



DATE: May 29, 2019

TO: Friends and Neighbors of Selby Gardens

FROM: Jennifer O. Rominiecki, President and CEO

RE: Facts and Corrections to Sarasota Herald Tribune May 28, 2019 Opinion Letter by Bob Bernstein Regarding Selby Gardens’ Master Site Plan

Selby Gardens’ voluntary Neighborhood Advisory Committee includes neighbors of Selby Gardens, interested members of the community, and presidents of nearby neighborhood associations. Since 2017, Selby Gardens has shared up-to-date facts and information about the Plan with the Committee and its members have provided input that has helped to shape the Plan.

During these meetings, many questions, comments, and suggestions were presented, and we listened – in fact, \$1.5 million in adjustments were added to the plan as a result. We continue to listen and make changes to the plan helping to strengthen the overall design and implement this extraordinary project in a way that is a testament to voluntary community engagement.

Throughout this process, we have offered to meet with any interested party to help ensure everyone understands the facts and undeniable benefits of Selby Gardens’ Master Plan so that accurate information is shared with all. We remain available and happy to meet at any time.

Unfortunately, a May 28, 2019 op-ed by Bob Bernstein (member of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee and president of the nearby Bay Point Park Homeowners Association) contained several misleading statements. Corrections and facts may be found below:

Misleading Statements

The Facts

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| <p>“What affects the Bayfront affects all of Sarasota. For its new “Master Plan,” Selby Gardens is applying for one of the most intensive land-use classifications allowed under the city’s Comprehensive Plan, a classification normally reserved for airports, hospitals and major entertainment venues.”</p> <p>“The current land use and zoning for the Selby property is compatible with surrounding land uses and fulfills its role as a transition/buffer between the</p> | <p>The Metropolitan Regional (MR) Future Land Use Classification was selected in coordination with Selby Gardens and the City of Sarasota due to the restrictive nature of this land use coupled with a site specific ‘Marie Selby Botanical Gardens (MSBG)’ zone district, which combined allow only for the implementation of Selby Gardens’ masterplan – nothing else.</p> <p>Of the 10 existing MR land uses, all but one (#1 – Airport Activities) are adjacent to residential land uses or land uses that allow residential zone districts. Other MR land uses also include retirement centers like the Pines of</p> |
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| Misleading Statements | The Facts |
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| <p>existing single-family and limited multi-family residential areas to the south. The “Metropolitan/Regional” designation for which Selby Gardens is applying belongs in the urban core — not adjacent to existing, established neighborhoods. If this commercial, intensive zone is allowed south of Mound Street, the rest of the areas south of Mound will come under the same pressure.”</p> | <p>Sarasota, or Plymouth Harbor on Sarasota Bay, hardly an intensive land use or major event venue.</p> <p>Given its restrictive definition, this designation was selected to provide the most protections to adjacent property owners from other future development and to prevent establishing a precedent for other development along US-41 in the future.</p> <p><i>From the City of Sarasota’s “The Future Land Use Plan,” The purpose and intent of this land use classification is to identify: areas in the City that represent attractions that draw visitors from great distances and have developed in distinct and identifiable “complexes”, “circles”, “centers”, or “campuses” (e.g. - “primary” uses).</i></p> |
| <p>“The first \$40 million phase of this \$100 million project does not include the addition of a single orchid.”</p> | <p>Through the Master Site Plan, Selby Gardens will be protecting our world’s-best scientifically-documented collections of rare orchids and bromeliads and expanding our capacity to collect more rare species.</p> <p>The first phase of the Master Plan is \$42.5 million and the goal for the entire project is \$92 million (including \$20 million for endowment).</p> <p>The first phase will include the Welcome Center, which will be adjacent to the Plant Research Center, a building that will house the Herbarium and Laboratory and Research Library. The Herbarium and Laboratory will steward and display Selby Gardens’ renowned preserved plant collection that is referenced by botanists worldwide. The Research Library will showcase an invaluable library collection that includes priceless, rare volumes and hand-colored botanical illustrations dating to the 1700s. Included in the collection will be the newly-gifted and highly-regarded orchid collection of Dr. Carlyle A. Luer, a founder of Selby Gardens and noted orchidologist. Dr. Luer has described and illustrated more than 3,000 plants for science, leading his contemporary peers.</p> |

