



(<https://keysnews.com>)

Login (<https://keysnews.com/login/?redirect=/article/story/two-groups-vying-for-old-chamber-property/>)

Q (<https://keysnews.com/archive/>)

(/feed=atom)

(<https://www.facebook.com/KeyWestCitizen/>)

(<https://twitter.com/KeyWestCitizen>)

A

A

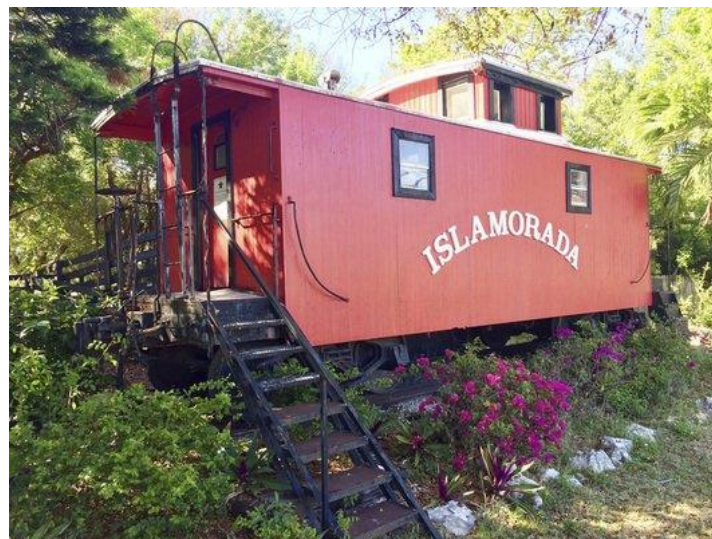
print

Two

groups vying for old chamber property

By Brian Bowden Free Press Staff

May 17, 2017



BRIAN BOWDEN/Free Press The old red caboose was the former home of the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce.

ISLAMORADA — The highway frontage at mile marker 82.5 that houses the old Islamorada Chamber of Commerce red caboose, historical information plaques, a picnic area and a small parking lot could have a new tenant by next month.

Last week at the chamber's board of directors meeting, the Florida Keys History and Discovery Center and the Matecumbe Historical Trust each submitted proposals to take over the abandoned property.

"Both ideas look nice," board President Ken Gentes told the Free Press.

Gentes wasn't able to provide more insight into which organization might make the better suitor for the property as he said the board hasn't yet had time yet to comb through both proposals. He said they would likely come to a decision by their next meeting on June 14.

The small bayside property is owned by the Florida Department of Transportation, which would need to sign off on a new tenant. It was leased years ago by the state entity to Monroe County. The county then leased the property to the local chamber. The chamber used it as its visitor's center before eventually moving to the entrance to Founders Park.

Jill Miranda-Baker, Florida Keys History and Discovery Center executive director, said her organization has a three-phased proposal for the property if it is able to take it over. The plan includes curb appeal improvements, interior caboose upgrades and exterior display additions.

"It would be a perfect extension for us and give a bit of a sneak peek into what we offer," Baker said in reference to the center, which is located about a half-mile away at the Islander Resort.

The old property needs quite a bit of maintenance. Much of the open area is unkempt and the caboose, which came from Tennessee and was donated to the chamber, has interior rotting and exterior rusting.

Barbara Edgar, Matecumbe Historical Trust president, said her group's proposal involves refurbishing all of the current plaques on the property that it placed there, adding plaques, ridding the property of overgrown exotics and overhauling the caboose.

"A lot of work and money will need to be put into that caboose," Edgar said. "And we plan to do that."

As part of the proposed caboose overhaul, the trust would like to add interpretive windows so visitors could look in them to read about different local artifacts.

"And the property would be open 24-7 under our watch," Edgar said.

Chamber Executive Director Judy Hull did not favor one proposal over the other.

"Both would make excellent choices," Hull said.

Asked why the Florida Keys History and Discovery Center would make a better suitor, Miranda-Baker said it is already well established in the community and it's near the caboose property.

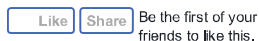
Edgar, in response to a similar question, said the Matecumbe Historical Trust already has a strong presence at the site and feels like it should be selected to continue the work needed there.

If the decision eventually handed down by the chamber's board doesn't sit well with either party, they could petition the county or FDOT to intervene on their own behalf.

"We're just going to wait and see what happens," Edgar said. "I'm not trying to step on toes here."

"[Regardless] we remain open to working with MHT and its board in promoting our common purposes," Miranda-Baker said.

bbowden@keysnews.com



Twitter and Google+ share links for the article: (http://twitter.com/keysnews/status=Two groups vying for old chamber property+https://keysnews.com/article/story/two-groups-vying-for-old-chamber-property/)