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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 6

Broadway beach access points, particularly on weekends. One of the big concerns is that there aren't ample trash receptacles, and/or they are not being emptied frequently enough. They are seeing an increase in crows, rodents and coyotes raiding the overflowing trash receptacles. Can public works arrange a fix for this (more frequent collection or more containers)?

Debra Williams
Mayor
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
The additional amount of annual revenue raised by pushing up the millage rates from 1.9600 to 1.9999 is approximately \$380,000.
Howard N. Tipton
Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton
Tip, excellent job in preparing the preliminary budget, as always, would you please provide me with the ad valorem revenue increase if the mileage rate is 1.9999.
My focus is, and always has been, number one on the employees' and two, on the residents. In an effort to increase our fund balance, prepare for potential emergencies, maintenance within an ever-aging systems, I feel that an increase is not a luxury but an absolute priority. IF we are to provide our residents with Premier community and exceptional service they have come to appreciate and love, we need to do this, Particularly in this politically uncertain state and federal times.
Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Commission
The attached budget letter and PowerPoint presentation are provided to you in compliance with the Town's charter requirements. This will form the basis of the staff presentation for the budget workshop on June 22nd. As always, I want to recognize Sue and Erica for their extraordinary work in pulling this together as well as our departmental leadership for their efforts to reduce costs over what was previously shared in the May budget workshop.
We look forward to reviewing with you during our briefings this week. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Howard N. Tipton
Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
Tip is correct. We currently only have the prior year comparisons. We will try to get this information from the other cities.
Sue Smith
Finance Director
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
I'm not sure we'll have that information as many of the jurisdictions are still working on what their numbers will be. We may be able to round up some information for the 6/29 meeting, but not by the 6/22 meeting.
Howard N. Tipton
Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Charter Required Preliminary Budget for FY26-27

To: Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton
Thank you Tip and I know in the past you have provided us with the neighboring cities tax and mill rates. Could you provide those as well, I did not see them in this presentation.
Thanks Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

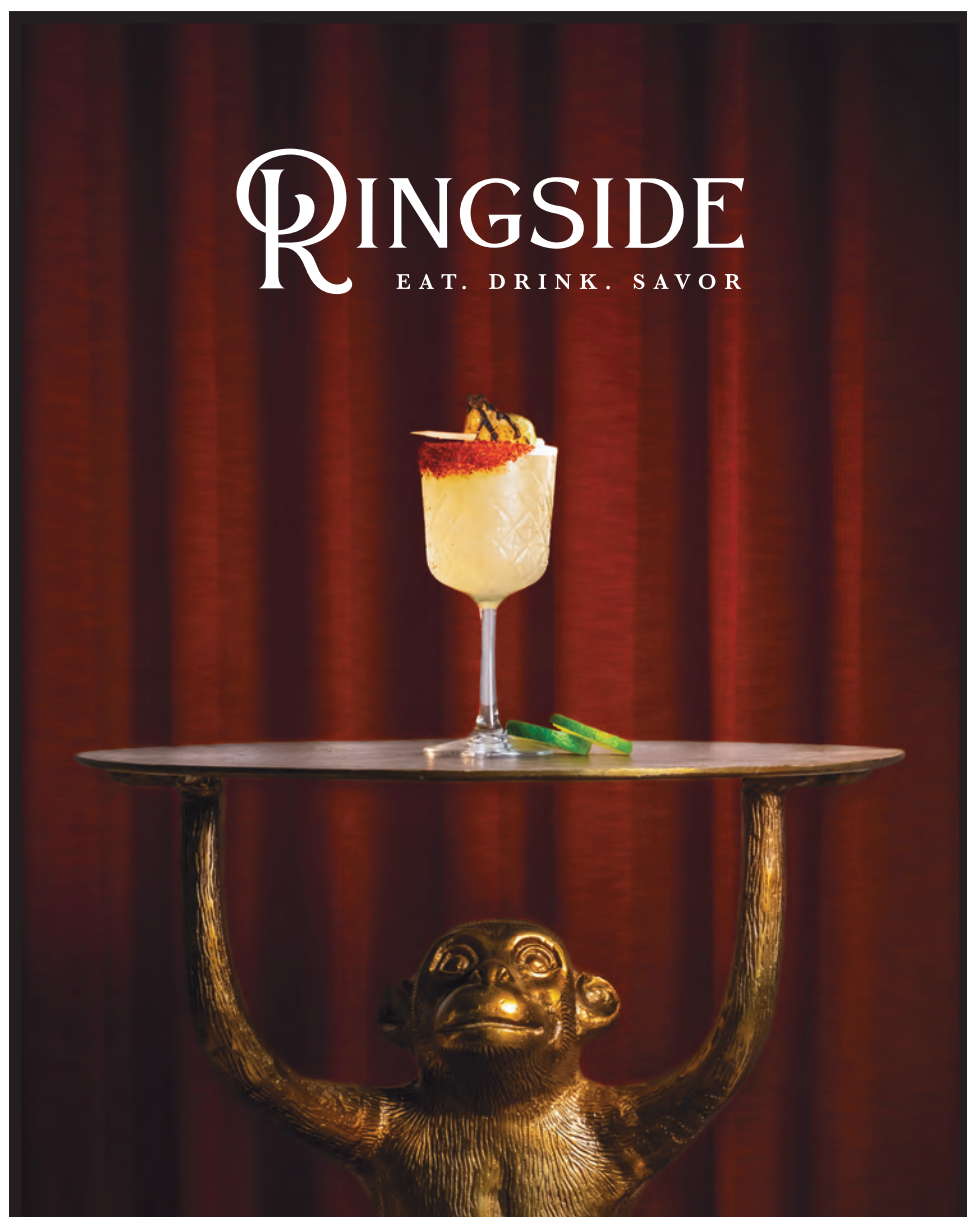
Sign on public beach

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
One of the reasons I live here!
Lynn Cook
Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Lynn Cook

See Letters, page 8



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EditorLetters



Letters, from page 7

We are most fortunate to have the competent and capable staff that we enjoy their efforts from every day.

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
Thanks for letting me know. I did see it was down on my turtle patrol yesterday. I am impressed with the speed of the removal. Good job.

Lynn Cook
Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Lynn Cook
Lynn the sign issue on the beach has been dealt with, thank you very much for your interest and reporting.

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Lynn Cook
Thank you Lynn for including me in the information stream. I will ask if these issues be dealt with swiftly.

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin
Gary, I am sending you this picture of the sign. I saw while patrolling my turtle zone yesterday since you are the commissioner of district one and would surely want to be aware of it.

