IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA

FINAL REPORT OF THE MONROE COUNTY GRAND JURY SPRING TERM 2025

UNBUILDING TRUST: THE GRAND JURY'S FINDINGS ON ABUSE OF POWER IN PARADISE

MEMBERS OF THE SPRING TERM 2025 GRAND JURY

MICHELLE STETTNER, Foreperson

MATTHEW KEY, Vice Foreperson

LAURA PIIPPONEN	RITA McNABB	WILLIAM BROWN
REBECCA BLAIS	MICHAEL HORN	ADRIAN WILSON
ELLEN FANIZZI DALTON	JORGE QUINTANA	CLEA DUFFY
SERENA M. LUKENS	KAY FERRUCCI	ERIC HAUSER
CHRISTOPHER SCHIEFER		AMY EICHEN

DENNIS W. WARD
State Attorney

COLLEEN M. DUNNE
Assistant State Attorney

I. INTRODUCTION

It is the province and the duty of the Grand Jury to investigate possible unlawful actions by all persons, private citizens and public officials alike. The Grand Jury's lawful and proper function is to return indictments when warranted, consider the actions of public bodies and officials in the use of public funds, and to report or present findings and recommendations as to practices, procedures, incompetency, inefficiency, mistakes, and criminal misconduct involving public offices and public monies.

In June 2024, after receiving numerous complaints and reports of misconduct by the City of Key West Chief Building Officer, Rajindhar Ramsingh, City of Key West Director of Code Enforcement, James Young, the City of Key West City Attorney, Ronald Ramsingh (Rajindhar Ramsingh's brother) and a few City Commissioners, the State Attorney's Office commenced an investigation. What started as an investigation into possible Sunshine Law violations and various malfeasances of elected/charted officials and department heads rapidly developed into a wide-scale, multi-faceted investigation uncovering a network of nepotism, fraud, dereliction of duty and various criminal acts.

Over the course of more than six (6) months, the State Attorney's Office, along with agents from the local FBI office conducted numerous interviews of past and current City of Key West employees. Subpoenas were issued for bank records, phone records, as well as, a list of public records from the City of Key West. As the evidence was reviewed and put into perspective with the witness interviews, and more importantly, a timeline of events, the various forms of evidence converged to create an inescapable picture, one that could not be unseen:

> A pervasive culture of negligence, nepotism, manipulation, and abdication of duty at the highest levels of city leadership. The existence of a disheartening pattern of public officials failing to discharge their sworn responsibilities, ignoring obvious red flags – even when public safety, fiscal

> accountability and democratic transparency were on the line. The investigation uncovered a complete "dereliction of duty" (invoking the full weight of its legal and moral implications) by several individuals. And most brazen, the cavalier criminal acts of several for personal gain, or gains for those within the "boys' club."

The Grand Jury, after reviewing all the evidence, returned three (3) indictments against former Key West City Attorney (CA) Ronald Ramsingh, charging the felony offenses of Illegal Interception of Communication, Disclosure of Illegally Intercepted Communications, Tampering with Physical Evidence, and Official Misconduct. A total of three (3) Indictments were returned against the former City of Key West Chief Building Officer (CBO) Rajindhar Ramsingh for the felony offenses of Tampering with Physical Evidence, seven (7) counts of Official Misconduct and Organized Fraud. One Indictment was returned for the former City of Key West Director of Code Enforcement James Young, charging the felony offense of Tampering With Physical Evidence.

This report is the culmination of the Grand Jury's inquiry and contains not only findings but recommendations based upon the testimony and evidence presented over five (5) weeks.

II. THE FACTS AND OUR ASSESSMENT

Within a matter of hours of being impaneled and sworn in, on the first day of the Grand Jury's service, the investigation began with evidence about then City Attorney Ronald Ramsingh secretly recording a ZOOM interview with his cellular device and without the consent of the interviewee. The video, as shown, left no question that it was done surreptitiously. If that were not enough, through testimony and other evidence, it was learned that Ronald Ramsingh shared the recording with another by sending it through electronic means. Although it begs the question of why anyone

would do this, there is no question, especially for a lawyer, that these acts are unlawful — they are crimes. For that reason, the Grand Jury returned an indictment charging Ronald Ramsingh accordingly.

The attention then turned to the circumstances and acts that led to the termination of the City of Key West City Manager, Al Childress. How was it that shortly after the City Manager received acceptable performance reviews, there was a sudden call for a special meeting to consider his termination? What chain of events led to not only a discussion for termination but ultimately the sponsoring of a special meeting for such a vote? Were there discussions being held between the sitting city commissioners in violation of the Sunshine Laws? What information was being disseminated to the city commissioners, such that, a special meeting was not only scheduled so quickly, but a decision of termination was reached against all the positive public comments supporting City Manager Childress and the overwhelming requests NOT to proceed with termination? A deeper dive into the text messages among city commissioners, CA Ramsingh, CBO Ramsingh, and Director of Code Enforcement Young started unveiling answers to those questions, revealing an orchestrated plan and collusion among these individuals and others to not only remove CM Childress, but to thereafter cover up their nefarious acts.

