SUNSET CELEBRATION AT MALLORY SQUARE: A Community Vision Plan

Presentation of Findings from Public Outreach
Executive Summary

Mallory Square is the most iconic historic waterfront space in Key West, where visitors and locals gather for sunset celebration. The evening hours with performers, artists, and food make the square a one-of-a-kind vibrant experience for all. Located on the northwest side of the island, the square is surrounded by significant and outstanding buildings that narrate the history of the mercantile and maritime activities that once drove the island’s economy. No other waterfront space on the island still retains so many historic buildings within its adjacent surroundings.

The City is interested in improving the physical environment and uses of this waterfront public space as it is underutilized aside from several hours a day during sunset celebration. City staff has gathered citizen recommendations, challenges and input regarding this waterfront space to guide short-term and long-term plans. Two hundred and eighty-nine citizens participated in workshops and an online survey from February 10 to April 30, 2021.

This report is an executive summary of the data obtained from the online survey and contributions of all tenants and residents that were involved in the public workshops. Next, a landscape-architectural firm will synthesize public input to create final conceptual designs for review. A final master plan will guide construction work.
History

In 1823, Commodore David Porter established a base of operations for an anti-piracy squadron on this property. After piracy was suppressed, this area became a hub for the wrecking industry. Buildings on this property were then used for storage and auction of goods salvaged from shipwrecks.

In 1961, the City of Key West and the Old Island Restoration Foundation decided to restore this area. Buildings on this site were restored and repurposed to create a center of activity for community gatherings. The current brick pavers and landscaping plan were implemented in the late 1990s.

Historic Structures:
- Sponge Market and Old KW Chamber of Commerce (ca. 1850)
- Waterfront Playhouse (ca. 1850)
- Stone Cisterns (ca. 1870)
- Meson de Pepe (ca. 1879)
- Hospitality House (ca. 1886)
- Key West Art Center (ca. 1906)
- Cable Huts (ca. 1921 & 1932)
- Key West Aquarium (ca. 1933)
Introduction

City staff began this process by establishing four main areas for improvement: lighting, seating, shade, and signage. In order to receive input on these four themes, staff began by meeting with tenants of the Mallory Square area on February 10th, 2021. The purpose of this meeting was not only to establish existing challenges, and assets, but also to ask tenants about their vision for Mallory Square. Landscaping, uses, connectivity, and zoning were then established as other topics for discussion. Public outreach included four workshops, one of which was held via Zoom, from March 11th to April 15th. Sixty locals participated in the workshops.

Simultaneously with the workshops, the City created an online survey, which was open from March 19th to April 30th. This document is a summary of findings reflecting the public outreach process. It is staff’s intention to use this data in order to establish priorities for the development of a revitalization master plan.

Statistics:
- 1 Online survey
- 229 Respondents
- 4 Public Workshops & 1 Tenant Meeting
- 60 Local Participants
- 289 Residents and visitors gave public comment

Meeting with Tenants → Public Workshops → Survey → Data Analysis → Presenting Findings → Development of Revitalization Plan
Creating active and passive recreational opportunities is essential to keep people in public spaces throughout the day. A theme of activating the square all day underlined every public workshop the City conducted. Suggestions included:

- **Open-air markets**
- **Educational Venues**
  - Public access and exhibits at the Custom House and Cable Huts
- **Recreational activities**
  - Museum Ships at the T-Pier
  - Fishing off the pier including rental of necessary supplies, community gathering spaces, urban amenities for children
  - Potential wedding venue at Cable Huts and Hospitality House
- **Additional bars and restaurants**
  - Food vendors and/or food trucks
- **Art and Theater**
  - Outdoor theater through expansion and opening of the rear wall of the Waterfront Playhouse Theater
  - Local music and art exhibits, programming for all ages, occasional flea markets, salsa night near Meson de Pepe
APPENDIX A

Map with Possible Improvements
Connectivity

Sunset Celebration at Mallory Square should be a major component of a larger revitalization project. The public overwhelmingly said that better connectivity is needed between the historic square and the rest of the island. Visitors have difficulty finding the square, given inadequate signage and lack of clean paths to other major destinations such as Zero Duval and Truman Waterfront Park.