I also sent it to the coding officer because I had some beach furniture of violations and lighting violations in the turtle zone as well.

Lynn Cook
Longboat Key

Sign on public beach

To: Lynn Cook
We are most fortunate to have the competent and capable staff that we enjoy their efforts from every day.

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key Beach Sand Degradation

To: Longboat Key Mayor Debra Williams

Dear Mayor Williams, we noticed the recent headlines in one of our local newspaper's noting the beautiful sugar white powder sand beach of Lido Key. As you know that is LBK's sand, "our" sand, that drifts South in the Gulf Stream current and due to storms as well as New Pass sandbar dredging, of our sand. One of the big reasons we bought our first home here thirty years ago, and before that making annual visits to the Colony, was the white powder sugar sand of LBK. We loved our beach walks. Now we walk on the course grey sand from we don't know where and has cost millions in beach "re-nourishment". Previous Commissions have understandably been pressured by fiscally responsible residents to minimize the cost of beach re-nourishment projects over the years. We have been in Commission meetings with Commissioners passing glass vials of different grades of sand samples trying to balance their fiscal responsibility with their sand quality decision. This dynamic has resulted in a clear degradation of LBK beach sand quality. "A penny wise and a pound foolish" because LBK has lost its key point of difference in attraction value. We also notice a dramatic reduction in marine birds on the beach as their coquina food source is buried. We urge our current and future Commissions to bring our special LBK beach back by re-nourishing with top quality sand to the benefit of LBK resident's quality of life and to support repeat visitation to our hotels and real estate market values. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Bob and Shannon Gault
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

Let's go to job site.
George Reenstra
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

I thought the intent was onsite, but I am good either way. It can be on site at Town Center Green or at my office at Town Hall (501 Bay Isles Road). I will plan on being onsite at Town Center Green, unless I hear otherwise.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman

Are we meeting on the job site or at Isaac's office?

Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: George Reenstra

Yes, I can do that. I'll be there at 11 am.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman

I can swing by around 11 am if that works. Let me know.

George Reenstra
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

Sounds good, thank you!

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman

Let me see how Monday and Tuesday developed because then I'm on my way to Europe, but I'll be back in touch.

George Reenstra
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

Thank you Commissioner and George. Things can change quickly, but right now, I am

See Letters, page 9

KeyRealEstate

Bird Key, Lido Key, Longboat Key latest sales

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath	Days On Market	Sale Price
424 BOWDOIN CIR	5,882	\$14,750,000	5 5 1	378	\$13,375,000
329 BIRD KEY DR	4,906	\$5,495,000	4 4 1	94	\$5,300,000
156 EMERSON DR	4,486	\$3,600,000	4 4 1	5	\$3,450,000
948 CITRUS AVE	3,266	\$3,095,000	4 3 1	81	\$2,950,000
218 ROBIN DR	2,673	\$1,950,000	3 4 0	39	\$1,900,000
1255 N GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#408	2,055	\$1,299,000	2 2 0	196	\$1,225,000
301 QUAY COMMONS Unit#1008	1,606	\$1,199,000	2 2 1	263	\$1,140,000
445 N ORANGE AVE Unit#306	950	\$599,900	2 2 0	65	\$575,000
101 S GULFSTREAM AVE Unit## 4A	1,200	\$497,500	2 2 0	609	\$450,000
850 S TAMIAMI TRL Unit#831	1,224	\$319,900	2 2 1	33	\$310,801
850 S TAMIAMI TRL Unit#704	980	\$275,000	2 2 0	68	\$245,000
415 L AMBIANCE DR Unit#A701	3,380	\$6,750,000	3 3 2	40	\$6,500,000
3620 FAIR OAKS PL	3,666	\$3,150,000	3 5 1	24	\$2,900,000
1241 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#304	3,045	\$2,499,000	3 4 0	6	\$2,499,000
531 WEDGE LN	2,751	\$2,499,000	4 3 1	37	\$2,425,000
3311 SABAL COVE DR	3,416	\$2,450,000	4 3 1	95	\$2,350,000
1241 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#207 S	2,965	\$1,500,000	2 4 0	58	\$1,425,000
1145 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#503	1,503	\$1,395,000	2 2 0	80	\$1,312,500
2425 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#2E	1,470	\$1,400,000	2 2 0	31	\$1,275,000
3427 WINDING OAKS DR Unit#14	2,555	\$1,150,000	3 3 0	36	\$1,100,000
240 SANDS POINT RD Unit#4206	640	\$1,115,000	1 1 0	230	\$1,050,000
4234 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#G2	1,636	\$849,000	3 2 0	371	\$800,000
3466 WINDING OAKS DR Unit#35	2,039	\$795,000	2 2 0	43	\$758,500
350 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#234	2,513	\$749,000	3 3 1	105	\$700,000
4900 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#203	1,325	\$689,000	2 2 0	199	\$671,500
660 CEDARS CT	1,440	\$589,000	2 2 0	17	\$557,500
6750 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#151	1,449	\$499,000	2 2 0	53	\$465,000
703 SPANISH DR S	1,322	\$435,000	2 2 0	5	\$430,000
4390 EXETER DR Unit#305	837	\$340,000	1 1 0	194	\$325,000

Letters, from page 8

open all of Monday morning, and Tuesday morning from around 10 a.m. to noon.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
Oddly enough I'm open both days, just let me know and I'll put it on the calendar. Thanks.
Gary Coffin
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: George Reenstra
Sounds good, thank you, sir!
Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
I'll read this and maybe we can get together and walk through it either next Monday or Tuesday because then I leave on Wednesday and I'm out of the country on business and I don't get back till around 18 July.
George Reenstra
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: George Reenstra
Our Public Works team met with a different contractor onsite this week, and the contractor is also one that we have used before and are satisfied with his work. His numbers were much better indicating he may be more interested in the work. We do need to work out some details, but here are the following preliminary numbers:

Bridge and boardwalk 130'x8' all the way from the Tennis Center deck to the oval walkway with composite decking, rip rap on the ditch banks at the bridge, replacement of chain link fence at tennis deck, and mahogany staining deck rails.

Preliminary estimate: \$99,800.

Bridge 60'x8' with composite decking and add pavers from bridge landing through retention pond to the oval walkway, rip rap on the ditch banks at the bridge, replacement of the chain

link fence at tennis deck, and mahogany staining deck rails.

Preliminary estimate: \$81,000.

