



July 21, 2019

Dear Mayor Johnston and City Commissioners:

We understand that there is discussion regarding charging beach use fees for weddings at Smather's Beach.

The suggested fees, at least, seem reasonable. However, the implementation of this program, will end up being just about impossible .

We have been through this twice now. Once, in old City Hall, with a “full house” and full Commission 10 years ago, and again a few years ago at the Eco Discovery Center with then Commissioners Teri Johnston and Tony Yaniz. We believe five attended that workshop and no public at all.

Both times that this subject has come up, it has also ended the same way. In the interest of your time, allow us to provide you with the results of both of those workshops:

- There are no entrance / exit gates at Smathers Beach. Consequently, there is absolutely no control over who comes and goes.
- The only way to enforce any beach use fees for couples getting married on the beach, would have to be by paid City employees walking the full length of the beach constantly, seven days a week, **especially** weekends and holidays. It would hardly be cost effective for the city to even consider that. These weddings are not hours long, they span from 10 minutes to an hour maximum.
- Those of us who still remain here doing beach weddings, will be directly, negatively impacted by any beach fees. Those many out of town wedding planners from Miami, Homestead and Marathon who come on weekends, set up, do a couple of weddings and leave will NOT be impacted. There is no way that you will ever catch them or enforce what they are doing. So we will be the losers.
- Honestly, there is no way for wedding planners to know, until a wedding occurs, exactly how many will attend.
- It is, however, very safe to assume that there are rarely if ever weddings on Smathers Beach anymore with 50 or more people. In fact, these days more than 50% of Smathers Beach weddings are couples only or a couple with a few family members. Very intimate gatherings.
- In addition, over the past 3 years, between the Zika virus scare and Hurricane Irma the wedding

business in Key West, is down over 60%, and hasn't recovered. It may never recover.

- The larger, over 50 person weddings, for the most part, no longer come to Key West. They don't come to Smathers Beach and us and not to the Key West resorts. Those days are gone. Over the past 3 or 4 years, they are mostly all going to Key Largo, Islamorada and Tavernier resorts and private waterfront homes. Ask any hotel here how their wedding business is. The answer usually is, "What wedding business?"
- The "large" wedding event couple wouldn't think of being married on a "public" beach, and they almost exclusively use a resort or private property where everything is at one easy location and much more private.
- Smather's Beach wedding clients, conversely, can't afford the large resort prices. They have much lower budgets and use planners like us to get married with an arch and a few decorations on a public beach. **But they do stay here, eat here and pay for attractions and activities here.**

IMPLEMENTATION: How will those new fees, per wedding, be collected? At the last two workshops, staffing was a big sticking point. How are you going to possibly collect funds and issue some kind of permit for each and every wedding? WHO is going to do it?

- At the last 2 workshops we suggested an ONLINE system. But the City determined that would be way too complicated and expensive, requiring staffing, specific programming, and 24/7 monitoring.
- Having to continually go to City Hall to get permits just won't happen. Planners will just take their chances, naturally assuming that actual enforcement won't happen, just like it doesn't for alcohol, camping, homeless on the beach, dogs on the beach, nudity, etc. There has never been any enforcement. How will you let the do-it-yourself couple know of this new development? There are many of those on Smathers Beach as well, and they are not from this area.
- What about liability insurance? You would also have to require any planner to provide you with proof of insurance. How would you get that information from the do-it-yourself couples?
- At the end of the day, there are really only four or five planners who use Smathers Beach and none of us are getting rich.

We hope that this helps. Again, the fees suggested are fair, just impossible to enforce. No one is saying don't charge a reasonable fee. What everyone has said is please, don't make our jobs any more difficult and time consuming than they already are.

If you would like us to come in and speak to any of these points or answer any questions during the workshops, we would be happy to do you at your request.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ray and Eileen Jensen
Weddings To Go LLC