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CITY OF CORAL GABLES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
MARCH 15, 2023
CORAL GABLES CITY COMMISSION CHAMBERS
405 BILTMORE WAY, CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA

EXCERPT: 517 Aragon Avenue

Board Members Present:

- Albert Menendez, Chairperson
- Cesar Garcia-Pons, Vice-Chairperson
- Alicia Bache-Wigg
- Xavier F. Durana
- Bruce Ehrenhaft
- John P. Fullerton
- Michael J. Maxwell
- Dona Spain

City Staff:

- Warren Adams, Director of Historical Resources
- Kara Kautz, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
- Nancy Lyons, Board Secretary

Also Participating:

- Edward Martos, Esq.,
Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman
- Shaan Patel, Homeowner
- Jose Cardona, Architect

1 THEREUPON:

2 The following proceedings were had:

3 * * * * *

4 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Next, Case File LHD
5 2022-013: Consideration of the local
6 historic designation of the property at 517
7 Aragon Avenue, legally described as the
8 West 36.4 Feet of Lot 16 and all of Lot 17,
9 Block 10, Coral Gables Section "B,"
10 according to the Plat thereof, as recorded
11 in Plat Book 5, at Page 111, of the Public
12 Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

13 MR. ADAMS: Can we play the PowerPoint,
14 please?

15 POWERPOINT PRESENTATION RECORDING: The
16 property at 517 Aragon Avenue is before you
17 to consider for designation as a Local
18 Historic Landmark. The application is a
19 result of a Historic Significance
20 Determination requested by the Board of
21 Architects.

22 As per Article 8, Section 8-103, of the
23 Coral Gables Zoning Code, Criteria for
24 Designation of Historic Landmarks, the
25 local historic landmark must have

1 significant character, interest or value as
2 part of the historical, cultural,
3 archaeological, aesthetic or architectural
4 heritage of the city, state or nation. For
5 designation, a property must meet one of
6 the criteria as outlined in the Code.

7 517 Aragon Avenue, is eligible as a
8 Local Historic Landmark based on three
9 significance criteria:

10 Historical and cultural significance,
11 Criteria 4, it exemplifies the historical,
12 cultural, political, economic or social
13 trends of the community.

14 Architectural significance, Criteria 1,
15 it portrays the environment in an era of
16 history characterized by one or more
17 distinctive architectural style.

18 And Criteria 2, it embodies those
19 distinguishing characteristics of an
20 architectural style or period or method of
21 construction.

22 Situated between the Granada Golf
23 Course and Le Jeune Road, in Coral Gables
24 Section B, the single-family residence at
25 517 Aragon Avenue sits on an interior 86 by

1 110 foot lot.

2 Coral Gables' developmental history is
3 divided broadly into three historical
4 periods. George Merrick founded it in the
5 early 1920s based on his vision for a fully
6 conceived Mediterranean inspired city. The
7 architecture during the initial period
8 combined elements commonly used in Spanish
9 Moorish and Italian architecture and has
10 come to be known as the Mediterranean
11 Revival style. During the 1920s,
12 structures and amenities were built almost
13 exclusively in this style.

14 The construction of 517 Aragon Avenue
15 occurred during the City's second
16 developmental period. It was one of the
17 first homes built during the New Deal Era,
18 when the City began to embrace contemporary
19 styles by using features of the
20 Mediterranean Revival Style.

21 As discussed in the following slides,
22 this home was permitted in February 1937,
23 by Architect William Merriam. It is one of
24 the few hundred homes built during the
25 1930s in Coral Gables. The home at 517

1 Aragon Avenue is an early example of the
2 minimal traditional style that emerged in
3 direct response to the Housing Act of 1934.
4 It is the thoughtful execution of a home
5 that acknowledges the City's Mediterranean
6 Revival foundation, while embracing
7 modernistic aesthetics. It was one of the
8 first homes in the City to usher in this
9 new style.

10 In Coral Gables, the dire downturn in
11 the economy coming so closely on the heels
12 of the devastating 1926 Hurricane, had a
13 drastic impact on new construction. In
14 Coral Gables, few single-family homes were
15 built during the Depression era. You can
16 see here the precipitous dollar value
17 decline in permits issued in the late
18 1920s.

19 With the implementation of the New Deal
20 and other incentives, the building industry
21 finally experienced a small resurgence in
22 the late 1930s and early 1940s. However,
23 it abruptly ground to a halt during the war
24 years, as materials and expertise were
25 diverted to the war effort.

1 As construction in Coral Gables tried
2 to regain its footing in the 1930s, it
3 shifted away from the elaborate and
4 embellished Mediterranean Revival style of
5 the 1920s, toward simpler and more modern
6 designs that reflected the new aesthetic
7 and priorities of society. In doing so,
8 Coral Gables began to follow the national
9 housing trends, and the City entered a new
10 architectural era, which bloomed into the
11 building boom of the 1950s.

12 The homes built during the 1930s were
13 unique transitional and most were of the
14 modernistic aesthetic. They represented a
15 turning point in Coral Gables architectural
16 history. The home at 517 Aragon Avenue was
17 one of the first of these Modernistic homes
18 in the Minimal Traditional style.

19 The Housing Act of 1934 created the
20 Federal Housing Administration. The
21 Minimal Traditional style emerged as a
22 direct response to this New Deal endeavor.
23 Renown architectural historian Virginia
24 McAlester states, "The Minimal Traditional
25 house was the little house that could. It

1 was the small house that could be built
2 with FHA insured loans in the midst of the
3 Great Depression between 1935 and 1940.
4 The Minimal Traditional was a well-studied
5 and thoughtful response to the much
6 challenging conditions ever to affect home
7 construction in the U.S. In the early
8 1930s, the Great Depression virtually shut
9 down the homes building industry. Banks
10 were going under, mortgages were past due,
11 and there were no funds for new
12 construction. The urgent first step was
13 the creation of a new method for insuring
14 long-term, low interest mortgages. This
15 was accomplished in 1934 through the
16 creation of the FHA, whose goal was to
17 produce small homes the average working
18 American could afford. The FHA not only
19 provided insurance that covered the
20 mortgage loan a bank made, it also prepared
21 publications that showed how to most
22 effectively design a small house.
23 Architects, desperate for work after 1930,
24 enthusiastically turned their attention to
25 the design of the small house."

