

## CORAL GABLES HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

July 31, 2008, 4:30 p.m.

City Commission Chambers

405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Florida

### MEMBERS: A S O N D J F M A M J J J #

Dorothy Thomson*	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Catherine Stewart	E	P	P	P	P	E	E	P	E	P	P	P	E
Ernesto Santos	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Gonzalo Sanabria								P	E	E	P	E	P
Dolly MacIntyre*	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Michael Beeman	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Joyce Meyers	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	E
Lisa Bennett	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	E	E
Shirley Maroon	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

### APPOINTED BY:

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II  
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.  
Comm. Maria Anderson  
Comm. Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.  
Comm. Wayne "Chip" Withers  
Historic Preservation Board  
City Manager David Brown  
City Commission  
City Commission

### STAFF:

Kara N. Kautz, Historic Preservation Officer  
Betty Perez, Historical Resources Department  
Simone Chin, Historical Preservation Administrator  
Rodney Carbonell, Historic Resources Department

**A = Absent**

**P = Present**

**E = Excused**

**\* = New Member**

**^ = Resigned Member**

**# = Special Meeting**

**GUESTS:** Myrna Leal, Emilio Cubero, Howard Gittelsohn, Julie Gittelsohn, Maria Teresa Hudson, Carlos H. Gamez, Juan Fernandez-Barona

**RECORDING SECRETARY:** Nancy C. Morgan, Coral Gables Services, Inc.

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The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Michael Beeman at 4:35 p.m. A quorum was present.

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT and DISCLOSURE OF CONTEXT:

Mr. Beeman read for the record the statement regarding lobbyist registration and disclosure. He then stated that if any members of the board had any ex parte communication or contact regarding any cases being heard, it was necessary to disclose such communication or contact. Board members did not indicate that any such communication occurred.

### MEETING ATTENDANCE:

**Ms. Maroon made a motion to excuse the meeting attendance of Ms. Meyers, Ms. Stewart and Ms. Bennett.**

**Mr. Santos seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote.**

### SWEARING IN THE PUBLIC:

Nancy Morgan swore in members of the audience who planned to testify during the meeting.

**LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION  
AND ACCELERATED SPECIAL CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS:**

**CASE FILE LHD 2008-06 AND COA (SP) 2008-14:**

Consideration of the local historic designation of the property at **932 Escobar Avenue**, legally described as the East 16.86 feet of Lot 4 and all of Lot 5 and the West 33.72 feet of Lot 6, Block 42, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Three, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, at Page 52, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The applicant is also requesting the issuance of an Accelerated Special Certificate of Appropriateness and design approval for the construction of additions and alterations.

Ms. Kautz thanked Board members for their availability for a special meeting, called due to the condition of the subject property. She described the format of the presentation, stating that both the historic designation and the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness would be presented simultaneously to ensure the Board had all information before addressing the items. The two items would require separate motions.

The history of the property was reviewed by Ms. Kautz as follows:

- A previous permit was issued by the City for the addition and renovation.
- During the demolition phase of the permit, a large portion of the house was demolished.
- It was discovered that the house had no structural footings or tie-beams and that the second floor was wood-frame construction.
- As a result, the house had structural issues to be resolved if major construction and demolition work was to proceed.
- During early June, staff became aware of the property's condition when the contractor asked for an assessment of the property and an opinion on whether or not the house should be allowed to be fully demolished.
- Ms. Kautz' opinion was that if a historical significance request had been made for full demolition at the onset of the project, it would have been denied. Therefore, she did not sign a demolition permit.
- A letter was sent to the homeowner that outlined options available: 1) designating the structure as a local historic landmark, which would provide access to certain provisions of the Florida Building Code that allow structural review of the property to be a little more lenient; 2) to bring the existing structure into full compliance with the Florida Building Code, which, given the wood-frame construction of the second floor, would be a difficult process that would likely obliterate the historic aspects of the house that remained; 3) to submit an application for historic significance for a request for full demolition.
- The homeowner opted to pursue historic designation and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

During a PowerPoint presentation Ms. Kautz displayed historic and current photographs of the property, stating there was very little permit history, and that there were no original drawings or elevations available. She described the house and alterations, stating that most later additions were demolished. She concluded by stating that staff recommended local historic designation based on architecture.

Regarding the portion of the application pertaining to the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), Ms. Kautz said the report was difficult to write because the house, in its current state was so radically changed from the original. Photographs were displayed that showed the house in the first week of June 2008 while Ms. Kautz updated current status and changes since June.

The core of the house that remains is the 1920s portion. Staff initially suggested that the front and a portion of the side façades could be eligible for designation if left intact, after which the COA process could begin. What was permitted previously included substantial alterations to the front façade that, had they been constructed, would have severely impacted the integrity of the house. Staff advised the owner that proposed alterations would need to be restudied for the process to occur.

