

February, 6, 2026

Danise Henriquez, City of Key West Mayor,
City of Key West City Council Members,
HARC Board Members

To Whom it may concern,

Key West's isolation and tolerant population made it a discrete escape for the LGBTQ community beginning in the early 20th century, with the island's "live and let live" ethos allowing them to live more freely than on the mainland. The growth of the community transformed Key West into one of America's most openly gay cities, and helped fuel a cultural and economic renaissance with revitalized neighborhoods, restored homes and a world-famous hospitality industry. The community's visibility and activism have helped shape city politics, tourism and culture. Their contributions to this community are immeasurable, and need to be honored and respected.

Some members of our community are advocating for the painting of a section of pickets on fences in the Historic District as a form of protest for the rainbow crosswalks being removed. Others believe that we need to adhere to the HARC Guidelines that are intended to preserve the architectural integrity of the Historic District.

I don't understand all of the hate, vitriol and threats that we have endured surrounding this discussion, because we have dared to express concern for the preservation of our Historic District. As One Human Family, we should all be capable of expressing strong feelings without losing respect for each other. It's not a question about who is right, but rather, how we treat each other while we figure it out. We should be able to find a solution that respects our history, protects our neighborhoods and honors everyone's dignity.

Preserving our Historic District matters because it protects the physical story of our community – it's architecture, culture, and identity – while keeping the character that makes Key West unique. It strengthens our sense of continuity, supports heritage-based tourism, enhances property values and fosters pride among all of our residents. Most importantly, it ensures that future generations can experience the authentic fabric of the past, rather than a recreated version of it.

The Pride Arch is a proposed permanent piece of public art that will stand at the intersection of Duval & Petronia, the same location where the rainbow crosswalks stood for nearly a decade, and is intended to replace them. I strongly support the development of this landmark, as it restores a visible symbol of LGBTQ pride after the crosswalk removal, and aligns with Historic District Guidelines. On the other hand, painting fences or other structures with modern or bold colors are specifically forbidden in HARC's Historic Architectural Guidelines and compromises the architectural integrity of the Historic District.

While the Pride Arch is a public symbol of LGBTQ pride, many are interested in having the ability to personally express their identity or support. I believe that a simple solution that respects everyone's best interests is to fly a Pride flag. It would not violate HARC Guidelines, it is as prominent, or more prominent than a painted fence, and it would enable all of us to continue to enjoy the unique architectural character of old Key West.

The HARC Guidelines are based upon the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. These national standards were implemented to prevent the loss of our historical architectural heritage and are the basis for establishing design guidelines for historic districts. These guidelines are intended to preserve the architectural environment and unique character of historic neighborhoods, giving them a sense of place and time, while protecting the historic streetscapes of our Historic District.

We should not allow any nonconformance with HARC guidelines, as to do so would set a dangerous precedent that would expose the city to law suits for not granting exemptions for someone else's individual or group's special interest, subject the entire HARC historic preservation effort to judicial challenge, and risk the loss of state and federal funds that support the preservation of the Historic District. The HARC staff, and both the city and HARC attorneys have been advising us of these potential pitfalls, yet some of us want to continue on a path down a slippery slope. Everyone is entitled to take pride in their beliefs, fly a flag or put a sign or art in their yard, as we have done. Just don't paint, adhere to, or hang it upon parts of the fence or structure that are subject to HARC Guidelines.

Additionally, the HARC Guidelines need to be clarified regarding fences. Case in point, the photo below:



Looks like a painted gate to me, but it's not, it's tape. This home was not cited, because the tape was interpreted as not being "permanently" affixed to the fence. Technically, a panel affixed to a fence with screws is not "permanently" affixed to the fence. I have also observed 4 ft. panels hung on a fence with wire. The guidelines need to reflect anything that is painted, adhered to or hung on parts of the fence or structure that are subject to HARC Guidelines.

Respectfully,

Daniel Sujak