We would need to work out the details and formalize this a bit, but even if we add a little contingency, numbers are still better. Please let us know what you think.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: George Reenstra
Yes sir, I'll keep you posted. Thank you.
Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
OK, let's see what happens. I'm leaving Tuesday afternoon for Germany gone for about a week on business and then I'll be back around 1 July.
George Reenstra
Longboat Key

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

To: George Reenstra
Thank you for the feedback. Yeah, it's possible this contractor, who has done good work for the Town before, may have plenty of work and priced it that way. I just talked to our PM, and he thinks the other contractor's numbers will be a good bit better. Right now, the other contractor is not scheduled to be out there until Thursday, but our afternoon is going to try to get him out there earlier than that so we can get his numbers sooner.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key
Premier Community, Exceptional Service

Longboat Key: Wood Bridge over Creek and Bridge Designation

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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 12

Felony

7:13 a.m.

Officer Nazareno while on patrol in the 4000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, observed a white Fiat that was noted as the owner possibly having a warrant. While driving through Bayfront Park, Officer Nazareno ran the tag and received a positive hit via ELVIS for the driver. The vehicle was occupied by a white male and parked in Bayfront Park. Officer Nazareno requested backup and stayed in the area until Sgt. Butler and officers arrived on scene. Upon arrival, Officer Maple made contact with the driver and confirmed he was the registered owner of the vehicle. The driver was detained and the Manatee County Warrant was confirmed through dispatch. The driver was taken to Sarasota County Jail by officers for booking. Based on the active warrant the man was taken to Sarasota County for Illegal Killing/Possessing/Capturing of Alligator/Crocodilia/Eggs and Contributing to Delinquency or Dependency of a Child. The man was transported to Sarasota County Jail by Officer Maple without incident. The vehicle was locked and keys given to the man at his request. The man informed he must make arrangements for vehicle or it could be towed. Case clear.



complainant traveling southbound on Gulfside Road towards Gulf of Mexico Drive. Officer Nazareno conducted an area canvass and made contact with the man and advised him that a 911 call was made about him taking pictures of properties. The man stated that he was taking pictures of listings and properties from the street and voluntarily showed Officer Nazareno his cell phone pictures which consisted of photos taken from the public street. No criminal activity reported. Case clear.

Noise

8:18 p.m.

Officer Martinson was dispatched to the 4800 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a noise complaint. Upon arrival, Officer Martinson walked to the grilling area next to the beach and located the loud music. He found the owner of the stereo on the beach and advised him the music was too loud. He apologized and the music was turned off. Case clear.

June 13

Person

8:25 a.m.

Officer Maple while on patrol in the 5500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, was flagged down by an older man on a bicycle who stated a man was lying down on the sidewalk about 1/4 mile south of the location. Upon Officer Maple's arrival, he observed a 30-year-old male, shaggy red beard, red hat, yellow shirt, red shorts, red crock shoes, lying down on his back in the middle of the sidewalk on the east side of Gulf of Mexico Drive. When approached, the man stated he was recently released from the hospital and was walking south to a beach near Publix and asked for a ride. A check of the individual produced negative results. The man could not confirm what beach he was looking for and thought Lido Key might be the right location. After a required pat down was conducted, the man was given a lift to the 100 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive without incident. Case clear.

June 14

Person

12:11 p.m.

Officer Nazareno was dispatched to Gulfside Road for a suspicious person call where the caller stated that a man with no shirt, blue shorts and riding a bicycle was taking pictures of property in the area. Upon making contact with the complainant, he said that the bicyclist did not step into his property but took a picture from the street in front of his house. He also said that the man was taking pictures of the vacant property next door. The man was last seen by the

June 15

Person

1:45 p.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to the 3100 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a suspicious person. The woman reported she believed the man was living in the van and changing in public. She reported the same incident previously on June 11. Upon arrival, Officer Troyer observed the man in the van. He knew the man by name due to having previous contact. Officer Troyer informed the man why he was contacting him and asked him about his business. The man said he was not a customer of any businesses in the plaza, however he was parking to use the public beach access. Officer Troyer apprised the man of town ordinance which prohibited camping and asked him to use public parking if he was using the public beach access. The man agreed he would move and did not want to cause any issues with anyone. Officer Troyer spoke with the complainant who said she was concerned because this has been an ongoing issue for approximately a month now, where the man would park on private property and change in public, but not being a patron to the businesses either. The complainant also had concerns as the man's intentions parking on the property also. The complainant said she was good friends with the property owner who previously advised the man not to park on the property unless he was doing business with the shops at the location. The complainant said the man continued to park on the property though. Case clear.

June 16

Marine rescue

12:40 a.m.

Officer Castro responded to the 4600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive for a marine rescue. A concerned citizen called 911 to report a swimmer she believed was struggling in the water. According to the caller, the swimmer had been in the water for approximately one hour and was far from shore. Marine units arrived on scene and made contact with the swimmer, who stated he was fine and did not require assistance. Case clear.

Trespassing

5:02 p.m.

Sgt. Montfort responded to the 6700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive for a trespassing of numerous people with dump trucks. The complainant owns the plaza and requested contact. Sgt. Montfort contacted the complainant who apprised him of the incident and said the residents of a home across the street were receiving numerous deliveries of sand to backfill the seawall located on the property. The dump truck which were delivering the sand were parking in his lot while waiting for their turn to be off loaded. The complainant said he did not give the operator nor the homeowner of the house for the truck to park there. Sgt. Montfort patrolled to the plaza and located numerous dump trucks parked and idling. Sgt. Montfort gathered the group of drivers and advised them of the situation and that the owner of the property wished for them to vacate. Sgt. Montfort then patrolled the home and spoke to the homeowner's assistant who was overseeing the beach delivery project. Sgt. Montfort advised the homeowner of the parking issue with the truck and the after hours noise violation. Sgt. Montfort subsequently issued the woman a civil warning for violation of the town's sound regulations. The homeowner complied and all noise ceased for the evening. Case clear.

Person

8:12 p.m.

Officer Van Dyke responded to the 3500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a suspicious person. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke located a man and woman beside a tent near the beach access. The subjects were observed collecting their belongings in order to exit as Officer Van Dyke arrived on scene. Officer Van Dyke educated the subjects on town ordinance, no formal written warning was issued since the subjects were compliant and cooperative. Case clear.

June 17

Boat

11:00 a.m.

Officer Barret while on patrol, observed a disabled vessel on the east side of Longboat Pass Bridge. The vessel had the anchor line caught in its propellor. Officers assisted the captain in removing the line from the propellor. Case clear.



