



## **Historic Architectural Review Commission**

**Recommendations for the protection, adaptive use, tourism, income generating, and vision towards the future for the remaining historic Key West Bight Site: Turtle Kraals, Thompson Fish House, Turtles Canary, and Pier C all as a complex listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places.**

### **Background**

In May 15, 2019, the Historic Architectural Review Commission and the Key West Bight Board held a workshop to discuss recommendations pertaining to the Key West Bight site known as Thompson Fish House complex, specifically their protection, adaptive use, tourism, income generating, and vision towards the future. As part of the workshop, recommendations are to be presented for approval and will then be submitted to City Commission, as the owners of the property in question.

## **Facts**

### **1. Certified Local Government Requirements**

In 1991, the Florida State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service approved the City as a Certified Local Government (CLG). The city still has good standing as a CLG.

Under Resolution 91-250, the City authorized the execution of the CLG agreement. Under the agreement, the city shall follow a public policy of protection, preserving, and planning, for the protection and preservation of resources of historical, architectural, and archaeological value within its jurisdiction

### **2. Creation of the Historic Architectural Review Commission**

In 1998, the Historic Architectural Review Commission was created under the City Charter.

### **3. Land Development Regulations**

Chapter 102 of the Land Development Regulations contains specific regulations of HARC. Created by the City Charter, HARC is the city agency charged with the preservation of the character and the appearance of the historic preservation districts and of all buildings, structures, and sites for which the code delegates their power and authority.

### **4. City's Comprehensive Plan**

Florida Statutes requires that the Future Land Use Element of a local government's comprehensive plan include criteria to be used to ensure the protection of natural and historic resources. The City's Comprehensive Plan includes a Historic Preservation Element that establishes goals, objectives, and policies. It also requires that the Housing Element of a plan provide for the identification of historically significant housing for purposes of conservation

and rehabilitation. Protection and preservation of historic buildings and structures under the city ownership and public participation on issues related to historic preservation are among many of the goals established under the plan, which are significant to understand the city's public policy in historic preservation.

**5. The National Register of Historic Places recognizes Key West as a Historic District. The Key West Bight is part of the local and National Historic District (NRHP).**

The Thompson Fish House Complex is individually listed in the NRHP. HARC has jurisdiction in the exterior and interiors of all structures and sites individually listed in the NRHP

**The Thompson Fish House**

The Thompson Fish House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in June 24, 1994, as one of the two buildings of the historic site known as Thompson Fish House, Turtle Cannery and Kraals. In addition, and as part of the listing three structures are recognized; the concrete main pier (today known as Pier c), the connecting wooden docks around the buildings, and the two turtle kraals separated by the cannery.

The areas of significance of the complex are commerce, maritime history, and architecture, and the period of significance is from circa 1918 to 1944. The site is also significant through association with Norberg Thompson. The following excerpts are from the NRHP nomination under the historic significant statement:

"The Thompson Fish House, Turtle Cannery and Kraals, were recently purchased by the City of Key West in order to preserve the area, to save it from the possibility of massive development, and to provide recognition of the maritime trades so important in Key West's history."

The nomination's significance statement ends with the following sentence:

"Walking the pier and viewing these buildings in their original setting and without adjacent modern development, is truly a trip back in time, to an era of major importance and significance to Key West and the State of Florida."

The Thompson Fish House underwent reconstruction for all exterior walls, as the state of deterioration of the exterior walls were beyond repairs. The southern portion of the building is vacant and still has remnants of an exhibition of the Dry Tortugas National Park and Fort Jefferson & Key West Bight Interpretative Center. That portion of the building does not have air conditioning or restrooms. The exhibition obtained approval from HARC in 2012.

#### **Concrete Main Pier - Dock C**

Included as part of the nomination to the NRHP, is the Concrete Main Pier, or Dock C. The Key West Bight Master Plan, dated 1994 and its Community Impact Assessment Statement address the proposed changes to Dock C, as it *"will be renovated to serve the historical structures and increase dock width around the Fish House. A +/- 150 foot extension will provide fuel facilities.. The extended pier will allow separation of fueling operations from the public access and will accommodate up to 200 foot vessels. A central office will be located in the Fish House"*. Under the Master Plan a table containing the proposed Key West Bight Marina- Approximate Slip Mix, Dock C is described as a *"fuel dock and historic vessels"*. The Master Plan also states, *"..the location of specific vessel type and use areas will be dictated by the market and by the Bight Management"*.

