

Historic Florida Keys Foundation

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Diane E. Silvia, Ph.D., RPA

March 9, 2018

The City of Key West
Ronald Wampler, CFM; Director of Building
P. O. Box 1409
Key West, FL 33041

Re: Unsafe structures: 5 Buildings at KW Diesel Generating Plant

Dear The City of Key West and Mr. Wampler:

I am Diane Silvia, Executive Director of the Historic Florida Keys Foundation. The mission of the Foundation is to "promote historic preservation in the Florida Keys through education, advocacy, collaboration and stewardship". I received your letter dated February 22nd concerning the five buildings at the Key West Diesel Generating Plant and am responding to your written notice of possible demolition in accordance with City Ordinance 14-76. Please be advised we do intend to assist the owner occupier consider all options to retain, renovate and repurpose as much of the property as is possible.

As a State of Florida licensed building inspector and plans examiner I do understand life safety is always the number one priority. As the Chief Building Official you are certainly correct to request action be taken to protect citizens and their properties. I am also a Historic Preservationist and always feel demolition should always be the last resort.

I agree with everything said in the Key West Citizen Editorial dated February 24-25, 2018. The City of Key West has an opportunity to use these structures for the public good, which is the reason the citizens of Key West voted to acquire them. With all the recent talk about affordable housing, would this not make an ideal location, here is Old Town, where there is a demand for employees. Locating affordable housing outside Key West requires commuting. At this location, alternate means of travel become feasible. The Homeless Shelter could then be located on one of the City's parcels on Stock Island.

Look at what the City has accomplished with your new City Hall. You have a state of the art building inside a historic envelope. The State of Florida is providing funding for affordable housing this year. Could some of these funds be used here? Of course, an undertaking like this takes time and funding, but once the buildings are stabilized

the build-outs could occur in phases. Affordable units could be leased or sold to individuals and deed restricted. Look at the demand and how quickly the Railroad Condominiums were occupied.

Another great use for a building (Building 2) on the property is to create a Bahama Village Museum. The history of the families and culture of Bahama Village could be highlighted along with the history of the Diesel Generating Plant. The TDC and the Bureau of Historic Preservation are excellent sources of brick and mortar funding for museums.

The City's Historic Preservation Planner, Enid Torregrosa-Silva has done a fabulous job thoroughly researching this complex. Most would agree with her and the Building Official that Building 5, the small concrete structure should be demolished as it is not of the period of significance and blocks access for fire safety.

The Chief Building Official has ordered the repair of Buildings 1 and 2 and has included a list of the basic repairs required. I believe most will agree that Buildings 1 and 2 are historically significant and must be saved. That leaves the fate of Buildings 3 and 4 in question. The City Commission has done the right thing to send this complex of buildings to HARC for review. I would like to request a property showing so the HARC Commissioners can view the interior of these buildings, even if for safety reasons, it means peeking through a doorway. This is the only way they can make an informed recommendation. This could be done as an advertised workshop to stay in compliance with the Sunshine Law.

If the City chooses to pursue funding for restoration and repair of these buildings I am happy to help with grant writing and letters of recommendation.

Sincerely,

Diane Silvia