

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

I'm writing to you to ask for your help with the issue we brought in front of you last month at our hearing. Unfortunately, our efforts to work collaboratively with the planning department have not resulted in a resolution as suggested by the Board of Adjustment at our previous hearing. So we will be continuing our appeal to the planning department's decision once again this week. On our behalf, Mr. Trepanier attempted to contact the city to work towards a solution several times over the last month. Immediately after last month's hearing he received a response with 4 requests. We immediately fulfilled those requests to which the only response was acknowledgement of receipt. After not receiving further communication or guidance from planning, Mr. Trepanier reached out last week and was informed by phone that the planning department's decision on the matter had not changed and there was no resolution outside of the appeal process.

As a lifelong resident of Key West and a proud descendant of the family that built Kino Plaza 48 years ago, I've always taken great pride in contributing to this community — both through our family business and through our continued investment in preserving its local character. This process has been long and discouraging, and I say that not out of anger, but out of deep concern for how difficult it has become for local, long-standing family businesses to navigate these issues. It sometimes feels as though the system is unintentionally structured in ways that make it difficult for small, community-based businesses to succeed — and that's truly disheartening for those of us who have invested our lives into this town. I am a proud descendant of the legacy my grandparents built 59 Years ago. They came from Cuba in 1959 with absolutely nothing left of the business and life they built there. When they got to Key West, my grandfather immediately started working hard, doing any type of jobs he could to not only provide for his wife and children but to also save up enough money to rebuild the business that they lost to Castro. By 1966, he had saved enough money to open Kino Sandal Factory at its original location on Whitehead Street. Over the next 11 years, he grew the sandal factory to such success that he was able to purchase a piece of property on Fitzpatrick Street that at the time was nothing more than a parking lot. My grandfather had a vision of creating a permanent home for the sandal factory that brought the architecture and design of Cuba to his little corner of Key West. So he thoughtfully designed not just a storefront for Kino Sandals, but a plaza to fill with businesses like his. Businesses created by hardworking men and women who had a desire to contribute their gifts to the community, like Rodriguez Cigars who have rented a space in the plaza since 1984. My grandparents loved to host and throw a good party. And that was taken into consideration when he designed the plaza, creating an open courtyard space to use for celebrations and get-togethers. He didn't just want to build a place for people to shop but also an atmosphere that drew people in through lively events. And by 1977 my grandfather had built Kino Plaza with his bare hands and brought his vision to life. He was an extremely skilled craftsman that took pride in everything he created, from sandals and furniture, to the legacy he left his 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 10 great grandchildren. Kino Sandals has had a home in Kino Plaza for 48 years and has shared that home with the community by hosting events dating back to the earliest days of the plaza. And we are doing nothing more than trying to continue what my grandparents started and offering a great space to local businesses and residents for their celebrations and events.

With my grandparents and uncle passing in the recent years, the family business has started to shift into the next generation with myself and my brother stepping into ownership of the plaza alongside my mom and aunt. I pride myself on inheriting my sense for business and hard work from my grandparents. So when I stepped into the role as a partial owner of the plaza, I immediately got to work improving what my grandparents, mother, uncle, and aunt have kept strong since 1966. Upon beginning to manage the property, that's when we realized that there was no business tax receipt for the events. So we immediately applied to receive the proper licensing. A process we thought would be simple due to the fact that events had been hosted in the plaza since the beginning of its existence. We were under the impression that it would be a simple process of applying for and receiving the licensing. That is where the challenges began. Licensing turned our request over to planning as if it were a new use situation. We responded with photos of events along with 88 affidavits from members of the community, including former commissioners Wardlow and Lopez, attesting to the fact that this is not a new use and they had all attended events in the plaza's courtyard. Planning responded by denying our request to bypass the major development plan review and variances process. Which brought us to the appeal hearing that took place last month and now we are having to continue this week because a resolution has not yet been reached with planning. We were really hoping not to have to return before you this month but we have done everything we can to try to remediate this situation with no success. So I am reaching out on behalf of my family to ask for your help so that we can put this issue to rest and receive our business tax receipt. Our family business has already been exhausting resources employing Mr. Trepanier for months as well as on the various compliance tasks, such as a fire safety review. We have been diligent in trying to ensure compliance and transparency which has been met with a prolonged process that has felt inconsistent and difficult to navigate. Our intent has always been to do things the right way – to honor the past while keeping Kino Plaza a vibrant part of the city's future. We respectfully ask for your support to help our family business acquire our business tax receipt so that local, long-standing family businesses like ours can continue to thrive and contribute to Key West's community.

Thank you for hearing our story and for considering the generations of hard work that built Kino Plaza and continue to sustain it today. I look forward to your guidance in helping us protect this small but meaningful part of Key West's legacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Roberts, Jr.", with a stylized, cursive script.

Tony Roberts, Jr.
New Ideas Inc.