

## Keri O'Brien

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**From:** Loretta DiTocco <lorettamdt@outlook.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 4, 2026 2:16 PM  
**To:** City Clerk External E-Mail; Brian L. Barroso; Monica Haskell; Samuel Kaufman; District VI; District VI; District V; District IV; District III; Mayor E-Mail  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Interlocal Agreement with Monroe County

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March 4, 2026

Dear City Manager Barroso and Members of the City Commission,

I am writing as a concerned member of the Key West community regarding the proposed transfer of the Higgs Beach park parcel — including West Martello Tower — from Monroe County to the City of Key West. Both commissions are currently exploring this transfer, with an interlocal agreement anticipated to govern ongoing County-funded capital improvements and existing grant obligations. While we appreciate the transparency of that process, the community has serious reservations that must be addressed before any agreement is finalized. This historic site — a cherished landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places — deserves a management structure that has proven itself equal to the task of preservation, not merely administration.

Monroe County's "lend-lease" arrangement with the Key West Garden Club has endured for over 70 years — a testament to a model that works. Under this partnership, a dedicated, volunteer-run organization has transformed what were once deteriorating ruins into a celebrated National Historic Site, earning an excellent rating from the National Register of Historic Places. This kind of sustained, mission-driven stewardship is rare and should not be disrupted without compelling justification.

Monroe County maintains a portfolio of historic museums and possesses demonstrated expertise in specialized historic preservation — from replacing delaminated ammunition bunker ceilings to managing complex, multi-million dollar FEMA and grant-funded projects. Most recently, the County has successfully overseen seawall repairs and historic brickwork restoration at Higgs Beach following Hurricane Ian. The City, by contrast, has acknowledged past struggles with funding routine maintenance for its own capital assets. This disparity in track record matters.

County Administrator Christine Hurley has publicly emphasized the importance of preserving the park's historic character and honoring existing grant commitments — a position the community strongly shares. However, she has also stated that a transfer would "streamline operations" and allow County staff to focus on services in unincorporated areas. That framing, while administratively sensible from the County's perspective, raises an important caution: for neighbors and the Garden Club, "streamlining operations" without clear, enforceable limits opens the door to a future

City administration that may favor more intensive, revenue-driven recreation or events entirely inconsistent with the site's quiet, contemplative character. Good intentions at the time of signing are not a substitute for binding protections in the interlocal agreement itself.

City Manager Barroso has spoken of "securing the future" through local engagement, and County Administrator Hurley has invoked "streamlining operations." Both goals are understandable. But the community deserves concrete, enforceable answers to two critical questions before any interlocal agreement is executed:

1. Will the City commit — in writing and in practice — to preserving the historic character and quiet atmosphere of West Martello Tower? The community values this site as a peaceful, historic sanctuary. "Streamlining operations" must not become a euphemism for commercialization or recreational programming that fundamentally changes the character of the site.

2. Can the City provide binding assurances of dedicated, sustained preservation funding? Historic preservation requires specialized knowledge and long-term financial commitment. Given the City's documented difficulties maintaining its own capital assets, residents need concrete guarantees — not aspirational language — that West Martello will receive the resources it requires.

Before any interlocal agreement is finalized, we respectfully urge both the City Commission and the County Commission to:

(1) hold a transparent public process that meaningfully engages the Garden Club, neighboring residents, and preservation Advocates;

(2) ensure the interlocal agreement contains explicit, enforceable restrictions against commercialization and intensive recreational use — not just aspirational language; and

(3) provide written guarantees of dedicated preservation funding and continuity of the Garden Club's stewardship role, with clear consequences if those commitments are not honored.

West Martello Tower belongs to all of us. It deserves stewardship equal to its significance. The burden of proof lies with those who would change what is, by any objective measure, a working model of historic preservation. We ask that you meet that burden before acting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Loretta M Di Tocco  
Key West, FL 33040