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**Ken Thompson Park - evaluation framework**

1 message

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**St Armands Residents Association** <st.armands.residents.assn@gmail.com>

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Bcc: Chris Goglia <chris34236@gmail.com>

**Dear PREP Board Members,**

My name is Chris Goglia, president of the St. Armands Residents Association. I am sending you this email with the approval of our Board of Directors.

At your upcoming April 18th meeting, the City Commission has asked you to consider an unsolicited proposal to privatize Ken Thompson Park (KTP). The purpose of this email is to offer a framework that might assist with your evaluation of this proposal.

I think you ultimately have to decide these two things:

**(1) Is it an appropriate use of this city park?** Personally, I'm concerned about the loss of a beautiful, peaceful, and free public open space in an environmentally sensitive area.

**(2) Can the area handle it?** St. Armands Circle is already a traffic choke point. This creates a public safety concern with regard to the ability of emergency vehicles to pass, for hurricane evacuation, and to the numerous pedestrians crossing the streets. Just when we thought we were going to get a little bit of relief with Mote Aquarium moving to UTC, we now have this proposal which could add to the problem. Underestimating the impact on traffic from this proposal has the potential to effectively cut off Longboat Key from mainland Sarasota.

**Here is what I predict is going to happen:**

I predict that--even if the PREP Board advises against it--the City Commission will vote 3-2 to give RIDE Entertainment a 10-20 year lease to privatize Ken Thompson Park. They will do this over the summer when many city residents are away and before the

November City Commission election, after which some of them may no longer be serving. And they will make it very expensive for the next City Commission to nullify what they've done. I believe three commissioners have already made up their minds and that your time and efforts--regardless of what you decide--will have been wasted.

### **Why do I predict this?**

Because, 1.5 years ago, these same three commissioners--Alpert, Arroyo, and Battie (all of whom are running for re-election this year)--voted to allow this same RIDE Entertainment to operate a six week winter festival/carnival at St. Armands Circle Park which kept the park closed--roped off with yellow security tape--for an additional three months to repair the grounds. They did this despite an unheard of 30 residents showing up to speak against this at a city commission meeting, and despite two different nearby residents associations, the merchants association, and the pastor of our Lutheran Church all asking them not to do this. And, for some reason, they didn't even bother running this by the PREP Board first.

### **Your process and timing may affect the outcome.**

I encourage you to take the City Commission at their word and proceed as if they really do want you to thoroughly evaluate this proposal. I hope you feel it is your job to return to the city commission with a thoroughly researched recommendation, and not a quick recommendation. I believe that the number of months you take to consider this issue will determine whether or not this precious, public property gets handed over to a commercial entity.

### **Here is the information I think you need to obtain and discuss before you make a recommendation to the City Commission--six things that are described in more detail below:**

- (1) FDOT Traffic Review
- (2) Business Plan Review
- (3) Environmental Agency Review
- (4) Engineering Review
- (5) Affected Party Analysis
- (6) Fair Market Rent Determination

**The following is a description of the information you might want to collect about each of the above items in order for you to make a thorough evaluation of the proposal.**

#### **(1) FDOT Traffic Review:**

The only road to City Island is State Road 789 which connects St. Armands Key and Longboat Key. Therefore, shouldn't FDOT be asked to weigh-in on this proposal? Ideally, a traffic study will be conducted to determine how much incremental

traffic this area can handle at different times of the year and at different times of day (e.g., rush hour, in-season).

I've heard it said that the traffic will simply replace that from Mote Aquarium after it moves to UTC. Will you just accept that statement? You might try to obtain from Mote their daily attendance numbers for the last 365 days. Mote Aquarium is only open in the morning and afternoon from 9:30am to 5pm. The KTP proposal will likely shift that traffic to the afternoon and evening, including rush hour, when the traffic through St. Armands is at its worst. So even if it merely replaces this traffic, it will shift this traffic to a busier time of day.

I've also heard it said that many of the attendees will arrive via the proposed water taxi. But, be that as it may, there will be plenty of people arriving via automobile as well.

Paragon Festivals hosted a recent [food truck rally and music festival](#) at KTP. Traffic on Saturday, January 20, created gridlock through St. Armands Circle. You might ask them how many vehicles they estimate came that afternoon. The maximum weekend afternoon traffic that this area can handle is somewhere significantly less than that.

## **(2) Business Plan Review:**

If FDOT tells you this location can handle X incremental cars in-season, and Y incremental cars during rush hour, then you still need to know how many cars the commercial entity is planning to bring in per day, at different times of the day, and at different times of the year, to meet their return-on-investment goals.

If the commercial entity won't share their financial plans with you, or if they haven't even thought about this yet, then how can you ever know the answer? And what else aren't they telling you? Does their proposal include weekend music festivals and a holiday festival during one of the busiest traffic weeks of the year? What keeps them from adding more and more attractions and events, to attract more and more people, than what they're currently presenting?