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| <p>“One of Selby’s stated objectives (page 8, “Selby Gardens Strategic Plan”) is to turn the Gardens into a “premier Bayfront entertainment location,” potentially bringing up to 468 cars, multiple times a day, to a six-story garage (almost large enough to park a 747 aircraft) between Gulfstream and Osprey avenues.”</p> | <p>The parking facility is five stories tall and proposes no change in quantity of events nor does it provide any new event venue spaces. The portion of our Strategic Plan regarding the quality of our events was a goal set in 2016 and has already been achieved. Selby Gardens is not intending to expand the number of event spaces on our property.</p> |
| <p>“The 75-foot-tall, massive garage has a footprint of one acre — as large as or larger than the State Street and Palm Avenue garages, in a residential area currently limited to 35-foot heights. One hundred and 11 trees, including five grand oaks, will be destroyed to create this concrete garage.”</p> | <p>None of the trees on the west side of Palm Avenue (what now constitutes the entirety of the public garden space) are impacted in any way by Phase One of the Master Plan.</p> <p>Approximately 40 percent of the total 315 existing trees and palms within Phase One of the Master Plan (all located on the east side of Palm Avenue) were observed to be in fair or poor health as determined by an ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) certified arborist. Our first responsibility has to be to protect public safety, so trees found with structural defects are proposed to be removed.</p> <p>Furthermore, there are 21 Live Oaks within the area of Phase One with an estimated DBH (diameter at breast height) of 24” or greater (City of Sarasota Code Defined ‘Grand Tree’). Of these 21, seven trees will be impacted by the project. Five trees will be removed, including three that are in poor health, and two will be relocated.</p> <p>Thoughtfully designed, the scale of the Sky Garden housing the parking structure will allow for a seamless transition from the downtown districts on the north side of Mound St. to the gardens.</p> <p>The size, scale, and mass of the parking structure has been sited adjacent to US-41, an urban corridor, and across the street from the downtown zone districts including Downtown Bayfront, which allows up to 18 stories.</p> |

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| | <p>State Street Garage holds approximately 75 fewer vehicles on 0.75 acres and is six levels. Palm Ave Garage is 50 percent larger in parking capacity at 729, is six levels, and 15 percent larger of a footprint than the proposed Sky Garden.</p> <p>The proposed parking structure is less than 300' from both the nearby Embassy House (approximately 180' height) and Palm Place (approximately 75' height).</p> <p>The parking facility has progressive heights. The vast majority is 53 feet.</p> <p>The parking structure is setback a minimum of 20' from property lines, more than any other similar structure in the City of Sarasota, to allow for a public 12' wide multi-use recreation trail (MURT).</p> <p>It will be located at the farthest point away from Marie Selby's original seven acres of land and will not interfere with the gardens' tranquil experience.</p> |
| <p>“This resulting increased traffic dramatically impacts the traffic of Longboat Key, Golden Gate Point, Lido and St. Armands as well as the historic, quiet neighborhoods to the north and south of Mound Street. The worst impact will be the backed-up traffic at the already congested Bayfront, on one of Sarasota’s most important thoroughfares.”</p> | <p>Per the City of Sarasota’s traffic study, the build out of the project represents no more than 1.7 percent of the service volume (total capacity of the roadway) on US-41. The variety of traffic improvements designed, privately funded, and installed as a part of Selby’s Phase 1 improvements represent meaningful enhancements to vehicular and pedestrian safety in addition to improved operations and capacity of signal timing at US-41 and Orange Avenue.</p> <p>The intersection upgrades will also allow for concurrent phasing of the signal, allowing greater capacity of cars to travel through the intersection, while maintaining the time allocated to the US-41 mainline. The study found that when considering all relocations and upgrades to the offsite roadways, no degradation in the level of service from the proposed project to US-41 or Orange Ave are anticipated.</p> |

