



**STAFF REPORT  
SPECIAL CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS  
FOR THE PROPERTY AT  
1541 SOPERA AVENUE  
A LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK**

*Historical Resources &  
Cultural Arts*

2327 Salzedo Street  
Coral Gables  
Florida, 33134

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**Proposal:** The application requests design approval for additions and alterations to the residence and detached garage, and sitework. A variance has also been requested from Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c. of the Coral Gables Zoning Code for the minimum rear setback for detached auxiliary structure.

**Architect:** Atelier 305 (Lester Perez Pizarro)

**Owner:** Juliette Perez & Fidel S. Ferreiro

**Folio Number:** 03-4118-006-1420

**Legal Description:** The west half of Lot 16, Lot 17, and the East half of Lot 18, Block 56, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Four, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, at page 57 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

**Site Characteristics:** The property is located on the north side of Sopera Avenue between Red Road and Alhambra Circle. The irregularly-shaped lot is approximately 100' x 110'.

**BACKGROUND/EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The single- family residence at 1541 Sopera Avenue, constructed in 1925 during the initial development of Coral Gables, is indicative of the Mediterranean-inspired ideals founder George Merrick envisioned for the City. It was designed in the Mediterranean Revival style by architect H. George Fink, a member of Merrick's original design team, for the Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company as part of a larger building plan contracted with Merrick's Coral Gables Corporation. The partners Lindsey H. Hopkins and H. W. Nicholes were nationally-acclaimed for their building campaigns in the Atlanta area. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue was one of the first fifty homes built as part of this program as a demonstration for the contract and was approved by Merrick. It was built contemporaneous to the development of the Biltmore Hotel and Golf Course in the adjacent and newly re-platted Country Club Sections. Unfortunately, plans for these areas were curtailed due to the 1926 Hurricane followed by the downturn in the economy. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue is one of a handful of homes built in this initial development phase in Country Club Section Part Four and stands as a testament to Merrick's vision. The property at 1541 Sopera Avenue retains its historic integrity and significantly contributes to the historic fabric of the City of Coral Gables.

The property was designated as a Local Historic Landmark in 2021.





**Figures 1: ca. 1940s photo [top]; Current Photos, 2021 [middle & bottom]**

### **PROPOSAL**

The application requests design approval for additions and alterations to the residence and detached garage, and sitework.

This project was begun in 2020 under previous Historic Preservation Officer Warren Adams.

The applicant applied for Board of Architects (AB-20-12-5715) on December 19, 2020. The project was reviewed by the Board of Architects on May 27, 2021 and was rejected with comments to meet with the Historical Resources Department and obtain a Historic Significance Determination. The application for the determination was submitted on September 20, 2021 and the letter stating that the property does meet the minimum eligibility criteria for designation as a local historic landmark was issued October 13, 2021. The property was designated as a Local Historic Landmark in November 2021.

Once designated, the Historic Preservation Officer reviewed the plans to give an “OK for BOA” in order to proceed to a BOA hearing. The “OK” was granted with comments to be addressed (see Exhibit “A”). Note that each time, the comments were given, they referred to needing a COA and Historic Preservation Board review. The comments were both written on the plans and also entered into the City’s permitting system.

At the last BOA hearing on March 17, 2022, the BOA deferred the item with the following comments: 1) CITY ARCHITECT TO APPROVE CHANGES ONCE COMPLETED; 2) CHANGE THE PROPORTIONS OF THE WINDOWS ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE GARAGE AND LEADING TO THE NEW PORCH AT THE REAR; 3) CHANGE WINDOW AT FRONT PORCH TO CLEAR FIXED UNITS; 4) KEEP EXISTING TEXTURED STUCCO; 5) FRONT WINDOW TO HAVE APPLIED DIVIDERS AS PER ORIGINAL DRAWINGS.

The City Architect ultimately approved the corrections on June 6, 2022.

The applicant applied for permit (BLDR-24-01-4928) on January 23, 2024. The permit has been in review since February 2024. The current Historic Preservation Officer reviewed the permit as follows:

On 3/25/24 – Disapproved with comments: “This is a designated historic landmark-modifications, additions and sitework require a Certificate of Appropriateness to be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board. Please contact hist@coralgables.com to schedule a meeting with staff.”

On 8/22/24 – Disapproved with comments: “HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD REVIEW REQUIRED. SAME COMMENT APPLIES. PLEASE CONTACT HIST@CORALGABLELS.COM TO SCHEDULE A MEETING.”

On 11/27/24 – Disapproved with comments: “HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD REVIEW REQUIRED. SAME COMMENT APPLIES. PLEASE CONTACT HIST@CORALGABLELS.COM TO SCHEDULE A MEETING.”

