




MEMORANDUM

Date: April 11, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Commissioners

Via: Albert P. Childress
City Manager 

From: Katie Halloran
Planning Director

Subject: **24-5717 - Coral Reef Restoration Partnership - Annual Report**

Introduction

Environmental Protection is one of the six priority goals of the Key West Forward Strategic Plan. In FY23 the City partnered with the Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium (“MOTE”) and allocated \$100,000 for coral reef restoration and maintenance from cruise ship disembarkation fees.

As part of the FY23 agreement, MOTE provides an annual report presentation on their performance over the 12 months. MOTE’s presenter, Taylor Berard is the new Community Engagement Coordinator at MOTE’s Elizabeth Moore International Center for Coral Reef Research and Restoration in Summerland Key.

Background

In 2019, MOTE was designated as a core partner with NOAA’s Mission: Iconic Reefs program in recognition of their innovative science and success in demonstrating how coral genetic resilience is the key for successfully restoring the coral reefs of the Florida Keys.

In 2020, MOTE became the first scientific organization to carry out every step of the staghorn coral sexual propagation process – from spawning and outgrowing in the laboratory, to out planting and maintaining corals on the reef until they reached sexual maturity, became gravid and spawned again to create a n entire second generation of disease-resistant and climate resilient corals.

In 2021, the City of Key West surveyed its residents for the creation of a Strategic Plan, finalized in August of that year. Environmental Protection of Nearshore Waters was fourth out of six community priorities that came from that survey effort.

On April 5th, 2022, the Commission passed an ordinance to establish a funding mechanism for a Coral Reef Restoration Fund and water quality testing from the \$1M+ the City annually received from cruise ships. The Coral Reef Restoration Fund's express purpose is to restore and maintain coral reefs adjacent to the City of Key West and engage certified, independent, qualified reef restoration experts, to be identified by resolution of the City of Key West annually, to restore and maintain such reefs and shall allocate annually these funds to the respective programs.

In FY23, the City set aside \$100,000.00 in new funds for Coral Reef Restoration partnerships with MOTE.

On April 18, 2023, the City Commission approved a consultant agreement with MOTE for the purposes of science-based coral reef restoration and maintenance, which included:

- Outplanting of over 1,000 corals to restore nearly 100 square meters of a targeted coral reef to ~30% coral cover in Key West waters.
- Utilize resilient genetic strains.
- Conduct multiyear monitoring to assess survival and ecosystem health.
- Implement a Key West public outreach campaign.
- Provide a final report accounting for how the funds were spent, the number of services provided and describing how the funds aided in reef restoration and maintenance.

The agreement was for one year and ended on February 29, 2024. The agreement may be extended for two additional one-year terms, upon the mutual consent of both parties and the approval of the City Commission.

For FY24, the City budgeted \$100,000 for Coral Reef Restoration that has not yet been allocated to a specific partner or program. The Commission can decide to pursue an RFP for the FY24 allocation or choose to extend MOTE's agreement.

The City and MOTE have continued to meet with the WQPP Steering Committee and have completed a draft Key West Water Quality Improvement Plan, the goals of which were presented at the September 14th Commission meeting. The final plan will be presented to the City Commission in May.