

City considers monument to Diana Nyad at Smathers Beach - KEY WEST

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Philadelphia has the fictional boxing champ Rocky Balboa immortalized in statue form. Los Angeles has a 17-foot bronze replica of NBA legend Magic Johnson in a forever playmaking stride. Boston will forever see Celtics coach Red Auerbach on the bench, holding a cigar, in its Faneuil Hall metallic tribute. And Baltimore has a young Babe Ruth standing outside Gate H of Oriole Park in honor of one of its native sons.

The city of Key West is considering placing a monument of world record swim champ Diana Nyad at Smathers Beach. That's where Nyad landed on Labor Day after crossing 111 miles of ocean from Cuba without a shark cage. It was her fifth and final attempt to accomplish what no one had done before. While no one at city hall has mentioned going as far as commissioning a statue, City Manager Bob Vitas has "Diana Nyad monument at Smathers Beach" listed as part of his report to the City Commission for its 6 p.m. Wednesday, meeting at Old City Hall, 510 Greene St.

Details weren't available Friday from Vitas because he will deliver his report first to commissioners, said city spokeswoman Alyson Crean.

But the recommendation from the Art in Public Places board is for the city to announce a \$5, 000 international competition for a Nyad tribute.

"What shape, I have no idea," said Michael Shields, the board's chairman. "That's up to the artist. It's for people coming to Key West. I mean, this is Lindbergh in Paris."

"It's great for Key West because it's all positive," said City Commissioner Teri Johnston. "That was a world record bringing a lot of notoriety to the city. This is one of the most historic occurrences on Smathers Beach that we'll probably see."

Johnston said the members of the Art in Public Places volunteer board have been developing ideas, and she said a statue doesn't have to cost "astronomical prices," particularly if materials and labor are donated. "It could be anything," Johnston said. "Something that positive should be memorialized."

Mayor Craig Cates said Vitas was asked to look into a possible monument but he doesn't yet know what the city manager's recommendation is.

Cates said he would support a Nyad fixture at Smathers, such as a plaque atop a keystone, and figures it could cost a few thousand dollars. The island could benefit from being known as the spot where Nyad

made history, the mayor said.

"It was special and will probably never be duplicated," he said. "It was quite a feat. It's worth recognizing because it brings attention to Key West. It's incredible."

Nyad, who served as grand marshal of the recent Fantasy Fest parade, has already received an honor from the City Commission. She appeared at a near empty meeting just days after completing the 53-hour swim, joined only by a few supporters.

On Labor Day, though, several thousand people turned out at Smathers Beach to watch Nyad come ashore. People waved flags and local police were clearly taken aback by the crowd's intensity. As hundreds flocked to get an iPhone or point-and-shoot snapshot of the swimmer, some tussles were reported on the beach as people elbowed their way to watch Nyad being carried on a stretcher once she made it to land.

The record swim made the 64-year-old Nyad an immediate international sensation. She's talked religion and atheism with Oprah Winfrey and graced the cover of AARP's monthly magazine.

"Find a way," became her mantra, she has said.

Nyad's team originally capped her record swim at 103 miles but Nyad has clocked it at 111 miles due to having to navigate the waters to avoid box jellyfish and other hazards.

At Old City Hall days after enduring the Florida Straits with a team of support staff following her in boats and kayaks, Nyad suggested to city commissioners they think about repainting the oversized concrete Southernmost Point buoy monument to correct the "90 miles to Cuba" claim.

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