



# KEY WEST

ART & HISTORICAL SOCIETY™

August 2, 2018

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of Key West Art & Historical Society (the “Society”), to inform you of concerns expressed, and a recommendation adopted, by vote of the Society’s Board of Directors<sup>1</sup>, regarding the Resolution identified as Item 30<sup>2</sup> on the City Commission’s August 7, 2018 agenda.

First, our Board of Directors wishes to commend HARC, City Manager Jim Scholl and City staff for their recognition of the great historical importance of the power plant facility (the “Facility”) located at the Angela St./Geraldine St. site, as well as the need to rehabilitate and reuse the Facility. HARC’s Draft Report correctly assumes and recommends that, upon completion of structural repairs needed to preserve the Facility, a change of occupancy will be necessary. The Board whole-heartedly endorses the proposed Resolution’s stated objective that the City preserve this historic resource and utilize it for a museum. That objective is consistent with the HARC Draft Report’s recommendation that the City “pursue rehabilitation focused on a new use that is compatible and sensitive to the historic character of the site”.

However, the apparent pre-selection of the World Powerboat Foundation as the entity to undertake this rehabilitation and reuse effort is troubling. Offshore racing powerboats played no part in the relevant historic period of this Facility; such vessels are completely unrelated to and out of character with this community infrastructure Facility. Replacing industrial power-generation equipment with speedboats would be incongruous to say the least. Comprehensive Plan Policy 1A-1.2.8 (Performance Standards governing re-use of an historic structure) prohibits the introduction of such “visual, auditory, or atmospheric elements that are out of character or alter its setting”.

The only stated justification for pre-selection of the Powerboat Foundation is that “The City has been approached by the World Powerboat Foundation with interest in utilizing the historic diesel energy plant at 100 Angela Street/Geraldine Street for a museum”. Although many other, historically appropriate, uses were discussed in multiple public meetings and at the HARC workshop, it appears that none of these potential uses has been given credence by City management. To pre-select one historically incongruent use and one entity runs counter to the public policy expressed in the City’s competitive solicitation ordinance, which strongly favors issuance of an RFP to assure selection of a qualified respondent capable and willing to undertake rehabilitation and an historically appropriate re-use of the Facility.

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid any appearance of conflict with their official duties on behalf of the City, Board members employed by the City recused themselves from voting on this matter.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.*, “Resolution directing the City Manager to pursue the feasibility of utilizing the historic diesel energy plant at 100 Angela Street/Geraldine Street as a museum for the World Powerboat Foundation”.



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As the stewards of three historic properties on the island, the Key West Art & Historical Society is committed to preserving the island's historic structures and making them available to the public. This difficult task requires major fundraising efforts, time, and commitment. Considering the state of the Custom House at the time the Society acquired the lease, I am confident there were naysayers who believed the job was too expensive or that the building was too far-gone. Fortunately, the Society and the community were able to raise the necessary funds to convert a derelict masonry building into the museum it is today, serving the local community and visiting public.

The Society strongly encourages the city to initiate an RFP process and to move forward with rehabilitation of the Facility. The Society is more than willing to assist in whatever capacity it can on these matters.

Kind regards,

**Michael F. Gieda**

*Executive Director*

**Key West Art & Historical Society Board of Directors**

*The mission of the Key West Art & Historical Society 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.*