Building and operating a restaurant and the "Aerobar" will cost money that will require many paying customers to support. You might want to understand what their initial investment is expected to be, over what period of time they will be amortising that (the length of lease they will be requesting), their projected monthly operating costs including insurance and what the city will charge for rent (more on this, below), their target return on investment, the average amount each attendee is expected to spend, and the number of attendees that will be required per day or month at different times of the year to achieve that target return.

Does this number of attendees fit with what FDOT says this area can handle? If the commercial entity refuses to cooperate on this, or if their numbers do not seem plausible, then how can you recommend that this proposal be accepted?

### **(3) Environmental Agency Review:**

Which agency or agencies--local, county, state, and/or federal--can tell you if the noise from the planned attractions will affect shore-bird nesting or the neighboring Save Our Seabirds injured bird rehabilitation center? Will the nighttime lights affect sea turtle nesting?

Will hauling in truck loads of sand to create a private beach affect any other vulnerable habitats? How many boats will be able to dock at the new water taxi pier and will they be traversing any manatee protected areas?

Who can tell us what other potential environmental impacts there might be that we aren't even considering yet?

### **(4) Engineering Review:**

Who has the engineering expertise to determine how the proposed 115 feet tall "Aerobar" needs to be anchored to withstand the frequent wind events we experience here so that it will pose no public safety risk? Does the business plan take these costs into account?

Will the proximity of the existing cell phone/radio tower to the "Aerobar" location impact signal transmission or reception?

What does the US Coast Guard think about the possibility of hurricane force winds toppling the "Aerobar" such that it might block a navigable channel (New Pass)?

How will noise from the planned attractions travel over the surrounding water during different wind conditions? The neighborhoods that may be subject to this will probably think this is critical for you to understand.

### **(5) Affected Party Analysis:**

What do the following stakeholders think about this? Surely the points of view of all of all of these affected parties are relevant to the recommendation that you've been asked to give.

Major stakeholders:

- the Mote research facility (which will remain on City Island)
- the Sarasota Sailing Squadron
- the Save Our Seabirds injured bird rehabilitation center
- the Sarasota Bay Explorers educational boat tours
- the Sarasota Ski-A-Rees water ski show team
- the Old Salty Dog restaurant
- the New Pass Grill restaurant
- the MarineMax marina

- people who pay the city to moor their boats off City Island
- the Sarasota County fire and ambulance operators
- the City of Sarasota Police Department
- Florida Department of Transportation
- the Town of Longboat Key - town council, town administrator
- the Longboat Key Chamber of Commerce
- the major employers on the barrier islands (Lido Beach Resort, Longboat Key Club, and Publix at Bay Isles are the big three that come to mind)
- the St. Armands Circle (Merchants) Association (SACA)

City residents:

- city residents in the adjacent Lido Shores neighborhood
- city residents in the nearby barrier island neighborhoods
- city residents who work on the barrier islands
- city residents who fish at KTP
- city residents who launch kayaks at KTP
- city residents who launch power boats at KTP
- city residents who picnic at KTP
- city residents who walk their dogs at KTP
- city residents who walk and ride bikes at KTP
- city residents who bring their children to the playground at KTP
- city residents who watch fireworks at KTP
- city residents who watch the annual holiday boat parade at KTP

We think there should be a city-wide survey conducted to solicit feedback from all city residents, and that the PREP Board members should split up the list of major stakeholders to personally reach out to the key contacts at each of them.

#### **(6) Fair Market Rent Determination:**

It is my understanding that the commercial entity has already offered to pay the city an unspecified "fair" market rent for the use of Ken Thompson Park. But, the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's online database lists [the "Just" value of this property](#) at over \$28 Million!

What are the "comps" for renting a property of this value? What is the ideal duration of a lease and what other terms and conditions should go into the lease? For example, should a lease prohibit the commercial entity from ever charging money for cars to park at KTP? Will they be able to charge people to park who want to watch fireworks or the holiday boat parade?

What terms in the lease restrict the commercial entity from adding more and more attractions and events, to attract more and more people and automobiles, than what they're currently presenting?

How far afield do we need to look to find someone with the unbiased expertise to tell us all of this?

I would expect the PREP Board to advise the City Commission what the city should charge to rent/lease this amazing property, and what the benchmark duration and terms of such a lease should be, as opposed to leaving it to the City Commission to just make up their own numbers and terms.

## **Conclusion**

Frankly, for an all-volunteer city advisory board to thoroughly evaluate this unsolicited proposal to privatize one of our public parks, I think the city commission needs to give you a six-figure budget to hire one or more independent consultants to help you gather and analyze the information I've outlined above.

Regardless, I would guess that a thorough evaluation of this proposal will take you several monthly meetings to complete. I recommend that you schedule at least seven months to do it--past the next City Commission election in November--so that it does not end up being a big waste of your time as I've predicted above, and because the implications to the City of getting this wrong are so great.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Goglia, President  
St. Armands Residents Association  
With the Approval of our Board of Directors

website: [starmands.org/ken-thompson-park](http://starmands.org/ken-thompson-park)

*Note: This email will be shared with a wide audience.*