1 In the 1930s, Minimal Traditional homes
2 appeared across the country. Its
3 simplicity responded to the economic
4 hardships of the Depression and the
5 burgeoning modern aesthetic of subtle
6 ornamentation and streamlined homes.
7 Typically, Minimal Traditional homes were
8 one story, with two to three bedrooms, and
9 low to moderate roof pitches. They were
10 well-built and often used modern materials
11 and methods.

12 This style focused on the practicality
13 of floor plans and the emerging trend of
14 the attached garages. Minimal Traditional
15 homes combined restrained features of
16 earlier ornate house styles with a
17 contemporary aesthetic. In general, common
18 influences on Minimal Traditional style
19 homes across the nation were Colonial
20 Revival, Arts and Crafts and Tudor styles.
21 However, the Minimal Traditional style was
22 flexible and could even embrace various
23 features. This led to area specific
24 variations, such as occurred here in
25 Southeast Florida.

1 Minimal Traditional houses in Coral
2 Gables were decidedly Modernistic. This
3 aesthetic included smooth stucco, an
4 overall horizontal emphasis, fenestration
5 without sills or lintels, curved and
6 geometric forms, and simplified roof types.
7 Coupled with this modernistic aesthetic was
8 the incorporation of elements from the
9 Mediterranean Revival Style.

10 The single-family residence at 517
11 Aragon Avenue is a very early example of a
12 Minimal Traditional home and is
13 representative of how the style manifested
14 in Southeast Florida. It includes numerous
15 hallmark features of the style. It is one
16 story, with an overall horizontal and
17 geometric emphasis and a low pitch roof.
18 The home is clad in lightly-textured stucco
19 and the fenestration is recessed without
20 sills or lintels, which gives the
21 Modernistic impression of the openings
22 being carved out.

23 The original openings visible from the
24 street are dominant and visually balance
25 each other, from Moorish arched front porch

1 to the large rectangular window with a
2 curved opening, to the shallow segmented
3 arched square opening of the carport. In
4 the Modernistic aesthetic, the numerous
5 decorative features of the Mediterranean
6 Revival style have been replaced with
7 simple features that impart a geometric
8 impression. For example, a large Spanish
9 chimney, common in the Mediterranean
10 Revival style, has been replaced with an
11 interior chimney, also with a geometric
12 emphasis. While the roof is clad in barrel
13 tile of the Mediterranean Revival style,
14 the roof along the front facade is low and
15 broad with the gable roof and extends to
16 accommodate the porch bay. This is a
17 distinct departure from the use of separate
18 roofs of varying types and heights common
19 in the Mediterranean Revival style.

20 The Modernistic feature of corner
21 windows are found on the east side facade.
22 There is also curved Modernistic built-in
23 planter at the southeast corner.
24 Additional embellishment is minimal, and is
25 comprised of the Mediterranean Revival

1 element of grouped vents, which are
2 condensed in this style to a rectangular
3 linear group in the gable eaves and crawl
4 space openings. These also add a
5 horizontal emphasis of the home.

6 Comparing some of the historic
7 photographs of the shown structure, an
8 examination of building and public records
9 indicate that this Minimal Traditional
10 style property retains its historic
11 integrity. On the left are the current
12 property survey and an aerial photo.

13 The only addition to the home occurred
14 in 1961. It's a one car garage, at the
15 west end, adjacent to the original carport.
16 As seen in the permit drawing on the top,
17 the front facade of the original carport
18 was moved out a few feet to align with the
19 new garage. Garage doors were also
20 installed in the carport at this time. The
21 center photo shows the new configuration
22 shortly after completion.

23 The front facade is distinctly
24 horizontal. Main contributors are the low
25 pitched roofs with the shallow eaves, and

1 the series of large Modernistic openings
2 across the facade. The markedly geometric
3 openings are the Moorish arch of the front
4 porch -- which are seen from the interior,
5 in the photo on the bottom right. These
6 are hallmark features of the home -- the
7 large horizontally oriented rectangular
8 window, whose Modernistic rounded sides is
9 seen in the top right photo, and the
10 shallow segmental arched square openings of
11 the carport and garage. The light textured
12 stucco accents add to the home's geometric
13 emphasis. At the eastern end, the front
14 porch bay protrudes slightly from the plane
15 of the remainder of the facade and the
16 gable roof seamlessly continues to
17 encompass it, note its carved rafter tails.
18 The current jalousie windows were installed
19 in 1961.

20 Some of the home's Modernistic features
21 are obscured by security gates, hurricane
22 shutter frames or vegetation. Three
23 features of note are called out here. They
24 include the corner window, whose location
25 is indicated by the red arrow on the 1937

1 floor plan. It is clearly seen in the
2 1940s black and white photos here, and is
3 currently encased in hurricane shutter, as
4 seen in the photo on the upper right.

5 There are two built-in planters that
6 add to the geometric nature of the home.
7 At the southeast corner of the home is a
8 two-tier curved built-in planter. It is
9 indicated by the green arrow. It is
10 currently overgrown, but can be glimpsed in
11 the current photo on the upper right and in
12 the 1940s historic photo.

13 The cascading stairs to the front
14 porch, which extend to a built-in planter,
15 are additional horizontal features. The
16 planters, indicated by the blue arrow, is
17 currently obscured, as seen in the bottom
18 photos.

19 The photo in the upper left provides a
20 view of the rear of the home. At the
21 western end is the new garage and the
22 original carport. The carport retains its
23 pass-through essence when the doors are
24 open and the space is used as a covered
25 terrace, as seen in the photo in the upper

1 right.

2 The photos on the bottom show the west
3 elevation of the home. The 1937 permit
4 drawing on the left shows the facade prior
5 to the installation of the French doors in
6 1994.

7 The photos on the right here show the
8 eastern portion of the rear facade. Note
9 the line of squared vents in the gabled
10 ends and the crawl spaces. This is both, a
11 nod and a departure from the Mediterranean
12 Revival round vents typically found above
13 the windows.

