



# Longboat Key News

May 8, 2026

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## InsideLook



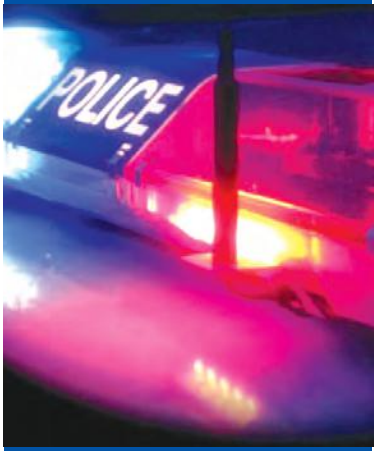
*Roundabout Art Going in Circles ...page 5*



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*Quick, Easy, Cheap and Tasty ...page 15*



*Women all lit up on beach ...page 10*

## Arch-enemies head to court as St. Regis and Longboat reach impasse over beachside structure

*Friday at 5:00 PM was supposed to be the deadline. Instead, it became a phone call. Chuck Whittall picked up the phone and told the Town Manager he was not taking the arch down. The state permit, he said, is the only permit that matters. Longboat Key has its answer. The St. Regis arch is going to circuit court — and Whittall says he will follow it from there to the Florida Supreme Court if he has to.*

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

For nearly a year, the question hanging over Longboat Key has been when the St. Regis arch dispute would stop being a zoning question and start being a legal one.

It became a legal one Friday at 5:00 PM.

That was the deadline Town Manager Howard Tipton had set for Unicorp National Developments and SR LBK to bring the unpermitted 14-foot metallic arch and crown-and-lettering sign on the resort's Gulf-jutting groin into compliance with Town code — or face suit. Five o'clock arrived, and so did a phone call. Unicorp CEO Chuck Whittall called Tipton and said he was not removing the structure.

"He believes they are on legal solid ground," Tipton said in describing the call, "that they have a permit from the state and it is in state waters and not in the Town's jurisdiction."

That, in one sentence, is the legal theory Whittall intends to take to a Sarasota County courtroom — and beyond.

### The Town Manager's Position

Tipton, for his part, declined to escalate the rhetoric. His comments after Friday's call carried more weariness  
**See Court, page 3**

## Beauty, Neglect, and a Battle for the Soul of St. Armands Circle

*While Developers Circle and the City Dithers, Merchants Association President Rachel Burns Walks Every Cracked Inch — and Has a Plan. Does Anyone Have the Will to Listen?*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
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On a warm afternoon in Sarasota, the scene at St. Armands Circle is nothing short of enchanting. Couples stroll past Italian statuary beneath swaying palms. The scent of gelato drifts across brick-lined walkways. Children press their faces against boutique windows while their parents settle into sidewalk café chairs, cocktails in hand, with the kind of unhurried ease that only happens when a place feels genuinely special. Laughter carries across the roundabout. The light is

**See St. Armands, page 12**



**St. Armands Circle Merchants Association President Rachel Burns**

## Longboat Key Gave Up Its Insularity for Beach Money; The Parking Lot Is the Receipt

*For most of its history, Longboat Key paid its own way to the water. Residents taxed themselves to truck in sand, groomed their own shoreline, built their own parks and kept access intentionally quiet.*

**STEVE REID**  
Editor & Publisher  
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The bargain was simple: pay for the beach, keep the beach. The mainland could go to Lido, Siesta or Cortez.

That bargain is over — and a small but vocal group of residents around Bayfront Park is just now reckoning with what replaced it.

The complaint that surfaced again at recent town meetings — too many beach cars, too many tents and grills, too much noise where pickleball players, dog walkers and shuffleboard regulars used to have the run of the place — is, at its root, a complaint about the cost of partnership. The town no longer writes the check for its beach alone. It writes it with Tallahassee, Washington and Sarasota County. And every co-signer brings a condition.

### The End of an Insular Era

Longboat Key's beaches were, for decades, a self-funded project. Voters approved a \$16 million bond in 2011 to keep sand on the shoreline. The town levied its own erosion-control tax to pay it back. Renourishment cycles, dredge schedules and dune work were Longboat's expenses to bear, and Longboat's alone.

The trade-off was control. The town chose how big the public access points would be, where the parking would sit, how visible to invite the rest of the region to be. It chose modest.

What changed wasn't the philosophy. It was the price.

### The Deal: Sand for Parking

The most expensive condition lives in the asphalt across Gulf of Mexico Drive from the recreation center.

To qualify for state beach renour-  
**See Parking, page 2**

### Parking, from page 1

ishment dollars, Florida requires meaningful public access — parking, restrooms, the works — within a defined radius of the funded shoreline. Bayfront Park is the only spot on the 11-mile island that has the room. So it is the lever the town pulls to unlock state participation in a project that, in 2028, is currently scoped at roughly \$32.9 million and 800,000 cubic yards of sand.

The state's slice of that 2028 project is about \$7 million. FEMA is in for \$12.2 million. Tourist development taxes contribute roughly \$5 million. The remainder rolls in from earlier renourishment funds.

Town Manager Howard Tipton, in an interview, framed the long-run trade in plainer terms. "They pay millions toward the town's beaches," Tipton said. "It's a small price to pay for the beach."

In Tipton's accounting, the state has historically delivered something on the order of \$10 million every seven or eight years — money that exists on the ledger only because the town keeps the bathrooms open, the spaces striped and the gate, in effect, unlocked.

### Why Sand Has Stopped Being Cheap

That money matters more every cycle, because the commodity itself has gotten brutal.

Longboat Key's first island-wide renourishment in 1993 placed 1.95 million cubic yards at roughly \$5 per cubic yard. The 2028 project is budgeted at about \$41 per cubic yard for less than half the volume. The 2024 hurricane season alone — Helene and Milton, principally — stripped an estimated 400,000 cubic yards from the island.

"The cost of sand continues to scale," Tipton said.

In a market where sand has become a regional scarcity and offshore borrow areas are increasingly contested, every outside dollar the town can pull in is a dollar it doesn't have to raise from its own taxpayers.

### The County's Deal: Parks for Parking

The state isn't the only outside check the town now cashes.

Sarasota County wrote a \$2 million one in 2016 to help build out the 3.54-acre Bayfront Park addition — the parcel the county itself had acquired in 2007 for about \$8 million through its Neighborhood Parklands program. The playground, the picnic shelters, the docks, the rain garden, much of the parking now under dispute: county money, county parcel, town management.

The Town Center Green library now in design is the next chapter. Sarasota County is paying for the roughly 8,000-square-foot core building and will operate it on a 50-year lease. The town is fundraising privately for the enhancements. When that opens, it will sit alongside the Bayfront Park complex as another public-facing amenity — and another draw for cars.

The pattern is consistent. When Longboat Key paid for everything itself, it could keep things small. The minute outside money started flowing in — for sand, for the park addition, for the library — outside expectations of public access came with it.

Each grant, each county contribution, each FEMA reimbursement carries a covenant. Build it. Open it. Park them.

### "An Existing Situation"

Tipton has heard the parking complaints before, and he draws a careful line around them.

The Bayfront Park stretch, he noted in our interview, is the most heavily trafficked public

area on the key. The beaches are open until 11 p.m. The pickleball courts, the dog park and the rec center have always been town amenities open to anyone who shows up. The added parking has, indisputably, brought more people. But the park itself, and the public's right to use it, predates almost every nearby objection.

"Some of the loudest complaining moved into an existing situation," Tipton said. "People are using a town amenity."

That doesn't dismiss the trash, the cigarette butts, the dogs where they shouldn't be or the tents left behind — code issues the police department has answered with extra foot and ATV patrols this month. It does, however, locate the parking debate where it actually sits: not as a question of whether Bayfront Park became a public beach, but of how a town that wanted to stay insular ended up codifying public access in exchange for the dollars that keep its sand in place.

### What's Coming in 2028

The next renourishment is not a routine refill. It is, by Tipton's description, a structural intervention.

The 2028 project will pair sand placement with a groin field on the most erosive stretch of the island — the Gulfside Road shoreline immediately south of the Ohana seawall, where downshore wave action and a hard sea floor have ground the beach away faster than anywhere else on the key. Tipton said the rate of nourishment in that segment now requires permanent structures, not just imported sand.

### The North-End Proof

The model is a few miles north. The seven-groin field at the north end — two permeable adjustable groins installed in 2015, plus the T-head groins added in 2021 — is, in Tipton's word, performing. Satellite imagery four years on shows much of the 2021 sand still in place even after the 2024 storm season.

"The north-end groins have demonstrated their use," Tipton said.

If the southern field works as the northern one has, the math improves: less sand needed per cycle, longer intervals between projects, lower per-cubic-yard pain. None of that, however, lessens the parking calculus at Bayfront. The state's formula doesn't care which end of the island is being rebuilt. Within a mile of the funded shoreline, the spaces have to be there.

