



Office of the President
11000 University Parkway
Pensacola, FL 32514-5750

May 22, 2009

Dear Honorable Members of the Pensacola City Council:

As you know, the University of West Florida has been a key partner, and has made a major commitment to the Community Maritime Park since its inception. We have raised over \$10.4 million in gifts and anticipated State match for the maritime museum from over 600 donors, and our fundraising efforts continue. The maritime museum will be a wonderful educational facility and a major “anchor” for the Community Maritime Park (CMP), bringing an estimated 300,000 visitors to the Park each year. And, of course, the museum will honor the memory of Vice Admiral Jack Fetterman who envisioned a first-class, waterfront maritime museum. Also, we are committed to constructing a wonderful amphitheater made possible through the generosity of Skip and Martha Ann Hunter. And, if sufficient private gifts are secured, we will construct and operate a multicultural center that will tell the story of Pensacola’s rich multicultural history. These anticipated activities involve a combined capital commitment by the university to the Maritime Park of approximately \$20 million, one of the largest if not the second largest commitment of all the parties to this project.

In light of the several years of conceptual planning and work by many people on the maritime museum, I have been troubled over the past few weeks to learn of an apparent effort to alter the location of the maritime museum through changes in, limitations to, or delay of the UWF ground leases. Our leases have long been contemplated, and in fact have been approved by the CMPA Board. There is an effort to move the public Vice Admiral John H. Fetterman Maritime Museum and replace it with private retail and development.

Any significant changes in the location of the maritime museum and in the UWF ground leases would put it in jeopardy for a number of reasons. First, because the maritime museum will be a University facility, funded in part through the State’s Courtelis Matching Program, a definite, certain, and unequivocal long-term ground lease is required for the facility to be eligible for State matching funds for construction as well as operation and maintenance. Second, during the public referendum that approved the project and during our fundraising efforts the maritime museum has been consistently portrayed on the west waterfront of the CMP, as described in the ground lease. We consider the location of the museum as a commitment that has been made to the public and to those who make charitable gifts to the UWF Foundation for the Fetterman maritime museum. Moving the maritime museum at this point would be inconsistent with UWF’s representation of the museum to our donors...a representation that we have made in good faith, based on our partnership with the City and agreement with the CMPA Board, and in the many graphic presentations that have been made to the public.

I think it is fair to say that in supporting the public referendum on the CMP project, the citizens of Pensacola were especially strong in expressing support for the public park on the south end of the CMP, the waterfront maritime museum, and the public educational opportunities the museum will provide for our citizens and visitors. I am very concerned that significant changes to the site plan, especially with respect to the public park and maritime museum, would betray the public trust that the people of Pensacola have vested with the leaders of the City and UWF.

Finally, we have heard concerns that the maritime museum would be a “dead zone” that would occupy a prime location in the CMP. This is simply not true. About one year ago, UWF specifically asked the conceptual design firm for the maritime museum, one of the leading museum design firms in the nation, to find ways to “activate” the west side of the museum. The result was an expansion of the Trader Jon’s restaurant concept to include significant outdoor seating, the addition of a large “door” on the west side of the museum that will enable hands-on displays and activities to occur on the west waterfront, and for museum displays to be visible to passersby on the west side of the museum. We continue to be flexible in finding ways, consistent with UWF’s educational mission, to activate the maritime museum and other UWF facilities to make them as attractive and as interactive as possible.

Please know that UWF wishes to continue to work cooperatively with the City, the CMPA Board, and the master developer to ensure the overall success of the CMP. However, I want to express the University’s serious concern over any efforts to make significant changes to UWF’s ground leases and to the consistent portrayals of our intentions for the site since the very beginnings of the project. UWF must be true to its commitments.

Sincerely,



Judith A. Bense, Ph.D.
President

cc: Mayor Wiggins
City Manager Coby
CMPA Board Members via CMPA Board Secretary Ed Spears