



Longboat Key News

March 20, 2026

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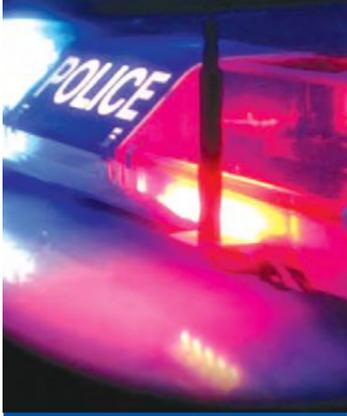
Wedding Bliss on Longboat Key ...page 4



A "Free Press" Not Guaranteed ...page 2



LBK Chief Mager responds ...page 5



Case of the undersized fish ...page 10

Amid 'Legal Gymnastics' and 'Jersey Beach' fears, Longboat board rejects St. Regis arch in standoff

Unicorp President and CEO Chuck Whittall pleaded with the board to view the arch not as advertising, but as a world-class amenity for a five-diamond resort.

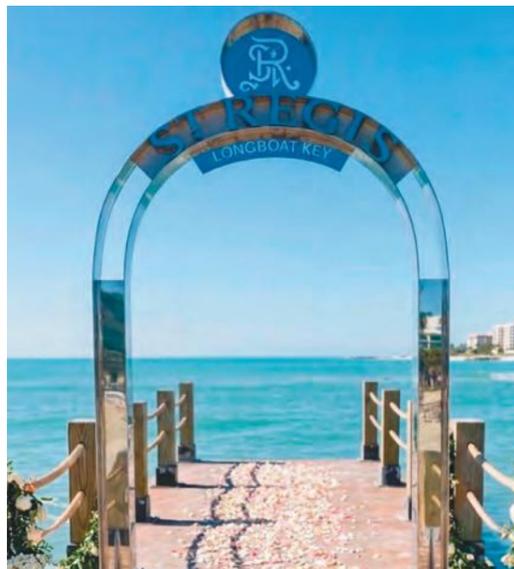
STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
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The battle over the St. Regis Longboat Key Resort's beachfront archway reached a boiling point on March 17, resulting in the town's Planning and Zoning Board officially recommending a denial of the ordinances designed to save the structure.

What began as a highly technical hearing over "private groin signs" quickly dissolved into a fiery, philosophical showdown. Accusations of "legal gymnastics," fears of turning Longboat Key into the "Jersey Beach," and a real-time fact-check over hurricane survival dominated the room.

Ultimately, the board voted to recommend the Town Commission deny both Ordinance 2026-07 and 2026-08, delivering a significant blow to the resort's attempt to retroactively legalize the 14-foot metallic arch con-

See Beach Arch, page 11



As National Parking Programs Profit, Sarasota Proposes Hikes to Plug a \$2.8 Million Hole

In cities like San Francisco, Seattle, and Miami, municipal parking is a lucrative, data-driven enterprise that pays for itself and funds local improvements. In Sarasota, it is a persistent drain on the city's coffers.

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Now, facing aging infrastructure, the lingering financial toll of recent hurricanes, and a widening operational deficit, the City of Sarasota is considering a sweeping overhaul of its parking fees. On Monday, March 23, 2026, the City Commission will review a proposal that could see transient parking

See Parking, page 6

Anchored in History, Reaching for the Clouds: Plymouth Harbor Builds Its Future While Preserving a Sarasota Legacy



The proposed expansion is shown to the left of the central tower. The City will consider the plan on March 23.

A sweeping new expansion plan aims to secure the community's next chapter without losing its mid-century soul.

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Sixty years ago, a young architect and a visionary minister dared to pierce the Sarasota sky, erecting a 25-story tower of unpainted concrete that forever changed the city's architectural and regulatory landscape. Today, Plymouth Harbor on

Sarasota Bay—the crown jewel of Coon Key and a monument to mid-century modernism—is once again asking the city for permission to reach for the clouds.

On Monday, March 23, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in the Commission Chambers, the Sarasota City Commission will weigh a sweeping

expansion plan for the legendary retirement community. The proposal, which sailed through the city's Planning Board with a 4-1 recommendation last month, would add a new 151-unit, 8 story independent living facility over a three-level parking garage.

See Plymouth, page 15

Paradise With a Traffic Problem: What the 2026 Citizen Survey Reveals About Longboat Key

If you ask a resident how they feel about their island, they will likely tell you it is one of the safest, most beautiful places in Florida.

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If you ask them what it takes to drive off that island on a Tuesday afternoon during season, the response will be decidedly less glowing.

The recently released 2026 Longboat Key Citizen Survey—conducted by the University of South Florida's Florida Institute of Government (FIG)—paints a complex picture of a community that fiercely loves its quality of life but is increasingly exhausted by the logistical realities of barrier island living.

Based on responses from 1,056 residents, the data reveals a clear mandate for Town Commissioners:

See Survey Says, page 4

“I No Longer Take The Free Press for Granted in America”

For decades, Marty Baron stood as the towering figure of American journalism, a quiet but fiercely resolute editor who steered the nation’s most storied newspapers through an era of profound technological disruption and political turbulence. He never hesitated in speaking truth to power.

BLAKE FLEETWOOD
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For decades, Marty Baron stood as the towering figure of American journalism, a quiet but fiercely resolute editor who steered the nation’s most storied newspapers through an era of profound technological disruption and political turbulence. He never hesitated in speaking truth to power.

But last Wednesday, speaking to a sold-out crowd of 204 attendees at the Sarasota Yacht Club under the sponsorship of the Longboat Key Democratic Club, the former executive editor of The Washington Post, The Boston Globe, and The Miami Herald delivered a stark, deeply personal warning about the survival of the American republic.

“I no longer assume that the constitutional order will hold,” Baron told the hushed room. “That the rule of law will prevail. That free expression – not just for the press, but for all Americans – will endure.”

Baron, who grew up in nearby Tampa, is perhaps best known to the public as the editor who spearheaded the Boston Globe “Spotlight” team’s investigation into the Catholic Church’s sex abuse scandal—a role immortalized by Liev Schreiber in the 2015 Academy Award-winning film. Later, under his 11-year stewardship, The Washington Post won 11 Pulitzer Prizes, exposing everything from government surveillance programs revealed by Edward Snowden to the vulnerabilities of the American electoral system.

Yet, looking back at a career that began in the 1970s—an era defined by the press’s role in uncovering the Pentagon Papers and Watergate—Baron confessed a profound shift in his outlook. He is no longer certain the institutions he spent his life defending can withstand the current political siege.

“In the decades since those revelations, I – probably like most of you – took for granted that we would always have a free press in this country: That the First Amendment would guarantee



Marty Baron spoke to a crowd at the Sarasota Yacht Club last week.

it,” Baron said. “I no longer take any of that for granted.”

The Erosion of Truth and the Authoritarian Playbook

At the heart of Baron’s address was the alarming disintegration of a shared American reality. He warned that the nation has lost its grip on the Enlightenment principles of education, See Marty Baron, page 11



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Survey Says, from page 1

keep the island safe, fix the beaches, and figure out the traffic.

Here is a hard-hitting analytical dive into what residents prioritized, what they praised, and where Town Hall is falling short.