### What Residents Are Actually Asking

The neighbors are not asking the town to give back the state's check. They are asking whether the parking burden can be redistributed — whether expansion can be spread across the smaller beach access points up and down Gulf of Mexico Drive instead of concentrated at the one park where the rec center, the dog park, the courts and the playground already compete for the same pavement.

It is a reasonable question. It is also a question with a hard ceiling. The state grant follows a defined radius from a qualifying access point, and Bayfront is the only point on the island with the footprint to hold the count. Smaller satellite lots can supplement. They cannot substitute.

That is the trade Longboat Key made when it stopped paying for the beach by itself. The sand comes in. The groins go up. The check clears. And the cars line up across the street from the recreation center, where they will keep lining up for as long as the island wants someone else to help pay for the shoreline that defines it.



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## Court, from page 1

than heat.

"I appreciate that he created a great resort out of the dilapidated Colony, and so much effort to buy the individual units," Tipton said. "Chuck wants to work together. It is not going through Town Code Enforcement. It is going straight to circuit court."

That second sentence is the operational one. Under the special counsel services agreement the Town Commission authorized 7-0 on Monday, the Town's outside litigation counsel — the firm Garcia Dell, headed by Martin Garcia — is now empowered to file directly in the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, bypassing the Town's own special magistrate. Town Attorney Maggie Mooney told the Commission Monday she preferred that route precisely because she expected exactly this scenario: a developer who would appeal any magistrate ruling into circuit court anyway, prolonging the non-compliance.

Friday's phone call confirmed her read.

### "The State Said They Are the Proper Agency"

Whittall, in an interview after the call to Tipton, was unequivocal about why he thinks Longboat Key has no standing to compel removal.

"The state gave us a permit to build a groin, do ropes and columns and put a sign on it," he said. "Maggie Mooney said she does not agree. The state said they are the proper agency. We believe we have rightly built the sign."

That is the argument in its purest form. The groin sits seaward of the Erosion Control Line, on sovereign submerged state land. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection issued a permit in 2024 covering the groin repair, the boardwalk, and — Unicorp maintains — the archway and sign that crown the structure. If the state owns the land beneath it, and the state has authorized what stands on it, Whittall asks, on what basis does a barrier-island town tell him to take it down?

The Town's answer is that local sign and zoning codes apply to structures within municipal boundaries regardless of who owns the underlying land. Mooney's two prior rounds of analysis at the Planning and Zoning Board, along with her March 9, 2026 constitutional memorandum, all rest on that premise. A judge will sort it out.

### "It Looks Like a 1950s Monaco Pier"

Whittall's affection for the structure he built is undisguised, and he leaned into it.

"It is not offensive — it is beautiful," he said. "It looks like a 1950s Monaco pier."

He described the arch as something the resort's guests, and members of the public who walk the beach, have embraced.

"We get lots of photos and weddings and Mother's Day at the sign under the arch," Whittall said. "It is a true landmark. It is an Instagram memory moment. Thousands of pictures and memories have been created."

That language — landmark, Instagram memory moment — sits at the heart of the case the Town is preparing to make against him. The previous LBK News reporting laid it out: in attorney Brenda Patten's January 23, 2026 application letter, Unicorp's stated purpose for the arch was to "draw attention to the property, promoting visitors and tourism," and to provide "a focal point for photos and memories, drawing more visitors and tourists to the hotel or motel." That is, on its face, the language of commercial advertising on sovereign state land — the precise problem the Town's sign code was written to prevent.

Whittall's view is that beauty and economic contribution should resolve the question. The Town's view is that the code resolves it.

### "Built to Outlast My Lifetime"

Asked about the structure itself, Whittall offered details that have not previously been part of the public record.

"It was about \$16,000 to build the arch," he said. "Hired a firm out of South Florida. It is built to withstand 150 mph hurricanes and is fabricated from marine grade stainless steel to outlast my lifetime. It will be here for generations."

The 150 mph wind rating is significant: it matches exactly the standard Mooney's withdrawn ordinances would have required of any "private groin sign" structure. The construction quality, in other words, is not in dispute. The legal authority to put the structure where it stands is.

"Small Voices Make the Loudest Noises"

If Whittall's tone toward the Town Manager was conciliatory, his tone toward the residents and commissioners who pushed for removal was something closer to exasperation.

"We don't know why a handful — granted, small voices make the loudest noises — find something better to do than argue over our sign," he said.

"We don't get it. We don't get it. We are not fighting over it just to fight. It could take years. We will fight it on every level, whether it's the Florida Supreme Court."

That last clause is the one with operational consequence for Longboat Key taxpayers. A circuit court case, fully litigated, runs into six figures. A circuit court case followed by an appeal to Florida's Second District Court of Appeal runs higher. A case Whittall is publicly committing to take to the Florida Supreme Court — the highest court in the state — runs higher still, with no guarantee, as Mooney warned commissioners Monday, that the Town will recover its attorney's fees and costs even if it prevails.

When Commissioner B.J. Bishop asked the Town Attorney that question on Monday, Mooney's answer was direct: "I cannot guarantee this commission that we will recover attorney's fees and costs. Certainly we will ask, but I don't want to mislead anybody."

Whittall, on Friday, supplied the other half of that equation. He intends to make sure they ask many times.

### "They Are Saying No Just to Say No"

Whittall's frustration with the Commission's posture spilled over into the bluntest comment of the interview.

"They are saying no just to say no," he said. "This is small potatoes. If we lose, we lose, we lose. We do not know what the town has to lose by letting it stay."

It is the clearest statement yet of how Whittall views the dispute: as a zero-cost gesture for the Town and a meaningful one for him. His implicit math is that the arch generates tourism, generates wedding bookings, generates social-media impressions, and generates good press — and that Longboat Key, by refusing to ratify it, is forfeiting upside while gaining nothing.

The Town's implicit math, expressed by the Planning and Zoning Board's two denial votes and reaffirmed by the Commission's unanimous Monday vote, is the opposite: that ratifying a non-compliant structure built without a permit on sovereign state land is itself the cost — a precedent that, once set, cannot be unset.

Both sides genuinely believe they are protecting something the other side is willing to sacrifice.

### "BJ Bishop Is Not Forward Thinking"

Whittall did not avoid naming the commissioner who has been most publicly opposed to

the arch.

"BJ Bishop is not forward thinking," he said. "There is no \$600 million resort on the Jersey shore. It is a beautiful monument to LBK and guests."

The "Jersey shore" reference is a callback to the March Planning and Zoning Board hearing, where Board Member Gladding warned that approving the amendments could turn Longboat Key into the "Jersey Beach." Whittall has consistently rejected the comparison, arguing that the comparison itself is the failure of imagination — that what Unicorp built is not the kind of overdeveloped commercial corridor the Jersey Shore connotes, but the opposite: a luxury resort whose presence elevates everything around it.

Bishop, who told a constituent in March that she would "continue to urge my colleagues we follow our sign code and have this removed," has not publicly responded to the personal characterization. She voted yes on Monday's litigation authorization, as did every other member of the Commission.

### Skipping Code Enforcement Entirely

The procedural detail in Tipton's comments deserves attention. "It is not going through Town Code Enforcement," he said. "It is going straight to circuit court."

That is by design. A typical municipal code violation in Florida moves through a sequence: code enforcement officer issues a notice, a special magistrate hears the case, fines accrue, and only then — if the violator appeals or refuses to comply with the magistrate's order — does the dispute reach circuit court. Mooney's recommendation, ratified by the Commission's 7-0 vote, was to skip the early stages entirely.

The reasoning was prophylactic. Footnote 2 of Patten's January 23 application letter had reserved Unicorp's right to litigate in any forum. Mooney told the Commission she expected the special magistrate path to "end up in the circuit court anyway" and saw no point in building delay into a process whose endpoint was already known.

Friday's phone call was the test of that prediction. The prediction held.

### Litigation Is the Substrate of This Property

Anyone surprised that the St. Regis arch is heading to court has not been paying attention to the eighteen acres on which it stands. Litigation is not an interruption of life on this parcel — it is the geological layer beneath everything built on it.

Strip away the cabanas, the wedding lawn, the porte-cochère, the boardwalk, and the groin, and what you find at the bedrock is forty years of legal filings.

In 1988, Colony founder Dr. Murray "Murf" Klauber sued the Town of Longboat Key after the Town pulled his building permit for a luxury spa condominium called The Reserve. Eight years later, a federal jury awarded him nearly \$9 million for civil rights violations, and the Town settled for \$6.5 million in cash in March 1997.

In 2007, Klauber sued his own Colony condo owners over \$14.1 million in disputed repair costs. In 2009, Bank of America foreclosed on him. By 2010, the Colony was closed; by 2013, Klauber had thrown three of his Colony companies into Chapter 11 to stall a Sarasota foreclosure hearing. The bankruptcy court eventually wrested the property from his hands. He died in 2018, the same year the buildings came down.