Ms. Kautz then reviewed in detail a comprehensive list of plans for alterations and proposed work on the house, along with staff observations and recommendations, concluding that staff's opinion was that enough of the original house could be retained to designate it.

**Mr. Sanabria made a motion to approve the historic designation and the addition in accordance with staff's recommendations.**

Mr. Santos commended the architect for the completeness of the plans, and expressed concern that much of the historic fabric of the house was lost, and the plans indicated a majority of the work was a re-creation of the house. He stated he could not vote in favor of designating the house. Ms. Thomson indicated agreement with Mr. Santos' remarks. Ms. Kautz reviewed the plans and the reasoning behind staff's recommendation.

Mr. Sanabria withdrew his motion to designate the house, and asked what the options were. Ms. Kautz responded that staff would sign a demolition permit if the house were not historically designated, which would allow the owner to build another structure on the property.

Ms. Leal, owner of the house, currently resides at 3116 Alhambra Circle and reiterated that if the house were not designated, she would apply for a demolition permit. Mr. Santos commented that part of the house could still be preserved, again stating that the plans were good.

Mr. Cubero, the project contractor, explained problems encountered and their efforts to take proactive and preventive action. Ms. Kautz pointed out that if the house was undesignated, it would be reviewed under the Florida Building Code and would never meet provisions of the code. Mr. Cubero and Mr. Santos discussed the difficult and costly work that would have to be undertaken to preserve the house. Thereafter, Ms. Maroon and Ms. Kautz discussed the differences between designating or not designating and the procedures involved.

Mr. Gamez, a neighbor at 902 Escobar, stated that the house was a charming element in the neighborhood, citing its unique appearance but also recognizing its dire current position. He urged the Board to retain at least the minimal historic integrity of the house. Mr. Santos responded that retaining minimal integrity would require designation. However, he said another recourse could be to demolish and rebuild the house, presenting the plan to the Board of Architects for approval.

**Ms. Maroon made a motion to approve local historic designation of 932 Escobar Avenue. Ms. MacIntyre seconded the motion.**

Mr. Sanabria indicated support for the motion.

Mr. Fernandez-Barona, a structural engineer, stated that he worked in historic restoration projects and had completed several on Miami Beach. He cited examples of houses where historic facades had been preserved under similar circumstances, and urged the Board to designate the house in an effort to maintain as much of the front façade of the house as possible to retain its street value.

Mr. Santos, Mr. Fernandez-Barona and Mr. Cubero engaged in discussion about the roof and flooring, and a variety of ideas to restore the property. Mr. Santos suggested reconstructing the house exactly as it is.

Mr. Beeman expressed his often-voiced concern about the number of historic houses in Coral Gables that were abandoned, neglected and, ultimately, destroyed. Ms. Kautz said this permitting process began approximately one year ago, and said staff was working with the Building Department to have partial demolition plans administratively reviewed by staff.

Mr. Santos and Mr. Gamez engaged in discussion about retention of the second floor and the main roof of the house, and Mr. Santos suggested using steel reinforcement to save significant elements of the house and taking as much architectural and structural action as possible to preserve the house. He encouraged retention of many charming features, including the

stairs and fireplace. He recommended creating a design to preserve the old house and bring the plans back to the Board for review. Ms. Thomson indicated agreement with the recommendation, and suggested deferring the application until the August meeting. Mr. Santos said he would get involved with recommendations for the house if the Board voted to designate the house.

**Ms. Maroon restated a motion to historically designate 932 Escobar Avenue. Ms. MacIntyre seconded the motion.**

Mr. Sanabria suggested amending the motion to defer the decision to allow Mr. Santos to review the plans with the architect and engineer. Mr. Santos advised that if the applicant returned to the Board with a more acceptable solution for the house, the process could move along, and pointed out that once the house is designated, the owner could realize tax benefits.

Ms. Leal stated that she made the decision to bring the matter to the Board because she wanted to move ahead with the project.

Ms. Thomson said she wanted the house to be saved, supported Mr. Santos' willingness to work with Ms. Leal's architect and engineer and again suggested deferring the application to the August meeting.

Ms. Kautz expressed concern that the house was exposed to the elements during the rainy season, and reiterated the reason for the special meeting to protect the property. Mr. Santos advised that the owner would have to protect the property and suggested they return to the Board with a more palatable package.

**Ms. Maroon withdrew her previous motions, and made a new motion to defer the application until the August meeting. Mr. Santos seconded the motion.**

Mr. Beeman added that the owner should secure the property to protect it against the elements.

Mr. Cubero discussed preservation of the roof with Mr. Santos, who offered optional suggestions, while acknowledging that it would not be an easy task. Discussion ended and the meeting concluded.

**Roll Call: Ayes: Ms. Maroon, Mr. Sanabria, Mr. Santos, Ms. Thomson, Mr. Beeman. Nays: Ms. MacIntyre.**

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjourned at 5:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kara N. Kautz  
Historic Preservation Officer