




MEMORANDUM

Date: December 14, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and City Commissioners

From: Albert P. Childress
City Manager 

Subject: **Dissolution of Save A Grave Program**

Introduction

The City Manager's Office respectfully submits a Resolution for consideration by the Mayor and City Commission for dissolution of the Save A Grave project with the Historic Florida Keys Foundation.

Background

In 1992, the City of Key West and the Historic Florida Keys Foundation entered into an agreement for historic preservation of the Key West Cemetery. The City partnered with the Historic Florida Keys Foundation to restore and preserve the Key West Cemetery to conduct historic cemetery walking tours and work with the Sexton and Planning Department on special projects.

The Historic Florida Keys Foundation extended their preservation efforts in 2018 with the creation of the Save A Grave Project. Save a Grave project allows individuals or groups to adopt one of the unmarked or abandoned graves at the Key West Cemetery. The intention was to "bring a site back to life" and have the adopters remain involved with the cemetery preservation. The partnership responsibilities to host cemetery strolls and solicit for Adopt a Grave participants has fallen directly on the City employees of the Key West Cemetery. Opening the door for the potential conflict of interest and perception of impropriety as City employees are requested to collect fees for the foundation during work hours.

Since 2021, the Sexton has documented the requests of the foundation for employees to solicit guests of the cemetery with Save a Grave pamphlets, restoration work completed without proper authorization, and concerns of the required historic tracing to consider a plot or headstone abandoned.

The cooperative project between the Historic Florida Keys Foundation and City of Key West noted the proceeds would be channeled through the foundation for ongoing cemetery restoration. The policies have not been outlined properly to account for the chain of custody for cash donations or the perception of impropriety with the City and Foundation responsibilities.

The HR Director completed a review of the program in August 2023 noting the potential for conflicts of interest in job descriptions for a City Employee to report to the Foundation. A meeting held with Community Services, Key West Cemetery Sexton, HR Director and Legal recommend the dissolution of the Save a Grave Project with the Historic Florida Keys Foundation.

Procurement

Procurement, there is not cost incurred by any department for the dissolution of this program.

Recommendation

The Save a Grave Project creates an opportunity for the perception of impropriety with the collection of donations and cash. The HR Director recommends the project be discontinued with the understanding the foundations expectation of City employees has created a possible conflict of interest. Cancellation of the contract must be done by the City Commission..

Exhibits:

Exhibit A – Resolution No. 92-79

Exhibit B – Save a Grave Project September 29, 2018