Currently Dock C is the only public fuel dock in the area that serves both, diesel and regular fuel. The proposed expansion of Pier C was built, as proposed, and as an extension to the north of the historic dock. The long fuel hoses can extend the length of the entire Dock's east side. The Dock Masters' office is located at the rear portion of the Thompson Fish House. The Dock Master's facilities include bathrooms for staff only and the offices are air-conditioned.

### **Recommendations**

The Historic Architectural Review Commission, acting as an advisory agency for the City Commission, which is also the owner of the buildings and structures in question, renders the following opinions and recommendations based in public discussion and professional knowledge in various fields of architecture, historic preservation, and engineering:

1. **"This is a singular opportunity for the City as this is a unique waterfront with historic buildings."**

The property known as the Key West Bight is not only within the designated Key West Historic District, but contains structures and buildings individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as well as buildings and structures recognized as contributing resources to the district. The historic buildings and structures in the Key West Bight shall be preserved and protected. The Thompson Fish House complex is the oldest remaining historic facility that have kept its integrity on the bight. As such, it reinforces the current brand name of *Key West Historic Seaport*. Their significance surpasses the local history, as

the complex when listed in the National Register of Historic Places was in dire disrepair.

**2. "The City's Comprehensive Plan requires public participation on historic preservation issues." "Budget for next Fiscal Year will include revisions to the Master Plan."**

The current Key West Bight Master Plan dates from 1994 and approved by the Planning Board and City Commission in 1998. Many of the architectural and urban recommendations of the Master Plan have been implemented; nevertheless, specifics as to the adaptive use of the Thompson Fish House, Turtles Kraals, and dock usage were never specified or fulfilled: These following paragraphs are from the 1994 Key West Bight Master Plan:

*"Margaret Street is one of the significant arrival points into the Bight and waterfront area. The Margaret Street plaza will contain a memorial to Booty Singleton in honor of his development of the shrimping industry in Key West. This plaza anchors the historical waterfront dock area, comprised of the cannery, kraals, fish house, and historical boat display. The plaza will be physically extended to incorporate a multi-use central parking area designed to accommodate a trolley drop off-pick up station, limited and handicap parking, and special events such as farmer's markets and entertainment as added attractions. The entire area will be distinguished by special paving, seating, lighting [,] and accent planting at the edges. The main plaza will be constructed to accept large tent covering for special events."*

*"Shrimp, sponge and green turtle were once abundant and major maritime industries in Key West. The old Turtle Kraals, Cannery [,] and Fish House still remain and the city has obtained a grant to design construction documents for the restoration of these historical structures. The Master Plan suggests that the cannery be restored as a small museum for display of information regarding the green turtle industry. Old working shrimp and sponge boats may be docked adjacent to the cannery as additional historical attractions. These historic elements should create a strong public attraction to The Bight area."*

It is essential that the current Key West Bight Master Plan be revised and updated; after 25 years and a paid bond, the vision and objectives of the Master Plan should be reflective of today's and future goals for the waterfront property. HARC

Staff and Commission members must be an integral part of the revisions and update of the Key West Bight Master Plan. This will secure that the vision, goals, and objectives established for the property are consistent with HARC and the Secretary of the Interior's regulations.

**3. "Keep the historic character and flavor of the working waterfront." "Shops to allow woodworking." "Someone working on a historic vessel or a mast."**

All new proposed adapted use must take into consideration the historic significance of each building and structure. Each building and site has its own individual character and identity. Because a building is historic, it is not true that it can only be adapted as a museum. The best adaptive use is always one that requires the least possible changes to the building and its character. It is also valid that as much as possible the new use relates to the history and significance of the structure, the more appropriate it will be to the building and surrounding historic context.

**4. "City was built through maritime enterprises and this is not celebrated enough." "Honor the Maritime Industry."**

Any adaptive use for any building or structure must take into consideration its historic surrounding context; waterfront property, pedestrian quality, and access to the property, character-defining features of each building and structure, and the conveying tale and story of each building as part of the Key West Bight. The city must establish a list of possible new uses that cannot affect the character of a building, structure, or site, giving priority to those proposals that are related with the historic use of the property, building, or structure.