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Editorial Opinion

The Great Sarasota Meltdown: One Out of Three of My Tennis Partners Has Disappeared

When the snowbirds came down this season, I conducted what scientists call “an informal census” and what my wife calls “staring at people.” The results were alarming. My friends on the tennis court — once a proud and thundering herd of horse-like, big-bellied foodies, the kind of men who ordered the surf and the turf and then asked what came with it — had shrunk.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
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This is the year of the GLP-1, the GLP-2, and presumably the GLP-3, which I assume is the sequel where they finally explain the plot. This is the year of Ozempic and all the drugs that have dissolved fat faster than global warming is dissolving the glaciers. And let me tell you, the comparison holds up, because you can see the runoff everywhere. Pants are pooling. Belts have new holes punched in them with the desperate enthusiasm of a man stabbing a voodoo doll. Entire wardrobes have been donated to Goodwill, where I assume there is now a section labeled Formerly Large Floridians, Slightly Used.



REID

A Census of the Vanished

When the snowbirds came down this season, I conducted what scientists call “an informal census” and what my wife calls “staring at people.” The results were alarming. My friends on the tennis court — once a proud and thundering herd of horse-like, big-bellied foodies, the kind of men who ordered the surf and the turf and then asked what came with it — had shrunk.

I am not exaggerating when I say roughly one out of three of them appeared to have shed at least half of their body. Gone. Vanished. Where there had once been a Gary, there was now a thin, vibrating outline suggesting a Gary, like a charcoal sketch of the original Gary done by an artist who'd never met him — a virtual Modigliani in moisture-wicking polyester. The whole population of Longboat and Sarasota, formerly a contented civilization of consumption, had quietly transformed into a slender new species, blinking in the sun with a new lease on life.

It's Only a Peptide

Here is the part nobody warned me about: the evangelism.

These newly slender people have found a religion, and the religion is themselves. One friend cornered me with the specific eyes of a man who has Seen The Light and would like to schedule a follow-up appointment for me to See It Too. He told me, wistfully, eyes wide open, that the drug had replaced his high-pressure pills. Replaced them! Then he leaned in and confided that the semaglutides may stop Alzheimer's in its tracks. He said it the way other men announce the birth of a grandchild.

“This is the future,” he told me. “It's only a peptide.”

It's only a peptide. I have not been able to stop thinking about this sentence. It has the cadence of a hymn. It is the kind of thing you'd embroider on a pillow if you were the sort of household that now exists, somehow, on 600 calories a day and pure spiritual radiance.

The Matcha Prophet

Late at night — and I want to be clear that nothing healthy has ever happened to anyone late at night — I would watch a certain Stanford professor. You know the one. The neuroscientist with the podcast, the matcha lattes, and the 1.5 million viewers per episode, all of them lying in bed at 1 a.m. getting more obsessed with optimizing their health, which is itself a kind of disorder we have not yet named.

I would lie there in the blue glow, absorbing protocols, learning about my circadian rhythm, feeling my circadian rhythm get worse in real time, and I would think: this is the new church. The lattes are the communion. The morning sunlight is the sacrament. The supplements are the rosary, except the rosary costs \$400 a month and ships from a warehouse in Utah.

We Did Not Read the Book, But We Skimmed the Reel

And here is where I get, briefly, almost serious, before I remember that's against my contract.

For years we filled the emptiness with food — the obesity, the consumerism, the consumption, the great American suspicion that if we just ordered one more appetizer the hole inside us would finally close. Now we have stopped eating, and the hole is still there, so we have filled it with content. People are thinner than they have ever been and flipping through videos faster than they have ever flipped. We are not book lovers. Let's just be honest about that. Nobody is shedding half their body weight and then settling in with Middlemarch. We are scrolling. But we are thin while we scroll, and it is, I have to admit, a beautiful thing.

I won't say it's become narcissistic. I won't say self-referential. I'll just note that we used to worship a casserole and now we worship the reflection, and the reflection is finally cooperating.

On Becoming Eternal

The pitch, in the end, is immortality. They're going to last longer and longer and longer. Their presence will be around forever. The Alzheimer's stopped in its tracks, the heart pressure regulated, the body returned to its factory settings. We are, my friend assured me, becoming eternal — through tides and peptides and technology.

So that's where we've landed. A whole coast of people who used to be horses, now slender and luminous and very possibly going to outlive the glaciers they're outpacing. I look at them on the court, these new immortals, serving with the radiant calm of the recently saved, and I think two things at once.

The first is: good for them, honestly. The second is that I am going to go get a cheeseburger,

and I am going to enjoy it like a mortal, and somewhere a peptide is going to be very disappointed in me.

It's only an impulse. It's the future too.

The Gauntlet of Desire

Most of our madness remains hidden at home. I have to survive my own kitchen, and I want to be clear that this is not a small thing. Every evening, my kitchen is a gauntlet of desire. It is harder to cross than it was for Clint Eastwood to drive that dilapidated bus through a hail of gunfire, and I am not being dramatic, I am being accurate.

This is me, late at night, usually after a drink or two, when my will has been weakened and my testosterone has apparently drained out of my brain and pooled somewhere unhelpful, and every last molecule of willpower has dissolved. I scan the granite countertop and I do not see food. I see calories. Everywhere. A dozen sirens on the rocks, beckoning, singing my name.

“Since when have you become boring? You need dark chocolate...”

“You played tennis twice today and twice yesterday — you can definitely handle a plate of cheese and crackers.”

“It is ugly and narcissistic to simply care about your physicality. Enjoy life. Look at all the great cultures: France, Rome the Greeks — they knew how to live! Just pick the Brugal 1888 or the Cabernet — but make a decision!”

My daughter has developed a fascination with baking. And not casual baking. She has gotten into dark chocolate chip cookies — and then, as if that alone were not a war crime against a man trying to stay a size medium, she makes a second batch with the good Ghirardelli cocoa powder, so now there are chocolate-chocolate-chip cookies sitting side by side with the regular vanilla-laden chocolate chip cookies, like twin demons offering me a choice that is not really a choice.

And that is before the Talenti gelato starts screaming from the freezer. That is before the blackberry cobbler begins yelling at me from the counter. That is before the Manchego, and the bottle of Cabernet that so obviously needs to be opened that it practically files a formal request. It is, frankly, too much for one unmedicated human to walk through. No GLP. No peptide. Nothing whatsoever to shut the food noise down.

I Love Conflict (I May Be a Classical Greek)

But here is the thing about me: I don't mind conflict. I love conflict. Maybe I'm a classical Greek at heart. I like the agonistic life. I like having a small war running in my psyche at all times — it is probably why I became a writer, why I like to dive into issues. So I step into the gauntlet, and I begin to negotiate, and the negotiations go roughly like this:

First, I rationalize. I can rationalize eating literally anything. I pre-heat the calories in my mind and assure myself that I will play so much tennis tomorrow that I'll burn them off like a welder searing the lipids right off my stretched stomach.

