

July 14, 2003

Mr. Fred Gaske
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Historic Preservation
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Mr. Gaske:

On behalf of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust I want to express our interest in applying for the Emergency Historic Preservation Project Funds made available by the Florida Department of State. The Trust is requesting \$234,179 in Emergency Historic Preservation Project Funds to complete a major restoration project on Virginia Key Beach Park that is scheduled to begin late 2003.

To put this critical restoration project into the proper perspective a brief history of Virginia Key Beach Park and the Trust are necessary. In 1999, a task force of concerned citizens came together to save a unique natural setting and historic park located on Virginia Key, an island just Southeast of Miami, Florida flanked by the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. Through the unanimous support of the City of Miami Commission, the task force became the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust. The Trust is charged with the preservation, restoration and development of Virginia Key Beach Park. During segregation the park was historically used by African Americans for beach and waterfront activities; from 1945 through the 1960's it was legally designated the "Colored Only" beach.

The park has a rich cultural history shared by the African American, Caribbean and Hispanic communities. It played a significant role in America's civil rights movement and hosted visits by nationally-known figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King and many prominent South Floridians that took part in the civil rights struggle.

The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is finalizing an eight (8) month public site planning process that has resulted in the development of a Master Plan. The Master Plan protects the natural setting, restores the beachfront and existing historic structures, replants thousands of trees and plants and transforms the park into a spectacular public venue of national importance. The park is a living museum that will also be home to a cultural center, museum and nature center complex.

The Trust is eager to fulfill the aspirations of the South Florida community and City of Miami Commission that charged it with this effort. We have been successful in raising funds and support from city, county and federal sources; however, the restoration of the existing historic structures on the park site is facing a \$234,179 shortfall that could severely slow the park's progress and jeopardize the entire Virginia Key Beach Park project.

As I stated earlier, the Trust is applying for \$234,179 in Emergency Historic Preservation Project Funds to help save this historic treasure. The (2-1) funding match necessary to satisfy our request comes from a \$500,000 federal appropriation to the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust from the U.S. Department of Interior, Conference Report on H.J. Res. 2, Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, (2003 – PL 108-007).

Similar to the "Miami Circle," the recently discovered Tequesta Indian burial site at the mouth of the Miami River, Virginia Key Beach Park also has a cultural and spiritual connection to South Florida. The park's importance to South Floridians is unquestioned; with the assistance of the Emergency Historic Preservation Project Funds, the entire nation will have the opportunity to experience this historic jewel.

If you have any questions regarding the funding requests or restoration project please feel free to contact me at 305-571-8230.

Sincerely,

Guy Forchion
Interim Executive Director

Attachments.

cc: M. Athalie Range, Chair
Virginia Key Beach Park Trust
VKBPT Historic Preservation Committee