

September 10, 2022

Ms Patti McLauchlin

City Manager

Mr. Todd Stoughton

Assistant City Manager

City of Key West

Regarding: Hawks Missile Site (areas owned or controlled by the City of Key West around Key West International Airport and adjacent and contiguous to City of Key West Parks and Recreation Facilities (Little Hamaca Park and White Crown Pigeon Reserve)

We understand from your update at the September 7<sup>th</sup> City Commission Meeting that you expect to meet in coming weeks with the leadership of Monroe County to begin discussions and negotiations related to a potential agreement to swap City owned and controlled properties known as the Hawks Missile Site for the County owned area known as Higgs Beach (the Parks Swap) .

As you may recall, you attended our February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (the Board) Meeting along with Richard Strickland, the Director of Airports for Monroe County. At that meeting, the two of you informed the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board of your plans to enter negotiations regarding the Parks Swap. The entire conversation occurs in the first 12 minutes of that meeting video playback.

As a result of that discussion, the Board agreed to postpone an action item and vote (attached) which highlighted the potential desired uses of this large unspoiled and underutilized area from a Parks and Recreation perspective. This postponed action item resulted from a year of public input and discussions by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board that included specific agenda items related to the Hawks Missile Site at the Board's meetings on March 29, 2021, April 29, 2021, September 22, 2021, October 28, 2021, and December 22, 2021. The Board postponement related to a recommendation that the City Commission retain a consultant to prepare a Master Plan to govern the future use of the Hawks Missile Site. The recommendation included the need for any negotiations to preserve the use of the Hawks Missile Site for passive recreation and for the benefit of the residents of the City of Key West for multi-use bike and recreation paths from Government Road to Las Salinas and Smather's Beach and for other purposes such as a kayak launch, history exhibits, kids activities and a bike park.

In addition, we understand that there is significant interest and concern from the public and adjacent Key West residents in the Parks Swap from two other perspectives: (1) restricting and minimizing any potential negative impacts to residents quality of life from potential future expansions of Key West International Airport and (2) the financial implications and any additional costs and investment the City of Key West may assume related to owning and operating Higgs Beach Park.

We wish you much success in your negotiations and ask that you keep this feedback in mind as you work towards achieving this important transaction.

Respectfully submitted,

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

## **Proposed Recommendation for the City Commission on the Hawks Missile Site Area**

### **Background:**

We would strongly encourage the City Commission to consider the following with respect to the Hawks Missile Site Area:

Along with the contiguous City Parks known as the White Crown Pigeon Reserve and Little Hamaca Park along Government Road, the Hawks Missile Site Area is the largest undeveloped open space area controlled by the City and is currently significantly underutilized by the residents and visitors of Key West

It is clear from the results of the recent consultant's report that all activities considered for the area should be restricted to passive activities (no recreation fields)

Some of the passive activities that the Parks and Recreation Board has discussed in the past to better utilize this very valuable City asset include:

- Multi-use bike and recreation paths to connect access to the area to South Roosevelt Blvd at both Key West By the Sea and at the Salt Ponds Condos and Apartments (as proposed in the Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan)
- Kyak Launch
- History exhibits to include both the production of salt and the role of the area in the Hawks Missile Crisis
- Kids activities such as a small adventure park that may include rock climbing walls and a short low impact zip line
- Bike park

Although the Monroe County Airports Authority has recently indicated an interest in acquiring a portion of this area, we believe that such proposal should only be considered if:

- (1) it is structured in such a way to minimize the amount of land relinquished and any disruption to the City's planned potential future uses described above
- (2) that the County pay full market value for any land transferred with such funding retained for use by the City's Parks and Recreation towards the cost of future improvement and development of the area

### **Action Item:**

**The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board recommends that the City Commission find funding to retain a Consultant with significant Parks Planning experience to assist the City in preparing a long-term Master Plan to guide future development of the Hawks Missile Site Area, including the provision for holding public workshops and obtaining significant public input, and for assistance in developing funding sources to fund the development**