Then came Whittall's turn at the wheel. After buying the wreckage in 2016 for \$22 million, Unicorp spent the next five years in court against Tennessee developer Andy Adams, who controlled seventy-five units and refused to sell at Whittall's price.

Other unit owners filed their own motions and their own threats to challenge the Town's approval of the project. Judge Hunter W. Carroll spent years parsing the resulting tangle before the condominium association was judicially terminated in 2021.

By the time Whittall settled with Adams that April for somewhere north of \$15 million, he estimated his total spend on the property and demolition — before a single new wall went up — at almost \$100 million. Now, having battled the Klaubers' aftermath, the holdout unit owners, and the bankruptcy court, Whittall is set to battle the Town that approved his project in the first place. The arch dispute is not the first courtroom this parcel has seen. It is just the next geological layer that forms the legal bedrock of the site.

### What Happens Next

The Town's outside counsel will now prepare the complaint. The forum will be the Twelfth Judicial Circuit in and for Sarasota County. The legal questions in front of the court will likely include the scope of municipal jurisdiction over structures on sovereign submerged lands, the interplay between state DEP permitting and local sign and zoning codes, and the constitutional limits on content-based regulation of signage under Reed v. Gilbert and City of Austin v. Reagan National Advertising.

Whittall has publicly committed to appealing through every available level. Mooney has publicly committed to pursuing recovery of the Town's costs without promising it. The arch — built for \$16,000, fabricated in marine-grade stainless steel, rated for 150-mph winds, "built to outlast my lifetime" in Whittall's words — remains where it stands, draped in fabric, awaiting a judge.

There are buildings, and then there are landmarks, and then there are lawsuits. The St. Regis arch is now all three.

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# EditorLetters



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

## Canal Dredging and Cost/Tax Allocation

To: Longboat Key Town Commissioners

We were recently presented the Longboat Key canal dredging plans. We have a few comments below for your consideration:

-Although the presentation charts show six benefits, we think there is really only one – “access for recreational boater” by the canal front parcels. The next 5 stated benefits seem spurious and not relevant. Most residents think that the canal front people will benefit the most; the bay front people a little; and the non water front people not at all. Therefore, shouldn't the cost be allocated proportionally to those who benefit?

- During the presentation it was mentioned that they wanted to keep the cost allocation simple. But wouldn't being more fair, though more complex, be better? When allocating the undergrounding cost a few years ago the benefits were analyzed in a lot of detail - e.g. we measured the distance to the nearest telephone pole to get a .5 EBU. Then the costs were allocated, parcel by parcel, by the different EBU benefits (reliability, safety, aesthetics) received. With this canal dredging plan the benefits have not been split out in any detail - just a simple 80/20 applied.

-Using a shared driveway maintenance analogy (e.g. asphalt paving) the owner with the longest driveway portion usually pays the largest proportion of costs. Using this proportional use approach for canal dredging the owner at the end of a canal benefits the most (and probably where most of the silting occurs) and should pay a proportionally larger part of the cost and tax. Has it been found that the parcels at the mouth of canals have little to no silting and therefore no, or less, benefit?

-For the 80/20 beach renourishment split, it was felt that bay side folks still benefited from the beach renourishment in the 80/20 proportional split. Bay side folks can still go to and enjoy the gulf beaches. Conversely with this canal dredging program, non water front owners do not benefit at all with the canal dredging. The presentation noted “mimics 80/20 beach renourishment funding structure”. We think we can get closer to who actually benefits percentage wise, rather than mimicking an entirely different situation. Where is the data that shows non water front homes will be more “appealing” with canal dredging as noted on chart 8? Though some might say the tax is only about \$30 per year – it is the principle that is the point here.

-Doesn't non-ad valorem have to show that the benefits are equal? Is the town stating that bay front owners will benefit the same as canal front? A 100% allocation to canal front parcels, in our opinion, seems to be more fair. The presentation stated “reinforced appeal for real estate...”. We assume this means increased real estate values and therefore benefit. Then why non-ad valorem when a higher appraised parcel benefits so much more than a lower appraised parcel? For example, if a \$2 million parcel improved their value with canal dredging by 1 per-

cent, the owner's net worth increases by \$20,000; while the \$1 million parcel only improves their net worth by \$10,000. This doesn't seem fair that one's non-ad valorem taxes would be exactly the same. Thus, ad valorem (which is also tax deductible) would be more fair than non-ad valorem.

Thanks for considering this input, and we appreciate all the work you do on our behalf.

Carla & Pete Rowan  
Longboat Key

## FEMA Project review

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Gary Coffin

I'm traveling but will review.

George Reenstra  
Longboat Key

## FEMA Project review

To: George Reenstra

On the face that appears to be great news thanks Isaac and a well done recap of all the balances on our claims.

Gary Coffin  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## FEMA Project review

See Letters, page 6

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# EditorOpinion

## Art in the Roundabouts? No, Sarasota Prefers Keeping Our Sculptures Safe in a Warehouse Next to the Christmas Decorations

*In India, they are fascinated by circles—the circle of life and death, the karmic wheel, the mandala, which maps the progression of your soul through the cosmos.*

*Here in Sarasota, we also have circles. We have traffic roundabouts. And we have, apparently, the unique municipal superpower of buying expensive sculptures, hiding them in undisclosed locations, and then arguing about the concrete pedestals they sit on for so long that the momentum dies, the artists age, and the roundabouts sit there staring at you like a blank canvas that the city paid \$358,000 to not paint.*

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

*A Brief and Glorious Beginning (Followed Immediately by Everything Else)*

Let me take you back, because context here is everything. When I moved to Sarasota 30 years ago, we had the Season of Sculpture. Artwork dotted the entire waterfront from Selby Gardens to the Ringling Bridge—sculpture after sculpture, year after year, a genuine cultural statement from a city that took itself seriously.

Michael Saunders used to say we were “a small city with big-city amenities,” and it felt exactly right. We had an opera. We had very little traffic. People could park.

Now we have big-city traffic, huge buildings going up everywhere, and an arts program that is somehow falling behind faster than a parking initiative that has never once paid for itself.

It started with such energy. The roundabout art program came in hot. We had art going into the circles on U.S. 41, and we were saving the grand gesture for the major roundabout at the center of everything: the bottom of the Ringling Bridge. The gateway to the islands. The place where every tourist, every airport visitor, and every person who actually matters to the regional economy drives through and forms an immediate impression of what kind of city this is.

Instead, we got a very expensive hole in the ground.

### The Part Where I Interrogate City Hall

Because I am a journalist, and because staring at an empty roundabout eventually does things to a man's psyche, I recently embarked on a vision quest. After calling several times, emailing into the void, and wandering the digital labyrinth of multiple City Hall departments, I finally tracked down Luke Mocherman, the City's Communications Specialist.

Luke, who was very polite, provided me with the official, unvarnished facts regarding our roundabout art.

Let me translate these facts from Municipal Bureaucracy into English, starting with the roundabout at Fruitville Road and U.S. 41.

According to Luke, the Public Art Committee selected artwork for Fruitville way back in 2023. But it was never brought to the City Commission. Why? Due to “cost uncertainties.” Translated, this means the city realized how much a contractor was going to charge them to pour a circle of concrete and they quietly slid the proposal under a desk. Currently, funds are reserved to pay the artist, but absolutely zero Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funds have been budgeted to design or build the base. We have a theoretical sculpture going on a non-existent pedestal paid for by imaginary money.

### The 10th Street Saga

Then we have 10th Street and U.S. 41. Luke informed me that the art for this roundabout was approved in 2019. (For those keeping track at home, 2019 was before we even knew what a “supply chain issue” was.)

The sculpture, a piece called Sarasota Seagrass by Casto Solano, has actually been fabricated! It exists! It is currently “awaiting shipment,” which is a terrifying phrase. But here is the punchline: The City has just now appropriated CIP funds for this fiscal year for the “design of the sculpture base and landscaping.”

Read that carefully. They did not fund the construction of the base. They funded the design of the base. Once they finish imagining the concrete block, they can move forward with budgeting for the actual concrete block. At this pace, Sarasota Seagrass will arrive sometime in the 2030s, assuming it doesn't get lost in the mail.

### The Main Event: Complexus Returns (Maybe. Eventually.)

But what about the center of the universe? The gateway at Gulfstream Ave and U.S. 41? The spectacular nothing?

It didn't start as a void! We used to have Complexus there—that edgy, modern red steel sculpture. When the roundabout was built, it was relocated to the Sarasota Art Museum. Well, Luke provided breaking news: The City actually wants to put Complexus back in the Gulfstream roundabout!

But, naturally, there is a catch. Or rather, two catches.

