



Longboat Key News

March 6, 2026

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InsideLook



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Snakes, a car chase and more ...page 10

The Multi-Million Dollar Battle to Save Longboat's Disappearing Shores

Longboat Key's identity is inextricably tied to its status as a premier beach community — defined by a ribbon of white, a virtual prayer rug of crystalline sand stretching for 10 miles along its gilded shores. The last thing the island needs is for its residents and visitors to stop focusing on tennis serves and golf strokes, and instead stare out at the water, wondering with desperate urgency if their scoured shoreline will ever be whole again.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Stand by the manicured tennis courts at the Longboat Key Club, and you'll hear the same conversation echoing between serves: the south end beaches are washing away. Take a drive up to Gulfside Road at mid-Key, and the story is the same, only louder. The dunes are flattened, the shoreline is receding, and the Gulf of Mexico is knocking on the island's front door.

"We have some hot erosion areas and on the southern end of the island," Longboat Key Town Manager Howard Tipton acknowledged. "It is not across the board, but there are some hotspots."

Following the devastating back-to-back hits of the 2024 hurricane season—Idalia, Helene, and Milton—which stripped an esti-



mated 400,000 cubic yards of sand from the island, Longboat Key is facing an existential and incredibly expensive crisis. The sand is gone, and buying it back has never been harder, or costlier.

The Staggering Cost of Sand: 1993 vs. 2028

To understand the panic on the

island, you have to look at the math. Thirty years ago, sand was cheap and plentiful. During Longboat Key's first major, island-wide renourishment project in 1993, the town pumped a massive 1.95 million cubic yards of sand onto the beaches. The total price tag? Just \$9.73 million. That broke down to

See Beaches, page 3

The View from the Bridge What Sarasota's New City Manager Means for the Islands

Friling emerged from a chaotic pool of 80 applicants and survived a rigorous gauntlet to win the job. She clearly has the administrative chops. But for Longboat Key and St. Armands, the honeymoon phase will be short. She will need to quickly prove that her vision for Sarasota includes the barrier islands as vital partners in the region's future.

STEVE REID
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The City of Sarasota finally has a new CEO. For residents of Longboat Key and St. Armands, the arrival of a new top executive brings a critical question: How will she handle the barrier islands' concerns over traffic, density, and coastal infrastructure?

Recently, the Sarasota City Commission voted unanimously to extend a conditional employment offer to Karie Friling, concluding a protracted 17-month search.

Friling, who would be the first woman to hold the position in Sarasota's history, comes to the Gulf Coast from the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, Illinois. She inherits the job after a lengthy



transitional period. Following the retirement of former City Manager Marlon Brown in October 2024, the city has been under the interim guidance of veteran local administrator Dave Bullock since May 2025. Now, the reins are officially being handed over to an out-of-state hire.

Operating under a commission-manager form of government, the Sarasota city manager is the most powerful unelected official at City Hall. She directs the staff, crafts the budget, and executes policy. For the barrier islands, her decisions will

See City Manager, page 15

Gridlock by Design? Sarasota's New Traffic Plan Takes Aim at Lido and Sarasota

Over the past decade, the City of Sarasota has aggressively approved thousands of new residential condominium units, fueling unprecedented congestion.

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In a twist of irony, Sarasota City Hall is trying to slow things down, citing "safety and livability" as the impetus.

For those who live on Lido Key, Bird Key, or along the downtown waterfront, the city's sweeping initiative is officially dubbed the Traffic Calming Plan (TCP). But for many, that name is merely a euphemism for adding concrete structures in the roadway and slashing speed limits on an already tiresome and beleaguering journey to

See Traffic, page 4

Residents Push Back on "Hotelization" at St. Armands Visioning Workshop

Sig Hermansen
Guest Writer
news@lbknews.com

Setting the Stage for 2046

On February 26, 2026, roughly 150 stakeholders invested in the future of St. Armands Circle gathered at the Mote Marine Keating Education Center. Organized by the City of Sarasota, this structured public feedback workshop invited residents, merchants, and commercial property owners to chart a path forward.

At stake is the City of Sarasota's approach to licensing, zoning, and infrastructure support for the popular tourist destination and historic residential community. The barrier island is still recovering from the devastating storm surges and winds of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which inundated the area in the autumn of 2024. Looming in the background are major decisions for Sarasota County Commissioners

See St. Armands, page 4

Celebrating “Doc” Wiley: The Adventurous Veterinarian Who Captured Sarasota’s Heart

If you walked into the American Animal Hospital or the Siesta Key Wiley Cat Clinic between 1969 and 1997, you were greeted by more than just a skilled veterinarian. You were met by a man who had seen the world but chose to anchor his heart right here in Sarasota.

Donald Kent “Doc” Wiley was a man of boundless energy. While he was a staple of the local community for decades, his life was a rich tapestry of adventures, public service, and an enduring love for the Florida coast.

A Tapestry of Adventure Before the Clinic

Born in Ohio in 1932, Doc’s thirst for exploration started early. Long before he ever donned his white coat, he was traversing the globe. After studying at Duke and Cornell, he sailed the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf with the U.S. Navy. His adventurous spirit even led him to spend time farming tobacco and raising sheep in Rhodesia. But his true calling to care for animals ultimately brought him back to the States, where he earned his veterinary degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1967.

Three Decades of Compassion in Sarasota

For nearly thirty years, Doc served the Sarasota and Siesta Key communities, becoming a comforting presence to countless anxious pet owners and a healing hand to their furry family members. Beyond his clinic walls, he was a dedicated pillar of the community, generously giv-



ing his time as president of the Sunrise Kiwanis Club and the Girls Club of Sarasota. Sunsets, Running, and the “Sunny Beachers”

Doc’s life was never just about work; it was about motion and connection. Through the Manasota Track Club, he discovered a lifelong passion for running and fell in with a lively crowd known as the “Sunny Beachers.” With them, Doc mastered his absolute favorite multi-tasking combination: running, biking, enjoying a cold beer, and watching the spectacular Gulf Coast sunsets.

A Second Act in the Peace Corps

When most people are ready to slow down, Doc was just gearing up for his next chapter. In 1997, at the age of 65, he closed his clinic and joined the Peace Corps. Stationed in Ecuador, he put his veterinary skills to work inoculating cattle—but more importantly, he met Helga. He courted her, married her, and proudly brought her back home to Sarasota. Together, they bought an RV and traveled across the United States, running races in almost every state they visited.

A Sunset Send-Off at Patriot’s Pier

Doc passed away peacefully on October 2, 2025, at the age of 93. He leaves behind his wife Helga, his daughters Claire and Diane, his grandchildren, and a community that will never forget his warmth and vibrancy.

Because Doc so deeply loved the water and watching the sun dip below the horizon with his friends, his final send-off couldn’t be held anywhere else.

A Celebration of Life for Doc Wiley will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 15, 2026, at Patriot’s Pier, located at 10 Beach Road on Siesta Key. As the sun sets over the Gulf that evening, family, friends, and former clients will gather to raise a glass to the veterinarian, the runner, the adventurer, and the friend who left Sarasota a little kinder and a lot more vibrant than he found it.



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Beaches, from page 1

roughly \$5 per cubic yard.

Today, that same sand is treated like white gold.

