

KEYSWEEKLY

JOHN BARTUS NAMED CITY ADMINISTRATOR BY KEY COLONY BEACH COMMISSION

By **Alex Rickert** - July 18, 2024



John Bartus, second from right, is unanimously appointed as the new Key Colony Beach City Administrator on July 15 by commissioners Tom DiFransico, left, Joey Raspe and Tom Harding. Commissioners Doug Colonell and Freddie Foster attended the meeting virtually. ALEX RICKERT/Keys Weekly

Former Marathon mayor and longtime city councilman John Bartus will take the helm as Key Colony Beach's next city administrator, following a unanimous vote of the KCB City Commission on July 15.

Bartus' re-entry into municipal government comes after just a brief hiatus, as his last term on the Marathon City Council expired in 2022 after 14 years of service over three separate stints. Included in his application packet were letters of support from Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsay, Monroe County Commissioners Holly Merrill Raschein and Michelle Lincoln, Marathon Mayor Robyn Still, Marathon City Manager George Garrett and Marathon Chamber of Commerce CEO Daniel Samess.

"As somebody who's sat in your seats for nearly a decade and a half, I've had to hire and fire city managers, and I'm very well aware of what I wanted to see in a city manager," Bartus told the commission Monday morning. "That's somebody who will simply execute the policies that the city commission implements. ... You are the policy makers, and my job would be to execute those policies and not play politics."

Entering the part-time post, Bartus will be tasked with continuing to help steady a city recovering from significant political turmoil and administrative turnover throughout the last few years. In the last nine months, Key Colony Beach has faced the resignations of then-Mayor Patti Trefry and commissioner Beth Ramsay-Vickrey.

Following former City Administrator David Turner's termination in December 2023, the city would go on to lose four additional employees in the next three months, highlighted by former Building Official Lenny Leggett, Code Officer Barry Goldman and building assistant Karl Bursa.

That trend appears to have steadied in the last few months, as all four commissioners up for re-election this November – Mayor Joey Raspe and commissioners Doug Colonell, Tom DiFrancisco and Tom Harding – went unopposed at the close of the city's qualifying period in June.

Asked for his opinion on the city's greatest opportunity for improvement by commissioner Doug Colonell, Bartus said he would prioritize ironing out the city's emergency plan, including working toward amassing 12 months of the city's expenses in reserves for use in case of such an emergency.

Giving a possible nod to the city's recent brushes with FEMA regarding reimbursement for a city hall building damaged during Hurricane Irma, Bartus said that having "all the Is dotted and Ts crossed" when requesting funds is "one of the most important things" he took away from holding office in Marathon during Hurricanes Wilma and Irma.



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Details of the position's salary, benefits and job description were still in negotiation at press time, but are expected to be discussed at the commission's July 18 meeting.

After months of deliberation by the commission in modifying the city administrator's job description to a part-time post, the commission reaffirmed Monday its extreme confidence in the city's department heads, whom Raspe said did not need to be micromanaged.

"I want it to be a great two-way street between the administrator and each of our department heads," Raspe said. "Each of them does a phenomenal job, and they very much don't need to be massaged in any way. You're going to be impressed at the amount of work they do and how on the same page they are with each other."

Raspe has served as the city's interim city administrator since Turner's departure, but has acknowledged on several occasions the difficulties of carrying out the position's duties without violating Sunshine Law by speaking directly to other commissioners.

Other applicants for the top post in KCB included former Marathon City Manager Mike Puto, former masonry company founder and real estate developer James Laconti and Marathon resident Janiya Pyfrom. Pyfrom's application was eliminated during preliminary reviews, while Puto later withdrew his application on July 12.



ALEX RICKERT

Alex Rickert made the perfectly natural career progression from dolphin trainer to newspaper editor in 2021 after freelancing for Keys Weekly while working full time at Dolphin Research Center. A resident of Marathon since 2015, he fell in love with the Florida Keys community by helping multiple organizations and friends rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Irma. An avid runner, actor, and spearfisherman, he spends as much of his time outside of work on or under the sea having civil disagreements with sharks.