

Statement before the City of Key West Charter and District Boundary Review Committee, December 8, 2021

Robert Gold, 7 Passover Lane. My wife and I volunteer, are directors for, and chair local non-profits, and have been active in local campaigns for national and local elections since 2008. We are deeply invested here.

I agree with Mr. Weekley and Commissioner Lopez' earlier opposition, and I once again beg the committee to reject this proposal.

At-large representation schemes have a long and shameful history in the U.S., with roots in the Jim Crow era following the Civil War. Decades of systemic discrimination and restrictive housing laws found cover under at-large representation that silenced the voices of those who were adversely affected. But this is not about race, it's about power.

At-large voting has been a failure for Key West's citizens in Monroe County. All five members of Monroe County's Board of County Commissioners are elected at-large. Because of at-large voting, the Commissioner for District 3 (who resigned in disgrace this week) was elected in 2020 to represent his district with only a third of the votes in that district. In this case at-large voting is clearly undemocratic.

We are in a vigorous struggle between those who defend the interests of residents of our community, and those outsiders whose agenda is continued relentless growth of tourism. The culture, history, tolerance, lifestyle, and unique charm that our resident's value is in jeopardy.

At-large voting delivers disproportionate power to deep-pocketed outsiders whose donations would fund candidates for the growth agenda, and further tilts the playing field of legitimate policy debate against those defending what is best about our community today.

Although this controversial proposal has been subject to vigorous debate online, none of its proponents have offered a compelling, consistent, or even substantive rationale for their support. With due respect, nothing I've heard from its proponent here is compelling, especially vague allusions to 'talent,' or blatant ageism.

Hundreds of transient licenses for units in Truman Annex are set to expire in 2025. By combining the voters of Bahama Village and Truman Annex into a single, gerrymandered district, an at-large City commission would almost certainly grant a temporary or permanent extension to those licenses. Allowing those licenses to expire, as originally agreed, would have a positive impact on our affordable housing crisis, by increasing the supply of long-term rental residences.

Adoption of at-large voting would further dilute the impact of local Key West voices on the critical issues that affect the welfare of our community. Please say no.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.