Then I move on to the other lies — the tender ones. How long will my daughter even be into baking? This won't last. Childhood is a fleeting moment. I can work myself into a full Rilke-grade argument in my own head, about the ever-moving nature of life and how we must be so present, so in the moment, bending each fleeting instant to its knees in submission — all of it, somehow, in service of eating a cookie.

And then, perhaps, like every addicted personality who ever lived, I suspend rational thought entirely and just manically gorge them down. Nine cookies at once. Until the shame arrives, right on schedule, and I wander off to bed, bloated, curl up next to my wife, and put on Diary of a CEO to better myself as I fall asleep.

It's Not Noise. It's Music.

Many people, I know, prefer a simpler world. They take their SSRIs and their GLPs and they make the food noise stop.

But I don't even want to call it food noise. Calling it food noise is like calling the Beatles noise. It's like calling Hendrix or Bach noise. I love the very particular sound of these words: blackberry cobbler. Chocolate chip cookies. Cabernet Sauvignon. Manchego. Avocados. Those are lyrics. That is music. Those are the words that stir my soul and keep me living — or at least, for today, they keep me living.

So I will probably not be donating my medium clothes. I will probably not be slipping into the size small I wore in college. And if you see me on the tennis court next week with a slightly tortured look on my face, I want you to know exactly what it means. It means I had thirteen chocolate chip cookies, two glasses of wine, and a full plate of guilt and shame the night before.

And I can live with that. I was born Catholic. The guilt was always going to be part of the recipe.

This is my confession.



Shore, from page 1

the third floor — the floor that has, in one form or another, started two wars on this island in five years — would hold a single residential condominium wrapped around a private pool, its roof cut open to the sky.

It is a lovely rendering. It is also the latest move in a campaign that residents, a former Longboat Key mayor, and the city's own paper trail suggest has been running, more or less continuously, since 2021: the steady effort to add height, density and — the word nobody on the applicant's side will say out loud anymore — hotels to the most protected commercial acre in Sarasota.

The case goes before the city's Development Review Committee on July 15.

Two Families, One Project

The first thing to understand about this proposal is that the operator and the landlord are no longer the same person — and that the separation is doing a lot of quiet work.

The restaurant brand belongs to Tom Leonard, who co-founded Shore with his wife, Susan Leonard. Shore opened its first retail store on St. Armands in 2008 and grew into a full restaurant on the Circle by 2012, before flood damage from Hurricanes Helene and Milton forced its closure at 465 John Ringling Blvd. in December 2024. (That space is now leased to Tommy Bahama.) “St. Armands has always been home for Shore,” Susan Leonard told the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, calling the return “incredibly meaningful after such loss and devastation.” Tom Leonard, for his part, framed it in the register he favors: “It's time for a little love on the Circle.”

The land, however, now belongs to the Kauffmans. The property owner of record is Mindy Kauffman, through Kauffman Shore Properties LLC. Her father, Dr. Mark Kauffman, is one of Sarasota's most prolific property owners and developers; the family's entities — United Associates Ltd. and Kauffman Family Partnership #1 Ltd., alongside Sarasota-based Red Property Management — recur throughout the filings. In a transaction that tells you something about how these things are arranged, Kauffman Shore Properties acquired the two parcels on Jan. 6 from other Kauffman-linked entities for \$100 apiece — a pair of dollar-store deeds that move flood-ravaged real estate from one family pocket to another while the public-facing story stays focused on grouper and key lime pie.

This division of labor matters. When the brand talks, it talks about homecoming and hospitality. When the land entity files, it files for entitlements. And when the third floor draws fire, each side can gesture at the other. It is a structure that diffuses accountability by design.

What They Are Allowed to Do — and What They Want

St. Armands Circle sits in the Commercial Tourist (CT) zoning district, a category that has, for decades, drawn a hard line: no hotels. City code defines a hotel as a building with six or more guest rooms rented to travelers on a daily or weekly basis — precisely the use the CT district was written to keep off the Circle. Redeveloping the ground-floor commercial space — restaurant, café, retail — does not, by itself, require rezoning. The city has confirmed as much; the project would need Planning Board approval but not a City Commission vote, and rezoning from CT “will not be necessary,” according to staff.

So why does any of this feel like a fight?

Because of the third floor. The current application describes it modestly: one condominium unit with a pool. But that is not how this project was introduced to the public. In December, Shore's own materials described a three-story “flagship” anchored by what was characterized as luxury residential space “that could evolve into a boutique hotel” — the first, in the brand's phrase, “fully immersive Shore lifestyle destination.” A residential third floor on commercially zoned property is, in the words of former Longboat Key Mayor Terry Gans, “heretofore unhalloved.” A boutique hotel on that floor would be flatly illegal under current code.

The gap between what is filed and what has been pitched is the whole story. File for a condo. Pitch a hotel. Build the box. Argue about the use later, once the structure exists and the sunk cost makes denial feel churlish. Residents have seen this choreography before.

The FEMA Wall: The 50% Rule

If zoning is the political obstacle, the federal flood code is the physical one — and it may be the single most important number in this entire saga.

Under FEMA's so-called 50% Rule, any improvement to a structure in a flood zone that costs 50% or more of the building's pre-improvement market value triggers a requirement to bring the entire structure up to current flood-resistant standards — which on a barrier island means elevating it to base flood elevation. At the Dec. 17 pre-application conference, the city's Development Review Committee warned the applicant's consultants, Bill Waddill and Dominic Pardue of Kimley-Horn, that ordinary floodproofing would not clear the bar. Deputy Building Official Mike Taylor pegged the combined existing structure value at roughly \$1.2 million and was blunt: “It doesn't sound like this project can be built for under 50% of the value of that,” he told Waddill. “Even with a private property appraiser, it would be difficult to meet those numbers and still be able to get what you want out of this.”

Here is the economic logic that turns a flood rule into a density argument. Once the 50% Rule forces a developer to gut and elevate — to spend, in Leonard's own description of his Longboat Key floodproofing, on water-resistant windows that run “\$500 per linear foot” and “basically make your building an aquarium” — the only way to make the math pencil out is to build up. The federal regulation designed to protect property becomes the developer's best argument for adding stories. As the residents' association has framed it: to make post-storm investment work, developers are looking upward. The third floor isn't an amenity. It's the return on a code-mandated cost.

The June application, notably, lists the estimated construction value as “TBD.” The most important number in the project is the one the applicant has declined to put on paper.

