

The Frederick Douglass School Black Educators' Memorial Project, Inc.



**P. O. Box 5043
Key West, Florida 33045**

To: Mayor Craig Cates, City of Key West

Date: January 13, 2016

Re: Information Relative to Meeting on January 14, 2016

Dear Mayor Cates:

On behalf of the Steering Team for the Frederick Douglass School Black Educators' Memorial Project, I am submitting this letter for your review prior to our scheduled meeting on January 14th with you to discuss our interests in the matter regarding the discussions we have had over the last 5 years with Commissioner Clayton Lopez regarding the use of the Band Room to establish a center and museum for the preservation of the history, legacy, and culture of the indigenous people of the island of Key West, a group that includes the people of African/Bahamian/Cuban/Spanish/Chinese American descent.

We hope to speak, too, for all of the indigenous people in our community whose families have lived on the island, not just in Bahama Village, but in surrounding areas, as well, since the 1800s. Our group has been working in the community since 2010, with the expressed purpose of erecting a public memorial to honor the Black Educators of Frederick Douglass School. However, as our work progressed, out of that purpose grew a bigger vision, and a major element of that vision is why we feel that this meeting with you, Mayor Cates, is so very important.

Five years ago, we approached Commissioner Lopez with the idea of establishing a museum and cultural center to honor the legacy, the history, and the culture of the indigenous peoples of African, Bahamian, Cuban, Chinese, and Spanish American descent. We asked for his help in securing the Band Room, since it was the only building left that was vacant and was a very important part of our people's educational history, our social and cultural upbringing, and part of the rich legacy that families of Douglass School and Bahama Village contributed to the success today of our entire island community. It is that legacy that forms a part of the backbone of the island's tourism and enriches the story of Key West that lures so many people here to participate in what is perceived as a place in America that offers our very own "taste of the Caribbean," all influenced by our people's dynamic history and culture and contributions to the broader Key West history and culture.

In five years of meetings and talks with Commissioner Lopez, and our constant reminder to him "that our people needed that building, that they needed it to help lift their souls and spirits up, that they needed one place on the island that would be part of posterity, the only place left where they would be remembered, where their history would be stored, a place that would serve as a beacon of hope to all of the losses that they have experienced thus far, in property, dignity, and place," he promised that he would help us make sure that the Band Room Building would be secured for the people and that he would help us make that happen. In one instance, Commissioner Lopez shared with us, when he was asked about

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funding for the building and the museum to do a structural study, that there was an amount of \$60,000 that he thought he could apply for to the City to pay for the study.

We know that legal proceedings have happened to secure the Band Room Building for the Health Department, and we would like the record to note that we do not, emphatically, oppose the Health Department in this endeavor, for more reasons than one. The Health Department has become one of our major partners in the work that we have done in Bahama Village with families, children and youth, with the elders, and with the entire Key West community with the support of now retired Joan Higgs, Mary Vanden Brook, and Alison Morales Kerr. Their Bahama Village 2012 Needs Study has served as the statistical backbone for our community building work over the last 5 years!

Further, we know that that decision to lease the Band Room Building was made without Commissioner Lopez including his promise to our organization in the discussion. We know that Commissioner Lopez publicly stated that he had never made a promise to help us secure the building, though he made it many times over the last 5 years, with witnesses present, and already we have forgiven him for that.

What we would like is for this injustice to be rectified and it is to you, Mayor Cates, the City Commissioners, and the citizens of Key West, that we appeal for your help so that the indigenous people of this island be given, rightfully, either the Band Room, as promised, or another building to house the Ellen W. Sanchez Center and Museum for the Preservation of Indigenous People of Key West.

I, John Wilson Smith, and Detra Saunders Fisher look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Sincerely,

Dr. Virginia Burgohy Irving

Project Facilitator

The Frederick Douglass School Black Educators Memorial Project, Inc.

Copy to: City Commissioners: Jimmy Weekley, Samuel Kaufman, Billy Wardlow, Richard Payne, Margaret Romero, Clayton Lopez

City Manager: Jim Scholl

City Planner: Thaddeus Cohen

ATTACHMENT: January 2011 Proposed Plan for Ellen Welters Sanchez Center



"It is alright to go back for that which is forgotten." (Ghanaian Saying)

We are a 501(c)3 charitable organization granted tax exempt status by IRS. (EIN#: 35-2413250)

The Ellen W. Sanchez Center
For
The Preservation of Indigenous Culture of Bahama Village & Surrounding Areas
(Proposed)

Established by the Steering Committee of The Frederick Douglass School Black Educators' Memorial Project, The Ellen W. Sanchez Center for the Preservation of African/Bahamian/Cuban/Chinese/Spanish American Culture, indigenous to Bahama Village & Surrounding Areas, will oversee the preservation of said cultural groups from 1827 – Present.

We envision the Center, initially with a role of:

- coordinating cultural and values driven educational programs that will target members of the community from birth to old age and are specifically and intentionally designed to enhance the well-being, not just of the members of the Bahama Village community, but, also, members of the broader community.
- serving as host to a Community Museum and Library that will house books, artifacts and historical information specific to these cultural groups and community, a Photo Gallery of Elders, living and present, and a Photo Gallery of The Image of the Child.
- providing the resources for a training and dissemination center for community building, using a dialogic process based on the international World Café model for community dialogue and conversation.
- acting as a wellspring for infusing and energizing the members of the Bahama Village community with continuous opportunities for development, renewal of creative ideas, and healthy community growth in collaboration with local partners.

The specific goals for The Ellen W. Sanchez Center will be:

1. To develop and encourage collaboration with local education and service groups, public and private business, and families of The Bahama Village Community that will support youth activities promoting the welfare of said community.
2. To develop and implement an education model that will support the well being of the youth in the Bahama Village Community in the City of Key West.
3. To provide a forum for historical, cultural, and educational enrichment using the Douglass School Community Center as a focal point.
4. To conduct legal activities that may from time to time be found appropriate to accomplish the purposes of the Memorial Project.



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January 11, 2011