The Good: Safety, Storm Recovery, and Satisfaction

It is difficult for any municipality to achieve the approval ratings Longboat Key currently enjoys regarding general quality of life.

- A staggering 99 percent of respondents rated the overall quality of life as either “excellent” or “good”.
- Residents feel incredibly secure, with 81.4 percent reporting they are “very satisfied” with the overall safety of the community.
- Public safety departments are overwhelmingly popular; among residents who actively used them, 83.3 percent were “very satisfied” with Fire & Ambulance services, and 66.9 percent were “very satisfied” with Police services.

Furthermore, the Town earned massive political capital for its handling of the 2024 hurricane season. Despite the devastation of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, nearly 96 percent of residents expressed satisfaction with the Town’s response and recovery efforts.

The Bad: The Undeniable Traffic Nightmare

If safety is Longboat Key’s greatest asset, traffic is its greatest liability. The survey makes it clear that residents are losing patience with gridlock.

- Traffic congestion was identified as a top issue facing the Town by 60.5 percent of respondents.
- More than half of the respondents expressed direct dissatisfaction with the flow of traffic, with 39.4 percent reporting they were “dissatisfied” and 13.9 percent “very dissatisfied”.
- When given the opportunity to leave open-ended comments, a massive 51 percent of all respondents used the space to complain about traffic congestion, bottlenecks at St. Armands Circle, and the inability to leave the island in the afternoon.

Interestingly, the Town’s attempt at an alternative transit solution—the Breeze transportation service—is struggling to gain traction. The survey reveals that fewer than half of residents report any level of familiarity with the service, and awareness actually declined slightly from 2025 to 2026.

The Ugly: Erosion, Insurance, and Red Tape

Beyond the roads, residents are deeply stressed about the physical and financial erosion of their properties.

- Beach Erosion is a Growing Threat: The percentage of residents identifying beach erosion as a top issue has steadily climbed, from 35.8 percent in 2024 to 41.3 percent in 2026. Consequently, 81.9 percent of residents rated beach management and shoreline protection as a “very important” priority.
- The Insurance Crisis: While it is largely a state issue, property insurance costs remain a massive local stressor, cited by 44.0 percent of respondents as a top issue facing the Town.
- Frustrations at Town Hall: While general administration scored well, regulatory departments took a hit. Among residents who actually used the services, nearly 23 percent reported dissatisfaction with the permitting process, and roughly 21 percent were dissatisfied with code enforcement. The FIOG report notes this is common for regulatory functions, but it remains a clear friction point for locals.

Shifting Tides: A Mandate for “Natural” Beaches

One of the most striking analytical takeaways from the 2026 data is a massive shift in environmental sentiment.

When asked if they support maintaining “natural” beaches—which means limiting beach grooming to only removing excessive seaweed to protect wildlife habitats—support skyrocketed. In 2025, only 45 percent of residents supported this. In 2026, roughly 75 percent of residents expressed support for natural beaches, while opposition plummeted from 46 percent to just 15 percent. This indicates a rapidly growing local consensus that environmental preservation must take precedence over manicured aesthetics.

Two Generations of Love

Elizabeth Klett, now Elizabeth Charles, and Patrick Charles were married on March 14, 2026, in a picturesque beachside ceremony at the St. Regis on Longboat Key, Florida.

The location held special significance for the bride and her family. Elizabeth’s parents, George and Joyce Klett pictured below, were married at the same site on April 29, 2005, when it was formerly known as the Colony Beach & Tennis Resort. When the property was redeveloped into the St. Regis, George and Joyce chose to become residents there, honoring the place where their own marriage began. Inspired by this enduring family connection, Elizabeth selected the setting for her own “fairytale” wedding, creating a meaningful continuation of a cherished tradition. Surrounded by loved ones and the beauty of the Gulf coast, the couple celebrated a joyful occasion that bridged generations.



Support for accelerating the Gulf of Mexico Drive multi-use trail is less definitive. While a plurality (47.4 percent) support speeding up the project, nearly 29 percent remain unsure, and 23.7 percent are opposed, suggesting the Town has more work to do to sell the concept to skeptical residents.

The Business Disconnect

For the first time, the Town attempted a dedicated Business Survey, but it essentially failed to launch. Out of approximately 221 surveys distributed, only 16 businesses responded—a dismal 7 percent response rate.

However, the few business owners who did respond sounded the alarm on two critical economic threats:

- Housing for Workers: 50 percent of business respondents were dissatisfied with the availability of quality, affordable housing.
- The Seasonal Cliff: 56.3 percent reported that seasonal fluctuations affect their business “very significantly,” making year-round survival a challenge.

The Bottom Line for Town Leadership

The FIOG report leaves Town Hall with several clear recommendations. First and foremost, leaders must prioritize strategies to address traffic, whether through regional partnerships or new management solutions. Second, they must maintain a relentless focus on infrastructure and stormwater management, as residents are watching the rising tides with a wary eye.

Longboat Key is not losing its charm, but the 2026 Citizen Survey proves that residents are demanding that the Town’s infrastructure and logistics finally catch up to its world-class reputation.

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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.

Police Chief Response to Policing Story

To: Editor

I am authoring this letter in response to an article written by Steve Reid who unfairly misrepresented how the Longboat Key Police Department methodically works to protect its community and how we strive to provide first-class police services that everyone should expect and deserve. The safety of our town, its residents, business owners, and visitors remain the number one priority of the Longboat Key Police Department.

Our responsibility is to ensure that Longboat Key continues to be a safe place to live, work, and visit. There were comments made suggesting that increased police presence may translate into over-aggressive or unnecessary policing. I want to be very clear: high visibility patrols are not about aggressive enforcement. They are about prevention, reassurance, and accessibility. When officers are present and visible in the community, it sends a simple message; our community is protected and our police department is actively engaged in keeping it that way. Visible policing has long been recognized as one of the most effective ways to deter crime before it occurs. It allows officers to interact positively with residents and visitors, respond quickly to concerns, and maintain the sense of safety that makes Longboat Key such a special place.

Our officers are highly trained, polite, and professional public servants who understand the importance of respectful and reasonable policing. They exercise discretion and judgment in their daily duties, and our department places a strong emphasis on fairness and professionalism. In fact, our enforcement statistics reflect that philosophy. In 2025, Longboat Key police officers issued twice as many warnings as actual citations. This demonstrates our commitment to education, voluntary compliance, and reasonable enforcement rather than unnecessary penalties. I give our officers full discretion to make those decisions based on the circumstances they encounter. There are no quotas or numerical expectations placed on them, only the expectation that they address violations appropriately and professionally.

Questions were also raised about the size of our department and the investment in modern police technology. Our police department is made up of 12 officers, 1 detective, 4 sergeants, and 3 members of command staff who all serve this community with professionalism and pride. We are a 24/7 day a week operation who covers both land and water security. Maintaining a well-trained, properly equipped department is not an excess, it is a responsibility. Public safety agencies must keep pace with modern tools and technology to respond effectively to emergencies, communicate efficiently, and protect both our officers and the community. Investments in training, equipment, and technology are not about expansion or unnecessary spending; they are about ensuring that our residents benefit from officers who have the tools needed to perform their duties safely, efficiently, and professionally. These investments ultimately enhance our ability to prevent crime, respond quickly, and maintain the high quality of life our residents and visitors expect and deserve.