Catch Number One: The City is currently begging the Florida Department of Transportation for a “Community Aesthetic Feature height variance.” I am not making that phrase up. We cannot put our art back on our road until the state highway department grants us a Community Aesthetic Feature height variance.

Catch Number Two: Complexus apparently got into a fistfight with the 2024 hurricane season and lost. The sculpture sustained significant damage and requires a “major restoration”

scheduled for June. So, assuming the state grants our aesthetic variance, and assuming the welders can put our red steel back together, we might actually have art at the gateway to the islands again.

### A Commissioner Makes a Promise (Bless Her Heart)

I recently spoke with a city commissioner—one of my actual favorites—who looked me directly in the eye and said: “Steven, I guarantee the sculptures are coming to the roundabouts.”

I believed her. I wanted to believe her, in the exact same way you want to believe the contractor who says your kitchen will definitely be done by Thursday. And then it's Thursday. And eventually you stop asking about Thursday and start asking about your emotional state.

We paid for charrettes. We selected the artists. We held the meetings. The art exists. It is sitting in workshops and warehouses right now. Warehouses are for patio furniture and Christmas decorations, not the collected ambitions of the Sarasota public art program. Art belongs in the roundabouts, where 50,000 cars a day drive past and feel, for just a moment, that they live somewhere worth caring about.

### Here Is the Part That Actually Kills Me

Thirty years ago, we ran the Season of Sculpture on the entire waterfront for about \$300,000 a year. That is a third of what it now costs to pour a single concrete pedestal.

As we've had this amazing waterfront development, we actually have LESS prominent art on our waterfront. A city that calls itself a cultural capital is quietly becoming less cultured, one deferred project at a time. It happens so slowly you don't notice until you drive past a beautiful, empty roundabout for the four hundredth time and suddenly feel a very specific kind of grief.

Look at the St. Armands entrance. It's a disgrace. Instead of stately palms and a signature welcoming landscape, we spent all this money on lane-widening and rebuilding the little humpback bridge with zero investment in actual beauty. The sidewalks need to be cohesive. The planters need a vision. None of this requires the Property Brothers to fly in. This is Municipal Governance 101. It is a class Sarasota has been auditing for thirty years without earning a single credit.

Our new city manager seems wonderful. But I will gently note that she comes from the Midwest, and her background is in forestry. This is excellent preparation for controlled burns, but historically not ideal training for stewarding one of Florida's premier cultural cities.

Tom Barwin, the former manager, had his detractors. But the roundabouts happened under his watch. He had a vision. What has happened since is a world bereft of vision—where a “visioning session” is basically just asking developers what tax incentives they would prefer. That is a bit like asking the fox what improvements he'd suggest for the henhouse.

### My Demands (There Are Only Two)

I have not surrendered on this issue. I have been standing in the middle of that roundabout, metaphorically speaking, demanding accountability from anyone driving by at 20 miles per hour. We commissioned this art. We hold the receipts. The only thing standing between Sarasota and a beautiful, iconic public art program is FDOT variances, unbudgeted concrete, and approximately 47 more meetings that we simply must refuse to have.

So here is what I am asking. Just two things, before the end of this year:

First: Get the sculptures erected. Approve the height variance. Fund the pedestals. The dividends in property values, tourism, and the simple human feeling of living somewhere worth caring about will more than justify the investment. I promise you this. It will be great. That feeling is worth considerably more than another parking study.

Second: Commission a real beautification plan for St. Armands Circle. Proper landscaped entrances, cohesive sidewalks, funded flood mitigation. Draw up the full tab. Figure out how to pay for it. And stop embarrassing us in front of the tourists.

We are a great city in spite of City Hall. We deserve to be a great city because of it. There is a difference, and I have been standing in the roundabout long enough to know exactly which one we are.



REID

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ads@Lbknews.com or 941.387.2200

# EditorLetters



## Letters, from page 4

To: George Reenstra and Commissioner Coffin

Thank you for the discussion today. As one follow-up, below is a list of claims by category that the Town of Longboat Key has submitted to FEMA. The FEMA rep. for our Beach claim (Category G below) reached out as recently as today to schedule a site visit for Friday May 8th to help move our claim forward, so that is a good sign. The Beach claim is our biggest one at around \$17 million. FYI – Overall, the Town’s FEMA claims total: \$22,103,053.32

Isaac Brownman  
Assistant Town Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

## Hurricane Season

To: Longboat Key Commission

With hurricane season approaching, the Clerk’s Office has updated the list of local hotel options for your reference. Commissioners are responsible for making their own arrangements at the hotel that best meets their needs. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact Steph or me directly. We’re hopeful that these accommodations won’t be needed.

Trish Shinkle  
Town Clerk  
Town of Longboat Key

## Hurricane Season

To: Longboat Key Town Clerk Trish Shinkle  
Thank you very helpful.  
Gary Coffin

Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Mooring boats

To: Longboat Key Commissioner Sarah Karon

Last year, the Florida legislature amended FS 327.60 to allow municipalities to limit anchoring for more than 30 days. This change was lead by Sylvester Stallone who was tired of the all the boats permanently anchored in front of his Palm Beach house!

A number of junky live-aboard boats are always anchored in the bay near the Linley dock. Some are just abandoned. As these boats never move, they do not use holding tanks, and thus pump raw sewage into our waters. Also, because they are poorly anchored, these derelict boats often wash up on our shores or sandbars after a storm, requiring many months and lots of taxpayer money for the state to remove them.

The change to FS 327.60 would allow the Longboat to adopt an ordinance to fine and remove these boats after 30 days. This would both protect our water quality and prevent these boats washing up on our shores. Would you be interested in exploring this idea with the LBK Commission?

James G. Haft  
Longboat Key

## St. Regis sign

To: Jeff Hamilton

The developer of the St. Regis withdrew his application Friday night from the Town’s Monday agenda regarding his sign. I have asked for the sign to be promptly removed. Will know more on Monday.

See Letters, page 11



# SECUR-ALL INSURANCE AGENCY

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*Sandra Smith* | 941.383.3388

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# KeyRealEstate

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

Address	Sq. Ft.	List Price	Bed/Bath/Half Bath	Days On Market	Sale Price
4955 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#101	3,122	\$5,650,000	3 3 1	27	\$5,250,000
4127 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#N-101	3,582	\$4,990,000	3 3 1	58	\$4,750,000
1581 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#507	1,721	\$3,500,000	1 1 1	185	\$2,975,000
1145 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#603	1,503	\$1,779,000	2 2 0	77	\$1,599,000
3030 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#384	2,550	\$1,699,000	3 2 1	8	\$1,750,000
2120 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#628	2,616	\$1,699,000	3 3 0	20	\$1,650,000
1135 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#605	1,503	\$1,650,000	2 2 0	44	\$1,600,000
2525 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#6B	1,491	\$1,425,000	2 2 0	112	\$1,387,500
3030 GRAND BAY BLVD Unit#323	2,550	\$1,250,000	3 3 1	57	\$1,200,000
2800 HARBOURSIDE DR Unit#D-19 D-20	N/A	\$985,000		346	\$725,000
3500 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#104	1,486	\$649,000	3 2 1	86	\$615,000
3540 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#102	1,284	\$599,000	2 2 0	14	\$575,000
420 GOLDEN GATE PT Unit#200A	2,620	2,620	3 2 1	242	\$2,750,000
1800 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#A202	1,980	1,980	3 3 0	124	\$1,150,000
1750 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#1D	1,403	1,403	2 2 0	86	\$1,300,000
1938 HIGH POINT DR	1,164	1,164	2 1 1	216	\$1,000,000
111 S PINEAPPLE AVE Unit#811	1,580	1,580	2 2 1	3	\$1,250,000
800 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#308	1,350	1,350	2 2 0	48	\$1,050,000
101 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#73	1,275	1,275	2 2 0	17	\$1,020,000
1001 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN DR Unit#510	1,224	1,224	2 2 0	379	\$675,000
101 S GULFSTREAM AVE Unit#7D	1,200	1,200	2 2 0	26	\$525,000



4955 GULF OF MEXICO DR Unit#101



**JEFF  
RHINELANDER**

941-685-3590

Jeff@jeffrhineland.com



**COURTNEY  
TARANTINO**

941-893-7203

courtney.tarantino@floridamoves.com



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3BR/2BA/1HB • \$4,495,000



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5BR/6.5BA • FULL BAYFRONT • \$7,800,000



**BIRD KEY • SARASOTA**  
259 Robin Drive  
3BR/3FB/2HB • FULL BAYFRONT • \$7,900,000



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by Bob Parrish (c)

**The night I knew your gentle eyes  
You saw my tears of sorrow  
I felt my hugging goodbye  
That will be coming tomorrow**

**I do not want this what can be done  
To help your body heal and be warm  
You to be well and far from harm**

**The night before I saw your eyes  
soft and blue  
You looked at me as if you knew  
I saw you rest your chin  
As I had tears seeing you again  
Your life again to keep your life**

**But I will be lonely  
As I Walk out of a room  
With in my arms only  
Your oak box not you**

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## **Mother Is Love And Honor From Bob Parrish**



**Mother has given birth to my body. More importantly Mother has taught me to be patient and kind. Mother has been loyal to me and taught me to be loyal and truthful.**

**Mother has taught me how to treat others - I should use self-control. Mother has taught me to be kind and gentle to others - I may not know how others have treated them. Mother has taught me to have joy I must first give joy to others. Mother loved me and when I find True Love - I should let it grow....**

# OnPatrol



The following are actual police reports as written by Longboat Key Police Officers. They are edited for length, punctuation and to protect privacy.