14 The architect, William Merriam, started
15 his career in Coral Gables in 1924 as a
16 draftsman to H. George Fink, hence he was
17 well-versed in the Mediterranean Revival
18 style and often incorporated nods to the
19 style in his Modernistic buildings.

20 In conclusion, the single-family
21 residence at 517 Aragon Avenue was designed
22 by William Merriam in the Minimal
23 Traditional style. Permitted in February
24 1937, it is amongst the few homes built
25 during the New Deal era in the City. This

1 1937 home is an early example of a style
2 that emerged in direct response to the
3 Housing Act of 1934.

4 The 1930s was a transitional
5 architectural period in Coral Gables. As
6 construction in Coral Gables tried to
7 regain its footing during the Depression
8 era, it shifted away from the elaborate and
9 embellished Mediterranean Revival style of
10 the 1920s, toward simpler and more modern
11 designs that reflected the new aesthetic
12 and priorities of society. In doing so,
13 Coral Gables began to follow national
14 housing trends and the City entered a new
15 architectural era.

16 The home at 517 Aragon Avenue
17 thoughtfully acknowledges the City's
18 Mediterranean Revival foundation, while
19 embracing the Modernistic aesthetics.
20 It's one of the first homes in the City to
21 usher in this new style.

22 The home retains its historic integrity
23 and serves as a visible reminder of the
24 history and the cultural heritage of the
25 City. Staff recommends approval of Local

1 Historic Designation of the property at 517
2 Aragon Avenue, based on its historical,
3 cultural and architectural significance.

4 MR. ADAMS: The property owner is here,
5 with his representative, and they have some
6 handouts and the PowerPoint presentation
7 they would like to show you.

8 Can we play the property owner's
9 PowerPoint?

10 MR. MARTOS: Board Members, thank you
11 for this opportunity. I appreciate the
12 time very much. I'm going to speak rather
13 quickly for, I think -- can you hear --

14 MR. MAXWELL: Your name, please.

15 MR. MARTOS: In a moment.

16 My name is Edward Martos, offices at
17 2800 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, here in Coral
18 Gables, and I'm going to speak rather
19 quickly during the presentation. It's
20 hopefully to everyone's benefit, but please
21 slow me down, tell me to stop, no -- no
22 insult there taken, okay.

23 So I'm here on behalf of the property
24 owners, and -- the next slide, please.

25 Before I get into it, I really want to

1 emphasize how we got here. The property
2 owners are two newlyweds. In November --
3 in November of 2022, they decided to move
4 into Coral Gables and make it their
5 permanent home. He's an architect, and so,
6 of course, it's always been his dream to
7 build his own home, and that's what's he's
8 hoping to do here on this property. I
9 emphasize that they are new owners, because
10 none of the changes that we're going to
11 discuss and conditions of the buildings are
12 obviously there. It's something that's
13 happened over many decades.

14 I want to go into the entire overview,
15 but you get the gist. I'm going to start
16 with the law, then the facts. I'm going to
17 emphasize the facts presented to you
18 already and then supplement them with some
19 facts from our architect, to some analysis,
20 and then I'll reserve a little bit of time
21 for any public comment there may be, any
22 questions you may have.

23 So to start with the law, you hear this
24 Code provision referred to every time
25 you're here multiple times, but I think

1 it's always good to slow down and take a
2 look at exactly what it says. It requires,
3 effectively, three things, but not
4 necessarily the three things mentioned in
5 the Staff report. It requires, first --
6 the slide you see in front of you is
7 directly taken from the Code. It requires,
8 first, that you find that the thing you're
9 designating, right, possesses integrity,
10 and you see where I've underlined that.
11 Then, the second paragraph requires that
12 that character be significant, must have
13 significant character. The third paragraph
14 doesn't apply here. It's for multiple
15 properties. Then, the fourth paragraph
16 goes into the criteria that Staff
17 emphasized in their Staff report, one of
18 the three things that they mentioned.

19 Next slide, please.

20 Here you can see the three things Staff
21 called out, right, out of a list of many,
22 and only one of these three is required,
23 but the two other ones are definitely
24 required. So, total, you have three things
25 that are required, integrity, significance

1 and one of these three, which are
2 exemplifying a trend, portraying a style or
3 embodying characteristics of a particular
4 style.

5 Next slide, please.

6 So, in layman terms, right, it's five
7 points. Integrity, right, what does that
8 mean? It hasn't lost the original thing
9 that it had, that original style, that made
10 it special. Significant, it stands out.
11 You're a City full of great historic
12 properties. If this one is to be
13 significant, it really needs to pop out.
14 And, then, it must meet one of those
15 criteria, exemplify a trend, meaning be a
16 prime example, okay; portray an era of
17 history, it brings you back to that era.
18 When you see that building, you say, I'm in
19 the Depression era, and you know it, right,
20 because you've seen it. And, then,
21 finally, it embodies a particular
22 characteristic that's peculiar to that
23 architectural style, okay. When you think
24 of that architectural style, it has this
25 feature and this building happens to have

1 that feature.

2 Next slide, please -- well, actually,
3 no, this is fine.

4 When I first heard of minimal
5 traditional, I didn't have the Staff report
6 with me, so I started doing some research.
7 I had no idea what it was. And the gist of
8 it, as you heard now, from the Staff report
9 is, it was a response to tough economic
10 times and there's hard set guidelines,
11 right. It's sort of like a chameleon, if
12 you will.

13 The County Code, or, rather, their
14 guidelines, say something similar, right.
15 I'll just highlight one sentence out of
16 here. The first sentence in the box on the
17 left, it's a catch-all term, right,
18 because, at that time, tough times mean you
19 improvise and you have to be flexible in
20 the architectural style. So, here, you
21 have some examples from Coral Gables, and
22 we're going to disclose those.

23 Next slide, please.

24 Here you have some County examples,
25 right, very boxy, rather, for the most

1 part, flat. Some of them have a little bit
2 of protrusion, but you get the idea, right.

3 Now, when I thought about this before I
4 had the Staff report, I said, this presents
5 a real challenge, because you have an
6 obligation and a duty, right, to find that
7 a building as ours embodies certain
8 characteristics and particular features of
9 an architectural style, but here you have a
10 style that is a chameleon. It has
11 everything, right, so it's a real
12 challenge, but it's not an insurmountable
13 challenge. It's something you've done at
14 least three times, right, that you've been
15 able to identify. So let's look at those,
16 right.

