



COA (SP) 2024-040
January 16, 2025

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

*Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts*

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- Proposal:** The application requests design approval for additions and alterations to the residence and sitework. Variances from the Coral Gables Zoning Code have also been requested from Article 2, Section 2-101 D (6) for ground area coverage and Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) for the minimum rear setback and Article 5, Section 5-403 for the height of the privacy wall.
- Architect:** Locus Architecture (Nelson de Leon)
- Owner:** 720 Madeira Holdings LLC
- Legal Description:** Lot 7, Block 7, Coral Estates Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 19, at Page 7, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.
- Site Characteristics:** The property is located on an interior lot on the south side of Madeira Avenue between Cortez and Casilla Streets. The lot dimensions are 50' by 145'.

BACKGROUND/EXISTING CONDITIONS

The single-family home at 720 Madeira Avenue was built in early 1937 when new construction in south Florida was sparse. Located in the Coral Estates subdivision, the home was in unincorporated Dade County at the time of construction. In late 1936 Marshall Laigle, a construction engineer who had built homes Coral Gables in the 1920s, purchased twenty lots in Coral Estates to build homes that blended with the adjacent Coral Gables aesthetic. Laigle hired the Coral Gables firm of Paist & Steward to design the homes, and he solicited realtor George Merrick, founder of Coral Gables, to handle the sales. For ten homes Laigle secured Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insured loans. Part of the Housing Act of 1934, the loans were to provide affordable homes for families after the lean Depression years. 720 Madeira Avenue was amongst these homes.

The Minimal Traditional home responded to the economics and aesthetics of the times. Renowned architectural historian Virginia McAlester states that *"The Minimal Traditional house was a well-studied and thoughtful response to the most challenging conditions ever to affect home construction in the United States."* Its simplicity was a response to the economic hardships of the Depression and the burgeoning modern aesthetic of subtle ornamentation and streamlined homes. In Coral Gables a variant of this style emerged in the mid-1930s embracing the Modernistic aesthetic while thoughtfully retaining Mediterranean Revival influences. The home at 720 Madeira Avenue home retains its historic integrity and is an example of how this style manifested in the Coral Gables area. The property was designated as a Local Historic Landmark in December 2024.



Figure 1: ca. 1940s photo



Figure 2: Current photo, 2024

PROPOSAL

The applicant is requesting design approval for the construction of a one-story addition, alterations to the existing residence, and sitework. Variances are also being requested from Article 2, Section 2-101 D (6), Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) and Article 5, Section 5-403 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code for ground area coverage, the minimum rear setback, and the height of the privacy wall.

SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

The following Standards have application in this matter:

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 scope of work contained in this application consists of a one-story addition to the rear (south) of the residence that will not be visible from the right-of-way on Madeira Avenue, alterations to the existing residence, and sitework. The approximately 275 SF addition comprises a new full bathroom, closets and hallway within the one-story connector piece between the existing residence and the existing auxiliary structure. (Originally a garage accessed through the carport, it was made inaccessible by the permitted 1963 addition behind the carport.)

To accommodate the addition, the rear wall on the home's south and a portion of the auxiliary structure's north façade will be removed to provide access into to the addition. Other alterations to the home include: the installation of impact-resistant windows and doors, removal of metal awnings (not original), demolition of exterior steps at the west side of the home (added in 1963, but noted for its inscription as "Supervised by Timothy"), demolition of the planters on the east side of the residence, removal of the original door opening and steps into the carport, resizing of two windows on the west side of the addition, and interior reconfiguration. At the auxiliary structure, window and door openings are being shifted to accommodate the new interior layout of the space as a master bedroom with full bath. Some of these appear to have been shifted or resized in the past.

Proposed site work includes: new chain link fencing, new 4'-0" masonry wall at the southeast corner of the original residence with aluminum pedestrian gate, new masonry privacy wall at the rear setback line ranging in height from 7'-10" to 8'-6", new raised patio and bench, new hardscape including driveway with connected walkway, new swimming pool and pool deck to the east of the addition, and landscaping.

North (Front) Elevation:

At the front elevation, the only visible changes are the installation of new impact-resistant windows that match the configuration of the original steel casements, the removal of existing metal awnings (typical all facades), stuccoing of the existing (non-original) brick planter, and the new wing wall with aluminum gate at the east side.

East (Side) Elevation:

The existing home will receive new windows that replicate the original window configuration. No opening will be resized. The non-original planter will be removed, except for one planter box that wraps the northeast corner of the home. The windows and doors in the 1963 will also be replaced and not resized. To the south is the one-story connector addition. It is under a flat roof with decorative parapets that are higher than the existing residence, but not visible from Madeira Avenue, allowing it to receive the modified roofs of the house and auxiliary structure. Further to the south, the modifications to the existing auxiliary structure include filling in the door and window and creating a large opening to accommodate a pair of French doors with sidelites. Behind the masonry privacy wall massing, a new window is being installed. A new fence and gate span to the rear property line for the required pool enclosure. Note that it is depicted as a chain link fence in elevation, but noted as metal on the site plan.

South (Rear) Elevation:

The rear elevation of the home is wholly obscured by the new privacy wall which consists of a center raised portion at 8'-6" high flanked by two lower walls at 7'-10" high. An arched opening leads from the pool area to the remainder of the rear yard. A window on the rear of the auxiliary structure is being resized.