## May 1 Incident

11:43 p.m.

Officer Miklos was dispatched to the 7000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive in reference to a suspicious incident reported by Bradenton Beach Police. Sarasota Sheriff's Office dispatch advised CAD notes that a subject threw something into a boat. The CAD notes stated Officer Miklos was to meet someone on the bridge with Bradenton Beach Police. Upon arrival, Officer Miklos came into contact with two Bradenton Beach Officers who stated both parties involved had left and the woman no longer wanted to meet with police, Bradenton Beach Police advised that allegedly someone from the bridge threw a fishing lure at a boat. The officers stated that the lure did not land in or hit the boat. The officers advised that allegedly the people on the boat and bridge were going to meet at the Coquina Boat ramp. The Bradenton Beach Police Officers did not believe anyone currently on the bridge had been involved in the incident. Officer Miklos did not believe any crime occurred in the town of Longboat Key jurisdiction. The bridge tender confirmed he did not have any problems with anyone and stated everyone could continue to fish. Case clear.



argumentative when she mentioned her new fence portion was bowing onto her property. Both parties were advised to keep the peace and to report the issue with the zoning department. Both agreed to take the issue to the Zoning Department. The verbal argument never became physical. Case clear.

## May 5 Incident

2:44 p.m.

Officer Miano and Officer Pescuma were dispatched to Police Department for a complaint of a suspicious incident involving a boat trailer. At the station with the complainant, the officers interviewed in reference to the incident with the custom boat trailer made by performance trailers. Approximately eight years ago he was allegedly given a 2006 custom boat trailer according to DMV records. Upon further investigation through David and Elvis which yielded ownership and the findings were relayed to the complainant. Case clear.

## Found property

7:48 p.m.

Officer Mathis while at the Police Department when he was approached by the complainant who explained that he had dinner at a restaurant on Lido Key and that when he left and was returning to his condo on Longboat Key he observed a wallet in the roadway and stopped to pick it up not far from the restaurant on Gulf of Mexico Drive. A check of the contents of the wallet revealed a Tennessee driver's license. Officer Mathis then contacted the owner of the wallet via telephone and he was happy that someone turned in his wallet and advised he would meet the officer at the Police Department shortly. The owner arrived a short time later and retrieved his wallet. After checking his returned wallet, he advised nothing was missing. The owner then completed a property receipt. Officer Mathis advised the owner that even though all items were inside the wallet and appeared safe, that he needed to monitor his accounts to ensure that no information was obtained by an outside party. Case clear.

## May 2 Incident

11:30 p.m.

Officer Martinson was dispatched to the 5700 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive on a call of a suspicious incident. Upon arrival to the area, Officer Martinson located a group of middle-aged women walking northbound on the beach with flashlights. Officer Martinson advised the women that turtle season began on May 1 and white lights on the beach were not allowed. The women stated they were visiting from out of state and did not know about turtle season. The women apologized and turned off their flashlights. Case clear.

## May 3 Citizen assist

1:48 a.m.

Officer Miklos was contacted by Sgt. Puccio who advised he was flagged down about a possible woman walking near the 1000 block of Gulf of Mexico Drive asking for help. At the time of the call, the area was in a heavy thunderstorm with low visibility. Sgt. Puccio and Officer Miklos came into contact with a woman who requested a courtesy transport to Wimauma. The woman advised she was not injured and just needed a ride back home. Sgt. Puccio advised the woman that the farthest he could take her was the 7-eleven on Cortez Road. The woman gratefully agreed to the offer. The woman was placed in the rear passenger seat of the vehicle. Officer Miklos transported her to Cortez Road in Bradenton without incident. Case clear.

## May 4 Citizen assist

11:04 a.m.

Officer Miano and Officer Van Dyke responded to Jungle Queen Way for a complaint of neighbors parking their vehicles in the driveway. Officer Miano located the owners of the vehicle and requested they be removed. The owners removed the vehicles from the driveway. Case clear.

## Civil 12:59 p.m.

Officer Miano and Officer Van Dyke were dispatched to Linley Stret for a neighbor dispute. On scene and both parties were separated prior to the officers' arrival. Officer Miano spoke with one of the neighbors who said she's having an ongoing issue with her neighbor about the location of the fence extension. The neighbor further related the verbal argument ensued when she saw the other neighbor threaten to remove the fence. The one neighbor related that the other neighbor was putting their trash near the property line. A small block engine was observed in the area. Officer Miano interviewed the other neighbor who stated that her neighbor became

## Citizen assist

8:14 p.m.

Officer Mathis was dispatched to St. Judes Drive in reference to a burglary in progress. The complainant advised people were seen inside the residence and they were not supposed to be there. Longboat Key Police responded to the location and made contact with the occupants. According to the complainant who was inside the condo with his family eating dinner, they had rented the unit on VRBO. The man then produced all documentation for the rental which included emails from the owner and receipts for financial transactions for the duration of his stay. Sgt. Montfort then made contact with the owner via telephone. The man explained that he looked on the unit's camera and observed people inside the residence and panicked. The man further advised that he looked at the calendar wrong and didn't think people were supposed to be there. The man advised everything was fine and the tenants were allowed to be there. Nothing further to report, case clear.

## May 6 Aircraft

9:30 a.m.

Sgt. Smith was flagged down by a pedestrian in reference to a suspicious incident. The pedestrian stated that something had fallen on her from a low-flying helicopter operating in the area. Sgt. Smith observed the helicopter and noted it appeared to be a mosquito control aircraft. Sgt. Smith made contact with the Director of Manatee County Mosquito Control, who confirmed they were conducting operations on Longboat Key. The Director advised the helicopter was dispersing granules used for mosquito larva control. He further stated the material was not a liquid substance and could be washed off if it came into contact with a person. Case clear.

## Incident

1:00 p.m.

Sgt. Smith was contacted by a caller in reference to a suspicious incident. Sgt. Smith made contact with the caller who is currently out of state. The caller reported that an unknown man had arrived at her residence and requested to speak with her. The caller said the subject identified himself as a Deputy. She said she contacted the Manatee County Sheriff's Office and was informed they did not have a deputy by that name. Sgt. Smith checked recent dispatch activity for Manatee County and located an incident involving an attempted process service at the caller's address. Sgt. Smith then contacted the supervisor of Civil process and with the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, who confirmed the deputy involved was Deputy Collins and that the attempt to serve the caller was valid. Sgt. Smith informed the caller and informed her that the contact at her residence was a legitimate attempt to serve court paperwork. Case clear.

## May 7 Bird

4:03 p.m.

Officer Maple while on patrol in Greer Island, was approached by a beach goer who advised there was an injured bird that appeared to be entangled by fishing line. Officer Castro and Officer Maple located the injured bird next to the jetty. Officers confirmed that fishing line was wrapped around the bird. However, the bird was moving but not flying. Officer Maple made contact with an employee from Save Our Seabirds, who requested pictures of the bird. Three pictures were sent to the employee via text message. The employee confirmed a volunteer was responding. Case clear.

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# EditorLetters



## Letters, from page 9

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## St. Regis sign

To: Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop  
Thank you for your support. I'm glad that you as a commissioner support the people that live here. Keep up the good work! Best regards.

Jeff Hamilton  
Longboat Key

St. Regis sign  
To: Jeff Hamilton  
Jeff - Thank you so much.  
BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key  
Sent from my iPhone

## Commissioner's Corner

To: Sarasota City Manager Karie Friling  
With the last minute request to film a Commissioner's Corner next week, the potential topic that immediately came to mind was "Understanding Ad Valorem Taxes." The purpose of this email is to gauge whether this sounds like a topic that will interest people and, if so, thoughts on who to have as a guest (or guests).

My concept is a qualitative — not quantitative — discussion. (I've attached notes I started developing in March to give a sense of what I mean by that.) That means avoiding a numbers-focused conversation that Kelly would likely be comfortable with. Instead, I wondered about inviting a member of staff or a member of the public to ask questions that could be answered within this framework. (Maybe even someone on Jan Thornburg's team.) Ideally, I wouldn't be the only person providing information (although I think I can handle it). Jennifer?