Although no explicit Sunshine Law violations by the commissioners were confirmed, it became evident that the CA Ramsingh, CBO Ramsingh, and Director of Code Enforcement Young deliberately withheld subpoenaed text messages. These text messages were lawfully requested by the State Attorney's Office as part of an ongoing investigation. While the content of the texts was not the central issue, the refusal to produce them, despite legal obligation, was a serious obstruction and a crime.

Phone records provided a damning comparison: a substantial discrepancy between what was turned over and what was expected. Hundreds of messages were never produced, despite being extracted from CBO Ramsingh's cellphone under a search warrant. The concealment was not an oversight, it was intentional.

The subpoenas were unequivocal. They clearly requested the withheld text messages, and the content of those messages confirms they fell squarely within the scope of what was demanded. But the withheld texts revealed far more than just misconduct in not providing them, but a broader, calculated plot. This was not merely an issue of transparency. It was an orchestrated removal of CM Childress, carried out to protect a corrupt inner circle entrenched in fraud, nepotism, and cronyism, shrouded in the toxic culture of a "Bubba System" (used here to mean a deeply rooted network of people in which rules are bent to ensure a mutual continued success) loyalty and the dangerous mentality of "the boys having each other's backs."

So, what was the Ramsingh brothers', Young's, and possibly some city commissioners' motive to remove CM Childress? A review of the text messages discovered on Rajindhar Ramsingh's extracted cellphone, coupled with emails and testimony from witnesses, reveals the motive appears rooted in a combination of personal resentment, professional accountability, and fear of public exposure.

The following are just a few of the text messages revealing the concerted effort to protect CBO Ramsingh from the public learning about the findings in the Corradino report (which will be explained in more detail below) and rally the commissioners to vote to terminate CM Childress.

Text message between City Attorney (CA) Ron Ramsingh and City Commissioner (CC) Lissette Carey on Sunday, June 2, 2024	
Sender	**Message**
CA Ramsingh	I saw your email. Keep in mind that the item is sponsored by Al. Withdrawal is usually done by the sponsor. You might want to consider proposing postponement at least until the December meeting to allow the new commission to opine on procedures moving forward between building and planning since there is a chance Dist 6 can go to the general election
CA Ramsingh	That can be your back up or compromise position if he refuses to withdraw it during change to agenda
Text message between City Attorney (CA) Ron Ramsingh and City Commissioner (CC) Lissette Carey on Wednesday, June 5, 2024	
Sender	**Message**
CA Ramsingh	I spoke to Keri and she said that you could make a motion to approve the agenda striking number 47 to Cordina report if you want. It doesn't matter that Al sponsored it. So you have her support in that if you wanted to try it she would then have to do a rollcall.
CC Carey	Okay. I'll think about that.

*** Days leading up to the scheduled Commission Meeting, which had the Corradino Report on the agenda for discussion.*

Text message between Raj Ramsingh, Ron Ramsingh, Jim Young on Saturday, June 5, 2024	
CBO Ramsingh	According to commissioner hoover, they're going to pull the presentation
CBO Ramsingh	This came from richard mcchesney
CA Ramsingh	That's correct. DBA called to let me know
CBO Ramsingh	But people could still make comment public comment
CA Ramsingh	Maybe/maybe not. Public comment I think is supposed to be related to something on the agenda
CBO Ramsingh	While agenda was published and I know it could be changed, but it doesn't mean that people who were there to talk about what was on the published agenda
CCD Young	I'm sure public comment doesn't have to relate to the agenda. I've seen Margaret Romero speak about items not on the agenda.
CBO Ramsingh	Good
CCD Young	Plus Citizens comments is before approval of the agenda, isn't that the time Lil Al will have to pull it?
CCD Young	I don't believe it. Your memo, postponing Randy Sterlings contract and now telling his buddy Joe to stay home he's slowly going down. We have the snake in our hands time to dispatch his head.
CCD Young	The Raj magic works again.
CA Ramsingh	Yup.

*** The Corradino Report was removed by Childress on June 6, 2024, the day of the meeting.*

*** Six days after the Commission meeting, wherein the Corradino Report was removed and the day after CBO Ramsingh's license was discovered 'delinquent' and Childress ordered the CBO to return from Orlando immediately.*

Text message between City Attorney (CA) Ron Ramsingh and City Commissioner (CC) Jimmy Weekley on Wednesday, June 12, 2024	
Sender	**Message**
CA Ramsingh	Todd submitted his resignation Today. Unfortunately.
CC Weekley	Why
CC Weekley	What does Al's contract say about termination?
CA Ramsingh	It says that he gets 20 weeks' pay without cause. No pay if there is cause- but that's not our situation
CC Weekley	What does it take to call a special meeting
CA Ramsingh	I believe the Mayor can call for one or three commissions, but let me double check. Standby.
CC Weekley	Ok
CA Ramsingh	My advise would be to say absolutely nothing until Saturday
CC Weekley	What are you thinking?
CA Ramsingh	That calling for a special meeting or talking about it to others before qualifying could get back to TJ and she declares before Friday.
CC Weekley	I thought of that. I would look at 12:01 on Friday
CA Ramsingh	Maybe we should wait for pacific Time to be sure lol.
CC Weekley	Ha

