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# THE NEWS-PRESS

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## \$3B Lee budget hikes spending, staff pay

Sheriff gets \$327.7M, but county fails to replenish its Conservation 20/20 land-buying program

**Charlie Whitehead**  
Fort Myers News-Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Lee County commissioners have put a stamp of approval on a \$3 billion coun-

ty budget, sending the spending package to a second and final public hearing. That hearing is scheduled for Sept. 16.

The overall county budget increases to \$3,017,623,112 from \$2,864,647,262,

or 5.34%. The budget includes \$1.23 billion for county operations, a 5.61% increase. That includes just less than \$450 million for the county constitutional officers: the sheriff, tax collector, property appraiser, clerk of courts and supervisor of elections. The sheriff's budget is far and away the largest at \$327.7 million.

The county's capital budget goes to slightly more than \$371 million, a jump of 19%. Other spending, for example, includes \$71 million on debt service and about \$129.5 million on insurance, taking the budget to more than \$2.3 billion, with \$705 million going into reserves.

See **BUDGET**, Page 6A



The view of The Boathouse from the Cape Coral Yacht Club beach, six months after it was ravaged by fire.

ROBYN GEORGE/THE NEWS-PRESS

## Boathouse, Cape Coral reach lease agreement

Future of popular tiki bar to be assured with council vote

**Robyn George**  
Fort Myers News-Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Good news on the Cape Coral foodie scene. An agreement has been reached to keep The Boathouse at the Cape Coral Yacht Club for another 30 years. The Kearns Restaurant Group, owners of the popular waterfront tiki bar and grill, reached a new deal with the city of Cape Coral a day before the Sept. 6, deadline.

See **BOATHOUSE**, Page 7A



The Boathouse Tiki Bar & Grill in Cape Coral is engulfed in flames on Oct. 17, 2024, just after reopening. PROVIDED BY MATT ROCHA

## Barrett: 'I'm nobody's justice,' not even Trump

Jurist discusses her views on high court role

**Maureen Groppe and Susan Page**  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – When Amy Coney Barrett was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court five years ago, her supporters assumed and her critics feared she would be a reliable vote for President Donald Trump.

But in an interview with USA TODAY, Barrett declared: "I'm nobody's justice."



Barrett

Indeed, she has been more independent than either side thought at first, and is now seen as an occasional swing vote on an admittedly conservative court.

That has surprised some analysts and outraged Trump's MAGA base. What would she do if Trump called her?

"I might wonder if he had the wrong number," Barrett said.

In a wide-ranging, hourlong interview about her new book, "Listening to the Law," being published Sept. 9 by Sentinel, Barrett discussed how she views her role, how being a working mother has helped her better understand some cases, and why she turned up the heat on one of her liberal colleagues.

### 'Listen to the law'

One of the former Notre Dame Law School professor's main goals in writing her book was to persuade Americans that the justices don't make their decisions based on personal preference or politics – partisan or otherwise. That might be a tough sell.

See **BARRETT**, Page 5A

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