The Parking Maneuver

Then there is the matter of the parking spaces — eleven behind the property, plus eight more the developer would need to satisfy the zoning code. And it is here that the relationship

between the City of Sarasota and the development community comes into sharpest, least flattering focus.

The application notes, almost in passing, that “coordination has been conducted with the City of Sarasota staff regarding the potential to purchase” eight additional spots from the St. Armands public parking garage. Read that again. A private developer, short on the parking his own project requires, proposes to buy public spaces — paid for and maintained by the public — to make a private mixed-use building with a rooftop pool conform to code.

This is not a new species of maneuver on St. Armands; it is practically the house style. Years ago, a push to build a hotel and gourmet market on the publicly owned Fillmore parking lot collapsed only when it emerged that municipal bond covenants legally prohibited eliminating the lot's paid spaces. One of the developers behind that effort, per the St. Armands Residents Association's own records, was the owner of Shore. The public parking supply has long been the soft asset that private projects reach for when the numbers don't work — and the city staff, residents note, has shown a recurring willingness to entertain the reach.

A Pattern, Documented

What gives this proposal its charge is that almost none of it is unprecedented. Lay the filings end to end and a decade-long pattern emerges.

2021–2022: As chair of the St. Armands Business Improvement District, Leonard helped lead a “Vision 2026” campaign to raise the Circle's height limit from 35 to 45 feet, permit hotels at up to 150 units per acre, and increase residential density. The City Commission rejected taller buildings on the Circle by a 5–0 vote in November 2022. The BID, which had spent months lobbying for entitlements on behalf of a handful of property owners, was subsequently disbanded after it emerged it lacked the authority to seek the zoning changes it was pursuing.

The Fillmore lot: The hotel-and-market scheme on public parking land, killed by bond covenants.

Winter Fest, 2022: As Gans recounts, the appropriation of public parkland and right-of-way in the median of John Ringling Boulevard for ice skating and lights — an effort, he writes, “almost cloaked in darkness fete accompli before residents caught wind of it,” undertaken

with Ride Entertainment, the same firm tied to an earlier pitch for a permanent carousel on that same public patch and a move on Ken Thompson Park.

August 2025: A closed-door meeting between Planning Director Steven Cover, his staff, and “many of the largest property owners” — scheduled for Sept. 8, invitation-only, not noticed to the public, the merchants' association president, or most property owners. When St. Armands Merchants Association President Rachel Burns and others began asking why a meeting about the Circle's

future was being held in private, Cover confirmed it was “just for those who are invited.” Within 48 hours, after a flurry of emails, the city reversed course, canceled the meeting, and announced a public “community conversation” instead — while Deputy City Manager Pat Robinson urged staff to “make haste” in scheduling, over summer, when, as Resident's Association President Chris Goglia pointedly noted, many residents are away and least able to participate.

The visioning sessions, 2026: Out of that backlash came two public “visioning” workshops, in February and April, facilitated by independent sociologist Dr. David Brain. Roughly 150 stakeholders gathered at Mote Marine's Keating Center for the first. The verdict was not close. Attendees wanted landscaping, outdoor dining, code enforcement and storm resilience — and were, in the reporting at the time, overwhelmingly opposed to adding hotel uses or changing the scale of the Circle. Asked to imagine St. Armands in 2046, they voted for the century-old village they already have: small boutique shops, low buildings, the quaint center that makes the place worth fighting over.

The community, in other words, has now said no to hotelization three times — at the ballot of a 5–0 commission vote, and twice at the city's own workshops.

What Is at Stake

Goglia, who leads the residents' association, has reduced the danger to a single mechanism that ought to worry anyone who owns or loves property on the Circle: precedent. “If this concept is financially successful for this one developer, why won't more and more commercial properties on St. Armands do the same thing?” he asked. “Once zoning changes are made for this one property, they then apply to all properties.”

That is the quiet truth beneath the rendering. A condo over a restaurant is a curiosity. A legal pathway to a third residential or hotel floor on the Circle is a template — one that every flood-damaged building owner facing the 50% Rule will have every financial incentive to copy. The barrier island's evacuation routes, its chronic traffic, its failure-prone stormwater pumps, and the simple fact that storm surge crested it twice in 2024 are not abstractions. They are the reasons the density line was drawn where it was.

Jim Ludwig, a Lido Key resident and Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations vice president, put the obligation plainly when the closed-door meeting unraveled: “St. Armands is too important to not spend the necessary time and effort to look at its future viability.” The question is whether a process that keeps producing the same public answer — no — will be allowed to keep producing it, or whether the answer arrives instead one \$100 deed, one “TBD” construction value, and one quietly purchased block of public parking at a time.

The Last Word, for Now

Credit where it is due, and Gans is right to give it: Tom Leonard builds and operates good restaurants, the still-thriving Longboat Key Shore among them. Sandwiched between the public pier and Mar Vista on 400 feet of bayfront, with its stadium seating and retractable roof, it is a genuine asset to the north end. Nobody serious wants the Circle corner to stay a gutted bank.

But there is a difference between revitalization and conquest, and the difference lives on the third floor. The community has been clear about what it wants: resilience, beauty, and the scale it has always had. What it keeps being offered, in Gans's memorable phrase, is “continued fires to be responded to and put out, started by a developer that seems intent to keep throwing things against the wall until one sticks.”

On July 15, the wall gets another throw.

Ads that work...

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Manager, from page 1

Howard “Tip” Tipton announced his retirement on June 1, capping a 45-year career in Florida local government — the last stretch of it as the manager of a town that, by his own account, gave him the least stressful job he’d had in three decades. That it still proved too stressful tells you something about the other jobs, and about the toll the work has taken. Tipton’s medical team, he told the Town’s employees, has advised that prolonged stress is driving health challenges he’s been dealing with recently, and he needs to take every step he can to get back to better health.

He told Longboat Key News he wished he could stay much longer.

What he leaves behind is a ledger that any manager would envy. Tipton steered the town through the 2024 hurricane season — two of the worst storms ever to strike the region within weeks of each other — and out the other side to what he has described as 100% recovery, with parks reopened, amenities restored and the island rebuilt to a higher standard of resilience. He saw the town-wide undergrounding of utilities pulled, finally and completely, out of the ground and into the conduit. And he was instrumental in raising the private money behind the future Longboat Key public library and Community Hall at the Town Center Green — a \$4 million local fundraising goal met, layered atop an \$11 million Sarasota County commitment.

He is also, almost universally, adored by the people who work for him. That last fact is not a footnote. It is the entire reason the search looked the way it did.

