



## *Islamorada, Village of Islands*

### Village Manager's Weekly Update *December 13, 2024*

#### **Islamorada Fire Rescue Santa Claus Ride – December 15**

**ISLAMORADA FIRE RESCUE  
PRESENTS  
SANTA CLAUS & HIS  
CAROLERS**  
DECEMBER 15, 2024  
SPONSORED BY  
ISLAMORADA FIREFIGHTERS' BENEVOLENT  
ASSOCIATION and ISLAMORADA FIRE RESCUE

Join us for our Islamorada Fire Rescue Christmas Parade on December 15, beginning at 5pm. Santa Claus and his Christmas carolers will be stopping by several locations throughout Islamorada.



We hope to see you around! For a full schedule of stops, click [here](#).

#### **Founders Park Master Plan Survey**

The next phase of the Founders Park Master Plan is in full swing! Over 4,000 households throughout the Village started receiving a mailed survey the week of December 9, 2024. Survey questions focus on what types of improvements residents and park goers want for Founders Park and what projects should be prioritized. We encourage all recipients to provide feedback within 10 days. If you did not receive a mailed survey as part of the statistically valid sample, please be sure to participate in the online version, which will be available in mid-January.

The results of this survey will establish priorities for where we can improve, how to grow responsibly, and what recreational opportunities our community needs for Founders Park. Community input is an important part of this process, and your feedback will be used to help guide decisions. We encourage all to participate.

Again, if you were not selected to participate in the statistically valid mailed survey, we encourage you to complete the online version in mid-January – all responses count!

#### **Toys for Keys Kids Toy Collection Drive**

**TOYS FOR KEYS KIDS**  
 **Santa is coming, and he really needs your help!**  
**Please donate new, unwrapped toys!**  
Bins located at ALL Upper Keys Fire Stations as well as at the following locations:  
Friday, December 6: Holiday Fest, 4:00 to 10:00pm at Founders Park (entrance gate)  
Saturday, December 7: Enchanted Florist MM 82.9, 11:00am to 4:00pm  
Sunday, December 15: Islamorada Fire Department Santa Parade

The Islamorada Fire Department came to the rescue to fill in for the Toys for Tots program. Within hours of notification, local volunteers to save children in need in the Upper Keys.

Volunteers across the Upper Keys are teaming up for this year's toy drive, Toys for Keys Kids. Collection bins for unwrapped toys are located at all Upper Keys fire stations and the Islamorada Fire Department's Santa Parade on December 15. Also note that The Enchanted Florist will be collecting unwrapped gifts on December 7 from 11am to 4pm.

We are grateful to our fire department for helping to make this year's toy drive possible. Toys will be collected at the fire stations through December 16.

## Improvement Work Completed at the Plantation Tropical Preserve



The Village has completed its improvement work at the Plantation Tropical Preserve on north Plantation Key and the park is now back open to the public. The Village contracted with CBT Construction to construct a 14' x 22' wooden gazebo to enhance park user experiences. The improvements include a sidewalk providing a wheelchair accessible path from the parking lot. A new water fountain was also installed, and two picnic tables and garbage cans have been ordered and will be placed within the gazebo within the next few weeks.

The Plantation Tropical Preserve is a 3.5-acre passive park with walking paths through diverse native vegetation. The park improvement project was responsive to needs expressed by park users and fulfills the final requirement for amenities that were to be constructed by the Village under the property's management plan. The management plan was established in partnership with the State, through its Florida Communities Trust Program, which provided the funding for acquisition of the property in 2002.

## Upcoming Founders Park Events

[BIRDING IN ISLAMORADA \(CLASSES BEGIN DECEMBER 9\)](#) – The first installment of Birding in Islamorada with Program Leader Rachel Dipietro, Naturalist and Bird Expert will take place on December 9 at Founders Park. Enjoy a leisurely walk in the park and bird watching with Rachel! Classes will begin with a short introduction on the birds in the Islamorada area, followed by identification and discussing traits and habits of the birds that are observed. Binoculars and bird field guides are recommended! All adults 18+ are welcome to attend, classes are \$9.00 per person. Pre-registration is required; call 305-853-1685 or stop by the Founders Park Office to reserve your spot.

[ISLAMORADA NATURE WALKS & TALKS \(CLASSES BEGIN JANUARY 13\)](#) – The first nature walk and talk with Program Leader Susan Kolterman, Florida Keys Naturalist, will take place on December 16 at Anne's Beach (MM 73). The goal of the series is to increase knowledge of Florida Keys and Everglades National Park flora and fauna while also promoting responsible stewardship of our natural resources. These walks involve a brief discussion on the history of the Upper Keys, as well as plant, butterfly, and bird traits. Sturdy shoes, sunscreen, water, binoculars, and/or a camera are recommended. All adults 18+ are welcome to attend, classes are \$9.00 per person. Pre-registration is required; call 305-853-1685 or stop by the Founders Park Office to reserve your spot.

## **The Fills: Status Update**

Following a successful collaboration with our partners at Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the Village recently received its permit to proceed with abandoning the hazardous parking spaces located along The Fills. That work is scheduled to begin in February 2025. Upon completion of our work, FDOT will be advertising for and selecting a vendor to undertake a landscaping enhancement project along The Fills in fall 2025, which will further help to deter illegal parking along the highway. As the various stages of work are completed, the amount of public works overtime necessary to patrol The Fills the area will incrementally decline.

Of note, FDOT and DEP are working together with Village support to provide safe public access at the bookend locations of the Indian Key Channel bridge. The [DEP site](#) on the Bay side of the north portion of that bridge, where the former boat launch used to be, is planned to feature a kayak launch for paddlers to access [Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park](#). Similarly, the [south side of the bridge](#) on the Ocean side is planned to feature a kayak launch for paddlers destined for [Indian Key Historic State Park](#). Limited parking is planned for each location and FDOT is committed to safety in reviewing proposed DEP designs for property ingress and egress at each location. The DEP will be responsible for site management at both locations. Islamorada, Village of Islands, will maintain its long-standing FDOT Fills agreement for mowing, etc., but will discontinue its management responsibilities associated with the [DEP property](#) once our current sublease with them expires in summer 2025.

It is also noteworthy that staff continue to encourage FDOT, DEP, and others to seek opportunities to further improve safety for users of the Florida Keys Highway Overseas Trail, which is an undercapitalized, world class asset capable of providing continuous public access to water views and recreational opportunities throughout its length, but for the inability of users to feel safe traversing bridges and other locations where traffic is in close proximity.

## **Committee Positions Available**

Islamorada has a strong tradition of volunteerism and civic engagement. Both our organization and community have benefited from dedicated residents willing to give their time to help shape the character and policies of our wonderful community. We hope that you will consider continuing this tradition through service on one of our citizen advisory committees.

We are currently accepting applications for appointments to the Local Planning Agency (LPA), Near Shore Water Regulation Committee, Workforce/Affordable Housing Citizens' Advisory Committee, and Land Acquisition Advisory Committee. Information about each committee, including how to apply, is available through our [employment portal](#).