17 You have the first one here, that was
18 mentioned in the Staff report, 501 Aragon.
19 The picture says everything. You look at
20 the left, looks a lot like the right, okay,
21 almost no changes, and it's not just the
22 pictures that get you there, the Staff
23 report from 501 Aragon, we pulled that, we
24 took a look, every Staff report highlights
25 all of the additions and alterations that

1 have been made, that's the entirety of the
2 discussion about alterations for 501
3 Aragon, "No structural additions have been
4 made. Alterations have been minimal."

5 Let's go to the next property, 737
6 Minorca, okay. The pictures kind of
7 present the same idea, almost identical.
8 You can see the window there is now -- used
9 to be a garage, but for the most part --
10 the porch, for example, remains the same as
11 it was, right.

12 Let's go to the next slide.

13 The Staff report said something very
14 similar to the last one. It's got this one
15 paragraph. It says, "Retained integrity."
16 This one had a little more discussion. So
17 let's dive into that discussion.

18 The next slide.

19 Now, here, you have that extra
20 discussion about the alterations for this
21 property. Notice what it says. The
22 alterations were made in 1939, by the same
23 guy who built the building, right. So
24 while it had been modified, many of the
25 modifications -- I'm not saying all -- many

1 of the modifications were made by the
2 original builder.

3 Next slide, please.

4 And, here, in plan view, you can see
5 how the plan differs. This is from the
6 Staff report. This isn't something that I
7 generated. Notice the blue and orange
8 areas. The blue area is the maid's room.
9 That was done by the original developer of
10 the property, right. So you can see,
11 again, here, on this property, it's
12 retained integrity, not much has changed.

13 Next slide, please.

14 This is the last example we have in the
15 City of Coral Gables of a traditional
16 minimal property that has been designated.
17 A picture says a thousand words. Pretty
18 much, it's just the awnings that have
19 changed, right.

20 Next slide, please.

21 And the Staff report says the same
22 thing. This is the entirety of the Staff
23 report's discussion on additions and
24 alterations, okay, and you can see there
25 have been few substantive changes.

1 Next slide, please.

2 So how do we compare? Our Staff report
3 has four pages worth of changes, starting
4 at Page 13 and continuing from there, okay.
5 They've been major, and they're detailed
6 there. You have a major change in 1961,
7 where the front of the building was
8 increased by about fifty percent. So that
9 horizontality was extended tremendously.
10 You also had further changes later in time,
11 where the original porch was enclosed,
12 okay, and then you had additional additions
13 made to the rear, okay, windows closed,
14 doors opened. Every facade has been
15 modified.

16 Next slide, please.

17 In plan view, this becomes very
18 apparent, and I'm going to have our
19 architect -- he's qualified to discuss all
20 of these in detail -- our architect is
21 going to go into all of those changes.

22 Next slide, please.

23 So I'm going to hand it over to our
24 architect, Jose Cardona, and -- before I
25 do, I want to go really quickly through the

1 legal criteria one last time, because while
2 he's talking, I want you to be thinking
3 about those legal criteria, right. First,
4 it has to possess integrity, right, it
5 hasn't lost that original something that it
6 had, okay. This building has gone through
7 three re-designs and he's going to detail
8 them for you, but think about that. How do
9 you retain integrity after three
10 re-designs?

11 Next, it's got to be significant. As
12 he's discussing this, you've got to ask
13 yourself, does this stand out, among all of
14 the great historic properties that we have
15 in Coral Gables.

16 Next, it has to exemplify a style.
17 It's got to be the prime example, right.
18 Unmistakable, when you see this building,
19 you say, this is an example of minimal
20 traditional, whatever that means, right.

21 Portray an era of history, it takes you
22 back to that point in history. When you
23 see it, you're in the '20s again or the
24 '30s again.

25 And then, it embodies a characteristic,

1 that thing that defines minimal
2 traditional, it's embodied in this one
3 building.

4 Next slide.

5 With that, I'll turn it over to Jose
6 Cardona.

7 MR. CARDONA: Mr. Martos, thank you for
8 your thorough presentation.

9 Dear Board Members, I thank you in
10 advance for your time. My name is Jose
11 Cardona, and I'm a registered architect.
12 I'm the principal architect for Design
13 Space Architecture, located t 9990
14 Southwest 77th Avenue, Penthouse 15.

15 My team and I have over 20 years of
16 combined experience dealing with historic
17 homes in Coral Gables. We have played
18 criteria roles remodeling, renovating and
19 upgrading historically designated
20 properties, as well as a large number of
21 homes in Coral Gables not designated as
22 historic, but that date back to the 1920s.

23 We have a good deal of experience in
24 residential architecture and know exactly
25 what it takes to appropriately design,

1 renovate and remodel a house in Coral
2 Gables, especially the ones that require a
3 little bit more attention due to their age.

4 Minimal Traditional architecture, its
5 core value stem from a retraction of
6 ornamentality, lavishness and complexity.
7 Here we can see a front elevation drawing
8 of the original architecture on the top
9 side of the page. On the right side of the
10 house, we can spot a porch, with poured
11 concrete semi-circular entryways. The
12 porch also has exposed rafters, with
13 decorative rafter tails. It's a design
14 that obviously is something that lends
15 itself to ornamentation.

16 We also see gable transitions on each
17 end of the home, and an expansive front
18 window and it was meant to be a decorate
19 chimney style, all components listed here,
20 in my opinion, add an opulent touch by the
21 architect dealing with the presumed
22 budgetary restraints during those times.

23 The most modest gesture in the home
24 appears to be the carport for a single
25 vehicle, situated on the far left of this

1 elevation drawing. This carport once
2 provided a literal transparency and a sense
3 of lightness to the house. We will see, in
4 upcoming slides, how that feature has since
5 been altered.