The public offered many ideas focusing on four major themes:

- **A walkway bridging Admirals Cut and Truman Waterfront (37% of Respondents)**
  - Much of the public was in agreement that there should be a way to walk from Truman Waterfront Park to Mallory Square along the water.

- **Improve the pedestrian experience from Duval to Mallory Square (25% of respondents)**
  - The walking experience from Duval to Mallory Square should be easy and enjoyable. The current walkway from Duval to the square on Wall Street is car-oriented and unattractive. The current waterfront walkway from Zero Duval to Mallory Square is cramped, convoluted, and in need of repair and signage. Redesign and renovate this waterfront path.

- **Beautify our existing walkways and entrances into the Historic Square (25% of respondents)**
  - Both Exchange St. and Tift's St. are tight car oriented pathways that are difficult for visitors to navigate.
  - Investigate the idea of a continuous walkway, with waterfront and inland sections, that would link Duval Street and Zero Duval by an improved waterfront walkway, to Mallory Square, across the Opal, then across Admiral’s Cut to Truman Waterfront Park, and back to Duval.

- **Widen the existing bridge between Mallory Square and The Opal (17% of respondents)**
  - Many respondents stated that the narrow bridge is tight, creates a bottleneck, and should be widened to help visitors navigate.
Lighting

Effective lighting of public spaces creates a visual experience and sense of place. Lighting also promotes safety, through increased foot traffic. With proper lighting, the public is encouraged to use the space during the evening hours.

Images of lighting options included in the survey, polls, and public workshops are displayed above. The public preferred the options below:

1. Tree lighting 2. Underwater lighting 3. Expanding the existing lighting at bridge

*The City will ensure that any lighting option that is chosen will not disrupt Sunset Celebration performance space.
Seating

Seating provides a place to rest, enjoy and meet others, and take in the views. Seating that is accessible, comfortable, and well-maintained, is key to activating public spaces. Seating also makes an area more inclusive, allowing users who may have physical limitations the ability to engage.

Images of seating options included in the survey, polls, and public workshops are displayed above. The public preferred the options below:

1. Berms/ Seating facing waterfront  
2. Siting around trees  
3. Hardscape seating

*The City will ensure that any seating option that is chosen will not disrupt Sunset Celebration performance space.

Comments:

> “Definitely a need for seating”
> “Needs to be comfortable”
> “Shade and seating please”
> Less seating is better for performers
Shade

Shade provides relief from the elements, offers aesthetic value, and a cool and comfortable place to congregate. Effective shading techniques attract people and invite them to stay outside longer. Shaded areas can allow for increased use of the square during the day.

Images of shades options included in the survey, polls, and public workshops are displayed above. The public preferred the options below:


*The City will ensure that any shade option that is chosen will not disrupt Sunset Celebration performance space.

Comments:

> “Seating and shade must be combined”
> “Essential for day time use”
> “Please add shade!!”
> “Shady spaces to sit and rest.”
Signage

A successful system of signage maintains a theme, attracts passersby, provides information and direction, and transports people to a destination. Signage needs to be seen, whether it is on the ground, at eye level, or overhead, and it needs to be clear and direct. Different types of signage can meet specific needs, target certain areas, all while incorporating the history of a specific site in the overall design.

Images of signage options included in the survey, polls, and public workshops are displayed above. The public preferred the options below:

*The City recognizes that the existing Mallory Square directory sign is a private sign that is not comprehensive in its representation.

Comments:
- “Welcome sign” by parking lot entrance
- “Simple one line signs”
- “Bathroom signage”
- “Post sunset time daily”
Landscaping

One of the most important aspects of an attractive public space is landscaping. Landscaping has the power to soften an urban space, bring people closer to nature, and create a safe and calming oasis within a busy and crowded city. Greenery not only adds to the aesthetics of a space, but also provides for public health and well-being.

