

CORAL GABLES HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING MINUTES

July 16, 2009, 4:00 p.m.

City Commission Chambers

405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, Florida

MEMBERS:	J #	A	S	O	N	D	J	F#	F	M	A	M	J	J	APPOINTED BY:
Dorothy Thomson	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	E	P	P	Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Margaret Rolando*						P	P	P+	P	P	P	P	P	P	Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Ernesto Santos	P	P	P	E	P	P	P	A	E	P	P	P	P	P	Comm. Maria Anderson
Venny Torre*										P	P	P	P	E	Comm. Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.
Dolly MacIntyre	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	Comm. Wayne "Chip" Withers
Richard Heisenbottle									^	^	^	^	^	P	Historic Preservation Board
Joyce Meyers	E	P	P	E	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	City Manager
Gay Bondurant*													P	P	City Commission
Shirley Maroon	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P-	P	P	P	City Commission

+ Ms. Rolando recused herself from discussion.

- Ms. Maroon left the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

STAFF:

Kara Kautz, Historic Resources Officer

Betty Perez, Administrative Assistant

Rodney Carbonell, Historical Resources Department

A = Absent

P = Present

E = Excused

*** = New Member**

^ = Resigned Member

= Special Meeting

GUESTS: Albert, McCraney, Hilda Dorsey, Grace D. McCraney, Ana Alvarez, Steven Lachterman, Tony Fernandez, Rev. Cathy Felber, Dick Ward, Rick Hickox, Stuart Bornstein, George McArdle

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

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dolly MacIntyre at 4:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT and DISCLOSURE OF CONTEXT:

Ms. MacIntyre read for the record the statement regarding lobbyist registration and disclosure. She 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.

MINUTES: MEETING OF JUNE 18, 2009:

Ms. Bondurant made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of June 18, 2009. Ms. Thomson seconded the motion, unanimously approved by voice vote.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Ms. Thomson made a motion to excuse the absence of Mr. Torre. Ms. Bondurant seconded the motion, unanimously approved by voice vote.

DEFERRALS: None.

PUBLIC SWEARING IN: Nancy Morgan swore in audience members who planned to testify during the meeting.

LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATIONS:

CASE FILE LHD 2009-04 Consideration of the local historic designation of the First United Methodist Church of South Miami located at 6500 Red Road, also known as 6565 Red Road (SW 57 Avenue) and 5999 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, generally described as Lots 1 through 8 inclusive and 34 through 40 inclusive, and a portion of the adjacent alley, less a portion of Lot 8, Block 196, Coral Gables Riviera Section Part Fourteen – 2nd Revision, according to the Plat thereof, recorded in Plat Book 28, Page 32, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida (lengthy legal description is on file).

Ms. Chin reviewed the history of the First United Methodist Church of South Miami from its inception as a congregation in 1914, describing the property's architectural features, criteria for significance and alterations/additions between 1964 and 1977. She noted that the alterations were not significant enough to detract from the historic nature of the property. Stating that the entire structure was to be considered for designation, Ms. Chin advised that staff recommended approval of historic designation based on the church's influence and contributions to the community as an institution as well as the property's history and architecture.

Rev. Cathy Felber, church pastor, stated her support of the historic designation. Dick Ward, church member, stated his support for the designation and thanked staff for its efforts.

There being no further requests for audience comments, Ms. MacIntyre closed the public hearing.

Expressing surprise that the church had not been previously designated, Ms. Thomson recommended that other undesignated historic properties also be designated. Ms. Kautz acknowledged the growing list of properties to be designated.

Ms. Bondurant made a motion to approve the local historic designation of the First United Methodist Church of South Miami as presented. Ms. Maroon seconded the motion.

Ms. MacIntyre thanked members of the church for caring about its heritage and urged that all historic religious institutions in the community be designated.

Roll Call: Ayes: Ms. Rolando, Ms. Thomson, Mr. Heisenbottle, Ms. Bondurant, Ms. Maroon, Ms. Meyers, Mr. Santos, Ms. MacIntyre. Nays: None.

Staff was directed to research other religious institutions within the community for qualifications regarding eligibility for historic designation.

AD VALOREM TAX RELIEF:

CASE FILE AV 2006-06 An application requesting ad valorem tax relief for the Hotel Place St. Michel located at 162 Alcazar Avenue, a local historic landmark, legally described as Lots 3 and 4, Block 24, Coral Gables Section "L", according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 8, at Page 85, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The related Certificate of Appropriateness – Case File COA (ST) 2006-38, was granted design approval on June 23, 2006, by the Historical Resources Staff.