6 Below are some examples of minimal
7 traditional architecture. They read as
8 modest, simple designs, with front facing
9 gables, minimal gable transitions and a
10 lack of ornamentality. The house on 517
11 Aragon Avenue, at one point, had glimpses
12 of minimal traditionalism; however,
13 throughout its life, several extensive
14 renovations and additions have obscured any
15 hints of its intended style.

16 Here we have a diagram that juxtaposes
17 the original massing of the house on the
18 left and the current massing of the house
19 to the right. On the left, you can see the
20 house's attempt at establishing some
21 horizontality with the front facade, while
22 being flushed with the original carport.
23 On the current massing to the right, we see
24 the construction of a two-car garage,
25 situated about 18 inches proud of the

1 original front wall of the building. The
2 volume inserted for the double garage
3 introduces a segmented rhythm along the
4 front facade that creates a push-pull
5 effect, unlike what one would expected from
6 a modest architectural style like Minimal
7 Traditionalism.

8 On the original massing, we see facade
9 alterations behind the carport, where a
10 small, single leaf door once existed. The
11 previous owners constructed oversized
12 double doors and decorative steps leading
13 to it. We can also see the original
14 covered terrace was enclosed on the rear
15 side of the house. Finally, we can see how
16 the semi-circular opening to the porch has
17 since been sealed with custom doors -- with
18 a custom door sidelight assembly. It had
19 to be custom to fit the archful opening.

20 We provided a plan study on the
21 original plan of the house to identify the
22 areas of alteration. These areas are
23 called out in pink. As you can see,
24 approximately 50 percent of the floor plan
25 has been altered in a way that retracts

1 from its association with minimal
2 traditional architecture. As mentioned
3 before, a two-car garage was built, the
4 rear terrace was enclosed, the front porch
5 was enclosed, various interior alterations
6 were done, and numerous window and door
7 openings were altered.

8 Here we see the front elevation
9 drawings of the house -- of the original
10 house, on the top side of the page, and
11 below, a front elevation produced for the
12 current front elevation. The most
13 significant change is the construction of
14 the two-car garage in lieu of the small
15 carport original to the home. The carport
16 once gave a sense of transparency to the
17 house. Now, the two-car garage creates a
18 closed off, heavy and opaque feel. Even
19 simply adding one garage door to the
20 carport would have adversely affected the
21 feel of the front facade. In this case,
22 two garage doors have been added. We could
23 also see, as mentioned before, how the
24 frontage aesthetic is now a segmented
25 language, instead of a seamless horizontal

1 transition.

2 Lastly, the semi-circular porch entry
3 threshold has been sealed with a
4 window-door assembly, and custom ironwork
5 was installed in front of the windows and
6 the doors. If this house was previously
7 designated as historic, many of these items
8 would not be allowed, nor considered
9 appropriate, as they drastically change the
10 egress of the home.

11 This back elevation shows the enclosed
12 porch at the rear of the house between the
13 two gable end roof. We can also see the
14 wrap around window on the far left of the
15 drawing, that was sealed and turned into a
16 large window for a bedroom. Further, the
17 chimney appears to have been designed to
18 have a touch of decorativeness, but at some
19 point, it was essentially humbled down and
20 now it's just a simple chimney. Lastly, we
21 can see the bulky opaqueness instilled at
22 the right side of the house, after the
23 double car extension was built.

24 The left elevation, facing west, was
25 completely altered during a 1988 kitchen

1 renovation. As you can see on the original
2 elevation, on the top of the page, the
3 house had two slim doors and a small window
4 in the kitchen. During the kitchen
5 renovations, all openings were sealed and
6 one large double door were installed, with
7 decorative steps leading up to it, and a
8 large window installed adjacent to the
9 double door. That's the image on the
10 bottom.

11 The original carport also had two
12 openings on the side, which were sealed
13 after the two-car garage was constructed.
14 Again, we can see the bulky and opaque
15 nature of that garage addition.

16 Nearly all openings on the right
17 elevation, facing east, have been modified.
18 The window to the right was sealed and
19 split into two windows. The window in the
20 bathroom was reduced in size and glass
21 blocks were installed. The wrap around
22 window on the corner was removed and turned
23 into a single punctured window. We also
24 see another elaborate semi-circle on the
25 side of what used to be the front porch.

1 As mentioned before, custom windows were
2 installed and custom ironwork was installed
3 superimposed over those windows.

4 It appears that the house has undergone
5 several modifications throughout its
6 history that have, unfortunately, removed
7 its inclusion to the group of historic
8 homes that exemplify the story of minimal
9 traditional homes built in the 1930s.
10 These homes were meant to be an
11 architectural response to the strenuous
12 economic times.

13 As mentioned, one feature of this house
14 was the carport fashioned on the west side
15 of the residence, which, frankly, led to
16 enclosing the carport, and as you saw, in
17 the new homes, the intent was to move away
18 from the fully built garages and provide an
19 economic solution to store vehicles.

20 The minimal traditional style of this
21 home was aligned with that notion. The
22 core value has unfortunately been tarnished
23 by the inclusion of a double car garage on
24 the main frontage of this building, as
25 shown on this image.

1 Here's an image showing the rear side
2 of the garage, again, showing that
3 opaqueness. A decorative water feature was
4 also added, and the side extension becomes
5 this segmented wing of the house, instead
6 of a continuation, as it was originally
7 designed.

8 Here's an image of the interior of that
9 garage addition. Basically, the garage was
10 built around the carport. The structure of
11 the new garage was tied into the existing
12 concrete of the carport, mending them in a
13 way that would require extensive repairs
14 and reinforcement if the garage was to be
15 removed.

16 This is the interior of the front porch
17 that was enclosed. Central air
18 conditioning was introduced. As such, you
19 know, if we were to unenclose this space,
20 the HVAC system for the house would have to
21 be redesigned.

22 Here's another image of one of those
23 enclosures. This is for the rear terrace,
24 and this was permitted during a 1961
25 renovation. Just like the enclosed porch,

1 both structures had exposed rafters and
2 presumably no insulation.

3 We also noticed the inclusion of
4 exposed rafters on the eave of the front
5 porch entry. The rafters have a decorative
6 rafter tail design, which was a clear move
7 to insert touches of ornamentality to the
8 home. These decorative gestures create an
9 overtone similar to that which is often
10 experienced in a detailed, intricate and
11 picturesque architectural style, like in
12 Spanish Colonial or Mediterranean Revival,
13 both of which are a far cry from the modest
14 and unassuming minimal traditionalist
15 style.

