

February 21, 2017

Thaddeus Cohen, Planning Director
City of Key West

Re: Request for Zoning Map and Future Land Use Map Amendments, Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society, Inc., 200 Greene Street

Chair and Planning Board Members,

I am writing to express my opinion to the Planning Board regarding the request for zoning and future land use map changes by Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society. My wife, Eden and I own Isle Cook Key West, a business located at 218 Whitehead Street, immediately adjacent to the Mel Fisher Museum.

As a business owner, I am pro-commerce, I support government efforts to maintain laws and regulations that promote businesses, and I support businesses doing what they can within the bounds of the law to prosper. That being said, I am somewhat confused by the zoning and land use change requests from the Mel Fisher Museum. It appears from the documentation regarding this matter that is available on your website, that the Museum's proposed future business uses are the same as its current uses, and all of its current uses are permitted under current zoning. Our business is located in a building directly adjacent to the Museum, in the same block and on the same side of Whitehead Street. In addition to our business, 218 Whitehead Street houses space for five other local businesses (with one space currently unoccupied) and a residential apartment that overlooks the Museum's courtyard and Whitehead Street. We are directly across the street from a historic home and gallery (Audubon House), and several residential homes, and directly behind both our building and the Mel Fisher Museum are residential apartments. I believe that the mixed use of this area (commercial and residential) was considered by the city when it was last zoned this area, and should definitely be considered when reviewing this change request. I believe that the city was attempting to balance the needs of small businesses, historical structures, museums, and galleries in this area, while ensuring that residents in this area were not overrun by the noise of bars and tourists that can be found nearby. I believe that this area was zoned specifically to create an atmosphere that was distinct from the lower Duval Street tourist area. Assuming that the Mel Fisher Museum does not plan to change their use of their property, then this change in zoning is unnecessary, as they are not planning to do anything more than they are currently permitted. However, if this change in zoning is permitted, it sets up the potential for future uses by the Museum or a future owner of that property that could substantially change the neighborhood and the atmosphere in this historic area.

As I mentioned above, I am pro-business, and I understand that as times change, the city needs to be flexible and willing to change laws and regulations to continue to effectively support local business and residents. That flexibility would certainly include zoning, and I believe that all zoning should be reviewed over time to keep up with environmental and social changes. That being said, I have seen no evidence of changes in the area surrounding the Museum that would require this change in zoning. In addition, if there have been changes of which I am not aware, and the city believes that the best way to support the

constituents in this area is to change the zoning, then I believe that the changes should be presented for input and discussion for the entire area, not just one building and one business. The proposal by the Museum applies a change just to their building, when there are several other businesses right next door. It seems very unlikely to me that the Museum's interests would be so substantially different than the other surrounding businesses so as to require what amounts to a special zoning change just for them.

In conclusion, based on my understanding of the matter to date and as a business owner in the Museum's immediate vicinity, I do not see a compelling need to change the zoning in this area (based on the Museum's stated plans). In addition, there are potential future negative consequences that could be created by the requested change in zoning, and if there are reasons for a change that are beyond my present knowledge, then I believe that a change in zoning should be discussed with all of the businesses and residents in this area, and a future direction planned for the entire area, not just one building and one business.

I urge the Planning Board to consider these factors when making a decision in this matter.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

William Brown
Isle Cook Key West
218 Whitehead St.