As offshore sand reserves dried up and environmental regulations tightened, the town grew desperate. By 2016, local leaders resorted to a massive, disruptive trucking operation—literally hauling 200,000 cubic yards of sand from an inland mine in Central Florida just to patch the beaches. The operation became a logistical nightmare. Tipton noted that the town endured a relentless “conga line of trucks.” The sheer noise and disruption as heavy machinery had to find access by slinking between high-end condominiums made it one of the most difficult renourishments in the island’s history.

Now, as the town looks toward its next massive island-wide renourishment, the economics are staggering. The town plans to place just 800,000 cubic yards of sand (less than half of the 1993 volume). The projected cost is \$32.9 million—which comes out to roughly \$41 per cubic yard.

Complicating the cost is a difficult irony in the business of beach nourishment. The heavy, coarse, and frankly ugly sand—which coastal engineers dub “kitty litter sand”—actually stays in place and builds a resilient beach. However, the pristine, powdery “sugar sand” that puts Longboat Key on tourism websites and realtor homepages can quickly erode or simply blow away in the wind. Yet, strict DEP regulations require the town to use specific, turtle-friendly white quartz sand, which comes at a premium.

The Terrifying Price of Doing Nothing

If \$32.9 million sounds like a tough pill to swallow, coastal engineers and town officials are quick to point out the alternative. Across the country, communities that have failed to renourish their beaches are paying the ultimate price.

“If you don’t put sand on the beach, the beach comes for the houses.”

Look just a bit north to Pinellas County. In recent years, the Army Corps of Engineers had \$42 million ready to drop new sand on towns like Redington Shores and Indian Shores. However, because a fraction of homeowners refused to sign public access easements, the project stalled. When the 2024 hurricanes rolled through, the un-nourished beaches were totally defenseless. The storms shredded the coastline, leaving residents one wave away from water overtaking their homes.

The situation is even more dire in Rodanthe, North Carolina. A 2023 cost-benefit analysis showed that saving the small Outer Banks community with beach nourishment would cost a staggering \$120 million over 15 years. Unable to secure that funding, the town was left to the mercy of the Atlantic. Since 2020, more than a dozen beachfront homes have literally collapsed into the ocean, scattering septic tanks, nails, and splintered wood for miles and destroying the local tourism economy.

The Irony of the Groins: A 30-Year Reversal

Perhaps the most visually striking change coming to Longboat Key is the return of hard structures.

Thirty years ago, the prevailing coastal management philosophy shifted away from groins and seawalls. The belief was that hard structures disrupted natural currents and were an eyesore. Longboat Key systematically removed its old groins, aiming for a pristine, structure-free shoreline.

But the Gulf of Mexico didn’t cooperate. As Tipton mused philosophically, “Sand does not stay where you want it to, it is subject to weather and winds.” Without structures to hold it, the expensive sand simply washed away with the longshore currents.

Now, the town and the DEP are rapidly reversing course. In 2021, the town installed five permeable rock groins at the north end of the Key. Today, facing the severe mid-Key erosion “hot spot” near Gulfside Road, coastal engineers are actively permitting a dense, multi-million dollar field of up to seven “T-head” rock groins. Tipton confirmed the town is shifting its strategy entirely. They are no longer “just trying to put sand on the beaches, but plan on employing structural solutions as well mid-key.”

While the town has officially been calling this a 2028 project, the timeline is accelerating. “We are looking at starting the groin construction in fall of 2027 and start the beach renourishment in late fall of 2027 — less than two years away,” Tipton told Longboat Key News.

The Neighborly Tug-of-War Over Sand

The desperation for sand has also sparked local controversy over where the existing sand goes. Some Longboat residents are questioning why the town shares the sand dredged from New Pass with neighboring Lido Key, which receives the precious resource every other dredging cycle.

The frustration stems from engineering facts that have determined all the sand that accumulates in New Pass actually washes there through longshore drift directly from Longboat Key’s beaches. To many residents, they are simply watching their own sand be given away.

Homeowners Left to Hold the Line (And the Warning from Massachusetts)

Because the cavalry isn’t arriving until late 2027, beachfront homeowners and HOA communities are being forced to take matters into their own hands. Many residents are funding their own private dune restorations, paying out-of-pocket to truck in sand and plant sea oats while navigating a labyrinth of strict DEP rules.

But private efforts come with a massive, heartbreaking risk.

In early 2024, a group of frustrated beachfront homeowners in Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts, grew tired of waiting on the government. They banded together and spent over \$500,000 of their own money to truck in 15,000 tons of sand to build a massive protective dune. Just three days after the project was completed, a severe storm rolled in. Within 72 hours, the ocean completely swallowed the dune, washing away half a million dollars of private investment. It is a brutal reminder to Longboat Key residents that “band-aid” private sand drops are no match for the ocean without a massive, engineered project behind them.

How Will the Town Pay for It?

Securing the \$32.9 million for the upcoming project is a puzzle of local, state, and federal maneuvering. For the local funding portion, Tipton told Longboat Key News that the town has officially paid off the debt on the 2021 beach project. Now, they are looking to keep the same funding methodology and can raise up to an additional \$13 million without going back to voters via referendum.

Tipton laid out the clear order of operations: “We will get some of the tourism money and state grant money and once the groins are done, we will fill in the sand on the beach starting ideally in late 2027.”

Town officials have tentatively mapped out the rest of the funding matrix:

- FEMA Relief: Approximately \$12.2 million in federal disaster recovery funds.
- State Grants: Roughly \$7 million from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).
- Tourism Taxes: Around \$5 million allocated from Manatee and Sarasota county bed taxes.
- Local Districts: The remainder will be covered by municipal funds and the aforementioned \$13 million capacity.

For Longboat Key, the sand is no longer just a luxury for tourists—it is the only thing standing between the island’s multi-million dollar real estate and the bottom of the Gulf.

Town Manager Tipton hears the concerns loud and clear from the tennis courts to the condominiums. “I completely understand the frustration,” Tipton empathized, “but permitting for the next beach renourishment project and the groins is actually coming together pretty quickly.”

And while Tipton’s favorable disposition and outlook may be reassuring, another hurricane season is rapidly approaching. As always, Longboat Key will soon become fixated on ever-increasing oceanic temperatures and intensifying storm cycles, knowing the island is just one bad storm away from losing the beach and the fragile remaining dunes that stand between the lifestyle residents love and the chaos of a hurricane’s aftermath.

Even if the island remains as lucky this year as it was in 2025 with no named storms hitting the coast, Longboat Key’s identity is inextricably tied to its status as a premier beach community—defined by a ribbon of white, a virtual prayer rug of crystalline sand stretching for 10 miles along its gilded shores. The last thing the island needs is for its residents and visitors to stop focusing on their tennis serves and golf strokes, and instead stare out at the water, wondering with desperate urgency if their scoured shoreline will ever be whole again.

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St. Armands, from page 1

and the City Council regarding how to manage federal grants and local funding. Key issues include:

- Upgrading flood control systems, including historically failure-prone stormwater pumps.
- Improving roadway evacuation routes from Lido Beach and Longboat Key, which routinely clog with vehicles during flood events.
- Undergrounding vulnerable overhead utility lines at risk during high winds.

A Visioning Exercise with Sticky Notes and Stickers

Outgoing Interim Sarasota City Manager David Bullock introduced the event’s moderator, independent facilitator and sociologist Dr. David Brain. Brain challenged the attendees to envision what St. Armands Circle should look like to someone returning in the year 2046.

The City divided participants into small groups of ten or fewer, each guided by a table facilitator. Individuals were asked to write their goals for the Circle on small notes, which facilitators then collected and posted on presentation boards. After reviewing the collective ideas, an elected group leader presented their table’s goals to the wider room. To gauge consensus, each participant was given five green stickers to indicate agreement with specific notes and three red stickers to signal disagreement.