16 Again, we can see in the image that the
17 expressive semi-circular entry to what used
18 to be the porch, this would have called for
19 skilled laborers to create form work that
20 can be considered above average in
21 complexity and you can also see the custom
22 windows and ironwork that was fashioned
23 here.

24 Here's the image of some of the window
25 openings, the current state of them, after

1 being modified by previous owners. And not
2 only were windows modified, the slim and
3 simple doors were converted to considerably
4 wide windows -- window-doors, even in
5 today's standards.

6 So, my team and I performed an
7 extensive inspection on the residence,
8 during which we visually inspected the
9 crawl space, performed drone inspections on
10 the roof and scanned the exterior walls
11 using radar technology. The result of the
12 inspection has been documented and
13 memorialized in a report submitted to the
14 Board.

15 The main observations dealt with the
16 location and quantity of the steel
17 reinforcement bars or rebar of the existing
18 residence or lack thereof. On this image,
19 we see a floor plan where we place a red
20 dot on locations where we discovered rebar.
21 While minimal rebar was found, the most
22 concerning thing was the size of the rebar
23 in the existing house. Current building
24 codes require a number five or five-eighth
25 inch diameter rebars on the corner of the

1 house. This house, when it was scanned,
2 it's got a half inch diameter rebar, and
3 it's just one, on the corner. Certainly,
4 this house will have to be extensively
5 reinforced in order to be considered a safe
6 dwelling unit.

7 Lastly, several spots in the crawl
8 space appear to have deteriorated wood
9 floor joists, some of which were poorly
10 repaired and are showing signs of failure
11 already.

12 In sum, the alterations that this house
13 has experienced through its time have
14 pushed it further and further away from
15 what could have been considered a humbly
16 designed home, in an era where cost of
17 construction was a major driver in
18 architectural design.

19 We urge the Historic Preservation Board
20 to move away from designating this property
21 as local historic. Coral Gables has a
22 plethora of beautifully significant local
23 gems and we feel as though including this
24 home as part of that group would dilute the
25 esteem of being labeled a historic home in

1 Coral Gables. Further, I implore the Board
2 to entrust that a newly designed home on
3 this lot would be adding to the
4 beautification of this marvelous city, and
5 that the meticulously appointed Coral
6 Gables Board of Architects will undoubtedly
7 aid in approving a design that adds to the
8 embellishment of the City Beautiful.

9 My sincere thanks go to all Board
10 Members for hearing my presentation and for
11 considering my opinion.

12 MR. PATEL: Hey, guys. Thank you for
13 listening to all of that. I know it was a
14 lot, but we did a lot of work and we worked
15 really hard on preparing for today. So I
16 really hope you listened and appreciated
17 that.

18 My name is Shaan Patel. That's me. My
19 wife, Pooja and I, would like to thank you
20 for hearing our presentation. She told me
21 that I could present it, as long as I
22 didn't mess it up too badly, so I hope that
23 you listened and hopefully I don't mess it
24 up.

25 I was born and raised here in Miami,

1 Florida, and I've lived here almost my
2 entire life. When I was ten, it was my
3 dream to be an architect, and as many an
4 architect, it was also my dream to design
5 and build my own home.

6 I later pursued that dream and attended
7 Rice University School of Architecture and
8 then worked in New York City for a bit as
9 an architect, before moving back here and
10 starting a design-build firm.

11 In 2017, I bought a little townhouse at
12 231 Majorca, and I've loved living in the
13 Gables immensely ever since. I honestly
14 believe it's probably the best city to live
15 in, in the County, and I hope to never have
16 to leave.

17 In April, my wife and I got married and
18 began looking for our dream home. We
19 decided to look for a space for us to build
20 a home of our own -- sorry, we settled for
21 a space to build a home for ourselves, that
22 added to and respected the character of the
23 Gables that we love so much, and that also
24 fit the needs of our modern family.

25 Last Fall, we found that location,

1 walkable to where we live now, and we
2 jumped at the chance to make an offer. The
3 home, as is, doesn't fit our needs. It is
4 essentially a two-bedroom house and we hope
5 to have children and also host our large
6 Indian families. Historic designation
7 would severely limit us on our dreams for
8 the property, and we're here today to ask
9 you to let us fulfill those dreams, for us,
10 for our future family, and for that little
11 ten-year-old kid in me.

12 We're excited and honored to
13 potentially be a part of the Coral Gables
14 story, and hope that you'll give us that
15 opportunity. Thank you so much to your
16 time.

17 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Thank you.

18 MR. MARTOS: Board Members, I'll slow
19 down a little bit for some closing remarks.
20 I want to just emphasize four key points
21 here. First and foremost, that legally
22 speaking, designation is not warranted, and
23 the reason for that is because the building
24 has lost its integrity, which is one of the
25 key criteria you must find, okay. Over

1 time, the architecture has shown how all of
2 the changes have taken away the distinctive
3 look, if you will, of a minimal traditional
4 building, all right.

5 Next, it's not significant. It doesn't
6 stand out among the historic fabric of
7 Coral Gables. It does not exemplify a
8 style, because of all of the changes that
9 have occurred. It does not portray a trend
10 in time. When you look at this building,
11 you don't see -- say to yourself
12 immediately, I'm back in the '20s or I'm
13 back in the '30s, okay, and it does not
14 embody any one particular characteristic
15 that you would call minimal traditional.
16 It's quite ornate, as our architect has
17 testified.

18 Important, too, because we always
19 think, you know, there's a possibility for
20 rehab or restoration or addition -- or
21 maybe even addition, within the framework
22 of a historic home, right, but here you
23 found that -- you can see that it's not
24 really viable for the structural reasons
25 the architect has pointed out. There are

1 problems with this building, involving the
2 rebar, of course, also extending flooring
3 and roofing. You also have to ask
4 yourself, if this is a minimal building,
5 and we're going to add, restore, modernize
6 the building, is it still minimal, right,
7 and that's why integrity is important.