We are also committed to being visible and engaged beyond patrol. Our department regularly attends homeowners' association meetings, and I personally attend all town commission meetings to stay connected with the community we serve. We believe in transparency, open communication, and being accessible to those we protect. As Chief, I have an open-door policy with anyone who'd like to talk about public safety on this island. We welcome community input, feedback, and engagement, as it strengthens our partnership and helps us better serve Longboat Key.

As part of our annual assessment, development and respect for community partnerships, the Town of Longboat Key sends out annual citizens surveys which allow us to gain input from our community and gauge our efforts. Over the past three years, the vast majority of our citizens have expressed they are satisfied or very satisfied with our police services, and this year specifically, a very small percentage expressed they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (2.1%).

My goal would be to reduce that number.

Longboat Key remains a safe island because of a strong partnership between the police department and the community we serve. Our visible presence, proactive approach, and responsible use of resources are all part of that commitment. We will continue to serve this community with professionalism, fairness, and respect while doing everything possible to ensure Longboat Key remains one of the safest and most welcoming communities in Florida.

Russ Mager
Chief of Police
Longboat Key Police Department

On Policing Article

To: Editor

It doesn't spark a taxpayers' revolt. Stop spreading misinformation. We like our Police presence. Thank you very much.

Gabriel E. Iriarte
Longboat Key

See Letters, page 12

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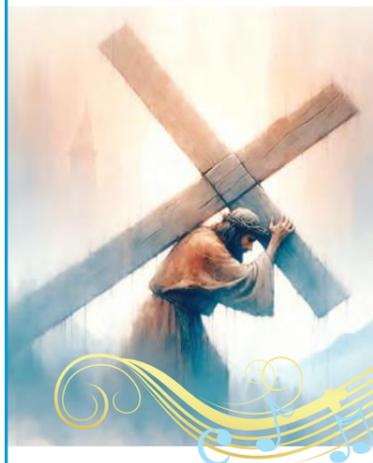
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Parking, from page 1

rates jump by as much as 50 percent, while some downtown and St. Armands workers could see their monthly permit costs triple.

The proposals, outlined in a presentation prepared by Broxton Harvey, General Manager of Parking, lay bare the stark financial realities facing the city's General Parking and St. Armands Parking Funds. For the upcoming 2026 fiscal year (FY26), the combined parking program is operating at a loss, projecting \$6,287,790 in revenues against \$6,558,574 in expenditures—a deficit of \$270,784. Without intervention, city projections show this combined deficit will balloon dramatically, reaching \$2,826,000 by FY28.

A deep dive into Sarasota's parking economics reveals a system fundamentally at odds with the successful, self-sustaining models adopted by other municipalities across the country.

The National Contrast: Tech, Turnover, and Reinvestment

Across the nation, successful municipal parking programs share a common blueprint: they view parking as a dynamic asset rather than a static public utility.

- San Francisco (SFpark) and Seattle: Both cities have pioneered dynamic, demand-based pricing. By using data to adjust meter rates on a block-by-block basis, they reduce cruising times and encourage turnover. Seattle specifically uses an "After 5" program that extends high-demand hours to 8:00 p.m. to capture maximum revenue.
- Old Pasadena, CA: This city utilizes a "Parking Benefit District." All net revenue is ring-fenced and reinvested directly into the immediate area for lighting, cleaning, and landscaping. This creates a positive feedback loop: cleaner, safer streets justify the higher parking costs to merchants and visitors alike.
- Miami and Washington, D.C.: These cities have aggressively slashed labor costs and increased transaction speeds by transitioning to 100% pay-by-cell and pay-by-plate technologies.

In these cities, rates are intentionally higher in high-demand areas to encourage turnover rather than idling, and the technology minimizes the overhead needed to enforce it.

Why Sarasota's Program Bleeds Money...

By contrast, Sarasota has historically struggled to make its parking self-sufficient. The city's internal presentation highlights several specific drains on the current system, ranging from massive transit subsidies to Mother Nature.

The Transit Subsidy: The Cost of the Bay Runner

Perhaps the most heavily debated line item is the \$924,231 that the parking division must pay annually to fund the Bayrunner transit service. From a pure spreadsheet perspective, it is a massive financial drain that generates absolutely zero direct fare revenue, as it is completely free to ride.

However, from a city planning perspective, the open-air trolley is considered a vital public utility. Operating from downtown Sarasota, over the Ringling Bridge, to St. Armands Circle and Lido Beach, its primary goal is to alleviate severe island gridlock. It also serves as an "employee shuttle," encouraging retail workers to park in underutilized downtown garages and ride the trolley, thereby freeing up premium parking spaces on St. Armands Circle for paying tourists. The public has responded enthusiastically; the Bay Runner transported over 554,000 passengers between its 2022 launch and late 2025.

To stop the financial bleeding without killing the popular service, the city recently voted to transfer the management of the trolley to Sarasota County's "Breeze Transit" system (rebranding it as Route 78). Because the county is a federally recognized transit agency, this loophole makes the trolley eligible for federal grants, a move projected to save the city \$1.9 million over the next five years. Yet, for now, the parking fund remains heavily burdened by its share of the costs.

Disaster Impacts and Infrastructure Drains

Beyond transit, the division has faced other severe setbacks. Flooding in St. Armands halted revenue collection entirely, as the city postponed parking fees and stopped writing citations. The parking fund is also actively repaying debt owed to the General Fund.

Furthermore, the city is bracing for massive, unavoidable infrastructure upgrades. 2027 will see \$1,025,600 in capital expenses, including replacing the State Garage elevator (\$750,000) and adding license plate recognition tech (\$90,000). In 2028, capital expenses will surge to \$1,490,000 to replace the Palm Garage elevator (\$750,000) and overhaul on-street meters (\$650,000).

The Proposed Fix: Modernization and Rate Hikes

To break the cycle of deficits and catch up to the national standard, the parking division is aiming for the system to break even. At the March 23 meeting, the Commission will debate the next major steps.

Aggressive Permit and Fine Increases

The city proposes a standard \$5 increase across its citation fee schedule, raising the fine for an expired meter from \$25 to \$30. With an average of 50,000 citations paid annually, this hike is projected to generate an additional \$280,750. Employee permits will also jump; downtown workers will go from \$20 to \$30 a month, while St. Armands workers will see their \$10 monthly rate triple to \$30. Normalizing these rates will generate an estimated \$317,280.

The Core Debate: Rates vs. Hours

For transient parkers, the city is presenting two options to generate the bulk of the needed funds:

- Option 1 (The Rate Hike): Standard on-street parking would increase from \$1.50 per hour to \$2.25 per hour. Garages would keep the first hour free, but the second hour would jump from \$2 to \$3. This is projected to generate an additional \$2,493,352 annually. City staff notes that even at \$2.25, Sarasota remains cheaper than downtown Tampa's \$4 hourly rate, though more expensive than Bradenton's \$1.80.
- Option 2 (The Seattle "After 5" Approach): Rates stay frozen, but hours of enforcement drastically expand. On-street parking would expand from its current 10-hour window to operate from 8:00 a.m. to midnight, seven days a week. Garages and surface lots would shift to 24-hour paid models. This option yields a slightly higher return, projecting an additional \$2,720,653.

