

Thank you, Mayor.

I'll first address the residents of the Village of Islamorada to explain why I oppose the construction of a pedestrian bridge at the entrance to Founders Park.

I'm asking my fellow Council members to authorize the Mayor to send a letter on behalf of the Village of Islamorada, asking Governor DeSantis to instruct the DOT to abandon the construction of the proposed bridge.

Simply stated, I oppose the bridge because of its irreversible and disastrous impact on the quality of life and community character of not only our Village, but also, the Florida Keys.

Islamorada has been my home for over 50 years.

Like most of you here this evening, I love my town because of its laid-back, small-town character.

A lot has changed in the Florida Keys since I moved here.

Some of it has not been so great, but some of it has been for the better: In my opinion, one of the most significant and positive changes was our decision to take control of our destiny, define ourselves as a community, and declare our independence.

We took another bold step and purchased Plantation Yacht Harbor which we now know as Founders Park.

Over the years Founders Park has evolved into not only our community park; it is indeed the heart and soul of Islamorada.

It's where our kids come to play baseball and soccer.

It's where our families can cool off in our community pool.

It's a place where we can dock our boat and experience world-class sunsets.

It's where we can apply for a building permit and take our pets for a walk in the park, as it were, all in the same day.

IT IS, by any measure, the Village's most prized possession.

Over the many years I've had the good fortune to make my home in the Florida Keys. I've learned a thing or two about our community character, but I could not describe my vision of our community more eloquently than the Mission Statement adopted by our Village founders over 20 years ago, which reads:

Our Mission

To Protect the Residents' Right to Quiet Enjoyment of Life

To Plan for Enhancing Our Village Character

To Preserve Our Community; Its People, Natural Resources, and Pride

To Provide Basic Services to Support our Quality of Life

For the life of me, I can't understand how the construction of this bridge at the entrance to Founders Park, is in any way, shape or form consistent with that Mission Statement.

We all know that what started out as a million-dollar project, deemed unwarranted by DOT, will now cost taxpayers approximately FIVE MILLION DOLLARS.

And, deep down inside, we know why that study was ignored and who was responsible for convincing DOT to build something that our town neither needed nor wanted.

The justification for the bridge started out as a traffic issue.

Well, come on! Special events like the Rotary Nautical Flea Market, Fourth of July, Holiday Festival and Island Fest, don't create a crisis so dire that we have to live with this assault on our community 365 days a year.

In point of fact, there is no evidence that it will have any discernible impact on traffic delays. Much of that traffic is going to Key West anyway.

And it certainly does nothing to address the traffic jams caused by the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, or the boat tournaments, bike runs and other events, such as Fantasy Fest, that occur throughout the year.

THEN ... justification for the bridge took a completely different direction ... to concern for the safety of school children.

Now, neither the School Board or Montessori school administration was asked for their opinion. The go-ahead was voted on BEFORE their input.

I have full confidence in our Sheriff's deputies. They are both qualified and dedicated to continue protecting our children when they cross U.S. 1.

Now, let's cut to the chase. In a letter dated August 4 2017, DOT decided NOT to construct a similar pedestrian bridge in Key West because, and I quote:

"Studies have shown that 95% of pedestrians will use an overpass if the walking time is the same as at street level. However, if using the overpass takes 50% longer than crossing at street level, almost no one would use the overpass.

It will just be visual clutter - we expect that a bridge, standing as high as 30 ft would be visually unappealing at the gateway to Key West."

ALSO, in the DOT Feasibility Study dated September 2016:

"At Founders Park in Islamorada, the location with the highest total annual event attendance, constructing a permanent pedestrian bridge is not warranted based on expected usage."

The DOT's very own Feasibility Study decided that it should NOT be built!

The Board of the Chamber of Commerce agreed that it should NOT be built. They petitioned the former Council URGING them to ABANDON this project.

The Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance also opposed the construction of the pedestrian bridge stating that it didn't fit the character of the scenic highway and encouraged the former Council to develop other alternatives.

I want our town to be remembered for its unique environment, small town atmosphere and forever known as the fishing capital of the world.

To my fellow Council members:

I know it is RIGHT that elected officials place the best interest of their community above their own personal agendas.

I know it is RIGHT that elected officials seek guidance from objective, credible sources.

I know it is WRONG for public officials to withhold pertinent information from their constituents.

We've read the results of DOT's Needs Analysis which, to my knowledge, was not made known to the public before the decision had already been made to build the bridge.

I'm here to ask you to take a stand for what you believe is right.

If you agree with

- the DOT,

- the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce,

- the Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance

- and the hundreds of Islamorada residents who have expressed their opinion that this structure is neither needed nor wanted,

... you will vote this evening to cancel this costly monstrosity.

By doing this, you'll send a message to Governor DeSantis that this bridge does NOT belong in the Florida Keys and certainly not here in the Village of Islamorada.

Now, let me tell you,

- some Council members may have expressed concern that the DOT will retaliate against the Village, or even make us pay them to abandon this ill-fated project.

However, legal advice has suggested it would be difficult for them to blame Islamorada, given that their OWN study recommended to NOT build this bridge.

The last thing the DOT wants to acknowledge is that they, in concert with a few individuals, decided to ignore their own conclusion that this bridge, doesn't belong here.

If we fail to act this evening, we'll be stuck with a FIVEMILLION-DOLLAR EYESORE that is not needed.

At the end of the day, the fate of this bridge WILL BE THIS COUNCIL'S LEGACY.
The decision is yours; Come on ... do the right thing.

In keeping with the overwhelming support of the residents of Islamorada:

I move that Council authorize Mayor Pinder to send a letter to Governor DeSantis, asking him to instruct the Department of Transportation to cease any further construction on the pedestrian bridge at the entrance to Founders Park, and to further authorize Mayor Pinder to travel to Tallahassee to meet with Governor DeSantis, personally.