8 Third, I want to emphasize, you know,
9 we often say in historic preservation, you
10 know, designation does not mean you can't
11 do anything with the property, and that's
12 very true, but that's not to say that there
13 aren't certain losses, and one of the
14 losses I want to emphasize here and why I
15 think significance is important, is that
16 the City is losing something. The City, as
17 a whole, is losing something. The majority
18 of your history is in front of you, it's
19 not behind you, and you have to leave some
20 room for new architects, like the new
21 owners, to come in, to design, within the
22 character of Coral Gables, not to go
23 outside the character of Coral Gables, but
24 to build new, to add something new to
25 contribute to the history, and so that is

1 something that would be lost. And,
2 finally, because I'm a lawyer, I have to
3 say, you know, it does affect property
4 values, and we have to keep that in mind.

5 With that said, I'm available for
6 questions, our architect is available for
7 questions, our owner is available for
8 questions, and if there's any public
9 comment, certainly I would like an
10 opportunity to respond.

11 Thank you very much for your time.

12 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Is there anyone in
13 the audience who would like to speak in
14 favor or opposition to this case?

15 MR. MARTOS: Board, I'm going to hand
16 out the materials that we discussed, in
17 case you want to reference them, okay. So,
18 for the record, I'm doing that and I have
19 copy also for the clerk. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Anyone in the
21 audience who would like to speak in favor
22 or opposition to this case?

23 THE SECRETARY: No one on Zoom.

24 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Okay. Then I'm
25 closing the public portion of the --

1 MR. ADAMS: You do have a letter of
2 support from the Historic Preservation
3 Association.

4 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: I saw that.

5 THE SECRETARY: Okay. Hold on.

6 (Inaudible.)

7 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Okay, but she's got
8 to speak on video or we really can't, you
9 know, consider what she's saying and we
10 already have a letter from her.

11 THE SECRETARY; Ms. Carbonel, can you
12 unmute yourself?

13 MS. CARBONEL: Hello? Okay. Are you
14 all listening to me?

15 MS. THROCKMORTON: Ms. Carbonel, if you
16 could please turn off whatever video you're
17 watching the meeting on. It seems to be on
18 a delay and we hear an echo.

19 THE SECRETARY; Ms. Carbonel, go ahead.

20 Ms. Carbonel?

21 MS. CARBONEL: Hello. Hello? Can you
22 hear me now?

23 THE SECRETARY: Yes, we can.

24 MS. CARBONEL: Okay. Yes, I heard that
25 I need to be on Zoom. Well, I can't,

1 because I'm driving, but you do have our
2 letter in support of Staff's report and --
3 I heard all of the presentation, and
4 there's only one criteria, as you all know,
5 that's needed, and the Staff really put
6 together a very strong case for
7 designation. We only have very few homes
8 that Mr. Merriam designed and it does -- I
9 do want to say that history is not behind
10 -- I mean, it's not in front of us, history
11 is behind us also, and we do live in a
12 historic city and it's always a wonderful
13 thing where we can continue to preserve
14 what has made us, why people move here, and
15 so I do wish the homeowners luck, and
16 congratulations, but you have a wonderful
17 cottage, you have a beautiful legacy there,
18 and you have a great historic heritage to
19 preserve, so I hope you do. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Thank you.

21 Anyone else, Nancy?

22 MR. MARTOS: May I rebutt, please?

23 MR. ADAMS: A couple of points from
24 Staff, if that's the case.

25 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Yeah. The public

1 portion is now closed. Go ahead.

2 MR. ADAMS: Okay. I've got a couple of
3 notes and I believe Kara does, as well.
4 And, firstly, I think the presentation, the
5 discussion, on minimal traditional was very
6 generalized. Minimal traditional buildings
7 will differ slightly from place to place,
8 and, as you know, Coral Gables has its own
9 unique style of architecture, dating the
10 '20s, and in each sentence, I think this is
11 clearly explained; by mid 1930s, in Coral
12 Gables, there was a departure from the
13 ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean
14 Revival.

15 Minimal traditional houses in Coral
16 Gables most often reflected this as a
17 style, as well as the dominant regional
18 Modernistic style of Art Deco and Art
19 Moderne. Specifically, minimal traditional
20 style homes in Coral Gables tended to
21 reflect Mediterranean Revival style
22 influences, with features such as barrel
23 tile roofs, and prominent chimneys. The
24 modernistic aspect included smooth stucco,
25 a horizontal emphasis, fenestration with

1 (unintelligible) carved in geometric forms,
2 simplified roof types, high-rise column
3 windows and floral motifs. So that's
4 Number One.

5 I think that the property owner is
6 using an overgeneralization of the style
7 and not focusing in Coral Gables. We
8 wouldn't use a neoclassical style from
9 Washington to try and justify a
10 neoclassical style here. We would look at
11 the local examples.

12 Number Two, the question of integrity,
13 how much has the building been altered.
14 There's actually a definition of historic
15 integrity in the definition section of the
16 Code. Historic integrity is the
17 authenticity of a property's historic
18 identity, evidenced by the survival of
19 physical characteristics that existed
20 during the property's prehistoric or
21 historic period. Historic integrity
22 enables a property to illustrate
23 significant aspects of its past. Not only
24 must the property resemble its historic
25 appearance, but it must also retain

1 physical materials, design features and
2 aspects of construction dating from the
3 period when it attained significance.
4 These features are listed in Appendix C in
5 your report.

6 And follows on to say, all six
7 qualities, integrity, location, design
8 setting, materials, workmanship or
9 association, do not need to be present for
10 eligibility, as long as the overall sense
11 of past time and place is evident. So
12 that's clearly defined in the Code.

13 And my next point is, 737 Minorca was
14 referenced by the applicant as being
15 minimally altered and that's why it was
16 designated. No, 737 Minorca actually does
17 have an addition to the side of this
18 property, much like this one that's in
19 front of you today, and so these were
20 really just the things that popped out to
21 me.

22 The final comment, historic designation
23 affects property values, without any proof
24 of this, it's a bit of generalization to
25 me, and I think you would be hard pushed to

1 argue that historic designation in Coral
2 Gables significantly affects property
3 values, goes way up, but we have no figures
4 to qualify that.

