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June 21, 2011

The City of Coral Gables  
Historical Resources Department  
405 Biltmore Way  
Second Floor  
Coral Gables, FL 33134

Re: Letter for determination of historical significance for  
Residence at 2 Casuarina Concourse, Coral Gables, Florida

This law firm represents the Estate of B. Carlin ("Estate"), the owner of the residence located at 2 Casuarina Concourse, Coral Gables, Florida ("Residence").

The Residence has not been designated a historic structure by the City of Coral Gables ("City"). The Estate is hereby requesting a determination from the City as to whether it deems the Residence historically significant.

The legal description of the Residence is as follows:

Lot 32, Block A, of GABLES ESTATES NUMBER 2, according to the Plat thereof recorded in Plat Book 60 at Page 37 of the Dade County, Florida, being situated in the City of Coral Gables.

The City's completed Application for Historic Significance accompanies this Letter.

An original survey of the real property on which the Residence is situated, signed and sealed and dated February 25, 2011, accompanies this Letter.

A Report prepared by Rafael Portuondo of the firm Portuondo Perotti Architects, in which Mr. Portuondo states his expert opinion that the Residence is not historically significant and the basis for his opinion, accompanies this Letter. The Report, in addition to reproductions of portions of the original drawings, includes numerous labeled color photographs of the overall site, and interior and exterior views of the Residence.

A check in the amount of \$100 made payable to the City of Coral Gables is provided.

The Estate does not believe the Residence should be declared a historic structure.

The Residence is 11,183 square feet and consists of 4 bedrooms and 6 1/2 baths. It is situated on a spectacular site, sitting on 1.96 acres surrounded on two sides by large expanses of the Coral Gables Waterway. The southeast portion of the property looks toward Biscayne Bay which is only a few hundred feet away.

The Residence is in deplorable condition. The roof needs to be replaced in its entirety at an approximate cost of \$510,000.00. The pool and pool deck, which are an integral part of the foundation of the Residence, must be raised and rebuilt due to serious structural defects. The cost of this repair is in excess of several hundred thousand dollars. The Residence contains asbestos which must be removed. The cost of removal has not yet been determined. In addition, there are countless other repairs that need to be undertaken and completed. It is reasonable to state that the cost to make the Residence habitable is well in excess of \$1,000,000.00. This sum does not take into account the cost to remodel, upgrade, and bring the Residence up to the standards and requirements of the South Florida Building Code and City of Coral Gables Building Code. That cost could easily be another \$1,000,000.00.

The Estate has had several contracts for the purchase of the property entered into with prospective purchasers, each of whom intended to raze the Residence and build a new house. All of the contracts failed to close because the City implied to prospective purchasers performing their due diligence that it would not issue a permit to demolish the Residence. Additionally, not a single prospective purchaser, including those who did not enter into contracts with the Estate, expressed an interest in repairing and restoring the Residence.

The Estate believes that the City's principal, if not sole criteria, in considering the Residence for historic designation is that its architect was Alfred Browning Parker. The critical question that must be posed is whether the City would consider the Residence for historic designation if it had been designed by another talented architect, but not one of the four or five most distinguished architects in the history of Florida. Stated another way, does the Residence on its own architectural and design merits warrant being designated a historic property.

The Estate has the highest regard and esteem for Alfred Browning Parker. Florida has produced few architects that are Mr. Parker's equal. An accurate description of his exceptionalism was contained in a 2008 article in *Moderism Magazine*:

He was inspired by the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright to produce original buildings that responded with sensitivity to the subtropical climate, the local landscape, new household technologies and shifting social patterns

that resulted in new ways of arranging domestic space, such as open floor plans and kitchens. Today, his residential work still looks fresh, modern and perfectly adapted to its settings, with open plans, lots of natural ventilation and the light and evocative materials like mahogany and coral keystone. No less an authority than Wright himself praised his work; in an article about Parker's Royal Road House in *House Beautiful* magazine in 1955, Wright declared, "This Florida house aims at the highest goal to which architecture may aspire; organic architecture. Along with this new but ancient way a home where the enlightened mind can flower, where people can develop their fullest potentials, is still a possibility.'

Juliette Guilbert in *Moderism Magazine* Summer 2008.

Regrettably, the Residence is a not a good example of Alfred Browning Parker's work and is not representative of his architectural and design principles. Those principles are best expressed by Mr. Parker in his own words:

Build simply-Build as directly as possible with no complications-Use the materials at hand and keep them sparse-Let your building love its site and glorify its climate-Design for use; make it beautiful.

The 5 Basic Principles of Architecture of Alfred Browning Parker, Ines Hegedus-Garcia in *Miamism* July 2010.

Make it useful... Make it beautiful. That's all I ever tried to do and that's what I'm still trying to do.

Alfred Browning Parker in *Design Book Magazine* 2010.

I'm a general practitioner, not a specialist ... And when it comes to forcing my design on the site, I've always had the idea of taking a little time in coming up with the concept, fitting it to the site, developing in the planning stages, carefully preparing instructions to bidders for the specifications in the working drawings and then supervising construction as an act of cooperation, not enforcement.

Interview with Alfred Browning Parker in the *Orlando Sentinel* 1986.

The Residence does not adhere to many of these principles. Though discussed with greater authority and detail by Rafael Portuondo in his Report and his use of

reproductions of portions of the original drawings and color photographs, set forth below is a description of the Residence and why its design is contrary to the principles of Alfred Browning Parker.

The most significant departure from these principles is the failure of the Residence to “love its site”. As noted, the Residence is located on a spectacular site, surrounded on two sides by large expanses of the Coral Gables Waterway and with an astonishing view of Biscayne Bay. Yet, the manner in which the Residence is situated on the property, it has practically no view of the water from any of its rooms.

