

Cheri Smith

From: Gigi Varnum <gigivarnum@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 20, 2019 3:35 PM
To: Cheri Smith
Subject: Mall on Duval item

Hi Cheri,

I'm requesting that you please the following into the record for tonight's Agenda item #21 about the Mall on Duval. I know it's late but letters were added as recently as yesterday, and I appreciate the accommodation. I will be unable to attend in person tonight due to a prior personal commitment.

Please confirm receipt of this email. Thank you so much and I hope you have a lovely day!

Sincerely, Gigi Varnum

Madame Mayor and Commissioners:

The "Mall On Duval" has two Facebook pages: one has not been updated since Memorial Day, and the other was last updated on March 9th. There's also a Central Duval District website - it has no content, but it exists - so the domain name has been purchased and hosted; that isn't free. One would think that if the Mall on Duval is so popular, its last Facebook post would not be from June (over two months ago), especially as the City is paying staff to manage it.

HRCC1 is, as you all know, a high-intensity commercial and residential zoning district. Residents and businesses located on the 500, 600, & 700 blocks of Duval have the right to gain access to their homes and workplaces 24/7, and to occupy their spaces peaceably. Local businesses have been granted operational licenses that are being adversely impacted by these street closures. The Mall on Duval not only unfairly favors some businesses on certain Duval blocks, it also proportionately and negatively impacts all the surrounding businesses and residents on side streets and outside the Mall blocks. Despite repeated promises by the Mayor and City Staff that no person or business will be adversely affected, folks can't get to their homes or places of work, or even get food delivered on weekends.

The Mall on Duval also appears to be a complete marketing failure: there's been no consistent tracking across the entire extended run as to who is attending, how often, or why. The Mall's social media presence is objectively tepid, at best. As the City is determined to spend taxpayer dollars on a program that only subsidizes three blocks of one street in town, the least the City owes its residents is a detailed report of precisely *how* our ENTIRE community benefits, to justify these expenses.

Our whole community is paying to promote a program that benefits only a few businesses. Other organizers have to pay for Special Event permits that bring tourism dollars to our island and actually put "heads in beds", while the Mall gets to usurp both the zoning process and event permitting process, and still does not bring in additional revenue.

A Special Event is supposed to be just that: special. Not weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly. The Mall on Duval doesn't even meet the definition of a Special Event, and until the city rezones the district or redefines HRCC1 to include regular weekly, multi-day street closures, the City undermines both the Special Events permit process and mocks all the other event and festival organizers who are required to abide by the rules.

So sum total, exactly how much has the City spent for the Mall on Duval? A city commissioner recently told me that the price tag to date is roughly \$200,000 dollars. City Staff has budgeted zero dollars for the Mall on in the 2020 budget, but so far this program is far from carrying its own weight. KWPD special event detail is overtime pay at time and a half, plus the cost of City Services to put up and take down the barricades, and empty the trash, and clean the streets... Even with bollards installed, those services and their associated costs aren't going to completely disappear moving forward.

The residents of Key West aren't made of money, and the Mall on Duval isn't some field of dreams, where "if you build it they will come". The City opted to fund the pilot program, but this can't be a bottomless well of handouts for three blocks of Duval - that's inviting disaster. If the businesses who benefit from this program want to prolong it, they need to get their ducks in a row and make this fly on its own two wings. The Mall on Duval must become financially self-sufficient to continue in perpetuity.

Updating Key West's most iconic main thoroughfare is obviously long overdue, and doing so is clearly a priority for this commission. So, let's bring attention to Duval Street by making it so beautiful that people wanna post pictures of it on their social media. Let's at least attempt to evenly and equally promote all the small businesses that make Key West unique. Let's create signs for official Duval Street hashtags so the 3 million unique tourist visitors we receive every year can spread our fame for us.

The Mall on Duval has been compared by some to Lincoln Road. Well, Lincoln Road is lined with world-class luxury brand retailers, was designed by famed architect Morris Lapidus, and took two years to build after being closed to car traffic, back in 1960. An elephant was present for the groundbreaking ceremony - it even used a shovel. It is inaccurate to even broadly compare temporary parade barricades on the sidewalks and a cop car on either end of a street closure with the "5th Avenue of the South", regardless of how much one loves Key West.

Look, there's a lot of good that can be done in Key West with two hundred thousand dollars: a suicide hotline, or how about one half of a brand-new affordable housing unit?! Personally, I feel we need both of those far more than continuing a taxpayer-funded Mall on Duval.

Thank you.