

Key West Commissioner Meeting Presentation
5:00 PM Tuesday, March 1, 2022
Respectfully Presented by Misha D. McRAE – Executive Director

State Name and address

Misha D. McRAE

410 United Street, Apt. B, Key West Florida

I'd like to start by congratulating my dear friend and 'Garden supporter' Dr. Perry Arnold for his well-deserved commendation.

Greeting Acknowledgement to

- Mayor Johnston
- City Attorney Smith
- Fellow Commissioners
- City of Key West Staff
- Fellow Citizens

Special thank you to:

- City Manager Patti McLauchlin and
- City Commissioner Sam Kaufman for their support and putting the Garden on the Agenda

Some may know me for being on the Key West Business Guild Board of Directors
Others know me as the Chairman of the Key West Tree Commission
Most know me as the Executive Director of the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden. I am a 26-year resident of Key west where 25 of those years are related to this Garden.

I stand before you to request and present the reasoning for a long-term lease of 99 yrs (**by your support and/or sponsorship of a referendum for the August 2022 General Election**)

1. **Land designated** as protected wildlife habitat for public use since before 1936
2. **2022: 86-year history** of the Key West Botanical Garden
3. Through that history, **Garden transitioned from a 55-acre** attraction in 1936 to 7.8 acres by 1990's
4. **Mission:** "The purpose of this organization is to preserve, develop, expand and maintain the historic Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden as an arboretum, botanical garden, cultural heritage museum, wildlife refuge and educational center by showcasing the historical significance of flora that are native to South Florida, Cuba and the Caribbean and emphasize cultivation of threatened and endangered species of the Florida Keys" has remained on course.

5. Since 1988, the **Key West Botanical Garden Society, Inc.**, a 501 (c) 3 not for profit took stewardship of the Garden to protect what was left of the original Garden. **We have been the Keeper of the Trees for 86 years—and we want to continue to be the Keepers for another 99 years!**
6. Key benchmarks in history
 - **1962: The City Commission acts** to protect the Garden and designates the remaining **11 acres “a permanent wildlife sanctuary, botanical garden and arboretum”** under the City’s Park System
 - **1991 City turn over management of the remaining 7.8 acres of the Garden to the Botanical Garden Society, Inc.**
 - **2005 Florida Communities Trust Grant affords the city to reacquire 7.5 acres of adjacent land for expansion of the Garden**
 - **2017 in partnership** with the City of Key West and the Power Squadron opened the Canoe/Kayak Landing for the Overseas Paddling Trail
7. The early **2000’s, brought a resurrection** of sorts. All under the timeline of longer lease, Big grants were executed:
 - New entrance, Visitor Welcome Center & Public Restrooms
 - Florida Community Trust (reclaimed land to 15.2 acres now)
 - South Florida Water Management
 - Capital Improvement projects
 - To name a few
8. A few other accomplishments:
 - **National and Global recognition** for the highest standards for arboretums and Gardens and for our collection of Native Plants (529 species)
 - **Education Department’s Living Lab** provides Pre-K to 12 grade environmental sciences
 - **Natural Safe Social Distancing: A safe place from the Corona Virus Blues**
 - Volunteer program accumulating over 2000 hours
 - Recognized Native plant collection of 529 species of plants and even more wildlife
 - Native Nursery “conserves, preserves and propagates for the community” housing over 2000 plants with over 90 listed on the Federal and State Endangered and Threatened species list
 - All of these accomplishments add value to our community and its citizens of all ages
9. **A number of distinctions:**
 - **The only frost-free tropical forest in the continental US**
 - **One of only 25 locations in the world know for biodiversity**

- Listed as a 'Living Museum' with the Institute of Museums and Library Services
- One of only 3 sites in the Keys that has fresh water (brackish) and the only location south of Florida City that has fresh sweet water
- Located in 1 of the State of Florida areas of critical concern
- Identified as a birding 'Hot Spot' by Birdwatching Magazine
- Greater Florida Birding & Wildlife Trailhead
- Florida Scenic Highway Trailhead
- Overseas Paddle Trailhead

10. 2017 the Society signed a new 10-year lease with the city

11. The past 10-years has seen the availability of big grant opportunities removed

- Majority related to the lack of a long-term lease

In closing:

- **We are not done yet, there is so much more to do.**
- Every great city has a great Botanical Garden, the City of Key West has the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden.
- **We need that longer lease to facilitate our ability to create long-term plans and**
- **To secure ongoing grants and funding to bring those plans to fruition:**
- **FOR THE GOOD OF US ALL AND THE ENVIRONMENT!!**
- **WE NEED YOUR ACTIVE SUPPORT TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN!!**