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| <p>“Selby Gardens’ public justification for its ambitious plans is the need for more parking to support its multiple party/event venues and a 10,000-square-foot “destination” rooftop restaurant.”</p> | <p>By no means does this project contribute to traffic in any meaningful way, to the barrier islands.</p> <p>The need for parking is based on the fact that currently, parking capacity on site does not adequately support the parking demand, and Selby Gardens turns away visitors on peak days. The capacity of the Sky Garden will yield an increase of approximately 75 percent of available parking spaces on site, while reducing in half the footprint dedicated to parking. The restaurant has a requirement of 39 parking spaces.</p> <p>For clarification, the restaurant is comprised of approximately 6,000 square feet for the public area and approximately 4,000 square feet for behind-the-scenes operations such as the kitchen, storage, and offices. This garden-to-table dining restaurant, like many successful restaurants in the City and across the country, hopes to become a destination for visitors and residents alike.</p> |
| <p>“To achieve a bay-view height, for which many other hotels and businesses paid handsomely, the Gardens’ leadership proposes the six-story garage. The restaurant will operate independently of the Gardens, as a for-profit entity, well beyond the Gardens’ operating hours.”</p> | <p>The determination for locating the restaurant on top of the five-story Sky Garden was done first and foremost to improve the site utilization by combining multiple uses into one structure to be efficient with the land, allow for more garden space, improve operations, logistics, and parking access. While the bay-views are a great amenity, it is not the reason the planning team determined this proposed location. Operating hours are yet to be determined and will take into account compliance to City of Sarasota code.</p> <p>The restaurant will be owned by Selby Gardens and operated by Michael’s on East with a significant portion of the proceeds from restaurant sales going back to Selby Gardens to further fulfill our mission.</p> |
| <p>“It will be one of the largest event spaces in Sarasota and a principal use for the site, competing with the private sector under the tax advantages of a not-for-profit organization on tax-free land. Selby Gardens also is seeking taxpayer funding</p> | <p>The new restaurant is not and will not be an event center. The events will continue to operate out of Selby’s banquet facility as has been for years.</p> |

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| <p>from Sarasota County and the state to pay for the Master Plan.”</p> | <p>Selby Gardens IS NOT relying on funding from Sarasota County, nor is Selby Gardens requesting the creation of a Tax Increment Financing District.</p> <p>The State of Florida has chosen to support Selby Gardens’ Master Site Plan because of the tremendous economic benefit it will provide our region. In 2018, Selby Gardens received \$500,000 from the State of Florida’s Department of Economic Opportunity. This amount represents 1.5 percent of the total \$33.5 million raised for the project to-date. Additional state funding for Selby Gardens’ Master Site Plan is tentatively set at \$600,000 for the upcoming fiscal year.</p> |
| <p>“The restaurant will be operated separately by restaurateur Michael Klauber, who will leverage his reputation for events, creating daily traffic havoc, noon and night. The Selby garage will only have two lanes of ingress and egress; traffic from those events will be directed onto Mound Street and south Orange Avenue, a designated neighborhood street that already is overburdened by traffic and an intersection operating at Level Service “F” (the worst), according to the city of Sarasota’s Thoroughfare Plan.”</p> | <p>The restaurant will function similarly to every other public restaurant in the community and does not include any designated event spaces.</p> <p>The proposed plan maintains existing points of access to the site from both US-41 and Orange Avenue. In other words, there are two point of ingress and egress into the Gardens.</p> <p>The proposed operations and capacity of the parking structure have ticket distribution on the second floor of the structure, which combined with dedicated turn-lanes, and an extensive arrival court allows for more que capacity for entering and exiting than any other parking structure in the City.</p> <p>Both on and off-site designs have been thoughtfully planned to improve upon the existing traffic conditions and include increased quantities of vehicles projected by the project.</p> <p>These improvements also include prohibiting vehicles from turning right and exiting to southbound Orange Avenue through signage and directional curbing. As denoted in the Traffic Impact Analysis by the City, Orange Avenue’s level of service from US-41 to Bahia Vista Street is currently at Level of Service (LOS) ‘D’ and is maintained at LOS D after implementation.</p> |

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| <p>“The Gardens’ claims that the additional traffic, including tour buses and numerous food/beverage/event truck deliveries, would have no impact on the Bayfront and the neighborhoods. Restricting all traffic exiting onto Orange Avenue to left-hand (northbound turns only) is an ill-conceived nightmare.”</p> | <p>Selby Gardens acknowledges that the proposed changes in operations will create a different condition with regards to types and frequencies of all types of vehicles. This is why significant investment in off-site roadway infrastructure upgrades are also proposed, which based on the Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) by the City, and independent analysis and design by Kimley-Horn, will not degrade the level of service.</p> <p>The change to the plan to direct traffic exiting to Orange Avenue to turn left is based on direct input from neighbors and will help to significantly reduce potential cut-through traffic from Selby Gardens to the communities to the south.</p> |
| <p>“The City of Sarasota and its residents have spent the last decade putting into the Comprehensive Plan and codes protection for neighborhoods. Granting Selby Gardens this new designation would destroy those protections in one action. Selby Gardens’ parking needs can be accomplished with a much smaller garage. A small, accessory-use restaurant is reasonable; it does not have to be an enormous business with a high-altitude bay view.”</p> | <p>Selby Gardens currently has 270 parking spaces and on peak days, turns away 200 visitors.</p> <p>The Sky Garden will accommodate approximately 480 vehicles and allows for expected growth in tourism and population. As any responsible business would do, Selby Gardens is planning and preparing for the future.</p> <p>According to the Small Business Administration, a restaurant with \$7.5 million or less in gross receipts is considered a small business. Projections for this restaurant would qualify it as a small business.</p> |
| <p>“Selby Gardens’ plan completely changes the character and purpose of the Gardens to a commercial event/party enterprise, a far cry from the Gardens that, until recently, has peacefully coexisted with surrounding neighborhoods.”</p> | <p>As we’ve mentioned before, there are no new event spaces in this Master Plan. The restaurant is a small portion of the Master Plan.</p> <p>The seven acres left by Marie Selby will not change.</p> <p>The character and purpose of the Gardens will not change.</p> <p>Our mission to connect people to nature is not changing with the Master Plan. In fact, with the Master Plan, due to consolidating the current surface parking taking up</p> |