Consensus on Charm, Pushback on “Hotelization”

While the workshop was designed to focus on high-level goals and desired outcomes, many participants eagerly used the platform to advocate for specific regulations and methods. Feedback varied by table, but a resounding majority favored preserving the Circle’s century-old tradition: charming residential areas, small boutique shops, diverse dining options, and a quiet

traffic flow conducive to walking and biking.

Residents and business owners alike stressed that chronic flooding is an existential threat the City and County must aggressively address. This is especially urgent given strict FEMA “50% Rule” guidelines that force extensively damaged properties to elevate to modern flood codes. Many attendees firmly rejected the creeping threat of “hotelization”—the push by some developers to add high-density, third-floor boutique hotels or short-term rentals—demanding instead that the area retain its quaint, village-center feel.

Next Steps for the Circle

Neighbors from Lido Beach and Longboat Key joined St. Armands residents in calling for comprehensive traffic calming measures, better public transportation (such as free shuttles or micro-transit) for both tourists and workers, and strict prohibitions on “hotel houses.” There was also strong support for restricting parking on residential streets, avoiding massive new parking structures, and fostering a collaborative beautification effort between developers and local government.

A follow-up session is scheduled for April 13, 2026, at the Keating Center. This second meeting will feature a presentation of the workshop’s gathered data and offer an opportunity to advance concrete recommendations. As always, the extent to which this community feedback will ultimately shape the binding decisions of the Sarasota City Commission and County Commissioners remains to be seen.

Traffic, from page 1

the beach or downtown. For frustrated commuters, it feels like an ironic antidote prescribed by a city that failed to manage the impacts of its explosive downtown growth.

Make no mistake: some of Lido Key’s and downtown Sarasota’s most desirable neighborhoods will be heavily impacted by these changes.

What the City is Planning

At its core, the TCP is an effort by the city’s Engineering and Transportation Planning Divisions, in collaboration with the Sarasota Police Department, to physically alter driver behavior. The strategy includes a two-pronged approach:

- Slashed Speed Limits: Following a recent speed study, the city plans to drop posted speed limits to a crawling 20 MPH on local roadways (where existing average speeds are currently 20 MPH or below) and cap non-local roadways at 35 MPH.
- Physical Roadway Alterations: To force drivers to comply, the city plans to install horizontal and vertical deflections. This means navigating new roundabouts, speed tables, raised intersections, and median islands designed to narrow street widths and restrict routing.

The Double-Edged Sword: Safety vs. Gridlock

Traffic calming is a highly debated topic. While City Hall champions the potential benefits—noting that slower, narrower streets lower the likelihood of severe accidents and create a more inviting environment for pedestrians—a look at how these measures have played out in other municipalities reveals a more complicated reality.

The Unintended Consequences:

- Emergency Response Delays: This is the primary concern for first responders nationwide. Studies show that a single speed table or hump can delay a fire truck or ambulance by up to 10 seconds—critical time during cardiac events or rapidly spreading fires.
- The “Spillover” Effect: When main thoroughfares become bogged down with speed tables and lowered limits, frustrated drivers often reroute through adjacent, previously quiet residential streets, a phenomenon known as “rat-running.”

- Vehicle Wear and Noise Pollution: Vertical deflections cause constant braking and accelerating, increasing wear-and-tear on vehicle suspensions. Furthermore, the noise generated by heavy vehicles braking and hitting speed tables can actually increase noise pollution for the homes located immediately next to them.

Is Your Neighborhood on the List?

The City is rolling out a phased approach to these changes, but community pushback or support will shape the final maps. The city has been divided into zones for public meetings, and for Longboat Key News and Sarasota City News readers, Area B is ground zero.

If you live in or travel through Area B, your driving habits are on the line. The following associations and communities are directly in the crosshairs of this plan:

- Bay Island Siesta Association
- Bird Key Improvement Association
- Downtown Sarasota Condo Association
- Golden Gate Point Association
- Harbor Acres Community Association
- Indian Beach-Sapphire Shores Association
- Lido Key Residents Association
- Lido Shores Property Owners Association
- Plymouth Harbor Residents Association
- St. Armands Residents Association
- Tahiti Park Neighborhood Association
- South Poinsettia Park Neighborhood
- Other residents living within Area B
- Businesses within Area B

Make Your Voice Heard: When and Where to Show Up

The most critical meeting for our readership is rapidly approaching. The city will present the Draft Neighborhood Traffic Calming Map for Area B and host an interactive map review.

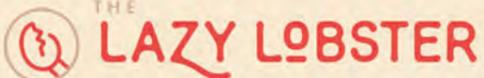
Area B Community Meeting Details:

- When: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 | 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. (Presentation begins at 5:25 p.m.)
- Where: Senior Friendship Center, 1888 Brother Geenan Way, Sarasota, FL 34236
(Note: The city is also holding meetings for Area A on March 24 and Area C on March 26, but Area B covers the critical downtown and island corridors).

How to Submit Comments

If you cannot attend the March 18 meeting in person, the city is accepting feedback online and by mail. All comments must be received or postmarked by April 17, 2026, to be included in the formal meeting record.

- Email: Corinne.Arriaga@sarasotafl.gov
- Mail: City of Sarasota, Attn: Corinne Arriaga, Project Manager, 1761 12th Street, Sarasota, FL 34236



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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.

St. Armands traffic

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold
Hello Penny Gold, I noted your comments in the newspaper regarding traffic in the St Armands Circle and possibly hiring a traffic consultant.
Below are a few pictures and brief comments:
- suggest adding To Ringling Bridge and Sarasota to the signs that say 789 South. Better than just 789
- additional signs to Long Boat Key. Now just one sign close to the LBK exit. Same comment re 789 North. Should say Gulf of Mexico Drive. May not be politically correct though.
- signs saying Lido Beach should say Lido Key. Lido is more than a beach.
- eliminate the parking spaces adjacent to the park in the Circle. They are very unsafe parking spots. Unfortunately merchants would object although there are ample spaces in the garage.
Unfortunately little can be done re afternoon delays due to backups from the Ringling Bridge made worse by FDOT construction and poor traffic signals and signage on the other side of the bridge. Good luck!
Steve Helpert
Longboat Key

Tunnel Mirror

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
Thank you so much the quick response. I am glad Bay Isles was able to help.
Penny Gold
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Tunnel Mirror

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
Wow, that's great! The mirrors really help! Thanks Penny!
Thomas M. Morgan
Longboat Key

Tunnel Mirror

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold and Thomas Morgan
According to below from Bay Isles Association, the tunnel mirror has been repaired. Thank you!
Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Tunnel Mirror Replacement

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
I wanted to provide you with a brief update that the replacement mirror for the tunnel was received this morning and has now been installed, thereby replacing the mirror that was damaged during the recent storm.
Please feel free to share this information with Commissioner Penny Gold. Should you have any questions or require any additional information, do not hesitate to contact me.
Philip S. Deming
Sarasota

Tunnel

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
Bay Isles Association would like to acknowledge that we are aware of the damage to the pedestrian safety mirror located along the rampway. Although Seaplace owns the westbound rampway, Bay Isles has historically undertaken responsibility for necessary maintenance and repairs in the interest of public safety and continuity.
During last week's windstorm, the eastbound mirror became dislodged from its hinge and fell, resulting in damage. I personally secured the mirror and relocated it to our vehicle control station pending reinstallation. We are presently in the process of restoring the fixture, and I have been assured that our maintenance personnel are treating this as a priority item today. We

are hopeful the mirror will be reinstalled promptly. In addition, we will inspect the adjacent mirror on the westbound rampway, which, to my knowledge, did not sustain similar damage during the storm.