“Over a 45-year career, it has been one of my great honors to lead this organization and be a part of this wonderful town,” Tipton wrote to employees in a June 11 message announcing his departure. “It’s one thing to talk a good game, and it is all together so much more impressive when the team walks the talk.”

A search of one

When Tipton first told commissioners in April that he intended to step down, the board faced the standard fork in the road: hire a national recruiting firm and run a months-long competition, or do something faster and more personal. With more than four decades of Florida local-government relationships at his disposal, Tipton offered to do the recruiting himself. The board agreed.

The commission did not hand him a blank check. It handed him a profile. According to Tipton’s memo to the board, commissioners wanted an experienced public administrator with Florida experience, a coastal background, a strong public-safety and emergency-management résumé, public-utilities experience, and someone capable of nurturing the town’s relationships with both Manatee and Sarasota counties as well as state and federal partners.

It is, Tipton conceded, a short list of people who fit — and an even shorter one once you account for who would actually uproot a career to move to one of the most expensive housing markets in Florida on the timeline the town needed. He reached out to a targeted group of Florida administrators, gauged interest, ran one tour of the island and Town facilities, and met with several candidates over two months. He emerged with a single name to recommend.

For a community of fiscally literate residents accustomed to scrutinizing every line of the tax bill, the absence of a competitive field is the kind of thing that ordinarily raises eyebrows. The town’s wager is that Tipton’s judgment — the very trust that made employees revere him — is itself the credential that justifies skipping the cattle call.

Who is George Landry?

The name Tipton brought back belongs to a man whose career splits cleanly in two.

For 20-plus years, Landry was a soldier. He retired from the U.S. Army as a first sergeant after service that, per his résumé, ran from 1990 to 2013 and included six deployments to Iraq, plus tours touching Afghanistan, Ukraine, Korea, Panama and Cuba. He led and trained 150 soldiers, ran reconnaissance teams during combat operations, and walked away with two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart.

The second act has been local government, all of it in St. Lucie County on Florida’s east coast. Landry started in 2013 as the county’s Human Resources and Risk Manager — where he restructured a self-insured health plan he says yielded \$2.4 million in annual savings — then ran Public Utilities and Solid Waste from 2018, bringing a 25-year outsourced utility back in-house and overseeing a \$200 million utility expansion. In 2023, the county commission promoted him to County Administrator, putting him atop an organization of more than 1,100 employees and a budget north of \$900 million.

He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Columbia Southern University and is a credentialed manager through the International City/County Management Association. He has coached high-school football in Fort Pierce and sat on the board of the local Boys and Girls Club.

There is a tidy symmetry the town may appreciate: Tipton himself once served as County Manager for St. Lucie County. Landry is, in a sense, following his recruiter’s old footprints west.

“Keep Longboat Longboat”

In the cover letter included in the agenda packet, Landry leans hard into the phrase he says he kept hearing as he learned about the island.

“As I learned more about Longboat Key, one phrase consistently stood out: ‘Keep Longboat Longboat,’” he wrote. “If selected, my role would not be to change Longboat Key’s identity, but rather to help protect, strengthen, and enhance it through professional management, responsive service, and collaborative leadership.”

He framed his pitch around continuity rather than reinvention — a reading of the room that, for a town wary of an outsider, is either genuinely astute or precisely what an astute outsider would write.

“Public service has been the foundation of my professional life for more than 30 years,” Landry wrote, “and throughout that time I have learned that leadership is ultimately about people, trust, and stewardship.”

He pledged, if hired, to keep the town “resilient, financially sound, and prepared for future opportunities and challenges” — three adjectives chosen, one suspects, with this particular readership in mind.

The money

Here is the part Longboat Key residents will read twice.

Landry’s starting salary is set at \$255,000 per year for fiscal 2027. Against the obvious benchmark — what Tipton would have earned — it is not an increase. Tipton’s base was \$211,500

when he was hired in January 2023; had he stayed and received a 5% raise this October, his FY 2027 salary would have landed at roughly \$255,624. In other words, Landry will earn about \$624 less than the man he’s replacing would have.

The town attorney’s memo characterizes the overall package as effectively budget-neutral when measured against the cost of Tipton’s continued service. That framing matters in a community where the manager’s compensation is a perennial line of public interest.

The terms, in brief:

- A five-year contract, running September 14, 2026, through September 30, 2031, with one optional two-year renewal (potentially extending through 2033) and successive one-year renewals after that. Landry’s initial term is a year longer than the four-year deal Tipton signed.
- A housing allowance of \$2,500 per month (\$30,000 a year) — \$500 a month more than Tipton’s \$2,000. The attorney’s memo attributes the bump squarely to “the current housing cost(s) and supply and demand issues” in the Longboat Key/Sarasota market, an acknowledgment that even a man earning a quarter-million dollars needs help buying in on this island. The allowance is contingent on Landry living within town limits or within 10 driving miles of them.

- A relocation allowance of up to \$10,000, repayable if he resigns within his first two years.
- A retirement contribution equal to 17.8% of salary, the same benefit afforded the last two managers, plus standard life, health, dental and disability insurance, a town take-home vehicle, and leave accrued at the rate of a 15-year employee.

- A removed perk: unlike Tipton, Landry is not taking the annual town-paid physical — a deletion the attorney estimates saves the town about \$5,000 a year.

- Severance, should the commission ever fire him without cause, is capped at 20 weeks — the maximum Florida law allows for a government employee. And removing him won’t be casual: under the town charter, it takes a supermajority of at least five of the seven commissioners.

The transition

Landry’s obligations in St. Lucie County mean he can’t start until September 14 — which is, not coincidentally, Tipton’s last day. Tipton timed his exit to make sure the commission’s first meeting

after summer recess is covered, handing off the gavel and the keys in a single motion.

Landry won’t be in the room Monday; a prior commitment keeps him away from the very meeting that will decide his future. He has indicated he’ll sign the agreement on or before the meeting date and, if approved, visit Town Hall on June 23 and 24 to meet staff, town leadership and residents.

He has already met privately with each of the seven commissioners and with Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman — the quiet, one-on-one courtship that has stood in for a public search.

What’s really being decided Monday

The town attorney’s memo is careful to underline a point that the streamlined process might otherwise obscure: the choice is the commission’s alone, to be made in the open. “The selection of the Town Manager and the approval of an Employment Agreement remain entirely a Town Commission board decision,” Maggie Mooney wrote, “at a noticed public meeting where the Town Commission can discuss, consider, and vote on these items as a collegial body.”

So the decision Monday is narrower than “Is George Landry the right manager for Longboat Key?” It is closer to “Do we trust the judgment of the man who picked him?”

For 45 years, betting on Howard Tipton’s judgment has paid off. On Monday, the town places that bet one last time — on his successor.