Sarasota is at a crossroads. As cities nationwide prove that parking can be a powerful economic engine, Sarasota must decide if it is willing to face public pushback to transition its subsidized infrastructure into a self-sustaining enterprise.

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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.

March 13

12:49 p.m.

Officer Mathis was dispatched to Harbourside Drive in reference to property damage. A complainant had reported that a vehicle had knocked down a gate arm while driving through. Upon Officer Mathis's arrival, he met with a representative of the Longboat Key Club. The employee advised that a blue Mercedes sedan knocked down the gate arm while traveling through the gate after another vehicle had opened it. The employee showed the officer the video from his mobile phone which showed the blue Mercedes knocked down the gate arm while traveling through the gate after another vehicle had opened it. As the gate arm came down, it struck the Mercedes and caused damage to the gate arm and wiring which attaches to the arm to control the LED lights on said arm. The employee then advised that he only needs a report to document the incident and no other action. The employee further advised that he would send the video to add to this report once he returned to his office since he cannot send it from his phone. Officer Mathis canvassed the area in an attempt to locate the vehicle and make contact with the driver. According to gate security, the driver of the vehicle identified herself. Officer Mathis's efforts to locate the vehicle and driver were fruitless. Upon leaving the area, the employee had already repaired the gate arm and advised it functioned as it should. Case clear.



Citizen assist

1:29 p.m.

Officer Van Dyke responded to Hibiscus Way in reference to a citizen assist call. The caller didn't wish to meet but stated they were a neighbor that observed unknown individuals catching undersized fish at the mentioned location. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke observed several elderly subjects both men and women, fishing on the residential pier. Ultimately Officer Van Dyke spoke with one of the subjects who said that the homeowners had recently left. He left no undersized fish being caught. Officer Van Dyke didn't observe any indication of a crime. Therefore, no further

investigation was necessary. Case clear.

Marine Rescue

2:57 p.m.

Officer Pescuma responded to the 3300 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to three swimmers possibly caught in a rip current in the Gulf. Upon arrival, the caller stated that there were only two swimmers, and they both made it back to shore safely. Officer Pescuma made contact with the caller who confirmed that it was only two swimmers and both were okay. The caller said they attempted to cancel the call with dispatch prior to the Fire Department arriving on scene. Case clear.

March 14

Driver

2:12 a.m.

Officer Troyer while on patrol in the 1200 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive, observed a gray Toyota Camry parked along the right of way in the grass facing northbound. Officer Troyer made contact with the vehicle due to the town ordinance that prohibits vehicles parking along the right of way. Officer Troyer activated his emergency lights and made contact with the vehicle. Upon walking up to the vehicle and observed the vehicle was occupied by two men and the vehicle had apparent steam flowing out of the hood. This was an indication to Officer Troyer the vehicle was not illegally parked; however, the vehicle was disabled along the right of way. Officer Troyer made contact with the driver and asked him about his vehicle being disabled along the right of way. The driver told Officer Troyer he was trying to get home and the vehicle broke down. Officer Troyer observed the vehicle's keys were in the ignition; all the dash lights were on as well. While speaking with the driver, Officer Troyer observed the strong odor of alcoholic beverage which emitted from the vehicle. Officer Troyer also observed that the driver had bloodshot and glassy eyes, a strong thick tongue and slurred speech, and a flushed face. Officer Troyer observed that he had slow hand movements as well. Based on his observations, Officer Troyer had reasonable suspicion to believe the driver was driving while under the influence of an unknown alcoholic beverage. Officer Troyer asked the driver to exit the vehicle which he complied with. Upon the driver exiting the vehicle, he used the vehicle for support when standing up. Officer Troyer instructed him to move behind his vehicle, which he observed the driver had a staggered walk; he also observed the odor of an unknown alcoholic beverage emitting from his person in an open aired environment. Officer Troyer asked the driver if he would be willing to conduct a Standardized Field Sobriety Test. When doing so, the driver didn't seem to comprehend what the officer was asking of him, and he had to repeat the questions. The driver eventually refused to complete the Standardized Field Sobriety Tests. Based upon his training and experience of Driving While Under the Influence Cases, and the indications of impairment exhibited by the driver, Officer Troyer developed probable cause to believe the driver was operating a motor vehicle upon public roadways while impaired. Officer Troyer placed the driver under arrest, double locked and checked the handcuff for proper fitment then transported the driver to the Sarasota County Jail. Once at the Sarasota County Jail, Officer Troyer asked the driver if he would be willing to voluntarily provide a sample of his breath for the blood alcohol content. The driver refused to voluntarily provide a sample of his breath for the purposes of determining the blood alcohol content. Officer Troyer read the driver his constitutional rights and the driver refused to speak with him. Based on his investigation, Officer Troyer found probable cause to believe the driver was in violation of Driving While Under the Influence, and Refusal to Submit to Testing. Case clear.

Animal

11:55 p.m.

Officer Mathis was dispatched to the 300 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to an animal problem. The caller advised that there was a baby raccoon on her patio and requested assistance removing it. Upon his arrival, Officer Mathis met with the caller who directed him to the baby raccoon. Officer Mathis checked the area for the rest of the raccoon family but was unsuccessful. Using a towel, Officer Mathis gently picked up the baby raccoon and returned to his patrol unit. Sgt. Montfort advised the Wildlife Inc. That they would meet at the Coquina Beach Access to take possession of the baby raccoon. Once at the beach, the baby raccoon was turned over to the Wildlife Inc. Staff. Case clear.

March 15

Hotel assist

1:09 p.m.

Officer Pescuma was dispatched to the 4600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a disturbance involving a man arguing with hotel staff regarding the confiscation of a possible fraudulent identification belonging to the subject's son who is under 21 years old. Upon arrival, hotel staff stated they wished to cancel the call for service stating the matter would be handled internally by hotel management. Upon arrival, Officer Pescuma was told that the father a 50-year-old man who had been arguing with staff was no longer on scene. Hotel management advised they didn't wish to pursue police involvement regarding the incident and indicated they would address the matter internally. No further law enforcement assistance was requested. Case clear.

March 16

Property

3:14 p.m.

Officer Miklos was dispatched to the 4500 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a possible hit and run traffic crash. Sarasota Sheriff's Office dispatch advised via CAD notes that the caller was not sure when the damage occurred. Upon arrival, Officer Miklos came into contact with the caller who advised he picked the vehicle up from a rental car agency at the Sarasota Airport. The man said he had several pictures of the vehicle at the airport, however, none of the pictures showed the damaged area. The damage did not appear to be recent. The damage was located on the passenger side of the front bumper and hood near the headlight. It should be noted that no panel was damaged or out of line consistent with a vehicle strike. Officer Miklos spoke to the man and advised that he was unable to determine that the damaged occurred at this location. The man said he stopped at a restaurant and grocery store after the airport. The man advised he didn't leave the vehicle while stopped at the grocery store. The man spoke to customer service who advised the vehicle didn't have any reported damage prior to his reservation and wasn't sent in for service. While on scene, Officer Miklos didn't observe any surveillance cameras pointed in the vehicle direction. Additionally, Officer Miklos didn't observe any surveillance cameras pointed in the vehicle direction. Additionally, Officer Miklos did not observe any broken plastic or glass pieces or any tire tracks that lead to the parked vehicle. Due to the lack of evidence, including no cameras, witnesses, suspects or complete confidence that the damage occurred in the parking lot, Officer Miklos updated the call to a property damage report. The man was provided a case number and business card. Pictures of the damage were uploaded to the case file. Case clear.