On 3/10/25 – Disapproved with comments: “Project is being scheduled for Historic Preservation Board, COA required prior to permit approval.”

### **SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION**

The following Standards have application in this matter:

2. *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*
5. *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*
9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
10. *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

### **STAFF OBSERVATIONS**

The applicant is requesting design approval for several additions and alterations to the existing residence and auxiliary structure (detached garage). The work proposed in the application consists of:

- A first- and second-story addition to the rear and atop the one-story portion of the main residence. A family room and closet (later additions) on the first floor will be removed. The addition consists of an expanded kitchen and new family room on the first floor and a master bedroom suite and laundry room on the second floor.
- A two-story addition to the east side of the existing one-story detached garage. The proposed addition consists of a garage at the ground floor and a gym with full bathroom above.
- Installation of new impact-resistant windows and doors.
- Interior alterations / remodeling to the existing residence.
- Site work is limited to removal of some driveway pavers to accommodate the two-story addition to the garage.

### **South (facing Sopera Avenue) Elevation- Sheet A-5 (Existing on Sheet A-5E)**

At the south facades of the existing residence, the existing windows and doors will be replaced with impact-resistant units (typical around property). It appears that the awnings will be recovered or replaced as well. The Keynote "B" notes that the house is to have a "textured stucco finish to match existing." The existing stucco is to remain and the house is not be entirely restuccoed, only patched as needed.

Comparing the existing and proposed elevations, there also appears to be alterations proposed to the wing wall at the west end of the façade, to the vent above the single arched window, and to the chimney. No details have been provided on these elements and, based on the 1940s photograph in Figures 1 as the earliest visual documentation, conjectural elements should not be added.



The two-story addition to the residence, seen behind the existing partial second story, is under a hipped roof.

The existing detached, one-story garage sits to the rear (north) and east of the house. A two-story addition is proposed that consists of an additional garage bay on the first floor and a gym with full bath on the second floor. The addition utilizes a double-wall construction to not destroy the existing wall of the garage. The addition is under a hipped roof with an exterior staircase leading to the second floor. Tiled hoods supported with brackets appear over the garage door opening and second-story entrance on the east side.

#### **North (rear) Elevation- Sheet A-5 (Existing on Sheet A-5E)**

The west elevation of the existing residence is obscured by the new addition. The elevation shown is new construction. The windows and doors are in keeping with the remainder of the house. Protruding sills are proposed to be added to the new windows. The terrace at the rear is covered on the first floor with an open balcony/terrace above. The first floor features a series of arched openings with ornamental metal railings to match existing ironwork on the residence. At the second floor, the same metal railing is repeated with small piers aligning with the columns below. A portion of the roof above the terrace has been transitioned into a gable end.

To the east, the rear of the auxiliary structure is visible with the addition setback approximately 5" from the face of the existing garage. A single casement window is found at the second floor.

#### **East Elevation - Sheet A-5.1 (Existing on Sheet A-5.1E)**

The east elevation faces the driveway to the property and consists of the existing residence with the existing partial second story volume under a flat roof with low-pitched faux-mansard that rings its perimeter. The existing northeast corner of the home (a later addition under a shed roof) will be removed and the new addition sits atop and behind (north) the existing residence. To accommodate the addition, a series of architectural features that step the two-story volume down to the parapet of the one-story volume will be removed so that the walls of the addition are in line with the existing. (See Figure 2) Note that the original windows of the existing residence have protruding sills that are not shown on the existing (or proposed) elevations. All existing sills are to remain and any new openings should either not have sills or they are to be differentiated from the originals. The volume of the new addition is topped with a hipped roof.



**Figure 2: East façade ca. 2020 (Courtesy: Realtor.com)**

To the north, the addition to the detached garage is visible. As discussed earlier, an exterior concrete staircase provides access to the second floor. A tiled hood provides protection for the French door at the second floor. To the left of the entry, a pair of double casements provides light into the gym space.

#### **East Elevation - Sheet A-5.1 (Existing on Sheet A-5.1E)**

The new addition on this side of the house sits directly behind the sloped roof of the original staircase. Flush with the walls of the existing residence, it sits under a hipped roof with the side of the gable roof portion visible to the north (rear). The existing kitchen windows will be resized and relocated. The side of the terrace is visible to the north and shares similar detailing as seen on the rear (north) elevation.

The second story of the garage addition is visible over the existing one-story garage. A pair of double casements is centered on this façade.

