



The Year in Review

One year ago, we said the 2024-2025 season was all about **Recovery & Resiliency**: recovering from the hurricanes and talking about how we had to be able to bounce back faster from future storms. **Both of these are still ongoing.**

Now, a year later, we can say that the 2025-2026 season has been all about **The Future of St. Armands**, in terms of:

- Upgrading our aging infrastructure
- What, if any, commercial development this barrier island can handle

More on these below.

\$13.5 Million for Stormwater

While some of you are here year-round, the rest of us started trickling back to town in early October to discover that there was **an outside chance** that we could help the city secure several million dollars in Resilient SRQ federal funding from the county for a St. Armands stormwater project. So, here's what we did:

- October 23 - we submitted [this letter](#) of support for the project to the County Commissioners
- November 7 - we gave a presentation about St. Armands flooding to the County Commissioners at their annual joint meeting with the Town of Longboat Key
- November 17 - we submitted [this letter](#) to the editor of the Herald-Tribune
- December 11 - we spoke at the county's Stormwater Environmental Utility Advisory Committee (SEAUC) and asked for their support of this project

- December 16 - 25 people went to the County Commission meeting in Venice to speak in support of this project **which was awarded \$13.5 Million!**

Then, we began communicating with city and county staff about how this funding could make the greatest impact:

- April 6 - we sent [this letter](#) to the City Director of Public Works and the County Stormwater Director about how we think this money should be spent
- April 22 - we sent [this email](#) with additional feedback
- April 23 - the city invited residential and business representatives to meet with city and county staff about the project
- April 24 - we sent [this email](#) to the City Engineer with [this ChatGPT recommendation](#) for how these funds should be applied, sorted by return-on-investment
- May 13 - we spoke at another SEUAC meeting to ask for their increased attention on this project

We now await a finalized project charter to learn the extent to which the County Stormwater Department has incorporated our feedback.

Undergrounding Power Lines

Power lines and other utilities (internet and cable) have now been fully buried on Bird Key, Longboat Key, one street on St. Armands Key, and very recently, on John Ringling Causeway all the way to St Armands. It is the clear trend on barrier islands and other areas vulnerable to storms around Florida.

This has been done to make everyone safer, provide better power reliability, and make neighborhoods more visually attractive and hopefully more valuable over time. Leaning poles and sagging wires disappear and will not be falling during storms, and it's far easier and faster for FPL to service pad-mounted transformers which do not require a bucket truck.

During the 2024 hurricanes, the one street on St. Armands was only without power for two hours while other parts of the island were without power for a week. On Longboat Key, only a single transformer was lost. Bird Key had some power loss originating from the city but nothing was caused on the island.

At the October 20, 2025 City Commission meeting, they voted 5-0 to approve a feasibility study about undergrounding utilities (burying power and telecom lines) on St. Armands and Lido Keys, with the

understanding that property owners would be required to pay for it, as was done on Longboat Key. Our membership showed strong support for this in our Annual Member Survey.

We understand that the city is close to hiring a consultant who will plan the project and determine the exact cost to property owners, which we anticipate will be spread out over twenty years to keep the amount as low as possible.

We're excited that this project is moving forward. Undergrounding utilities AND stormwater improvements are going to make St. Armands more resilient.

Know Thyself

St. Armands residents have chosen this island for many reasons, not least of which is the ability to walk to all of the wonderful shops and restaurants on the Circle. We recognize that when these businesses thrive, so does our residential experience.

When I speak with those of us who have been here for a long time, I sense a nostalgia for the higher-end shopping district they tell me that St. Armands used to be. Even the city website refers to St. Armands as the so-called "jewel of Sarasota" ([link](#)). But I hear concerns that the Circle is becoming a food court, that it looks tired in places, and that now we have a bong shop, an arcade, and a t-shirt shop with a naughty name. Instead of a Morton's Gourmet Market, we got a convenience store selling soda and chips.

What is St. Armands, and what should it be?

- Are we a beach village like Siesta Key or Anna Maria?
- Are we a high-end shopping, dining, and wellness district for the St. Regis, Ritz Carlton, Rosewood, and Waldorf-Astoria crowd?
- Are we an outdoor pedestrian mall like UTC, or ICON Park in Orlando?
- Or are we something else entirely, or something in between?
- What did John Ringling intend for St. Armands ([link](#)), and is that even relevant anymore?