Please kindly advise Commissioner Gold that Bay Isles is addressing this matter expeditiously so that she may relay the same assurance to her constituent, Mr. Morgan. And you are welcome to share this email with Commissioner Gold.

We apologize for any inconvenience and appreciate your attention to this matter.
Philip S. Deming
Sarasota

Tunnel Question

To: Philip Deming
Please read below and let me know Bay Isles Association response. Thank you!
Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

Tunnel Question

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold
Thank you Commissioner. Actually, we cannot as it is still under private ownership and control. What we can do is forward to the Bay Isles Association who is still responsible for it. I will personally send it their way and send any response I get back to this group.
Isaac Brownman
Assistant Town Manager
Town of Longboat Key

See Letters, page 6

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2025 THE OFFICIAL COMMUNITY'S CHOICE AWARDS WINNER

Editor Letters



Letters, from page 5 Tunnel Question

To: Longboat Key Assistant Town Manager Isaac Brownman
 I received the following note from a constituent and wonder if our Public Works team can assist with a repair. I know we are currently processing the legal documents needed to transfer tunnel ownership, but hope you can help determine which organization will be able to help with a repair during the interim. Thank you for your guidance on this.
 Penny Gold
 Commissioner
 Town of Longboat Key

Tunnel Question

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Penny Gold
 I'm not sure you can help here, but I found that the mirror in the tunnel under GMD going W from Sea Place has been broken for a while. There's no glass, just a broken frame. Can you help?
 Thomas M. Morgan
 Sarasota

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Sarah Karon
 Thanks Sarah. We've asked FDEP to share what next steps they go through when a complaint is received. I will share what their process is, if it's different from what I believe would be the next steps. I believe the next steps would involve investigation of the complaint and then proceeding with enforcement actions that can include financial penalties and/or mitigation if a violation & responsibility is determined.
 Allen Parsons
 Planning and Zoning Director
 Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: James Haft, Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen Parsons
 Jim, those images are infuriating, thank you for sending. Allen, what can we expect from FDEP in terms of next steps?
 Sarah Karon
 Commissioner
 Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: James Haft
 Thanks Jim. This info will be shared with FDEP.
 Allen Parsons
 Planning and Zoning Director
 Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Sarah Karon
 Following up on the Jewfish Key mangrove clear-cutting, here's before/after pics of the northern end. The 'before' picture was from April 2024. The 'after' picture is from March 2025, the most recent available on Google earth. The difference is very stark... he raped the island. I believe they did even more cutting since last March. Isn't this sufficient evidence to take action?
 James Haft
 Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: James Haft
 Jim, thank you for continuing to press this issue. I will be happy to start communications with FDEP using Allen's contact below. Do you think we can locate some "before" photos? This is fully illegal behavior and it must be penalized. Let me know your thoughts for next steps.
 Allen and Charlie, let's please use this experience with JFK as a motivator to improve our watchdog, education and enforcement of codes. What do you think might be doable along these lines, and how can the residents assist? I will look to find best practices in other communities and perhaps the Green Team can help with monitoring.
 CC-ing Isaac here for advice, not trying to cause extra work for staff but I know mangrove protection (and appreciation!) is a big concern. I'm hopeful we can turn more energy toward better stewardship.
 Sarah Karon
 Commissioner
 Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen Parsons
 Must the property owner be caught in the act in order to be cited? If that's the case, it seems unlikely that mangrove laws can ever be enforced. Wouldn't before/after pictures suf-
See Letters, page 11

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155 TYLER DR	4,389	\$4,350,000	5 5 2	0	\$4,350,000
369 S POLK DR	2,179	\$3,975,000	4 4 0	13	\$3,650,000
990 BLVD OF THE ARTS Unit#801	3,100	\$2,850,000	3 3 1	215	\$2,687,500
111 GOLDEN GATE PT Unit#303	2,050	\$1,999,000	3 3 0	117	\$1,850,000
111 S PINEAPPLE AVE Unit#613	1,482	\$1,350,000	2 2 1	0	\$1,350,000
1960 LINCOLN DR	1,611	\$925,000	3 2 0	231	\$925,000
521 & 523 OHIO PL	1,589	\$899,000	5 3 1	109	\$749,990
1188 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#401	2,020	\$674,900	3 2 1	205	\$665,000
1771 RINGLING BLVD Unit#1206	1,483	\$689,000	2 2 0	21	\$660,000
1740 ALDERMAN ST Unit#7	1,267	\$529,000	2 2 0	25	\$490,000
750 N TAMIAMI TRL Unit#421	1,020	\$399,000	1 1 0	16	\$399,000
1650 PINE TREE LN Unit#105	940	\$325,000	2 2 0	209	\$325,000
850 S TAMIAMI TRL Unit#822	1,224	\$312,900	2 2 1	189	\$310,000
850 S TAMIAMI TRL Unit#301	980	\$268,000	2 2 0	347	\$250,000
520 HARBOR CAY DR	3,828	\$3,475,000	4 4 1	319	\$3,300,000
5382 SANDHAMN PL	3,330	\$3,245,000	4 3 1	15	\$3,075,000
601 TRITON BND	3,313	\$3,275,000	4 3 2	160	\$3,000,000
545 SANCTUARY DR Unit#B605	2,580	\$2,395,000	3 3 0	28	\$2,350,000
520 GOLF LINKS LN	2,016	\$2,299,000	3 3 0	7	\$2,150,000
2410 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#121	3,825	\$2,295,000	3 3 1	338	\$2,125,000
340 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#126	2,274	\$2,100,000	2 2 1	32	\$1,850,000
2105 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#3303	1,463	\$1,550,000	2 2 0	75	\$1,350,000
2721 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#208	884	\$1,100,000	2 2 0	3	\$1,100,000
360 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#322	2,276	\$1,195,000	2 2 1	92	\$1,100,000
1928 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#1403	1,590	\$699,000	2 2 1	327	\$635,000
6701 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#311	936	\$699,900	1 1 0	417	\$620,000
2089 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#G1-104	1,257	\$649,000	2 2 0	7	\$590,000
1904 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#202	1,590	\$449,000	2 2 1	141	\$419,500



**JEFF
RHINELANDER**

941-685-3590

Jeff@jeffrhineland.com



**COURTNEY
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Judy Kepez-Hays
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Steven Kepez
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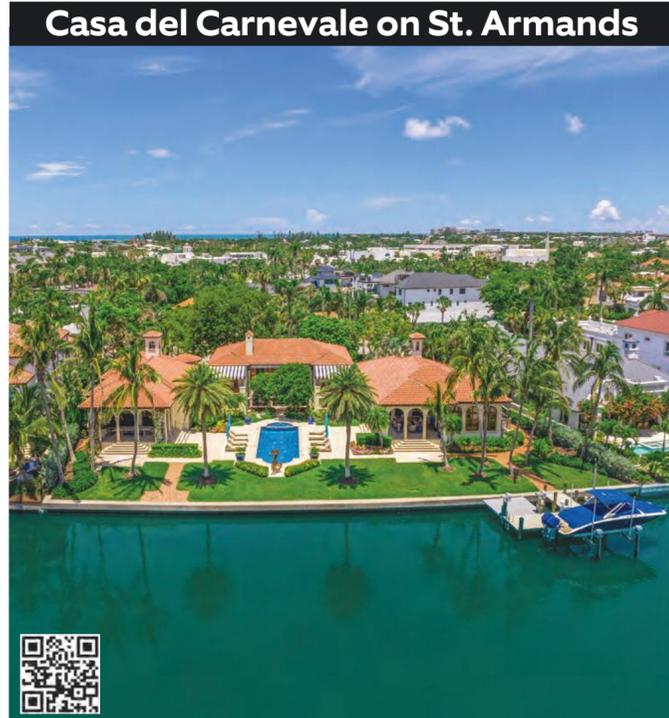
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757HideawayBay.com



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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.