The Town Commission’s special meeting begins at 1 p.m. Monday, June 22, at Town Hall, 501 Bay Isles Road, and will be live-streamed on the Town’s website.



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SportingLife

The Emerald Labyrinth: Kayaking the Hidden Mangrove Tunnels of Longboat and Lido Key

The air shifts the moment you cross the threshold. The bright, blinding glare of the Florida sun is suddenly swallowed by a dense canopy of emerald green, replaced by a cool, dappled twilight.

Here, just inches above the waterline, the ambient hum of Gulf Coast traffic and outboard motors fades into an ancient, cathedral-like silence. The water turns from a sparkling turquoise to a deep, reflective glass, mirroring the twisted, grasping roots that rise from the shallows like the fingers of a sleeping giant. This isn't the open ocean, and it certainly isn't the pristine, manicured beachfront that draws millions to our shores. This is the wild, tangled heart of the barrier islands—a primeval labyrinth waiting to be explored.

Gliding into the mangrove tunnels of our local keys by kayak is a plunge into a world that feels completely untouched by time. The deeper you paddle, the more the modern world slips away, leaving only the rhythmic drip of water from your blade and the sudden, startling splash of a mullet breaking the surface.

Launching into the Labyrinth at Quick Point

The park at the south end of Longboat Key hides some of the area's longest living tunnels

While many paddlers immediately think of Lido Key for tunnel exploration, some of the most spectacular, uninterrupted stretches of mangrove canopy are located right on the southern tip of Longboat Key. Quick Point Nature Preserve, a 34-acre coastal haven, serves as the perfect beginning to your journey.

Launching near the preserve drops you almost immediately into a quiet, winding maze. The tunnels on the south end of Longboat are exceptionally long, drawing you deep into the heart of the coastal forest. As you maneuver through the tight corridors, the red mangroves close in around you. Their complex, stilt-like prop roots form an intricate wooden cage along the banks, creating living passageways that twist and turn with no clear end in sight.

Paddling through here requires a bit of finesse. You learn to read the currents, taking slow, deliberate strokes. Sometimes, the canopy dips so low you have to duck, pulling your paddle parallel to the hull to squeeze through a particularly tight choke point. I usually keep my Nikon Zf slung close by in a



dry bag, because the way the midday light pierces through the leaves—casting sharp, golden beams into the dark water—is an absolute dream to shoot. The scent of salt and damp earth is rich and grounding. For anyone looking to shake off the routine, this quiet exertion is the perfect antidote to the noise of daily life.

Open Bay Experiences

Trading the tight canopy for the sweeping grass flats of Sarasota Bay

Eventually, the tight, claustrophobic thrill of the Longboat tunnels spits you back out into the expansive, sun-drenched waters of Sarasota Bay. The contrast is spectacular. The horizon suddenly rushes back in, and the water clears, revealing vast meadows of seagrass swaying beneath your hull. This transition zone is an absolute goldmine for coastal wildlife.

If you let the kayak drift in silence, the ecosystem comes alive around you. It's not uncommon to hear the heavy, resonant breath of a manatee before you see it, followed by the slow, gray curve of its back breaking the surface just feet from your boat. Dolphins frequently patrol these open channels, their dorsal fins cutting cleanly through the water as they herd baitfish against the mangrove shorelines. Overhead, ospreys circle and dive with pinpoint precision, while white egrets and great blue herons stand like statues in the shallows, waiting for the perfect strike.

At 57, I've found that few things beat the low-impact, rhythmic physical effort of kayaking these flats. It gets the blood pumping without the jarring impact of a hard tennis court, and the sheer visual payoff is worth every stroke. You can easily spend hours out here just drifting, watching a yellow-crowned night heron stalk the roots or trying to count the tiny hermit crabs scattered across the gin-clear sandy bottom.

The Classic Lido Key Maze

A twist through Ted Sperling Park's famous coastal canopy
If you want to extend your paddling itinerary, making the short hop over to the Ted Sperling Nature Park on Lido Key offers a slightly different flavor of exploration. Lido is the epicenter of the area's kayak scene for good reason. Its highly manicured, well-marked trail system makes it incredibly accessible, even if it draws more of a crowd than the quiet stretches of Longboat.

Exploring these waters is a true choose-your-own-adventure. You can paddle hard against the tidal currents in the open bay for a solid workout, or just let the gentle drift carry you through the dark, twisting tunnels of the preserves. It's the kind of day that leaves you thoroughly exhausted in the best way possible. After a four-hour paddle, nothing sounds better than heading home, firing up the stove, and rendering down some thick-cut pancetta to toss with a ridiculous amount of fresh, sweet San Marzano tomatoes and parmesan.

Whether you're threading the needle on the south end of Longboat or cruising the bright, open flats of the bay, a kayak is the ultimate passport to the real Florida. It's right in our backyard, waiting to be discovered.

Your Guide to Launching and Renting

If you're ready to hit the water, here is everything you need to know about where to park the car and grab a kayak.

Longboat (South End & Quick Point)

The gateway to the long, winding tunnels of Quick Point Nature Preserve and the open grass flats of the bay.

Where to Park

Head to Overlook Park (101 Gulf of Mexico Drive). Located right at the base of the New Pass bridge, it offers easy parking and a simple launch point for accessing Quick Point by water.

Where to Rent:

Watersports Now: Specializes in 100% clear kayak tours that take you directly into the mangrove tunnels of Quick Point, providing an incredible view of the marine life below.

Liquid Blue Outfitters: Offers guided tours and rental delivery services, specializing in navigating the tidal changes around the southern tip of the island.

Longboat Key (Mid-Island Open Bay)

For a more expansive paddle with access to less-trafficked backwaters and Audubon islands.

Where to Park

Bayfront Park (4052 Gulf of Mexico Dr) offers ample public parking, restrooms, and direct, easy access to Sarasota Bay's grass flats.

Where to Rent:

Happy Paddler Kayak Tours & EcoVentures: The premier outfitter on the island with a rental stand right at Bayfront Park, plus a shop at Longboat Pass on the north end.

Lido Key (Ted Sperling Nature Park)

The most famous network of enclosed mangrove trails in the area.

Where to Park

190 Taft Drive, Sarasota. Follow Taft Drive straight into the park. Parking is free but fills up fast; arrive before 9:00 a.m. to secure a spot.

Where to Rent:

Almost Heaven Kayak Adventures: Operates directly out of the park, offering eco-tours and rentals near permit spot 4.

SURFit USA: Launches right from the park with a great selection of kayaks and stand-up paddleboards.

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