



MEMORANDUM

Date: October 12, 2023

To: Albert P. Childress
City Manager

From: Katie Halloran
Planning Director

Subject: **Quarterly Presentation of the College of the Florida Keys Water Quality Monitoring Partnership.**

Introduction

One of the goals of the Key West Forward Strategic Plan is to improve water quality and the cleanliness of our near shore waters. The City has partnered with the College of the Florida Keys (“the College”), specifically Dr. Patrick Rice, to advance and expand water quality monitoring so that the City may make sound decisions to improve those conditions. Dr. Rice is the Chief Science and Research officer at the College.

As part of this partnership, the College will present quarterly updates as to ongoing field work and a final report 90 days after the current grant terminates, expected June 30, 2024.

Background

In the fall of 2020, the College began sampling water quality within the Key West Harbor to capture the effects of an absence of cruise ships during the Covid shutdown. Based on funding priorities set by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Water Quality Protection Program Steering Committee (WQPP), the College then received a grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to expand the monitoring stations and sampling post Covid.

In 2021, the City of Key West surveyed its residents for the creation of a Strategic Plan, finalized in August of that year. Environmental Protection of Nearshore Waters was fourth out of six community priorities that came from that survey effort. Per Strategic Plan action items, City staff met with Dr. Rice, as well as technical experts from the WQPP to determine sampling priorities and a budget, which was proposed in April of 2022 and approved for FY23.

During the summer of 2022, the City partnered with the College on a 2nd EPA grant proposal to expand the Key West Harbor monitoring and add the City’s sampling priorities (Mooring Fields,

Mt Trashmore and Ft. Zach, Higgs, and Smathers Beaches). The EPA announced that the College had been awarded the 2nd grant in December of 2022.

On April 18, 2023, the City Commission approved an interlocal agreement with the College to assign those FY23 funds to extend the timing and scope of the Key West Harbor monitoring as well as add new monitoring areas of interest named in the EPA grant.

The City and College have continued to meet with the WQPP Steering Committee and have completed a draft Key West Water Quality Improvement Plan, which was presented at the September 14th Commission meeting.

Procurement

On April 5th, 2022, the Commission passed an ordinance to establish a funding mechanism for a Coral Reef Restoration Fund and water quality testing from the \$1M+ the City annually received from cruise ships.

In FY23, the City set aside \$180,000.00 in new funds for water quality partnerships with the College of the Florida Keys.

For FY24, the budget currently reserves \$40,000 for water quality monitoring with the College, the remainder of the project being funded by the second EPA grant.