**5. "Can the building be equipped with air conditioner?"**

Yes, air conditioning equipment can be installed at the Thompson Fish House. All proposed adaptive use must take into consideration the integrity of a historic building, structure, and site. Necessary infrastructure equipment for a new proposed use must be sensitive to the building form and character-defining features must be taken into consideration while designing any mechanical equipment.

**6. "Take into consideration a sensible proposal that may not generate enough revenue to the city." "Proposals that may not produce enough income may apply for TIFF Funds." "Best use for the property."**

Although the prevue of HARC does not include analysis of revenues for the City, during the workshop it was recommended that the city must understand that a proposed adaptive use may be more sensitive to a building, to its history and to the community needs, but the enterprise may not generate enough revenue for the city. A balance between what is appropriate vs. income generation must be present during the decision making for a final tenant and use.

**7. "Better environment for creative thinking." "Provide clear constraints of what may be allowed to a building, structure, or site."**

Historic buildings are part of our society, and we as such are the current stewards. The historic use of many of the buildings that had survived all this years in the waterfront may not be feasible as the use no longer exists or is not achievable. Nevertheless, the surrounding environment, the history of the property and site, the preservation and protection of the building or structure and the needs of the



community all shall be considered by each application promoting new use. In a near future imaginable uses may be created, but a historic building transcends the generational time.

#### **8. Character-defining features of each building and structure.**

The following features of buildings and structures are recognized as character defining elements of each building and structure through their nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Alterations, obscuring or changing those features are ill advised.

##### **Thompson Fish House**

Building height - One and a half story.

Building gable roof- Full front frame gable covered with corrugated metal with mill finish. A shed roof dormer is located on the west side of the gable roof. No openings to the roof or changes to the roof form or to the dormer shall be permitted.

Building exterior - Poured concrete with wood form marks, unpainted concrete. The gable ends are sheathed with tongue and groove siding- horizontal at the south wall and vertical at the north wall. Wood siding must be kept unpainted. Windows and doors fenestrations must remain intact in size, shape, and location. Concrete walls shall not be painted.

Main entrance of the building faces south.

Building form shall not be altered.

Building Interior - Interior walls have stucco finish and floors are wooden planks. Any interior alterations must keep the current *reading* of a full floor to ridge. The existing

mezzanine area was added circa 1978. Any new walls, partitions, or other elements should be removable and should read as a *floating element* in the one room space. Roof structural elements should be kept exposed.

### **Turtle Cannery Building**

Building Height - One-story

Building gable roof - Full side gable covered with corrugated metal panels. No openings to the roof or changes in the roof form shall be permitted.

Building exterior - Wood siding on the eastern portion and north facade of the building should be kept unpainted. Western portion of the building has vertical metal corrugated siding with unpainted mill finish. Windows and doors fenestrations shall not be changed in size, shape, or location.

Main façade of the building faces east, which was an addition of an uncertain date, but older than sixty years.

Building Interior - Interior walls are sheathed with tongue and groove unpainted boards. Ceiling is covered with tongue and groove boards running the length of the building. Floors are 2" by 8" wooden planks. Any new walls or partitions should be removable and should read as a *floating element* in the one room space. Painting interior wood walls shall not be allowed.

### **Connecting dock/ piers**

Main dock - Concrete pier- Expanded on its east and north side to provide space for fueling pumps. Main dock shall be kept with its current unpainted concrete finish. Any replacement of piles must match existing in size, profile and material.

Docks - Wooden piles and timber framing. Replaced over the years with lumber of contemporary dimensions. Docks have been extended along the north and west. Replacement of decking boards must be done in wood.

Any pile replacements must be made in wood and shall match existing ones in profile and height.

**Turtle Kraals (pens)**

They bound the Turtle Cannery Building on its north and south. The north kraal consists of lines of concrete piles approximately 7" square, tied together along the full length of each row with 2" by 8" wood members bolted together. The piles extend from the ocean bottom to the point of high water level concrete piles. The south kraal consists of rubble stone and concrete retaining walls. These unique elements shall not be covered or demolished.

Any proposed alteration or changes to any of the preceding buildings and structures shall comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation as well as the Historic Architectural Guidelines. Any proposed signage, electrical, or mechanical additions or changes shall be also evaluated for compliance.