



A village in peril

Bahama Village's roots run deep, but will growth cut them off?

By **STEVE SCHROER**
Citizen Staff Writer

With the Navy on one side, downtown on the other, and the racial divide deep, Bahama Village has been locked away from the rest of Key West — an island all its own.

Separate and unequal, the city's historic black neighborhood lags in income and is losing population while the surrounding city booms.

In 1990, the population of the 22-block enclave was 1,945 — 8 percent of the town and a steep drop of nearly 400 from a decade before. Outside Bahama Village, just 6 percent of the town is black. Inside, the number is 65 percent and falling.

Most moving into the area today are white, fueling fears that the most rooted community in Key West with roots reaching back 150 years would be pushed aside and lost for good.

To safeguard the area, the city commissioned a plan to reinvigorate the neighborhood's economy and preserve Bahama Village against a rising tide of gentrification.

But now that plan, completed in 1995, is out of date, thanks to Navy surplus property which is being returned to civilian use and abuts Bahama Village to

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Thomas and Petronia streets, top, have brightened recently with the addition of successful businesses, while the intersection of Angela and Thomas streets, left, shows the contrast between historical landscape and upscale housing. Above is one of several Navy buildings set to be returned to the neighborhood.

Photos by **ROB O'NEAL**
The Citizen

...she had been beaten. She called an officer to meet her at Fleming and White streets, the report said.

Key West Police Officer Frank Duponty said when he met her there, he saw the woman had fresh bruises and scratches on her face and arms. She told police a man picked her up, but would not give his name or address. She refused medical help and said she was going to stay with a friend at Big Coppitt Key, the report said.

About an hour and a half later, she called police again and asked an officer to meet her on Von Phister Street. She told police her roommate at her home in the 1700 block of Washington Street had gotten angry

called police from Fleming and White streets.

After the woman talked with police the second time, Duponty and Lt. Al Flowers went to her Washington Street home, where they found the woman's roommate. He had fresh marks, scratches and blotches on his right fist and back, the report said.

Douglas Kutney, 53, was arrested and charged with domestic battery and depriving someone of the use of a car, police said. He was taken to jail.

Information in the Crime Report is obtained from reports provided by area law enforcement agencies.

If you have information that could solve a crime in the Keys, call Crime Reporters, (800) 346-TIPS.

BAHAMA

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the north and west.

As the former "front door" to Key West until the Navy needed the waterfront acreage around the harbor, Bahama Village will once again be opened up to the sea when the Navy land is conveyed.

New development is planned for the future "Truman Waterfront," and how the expected stampede of tourists to the harbor will effect Bahama Village is the task before those chosen to rewrite the 1995 plan.

Specifically, will opening up the waterfront rejuvenate the neighborhood or speed its decline by pushing blacks out?

"That's what the new plan is about," said Local Redevelopment Agency Director Bill Harrison, who oversees the return of Navy surplus property. "We're going to look at both plans, and make sure they're compatible. The base reuse plan for Truman Waterfront will be incorporated into the new Bahama Village preservation plan. The goal is the same: preserve the neighborhood."

Harrison said increased traffic will be a special worry, but he also predicted the waterfront project will be great news for Bahama Village and the whole island.

The entryway to Fort Zachary Taylor will be moved, too, changing traffic patterns for sightseers and beachgoers through the

neighborhood. **ROB O'NEAL / The Citizen**
 Commissioner **Carmen Turner**, whose district includes the village, said neighbors need to be consulted every step of the way, and the new plan must reflect the commission's commitment to Bahama Village.

"In the past, the commission hasn't always followed through on its promises to Bahama Village, but I think this commission is committed to helping," she said. "I'm very concerned about the increased traffic, and I want to make sure the public involvement is extensive. One of the ideas that came out of the charette is to turn the battery into a museum on blacks in the military. It's a good idea and ties in very well with Bahama Village."

One of the largest neighborhoods to be placed on the national register of historic districts, the name Bahama Village was adopted in 1988 to honor the region's roots and attract tourism.

According to census data, the neighborhood is the most rooted on the island. In Bahama Village, 59 percent of residents have lived in the same house for more than five years. On the rest of the island, the figure is 36 percent.

"People keep telling me it's too late to try to save Bahama Village," Turner said. "My response is that as long as we have the public involved and someone on the commission to fight for the area — it's not gone yet."

DeLoach said tents would be used to house a maximum of 50 people — 25 men and 25 women and children in separate tents. He also presented the group's plan for the shelter which includes showers, toilets, storage lockers (if available), laundry, and a light breakfast.

Roy Grant, coalition co-chair and president of the Florida Keys Outreach Coalition for the homeless, urged commissioners to get involved and make a difference.

"In order to solve the problem, you have to get involved," said Grant. "This can work." Grant also commended Mullins for initiating the effort saying it was the first time a city official has taken responsibility for a problem that is not going to go away.

Commissioner Jimmy Weekley said the business community needs to get behind the project, and Mullins asked city staff to update commissioners on the shelter's status at the next commission meeting.

DeLoach said the shelter could be built without the city's help.

BOAT

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Key Sanctuary Preservation Area — a well-defined portion of coral reef in the Marine Sanctuary, six miles northeast of Key.

"It's been set aside as a special portion of the reef," he said.

Officials with the Florida Marine Patrol, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Coast Guard responded to a grounded boat immediately.

The U.S. Coast Guard arrived early Tuesday afternoon that the damaged vessel broke up, putting the crew member in danger and the crew should be airlifted for safety.

But when the Coast Guard helicopter reached the vessel, one crew member decided to be airlifted. The other two crew members remained on board.

Sanctuary officials are investigating the cause of the grounding and extent of the injury to coral reef.

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