Feb. 27

Citizen assist

10:43 a.m.

Officer Van Dyke responded to the 4000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a citizen assist call. The complainant called the police department to report someone hitting golf balls within Bayfront Park. As per Town Ordinance, no chipping or putting is permitted within any park, beach/bay access or public place. Upon arrival, Officer Van Dyke was unable to locate the subject or any indication of the incident. No violations were observed. Case clear.



Boyfriend

8:33 p.m.

Officer Troyer was dispatched to the Italian Restaurant in the 6800 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a suspicious person. The owner contacted the police and reported a man wearing a denim jacket sleeping on a bench in front of the restaurant. While enroute to the call, Officer Troyer attempted to contact the owner but she did not answer the phone. Upon his arrival, Officer Troyer observed a man wearing all black walking away from the shopping plaza. Officer Troyer did not observe any other persons in the area, therefore he made contact with the man. The man said he was not sleeping and he did not wish to speak with the Officer at all, and he walked away. Officer Troyer did not have any reason to believe a crime was committed at the time and could not demand an ID from the man. Due to this, Officer Troyer spoke to the owner who said that was the man who was sleeping on the bench. She also informed that she determined the man was the boyfriend of an employee and he was waiting for his girlfriend to get off work. The owner did not need any further law enforcement assistance. Case clear.

Feb. 28

Incident

9:30 p.m.

Officer Pescuma was dispatched to Harbourside Drive in reference to a suspicious incident that occurred on Feb. 25th. Upon arrival, Officer Pescuma met with the homeowner who reported locating a deceased snake positioned on the ground in front of the residence. The snake was observed to be coiled in a natural defensive posture, however, the head had been severed and was not attached to the body. The homeowner stated they were unsure how the snake came to be at the location and did not observe anyone in the area prior to the discovery. The homeowner further advised they found the placement unusual and suspicious due to the snake appearing intentionally decapitated. The surrounding area was inspected. No persons were observed in the immediate vicinity and there were no obvious signs of disturbance, struggle or damage to the property. It could not be determined at the time of investigation whether the snake had been killed and placed at the location by an unknown subject or whether it was the result of animal predation. Photographs were taken for documentation purposes. No surveillance footage was immediately available at the time of contact. The homeowner was advised to report any additional suspicious activity and to notify law enforcement if further information becomes available. At this time, no suspects were identified. The incident is documented for informational purposes. Case clear.

March 1

Car chase

4:11 a.m.

Sgt. Montfort while on patrol in the Broadway area, observed a small white sedan traveling southbound on Gulf of Mexico Drive and passed Sgt. Montfort. Sgt. Montfort observed the vehicle occupied by numerous occupants, it appeared the front passenger seat and all rear passenger seats were occupied. Sgt. Montfort pulled out behind the vehicle and then the sedan began rapidly accelerating at a high rate of speed. Sgt. Montfort then attempted to stop the vehicle by activating the emergency lights and sirens and attempted to catch up to the vehicle. The vehicle continued to increase speed and it was apparent the vehicle was fleeing to elude law enforcement. Sgt. Montfort then observed the vehicle pass a dark in color pickup truck in a no passing zone in the area of the north entrance to Gulfside Road, a no passing area and

on a curve. Sgt. Montfort then notified Sarasota County Communications Division that he had a vehicle fail to comply at high speeds and then deactivated his emergency equipment in the area of the 6400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. Sgt. Montfort was able to see the taillights of the vehicle from a distance and estimated losing sight of the vehicle in the area of 4900 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive. After several minutes, Sgt. Montfort proceeded south on Gulf of Mexico Drive to check the area in case the vehicle may have lost control and crashed. While slowly patrolling south, Sgt. Montfort was pulling over in the area of the resort to complete his case report for the chase event. He then observed a small white

sedan at the entrance of the resort closely parked to another vehicle which was loading luggage. Sgt. Montfort proceeded to the valet area and was advised by people departing the resort that three men and one woman hastily exited the sedan and entered into the front entrance of the resort. Moreover, Sgt. Montfort observed the vehicle was in fact unoccupied, the exhaust was cracking from extreme heat and the smell of hot brakes. Sgt. Montfort also detected a strong odor of burnt marijuana emanating from the vehicle. Sgt. Montfort confirmed that this was the vehicle he attempted to conduct a traffic stop on. The vehicle was a 2015 white Hyundai Sonata. An FCIC/NCIC check of the vehicle registration returned the ownership as "Tampa Bay Auto Rental Group LLC," which appeared to be a buy here, pay here vehicle dealership. Further inspection of the vehicle showed the driver's seat was completely lowered and slid to the rear as if a tall subject was operating the vehicle. Officer Mathis was able to make contact with the overnight security officer from the resort who stated he was able to locate what room the subjects were staying in. The room was identified and the security guard was able to make contact with the occupants of the room and advised them to come and move their vehicle. Shortly thereafter a woman came out from the main entrance and greeted the officers on scene. The woman identified herself and said she was the owner of the vehicle. Officers were not able to determine if she was in fact the owner as the vehicle's registration did not return to her. The woman said she was operating the vehicle and did not see law enforcement behind her. The woman did say she saw another police officer on a separate traffic stop when entering the island. The woman was extremely uncooperative and demanded that the vehicle be released to her. The woman was also advised that because the vehicle was used in the commission of a felony crime, the registered owner not being able to be determined and the driver not present with the vehicle, the vehicle would be impounded pending further investigation. The next available tow truck was requested to the scene, and a tow truck was requested to the scene. Officer Troyer conducted a vehicle inventory of the vehicle and located a small amount of U.S. currency and drug paraphernalia. The tow truck arrived on scene and the vehicle was turned over to the tow operator. Case status active pending further investigation.

March 2

Assist

2:26 p.m.

Officer Miklos while on patrol near Bay Isles Parkway noticed a man with a long sleeve yellow plaid shirt, tan pants with brown boots holding a panhandling sign for money in the middle of Bay Isles Parkway. As Officer Miklos approached the man, a call for service was created by Sarasota Sheriff's Office dispatch which was called in by a passerby who didn't wish to meet with police. Upon making contact with the man, he was identified and he said he did not have an ID on him due to losing his Illinois license years ago. The man advised he was a homeless veteran attempting to make money. The man was searched through NCIC for wants and warrants which returned negative results. Officer Miklos conducted a terry frisk of him before entering the vehicle which had yielded no weapons. The man was provided a courtesy ride to the Town Green Park behind Publix to retrieve a blue bookbag. The man requested a courtesy ride to Ken Thompson Parkway. Sgt. Puccio was on scene and approved of the transport. Officer Miklos conducted a transport for the man following adding his information. The man was last seen in Ken Thompson Park traveling south. Case clear.