**The same day, Childress issued a "Record of Counseling' to CBO Ramsingh for his license becoming 'delinquent' which led the City to shutdown Building Dept for 36 hours.*

Text message between City Attorney (CA) Ron Ramsingh and City Commissioner (CC) Lissette Carey on Friday, June 14, 2024	
Sender	**Message**
CA Ramsingh	I conferred with Keri. we only need two commissioners to call for a special meeting. Keri would like the request in writing and the notice provisions are not as stringent. It could be as early as next week.
CC Carey	I'm down.
CA Ramsingh	Ok. I will see if there are other sponsors
CA Ramsingh	Friday not good for Billy or Clayton. Looking like Thursday
CA Ramsingh	I just told Al. He seemed to have taken it in stride. I think he's going to be calling the four of you to talk about it, but I told him that was the request of the 4 sponsors and that I had and I hope to resolve it amicably without any allegations of fault.
CC Carey	Okay. Thank you for all of the hard things you do.
CC Carey	Call me later or tomorrow if you can

Witness testimony received by the Grand Jury also provided insight into what was really behind the efforts to have Childress removed. After connecting everything together, below is a list of motives the Grand Jury has found emerging from the evidence reviewed:

1. **Resistance to Change:** Childress was disrupting "the way it has always been done," likely referring to entrenched practices in the Building Department. This resistance to reform often ignites when longstanding, unchecked processes are exposed.
2. **Professional Discipline and Accountability:** Childress disciplined CBO Ramsingh after it was discovered that Ramsingh's license was delinquent. This failure to maintain his most basic job requirement, i.e. his license, led to a shutdown of all building department operations — a public embarrassment and potential legal exposure that likely fueled the Ramsinghs' and others' personal grudges.
3. **Transparency and Public Scrutiny:** CM Childress placed the "Corradino Report" — which exposed permitting irregularities and suspected misconduct of the CBO, on the city commission's agenda for public comment and discussion. This move would have put the Ramsingh brothers and, potentially, city commissioners under public and possibly legal scrutiny, creating a powerful incentive to silence or remove him.
4. **Collusion and Political Protection:** The concerted efforts of others, who the evidence we reviewed appear to have been recruited by 'the boys' club' suggests a broader conspiracy, possibly to protect their own interests, alliances, or reputations tied to the building department's questionable practices.

In summary, CM Childress' insistence on reform, accountability, and transparency threatened a network of individuals who benefited from the status quo — and their coordinated hostility strongly indicates a motive to force his removal in order to protect their positions and prevent further exposure.

With all the attention placed on the Corradino Report, delving into the report and its findings was the next logical step taken by this Grand Jury investigation. What was in the report that the Ramsinghs and others fought so hard to keep from the public? The report mentions specific properties where permitted work raised questions about how the work was approved, why certain departments had not reviewed the permit applications or been given a chance to approve them, and whether the necessary variances were missing. In some cases, permits were approved despite prior denials. For this, the Grand Jury examined details and data from the permit management system (TRAKiT) for numerous properties and specific permits that fell within Rajindhar Ramsingh's time as CBO.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND ITS PROTECTIONS

Before analyzing the TRAKiT data, the Grand Jury first heard testimony from several highly experienced and well-respected professionals, each with extensive knowledge of land development processes, building codes, and the permitting system. These experts included former City of Key West Chief Building Official Terry Justice, former Senior Planner Dan Guilizo, Joseph Corradino of the Corradino Group, and former Historic Preservation Manager Enid Torregrosa-Silva. Together, they provided the Grand Jury with a comprehensive overview of the development review process. More importantly, they explained why certain procedures are necessary and strict adherence to these procedures is critical — emphasizing the potentially devastating safety, environmental, and economic consequences for the City of Key West, and possibly beyond, if these protocols are ignored.

Those who have taken on the task of making improvements to or simply repairing their home will likely state it was a painstaking process and come away thinking there were too many 'hoops to jump' and they may even say they were 'robbed' by the fees assessed. One may even question why so many departments need to review a

particular permit application and plan, and that it is just a waste of time and a way for the city to be an obstructionist. Many within the Grand Jury panel had some of those thoughts, but now have a new understanding and respect for the sometimes laborious process. The following is a summary of the profound facts we learned that not only invoked an appreciation for the process but also, as will be discussed later, demonstrated the profound selfish gains and harm that has occurred due to CBO Ramsingh's fraudulent acts in the handling of various permits and building projects.

The City of Key West has been designated by the State Legislature an 'Area of Critical State Concern' (ACSC), and with that there are principles that have been established guiding the development within the city in order to preserve and protect its resources. The ACSC principals, the state building codes, the city land development regulations, zoning codes and the city's Comprehensive Plan all set forth different restrictions and regulations governing the development process. What at first glance would seem to be too many regulations, they all have a purpose.

For instance, a regulation on the percentage of impervious surfaces is necessary to help with the city's devastating flooding and stormwater management issues. The more impervious surface on a particular lot of land increases the volume and speed of stormwater runoff, which increases flooding in areas and, with it can carry pollutants into the waterways, degrading water quality not just for the oceans and bays. The careless oversight of these regulations has real world impacts on the city of Key West and beyond; including near shore water quality which affects the health of ocean life and fish, as well as neighborhood flooding.

