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May 31, 2023

\$1 million set aside for Midnight Pass

Author: **John Morton**

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By John Morton

Sarasota County’s request for \$1 million in state funding toward the possible restoration of Midnight Pass was honored during the Florida Legislature session that ended May 5.

It marks the first time the state has contributed toward the issue. Midnight Pass used to run between Siesta Key and Casey Key and connect the Gulf of Mexico with Little Sarasota Bay.

In 1983, Sarasota County gave permission to two homeowners on Siesta Key to fill-in the shifting pass and attempt to move it. They felt their properties were being threatened. No alternate flow was created, the result being the area turning into one continuous beach while the bay was choked off.

“It is very exciting ... this is the first time our elected leaders have unanimously supported cleaning Little Sarasota Bay and restoring the pass,” said Jamie Miller, spokesman for Midnight Pass Society II — the 501(c)(3) nonprofit group that two years ago resurrected the pursuit of a remedy. “These leaders include our local board of county commissioners, our county’s legislative delegation, and our U.S. Rep. Greg Steube.”

The money is represented in line item 1823-C of the 2023-24 budget.

The money would go toward research, design and permitting. The county must also decide on a plan of attack to re-establish a flow. Considerations include dredging a channel, making the waterway navigable for boats like it was before; creating a bridge-like culvert system; or running a pipe underground between the gulf and bay.

Having the state on board is critical in the area of permitting, county leaders have said. In fact, county attempts for permits in the past (1991 and 2008) were denied by the state’s Department of Environmental Protection. Since then, safeguards and standards have only increased.

At its December annual retreat, the Sarasota Board of County Commissioners made improvements to Little Sarasota Bay a priority, noting that Midnight Pass was part of that puzzle.

In April, David Tomasko, executive director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, addressed commissioners on the matter. He’ll be speaking publicly on the topic again at 4:30 to 6 p.m. June 1 at the meeting of the Siesta Key Association at St. Boniface Church, 5615 Midnight Pass Rd.



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Tags: **David Tomasko, Jamie Miller, Little Sarasota Bay, Midnight Pass, Midnight Pass Society II, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program**

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