

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 25, 2019 – (Key West, FL). **Key West Art & Historical Society Wins City Commission Approval for Historic Diesel Plant Restoration**

On Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, the City of Key West approved Key West Art & Historical Society's proposal for the Stabilization and Redevelopment of the former Key West Diesel Plant, a complex of five decaying buildings located adjacent to Bahama Village and the entrance to the Truman Waterfront that date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Tentatively named the D.I.E.S.E.L. (Discovery, Industry, Engineering, Science, Experience and Learning) Plant museum complex, the Society will stabilize and renovate the historic buildings while honoring their original design and footprint, just as they have done in their rehabilitation projects at the Custom House, Fort East Martello, and the Key West Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters museums, which see upwards of 150,000 visitors annually.

"We are delighted that Key West Art & Historical Society, who already have an impressive track record of large-scale rehabilitation projects in Key West, came forward with a proposal that will bring this facility back to life while respecting its history, retaining its generators, and providing educational and community mix spaces at the gateway to the new Truman Waterfront Park," said Bryan Green, chairman of HARC (Historic Architectural Review Commission).

Previous plans to demolish a significant portion of the historic buildings were postponed after HARC persuaded City Commissioners to consider other possibilities, allowing the organization to research the buildings' history and identify appropriate uses via a community workshop, explained Green.

Key West Art & Historical Society, in its response to the City's RFP (Request for Proposals), detailed essential criteria for transforming a heritage building into a museum: integrity of history, original structure and materials, new space and new function, display and interpretation, visitor interpretation, and community usage. The rehabilitated facility will include an extensive interactive museum drawing on local customs and history and a mixed-use space that will host the Society's diverse programs, function as a rental and gathering area for Bahama Village and the larger community, and act as a visual projection gallery during museum operating hours.

"The Society's objective is to create a greater sense of place, historical understanding, civic pride, and community ownership while preserving the property," said Michael Gieda, Key West Art & Historical Society Executive Director. "The provenance of the buildings and the equipment housed inside have been carefully considered to reimagine how the spaces could serve new functions, providing greater benefit to the community and honoring the island's past while embracing the future."

In step with contemporary rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings for the

arts, a restaurant and microbrewery with exhibits, signage, some of the diesel plant's original generators, and a menu that highlights and educates on local heritage cuisine will be housed inside the facilities, an extension of the museum's educational mission and a convenience for visitors and groups availing themselves of the facilities.

With the proposal now approved, City Manager Jim Scholl is authorized to negotiate and execute a contract in conformance with terms contained in RFP 001-19, including a 20-year property lease.

Plans to adapt the Key West Diesel Plant are to be undertaken in three phases, beginning with stabilization of the decaying buildings including roof replacement, covering all exterior openings, and stopping water intrusion and further deterioration. This phase is to take place within two years of execution of the lease.

Founded in 1949, Key West Art & Historical Society's mission is to preserve the culture of the Florida Keys through exhibiting and displaying regional art, architecture and history for the purpose of educating the community and visiting public. It is one of the oldest cultural not-for-profits in the Florida Keys with a exemplary record of accomplishment in funding and managing the rehabilitation and re-adaptive use of three local museums – Fort East Martello, Key West Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters and the Custom House.

For more information, contact Michael Gieda at [mgieda@kwahs.org](mailto:mgieda@kwahs.org) or at 305-296-6616, extension 103. ***Your Museums. Your Community. It takes an Island.***

**IMAGE:**

A draft rendering of the renovated D.I.E.S.E.L plant property by Bender & Associates Architects.