March 20

Transceiver

2:22 p.m.

Officer Zunz responded to the Police Department front desk for a turned in radio a woman had just found at the 5600 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. The radio, an Icom IC-M3A marine transceiver, had either fallen out of the window of a black van as it turned onto Gulf of Mexico Drive, or it was already laying in the street against the curb. She was unsure of what happened. The radio appears to be undamaged and in good condition physically, though it did not power on. Officer Zunz placed the radio into a locker for safe keeping. Case clear.



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Marty Baron, from page 2

expertise, experience, and evidence.

“How can democracy flourish, or even survive, when we can’t determine the most basic facts?” Baron asked, pointing to the persistent falsehoods surrounding the 2020 election and the demonization of federal workers and protesters. “Every one of those factors is now being devalued, denigrated or denied.”

Drawing on his experience training journalists in Bogotá, Colombia, and his close ties with independent reporters in Hungary, Baron laid out the parallels between foreign democratic backsliding and the current climate in the United States. He explicitly cited Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s systematic dismantling of independent media as the blueprint now being deployed domestically.

“Trump took Orbán’s playbook, and is running with it,” Baron asserted. He detailed how government pressure and billionaire capitulation are working in tandem to muzzle critical reporting. He pointed to the Federal Communications Commission under Brendan Carr, which he accused of leveraging regulatory power to exact political favors.

Baron recounted the recent merger of CBS owner Paramount with Skydance, heavily financed by Republican megadonor Larry Ellison, as a prime example of corporate buckling. Following a \$20 billion lawsuit threat from the president over a “60 Minutes” interview, Paramount settled for \$16 million. Shortly after, the merger was approved, unexperienced loyalists were installed at CBS News, and late-night host Stephen Colbert’s show was abruptly canceled.

Quoting Colbert’s own apt observation before his cancellation, Baron noted: “The deal ‘has a technical name in legal circles: It’s big fat bribe.’”

A “Recklessly Self-Inflicted” Disaster at The Post

The most riveting and emotionally charged segment of Baron’s speech centered on his former employer, The Washington Post, and its billionaire owner, Jeff Bezos. Baron praised Bezos’s initial decade of ownership, noting that the Amazon founder “admirably defied Trump” and provided the investment necessary to turn a financially failing paper into a profitable, cutting-edge powerhouse.

But the tone shifted drastically as Baron addressed Bezos’s recent actions, particularly the decision to kill the paper’s presidential endorsement of Kamala Harris just 11 days before the 2024 election.

“For 16 months now, he has been cozying up to the president in various distasteful ways. I believe the reason is easy to identify: He fears vengeance,” Baron stated bluntly, noting Amazon and Blue Origin’s heavy reliance on lucrative federal contracts.

The fallout, Baron explained, has been catastrophic for the institution he once led. “Trust in The Post declined. Readership and subscriptions collapsed. Top talent fled,” he said, detailing the recent slashing of the newsroom staff by at least 40 percent, the elimination of the sports department and staff photographers, and the evisceration of the foreign desk.

“This was, as I said at the time, ‘among the darkest days in the history of one of the world’s greatest news organizations,’” Baron lamented. He castigated Bezos for a series of “dreadful decisions,” from attending the inauguration to reorienting the opinion pages to appease the

current administration.

“Today, the editorials themselves lack moral fiber. Criticism of Trump is typically muted. His worst abuses are often overlooked, no doubt deliberately,” Baron said. “Never before had I seen brand destruction so rapid, so complete and so recklessly self-inflicted... People ask me: Where did that man go? Honestly, I have no idea. Perhaps ‘missing person’ posters might be helpful.”

The Criminalization of Journalism

Beyond corporate capitulation, Baron warned of direct, unprecedented legal and physical threats to journalists. He pointed to the Trump administration’s active groundwork for prosecutions, noting former Attorney General Pam Bondi’s removal of constraints on obtaining reporters’ records.

“Expect the Justice Department to regularly pursue reporters’ phone records and emails, and to petition courts to order reporters to divulge their sources,” Baron warned. “Since journalists are unlikely to do that, expect the DOJ to request that they be jailed.”

He cited the chilling mid-January FBI raid on the home of Washington Post reporter Hannah Natanson—the first time the federal government has ever searched a reporter’s home in a national security investigation—and the unprecedented arrest of independent journalists Don Lemon and Georgia Fort while documenting a protest in Minnesota.

“Never before have the federal laws the government cited in this case been deployed against journalistic activity. The administration was criminalizing journalism,” he said.

Finding Optimism in the Arc of History

Despite the grim landscape, Baron concluded his talk with a surprising pivot toward optimism, grounded in the long, often turbulent history of the American press.

He reminded the Longboat Key audience that efforts to silence the press are as old as the nation itself, from the shuttering of the first American newspaper in 1690 to John Adams’s Sedition Act in 1798, and Woodrow Wilson’s Espionage Act during World War I. Time and again, he noted, the American public eventually rose up against these suppressions.

Quoting the Nobel Peace Prize-winning cardiologist Bernard Lown, Baron said: “Only those who see the invisible can do the impossible.” In other words, what we can’t see can be envisioned. What seems impossible can be achieved.”

He urged his fellow citizens to remember that the core function of the press—as envisioned by James Madison—is the “right of freely examining public characters and measures.” Journalists, Baron insisted, are not stenographers; they are investigators bound by duty to look behind the curtain.

“Vigilance of public officials is, above all, the task democracy imposes on every journalist. If a free and independent press is to survive, holding our public officials to account is a mission we can never forsake,” Baron concluded, turning his final appeal to the attendees in the room.

“And by ‘we,’ I also mean the public, our fellow citizens. Nothing will matter more to the future of a free press than your support for our work. I hope we can count on it.”

Blake Fleetwood is a former investigative reporter for the New York Times. He has also written for the NYT Magazine, Wall Street Journal, NY Daily News, USA Today, Huffington Post, The Washington Monthly, The Boston Globe, Real Clear Politics, and The Hill.

Beach Arch, from page 1

structed over the Gulf of Mexico.

The Public Safety Argument Fails

To circumvent strict local sign codes, town staff and the resort’s legal counsel leaned on a specific legal strategy: claiming the archway serves a “public safety purpose” by identifying the responsible entity (St. Regis) for emergency responders.

The board wasn’t buying it.

Board Member David Lapovsky called the justification exactly what he thought it was. “The explanation, the justification for this being public safety responses is kind of silly,” Lapovsky stated bluntly during the hearing. “When I read that in the material, I put BS in the margin because it was so obviously bull.”

Brenda L. Patten, an attorney with Berlin Patten Ebling representing St. Regis developer Unicorp, candidly acknowledged that the safety argument was primarily a legal maneuver to satisfy state law, which requires a “public purpose” for legislative zoning changes.