West (Side) Elevation:

The existing home will receive new windows that replicate the original window configuration. The windows and doors in the 1963 will also be replaced and with the windows being relocated and resized. To the south, the one-story connector addition is a mirror of its east façade. At the auxiliary structure, two new windows are being introduced and the existing center window is being resized and relocated.

VARIANCES

Variances have also been requested from the Coral Gables Zoning Code. The following variances are being requested in conjunction with this proposal:

- 1. Grant a variance to allow a maximum ground area coverage for a principal building of approximately two thousand seven hundred (2,700) square feet (37.2% of the lot) vs. the allowed two thousand five hundred thirty-seven (2,573) square feet (35% of the lot) as required by Article 2, Section 2-101 D (6) of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.*

The proposed addition increases the ground area coverage of the residence 138 SF over what is allowed by the Coral Gables Zoning Code. The alternative to granting the variance would be for an addition with a smaller footprint but is two stories in height. Because the addition is one-story in height, which is in keeping with the existing residence and is not visible from the street, Staff supports the granting of the variance.

- 2. Grant a variance to allow the proposed mechanical equipment to have a rear setback of approximately six feet (6'-0") vs. the minimum rear setback shall be ten feet (10'-0") as required by Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.*

The proposed mechanical equipment is to be located at 6'-0" from the rear property line where the Code specifies a 10'-0" rear setback. The existing auxiliary structure is located 5'-1" from the rear property line. The mechanical equipment will not be increasing the existing non-conformity on the property. Staff supports the granting of this variance.

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

3. *Grant a variance to allow the privacy wall to have a maximum height of approximately eight feet and six inches (8'-6") vs. the maximum height of four feet (4'-0") as required by Article 5, Section 5-403 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.*

The Coral Gables Zoning Code stipulates that the maximum height for walls is 4'-0." The proposed wall ranges in height from 7'-10" to a maximum height of 8'-6." There is no special or unusual circumstance that would necessitate the variance. The letter of intent notes that the auxiliary structure of the property to the rear (south) has a 5'-0" rear setback. That property is a 1920s home with garage/auxiliary structure and the condition can be found all around Coral Gables. The privacy being sought can be accomplished with a 4'-0" and appropriate landscape intervention. Staff does not support the granting of this variance.

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.	No
2) That the special conditions and circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.	No
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.	No
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.	No
5) That the variance granted is the minimum variance that will make possible the reasonable use of the land, building or structure.	No
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.	No
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BOARD OF ARCHITECTS

The proposal was reviewed and approved with conditions by the Board Architects on October 24, 2024. The BOA notes were as follows:

10/24/2024 BOA MEETING. *MOTION TO APPROVE AS NOTED WITH THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS: 1) REAR SETBACK OF 5'-0" IS ALSO APPROVED IN THIS APPROVAL.

STAFF CONCLUSION

The application requests design approval for additions and alterations to the residence and sitework. Variances have also been requested of the Coral Gables Zoning Code from Article 2, Section 2-101 D (6) for ground area coverage and Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) for the minimum rear setback and Article 5, Section 5-403 for the height of the privacy wall. The massing and location of the addition are the most appropriate for a modest home like this one, being one-story and to the rear. The addition is clearly differentiated by its flat roof and decorative parapet.

Regarding the requested variances, if the Board denies the variance for the 8'-6" wall as per Staff recommendation, there is an opportunity to shift the mechanical equipment to the north. Thus, increasing its distance from the rear property line.

Staff requests that the following condition be incorporated into any motion for approval:

1. Window/door muntins are to be high-profile / dimensional.
2. Window/door glass to be clear / no reflectivity / no tint / no low-E.
3. The original front door is to remain (it is shown as dashed in the demolition plan).
4. Roof tile is to be true two-piece barrel tile.
5. Material to be specified for the new pool deck.
6. A separate Standard Certificate of Appropriateness may be required for the swimming pool and deck if it is under a separate permit.
7. Provide a recess at the infilled door opening within the carport.
8. Provide a separation between the new driveway and the new walkway.
9. Provide further information on the color scheme of the walls, windows, trim, etc.

Therefore, Historical Resources Department Staff recommends the following:

A motion to **APPROVE** the design proposal for additions and alterations to the residence and sitework on the property located at **720 Madeira Avenue**, a Local Historic Landmark, legally described as Lot 7, Block 7, Coral Estates Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 19, at Page 7, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida, and **APPROVE WITH THE CONDITIONS NOTED ABOVE** the issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness.

AND

A motion to **APPROVE** a variance to allow a maximum ground area coverage for a principal building of approximately two thousand seven hundred (2,700) square feet (37.2% of the lot) vs. the allowed two thousand five hundred thirty-seven (2,573) square feet (35% of the lot) as required by Article 2, Section 2-101 D (6) of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.

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AND

A motion to **APPROVE** a variance to allow the proposed mechanical equipment to have a rear setback of approximately six feet (6'-0") vs. the minimum rear setback shall be ten feet (10'-0") as required by Article 2, Section 2-101 D (4) c of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.

AND

A motion to **DENY** a variance to allow the privacy wall to have a maximum height of approximately eight feet and six inches (8'-6") vs. the maximum height of four feet (4'-0") as required by Article 5, Section 5-403 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Pernas", written over a horizontal line.

Anna Pernas
Historic Preservation Officer