The above are rhetorical questions intended to get you thinking.

Unintended Consequences

Lincoln Road in Miami Beach may be a good parallel to St. Armands Circle because of its shift from a local-serving district to a tourist entertainment district. ChatGPT reports that locals remember the

1990s to early 2000s as its golden modern era, with artists, cafes, and galleries. Lincoln Road was eclectic, local, and culturally vibrant. But then this happened:

- Very high rents pushed out independent restaurants and shops
- Too many chain stores replaced local businesses
- Too much focus on tourists instead of locals
- Loss of the quirky artistic identity
- Nightlife became more prominent
- Increased concerns about homelessness, petty crime, and disorder
- Vacancies later increased when rents overshot market demand

When asked about the potential for bigger buildings and hotel usage on St. Armands, ChatGPT warns of higher rents, a shift in the retail mix, later hours, noise and light pollution seeping into the adjacent residential areas, and increased parking and pedestrian activity on the surrounding residential streets.

The Traffic Issue

St. Armands Key is already a traffic chokepoint, with known street flooding issues, on a state evacuation route. St. Armands is the only direct way for Sarasota's residents, tourists, and workers to get back and forth between mainland Sarasota and the city's only beach on Lido Key, the public boat ramp and water access on City Island, and the Town of Longboat Key.

Residents have told me about missed medical appointments and two-hour drive times to pick up a family member at the airport. I recently spoke to some restaurant workers at UTC who used to work on St. Armands. They told me that UTC is farther away from where they live, but they can get there faster than it used to take them to get to St. Armands.

More people crossing the streets, more cars driving through, more cars looking for parking, more cars competing for the same number of parking spaces, more delivery and service vehicles, and more Uber drop-offs and pickups will only compound this traffic problem which affects residents and businesses alike.

The Hotel Question

Should St. Armands have a hotel? The problem is this: if you allow a hotel on one commercial property, then you have to allow them on all properties. You could end up with a lot of hotel rooms. And once you allow this, you can never take it away.

St. Armands is already surrounded by hotels and resorts (and vacation rentals). We have them on nearby Lido Key, Longboat Key, and in downtown Sarasota. Their shuttle buses take guests to St. Armands Circle all day long. The bus-only lane on the Ringling Bridge is being extended to make it even easier for buses to get back and forth.

As recently as four years ago, the city conducted **two community workshops** about adding hotel usage all over St. Armands Circle. **The City Commission then voted 5-0 to reject this idea.**

But be that as it may, this idea is back on the table again, and I've heard from some people that they are not opposed to it; that we could use some new development on St. Armands, with the hope that it would attract more upscale businesses. But each year, the results of our Annual Member Survey show that the majority remain opposed, with the concerns including traffic, infrastructure, and irreversible changes to the charm and scale of St. Armands.

And there has been a lot of concern about **the process**:

- Last June - this seems to have come up again in a letter to City Commissioners and staff ([article](#))
- August - An invite-only meeting about "the future of St. Armands" between the city's planning department and a select group of commercial property owners was cancelled when city management heard the concerns from all the other St. Armands stakeholders ([article](#))
- September 25 - an urban planner with Kimley-Horn, now known to be representing this latest St. Armands development effort, gave a presentation with slides showing "residential" usage and "utilizing" the St. Armands Parking Garage
- November 3 City Commission Meeting - Interim City Manager says: "we're just in the beginning stage of an exercise to look into the future of St. Armands, and, you know, sort of a visioning, long term planning exercise"
- December 12 - A clothing store and restaurant is in the press for wanting to return to St. Armands with a new third floor containing a courtyard style pool ([article](#))
- December 17 - A Kimley-Horn team representing this proposed development went in front of the city's Development Review Committee (DRC) to receive feedback about the materials they've submitted to the city thus far including **eight "residential" units**