“The courts have said if the board approving such an ordinance has any public purpose... the courts will accept that determination,” Patten explained. “You can have a hundred people in the audience saying, ‘We hate this. It’s terrible. It’s ruining my property values.’ The court doesn’t care. If there’s one legitimate public purpose in the ordinance, the court can ignore everybody who says this sucks.”

A Clash of Visions: “Tasteful” vs. “The Jersey Beach”

The debate deeply divided the board on what Longboat Key’s aesthetic future should look like.

Unicorp President and CEO Chuck Whittall pleaded with the board to view the arch not as advertising, but as a world-class amenity for a five-diamond resort. “It’s recording a memory,” Whittall said, noting that guests frequently use the arch for engagements and sunset photos. “I don’t think I’ve heard one single guest or one person who’s been there say they don’t like it.”

St. Regis Hotel Manager Cara Hardman delivered an emotional defense of the structure, calling her team “memory makers” and displaying photos of proposals and families under the arch. “It’s not just an arch or a sign. It’s the commemoration of life’s best moments,” she said.

Board Member S. Jay Plager emphatically agreed, offering his full support for the resort. “This particular sign is tasteful and I congratulate the gentleman who developed it,” Plager noted. “The die was cast back then to have a major commercial entity established on our otherwise little residential island... this little bit of archway and sign shouldn’t come as a surprise to anybody.”

But Board Member Nicholas Gladding led the fierce opposition, warning of a slippery slope where other waterfront resorts like Zota would demand their own massive beachfront signs.

“I don’t think it’s good policy. I think it’s bad policy for us as a board to do this,” Gladding warned. “We don’t want to see Longboat Key turn into the Jersey Beach.”

The Hurricane Fact-Check

Tensions further flared when developers attempted to praise the arch’s structural integrity. During his presentation, Whittall noted the arch was built to withstand 150 mph winds and claimed it had already survived Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

He was quickly fact-checked from the dais. The board pointed out that the hurricanes devastated the Gulf Coast in September 2024, but the arch wasn’t erected until August 2025.

“The statement that it survived two hurricanes is just false,” the Chair corrected. Whittall apologized, stating he had been misinformed by his team.

Residents Push Back on “Developer Overreach”

Local residents also took to the podium, urging the board to hold the line against corporate exceptions.

Former Town Commissioner Maureen Merrigan characterized the ordinances as “legal gymnastics to carve out an exception” to the town code. “The problem that’s being asked to be solved was actually self-created,” Merrigan argued. “If we make this kind of exception or carve out, the next developer or business walks in and says they got one, and they will be right.”

Diane Canny, a resident of neighboring Beach Place, echoed the frustration of locals. “It’s a developer overreach on a private, unique groin,” she said, raising concerns about metallic glare and the precedent it sets for the island’s pristine beaches.

The Outcome

Despite the impassioned pleas from St. Regis leadership, the Planning and Zoning Board ultimately refused to play ball.

Calling the proposed code amendments a “convoluted and silly process,” Board Member Paul Hylbert joined Gladding and Lapovsky in voting against the measures. The board ultimately passed motions to recommend denial of the sign code amendment (3-2) and the zoning text amendment (4-1).

The St. Regis arch is not ordered for removal just yet. The board’s votes are strictly advisory, meaning the ultimate fate of the controversial structure—and Longboat Key’s famously strict sign code—now rests entirely in the hands of the Town Commission, which will take up the issue in May.

Longboat Key News Sarasota City News

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Editor Letters



Letters, from page 5 Over Policing

To: Editor

I have never seen over policing anywhere like this!! Please make it stop!

Lois Marotta
Longboat Key

Police

To: Editor

Your recent story which criticized the Town Police for stopping cars for speeding and other violations lacked one of the most important issues journalists learn; citing the names of those you credited with complaining about the Town Police in the article. The only thing you wrote was "Anonymous" when crediting people complaining.

We have just received the most recent town survey of what residents think about our community, our town staff and services. The data from the annual citizen survey that was just released shows the vast majority of our citizens have shared over the past three years, with slight upticks each year, is that they are satisfied or very satisfied with our police services and that only a very small percentage are very dissatisfied. Quite frankly, if we're talking about opinions, the opinions of our citizens take the discussion in the complete opposite direction of your story.

I can also report that a family member of mine was stopped when traveling northbound on GMD just after leaving the bridge. They were educated with FDOT's change of speed signs that run along that area by Country Club Shores, appreciated the information and did not receive a ticket. My comment at the time was "I wish they would stop people going 25mph in a 45mph zone and educate them".

Your story read like someone was speeding and got caught. My suggestion to people is if you don't want to get stopped, don't break the law.

BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Longboat Key

Policing paradox

To: Editor

Thank you Steve Reid for sharing the 2025 traffic data which includes 1900 citations and 4000 warnings. In particular you highlight the 20,930 self-initiated calls when an officer actively looks for an infraction. After my own traffic ticket on LBK, I will never read "On Patrol" in the same way.

"Dec. 20 Vehicle 9:08 p.m. While on patrol, Officer X observed a vehicle parked in the right of way at the 4800 block of Mexico Drive. Upon further investigation, it seemed as though it was abandoned. Officer X made contact with the vehicle's owner who said they called dispatch and informed them that the vehicle broke down and they were working on getting a tow but the car was not abandoned. Case clear."

To the contrary. That same officer came to my door within 5 minutes of observing my car on the right of way. He started to say that I had abandoned my car but I cut him off, explaining that two minutes earlier I called the police department about my car. He then said he heard my call, heard me say "please do not give me a ticket. My car is not abandoned, it went dead but I was able to roll it off the road and bike lane onto the grassy right of way." When I asked the officer the purpose of banging on my door at 9:30 Saturday night when he knew the car was not abandoned, he replied "you need to get that car towed immediately." I politely promised to get the car towed as soon as I could locate my insurance paperwork. His response "I am on duty until 6:30am. I can't promise that another officer will not give you a ticket." When I arrived at my car Sunday morning, Officer X had written a citation at 4:31 am.

I contested that ticket and believe I would have won. However, the Special Magistrate was not able to hear my case in January, February or March. Just last week I was informed by email that it was not necessary to show up for a hearing because the police department decided to dismiss the case. Only after I officially contested the ticket was this overzealous citation voided. Case closed.

Wendy Peck
Longboat Key

St. Armand's circle American flags

To: Editor

I am a proud Vietnam war veteran . I visited this week . I must say I was appalled and saddened by the display of American flags along the sidewalks. I gave of my youth, my blood for our flag. To see them all faded and torn breaks my heart that a wonderful community would not care how they represent our country. Just saying

Ned Sugzdis
Longboat Key

Bridge

To: Longboat Key Commission

A question came up during several commission 1:1 briefings about the comparative maximum slopes between the proposed high fixed-span for Longboat Pass Bridge and the current Ringling Causeway Bridge. The proposed Longboat Pass Bridge as a high fixed-span would actually have a lesser maximum slope than Ringling Causeway. As you can see from Jenn Fehrs email below, the FDOT Project Manager shared that Ringling Causeway max. slope is 5% and proposed Longboat Pass High Fixed Span Bridge max. slope would be 4.5%. This is because the Longboat Pass bridge span and the approaches for Longboat Pass cover more than the waterway width; the navigable channel of Longboat Pass is much further to the north (see image below). Therefore, the peak of the bridge will be to the very north of the waterway. So, much of the bridge slope on the Manatee County side will be over land as the grade comes back down; the slope going up to the top of the bridge from the Longboat side has a much

longer run-up distance, so the grade remains shallow for a distance as it gradually runs-up to that peak.