March 3

Incident

12:50 p.m.

Officer Miklos was dispatched to the 5800 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a vehicle crash to a vehicle crash that occurred overnight. Upon arrival, Officer Miklos met with the complainant who said he was struck by another vehicle in the parking lot. He said he believed a white Volvo SUV which was parked over the parking curb, had struck his vehicle. The complainant and Officer Miklos observed scuff marks on the front bumper of the Volvo. The complainant and Officer Miklos walked to his Nissan where the officer observed a dent and scuff marks on the driver side of the vehicle. Officer Miklos conducted an ELVIS search of the Volvo which was parked over the curb, however denied hitting any vehicles. The woman stated the damage to her vehicle was not new. Officer Miklos returned to the damaged Nissan and observed the damage again. At that time, Officer Miklos observed a hint of red paint transfer in the scuff mark. Officer Miklos advised the complainant of his finding who provided a video he took of the vehicle when he took possession of the vehicle at the airport. The video was dated Feb. 27, and was a video showing all the damage around the vehicle. In the video, the complainant walked around the driver side quickly and does not point out any damage. Officer Miklos was able to pause the video near the driver door and observed what appeared to be a dent and a shadow where the scuffs were located. At the time, the complainant and Officer Miklos agreed that the damage was not new and did not occur in Longboat Key. Case clear.

Dog

7:19 p.m.

Officer Nazareno responded to the 4400 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive for an animal problem call. Upon arrival, Officer Nazareno made contact with the caller who found a small black dog at the parking lot of the location and did not get a response after numerous attempts to contact the phone number on the dog's collar. Officer Nazareno then left a text message for the owner who later contacted dispatch and responded to the scene to pick up his dog. Case clear.



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BreakPoints



Bringing the Desert Heat to the Gulf Coast: What Sarasota Tennis Players Can Learn from Indian Wells

As the tennis world focuses on the California desert for the 2026 BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells, it's the perfect time for recreational players here on Longboat Key and in the greater Sarasota area to grab a notebook.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Watching the pros isn't just about marveling at their athleticism; it's about active studying. Interestingly, the conditions at Indian Wells have a lot in common with our local Florida courts, making this specific tournament a goldmine for tactical takeaways.

Here is how you can watch the top men and women right now and use their strategies to dominate your next match at the Longboat Key Tennis Center or Payne Park.

The Court Connection: Why Indian Wells is Relevant to Florida

Indian Wells is played on hard courts, but they are notoriously gritty and slow. The ball bites the surface, slows down, and bounces high through the dry desert air.

If you play regularly on the Har-Tru (clay) courts that are so popular around Sarasota, this should sound familiar. Like our local clay courts, Indian Wells neutralizes big, flat hitters and heavily rewards patience, heavy topspin, and smart point construction. You can't just hit through your opponent; you have to outmaneuver them.

What to Learn from the Top ATP Men

The men's draw is heavily stacked right now, and the top seeds are putting on a masterclass in slow-court tactics.

- **Carlos Alcaraz's Drop Shots:** The World No. 1 is currently unbeaten in 2026. Because the courts are slow, players stand much further behind the baseline to return his heavy groundstrokes. Alcaraz exploits this beautifully by disguising his drop shots. Your Takeaway: If you are pushing your Sarasota opponent deep into the fences with high topspin, sneak in a drop shot. On a slow Har-Tru court, making your opponent sprint forward is exhausting and highly effective.
- **Jannik Sinner's Controlled Aggression:** Sinner (No. 2)



hits a massive ball, but watch when he pulls the trigger. He doesn't go for a flat, low-percentage winner on the first ball. He uses heavy, deep angles to push his opponent off the court before flattening out his shot for the winner. Your Takeaway: Stop trying to hit winners from behind the baseline. Build the point with depth, wait for the short ball, and then step in.

- **Novak Djokovic's Depth and Defense:** Notice how Djokovic targets the middle of the court with deep, looping shots when he is out of position. Your Takeaway: When you are pulled wide, don't go for a risky down-the-line winner. Hit a high, heavy ball deep down the middle to reset the point and buy yourself time to recover.

What to Learn from the Top WTA Women

The WTA field is bringing incredible variety to the desert this year, with a mix of heavy hitters and defensive maestros.

- **Aryna Sabalenka's Court Positioning:** The current World No. 1 uses her heavy topspin to completely dictate the baseline. Notice how she tries to make contact with the ball while it is still rising, taking time away from her opponent. Your Takeaway: On slow courts, it's easy to get lazy and let the ball drop. Focus on your footwork, step into the court, and take the ball at its peak to keep your opponent on their heels.

- **Mirra Andrejeva's Point Construction:** The defending 2025 Indian Wells champion won the tournament last year at just 17 years old by outsmarting her opponents. She uses angles, slices, and high loops to break her opponent's rhythm. Your Takeaway: You don't need overpowering pace to win in Sarasota. Use a slice backhand to keep the ball low in the wind, or a high looping forehand to push a shorter opponent

back.

- **Coco Gauff's Defensive Resilience:** Gauff is a master at making her opponent hit one extra ball. In the heat of the day, making your opponent work for every single point leads to unforced errors. Your Takeaway: Embrace the grind. In the Florida humidity, if you can consistently get one more ball over the net than the player across from you, you will win the match.

- **Victoria Mboko's Fearless Returns:** The 19-year-old Canadian just cracked the Top 10 for the first time. Watch how aggressively she treats second serves. Your Takeaway: Don't just block a weak second serve back into play. Step around your backhand, look for your forehand, and immediately put the server on the defensive.

Actionable Sarasota Strategies

To bring it all together for your next match on the sun-baked courts of Longboat Key:

1. **Embrace the Rally:** Accept that the ball will come back more often on slower courts. Don't panic and over-hit.
2. **Use the Wind:** If the sea breeze is kicking up off the Gulf, use heavier topspin when hitting with the wind to keep the ball in, and hit slightly flatter and harder when hitting into the wind.
3. **Hydrate Like a Pro:** You'll see the pros at Indian Wells drinking electrolytes at every changeover. Sarasota's humidity drains you faster than you think. Start hydrating the night before your match.

Letterds, from page 16

rice? Incidentally, the clearcutting of mangroves on Jewfish occurred months ago (just before I first registered a complaint).

James G. Haft
Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: James Haft

Thanks Jim. Code Enforcement staff investigated when the complaint came in (including going to the site 3 days in a row). Unfortunately, staff did not see anyone cutting mangroves. The complaint was also forwarded to FDEP at the time (as they are the state designated agency responsible for mangrove permitting & enforcement). An FDEP contact for follow-up, if you're interested, is Hannah.Westervelt@FloridaDEP.gov

Allen Parsons
Planning and Zoning Director
Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on JFK

To: Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Director Allen Parsons

Hi Allen & Charlie — Thank you both for coming to our LBK North meeting on Thursday. Just wanted to follow up on the Jewfish Key clear cutting of mangroves. I had reported this back in November. It was handed off to someone in code enforcement (whose name I forget) but nothing more happened as far as I'm aware. This is highly illegal and environmentally damaging action. According to another JFK Owner, the culprit is Jordan Mollenaar, who owns 5 properties on the island.

I just spoke with someone working on the island. They are actively clearing now in the "Preservation" area. It is Jordan Mollenaar that had hired the work to be done. He owns 5 properties now on the island. I can share his contact information with you. Other neighbors as well as me are upset about this, but feel powerless.

