

February 4, 2019

To: Mayor Teri Johnston and Key West City Commission
CC: City Manager Jim Scholl

Dear Mayor Johnston, City Commission and City Manager,

The Board of Directors of the Key West Art & Historical Society voted to forward their opposition to the proposed city lease to the Fury Watersports for the space located in the Thompson Fish House at the Historic Seaport.

Several factors steered the Board's decision, including the historic significance of the property versus the proposed use, the lack of HARC involvement in the process and the limited amount of time the RFP was advertised.

The Thompson Fish House, the adjoining walkway and public space are all part of the property that is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historically, the Thompson Fish House, the adjacent Turtle Cannery, the pier and docks are significant for their association with the island's fishing and turtling industries, essential to Key West's early development. The origins of the fishing industry can be traced to Spanish fishermen from Cuba who were frequenting the Keys as early as 1780. Shipments of salted fish to Havana via Key West schooners also became important to the island's economy. Additionally, Norberg Thompson, the owner of the Thompson Fish House, served as Key West Mayor, City Council member and County Commissioner.

It is our concern that the proposal from Fury Watersports, even with the inclusion of a 'museum', will detract from the historic importance of property and its role in Key West's early development.

Given the property's history and National Register of Historic Places listing, the city's Historic Architectural Review Commission, per the city's Comprehensive Plan, should have reviewed any new plans or proposals associated with the property to ensure the character, integrity, and appearance of Key West's historic district is well-preserved.

It is our understanding that the issuance of the RFP was published for one day. Said Public Notice stated the wrong dock, and did not include the use of adjacent dock space or the front pier. If the RFP was more widely-publicized there would have been a greater chance for other local businesses or interested parties to draft and submit proposals.

We hope that commission will seek HARC's input and review the RFP process for the property prior to voting on the proposal. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Key West Art & Historical Society's Board of Directors
Recused: Directors Sam Kaufman, Enid Torregrosa, John Paul Castro and Jay Hall

CC: Michael F. Gieda
Executive Director