Ms. Kautz reviewed the history and photographs of the Hotel Place St. Michel, its designation as a local historic landmark in 1995, and its restoration and alterations as she conducted a PowerPoint presentation. Property owner Stuart Bornstein was introduced as a member of the audience.

Ms. Kautz reviewed the criteria and requirements of the ad valorem tax benefit, adding that work was initiated on the property due to hurricane damage. There were no additions to square footage.

In response to Ms. Thomson's inquiry about plans for the site, Mr. Bornstein said he was currently in negotiations with a restaurant group. He added that the exterior of the property was 100% renovated, with no structural changes to the interiors.

Mr. Heisenbottle made a motion to approve the application for ad valorem tax relief for the Hotel Place St. Michel as presented. Ms. Bondurant seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes: Ms. Thomson, Mr. Heisenbottle, Ms. Bondurant, Ms. Maroon, Ms. Meyers, Mr. Santos, Ms. Rolando, Ms. MacIntyre. Nays: None.

SPECIAL CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS:

CASE FILE COA (SP) 2009-11 An application for the issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness for the property at 126 Oak Avenue, a contributing structure within the "MacFarlane Homestead Subdivision Historic District," legally described as Lot 18, Block 3-A, MacFarlane Homestead, as recorded in Plat Book 5, at Page 81, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The applicant requested demolition of the existing structure.

Ms. Kautz displayed current photographs of the house, stated the 1929 house was a contributing structure in the historic MacFarlane district, so designated on September 17, 1998. Funds were set aside by the County in 1998 to restore seven properties in the historic district, this property among them. Restoration of three properties consumed available funding, disabling the remaining four from restoration.

Ms. Kautz said the property was cited by Code Enforcement for minimum housing due to deterioration. The case is pending. She explained the Zoning Code's provisions for demolition and factors to be considered (included in Board packets).

Staff observations for Board consideration about the property were stated as follows:

- The degree to which the building contributes to the historic and/or architectural significance of the historic district;
- Whether the building is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in the neighborhood;

- Whether the loss of the building would adversely affect the historic and/or architectural integrity of the historic district;
- Whether the retention of the building would promote the general welfare of the City by providing an opportunity for study of local history, architecture and design, or by developing an understanding of the importance and value of a particular culture and heritage;
- Whether architectural plans had been presented to the Board for the reuse of the property if the proposed demolition were to be carried out, and the appropriateness of said plans to the character of the historic site or district, if applicable; and demonstration as well as the posting of a bond requirement that sufficient funds were in place to carry out such plans;
- Whether the building poses an imminent threat to public health or safety;
- Whether the applicant demonstrated that retention of the building would create an unreasonable or undue economic hardship as described in Section 3-1115;
- Whether there is compelling public interest requiring the demolition.

Ms. Kautz said staff was sympathetic to the plight of the homeowner and the condition of the property; however, she opined that granting the request would set a negative precedent for the district. In reviewing Code provisions, staff found the following:

- The property is a contributing structure within both the Coral Gables and National Registers of Historic Places, and its loss would be detrimental to the historic district.
- While not the last remaining example of its kind, the historic district is finite in its contributing structures, and is the site of the only examples of this type of wood frame vernacular architecture in the City.
- The loss of the property would be detrimental to the historic district and adversely affect the integrity of the district.
- If the property could be restored, it would promote the general welfare of the City, neighborhood and historic district.
- No plans for the property were presented to staff for evaluation.
- Regarding whether or not the building posed an imminent threat to public health and safety, Ms. Kautz said the opinion was as yet undetermined.
- Undue economic hardship information was not provided for evaluation.
- The presence of a compelling public interest requiring demolition was unknown at the time of staff's report.

Ms. Kautz reported that one neighbor complained about the condition of the property.

In view of these conclusions, Ms. Kautz stated staff's recommendation to deny approval for demolition of the property, and to deny issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness. However, she added, if the Board determined that the property was too deteriorated to be successfully restored, the Coral Gables Zoning Code allowed for certain conditions to be placed on the demolition if approved.

Finally, Ms. Kautz stated that a National Trust Loan Fund grant was applied for rehabilitation of this house; however, approval had not yet occurred, and it was unknown if approval would be granted.

