



Florida Trust for Historic Preservation  
906 East Park Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32301  
(850) 224-8128

October 9, 2019

*Sent via email*

Mayor Dean Trantalis  
City of Fort Lauderdale  
City Hall  
100 North Andrews Avenue  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301

Dear Mayor Trantalis:

On October 5, 2019 we requested a meeting with you to discuss our property located at 900 N. Birch Road in Fort Lauderdale and our position. Your offer accepted our request to meet but asked for us to identify which statements we allege to be inaccurate in your letter to the governor and the documentation that substantiates our position so that you are better prepared to discuss in person. Please see your statements below in red with our responses as follows.

*I am requesting that you and the Cabinet intervene in the ongoing dispute regarding the historic Bonnet House located on Fort Lauderdale's beach.*

It is unclear why your letter from October 2, 2019, is addressed to the Governor of Florida and why the City of Fort Lauderdale is seeking the Florida Cabinet to halt a historic property agreement between two Florida non-profits. Neither the Governor of Florida nor the Florida Cabinet have control over the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, which is an independent nonprofit, its thirty-five acres of property or Bonnet House, Inc, also an independent nonprofit.

*As you may know, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation has ordered the local management of the property to immediately turn over control. I am asking that you and the Cabinet halt this action and investigate the ongoing dispute over the property and the egregious actions underway by the Florida Trust.*

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation has been the sole owner of the Bonnet House property and grounds since 1983, when its owner Evelyn Bartlett entrusted the property to the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation for its long term stewardship through a Preservation Agreement.

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation is preparing to restructure management operations at the Bonnet House, a 1924 historic estate in Ft. Lauderdale it has owned since 1984. Your office was made aware of this in February when multiple in person meetings were made with the City. The Florida Trust will accomplish this transition by exercising its contractual right to terminate its Historic Property



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Agreement with Bonnet House, Inc. for management and operation of the Bonnet House property. To state our actions as egregious is a defamation to our character as a non-profit organization. It is important to make clear that this action was initiated by Bonnet House Inc. request for Florida Trust to authorize sale and development and then a request for a divorce. They were the drivers, not the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation.

*Bonnet House in Fort Lauderdale is one of Florida's finest historic sites. Preparing to celebrate its centennial year, it is a wonderfully authentic example of turn-of-the-century Florida, a respected centerpiece of our diverse community. Unfortunately, the future of Bonnet House has been put at immediate and long-term risk by the actions of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation against the not-for-profit Bonnet House Inc.*

The Bonnet House is a 35-acre historic estate on Fort Lauderdale Beach, and the last undeveloped ocean-front property in the city. This historic property was the home of the late Fred and Evelyn Bartlett and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Ms. Bartlett's express wishes for the property as laid out in the 1983 Preservation Agreement were that the property be *"retained and maintained in its current natural condition, unspoiled by development and available for the benefit and enjoyment of the general public...."*

The Florida Trust goal has been and will continue to be the protection and preservation of historical properties throughout Florida, including the Bonnet House. We are preservationist and historians.

*The Trust has ordered the not-for-profit to vacate the site and end its stewardship. Bonnet House Inc. is the local charitable organization tasked with funding and maintaining the house and gardens, tasks which they have effectively accomplished with great care.*

On Fri., Jan. 12, 2018, the Florida Trust formally approved BHI's request that we find the continued operation of the Bonnet House to be economically infeasible. BHI has not presented a program for Bonnet House that is acceptable to Florida Trust that assures economic self-sufficiency and which is in accordance with the wishes of Evelyn Bartlett. I would like to point out that Bonnet House, Inc. are not "tasked" with anything outside of the Historic Property Agreement with the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation. They are simply operators and started life as an offshoot of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation.

On February 20, 2019 The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation issued a 180-Day Termination Notice of the Historic Property Agreement. Bonnet House, Inc. was created by the Florida Trust in 1990 to manage and operate the Bonnet House property and grounds on behalf of the Florida Trust. The current agreement between the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation and Bonnet House, Inc. expires in 2020.

*It is important to understand the Florida Trust does not allocate money to support Bonnet House. The local Board is responsible for funding all operations. In fact, the Trust has used the Bonnet House as a*



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*piggy bank for its own purposes. The Trust has taken at least \$1.4 million from the Bonnet House, and now 64% of its budget is funded by Bonnet House dollars. This is neither fair nor appropriate.*

Florida Trust for Historic Preservation writes and manages grants and writes and approves letter of recommendation as the owner of the property. It also engages in oversight activities, as required by the Historic Property Agreement, including actions like reviewing BHI's budget and programs to confirm that they comply with the Trust documents that conveyed the property to Florida Trust. Furthermore, the National Trust has oversight responsibilities and receives budgets for the Bonnet House each and every year. To imply that the Florida Trust has stolen money from the Bonnet House is wrong. There is a historic property agreement that is place and the terms of that agreement are clear. It is important to note that the money you reference from the historic property agreement is over a period of over 30 years.

*I think the Cabinet needs to consider how the Florida Trust, under its plan, could maintain and pay for the needs of the Bonnet House considering its own lack financial resources. The Trust lacks the funding or bandwidth to do so. The unfortunate reality is the local Bonnet House board has raised more than \$1 million in recent years to support the property while much of that money has been siphoned off by the Florida Trust to pay for things like offices in Tallahassee. That remains a main source of conflict, and one which puts the Bonnet House in jeopardy.*

Absolutely no money from fundraising has been siphoned off by Florida Trust. Florida Trust receives a portion of gate receipts and special event fees only. That is simply an untrue statement. To the contrary, there is an endowment fund for the property that Florida Trust funded as part of the Trust agreement. By contrast, BHI has never created a capital improvement account for the property.

*When the Florida Trust walked away from mediation with Bonnet House Inc., it put its own financial demands ahead of that of Bonnet House and the letter and spirit of the trust documents. In a 1987 letter, Mrs. Evelyn Bartlett wrote: "Bonnet House should not have to support the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation. That is not fair. They should raise their own money."*

There was an impasse in negotiations of the mediation that took place between both parties. The letter you refer to was written by Mrs. Bartlett in the early years of ownership by the Trust. Mrs. Bartlett lived for many years after that letter was written and gave final instructions for the deed to be executed in favor of the Florida Trust **after** the formal historic property agreement was in place. This statement has become a favorite soundbite for Bonnet House, Inc. in their attempts to wrestle away the property for their own benefit.

*It is my hope that an investigation by the Cabinet will show that the best course is for the Florida Trust negotiate a new, long-term agreement with Bonnet House Inc. By insisting on a more sustainable, durable agreement between the Florida Trust and Bonnet House Inc., your actions can safeguard the site and respect Mrs. Bartlett's clear intention and direction for her home she entrusted us all to protect in perpetuity.*



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As stated neither the Governor of Florida nor the Florida Cabinet have control over the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, its thirty-five acres of property or the Bonnet House, Inc. Moreover, Florida Trust has always been interested in renegotiating the historic property agreement.

It has been and will continue to be our mission to promote the preservation of the architectural, historical and archaeological heritage of Florida. We look forward to our meeting with you. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan A. Malloy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan Malloy  
Board President  
Florida Trust for Historic Preservation