Another very important regulation connected with the building development process is the Building Permit Allocation System (BPAS) which controls the number and type of new residential units allowed. This allocation system is extremely important to ensure adequate infrastructure and resources available to support the population such as waste management, water resources, but most importantly in relation to the hurricane evacuation plan and the state requirement of a 24-hour

hurricane evacuation time for the island. Unbeknownst to many on the Grand Jury panel until hearing from the educated and seasoned experts, circumventing a requirement for a residential/transient unit to have the necessary BPAS allotment has far-reaching negative consequences that one may otherwise be unaware of. If there are more occupants/ residents in the City than city and county officials have accounted for, this has real world negative impact on the ability of the entire community to timely and safely evacuate the area in case of emergency.

Lastly, regulations such as 'set-backs' and building coverage percentages, although may be seemingly trivial, again they are necessary for floodplain considerations, but also help ensure adequate space for neighbors, and not negatively affect a neighbor's property marketability, i.e. an oversized house on a nearby lot blocking the neighbors view, or sunlight can reduce its market value. The regulations are in place for a reason and must be followed by everyone, otherwise it allows for an unjust inequality where one with means can not only build or improve their home to an unimaginable worth but at the same time reduce the value of their neighbors.

THE FRAUDULENT AND CORRUPT ACTS OF CBO RAMSINGH

With the foundation necessary to understand the importance and necessity of compliance with the land development process, the Grand Jury started a deep dive into various properties and building permits, which CBO Ramsingh was actively involved in, and raised red flags. This review consisted of Permit Details from TRAKiT, public record emails, bank records, and Permit Audits for each permit, which provided information such as when entries for a permit were made, who made the entries, and also documented changes made to entries and who made those changes.

In addition to the data provided from the records mentioned above, the Grand Jury reviewed the 54-page Corradino Report, which provided a review of the city's development processes. Testimony received by the Grand Jury explained that CM

Childress had suggested that a comprehensive review of the city's development process be conducted by a third-party to help identify issues and provide assistance with the ongoing problems between the Building Department and the Planning Department. Assistant City Manager (ACM) Todd Stoughton had been tasked to work on these issues and was unsuccessful in doing so. CM Childress' request was submitted to the commission and was approved by consent, authorizing the expenditure of up to $50,000 for the review.

The Corradino Report identified troubling practices within the Building Department, particularly under the leadership of CBO Ramsingh. These practices were inconsistent with applicable laws, improper in the management of the permitting process, and, in some instances, negligent. Found within the report were specific examples of questionable practices and approvals of a few permits for projects within the city during CBO Ramsingh's stint as CBO. The Grand Jury looked into a few of those examples as well as others to make their own determination of any malfeasance and/or criminal conduct.

What the Grand Jury learned from a review of seven (7) different properties, named in the Indictment, was that CBO Ramsingh had engaged in fraudulent practices such as, approving permits without surveys or plans being provided which were required, closing permits despite not having inspections being conducted, and in some cases for projects that involved plumbing, electrical. Beyond that, the evidence showed CBO Ramsingh bypassing departments and necessary reviews; namely, Planning, HARC, and in one case allowing a permit to be approved for work that had been previously denied by the Planning Board.

CBO Ramsingh's cavalier acts of bypassing necessary reviews not only created potential negative impacts which the land development process protects, i.e., flooding, water quality, adequate resources as described above, but by removing these reviews it has cost the City of Key West financially. The fees associated with the review process and inspections are funds that go into the city's coffers. Although saving in a

review/inspection fee may be beneficial to the particular homeowner or contractor, overall, it hurts the citizens. Based on the testimony and evidence found within the Corradino report, since CBO Ramsingh started as the CBO in 2021, the number of reviews has dropped 86%.

If that were not enough, the most egregious wrong-doings discovered by the Grand Jury was CBO Ramsingh's manipulation and misuse of the TRAKiT system for his own personal gain. A few of the properties that were named in the Indictment charging Official Misconduct, it was discovered that payments for projects went to a construction company named Strykker-Avery Homes, LLC. Records provided to the Grand Jury in the form of Sunbiz records, bank signature cards and deposited checks identified Rajindhar Ramsingh as the owner/agent of the company and signing and depositing checks in connection with the projects.

The Grand Jury then focused on properties and projects within the city of Key West that CBO Ramsingh's construction company Strykker-Avery Homes, LLC was associated with and paid. Separate from CBO Ramsingh's altering, changing, or deleting entries in TRAKiT and/or circumventing reviews and inspections, five (5) properties revealed a windfall in terms of revenue generated for Strykker-Avery Homes, LLC. In just five (5) construction jobs, CBO Ramsingh's construction company's gross revenue exceeded 1.9 million dollars. Moreover, the evidence showed in a few of these projects, CBO Ramsingh was the one to approve the permits and furthermore neglected to require inspections.

One can only wonder how many more properties/permits CBO Ramsingh's company has worked on, and he supplemented his CBO income with. It is the Grand Jury's hope that the fraudulent course of conduct, having now been revealed, a further investigation is conducted and steps are taken by city leaders to prevent all of this from ever happening again.