Albert McCraney, representing his mother and aunt, owners of the property who are retired and living on fixed income, stated that the building was a hardship to them, described the length of time they had waited for restoration of the property, and acknowledged that it was an eyesore. He stated the family's decision to demolish the building, but to retain the property in the family for later use. He also spoke of how detrimental the building was to his neighbor, Mr. Hickox, who was trying to rent his property. He also stated that the family wants to keep the property and has no intention of selling it.

Mr. Hickox, 130 Oak Avenue, described a constant and ongoing problem with rats, termites and snakes, and said the roof and floors were caved in. He said the house was not a candidate for rehabilitation, and cited his difficulties in finding tenants for his own property. He urged the Board to approve the demolition, and suggested that a new structure could be built in the likeness of the original house.

There being no further requests for audience participation, Ms. MacIntyre closed the public hearing.

Discussion, comments and suggestions:

- Owners requested historic designation of the property in 1998 to be eligible for County restoration funding.
- The property has been secured and fumigated to accommodate neighbor requests.
- Code Enforcement has not cited the building as an unsafe structure, but as minimum housing.
- The owners of houses in the MacFarlane historic district need to make more of a personal effort to maintain their properties, and the City has an obligation to enforce Code if homeowners do not maintain properties.
- By permitting demolition, the Board could be encouraging homeowners to let their properties deteriorate.
- The City should not wait 10 years to take action about historic buildings such as the subject property.
- The owners' plight could be considered economic hardship since they trusted the promised County rehabilitation funding.
- There was no provision of documentation showing economic hardship.
- If the building were demolished, any new construction plans would be presented to the Board for approval as the entire property is designated historic, not just the structure on the property. Any new structure would be considered non-contributing within the historic district.
- If it were possible to get the grant from the National Trust Loan Fund, would it be possible to be restored? The Fund grant included the cost of restoring the structure.
- District houses were built as extemporaneous wood-frame structures, poorly constructed and maintained. Extremely significant money would be necessary to restore such a deteriorated house.
- This building could be entirely destroyed in a strong hurricane.
- The homeowners complied with Code Enforcement in all instances other than the wood issues.
- The property was first cited for minimum housing in December 2007, the demolition application was noticed to all properties within a 1,000-foot radius, and Ms. Cooper is aware of the application.
- Standards and criteria regarding structures in conditions such as this property need to be established.
- Suggested: Postpone the application for 30 days to learn the decision of the National Trust, and have the owner secure a report issued by a building official or independent structural engineer as to the condition of the house.
- Considered whether the Board's trust fund could contribute to the cost of an independent structural engineer's study and report as Board consensus was inclined to mandate it.

Mr. Heisenbottle made a motion to postpone making a decision on the application until the August Board meeting and, during the interim, learn the status of National Trust grant funding for rehabilitation, and simultaneously have a building evaluation conducted by a building official for safety and status for practical restoration. Ms. Meyers seconded the motion.

Ms. Rolando expressed support for a structural engineer's report as the Board needs to have sufficient information to make an informed decision; however, subsidizing the cost of the evaluation from the Board's trust fund should be contingent upon the subsidy being approved in this case only.

Mr. Santos suggested that Code Enforcement staff be directed to research information they may already have since their past involvement with this property would likely have included an examination by the City Engineer.

Ms. Kautz advised that, in the past, Code Enforcement cited 214 Florida Avenue for demolition by neglect and fined the property. Structural Engineer Doug Wood, a highly-respected expert, examined the property and recommended allowing the demolition. Mr. Santos reiterated that Code Enforcement should render an opinion.

Ms. Meyers asked if Mr. Heisenbottle's motion included subsidizing the cost of an evaluation by a structural engineer. Mr. Heisenbottle replied affirmatively.

Ms. Thomson voiced opposition to using the trust fund to pay for the structural engineering report when the cost was unknown.

Ms. Rolando then recommended that a structural evaluation be performed by a City building official with expertise in unsafe structures to determine if the house is unsafe.

Mr. Heisenbottle and Ms. Meyers accepted Ms. Rolando's amendment to the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes: Mr. Santos, Ms. Rolando, Ms. Thomson, Mr. Heisenbottle, Ms. Bondurant, Ms. Maroon, Ms. Meyers, Ms. MacIntyre. Nays: None.

CASE FILE COA (SP) 2009-12 An application for the issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness for the property at 813 Obispo Avenue, a contributing structure within the "Obispo Avenue Historic District," legally described as Lot 14 and the west one-half of Lot 13, Block 28, Coral Gables Section "B", as recorded in Plat Book 5, at Page 111, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The applicant is requesting design approval for the construction of an auxiliary structure on the property. A variance from Section 5-1603 was requested to allow the auxiliary structure to have a flat roof with a parapet.