Does this sound useful to the public? Feasible to assemble in the requested timeframe?  
Could we post this internally? It is very part time and could be really interesting. It is for the ManaSota League of Cities of which I am a member.

Jen Ahearn-Koch  
City Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Job posting

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch  
Yes - it only posted yesterday because I have been underwater with moving back to my house!  
I also have my assistant tasked with figuring out the clerk association job posting link.  
Hopefully he will accomplish that today.

Lisa Moore  
Commissioner  
City of Bradenton

## Job posting

To: Bradenton City Commissioner Lisa Moore  
Could you send me the Link to the posted job please so I can share it? I tried to find it on FLC website and had no success.

Thanks,  
Jen Ahearn-Koch  
Commissioner  
City of Sarasota

## Job posting

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch, Bradenton Commissioner Lisa Moore  
Please see Trish's note and add this.

BJ Bishop  
Commissioner  
Town of Longboat Key

## Job posting

To: Bradenton City Commissioner Lisa Moore, Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch

I don't want to interfere with your process, but I noticed under the heading "Meetings Management" that attending the meeting and writing minutes were not included in the job description. I recall that Rachel indicated she wasn't proficient in that area, and it should probably be included.

Meetings Management: Schedule bi-monthly meetings, prepare agendas and materials, arrange presenters, ensure quorum, attend Board meetings, and prepare meeting minutes.  
The link to post on the FLC site is: <https://flcityjobs.com/>.

Trish Shinkle  
Town Clerk  
Town of Longboat Key

## Job posting

To: Sarasota City Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch, Longboat Key Commissioner BJ Bishop  
Please see attached revised job listing. Please let me know your thoughts. If anyone has a direct contact at the League that I can ask about posting with them and Indeed, that would be great!

Lisa Moore  
Commissioner  
City of Bradenton

## FEMA Project review

To: Longboat Key Finance Director Susan Smith  
The Town of Longboat has 14 projects pending review by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Attached is a listing by category with the current status and the federal cost share for both Hurricane Helene and Milton.

Category A Debris Removal  
Pending PDMG Application Review  
Total \$4,132,870.22

Category B Emergency Protective Measures  
Pending PDMG Application Review  
Total \$738,900.77

Category C Roads And Bridges (Streetlights)  
Pending PDMG Application Review  
Total \$114,556.63

Category E Building Equipment  
Pending Applicant Development  
Total \$37,212.75

Category F Utilities  
Pending FEMA 406 HMP Completion  
Pending EHP Review  
Total \$25,378.45

Category G Parks and Recreation  
Pending FEMA 406 HMP Completion  
Pending EHP Review  
Total \$17,028,756.55

Total Federal Cost Share pending reimbursement  
\$22,103,053.32

Ronica Jackson  
Accounting Manager  
Town of Longboat Key

**RINGSIDE**  
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Sarasota's Newest Dining Spectacle - Now Open!

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## St. Armands, from page 1

perfect. The vibe, as it almost always is here, is a little bit European, a little bit Old Florida, and entirely its own.

### This is St. Armands Circle at its best — and its best is extraordinary.

But walk the Circle now — really walk it, the way Rachel Burns does — and you will begin to see what the tourist brochures and national rankings don't show you: broken concrete patched over broken pavers patched over cracked asphalt. Sidewalks that tilt and heave. Pedestrian bottlenecks created by misplaced planters. Storefront facades set at inconsistent depths. A parking-to-beach promenade so pinched on one side that visitors are forced into the street. And most urgently — most damning — a drainage system so inadequate that after the 2024 hurricanes, standing water sat in the St. Armands shopping district for days after it had receded everywhere else.

"There is no drainage," said Burns, president of the St. Armands Circle Merchants Association, in the flat, factual tone of someone who has said it many times before and has stopped being surprised that the situation hasn't changed. "There is simply no adequate drainage."

Burns is arguably the most clear-eyed person in any room when it comes to what ails this extraordinary place — and what it will take to fix it. This reporter walked the Circle with her recently, and the experience was equal parts inspiring and sobering.

### A Year of Reckoning

To understand why the stakes of this moment are so high, you need to understand what happened here in 2024.

Back-to-back flood events from Hurricanes Helene and Milton virtually shut down St. Armands Circle for months and forced many residents out of their homes. The Circle flooded three times during the 2024 hurricane season alone — and had been suffering repeated fresh-water flood events for years before that, driven by the consistent failures of an overwhelmed pump and drain system. Storm surge engulfed the Circle with several feet of water, forcing nearly all retailers, restaurants, and other businesses to close for weeks and in some cases months. Of some 130 street-level commercial spaces, approximately 90 are currently open for business. The rest are reminders — boarded storefronts and darkened windows — of what was lost.

The human cost was vivid and wrenching. Business owners described cleaning up after Helene, getting contractors lined up, wrapping their minds around the damage — and then getting hit again by Milton two weeks later, and starting over from nothing. Some did not come back.

Among the departures was one of the Circle's most beloved anchors: Tommy Bahama, a coastal lifestyle retailer and restaurant that had operated on St. Armands for over a decade. In a public statement, the owners cited malfunctioning pumps that left standing water inside their store for days after the storm and what they described as a lack of urgency from the city in addressing infrastructure failures. The infrastructure, they said, had remained largely unchanged for years. They closed their St. Armands location permanently. They were not alone.

That kind of departure — from a business that genuinely loved this place — should have served as a five-alarm fire. Instead, eighteen months later, the city is holding visioning sessions with consultants, floating the idea of separate developer-only meetings, and delivering the news that \$13.5 million in stormwater funding will take five years to deploy.

Five years.

Fortunately, private investment isn't waiting for the city to catch up. Sources told Longboat Key News that the former Tommy Bahama building will reopen and has been leased by Pinchers, a regional seafood restaurant group. Across the Circle, construction is already underway at the former Chase Bank building and the site of the former deli, where Tom Leonard is actively renovating and rebuilding. Leonard is bringing a new Shore location to the site, which will feature a retail space on the ground floor and the restaurant on the second floor. These multi-million dollar projects offer a much-needed vote of confidence in the district's future, but they also underscore a stark contrast: business owners are moving forward while municipal solutions lag far behind.

### The Second Visioning Session: Frustration in the Room

The city's second and final community visioning session for St. Armands drew more than 150 people — residents, merchants, Lido Key neighbors, and stakeholders from across the barrier islands. What they heard did not sit well.

Chris Goglia, president of the St. Armands Residents Association, laid it out plainly in a letter sent afterward to a broad coalition of residents, merchants, and commercial property owners — because, as he wrote, "this topic affects us all and we must work together to protect the future of St. Armands."

"My overall impression: It seemed that City staff wanted to use last night's session to update the community on all of the resiliency projects and initiatives that are currently being worked on," Goglia wrote. "But it also seemed that staff did not expect the frustration, bewilderment, and anger expressed throughout the evening."

The frustration had a specific and legitimate focus. The city's Business Relations Coordinator announced that officials are planning an additional session with just St. Armands business and development interests — explicitly to discuss "zoning or code considerations." The optics were immediately inflammatory. A previous attempt at exactly that kind of closed-door process — without resident participation — had triggered the public outcry that produced these community-wide workshops in the first place. Now the city appeared to be reverting to form.

"The top concern of many was confirmed," Goglia noted.

Beyond the political alarm, what emerged from the meeting was a portrait of a community that feels abandoned. Residents were stunned to learn the five-year timeline for the stormwater funding. Nobody believes the new speed bumps are effective. The consensus was that St. Armands is not ready for the next heavy rain event — eighteen months after two catastrophic

hurricanes made landfall. As Goglia put it with devastating plainness: "The consensus opinion was 'no.'"

That answer is a civic failure. It demands accountability, urgency, and action.

### Walking the Circle With Rachel Burns

Rachel Burns doesn't manage the merchants association from a desk. She walks the Circle. She knows every heave in the sidewalk, every inconsistency in the paving surfaces, every place where pedestrians are pushed toward the curb by a misplaced planter or an uneven grade transition. She photographs problem spots. She tracks maintenance failures. She has spent years cataloguing what is wrong here — and years longer imagining how to fix it.

"In an ideal world, it would all be European-style cobblestone," she said, gesturing at the patchwork of surfaces underfoot. "But you look around and you have textured concrete patched over interlocking pavers, then poured concrete, then open planting areas with rocks and mulch that aren't even contained. Everything tells a different story — none of them cohesive."

Walk the Circle with her observations in mind and you start to see what you'd previously strolled past without registering: old city-installed medallions sitting alongside inlaid brick alongside rectangular concrete alongside painted surfaces alongside interlocking pavers, all in various stages of decay, all producing a visual and tactile experience more reminiscent of an archaeological dig than a world-class shopping destination.