See Letters, page 12

letters@lbknews.com

Longboat Key News Sarasota City News

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Editor Letters



Letters, from page 6

James Haft
Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: James Haft
Jim, I am including Allen and Code Enforcement to check into this.
Charles Mopps
Public Works Director
Town of Longboat Key

Mangrove cutting on Jewfish Key

To: Terry Driver
It appears that the crew building a new house on the north end of JFK has clearcut well over 100 feet of mangroves from the beach. I'm told this is a house being built by Shaun Kaleta. I can't imagine that he received permits to do this. What recourse does the Town or the State have for this violation?
James G. Haft
Longboat Key

Community Center agreement delayed by County
To: Manatee County Commissioner Tal Siddique
Thanks, Tal! Let me know if I can be of assistance.
Sarah Karon
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Community Center agreement delayed by County

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Sarah Karon
Our county attorney is actively reviewing the request. There are a few notes of caution she has shared with staff, one of which is the justification of improvements to private property when an agreement with the Town and the property owner has not been secured. I'll have a discussion with our staff about what this means. I don't want to pre-empt the attorney's efforts on this project.
Tal Siddique
County Commissioner
Manatee County Government

Community Center agreement delayed by County

To: Manatee County Commissioner Tal Siddique
Echoing Maureen's comments, anything you can do to expedite this legal process will be appreciated. We remain so enthusiastic and grateful for your support with this wonderful new initiative!
Sarah Karon
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

Community Center agreement delayed by County

To: Manatee County Commissioner Tal Siddique
Today the LBK North Community — 29 community leaders representing approximately 1,000 Manatee County residents on Longboat Key through their HOA and condominium associations — learned from our Mayor that the Town is still awaiting finalization from the County (Legal Department?) of the inter-local agreement for the Community Center space at the Paradise Center.
In mid-December, a draft agreement was developed, and you shared that you were "looking forward to it coming before the Board" and its approval (consent agenda). Based on that update, we were hopeful this would be completed within six weeks. It is difficult to understand what is causing the continued delay in approving a solution for a community space that all parties agreed meets our near-term (three-year) needs.

The BOCC expressed clear support and enthusiasm for this project at the LBK Joint Meeting in May 2025, and County staff moved quickly to evaluate alternatives and identify the Paradise Center as the most viable option. For many in the community, it felt as though we were finally solving a decade-long challenge after the Whitney property fell through and other locations proved economically unfeasible.

The Town and the community are ready to proceed, yet we are losing valuable time during the busiest months on the Key, when seasonal traffic makes it especially difficult for residents to travel off-island (December–April).

Tal, we are grateful for the work done by all to date. Given the urgency, if there is anything you or your staff can do to help in bring this agreement to conclusion as soon as possible, the LBK North community would be deeply appreciative.

LBK North Board
Maureen Merrigan
Paul Hyllbert
Jim Haft
Jeff Driver

Property Tax

To: Florida Senator Jim Boyd

I am writing first and foremost to thank you for the measured and thoughtful approach you have taken to the Governor's call for a property tax overhaul. As an elected official, I have been dismayed by the reckless House bills that have been pushed to the Senate. The term reckless is defined as "a dangerous disregard for consequences", so I use it here to emphasize the significance of the property tax issue.

The flurry of House bills this session chose to ignore the upcoming 2027 Taxation & Budget Referendum Commission, scheduled to convene in 2027. That would be the proper place to research, discuss and carefully consider why, if and how to address the complexities and ramifications of an entirely new state tax structure. As I understand the Commission, the Senate President, Governor and House Speaker are charged with overseeing this important work. As I am sure you are aware, cities, counties and towns throughout the state are already facing serious budget challenges following the pandemic, which precipitated rapid inflation, particularly on first responder salaries and equipment. That was followed by three hurricanes, resulting in a host of infrastructure demands, flood control mitigation requirements and skyrocketing insurance premiums. (All general fund expenditures). Following these crises, I have heard constituents clamor for property "insurance" relief, but not one complaint about their property taxes.

All the regular functions of local government continue to require tax expenditures, whether or not we have the tax revenues to support them. Without the ability to levy ad valorem taxes, things like regional health care, beach renourishment, water quality and access, some roads and drainage, police and fire equipment, parks and recreation, flood mitigation, etc., will all be constrained. The committee and floor debates failed to produce any viable plan to help cities and counties replace needed revenues. Thus, citizens in non-homestead properties, rental units and local businesses may well bear the brunt of any property tax change. Significantly increased sales taxes could be a major stopgap for cities and counties, but would also discourage Florida commerce and tourism.

Another serious issue to consider is the impact on city and county bond ratings. These will be downgraded as soon as reliable tax bases become inadequate or unavailable. Community improvement projects and necessary local loans will only be available at much higher rates, costing taxpayers significantly more. It became painfully clear during the House floor debate that the sponsor of HB 203 had never considered the bill's impact on bond financing, or the chilling effect it might have on investors.

Property tax is a complex issue that certainly needs more work. I hope the 2027 Taxation & Budget Referendum Commission will be able to answer the multi-billion dollar question: How can Florida taxes be restructured to protect the quality of life we all enjoy in this great state? Today, it is the careful local oversight of ad valorem general fund dollars that make Florida such a desirable place to live. I am hopeful you and the Senate body will seriously analyze the ramifications of any tax referendum proposal and its impact on all of our communities.

Please know how much I appreciate your careful work on this issue, and for all that you do for the people of Florida.

Penny Gold
Commissioner
Town of Longboat Key

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Slow Down, Sarasota: State Advances 10 MPH E-Bike Speed Limit Near Pedestrians

Who doesn't like to ride fast and silently with the freedom of a motorcycle, yet with the planet-saving feeling of an e-bike, as you glide to your coffee on St. Armands Circle or careen up the Ringling Bridge, mildly pedaling to indicate that it might be exercise on some level? And think of the confidence-building of an e-bike; you can pedal far away and know that you can put it in electric mode and cruise home all geared up with a mild sense of accomplishment.

STEVE REID
Editor & Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Some of those good feelings are about to be tamped down or modulated, as strict new rules make their way through Tallahassee. But the Wild West days of weaving between cars and sidewalks, in between pedestrians, seamlessly and quietly, may rapidly be coming to an end.

For cyclists zipping down Gulf of Mexico Drive or navigating the bustling pathways of our barrier islands, a major shift in the rules of the road is looming. The Florida Senate recently cast a unanimous 37-0 vote to pass Senate Bill 382 (championed by State Sen. Keith Truenow), which aligns with House Bill 243 (sponsored by Rep. Vicki Lopez). Together, this legislation is designed to aggressively curb the speeds of electric bicycles and scooters on shared-use paths across the state.

Epidemic or Saving Grace? An Exploding Suncoast Market

The proliferation of the bikes — is it an epidemic born from the pandemic when sales surged as technology converged with opportunity? Are they one of America's saving graces, pushing people outdoors, encouraging people who just refused to head out into the Florida heat despite the fact there are very few hills in Sarasota or Longboat Key?

Whether you view them as a nuisance or a necessity, their presence is undeniable. E-bikes have shifted from early-adopter novelties to practical daily transportation.

- **Outpacing Electric Cars:** In 2022, U.S. e-bike imports (1.1 million) actually surpassed the total number of electric cars sold (800,000).
- **Rapid Adoption:** In 2023, nearly 20% of Americans who rode a bike used an e-bike, up from less than 8% just two years prior.
- **Global Boom:** The global market, valued at roughly \$35–\$54 billion in 2024, is projected to shatter the \$100 billion mark by 2030.

