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OCT 2 2014

October 2, 2014

GROWTH MANAGEMENT DIVISION

Christine Hurley
Director, Growth Management Division
Monroe County
Via Hand-Delivery

Re: Ballast Key; Alt. Key 1158160; RE 00124030-000000

Dear Ms. Hurley:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the adverse impact on Ballast Key that would result from adoption of proposed amendments to the County's Comprehensive Plan, scheduled for hearing on October 7. As you may know, I have owned Ballast Key for several decades. During that time, I have made substantial improvements to the island, including construction of two residential buildings, a utility building, dock, gazebos, and extensive landscaping. Title to Ballast Key is currently held by my Living Trust.

For the past several months I have been engaged in discussions with the University of Miami and with other scientific and conservation organizations concerning my intended donation of Ballast Key. My intention is that this unique property be utilized as an educational center for oceanographic and marine research. I envision the creation on the island of a small campus to be operated by the University's Rosenstiel School in conjunction with other educational, scientific and conservation organizations.

The Comprehensive Plan amendments now under consideration by Monroe County include a new definition and development restrictions that would apply to "Offshore Islands". Those amendments are intended to serve the salutary purpose of protecting the environment and habitat values of the many undeveloped islands in the Florida Keys that are unconnected to US Highway One. Those islands, typically vegetated entirely by native wetlands and hammock vegetation, serve as habitat for migratory birds and other species of wildlife. However, there are a few islands, Ballast Key among them, that were created or substantially altered by man, which should not be placed in a land use category designed for pristine wildlife habitats.

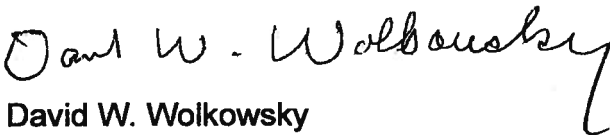
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Over the past several decades, I have planted a carefully-chosen mix of native and ornamental vegetation on Ballast Key, and improved the island with residential and accessory structures that enable my guests to enjoy the beauty of this unique island. It is now time to contemplate how this resource may best be utilized for the benefit of future generations. It is my hope and intention that use of Ballast Key will be expanded to accommodate education and research in the marine sciences. Unfortunately, the proposed "Offshore Island" amendments would greatly impede, if not prevent, that objective. And they would also render much of the existing improvements nonconforming.

I respectfully request that the proposed Amendments be revised to exclude Ballast Key from categorization as an "Offshore Island". Unlike the vast majority of islands unconnected to Highway 1, Ballast Key was created by man rather than by gradual natural processes such as coral accretion or mangrove growth, and it has been altered to accommodate human habitation. Surely it would be reasonable to differentiate Ballast Key from neighboring islands such as Man Key, Woman Key, the Barracuta Keys and the hundreds of other undisturbed offshore islands that need the protection of the exceptional restrictions imposed on "Offshore Islands" under the Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Please include this request in the materials presented to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration in their deliberations on the pending Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Sincerely,


David W. Wolkowsky