



## THE CITY OF KEY WEST

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MEMORANDUM

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**TO:** Jim Scholl, City Manager  
E. David Fernandez, Asst. City Manager

**FROM:** Gary W. Bowman, General Services and Engineering Director

**DATE:** May 12, 2010

**SUBJECT:** **Approving the transfer of historic telegraph cable excavated at the intersection of Catherine Street and Whitehead Street during the construction of the United Street Stormwater Mitigation project (ST0906) to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum; authorizing the City Manager to enter into a transfer agreement**

#### ACTION STATEMENT:

This resolution will approve the transfer of historic telegraph cable excavated at the intersection of Catherine Street and Whitehead Street during the construction of the United Street Stormwater Mitigation project (ST0906) to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum to preserve and exhibit the cable as an item of historical significance and authorize the City Manager to enter into a transfer agreement.

#### BACKGROUND:

A telegraph manhole and conduit were excavated during the construction of the United Street Stormwater Mitigation project. These items were thought to be of historical significance prior to the excavation and were carefully removed by the contractor. Shortly after excavation, Dr. Diane Silvia, PhD, of the Historic Florida Keys Foundation, was contacted to confirm historical significance. Historical significance was confirmed. At this point, the City had no plans to keep the excavated items. At Staff's request, Dr. Silvia's suggestion was to contact the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum and she added that the group at the museum is the only group locally that is capable of preservation. As it turns out, the museum is very interested in acquiring only the excavated telegraph cable and not the manhole.

*Key to the Caribbean – Average yearly temperature 77° F.*

The telegraph cable is being stored at the old solid waste transfer station on Stock Island. The manhole is presently being stored at Indigenous Park.

Staff also contacted FDOT's Planning and Environmental Management Office since the United Street Stormwater Mitigation project is funded by an FDOT Local Agency Program (LAP) grant. With assistance from FDOT's architectural / historical consultant, Janus Research, the telegraph manhole and conduit were registered with the Florida Division of Historical Resources – Florida Master Site File (FMSF). The FMSF form is attached along with email confirmation from FMSF of receipt of the form.

The telegraph manhole and conduit were part of Key West's telegraph system initially developed by the International Ocean Telegraph Company (IOTC). Tom Hambright, Director of State and Local History for the Monroe County Library, published an article in 1991 about the history of the telegraph cable. According to Mr. Hambright, the telegraph manhole and conduit excavated were part of the 1917 cable system linking Key West to Cuba by providing connections to link the undersea cable to the land line. Mr. Hambright's article is also attached.

### **PURPOSE & JUSTIFICATION:**

The transfer agreement allows the City to document the donation of the historic telegraph cable to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum. It also provides a mechanism for other historical agencies (State, Federal or non-profit entity) to have the same opportunity as the museum for custody and display. In the event no such agency can be identified, the museum shall properly dispose of the cable in compliance with regulations pertaining to disposal of items containing lead, as stated in the agreement.

### **OPTIONS:**

1. Approve the transfer of historic telegraph cable to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum and authorize the City Manager to enter into a transfer agreement. This will allow the museum to take custody of the historic cable and begin preservation.
2. Do not approve the transfer of historic telegraph cable to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum. Without the approval of the transfer and authorization to enter into a transfer agreement, the City cannot move forward with donating the historic cable to the museum.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There is no cost for donating the historic telegraph cable to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum. If the transfer is not approved, the telegraph cable will remain at the old solid waste transfer station until the City determines a course of action. Due to the historical significance of the cable now documented with the Florida Division of Historical Resources, it is unlikely the City will choose to dispose of the excavated items.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the City Commission select option 1, approve the transfer of historic telegraph cable to the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum and authorize the City Manager to enter into a transfer agreement.

GWB/cds