- December 17 - DRC response: "The subject property is approximately 0.33 acres, which would provide for a total maximum density of approximately **four residential dwelling units** above the first floor. Pursuant to Table VI-501A, **Hotel/Motel uses are prohibited** in the CT zone district."
- January 23 - another development downtown is being told by the city that they cannot advertise short-term rentals which would be considered **illegal hotel usage** ([article](#))
- February 26 - The first of the two, city-run St. Armands "visioning sessions" with over 150 attendees. Common themes were: (1) keep the same scale and charm, (2) fix the stormwater and flooding issues, (3) fix the traffic issues, and (4) beautify the place. Hardly anyone thought that we needed bigger commercial buildings with hotel or Airbnb usage.
- April 13 - The second of the two, city-run "visioning sessions", also with 150+ attendees. The top concern of many was confirmed when the city's Business Relations Coordinator announced that they are discussing doing an additional session with just St. Armands business and development interests to include "zoning or code considerations".
- May 18 - We finally have confirmation that the developer is pursuing hotel usage for the proposed eight "residential" units ([article](#))

We anticipate that someone will attempt to advance this over the summer when so many residents are away. We'll see what happens.

Investment Has Resumed

It just took a little patience to get development dollars flowing back into St. Armands. Lots of residential construction is under way, with a lot more about to begin. On the commercial side:

1. Renovations for the new Shore store and restaurant have begun
2. It was reported that someone made the owners of Speaks Clam Bar an offer that was "too good to pass up" and we look forward to something new going into that space
3. We've heard that a local, casual seafood chain called [Pinchers](#) will be opening at the old Tommy Bahama restaurant location
4. The local press has recently reported that more and more new tenants are moving into the retail spaces ([link](#))

So far, none of this investment has required a height increase, a density increase, new uses, or parking changes. These things just take time.

Bring Back "Complete Streets"

Many people have commented that St. Armands Circle could use a face lift. The sidewalks and landscaping in front of the shops are a hodgepodge of different styles, materials, and level of upkeep.

Currently, each commercial property owner (or their tenant) is responsible for those areas. Could the city decide to come in and redo all the sidewalks and planting areas to match? They sure could. In fact, the city is planning something like this for Main Street.

We call on the City of Sarasota to resurrect the St. Armands Complete Streets project. This project got tabled three years ago due to projected costs, timeframe, and lack of consensus over project scope ([more info](#)).

But, now that we have:

- Residential and commercial property owners (or their tenants) being asked to cover the cost of undergrounding power lines and utilities, and...
- The county investing \$13.5 Million in Resilient SRQ federal funds into our stormwater management system...

We ask the city to invest in new, uniform sidewalks and planters--and plants, flowers, irrigation, and maintenance--throughout the St. Armands Circle Commercial Tourist district.

The city is said to be at the 60% design stage of a Main Street Complete Streets Project for which they've secured a \$12 Million federal grant with a \$3 Million city match ([article](#)).

Why isn't the city doing something similar for St. Armands?

Let's make St. Armands Circle beautiful for city and county residents and tourists alike, which will in turn help our local businesses.

City Commissioners?

Our New Business Sponsorship Program

This year, we launched a business sponsorship program for local businesses who would like to show their support for our association and grow awareness among our members. This helps us keep our membership dues and annual dinner ticket prices as low as possible.

We welcome **The Cottages on the Key**, a vacation rental management company, as our first business sponsor. In the seven year's since the hotel houses arrived, they are the only vacation rental management company to ever reach out to our association and communicate that they wish to be good neighbors. Our main contact there provides his personal cell phone should there ever be any problem. We thank them for their support.



We look forward to expanding this program and adding some additional business sponsors in the year ahead ([more info](#)).

In Closing...

Each year at our Annual Dinner, which is also our General Membership Meeting, our membership votes for our Board of Directors, which in turn votes for our officers. We are an 11-person representative Board from all parts of the island and from all over the country, including one from Canada and one who owns and operates a rental property here. There are approximately 200 houses on St. Armands, and that means that 1 out of every 20 houses has someone serving on our Board, which is amazing representation!

We take our role of representing residential interests to local government seriously: we talk with our neighbors, we field our Annual Member Survey, and people reply to our email bulletins with feedback. We build relationships with city and county leadership, management and staff, and with other community leaders and the local press.

Thank you to our members for supporting your **all-volunteer** Board of Directors as we freely give our time and energy to stay informed about issues like the ones described above, and do what we can to achieve positive outcomes desired by our membership. If you think we should be doing more, or doing something different, I invite you to come to our monthly meetings and get more involved. Every member can participate in our conversations and we can always use more help. We have such a wonderful community here.

