

**Will the Sarasota City Commission
Vote for
Poor Parking for "The Bay"?**

A hearing was held Monday, **March 8, 2021 at City Hall**

And Email to [Sarasota City Commissioners](#)



Ready to walk from home to shows at the Van Wezel or its replacement theatre and to other attractions at The Bay? Or do you want to have to pay for an Uber ride or carpool, all because the City provides nowhere to park?

The Sarasota City Commission will cast their first vote Monday night on a scheme to eliminate up to 78 percent of the present on-site parking at the site of The Bay, starting with eliminating 91 percent of the on-site parking in the Phase 1 Plan.

Phase 1 would eliminate the current 90 space parking lot which previously served the former G-Wiz building and has been heavily used (which a City report acknowledges) as parking for the Van Wezel, by a one minute walk over a footbridge. It would replace those 90 spaces with a parking lot with only eight spaces (half of them for handicapped parking).

Together with only 16 spaces for parking along Boulevard of the Arts next to Phase I, this provides a mere 24 spaces for people to park to enjoy all of the attractions in The Bay, Phase I – the sunset boardwalk, dining, scheduled activities and the rest.

Although promoters say that people can still park in the Van Wezel parking lot (apparently when it is not being fully used for shows there) to enjoy Phase 1, what they don't tell you is that lot is largely planned to go away as well.

Here is the Master Plan Parking scheme for the Bay, taken from a July, 2019 draft which I obtained by a public records request. It proposes a reduction of on-site (off-street) parking from 1,381 parking spaces today to 306, a reduction of 1,077 spaces. A modest increase of on-street

parking in the vicinity slightly reduces the total reduction in parking spaces to 956 fewer spaces than today. 1,427 (or 1,429 by this count) total parking spaces at The Bay site at present, but only 473 spaces by this new plan. What on earth are they thinking?



Even if there is now a less extreme version of this parking reduction than shown in this fairly recent draft, any reduction of parking while increasing attractions to draw people to The Bay is a recipe for public discontent, and worse.

One remarkable thing about this is that the City is close to completing a binding agreement with the foundation for a new Performing Arts Center at The Bay which will commit the City to spending \$137.5 million of taxpayer dollars it does not have to build that Center and to providing parking for 1,000 vehicles to serve it. (Another \$137.5 is to come from private donations, which has no basis in history or reality). The plan is to provide much of that parking somewhere undetermined off-site and have the City pay to buy and operate shuttles for those attending shows. Even at 1,000 spaces, that is about what is now provided for the 1,741 seats at the Van Wezel, for a new Center that will seat 2,400.

The 2019 Report complains that its studies show that no one walks to Van Wezel shows today because of the easy parking, and that “parking deterrents” which include far fewer spaces and high parking fees will induce patrons to walk from their homes to shows, as well as to “encourage ride-share services and carpooling.”

This is all part of the decades-long hostility to drivers by City staff, now shared by the Bay Park Conservancy. They live in this fantasy world that if the City congests its streets with road diets and makes it difficult and expensive to find parking, people will be forced out of their cars to walk and ride bikes wherever they need to go, and ride buses (or pay for Uber or taxis) that get caught in traffic too.

It's also part of a staff-declared "new paradigm" to accommodate intense development that overcrowds roads by embracing traffic congestion rather than remaining concerned about it.

When The Bay went through its much-touted public workshops (really walk-around displays at which the plan was pushed by project staff), the elimination of surface parking was explained by saying that there will be a huge underground parking garage, covered by landscaping.

They never said how they would pay for it. Later – after gaining support for The Bay by the public and public officials -- they quietly abandoned the underground garage, finally acknowledging that it was obviously too expensive.

Even before getting City Commission approval for The Bay Phase I, the Bay Park Conservancy boasts that it has destroyed the 90-space parking lot. It should be asked how they got a permit to do that, or if they even got one.

The agenda packet for the March 8 City Commission hearing on Phase I includes a statement that overall at The Bay, 890 parking spaces are required by City Code and 1,352 are "provided." But looking further at data in the Site Plan suggests that those numbers reflect current demands and roughly the number of current off-street parking spaces, not the total that will be provided with the parking reductions called for by plans for The Bay.

Much of The Bay project has great merit and should proceed.

But the taxpayer money to be squandered on a lavish new Performing Arts Center to which many Sarasota citizens cannot afford tickets should be used instead to build an adequate parking garage for an improved Van Wezel theatre (which at 1,741 seats is plenty big enough, if you ever sat way back in the last row), in order to replace the present asphalt there with green space as has been planned. And then adequate parking should be preserved and planned for all of the other good features of The Bay.

I will present more about the draft Agreements between the City and the Sarasota Performing Arts Center Foundation, Inc. (formerly the Van Wezel Foundation) which are being negotiated. It will become increasingly clear that pouring so many millions into that project which can be better spent on other pressing needs -- at The Bay and elsewhere -- and avoiding an inevitable tax hike when the City runs out of money and the Foundation threatens suit as allowed by the Agreement, is a nightmare that should be avoided.

Monday night is the time to have the conversation which our elected officials have unfortunately been too timid to have, about the need for adequate parking at The Bay and the other problems that need to be corrected before it is too late.

Please attend the public hearing Monday night if you can and tell the City Commissioners that not everyone can walk or bike to shows and other attractions at The Bay, and should not have to carpool or pay for rides, and they need to provide people who drive there a place to park.

And whether or not you can attend, please email the Sarasota City Commissioners to ask them to pause and fix this disaster in the making:

[Email the City Commissioners](#)

Thank you,

Dan Lobeck
For Control Growth Now

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