#### **VARIANCES**

A variance has also been requested from Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c. of the Coral Gables Zoning Code for the minimum rear setback. The following variance is requested in conjunction with this proposal:

*Grant a variance to allow the addition to the detached auxiliary structure to have a rear setback of approximately five feet (5'-0") vs. The required minimum rear setback in Single-Family Residential Districts shall be ten feet (10'-0"), pursuant to Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c. of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.*

The Coral Gables Zoning Code requires that all properties maintain a 10'-0" rear setback. The existing one-story detached garage is legally non-conforming with a 4'-7" rear setback. The proposed garage addition has a 5'-0" rear setback and does not encroach any further into the rear setback than the existing structure.

The Historical Resources staff finds that the following criteria, necessary for authorization of the variance, apply:

Criteria	Yes/No
1) That special conditions and circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, structure or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures or buildings in the same zoning district.	Yes
2) That the special conditions and circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.	Yes
3) That granting the variance requested will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by this Ordinance to other lands, buildings or structures in the same zoning district.	Yes
4) That literal interpretation of the provisions of the Zoning Code would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district under the terms of the Zoning Code and would work unnecessary and undue hardship on the applicant.	Yes
5) That the variance granted is the minimum variance that will make possible the reasonable use of the land, building or structure.	Yes
6) That granting the variance will not change the use to one that is different from other land in the same district.	Yes

7) That the granting of the variance will be in harmony with the general intent and purpose of the Zoning Code, and that such variance will not be injurious to the area involved or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare.	Yes
8) That the granting of the variance is appropriate for the continued preservation of an historic landmark or historic landmark district.	Yes

### **BOARD OF ARCHITECTS**

See the timeline provided in the Proposal section above.

### **STAFF CONCLUSION**

The application presented requests design approval for additions and alterations to the residence and detached auxiliary structure. Staff has worked with the applicant to redesign the addition to the detached garage to keep it an independent volume and leave the existing garage unimpaired.

For the design of the addition to the main residence, the applicant was counseled and allowed to proceed with the proposed design by Historic Preservation Officer Adams, although is not in keeping with some of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Current Historic Staff is not in agreement with the guidance given to the applicant but acknowledges the predicament of the applicant.

At a minimum Staff requested that the applicant explore a modification to the proposed roof (i.e. a flat roof) to minimize its impact on the historic structure. Because the structural drawings have already been prepared and approved, the applicant did not want to entertain the request. The current Historic Preservation Officer requested renderings to determine how visible the addition is from the street. Those renderings are included as Attachment "B." A request to restudy the roof has been included as condition #1 below. The Board may accept the condition or not.

Staff requests the following conditions to be incorporated into any motion for approval:

1. Restudy the roof of the addition to the house and explore the possibility of a flat roof system.
2. Window/door muntins are to be high-profile / dimensional.
3. Window/door glass to be clear / no tint / no reflectivity / no low-e.
4. Eliminate the window sills from the additions or provide a detail demonstrating how they are to be differentiated from the existing.
5. Show all existing sills and label as existing to remain.
6. French doors are to have a higher kickplate.
7. All existing coral rock walls on the property are to remain.
8. Roof is to be true two-piece barrel tile.
9. The existing house and detached garage are not to be restuccoed. Patch as needed and provide a sample of new stucco for Historic to approve prior to application.
10. The wing wall at the southwest corner of the residence is to remain.
11. Work with Staff on any proposed alterations to the front (south) façade.
12. Clarify if the front door is existing to remain.
13. Provide a separate page of elevation drawings of just the auxiliary structure in the permit set.

14. Provide details of the tiled hoods and the bracket supports on the auxiliary structure in the permit set.
15. Provide details about the existing and proposed garage doors.
16. The iron lamp feature at the existing garage is to remain (see photos on A-2).
17. Specify the “metal” to be used on the new railings and consider simplifying the design.
18. A separate Standard Certificate of Appropriateness is required for the new awnings.

**Therefore, Historical Resources Department Staff recommends the following:**

A motion to **APPROVE WITH THE CONDITIONS NOTED ABOVE** the design proposal for an addition and alterations to the residence and sitework on the property located at **1541 Sopera Avenue**, a Local Historic Landmark, legally described as the west half of Lot 16, Lot 17, and the East half of Lot 18, Block 56, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Four, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, at page 57 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida and **APPROVE** the issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness with the conditions noted above.

AND

A motion to **APPROVE** a variance to allow the addition to the detached auxiliary structure to have a rear setback of approximately five feet (5'-0") vs. The required minimum rear setback in Single-Family Residential Districts shall be ten feet (10'-0"), pursuant to Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c. of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.

