

SARASOTA

Flood prevention tops Sarasota County's \$57M storm recovery spending



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Sarasota Herald-Tribune

Dec. 19, 2025, 12:54 p.m. ET

Key Points

- Sarasota County awarded \$57 million in hurricane recovery funds from a total of \$177.66 million requested.
 - A flood mitigation project to convert the Forest Lakes golf course into a regional floodplain received the largest award of \$15.6 million.
 - The city of Sarasota was granted \$13.5 million for flood resiliency at St. Armands, while its Whitaker Bayou project was denied.
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The Sarasota County Commission awarded \$57 million in [hurricane recovery funds](#) at a jam-packed meeting in Venice earlier this week.

There was about \$177.66 million in requested funding for projects, about three-times more than what officials actually had to disburse. They had to make those decisions in front of a gallery full of expectant and hopeful residents activists and specialists on Tuesday, Dec. 16.

That morning, the parking lot at the Robert L. Anderson Administration Center was packed bumper to bumper. Cars settled in the grass stretched all the way down the road to the Audubon nature center. There were several hours of public comment to begin the meeting - with about 80 speakers - who sounded off in support of the projects in their neighborhoods.

It was what Commissioner Ron Cutsinger called “an impossible task.”

There were 25 applications from 10 non-profits and 4 municipalities - including Sarasota County, the city of Sarasota, North Port, and Venice. County staff scored each application from 0 to 100 based on criteria such as project readiness, project impact, the financial plan, how much the proposal ties back to 2024 storms.

The biggest single award was \$15.6 million for a flood mitigation effort that would excavate the Forest Lakes golf course and turn it into a regional floodplain, similar to the [Celery Fields](#).

The city of Sarasota asked for about \$51 million; the largest chunk of that was for flood resiliency efforts at [St. Armands](#). That project received \$13.5 million from the county. The other major city project - a stormwater resiliency effort for Whitaker Bayou - was turned down.

Commissioners also agreed to allot \$3 million to help rebuild the Newtown Boys & Girls Club, a project that scored the highest of any non-profit proposal.

The highest-scored public project also got funding: \$3.06 million to expand the Southgate Regional Lift Station and help the county's wastewater collection.

The commission also approved:

- \$14.7 million to improve the 13.5-mile River Road Interstate Connector (the requested amount was \$28.01 million, scored at 85 by county staff).
- \$6 million for a Bahia Vista Flood Mitigation Project (scored at 28.33).
- \$261,000 for Family Promise of South Sarasota County to build its Shamrock Emergency Shelter (scored at 81.67).
- \$750,000 in improvements to the Venice YMCA campus (the requested amount was \$12.01 million, scored at 56.67)
- \$178,537 to purchase and install three bypass pumping stations in Sarasota County (scored at 49.33).

Resilient SRQ was initially formed for Sarasota County to disburse the federal hurricane recovery dollars for Hurricane Ian recovery. The program was bolstered

earlier this year with another \$210 million after Hurricanes [Debby](#), [Helene](#) and [Milton](#) struck the area in 2024.

70% of all the federal money, which came specifically from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, must benefit county residents with a “low to moderate income,” defined as those who pull in 80% of the area median income.

Of all the federal money, about \$57 million is meant for “general infrastructure and public facilities projects.” Local non-profits and municipalities are able to pitch their projects to the county to receive the funding.

The commission in November approved \$30 million for flood prevention projects along Hudson Bayou, Whitaker Bayou, and the Celery Fields under Resilient SRQ.

Not everybody got picked for the dance.

The largest request from a non-profit was about \$19.2 million for the Newtown Family Center (scored at 68.67), which the commission did not fulfill. Other rejected projects included:

- \$18.5 million for improvements to the Sarasota YMCA (scored at 57.67).
- \$3.85 million to improve Venice’s [Flamingo Ditch](#) (scored at 21.67).
- \$2.2 million for mental health housing (scored at 49.33).
- \$1.459 million for utility improvements to the Snook Haven campground (scored at 17).

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