The Residence is designed and constructed in a “U” shape, more accurately depicted as follows:



The inside of the U is the pool and pool deck. The Coral Gables Waterway runs the entire length of the right side of the U and the entire length of the top of the U. The kitchen, breakfast area, bar, and family room are on the right side of the U, with the kitchen at the bottom, the family room at the top, and the breakfast area and bar in the middle. The family room borders the Waterway on two sides. Yet, there are only two small sliding glass doors on the right side of the room that looks out on the Waterway. The back side of the room, which should have views of the Waterway and Biscayne Bay, is a solid windowless wall with has no views whatsoever. The kitchen, breakfast area, and bar also have only a single small sliding glass door on the right side of the room that looks out on the Waterway. Additionally, the rooms on this side of the Residence are too small and not in proper proportion. And it is awkward that the only entrance to the family room is through the kitchen.

Running the entire length of the second floor directly above the kitchen, breakfast area, bar, and family room, is the master bedroom suite. There is a small balcony on either side of the suite, accessible by sliding glass doors. The left side of the suite contains the bathrooms and closets. Other than the sliding glass door, this area has no windows or natural light and has a cave like feeling. The right side of the suite is the bedroom and sitting area and is the side that borders the Coral Gables Waterway. Similar to the left side of the suite, other than the sliding glass door there is no other windows or natural light. The only view of the Waterway is available by standing in front of the sliding glass door. Sitting or lying in bed one would have to contort oneself to see the Waterway. Additionally, the master bedroom suite is extremely small, more like a guest suite than a master suite, and not in proper proportion.

The living room and dining room are at the bottom of the U. Looking out to the top of the U they should have wonderful views of the Coral Gables Waterway and Biscayne Bay. They do not. Inexplicably, two out buildings housing the pool equipment and the guest suite, represented by the two dots at the top of the U, almost entirely block the view of the Waterway and Bay from the living room and dining room. These two out

buildings are only a few feet from the Waterway and a few hundred feet from the Bay. Thus, the best views of the Residence are from a maintenance building and a seldom used guest room and bathroom. There is a small non-descript library on the second floor near the master bedroom suite that is accessed by a stairway in the dining room. The entrance into the house is modest, with a low clearance, a tall person must stoop to enter, dark, and lacking in warmth. The living room and dining room have a magnificent curved wood ceiling which represents Alfred Browning Parker's design and craftsmanship at its finest.

The left side of the Ü is comprised of bedrooms, bathrooms, and an office. Their principal view is of the pool and pool deck and across to the right side of the Residence. But for the two out buildings, these rooms would have significant views of the Coral Gables Waterway. There is no second floor on this side of the Residence.

As has been shown above, the Residence fails to "love its site". Here you have one of the most beautiful waterfront properties in Coral Gables, with magnificent views of the Coral Gables Waterway and Biscayne Bay, and the design of the Residence not only does not take advantage of these views but, appears to go out of its way to obscure them.

The Residence departs from Alfred Browning Parker's principles to "make it beautiful" and to "use the materials at hand and keep them sparse". The Residence's predominant construction material is red brick. As the Residence is over 11,000 square feet, the overwhelming use of brick gives the Residence a massive bunker or a compound like feel.

Regrettably, because of the location of the Residence on the property, the use of brick as the principal building material, the need to replace the roof, the structural defects relating to the pool and pool deck, and other extensive repairs that are required, there is no practical way to redesign, reconfigure, or rebuild the Residence.

It is ironic that a few years after designing the Residence, in the same development only a mile away, Alfred Browning Parker built a home on Biscayne Bay for himself and his family. That home follows Mr. Parker's design principles with wonderful results. Unlike the Residence, "it loves its site", "he made it beautiful", and it uses the materials at hand and keeps them sparse".

The Gables Estates house, which Parker completed and moved into with his wife and children in 1965, overlooks Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean from atop a stone plinth. As with the Royal Road house, persianas open the interior spaces to sea views and breezes, but can be shut up tight against a storm. Cantilevered balconies encircle the upper levels, and a section of the plinth that is supported by stone-clad columns shades outdoor recreational space. The columns allow a view to the ocean from the lower level entry court as well as space for rising waters to pass

through during tropical storms. Perhaps the most poignant example of Parker's exceptional sensitivity to nature is the orientation of the square columns; they are angled to present less resistance to surging floodwaters.

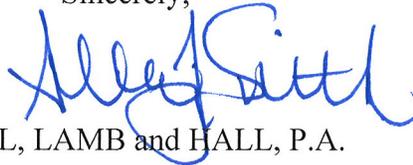
"I had a room for every kid in that house, and we had six by then," he says. "They all had their rooms right on the Bay."

Juliette Guilbert in *Moderism Magazine* Summer 2008.

Alfred Browning Parker designed over 6,000 houses. Royal Road was singled out for praise by Frank Lloyd Wright. Woodsong in Coconut Grove was named in 2005 by the British design magazine *Wallpaper* as one of the 10 best houses in the world. In addition, Mr. Parker's houses have won countless design and architectural awards. It is likely that the great majority of those homes are appropriate and worthy of historic designation.

For the reasons stated herein and in the Report of Rafael Portuondo, the Residence at 2 Casuarina Concourse is not one of those homes and should not be declared a historic property.

Sincerely,



HALL, LAMB and HALL, P.A.

Allen J. Smith, Esq.

AJS/ev

cc: Jeffrey Matthews  
Robert G. Breier, Esq.