The dysfunction is not merely cosmetic. Everything from the building face to the curb is the private property owner's responsibility to maintain — even when it sits on what is technically public right-of-way. The result is a wild spectrum of maintenance standards and finishes. Burns described planters that teenagers knocked apart in a video she reviewed, leaving loose bricks scattered across the sidewalk. Tree roots buckling the pavement. Weed barrier showing through eroding soil cover.

"Everybody is doing Band-Aids," she said. "And it looks shabby because a lot of the curbing is interlocking pavers that get hit by cars and people and water — and it becomes an overlapping maintenance issue with no one clearly responsible for the whole picture."

The raised planters present a particular paradox. Visually, Burns said, she loves them — they create vertical interest and lushness. But they create pedestrian bottlenecks, backing up foot traffic in a place designed to feel open and welcoming. Her solution is elegant and immediately actionable: replace fixed elevated structures

with large moveable containers — pots that tenants and owners can reposition to open pedestrian flow while maintaining the visual richness. Simple. Inexpensive. Doable this season.

On the west exit toward Lido Beach, she pointed to a sidewalk so narrow on one side that visitors routinely walk in the street. "People park in that garage and walk to the beach. That's the natural behavior and it should be. We should be designing for it. Right now, one side of that exit is so tight it's almost hostile."

The new deputy park manager, John De Pazos, she said, has been a genuinely engaged and productive partner — the kind of operational responsiveness the Circle has long needed. "He has been phenomenal to work with," Burns said. That kind of responsiveness, scaled up and given structural authority, is precisely what the Circle's governance model requires.

### The Drainage Crisis: Ground-Level and Urgent

When Burns talks about drainage, her voice shifts — more serious, more urgent, more resolved. This is the existential issue. Everything else flows into it.

"The water stays in this district for several days after it has receded from everywhere else," she said, stopping near the south side of the Circle. "There are absolutely no drains on this side. The water has nowhere to go."

The stormwater drain and pump system on St. Armands is managed by Sarasota County via an interlocal agreement with the city, and its repeated failures have resulted in flooded businesses and ground-level homes on a regular basis — not just during tropical storms, but during ordinary heavy rain events that would barely register anywhere else. An entire district, ranked among the best shopping destinations in America, sits in a bowl with no drain.

Burns has spent serious time thinking about structural solutions that don't require tearing up everything and starting over. Her most compelling idea: re-pitch the sidewalks upward to meet building entrances at grade level, which would allow the streets themselves to be re-pitched toward the center — where properly installed French drains could run continuously, carrying stormwater away rather than letting it pool for days.

She points to a downtown Sarasota streetscape project as a working model — French drains running the entire length of a roadway in front of a prominent residential building, with water flowing into them continuously. The technology is not exotic. The principle is not complicated. What has been missing is the will, the coordination, and a unified plan to apply it at St. Armands.

She is also alert to smaller, incremental interventions: the inconsistency in sidewalk slopes as you enter storefronts like the Wyland Gallery or Kilwins, where the grade change is steep and abrupt; the disparity in how far back building frontages are set from the street, which creates an uneven, fragmented pedestrian experience; the narrow angled walkway connecting St. Armands to Lido Beach, which Burns believes should be transformed into a far more prominent, welcoming pedestrian arrival corridor.

"If you're going to invite people to walk from their car to the beach and back," she said, "give them a walkway worthy of the destination."

### The Deeper Problem: No One Is In Charge

What emerges most powerfully from a long conversation with Burns — and from Goglia's pointed letter — is not any single fixable problem. It is the fundamental governance vacuum at the heart of St. Armands.

"Getting anything done on the Circle is very difficult because it's a conversation with planning, it's a conversation with engineering, it's trying to get various entities on board," Burns said. "But there's no point person. There's no one who has responsibility. There's no unified ongoing vision."

The Business Improvement District, when it existed, could sometimes scrape together

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**St. Armands, from page 12**

around \$300,000 for landscaping and maintenance. That is not a budget for a world-class shopping district — and both Burns and those familiar with the situation know it. Downtown Sarasota has the financial infrastructure to set aside real money for cohesive streetscape planning. St. Armands never has.

“There has just never been the financial resources,” Burns said. “They’ve been lucky to get \$300,000 when they had the BID board. So everything becomes piecemeal. The vision gets pushed forward in fragments — and lately it’s just been development incentives — while the core starts becoming dilapidated.”

It shows on every block. Redevelopment is further complicated by the fact that several buildings have multiple owners, meaning any significant project requires either separately constructed fire walls or unanimous agreement on a development plan — regardless of whatever height limits or other constraints apply. That complexity makes organic private investment slow, difficult, and uncertain.

Meanwhile, the city’s instinct — to convene separate meetings with developers and property owners to discuss zoning incentives — is precisely backwards. Burns noted the buildings that have already been built to maximum allowable height on the southwest side of the Circle. Most of the Circle remains one and two stories. The human scale, the walkability, the sense of a place designed for people and not for revenue maximization — these are the qualities that earned St. Armands its national reputation. They cannot be manufactured. They can only be preserved or surrendered.

As Goglia wrote in his letter: “Flood-proofing buildings is easy and inexpensive compared to encouraging property owners to knock down and rebuild with three stories and upstairs rentals, forever changing the character of St. Armands Circle.”

That is precisely right. And it is the core of what is at stake in every meeting, every visioning session, every conversation about zoning that happens without the full community at the table.

**What Can Be Done Now — and What Is Worth Fighting For**

Here is the uncomfortable truth that all parties — residents, merchants, property owners, and the city — must confront simultaneously: not everything requires \$13.5 million and five years. A significant portion of what ails St. Armands is addressable now, affordably, with coordination and political will.

Burns outlined a set of practical, near-term interventions that require neither developer subsidies nor rezoning battles:

- **Moveable Planters:** Replace fixed elevated planters with large moveable container plantings that can be repositioned to open pedestrian flow while maintaining the visual character that makes the sidewalks feel inviting.
- **Unified Surfaces:** Adopt a unified sidewalk surface standard — not replacing everything at once, but establishing a consistent materials plan and beginning to apply it block by block, starting with the worst sections, using interlocking pavers as the consistent finish wherever repair is needed.
- **Pedestrian Promenade:** Widen and formalize the pedestrian connection on the west exit toward Lido Beach — creating the promenade that visitors instinctively want, connecting the parking garage to the beach with the kind of walkable corridor that turns a parking transaction into an experience.
- **Median Landscaping:** Plant and landscape the medians that currently sit underutilized. The visual impact is immediate. The cost is manageable.
- **Interim Drainage:** Install interim French-drain capacity on the blocks with the most severe standing-water problems — particularly on the south and west sides of the Circle — while the larger infrastructure upgrade works through its five-year pipeline.
- **Maintenance Accountability:** Clarify maintenance responsibility at the property line in a formal, enforceable way so that broken planters, encroaching tree roots, and eroding surface materials in the public right-of-way fronting private properties are addressed systematically, not haphazardly.
- **Unified Leadership:** Designate a single point person — a position, not a committee — with actual authority to coordinate across city planning, county engineering, the stormwater authority, private property owners, the merchants association, and the residents association. The bones for collaboration are present. What is missing is structural clarity about who leads.


**The Stakes Are Real and the Clock Is Ticking**

It is worth pausing here to remember — fully, concretely — what exactly is at stake. St. Armands Circle was born from one of the most audacious acts of civic imagination in Florida history. In 1917, circus magnate John Ringling purchased St. Armands Key and envisioned a European-style luxury shopping and residential district, its streets radiating from a central park roundabout, adorned with Italian statuary from his personal collection, lined with rose-colored curbs, humming with cosmopolitan energy. He used circus elephants to haul the bridge timbers. He led the opening parade across his own causeway in 1926 with a circus band playing in the roundabout.

The man built a dream on a mangrove island — and nearly a century later, that dream is still standing. Still drawing millions. Still producing the kind of joy that makes people close their laptops and linger. More than 30 sculptures grace its streets, one-third of which belonged to Ringling himself. The Harding Circle Historic District at its center was designated a place on the National Register of Historic Places. This is not just a shopping center. It is a living piece of American history.

It is also, by any honest economic measure, a regional powerhouse. Tourism in Sarasota County generates billions in annual economic impact and supports tens of thousands of local jobs. St. Armands sits at the very center of that ecosystem — widely regarded by county tourism officials as one of the most visited tourist attractions in

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Sarasota County, and previously ranked by USA Today among the top outdoor shopping destinations in the nation. It is the gateway to Lido Beach, an evacuation corridor for barrier island residents, and an economic engine whose health reverberates across the entire region. When St. Armands floods, when businesses close, when visitors don’t come back — everyone from the restaurant server to the hotel housekeeper to the county tax collector feels it.