I hope that makes sense and we can certainly discuss on Monday as needed. We have included renderings from FDOT in our Monday presentation and those may help with the descriptions above and below.

Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Savannah's Baby

To: Longboat Key Commission

Good Monday morning! We have some good news to start the day! Preston Cobb made his entrance into the world yesterday afternoon, weighing in at an impressive 10 lbs. and 14 oz. A relieved Mom and baby are doing well!

Howard Tipton
Town Manager, Town of Longboat Key

FDOT

To: Adam Cross

Did Rick say he had an important contact in FDOT (Fl Dept of Transportation)? We have a serious issue coming up on Monday's agenda that concerns the bridge on the northern end of the island. FDOT for financial reasons is proposing a 78' fixed span bridge that will look like a black diamond hill at a ski resort. It will not be pedestrian or bicycle friendly and quite unsightly. The residents are quite upset and so are the cyclists and runners. If you know of someone I can reach out to that would be wonderful. Thanks so much.

BJ Bishop
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

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Plymouth Harbor, from page 1

But the proposed expansion is more than just a real estate play; it is a critical operational pivot for a nonprofit institution navigating a years-long waiting list, aging infrastructure, and the delicate politics of coastal development. It is also the latest chapter in a story about how Sarasota's most iconic building continues to redefine how Americans age.

The House That Smith Built

To understand the stakes of Monday's vote, one must understand the outsized shadow Plymouth Harbor casts over Sarasota.

In 1962, the Rev. Dr. John Whitney MacNeil dreamed of a retirement community that defeated the cold, barracks-like isolation of traditional aging facilities. He selected Frank Folsom Smith and his partner Lou Schneider, gifted young architects of the famed Sarasota School of Architecture.

"So many of the stories you became aware of around the country were the same," notes Harry Hobson, who served as Plymouth Harbor's CEO from 2004 to 2022. "The senior minister felt bad seeing so many widows living alone in social isolation. This type of living changed that."

"What Frank Smith and Reverend MacNeil did, they were truly trying to create a unique architecture," adds Jeff Weatherhead, Plymouth Harbor's current CEO. "So many choose to move to Sarasota and they do not have strong social connections. The goal then, as now, is to create that sense of community so residents have a social network."

MacNeil secured 17 unspoiled acres on Coon Key from the Arvida Corporation, preserving the island's natural foliage and bird rookeries. Inside, to prevent the high-rise from feeling forbidding, Smith designed stacked three-story "colonies" surrounding an inner atrium, fostering an intimate, neighborhood atmosphere.

"The design of the 25-story tower is that every three floors, the first floor of the three has a community room, and the two floors above have an expansive atrium column," Weatherhead explains. "It creates a neighborhood within the tower."

This architectural philosophy extended to the community's governance. "That is reflected in the political structure," notes John Patterson, a former Plymouth Harbor board member. "Each Colony elects a representative... They have a seat on the governing board of Plymouth Harbor."

Hobson emphasizes just how radical this was for the industry. "It was unique to have a resident on the board of trustees, but what was very unique is that all three residents on the board of trustees are full voting members."

When Plymouth Harbor opened in 1966 at a staggeringly economical \$10.75 per square foot, it was a sensation. It was the tallest building in Sarasota. It was so shockingly tall, in fact, that a panicked City Commission swiftly passed an 18-story height restriction to prevent the city from "turning into Miami." That reactive law ensured that Plymouth Harbor would indefinitely remain the tallest building in town.

A Model of Survival

From the beginning, Plymouth Harbor operated on a model that was both charitable and financially precarious. Residents paid an entrance fee that guaranteed they would always have a home and healthcare, even if they outlived their funds.

"The original concept was... a place for people of moderate income to come and retire," Patterson recalls. "Everyone would share the same magnificent modern amenities. The fewer people there were to share the cost of these modern amenities... the [harder it was] to make the numbers work."

The very success of the community almost led to its downfall. "What happened is it was more successful than anyone knew," Patterson says. "It was promoting the longevity of the residents far longer than the actuary predicted. Entrance fees from new residents were not being received when anticipated. Monthly costs were fixed."

"It was a great concept, and beautiful," Hobson explains. "The few retirement communities that existed were mostly in the South. But the only contracts in place were like Plymouth Harbor's, where you moved in and the contract stayed the same. That was not sustainable."

Original administrator Jack Smith recognized the impending crisis and saved the community from financial ruin through sheer personal goodwill. "Jack saw what was happening. He was the one on the front line who went resident to resident to ask them to voluntarily change their contract to allow a cost of living adjustment," Hobson says. "He had incredible trust with the residents, and he did it the right way. Only a handful didn't do that."

Today, the core model remains the same, offering residents a discount on healthcare needs and the peace of mind that they will never be asked to leave. "People on average live seven to eight years longer [here] than if they remain in their own home," Weatherhead says.

That peace of mind extends heavily to the families of the aging residents. "If there was any kind of relapse or issue, we could say, 'Take your time, we got this,'" Hobson recalls. "They would say Plymouth Harbor is the greatest gift my parents could have given us."

The 2026 Expansion Plan

When Hobson retired in 2022, handing the reins over to Weatherhead was a passing of the torch designed to keep the community moving forward. "When the search committee was searching for my successor, I was so excited to see Jeff's name come up," Hobson says. "My wife worked with Jeff in another organization. She would say, 'This guy is good, and this guy knows how to connect.' That is what is key."

Weatherhead immediately had to connect the community's past to its future needs. Decades of combining the original, small 500-square-foot efficiencies into larger, two-bedroom apartments had reduced the overall housing inventory from 343 units down to 215, resulting in a daunting waitlist.

"We started serving a more sophisticated [market], and that reduced the number of units," Weatherhead says. "The market was saying, 'We want to come to Plymouth Harbor, and we want two-bedroom units.'"

To meet modern demand, Plymouth Harbor has proposed a major site overhaul. The centerpiece of Site Plan Application No. 25-SP-01 is a new building on an approximately 5.25-acre portion in the northeast corner of the property, replacing an existing surface parking lot.

The specs of the new structure are substantial:

- **The Residences:** The building will house 151 new independent senior living dwelling units. Adding these to the existing units will bring the campus total to 366 independent living residences. This is still fewer than the number of residences it had when it first opened in 1966.

- **The Height:** It will rise 115 feet in total, featuring eight stories (90 feet) of residential space perched atop three levels (25 feet) of structured parking.

- **The Parking:** The new garage will provide 590 spaces, bumping the campus's total parking capacity to 790 spaces—far exceeding the city's requirement of 424.

"When I got here in June 2022, we looked at what was needed," Weatherhead recalls. "We needed to look at parking problems so guests could come and visit without worrying about

parking. We needed to update the common areas. I looked out at the larger parking lot... I asked an architectural friend to design-build a parking structure, put residences on top to pay for it, and leave all parking on-site while it is developed."

