

NEW NAVY COMMANDER INHERITS HOUSING CRISIS

By **Mandy Miles** - May 19, 2022



The Navy demolished 166 housing units at Sigsbee Park in May 2021 after they flooded in Hurricane Wilma in 2005 and sat empty for 16 years. CONTRIBUTED

So much for a learning curve.
Capt. Beth Regoli, the new commander of Naval Air Station Key West, barely had time to unpack before running headlong into Key West's housing crisis.

Regoli took the helm from Capt. Mark Sohaney on May 12 and immediately had plenty on her plate, with a May 15 news article on military.com about the lack of housing for junior sailors at NAS Key West.



The island's already critical housing shortage, which affects both military personnel and civilians, was exacerbated in recent weeks by the Navy's closure of two barracks buildings that can house up to 100 unmarried sailors.

The decision to close the barracks buildings for renovations occurred months ago under Sohaney's command. Regoli was not involved in the discussions or decision, and the military.com article published the day before her first official day on Monday.

But she is now tasked with finding solutions.

"Housing solutions are important as the health and safety of our sailors is a top priority," Regoli told the Keys Weekly on Wednesday. "I'm looking forward to continuing a great working relationship with the Public Private Venture office, and finding solutions to upgrading and renovating homes for our sailors and families."



The closure forced about 60 junior sailors, recently stationed to Key West, to compete for limited on-base housing options or for private rental apartments. In the wildly expensive Key West housing market, rents typically exceed the \$2,364 monthly housing allowance that junior sailors with no dependents receive in Key West.

With average rents for a one-bedroom apartment in Key West hovering around \$3,000, sailors willing to pay the difference between their allowance and their rent still



must find an available unit — and come up with first and last months' rent and a security deposit.

"The next option — privatized base housing — is also a nonstarter for young, single sailors," the article states.

Naval Air Station Key West spokeswoman Danette Baso Silvers acknowledged to military.com that the current wait-list for privatized housing 'can be up to four months.'

"In the interim, Silvers added, the Navy is making available vacation-rental style trailers on military property, but sailors are charged the same rate as vacationing military personnel — \$127 a day or \$3,810 per month. Split between two sailors, the rent falls within their housing allowance. Of the 60 sailors impacted by the barracks closure, only 19 have yet to find alternative housing, Silvers told military.com."

Navy demolished, but didn't replace 166 units at Sigsbee,



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Closure of the two barracks buildings isn't the only housing issue at Naval Air Station Key West, where 166 townhomes at Sigsbee Park sat empty and unused for more than a decade after being flooded by Hurricane Wilma in 2005.

The Key West city commission in 2016 asked Navy personnel to expedite the repair or replacement of those units. Returning those 166 units to active use for military personnel would alleviate the competition between military members and civilians for private rental housing, City Commissioner Sam Kaufman said at the time.

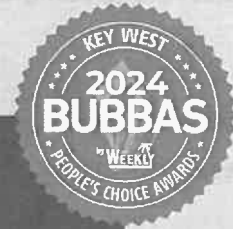
Five years later, in May 2021, the Navy demolished those 166 townhomes at Sigsbee Park, and has yet to replace them. The Naval Facilities Command Southeast, which manages navy properties, solicited proposals from interested developers. Those proposals were due in December 2021.

"Now there are 18.13 acres of green space. We are awaiting a feasibility study and then leadership will be able to determine options for the property," Silvers said on Wednesday, but did not have a timeline for the feasibility study.

"I'm looking forward to the next steps for the 18.13 acres on Sigsbee Park so we can determine options for use of that property," Regoli added.

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Mandy Miles drops stuff, breaks things and falls down more than any adult should. An award-winning writer, reporter and columnist, she's been stringing words together in Key West since 1998. "Local news is crucial," she says. "It informs and connects a community. It prompts conversation. It gets people involved, holds people accountable. The Keys Weekly takes its responsibility seriously. Our owners are raising families in Key West & Marathon. Our writers live in the communities we cover - Key West, Marathon & the Upper Keys. We respect our readers. We question our leaders. We believe in the Florida Keys community. And we like to have a good time." Mandy's married to a saintly — and handy — fishing captain, and can't imagine living anywhere else.