THE CONCERTED EFFORT TO KEEP THE STATUS QUO & THE COVERUP

Consider, in light of the Corradino findings, the text messages referenced earlier—specifically those discussing the removal of the Corradino Report from the public agenda and any discussion. These messages, dated June 5, 2024, were deliberately withheld from the State Attorney's Office by the Ramsingh brothers and Mr. Young in response to a lawful subpoena.

With the contents of the Corradino Report now revealed, those text exchanges among members of the so-called "boys' club," as well as the City Attorney's efforts to "counsel" Commissioner Carey on how to remove the report, take on a much more troubling significance.

It was learned that several commissioners often relied on the City Attorney to explain documents to them and made decisions based on those explanations without forming independent opinions on matters. These explanations extended beyond the city attorney's responsibility to provide legal council. CA Ramsingh's 'guidance' to commissioner Lissette Carey to remove, and how to remove the Corradino Report is a prime example.

Commissioner Carey's testimony revealed to the Grand Jury a perceived intimidation by CA Ramsingh to coerce her to take those steps to remove the Corradino Report from the city commission's agenda and thereby precluding public discussion. According to Commissioner Carey she advanced this directive as a result of intimidation and coercion from CA Ramsingh when he revealed the mention of her family in the Corradino Report. Yet, she still failed to read the report to gain her own understanding of the impact to family, but more importantly, her constituents.

This raises a fundamental question: how was it permissible for the City Attorney to be involved in any matter related to the Building Department, given that his brother

served as the CBO? The conflict of interest is not only clear—it presents a glaring appearance of impropriety.

Yet nothing was said or done when the City Attorney (along with the other members of 'the boy's club') took up the cause to have the Corradino Report removed from the agenda and public discussion, and his brother's misconduct, actually criminal conduct, brought to light. Thankfully, the Grand Jury did not turn a blind eye. What the evidence demonstrated was due to City Attorney Ramsingh's overwhelming unchecked power and influence, he, along with his brother and others were able to create a 'false shield', a toxic bubble of protection, enabling the misconduct while silencing other city employees and manipulating city officials.

A COMMENT ON THE CITY COMMISSION

Based upon the testimony the Grand Jury received, it became apparent that the citizens of Key West were not being served to the best of all the commissioners' and public officials' abilities. Turning a blind eye to items and tasks that may cause conflict or unpopularity and putting minimal effort in their role as a commissioner/public official is an insult to the citizens who put their faith and trust in their role as a leader. For example, the Grand Jury learned that not all commissioners "did their homework" prior to making important decisions and instead relied on the opinions and suggestions of others. One blatant example is the demonstrated apathy towards the Corradino Report by former commissioners Jimmy Weekley, Billy Wardlow, and Clayton Lopez, who admitted they either did not read or did not thoroughly read the report.

It became obvious that in the twilight of former commissioners, they failed in regard to their duties and responsibilities to the City Commission and their constituents. The fact that they did not give any consideration and diligence in thoroughly reading and digesting the Corradino Report and its implications - a neutral consulting firm that they all agreed on and used nearly $50,000 dollars in city funds to obtain- directly

continued the toxicity present in the Building and Planning Department and allowed the continuation of the criminal misconduct of the CBO.

We heard that commissioners/public officials were presented with numerous opportunities to become informed and address the many concerns from city employees and constituents but failed. A person in a position of leadership should avail themselves of all information and ensure they gather facts and input from all sources. They should have strength of character and convictions to lead and form edicts and make decisions that best serve the city, the citizens and the community at large, not just those that have "connections," or are "well-known." These impactful decisions and edicts have broader implications. Willful blindness to the weight of the role and blindly following the "guidance," if it can even be called that, from the CA or the CM without even attempting to gain an independent knowledge and form their own decision is the epitome of negligence.

It begs the question of what are the motivations and reasons for wanting to serve in a position that is so vital to the day-to-day mechanisms of running a city and each citizen who resides in it? Why do these individuals do their job? The answer should be to help make the City of Key West shine and make it a place that continues to be a a great place to live and a destination for tourists.

Over five (5) weeks, the Grand Jury heard from over 25 witnesses and reviewed countless documents, most of which were public records obtained from the City of Key West. The testimony and evidence depicted a culture defined less by governance and more by loyalty to a closed-circle "boys' club" prioritizing personal gain, loyalty, and influence over public service. This "loyalty" came at the direct expense of transparency, fairness, and the Key West citizens. Ronald Ramsingh, Rajindhar Ramsingh, James Young, and other city officials swore to serve.

A total of seven (7) indictments, charging thirteen (13) felony offenses, the majority related to/in connection with their public/official employment with the City

of Key West. The conduct of these individuals, aside from being criminal and unethical, compromised the public's safety and shattered its trust. Make no mistake, although only three individuals were indicted, based on what the Grand Jury discovered, there are others whose actions are questionable.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

We make the following recommendations and strongly encourage they be immediately adopted and implemented. If such recommendations are not adopted, the City of Key West Commission should provide an explanation at a public City of Key West Commission meeting within a minimum of 90 days from the release of this report.