Comments:
- “Need significant increase in trees and landscaping”
- “Take out gravel sections”
- “Grass won’t survive” due to high foot traffic
- “Green space”

Images of landscaping options included in the survey, polls, and public workshops are displayed above. The public preferred the options below:
1. Additional shade trees  
2. Large landscape green areas  
3. Current brick pavers
Zoning and Mobility

Mallory Square is currently zoned HPS. Zoning promotes certain uses of a property while prohibiting others that might not be a good fit. The HPS zoning is as follows:

**Current Uses Permitted:**
- Community centers, clubs, and lodges
- Educational institutions and day care
- Hospitals and extensive care
- Nursing homes, rest homes and convalescent homes
- Parks and recreation, active and passive
- Places of worship
- Business and professional offices
- Medical services.
- Parking lots and facilities
- Cemeteries

**Current Conditional Uses:**
- Cemeteries
- Cultural and civic activities
- Protective services
- Public and private utilities
- Marinas
- Deed restricted workforce affordable housing

The public’s vision for the City’s Future Mallory Square Zoning District includes an emphasis on activities, sense of place, and community.

**Possible Uses Permitted:**
- Parks and recreation, active and passive
- Cultural and civic activities
- Restaurant
- Bar
- Open-air vending and mobile vending consistent with city regulations

**Possible Conditional Uses:**
- Protective services
- Marinas
- Community centers, clubs, and lodges.
- Educational institutions and day care.
- Parking lots and facilities.

**Mobility** – As these city properties are rezoned the city must study alternative means to allow access to the Sunset Celebration Square.
The Public has been integral in forming this study and shaping how the City will move forward with Mallory Square. Through the workshops and online survey, the public weighed in on challenges and opportunities to keep revitalized Mallory Square.

- The public had extensive comment on the state of the square itself and the current amenities:
  - Most public comments were related to the restroom area. The small restrooms are not sufficient for the amount of people at the square and they can become unpleasant quickly.
  - Public comment also focused on the opportunities the City has for maintenance in the plaza, power washing sidewalks, scraping up gum, and picking up stray litter.
- People experiencing homelessness were a concern to some locals and residents as well. The City should strive to ensure that all people can comfortably use the park, while ensuring a safe and clean public space.
- Many respondents also wanted to see the Waterfront Playhouse Theatre expand to include an outside stage that can be used by artists, actors, and performers alike for alfresco performances.
- Cruise ships and the pier were a major focus as well. Many respondents wanted to see the T-pier expanded so that the public could walk out on the pier to sit, fish, and enjoy the proximity to the water. Respondents did not want major cruise ships to return to Mallory Square, but would welcome smaller ships and museum/educational ships at the pier.
- Lastly, a portion of the Public had fears that the Mallory Square renovation could “Miami our Key West”. Many respondents wanted the City to “leave it alone” and keep Mallory Square as is. The city would agree that any renovations must be in keeping with local historical guidelines and the character of the square.

Other category consisted of comments such as:
- “Please keep the military memorial free of vendors and performers”
- “How do you pay for the improvements?”
- “Add visitors information kiosk”
- “Remove black prison gates”
- “A place that is very much Key West. Don’t make it bigger and fancier. Make it homey, comfortable, open and airy, but available for all.”
- “Move from a cruise ship port with all of the cement to something green and friendly…”
- “Functional comfortable environment with infrastructure resistant to hurricane damage.”
Moving Forward

Immediate next steps:

> Review the maintenance and overall cleanliness opportunities at Mallory Square and commit to a grounds maintenance checklist
> Develop and release an RFP for architectural and landscape firms
> Consider pilot projects while the City, and a landscape architect seek permanent solutions
> Move forward on grant opportunities for improvements

6 month tasks:

> Consider renaming the square to represent the island’s vision
> Develop a new zoning district for the square and surrounding City-owned parcels
> Initiate implementation of connectivity suggestions that may include widening the bridge at The Opal, Admirals Cut bridge, and walkways from Duval, Front St, Zero Duval to Mallory Square
> Create regular programming at the Square to engage more visitors and residents, including daytime markets, etc.
> Consider a pilot project for Wall Street, Tift’s Alley and Exchange Street to encourage multi-modal pathways to Mallory Square
> Schedule a follow up meeting with the public to discuss progress

1 year tasks:

> Confirm the name of the historic square
> Initiate construction on proposed design for the square
> Implement the newly approved Mallory Square Zoning District
> Develop connectivity solutions including capital improvements
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  - Vice Mayor Sam Kaufman
  - Jimmy Weekley
  - Greg Davila
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  - Billy Wardlow
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