



Winter is Coming

Lido Key Residents,

While the subject of this email is a reference to the book and TV series *Game of Thrones*, I felt it was appropriate to use this phrase to alert you to the fact that **the St. Armands Winter Fest may be coming back again later this year.**

In fact, it has been placed on [the agenda](#) of the upcoming Monday, February 6, City Commission Meeting (Unfinished Business IX.4). And, [the new proposal](#) now includes a Ferris wheel and uses even more of the park than before:



I got wind of this yesterday, and asked Mayor Battie if this could be postponed for **a mere two weeks** to the February 21 City Commission Meeting for two reasons:

1. Already on February 21, it is planned that the City Commission will be discussing the legality of the continued use of public right-of-way "parklets" by private restaurant businesses for outdoor dining. My premise is that if this is determined to be illegal, then so must the private use of the St. Armands Circle Park which is also a public right-of-way.
2. On February 6, two or more Commissioners or Charter Officials (I'm not sure exactly who or how many) have to leave the Commission meeting at noon and may not be there to discuss and vote on this issue if the meeting runs long.

My request was denied. **So... Monday, February 6 it is. Would you please take a moment to mark this in your calendar?**

Why should Winter Fest not be allowed to happen again later this year? Five reasons:

(1) It may be illegal. Every square inch of land in the City of Sarasota is either a parcel that somebody owns (and pays taxes on) or part of the public right-of-way. That's it, there is no third option. And St. Armands Circle Park is the only City Park that is not a parcel of land that the City owns, as it is the central island of a roundabout and therefore part of the public right-of-way. Roads, medians, and the central islands of roundabouts are part of the public right-of-way, which means that the public has the **irrevocable right** to use and access these areas. As with outdoor dining in "parklets", the City is discussing the legality of letting private business use such areas, and the Winter Fest should not even be considered again until that issue is resolved.

(2) It denies the public access to a City Park for nine weeks. While the majority of the usable space in the St. Armands Circle Park was fenced off for the six week festival, it was unavailable for **an additional three weeks** after the end of the festival--roped off with yellow security tape--so that new grass could grow. Unfortunately, the areas where the ice rink and carousel were placed are now depressions that hold rain water. Will this cause problems for this weekend's art festival? Will this lead to a mosquito problem? Will the City hold the permittee accountable to make this right, **or will tax payers have to absorb this cost?**



(3) Both the residents and merchants associations don't want it. Which means, by extension, that the majority of residents and merchants don't want it either. After all, that's what associations do; they represent their constituents. Look, there are some exceptions. I'm sure there will be plenty of people who are willing to say that they loved the festival. And everyone thought the lights were pretty (myself included), and everyone with kids or grandkids brought them and they all had a great time. Regardless, the residents and merchants associations believe that the majority of their constituents do not think the Winter Fest was a good fit for St. Armands, and certainly not worth denying public access to and use of the park for nine weeks.

(4) If it is successful, it will impact traffic. At the January 3 City Commission Meeting, one of the applicants said: "Imagine what we could do with a whole year of planning."

Well, on January 10, just one week after those remarks and one week after the closure of the winter festival, the City experienced what can happen when there is a traffic issue on the barrier islands. It wasn't a remarkable day, and it wasn't a particularly busy time of year, but traffic was essentially at a standstill for hours, backed up from downtown to past the Longboat Publix when roundabout construction required the closure of all but one eastbound lane. Apparently, the phones at City Hall and the police department were ringing off the hook with people calling in to complain.

Observer Article: [Surprise roundabout lane closure outrages Sarasota, Longboat](#)

St. Armands, Lido, and Longboat residents (and businesses) are **justifiably concerned** about anything that can have a significant impact on traffic through St. Armands, including **a well-promoted**, six week long winter festival. This festival is the equivalent of a six week long art festival which nobody would ever think of doing there. **A known traffic chokepoint is not the right place to put something like this. How about the City's own fairgrounds at the Robarts Arena?** Has this been considered as a potentially better location for traffic, parking, restrooms, and for many other reasons?

(5) It's a public safety hazard. We have a picture of a visually impaired individual with a walking stick forced to move out of the way to avoid the trackless train on a public sidewalk:



As the train passes, it can be seen that a second individual with a walking stick or cane, walking in the opposite direction at the same time, also had to move out of the way to avoid the train:



How about this young couple with a baby having to hug the concrete wall and bushes to avoid the train:



Should the City at least ban motorized trains from public sidewalks that are simultaneously used by parents with babies, people walking pets, children on scooters, and physically and visually impaired individuals?

Please remember that, for at least the past 40 or so years, there has always been a wonderful Christmas celebration on St. Armands, produced by the St. Armands Circle (Merchants) Association (SACA). The celebration has included the beautifully lit tree and other Circle decorations, a tree-lighting ceremony with cookies and caroling and a visit by Santa and Mrs. Claus, a living nativity scene sponsored by the St. Armands Key Lutheran Church, and many, many other attractions and activities. SACA has always invited residents to help decorate and has worked with the BID to obtain funds and other assistance. This was always a free celebration that did not require fencing off the City Park and public right-of-way for nine weeks. **And this is what we can return to.**

What can you do about this? Well, there are five City Commissioners, and, if this email doesn't do it, you'll need to convince at least three of the five of them that this is a bad idea. [Here is the link](#) to the City webpage with the names, photos, and email addresses of all five City Commissioners.

We are in District 2 and our District Commissioner is Vice Mayor Liz Alpert. There are two At-Large Commissioners who were elected by the entire City: Jen Ahearn-Koch and Debbie Trice. And even the Commissioners from the other two districts are still supposed to represent the entire City: Erik Arroyo and Mayor Kyle Battie. The listed phone number will take you to their shared executive assistant through whom you can request an in-person or video or phone meeting (although they generally seem to be booked a week or two out).

Or you can email them at their email addresses. In my experience with past issues, emailing the Commissioners hasn't seemed to be very effective, but it's worth trying.

Or you can show up at the February 6 City Commission Meeting to speak on this agenda item. There is some free parking around City Hall, paid parking on the street and at other nearby lots, or free parking at the Whole Foods Garage a couple blocks away. The meeting starts at 9am and goes until it's over. When you enter the City Commission Chambers, there will be a card to fill out that you then hand to the Deputy City Clerk who sits just inside the door and who can answer your questions.

Will this issue get you out of your comfort zone and get you to a City Commission Meeting? I'll look for you there on Monday, February 6.

[Click Here to Visit the Association Website](#)

Best,

Chris Goglia, President

St. Armands Residents Association

With the Approval of our Board of Directors