And yet the 2024 hurricane season did not create the infrastructure crisis at St. Armands — it exposed one that has been building for decades. Businesses that survived two major hurricanes and months of closure are operating with hard-won resilience and finite patience. The empty storefronts still visible around the Circle are not abstractions. They are warnings.

The community that showed up in force — 150-plus people, night after night — to the city’s visioning sessions did not come because they want St. Armands to become something different. They came because they want it to become what it always should have been: fully functional, beautifully maintained, fiercely protected, and worthy of the dream that a circus ringmaster and his elephant work crews conjured on a mangrove island a hundred years ago.

“Almost in spite of itself,” Burns said, near the end of our walk, looking out at the Circle in the late afternoon light, “it’s actually a beautiful, funky place.”

That phrase should embarrass every official responsible for its condition. And it should inspire every person who loves it — resident, merchant, visitor, and elected official alike — to demand that this remarkable place finally receive the sustained, intelligent, well-resourced care it has always deserved and almost always been denied.

Rachel Burns has walked that dream one cracked sidewalk at a time. She knows what it needs. The question — the only question that matters now — is whether the people with the authority to act will stop studying the problem and start solving it.

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# WineTimes



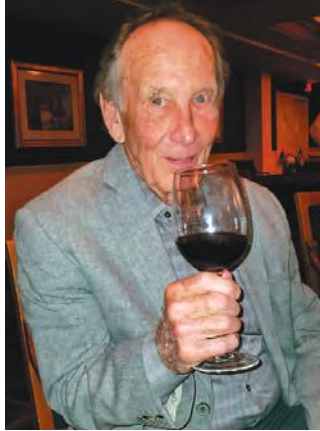
## Quick, Easy, Cheap, and Tasty

*So let's start with the Quick scenario in which close friends drop by for cocktails one evening with new friends and casually mention that the new friends follow a strictly vegan diet.*

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

Our readings of food recipes suggest that a formula helps make a recipe successful in print: promise two or more of Quick, Easy, Cheap, and Tasty. Illustrate with a colorful image of the finished product and bank the sure, albeit modest, check.

So let's start with the Quick scenario in which close friends drop by for cocktails one evening with new friends and casually mention that the new friends follow a strictly vegan diet. You glance at the platter of Brie on little toasts, cream cheese with chives on celery stalks, and prosciutto wrapped around dates and know that the new friends will see sweetbreads, white lard on grass shoots, and pork belly wraps. Quickly you look in the frig for frozen edamame, fresh snow peas, a package of sugar snap peas, or leftover haricot verts. If the pods have little stems, pull them down to string the pods. Wash them in a bowl a couple of times and drain them. Sprinkle pink Himalayan Pink or other salt over the top of the bowl and steam in a microwave or an air fryer for around 30 seconds. Add a dipping sauce of a touch of soy in sesame or olive oil to the platter.



Next the Easy part. Add healthy Crudites to any platter that you pass to guests that may have concerns about diet. In addition to the usual celery stalks, carrot slices, broccoli, cauliflower, and cucumber slices, add cabbage slices, avocado slices, pickled red and yellow beets, red and yellow bell pepper slices, pickled onions, and romaine leaves. If fact, almost anything vegetable in the fridge will find favor if accompanied by a group of small sauce bowls of salsas minimally doctored with pepper, Worcester, hoisin, or fish sauces.

Cheap generally describes healthy selections from the produce sections of markets. You may have to stock a few extra items in the frig for the Quick occasions.

The tasty part depends to some extent on the sauces served with the Quick and Easy items. Our favorite sauce for most food items, complementary wines, will bring your recipes up to a world-class level. Our latest favorite, the 2023 Andrew Murray Vineyards Espérance Rosé from the St. Inez Valley of California, at \$30 moves out of the Cheap niche, but it elevates a bowl of steamed snow peas to its peak. The wine offers a blend of slightly off-dry fruit flavors of Mourvèdre and Grenache grapes. It embraces the subtly sweet greens taste of the pod and the nutty flavor of the nascent pea.

Cheap alternatives to the Espérance Rosé include bargain wines that we have found to be the next best thing to Champagne and the fine Rosé wines of France: the consistent Campo Viejo Rosé from Rioja Spain (\$10) and its quieter cousin, the Campo Viejo Rosé from Navarra (\$12). Rosé has enough of a sweet taste to avoid a bitter finish and a level of acidity that does not upstage a mild vegetable.

If you are reading this article in print or on LBKnews.com, you will know that the formula worked again.

S. W. Hermansen has used his expertise in econometrics, data science and epidemiology to help develop research databases for the Pentagon, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Agriculture, and Health Resources and Services. He has visited premier vineyards and taste wines from major appellations in California, Oregon, New York State, and internationally from Tuscany



and the Piedmont in Italy, the Ribera del Duero in Spain, the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale in Australia, and the Orego Valley in New Zealand. Currently he splits time between residences in Chevy Chase, Maryland and St. Armand's Circle in Florida.

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

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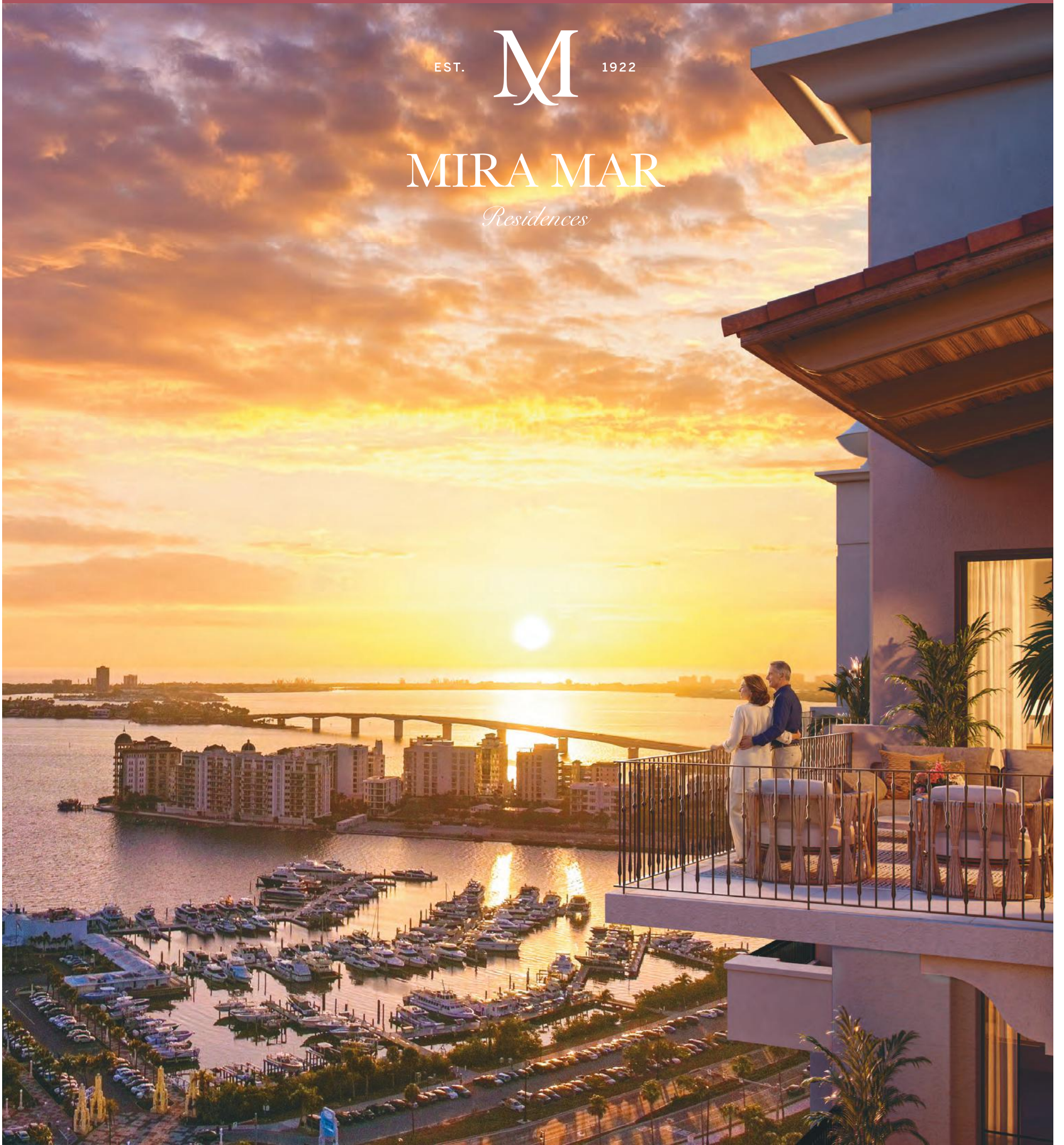
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