I've included some pictures from this past year at the bottom of this email.

We're excited for a great upcoming 2026-2027 season, and I hope everyone has a happy, healthy, and peaceful summer.

Best,

Chris Goglia, President

St. Armands Residents Association

website: starmands.org

Notice: SARA email bulletins are generally sent out to a wide audience. In addition to our membership, city and county leadership and staff, members of the local media, and other parties are sometimes included. We thank all recipients for their interest in, and/or consideration of, the topics that we share.

~~~ Some pictures from the past year ~~~

Some of the residents, business and commercial property owners or their representatives, and city, county, and other community leaders who all joined together to speak in support of the St. Armands Resiliency & Flood Mitigation Project at the December 16 County Commission meeting:



Our stormwater pump stations have already been hardened with new pumps, elevated control panels, and waterproofed appurtenances. The backflow preventer on one of our stormwater outfall pipes was fixed and one of the backup power generators for our stormwater pumps was replaced and elevated:



Thank you to the commercial property owners who have used graphic window wraps to dress up empty store fronts during renovations:



A scene from this year's Annual Dinner & General Membership Meeting which we always hold in early March at one of the area's premier event venues: (and thank you to Andrew Vac for his great sense of humor!)



This year's winners of the St. Armands Key Community Impact Award for their work to build the "ArmaLido" community:



2026 St. Armands Key Community Impact Award



**Mike Adkinson and
Mari Lynn Cheatham**

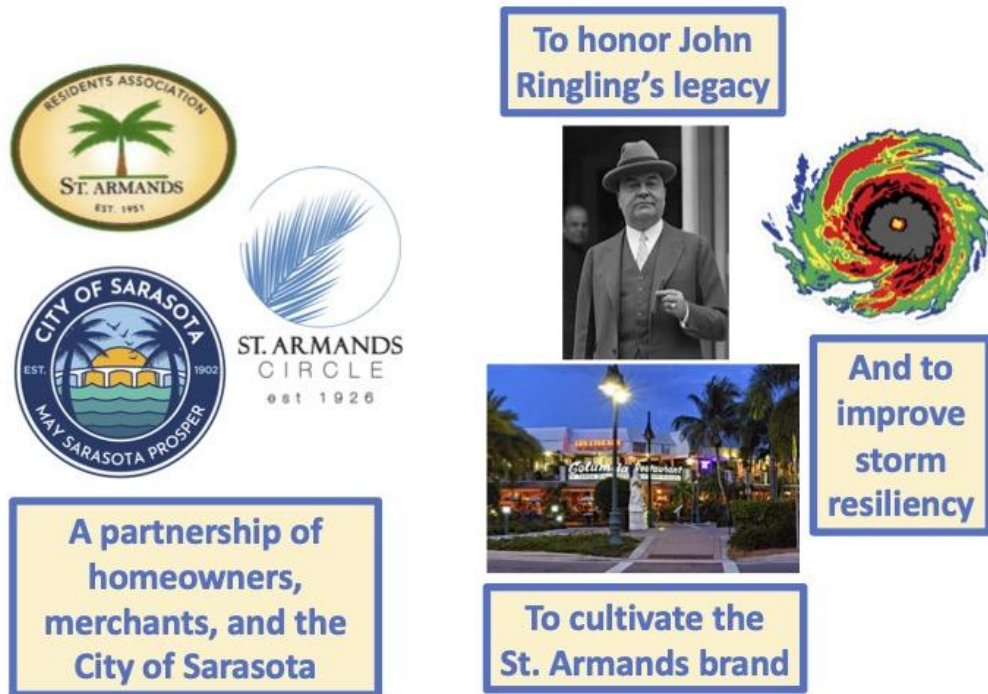
The huge turn-out at the city-run St. Armands "visioning sessions":





Our vision for St. Armands:

Our VISION for St. Armands



Our membership is only \$50 per year and includes residents and business supporters from across the barrier islands and beyond: ([click here](#) to join/renew)



Thank you for your support, and have a great summer!

This message was sent to you by the St. Armands Residents Association

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<https://starmands.org/>

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