Respectfully submitted,



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Kara Kautz

Acting Historic Preservation Officer



**EXHIBIT “A”**  
**BOA reviews from EDEN permitting system**  
**and Historic Preservation Officer Adams “OK for BOA” notations**

Permit #	AB-20-12-5715		Address	1541 SOPER AVE CORAL GABLES FL 33134-6247		
Permit type	BOA PRELIMINARY/MED BONUS/FINAL					
	Group	Action Code	Action Description	Completion Date	Complete Code	
	1	BOA COUNTER	Routed			
	2	CASHIER	Routed			
-	3	BOA COORDINATOR	Canceled			
	3	ab030	FINAL APPROVAL		<input type="checkbox"/>	
	3	prhist	HISTORICAL PLAN REVIEW	03/01/2022 03:50:14 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	comp
	3	prhist	HISTORICAL PLAN REVIEW	04/08/2022 08:29:59 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	comp
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	05/11/2021 10:31:14 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	cont
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	05/27/2021 03:59:41 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	reject
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	09/14/2021 11:20:24 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	incomp
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	11/02/2021 01:58:35 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	incomp
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	11/18/2021 10:23:29 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	defer
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	03/17/2022 10:27:51 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	defer
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	04/18/2022 04:54:18 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	defer
	3	ab020	PRELIMINARY APPROVAL	06/06/2022 11:21:08 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	apvd
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	01/27/2021 10:26:06 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hold
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	02/04/2021 03:08:39 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hold
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	03/02/2021 03:50:42 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	hold
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	04/02/2021 08:32:11 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	defer
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	08/25/2021 03:35:46 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	reject
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	09/14/2021 03:34:03 PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	reject
	3	pbzoning	ZONING PRE-BOA	10/28/2021 10:07:17 AM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	comp

Complete	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Code	comp	COMPLETED
Start date	03/01/2022 03:50:14 PM	Complete date	03/01/2022 03:50:14 PM	Hours
Completed by	wadams	WARREN ADAMS	<input type="checkbox"/> IVR message	
Comments			Activity Check List	
OK for BOA Historic stucco shall remain textured Muntin patterns to be the same as original drawings Reinstated architectural features may need further study Garage addition appears to overwhelm historic garage Windows shall be the same as those on original drawings COA and HPB review required				

Result Information			
Complete	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Code	comp COMPLETED
Start date	04/08/2022 08:29:59 AM	Complete date	04/08/2022 08:29:59 AM
Completed by	wadams	WARREN ADAMS	<input type="checkbox"/> IVR message
Comments		Activity Check List	
<p>OK for BOA  Muntin patterns to be the same as original drawings  Reinstated architectural features may need further study  Garage addition appears to overwhelm historic garage  Windows shall be the same as those on original drawings  COA and HPB review required</p>			

AB-20-12-5715

S 1541 SOPER AVE

Section	Approved	
	By	Date
<input type="checkbox"/> BOARD OF ARCH.		
<input type="checkbox"/> BOARD OF ARCH.		
<input type="checkbox"/> MED BONUS		
<input type="checkbox"/> MED BONUS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ADMIN APPROVAL	<i>[Signature]</i>	6/6/22

HOLD ZONING 3/2  
sible for determining whether development  
review Standards set out in Article 5,  
les Zoning Code

## ARCHITECTS

REJECTED X  
FOLLOWING COMMENTS: 1) APPLICATION  
HISTORICAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT;  
IC SIGNIFICANCE DETERMINATION;  
LLUSTRATE THE EXISTING CONDITIONS OF

DJIAN, SECONDED BY G. PRATT

O.K. FOR BOA

HISTORIC STUCCO SHALL REMAIN TEXTURED

MUNTIN PATTERNS TO BE THE SAME AS ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

REINSTATED ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES MAY NEED FURTHER STUDY

GARAGE ADDITION APPEARS TO OVERWHELM HISTORIC GARAGE

WINDOWS SHALL BE THE SAME AS THOSE ON ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

COA AND HPB REVIEW REQUIRED

APPROVED FOR BOA ONLY  
NEEDS CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

*[Signature]* 3.1.2022  
Signature Date

O.K. FOR BOA

MUNTIN PATTERNS TO BE THE SAME AS ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

REINSTATED ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES MAY NEED FURTHER STUDY

GARAGE ADDITION APPEARS TO OVERWHELM HISTORIC GARAGE

WINDOWS SHALL BE THE SAME AS THOSE ON ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

COA AND HPB REVIEW REQUIRED

W.A. 4/9/2022

**EXHIBIT "B"**