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| | <p>two acres of land, Selby Gardens' will be able to increase garden space by 50 percent.</p> <p>The Gardens has made numerous modifications and improvements to the neighborhood, \$1.5 million worth, in order to continue to coexist peacefully with the neighborhood and the community. These updates include additional roadway improvements, noise mitigation efforts, dedicated public open space through the granting of land from our property for a public, 12-foot Multi-Use Recreational Trail (MURT) in addition to several public parklets within the property.</p> |
| <p>“It also is an egregious departure from and perversion of Marie Selby’s stated wishes that the property she was gifting be “a public garden for the people of Sarasota” (selby.org/the-gardens/history/). Selby Gardens will become a party venue for the well-heeled, since public access to any of the property will be limited to those who can pay for admission, parking and an expensive restaurant.”</p> | <p>The original property Marie Selby left will not change and will remain a garden for the public to enjoy.</p> <p>All other parcels adjacent to her original gift were purchased throughout Selby Gardens’ nearly 45-year history and were never cohesively planned.</p> <p>By decreasing our surface parking and increasing our garden space, we will in fact increase our capacity to introduce more underserved youth and families to nature.</p> <p>Further, by diversifying our revenue streams, we can keep admissions competitive with the attractions in Sarasota County and stay open for all who want to enjoy the Gardens.</p> <p>A ticketing system will be installed on the second floor of the Sky Garden. Tickets of guests visiting the Gardens or restaurant will be validated.</p> <p>Restaurant prices have not yet been determined and will be competitive with restaurants in the City of Sarasota.</p> |

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| “This is not a simple matter of “not in my backyard” or “not wanting change.” Intensive commercial development with its intensive traffic does not belong at this already stressed intersection or in <i>any</i> neighborhood.” | This plan is not commercial development. Selby Gardens’ is not a “developer.” The restaurant is only one small part of the Master Plan. The Master Plan is desperately needed to safeguard our collections and accommodate those who want to come to the Gardens but who are turned away because of a lack of parking. |

Over the past three years, this plan has been thoughtfully designed by esteemed professionals from across the country and in Sarasota. I would like to remind everyone of the tremendous benefits of this plan to the Sarasota community and the world. Once fully implemented, Selby Gardens' Master Plan will:

- codify our privately-owned, downtown 15-acre oasis as a botanical garden in perpetuity and protect it from future high-density development;
- grow garden space by 50 percent within our existing footprint;
- safeguard and showcase the world's best scientifically documented collections of orchids and bromeliads;
- add significantly more free public access to our privately-owned property through the creation of a 12-foot wide Multi Use Recreational Trail around the perimeter of our property and the addition of substantial public park space;
- create public access to the water through improving and maintaining the City-owned pocket park at the northwest corner of our property;
- become an international model for the latest green building technology by serving as the first Net Positive Energy Botanical Garden Complex in the world;
- return clean water to Sarasota Bay through a 500,000 gallon storm water management system;
- preserve our important history and historic structures for the generations to come;
- improve traffic conditions for our site and for our surrounding public areas;
- accommodate our rapidly growing visitor base and have more capacity to connect the underserved families and children in our region to our treasures;
- diversify revenue streams for the long-term survival of our institution;
- generate more than \$78 million of economic impact for our region; and
- create nearly 3,000 jobs - with hiring priority given to City residents.

For any questions about Selby Gardens’ Master Site Plan, please write to masterplan@selby.org.

Jennifer O. Rominiecki
President and CEO
Marie Selby Botanical Gardens