To make this possible, Plymouth Harbor is asking the city to rezone the property from the Medical Charitable Institutional (MCI) Zone District to the Residential Multiple Family 5 (RMF-5) Zone District. City planners note that the RMF-5 designation is the proper implementing zone district for the property's current Metropolitan/Regional #3 Future Land Use classification. The rezone will not only permit the new tower but will also legally reduce the existing zoning non-conformities of Smith's original masterpiece.

What's at Stake: Trees, Traffic, and Art

Building a 115-foot tower on a fragile coastal island requires a labyrinth of environmental and logistical compromises.

The development will require the removal of 77 trees from the property. However, Plymouth Harbor treaded carefully: all existing "grand trees" on the site will be preserved. To mitigate the loss of the other trees—primarily 68 palms—Plymouth Harbor will plant 25 new palms and 49 three-inch caliper trees, a figure that exceeds the city's minimum mitigation requirements.

Traffic, the eternal Sarasota flashpoint, was also scrutinized. A mandated Traffic Impact Analysis determined that the new building will generate 38.25 net new vehicle trips during the PM peak hour. Because this exceeds 1% of the service volume for John Ringling Boulevard, the development was deemed "not de minimis," requiring a full site access and circulation study, which the applicant successfully completed.

In a city internationally renowned as an artistic capital, the expansion's aesthetics are just as heavily scrutinized as its footprint. To that end, Plymouth Harbor is making a staggering \$750,000 public art investment. This sprawling installation will face John Ringling Boulevard, serving a brilliant dual purpose: enriching the cultural tapestry of the community while elegantly screening the new parking garage with a minimum 50 percent opacity. It is a striking design choice befitting Sarasota's elite cultural stature, transforming a highly functional structure into a monumental canvas for the public to enjoy.

Next Steps and the Final Verdict

Plymouth Harbor's path to Monday's climactic City Commission meeting has been remarkably smooth. The city's Development Review Committee signed off on the project in early January 2026, and the Planning Board voted 4-1 to recommend that the City Commission approve both the rezoning and the site plan.

If approved, the logistics of construction will be formidable. "The reality is we are going to have to temporarily [displace] residents and team members because we will clear the large parking area," Weatherhead says. To make the logistics work, all resident vehicles will be kept safely on-site during construction, while the displaced employees will be bused in for the next 18 months.

The hope is to break ground in the fall of 2027, with the first residents moving in by early 2030. The demand is already evident: a recent priority campaign secured 250 households, with nine deposits secured in just four days.

As Plymouth Harbor prepares for this massive undertaking, the focus remains on the intangible qualities that have defined it for 60 years.

"From the heart: I have been retired a little over three and a half years, and I look back, and it was really not about the state-of-the-art fitness program and the memory care accolades," reflects Hobson. "What means the most to me is the connectivity. I had such reward knowing the residents and their families."

"In my living room now, I have two beautiful leather chairs that were once in my office at Plymouth Harbor," Hobson adds. "I look at those chairs almost every day and they remind me that it is about connections. We sat with residents in those chairs and had these conversations. It is the connections with residents and the team members that meant everything to me. Everyone working on the same mission, the same song sheet."

For Plymouth Harbor, the stakes of the expansion are existential: evolving a 1960s architectural triumph into a sustainable, modern enterprise capable of serving the next generation of retirees. For Sarasota, it is a test of how the city balances its revered mid-century history with the pressing demands of its booming future.

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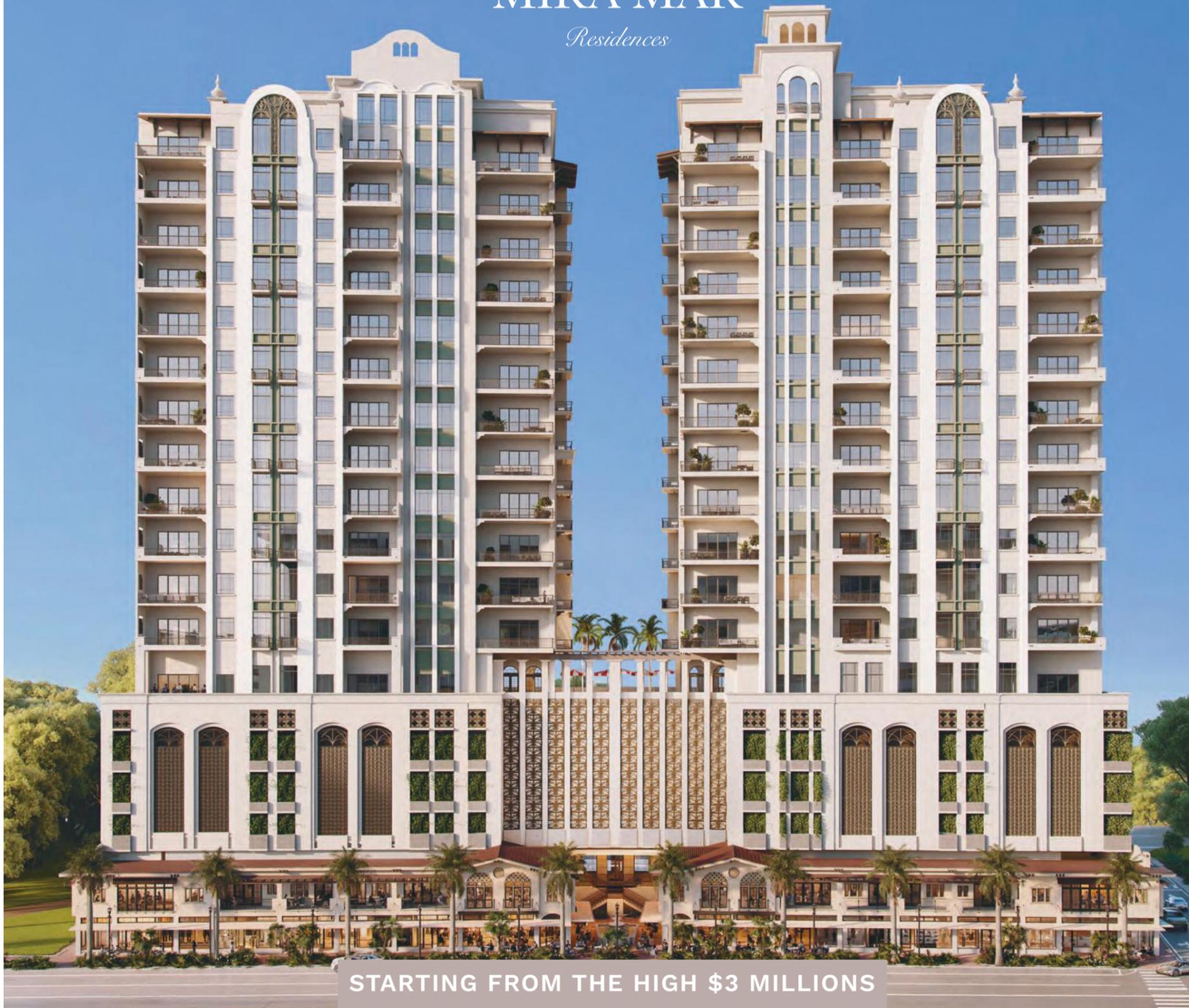
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