CURRENT & FORMER CITY OFFICIALS

1. **Ronald Ramsingh** – Although no longer employed with the City, it should be noted that we unanimously concluded that Ronald Ramsingh should have been immediately terminated for cause. Ronald Ramsingh should also be barred from future government employment, whether with the City of Key West or Monroe County.

2. **James Young** – Although no longer employed with the City, it should be noted that we unanimously concluded that James Young should have been immediately terminated for cause. James Young should be barred from future government employment whether with the City of Key West or Monroe County.

3. **James Young** – Complete an audit of all work done on his property at 902 Thomas Street by Strykker-Avery/Rajinhdar Ramsingh shall be thoroughly inspected at his cost under and after-the-fact permit.

4. **Rajinhdar Ramsingh** - Although no longer employed with the City, it should be noted that we unanimously concluded that Rajinhdar Ramsingh should have been immediately terminated for cause. Rajinhdar Ramsingh should be barred from future government employment, whether with the City of Key West or Monroe County.

5. **Rajinhdar Ramsingh** – Immediately complete an audit of all work done on his property at 2827 Harris Avenue, which is currently up for sale. Notification shall be made to the real estate company listing his house that an audit of all work as well as a comprehensive inspection of all prior permits will be immediately conducted under an after-the-fact permit at his expense. Additionally, the Monroe County Property Appraiser's Office should be contacted to ensure that all prior permits and accurate data have been received, which is used to calculate valuation and ad valorem tax purposes.

6. **Rajinhdar Ramsingh** – Immediately complete an audit in the TRAKiT system to identify all properties either Strykker-Avery and/or Rajinhdar Ramsingh is listed as either the applicant, contractor or otherwise associated with a permit, other than as CBO. For all properties that Strykker-Avery or Rajinhdar Ramsingh performed the work and there are no inspections or CO, notification shall be made to the property owner.

7. **Lissette Carey** – While not charged with any criminal violations by this Grand Jury, the testimony and evidence of her actions and inactions raised many concerns in her decision-making and, more importantly, her ability to serve the city in the capacity as a commissioner. Whether it is a lack of understanding the role, duties and responsibilities the position of a City Commissioner entails, she has not demonstrated the wherewithal and convictions needed to serve in this capacity. Although having had a positive impact while in her prior role with the Housing Authority, the Grand Jury

concludes and recommends that, in the interest of integrity and betterment of the city, Lissette Carey resign from her position as City Commissioner.

8. **Todd Stoughton** – Todd Stoughton was the individual charged with working with the Building and Planning Departments to resolve the ongoing conflicts. Testimony and evidence received by the Grand Jury revealed that Todd Stoughton's close relationship with Ronald Ramsingh, Rajinhdar Ramsingh and Jim Young, the three indicted defendants, skewed his ability to think and act objectively, instead prioritizing the relationships over implementing real change. Whether by choice or unduly influenced by the professional and personal relationship with the three indicted defendants, Todd Stoughton's inability to do his job impartially when it came to addressing issues with CBO Ramsingh was a contributing factor to the ongoing toxic environment created with the permitting process. Despite the removal of the three indicted defendants, his prior conduct raises serious concerns about his ability to execute his current responsibilities and serve in a management/supervisory role to the betterment of those under him and the much-needed advancement of the city and its residents. The Grand Jury concludes and recommends that Todd Stoughton resign from his current position as Assistant City Manager.

ORGANIZATIONAL, STRUCTURAL & PROCEDURAL

9. Establish a robust Whistleblower Protection policy and procedure to encourage city employees, residents and vendors to come forward without fear of losing their employment or face intimidation, threats or retaliation.

10. Implement strict anti-corruption policies and require the Human Resources Department to keep all formal performance evaluations in employees' files.

11. Adopt an ordinance that requires each city employee to undertake ethics training that includes a review of the Conflict of Interest Code of Ethics Ordinance and Florida's Public Records Law. A minimum of eight (8) hours yearly for all city employees and a minimum of sixteen (16) for all Elected, Chartered Officials and Department heads.

12. Codify procedures allowing for the immediate temporary suspension with pay of charter employees arrested for a criminal offense, and in the case of the filing of formal criminal charges, allow for the suspension to be without pay.

13. Restructure the City of Key West organizational chart with respect to the Human Resources Department and make an independent or a charter position. Based upon the information received by the Grand Jury, there have been breakdowns/nonactions and, in some cases, retaliation when employees with concerns or issues with their supervisor or department head report issues following the Chain of Command, due in part to the current organizational structure of human resources reporting to the assistant city manager. Any employee should be able to take any issue with any other employee, regardless of their position, and feel safe, and that it will be handled by someone outside of any chain of command.

14. For the next fiscal year, the City of Key West should budget for an Internal Auditor who is a licensed CPA. The duties would be to conduct efficiency and performance audits of the city government and its officials with written reports submitted to the City Manager, Mayor and City Commission. The Internal Auditor would report directly to the City Manager and have have free and unrestricted access to government employees, officials, records and reports where appropriate and to require all branches, departments and officials of city government to produce documents, files and other records. This will assist the city in accomplishing its objectives by bringing a systematic and disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the

effectiveness of the organization's risk management, controls and governance processes.

LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE & ADMINISTRATIVE

15. City Commissioners – Through the evidence and testimony received by the Grand Jury, we learned that several Commissioners failed, or chose not to read or follow up on reports that were commissioned/sanctioned regarding the city and were paid for with city funds. There needs to be a system in place to assure that each Commissioner fulfills their duty to the citizens of Key West to read and sign off that they have reviewed any reports commissioned/sanctioned regarding the city, whether or not city funds were expended on a particular report or review. In situations where the Commissioners will be called to act upon or vote on a matter, require that a certification of document review be executed by each Commissioner before the meeting/vote.

16. City Attorney – The City Attorney should only be involved when there is a legal question involved. This individual should not have unlimited influence on other city employees in the execution of their duties. The City Attorney is instrumental in ***guiding*** the City Commission and Administration in the development and implementation of policies and procedures.

    The Grand Jury learned that the City Attorney was requiring attendance at all meetings the City Manager would conduct, be it with Commissioners, Department Heads, or employees. This led to the City Attorney being able to exercise their influence and impose their will on the individuals, preventing an open and free discussion. We would like to emphasize that the City Attorney need not attend every meeting among Commissioners, City

Managers, Department Heads, and employees unless legal counsel is required and/or an agreement with all the parties for the City Attorney's presence.

17. City Attorney – Procurement of Legal Services. We strongly recommend that Sec 2-797(4) a be revised and change the amount the City Attorney can expend without notification to the City Manager and the Commissioners from $50,000 to $2,500:

Sec. 2-797 – Exemptions

(4) *Exempt contractual services and commodities.* Exempt contractual services and commodities not subject to the competitive procurement requirement are as follows:

a. Legal services including paralegal, expert witnesses, appraisal services and court reporters. Prior to engaging legal services estimated to have a cost in excess of ~~$50,000.00~~ $2,500.00, the city attorney shall notify the city manager and the city commission.

18. Chief Building Officer – The discovery that the CBO was operating a construction company (Strykker-Avery Homes, LLC) within the City and possibly performing inspections within the City's jurisdiction, while the acting CBO, is totally abhorrent. The CBO's employment contract and job description should include the following stipulations as a condition of employment:

a. The building official shall not perform, operate, or lend his/her license to any Private Provider inspection services within the City's jurisdiction.

b. The building official shall not perform any construction contracting operations or have any association, monetary or otherwise with any construction contracting within the City's jurisdiction.

c. The building official shall update all licensure information to list the City of Key West so that all notifications regarding licensure are sent to the City of Key West.

d. The building official shall keep current and all licensures necessary to serve as the building official and shall be subject to discipline, including suspension without pay, in the event a license becomes delinquent/inactive/disabled/suspended.

19. Chief Building Officer – We strongly recommend that Sec. 90-301 – Enforcement Authority be revised to be consistent with Fl. Stat. 468.604:

Sec. 90-301. - Enforcement authority.
(a)The Chief Building Official, under the supervision of the city manager, shall administer and enforce the Florida Building Code as adopted and required by Florida Statute. The Building Official may be provided with the assistance of such other city officers and employees as the city manager may direct but in no case shall assign an unlicensed staff member to perform duties that require licensure. The Building Official shall administer the building permitting process such that all City Departments responsible for specific application reviews and/or inspections may collaborate efficiently. This shall include such departments responsible for reviewing application criteria for Fire Prevention and Life Safety, Floodplain Management, BPAS, Zoning, Land Development Regulations, Historic District Development, Utilities, Parking, Urban Forestry, Roadways and traffic. land development regulations.

20. The City Planner – We strongly recommend that Sec. 90-301 – Enforcement Authority be revised as follows:

Sec. 90-301. - Enforcement authority.

(b) The City Planner, under the supervision of the City Manager, shall have the administrative responsibility to interpret the land development regulations. ~~Such interpretations shall be in writing and accompanied by review and written consent by the city attorney.~~

21. The City Code Official - We strongly recommend that Sec. 90-301 – Enforcement Authority be revised and the following subsection be added:

Sec. 90-301. - Enforcement authority.

(c) The City Code Official, under the supervision of the City Manager, shall enforce the City Ordinances, which include the Florida Building Code by reference and the land development regulations with the collaborative assistance of the Planning and Building staff.

22. Establish a Citizen Advisory Committee to provide recommendations on specifically identified building permit-related matters and city proposals. This advisory board would provide input and recommendations on proposed projects, ensuring community participation and transparency in the decision-making process. The Committee would review project details, listen to public feedback, and offer suggestions in the form of a report to city officials based on what is gathered through public comment or meetings held. The ultimate decision-making still falls within the authority of the commission, however, this would allow for more citizen input than the 3-minute comment period at a commission hearing, after only 2-3 days to review the agenda item along with the data and analysis. This will provide a structural way for residents to engage in the decision-making process as well as help prevent conflicts and delays in project implementation.

BUIDING PERMIT PROCESSES

23. TRAKiT is the current system the City uses for permitting, code and project development. We learned that there is a way the program can be set up so that a permit application can automatically be sent to all the different departments for review and approval, taking the human factor out of the process. Additionally, a Building Permit Check List by Job or Trade could be put together, as was previously done by former Historic Preservation Manager Enid Torregrosa-Silva, to provide guidance for the appropriate departments that need to review permits received.