The Catalyst: Tragedies and Rising Crash Rates

Like most legislation, it is being championed mainly in reaction to some tragic incidents that have occurred. Backed by safety advocates, the state's push responds to severe, and sometimes fatal, crashes—including a deadly e-bike accident in Key Biscayne and an incident where a 5-year-old child was struck in Volusia County.

The danger hits incredibly close to home for the Suncoast.

Local Impact: According to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, there were 371 bicycle accidents in Sarasota and Manatee Counties in 2022 (flhsmv.gov). This means that, on average, a bicycle accident happened almost every day where we live.

"It's real. It's happening to a lot of youth in our communities, and we have to take some kind of action to figure out how we can fix or correct [it] in the future," said Sen. Truenow.

The 10 MPH "Bubble" and New Safety Rules

This is a big deal, and anyone who owns an e-bike or is thinking of getting one needs to be aware of the new rules that will severely limit how fast and where you can ride the bikes. To manage this influx of high-speed micromobility on paths meant for walking, the legislation enforces a situational speed limit.

If signed into law, riders will face several new restrictions:

- **The 10 MPH Rule:** Riders must drop speeds to 10 mph (16 km/h) or less when riding within 50 feet (15 meters) of a pedestrian on a sidewalk or shared-use path.
- **Yielding and Signaling:** Riders must yield the right of way to pedestrians and provide an audible signal (ringing a bell or calling out) before passing.
- **Licensing and ID:** The bill introduces provisions that may require a driver's license for operating certain classes of e-bikes, as well as general identification requirements.
- **Modification Bans:** The legislation includes strict provisions against illegally modifying e-bikes to exceed their factory speed classifications.

Violators will face a \$30 noncriminal traffic infraction, a fee that does not increase with repeat offenses.

Standardizing E-Bike Classes

To help local law enforcement, including the Sarasota and Longboat Key Police Departments, better regulate the market, the bill aligns Florida's e-bike definitions more closely with federal standards:

E-Bike Category	Motor Assistance Type	Maximum Assisted Speed
Class 1	Pedal-assist only (no throttle)	20 mph
Class 2	Throttle-assist or pedal-assist	20 mph
Class 3	Pedal-assist only	28 mph

Next Steps: A 9-Member Task Force

One of the biggest hurdles in regulating e-bikes has been a lack of unified data. Under the new bills, local and state law enforcement will be mandated to specifically track e-bike acci-



idents to distinguish them from traditional bicycle crashes.

Additionally, a 9-member Electric Bicycle Safety Task Force will be established to study the new data and recommend future regulations.

While the bill has garnered support from police chiefs, school boards, and the AARP, not all residents are thrilled about the state stepping onto the bike path, with some locals calling it government overreach into recreational activities. Regardless of the mixed public reaction, the future of the rules now rests with the Florida House of Representatives and, ultimately, the Governor's desk.



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City Manager, from page 1

immediately impact traffic flow, infrastructure resilience, and the relentless pressure of downtown redevelopment.

While mainland commissioners praised her approachability and preparation, barrier island residents who frequently battle City Hall over density might take note of her past approach to development pushback. During an interview with the city's search consultant, Friling recounted a past clash over a comprehensive plan in a growing Illinois town, where residents opposed development in favor of preserving open space.

"You know, it's always hard because you have a lot of NIMBYs [Not In My Backyard] in any community," Friling told the consultant. "We got into a lot of disagreement with a lot of local community groups who said, 'You know what, I commute home every single day, I like seeing 1,000 acres of agriculture land out in my backyard.' I bet you do, but that can't be the future of this community."

If Friling officially packs her bags for Florida, here is what Longboat Key and St. Armands residents need to be watching:

The Exhaustive Search and the Ones Who Walked Away

The city's national search, which netted over 80 applicants, was anything but straightforward. The process was marked by notable dropouts who simply walked away from the job. Chief among them was Mount Prospect Village Manager Michael Cassady—a top semi-finalist boasting an Emory University background. Local officials in Illinois noted that Sarasota recruiters actively pursued Cassady, rather than the other way around, but he ultimately turned down the role before the interview stage, citing a mix of personal and professional obligations. Another finalist, Tim Gleason, also dropped out of the running after securing a city manager role in Iowa.

The remaining five finalists—including highly credentialed administrators like Christopher Rodriguez, an assistant city administrator from Washington D.C., and Harry Black, a former Stockton, California city manager—were subjected to an exhaustive 48-hour interview gauntlet. The process kept the competitors in uniquely close quarters as they faced senior staff, held one-on-ones with commissioners, and participated in a rapid-fire public forum with community leaders. Ultimately, Friling emerged with the conditional offer.

Will Prairie Experience Translate to Coastal Crises?

Friling's resume boasts oversight of a \$150 million budget, 500 employees, and an agency serving nearly 1 million residents in Illinois. In her application, she highlighted over three decades of executive leadership and a recent 2024 ballot victory that allowed her district to acquire hundreds of acres of open space. Crucially, her background includes stormwater and flood mitigation planning.

However, mitigating midwestern river flooding is a vastly different beast than managing catastrophic storm surge, king tides, and the existential threat of sea-level rise facing St. Armands Circle and Gulf of Mexico Drive. Island residents will need to see rapid proof that Friling can pivot her environmental stewardship experience to the unique, high-stakes realities of a coastal Florida community.

Downtown Development vs. Island Access

Friling brings experience in downtown redevelopment, an area of constant friction west of the bay. Sarasota's ongoing explosive growth has routinely placed a massive strain on the transportation network, turning the Ringling Bridge into a parking lot and bottlenecking access to and from St. Armands and Longboat Key.

As Friling takes the helm, islanders will be watching closely to see if her administration actively coordinates regional traffic solutions, or if the barrier islands are treated as an afterthought to mainland expansion.

Navigating the Final Interim Shuffle

The transition period itself remains a point of vulnerability. Interim City Manager Dave

Bullock—a familiar face who provided stability and possesses deep local knowledge of Longboat Key—officially stepped down today, Friday, March 6, at 5:01 p.m. Because Friling has yet to publicly comment on the job or submit a formal resignation in Illinois, the commission tapped Jennifer Jorgensen to step in as the new, temporary interim manager. (Officials at Friling's current district, where she earns a base salary of \$223,000, confirmed they are aware she is weighing the Florida offer and anticipate a seamless transition if she leaves.)

Jorgensen brings a distinct corporate and legal pedigree to the temporary role. Before joining Sarasota's staff in 2023, she oversaw global vendor strategy and negotiations for The Walt Disney Company. She holds a law degree from the University of Nebraska and an undergraduate degree in speech communication from the University of Minnesota. Most recently serving as Sarasota's Director of Governmental Affairs, Jorgensen has been the city's point person on massive mainland initiatives, collaborating heavily with The Bay Park Conservancy and the Sarasota Performing Arts Foundation.

While Jorgensen expressed gratitude for the commission's confidence in her to manage the short-term appointment, for the barrier islands, this game of musical chairs at City Hall means a temporary lack of long-term strategic direction on critical regional coordination efforts until Friling officially boots up her computer.

The Bottom Line: Friling emerged from a chaotic pool of 80 applicants and survived a rigorous gauntlet to win the job. She clearly has the administrative chops. But for Longboat Key and St. Armands, the honeymoon phase will be short. She will need to quickly prove that her vision for Sarasota includes the barrier islands as vital partners in the region's future.

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