5 I think Kara wants to make a couple of
6 points.

7 MS. KAUTZ: In a similar vein to what
8 Warren just said, the other example that
9 was noted in the Staff report is 1700
10 Cortez Street, the porch, that has a
11 similar arched circular feature, has also
12 been enclosed and was enclosed at the time
13 of designation and that was cited as being
14 minimally altered. So we have done that in
15 the past.

16 The architect said that the Historic
17 Preservation Board would not allow the
18 front porch to be enclosed as it is now, a
19 couple of meetings ago you all actually
20 just allowed someone to enclose their
21 porch, so that's not actually a true
22 statement.

23 Again, the rafters that were noted as
24 an alteration of the porch, with the
25 decorative rafters, those are not an

1 alteration. They are original to the house
2 and indicative of the style.

3 And the other point was that, on the
4 east elevation, the windows that were noted
5 to be altered, were not. If you look on
6 Page 13 of your Staff report, they were
7 changed during construction, as was a
8 common practice at the time.

9 So I just wanted to point those things
10 out.

11 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Okay.

12 MR. MARTOS: Board, I'll be very, very
13 brief. I just want to hit on two points --
14 actually, three points.

15 First, if you'd like to see the actual
16 Code provision that applies here, I have a
17 screenshot version in our PowerPoint
18 presentation. We can scroll down to the
19 bottom of that. It very clearly states,
20 you have to have integrity, be significant
21 and then one of those three criteria that
22 Staff pointed out. It's all of the above.
23 It's 1 and 2, and then one of the
24 remainder.

25 Can you scroll back, please? Who's

1 controlling the -- I am, yeah.

2 There's the screenshot, and you can see
3 that's straight from Municode. So it's not
4 just one of all of these criteria. It's
5 the first two, integrity and significance,
6 and then one of a long list, and Staff has
7 only called out three from the long list.

8 As to the prior historic designation
9 reports, at no point in any presentation
10 did I say that there were zero alterations
11 in the other buildings. What I said was,
12 they were minimal. I pulled words exactly
13 from Staff's own reports. I want to
14 emphasize that. There was no attempt to
15 mischaracterize anything.

16 And, then, finally, with respect to
17 costs, in the packet that you've been
18 provided from our architect, there's
19 actually a breakdown of additional costs
20 and expenses that would be related to a
21 renovation or restoration of the property.

22 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: We don't consider
23 costs, as far as our deliberations. That's
24 beyond our scope.

25 MR. MARTOS: I understand. I just want

1 to make it clear, for the record, that it
2 has been submitted into evidence.

3 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Okay.

4 MR. MARTOS: So that is there. And,
5 finally, thank you, again. I appreciate
6 your time very much. I know this is a
7 volunteer board and the hour is late, so
8 thank you.

9 MR. MAXWELL: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Any questions?
11 Comments?

12 MR. FULLERTON: I have one question for
13 Staff, and I think it was just answered,
14 but I'd like to hear from Staff. Has the
15 applicant requested any economic hardship
16 for this -- any reasons for economic
17 hardships on this application?

18 MR. ADAMS: No, and that normally
19 accompanies a Certificate of
20 Appropriateness application, but there's
21 been no request for economic hardship. We
22 don't know exactly what repairs or
23 alterations are being proposed.

24 MR. FULLERTON: Thank you.

25 MR. MAXWELL: Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Mr. Maxwell,
2 anything?

3 MR. MAXWELL: No.

4 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: No? Anybody? Any
5 comments?

6 Then I'll consider a motion, any
7 motion.

8 MS. THROCKMORTON: Mr. Chair, sorry to
9 interrupt. Prior to a motion, I'd just
10 like to remind you all that the discussion
11 we had from Ms. Carbonel was not sworn
12 testimony today. So to the extent that
13 that's something you rely on, please do
14 not, as that was not sworn testimony today.
15 So whatever motions you make, please make
16 them based on the record that was provided
17 to you and was sworn.

18 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Okay.

19 MR. MAXWELL: Yeah. I'd like to make a
20 motion to approve the historic designation
21 of 517 Aragon, legally described as the
22 west 36.4 feet of Lot 16 and all of Lot 17,
23 Block 10, Coral Gables Section B, and to
24 approve the motion for the preservation on
25 the basis of local, historical, cultural

1 and architectural significance.

2 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Do I have a second?

3 MS. SPAIN: I'll second it.

4 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Ms. Spain seconds
5 it. Mr. Maxwell motions.

6 MR. GARCIA-PONS: Can I proffer a
7 friendly amendment to the --

8 MR. MAXWELL: I'll listen.

9 MR. GARCIA-PONS: Based on the Staff
10 report -- based on the information provided
11 in the Staff report?

12 MR. MAXWELL: Yes. Thank you.
13 Amendment accepted.

14 THE SECRETARY: Mr. Fullerton?

15 MR. FULLERTON: Yes.

16 THE SECRETARY: Ms. Bach-Wiig?

17 MS. BACHE-WIIG: Yes.

18 THE SECRETARY: Mr. Garcia-Pons?

19 MR. GARCIA-PONS: Yes.

20 THE SECRETARY: Mr. Durana?

21 MR. DURANA: Yes.

22 THE SECRETARY; Mr. Maxwell?

23 MR. MAXWELL: Yes.

24 THE SECRETARY: Mr. -- Ms. Spain?

25 MS. SPAIN: Yes.

1 THE SECRETARY; Mr. Ehrenhaft?

2 MR. EHRENHAFT: Yes.

3 THE SECRETARY: Mr. Menendez?

4 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: Yes.

5 THE SECRETARY; The motion passes.

6 MR. MAXWELL: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN MENENDEZ: All right. Thank

8 you.

9 We're going to take a ten-minute recess.

10 * * * * *

11 (Thereupon, the meeting was concluded at
12 8:30 p.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF FLORIDA:

SS.

COUNTY OF MIAMI-DADE:

I, NIEVES SANCHEZ, Court Reporter, and a Notary Public for the State of Florida at Large, do hereby certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the foregoing proceedings and that the transcript is a true and complete record of my stenographic notes.

DATED this 30th day of March, 2023.



NIEVES SANCHEZ