24. In order to prevent circumvention of any necessary reviews or variance requirements, it is recommended that when a variance is denied, there be some type of 'red flag' entered in the system under the property's address. In the event another permit is applied for, the previous application and the denial can be reviewed to ensure the new application is processed appropriately.

25. Complete an audit for all expired permits. The CBO is to create a matrix with the categories of permits that may qualify for 'Administrative Closure" with no final inspection. Permits that should not qualify for closure without a final inspection should be for minor work and not involve any life-safety impacts, i.e. nothing structural, electrical, fuel, gas, egress, change of use, or commercial.

26. Establish a process that notifies permit holders when a permit will expire without an approved inspection within 60 days. Upon the expiration of the permit, a code visit should be scheduled and/or the property owner contacted for them to provide the status of the work completed or notify that it has been cancelled. All of which is to be documented within TRAKiT. Establish a

fee/penalty schedule for expired permits based upon the length of time the permit was expired to be assessed prior to a Certificate of Occupancy (CO) being issued.

27. Those properties/projects that fall under the jurisdiction of HARC and need to be inspected shall be inspected by a HARC inspector, unless there is a written agreement/permission by HARC (noted in the system by a HARC representative, not the CBO or building inspector) for a building inspector to complete the inspection.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The majority of the evidence and testimony presented over the past five weeks was, to say the least, shocking—revealing a pattern of systemic neglect and deep-rooted corruption. Yet, amidst the darkness, there were glimmers of light: moments of hope found in the testimony of dedicated, passionate employees. These individuals bravely spoke out about the work environment and their unwavering commitment to serving the city's best interests—despite facing bullying, retaliation, and obstruction from those higher up in the chain of command.

The current employees who chose to testify, fully aware of the risk of potential retribution, deserve the highest commendation. Without their strong moral compass and courage to speak the truth, the toxic culture—and potentially criminal behavior—might have continued unchecked.

Many of these employees were visibly emotional as they testified, expressing a profound sense of relief at finally being able to share their truth with people who were genuinely listening. For some, the feeling of being heard after so long was so overwhelming that it moved them to tears.

These are the individuals who are the fabric of what is needed right now, and those in power should strive to keep them. The motivation to do their job well and devotion to public service embody the ethical core that the City of Key West desperately needs. There are good people in place who can bring back pride to the city, but they cannot do it without support. They alone cannot change what has been enabled and fostered through decades of maladaptive functioning by leadership. By working together and with an open mind to allow for all to speak and be heard, versus a strict compliance to the 'chain of command,' can integrity and trust return.

The Grand Jury also acknowledges that the Mayor is aware of the significant challenges currently facing city government, including issues related to administrative efficiency, fiscal management, and public service delivery. It is evident the Mayor wants to take a proactive approach by initiating reforms and engaging with key stakeholders to develop solutions. The Grand Jury commends this approach and encourages continued transparency and collaboration to ensure meaningful and lasting improvements that benefit the entire community.

V. CONCLUSION

Benjamin Franklin stated, "It is the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority." We, the Grand Jury, questioned authority and found it wanting. We uncovered not merely dysfunction but design—intentional acts of suppression, manipulation, and willful ignorance. The actions and inactions detailed herein have weakened the structural integrity of Key West's government, undermining public faith and placing our community at risk.

This report is both a factual record and a call to action. The citizens of Key West deserve leadership that is competent, ethical, and courageous. The City of Key West can no longer afford the consequences of complacency. This is not the end of Key West. It is the beginning of its reckoning. This is a great city of "One Human Family," which

requires hard decisions to be made and leaders not afraid to make the hard, unpopular decisions and not cave to pressure, and "this is the way it has always been mentality."

The word "Conch" holds different meanings for different people. Traditionally, a symbol of local pride and identity in Key West, it has, in the context of the Grand Jury's findings, become tainted, synonymous with collusion and corruption among certain public officials. It is the sincere hope of this Grand Jury that, now that the curtain has been lifted and the nepotistic culture exposed, meaningful change will follow. Only then can the term "Conch" once again be a source of honor and pride.

Let this report serve as a blueprint for reform and a warning to those who would place personal loyalty and personal gains above public duty; The citizens are watching. The laws will be upheld. And the sunshine, so central to our island, must now be restored by our government.

We stand united in our findings and recommendations – because the people of Key West deserve better, and now, they know the truth.

SO SAY WE ALL,

Michelle Stettner

MICHELLE STETTNER

MATTHEW KEY

MATTHEW KEY

AMY EICHEN

JORGE QUINTANA

JORGE QUINTANA

MICHAEL HORN

ADRIAN WILSON

ELLEN FANIZZI DALTON

KAY FERRUCCI

KAY FERRUCCI

WILLIAM BROWN

WILLIAM BROWN

SERENA M. LUKENS

SERENA M. LUKENS

CLEA DUFFY

CLEA DUFFY

RITA McNABB

RITA McNABB

LAURA PIIPPONEN

LAURA PIIPPONEN

REBECCA BLAIS

ERIC HAUSER

ERIC HAUSER

CHRISTOPHER SCHIEFER