During a visual presentation of the property and its history, Ms. Kautz described the original garage and the application for a one-story, two-car garage, bathroom and roof/porch area designed to blend with the existing house. She added that a variance was requested to allow for a flat roof parapet, and explained Code provisions that applied. The Board of Architects reviewed the project and advised the applicant to re-evaluate the step on the right side of the parapet. Board members reviewed the Board of Architects' comments and revised design.

Architect Tony Fernandez, representing the homeowners, stated his preference for keeping the initial design. He compared his elevation with changes suggested by staff and the Board of Architects, mentioning modifications to the new structure to differentiate it from the existing structure. Mr. Fernandez indicated his agreement with the Secretary of Interior standards and reviewed his view on the design differentiation and his efforts to unify elements. He reiterated his preference to maintain the original design.

Ms. Kautz displayed photographs of similar designs, and pointed out that the right side of the applicant's design distracted from the simplicity of the original structure.

Homeowner Lachterman expressed his preference for the arched concept of the design as it is distinguishing and complements the appearance of the pool.

There being no further requests for audience comment, the public hearing was closed.

Board comments:

- Ms. Rolando: The design of the arch at the entrance to the bathroom seems grandiose; the entrance to the bathroom has a French door which may not provide privacy.
- Mr. Heisenbottle: Concerned about the ability to distinguish between the proposed new structure and the original house. The stucco on the new structure should not match the original.
- Mr. Santos indicated support of staff's recommendations, and added that stucco techniques used in 1926 and today are totally different.

Ms. Thomson made a motion to approve the application with staff recommendations. Mr. Heisenbottle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes: Mr. Santos, Ms. Rolando, Ms. Thomson, Mr. Heisenbottle, Ms. Bondurant, Ms. Maroon, Ms. Meyers, Ms. MacIntyre. Nays: None.

CASE FILE COA (SP) 2009-13 An application for the issuance of a Special Certificate of Appropriateness for the property at 1136 Alhambra Circle, a contributing structure within the "Alhambra Circle Historic District," legally described as Lot 3 and the west 35 feet of Lot 4, Block 15, Coral Gables Section "C", as recorded in Plat Book 8, at Page 26, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The applicant is requesting design approval for the construction of an addition and alterations.

Ms. Chin displayed property photographs, and reviewed the history and alterations. She pointed out that the applicant requested a new, two-car garage in front of an existing alteration. The applicants also want to replace all non-historic windows and doors with impact-resistant windows, to remove an arched window on the front elevation, to install a new property wall and reconfigure the driveway.

Architect Ana Alvarez reviewed the project, adding that the purpose of the low masonry wall was to establish a threshold and to mitigate serious water pooling in the front yard during rain.

Ms. Chin advised that the project was reviewed by the Board of Architects with no comments, and added that staff recommended approval with the condition that the two windows on the new garage be re-studied so they do not mimic original architecture.

Fernando Alvarez, property owner, said there was a serious flooding problem in the front yard, and requested that appropriate municipal action be taken to install a drain.

There being no further requests for audience input, the public hearing closed.

Board comments:

- Ms. Bondurant: The level of flooding in front of the house was excessive. (Ms. Kautz will find out if plans are underway to alleviate flooding problems.)
- Mr. Santos: Concerned about the elevation and proportions of the garage, which appears too dominant and out of proportion. He recommended re-studying the garage design to lessen the mass. He made suggestions about design revisions to accomplish a lower appearance.
- Mr. Heisenbottle: The size and scale of the garage design are out of proportion to the house, far forward and dominating. He suggested revisions and recommended further study and other alternatives.

Mr. Heisenbottle made a motion to continue the item until the next meeting at which time the architect and owner could present alternatives to diminish the size and scale of the addition. Ms. Rolando seconded the motion.

Additional alternatives were discussed, including Mr. Santos' suggestion of removing the roof portion to create the alignment at a lower scale, likely being able to use the same walls. Mr. Santos offered to meet with the project architect and staff to help with design revisions.

Roll Call: Ayes: Mr. Santos, Ms. Rolando, Ms. Thomson, Mr. Heisenbottle, Ms. Bondurant, Ms. Maroon, Ms. MacIntyre. Nays: None. Ms. Meyers was no longer present at the meeting.

CITY UPDATE:

Ms. Kautz reported that the alley vacation for the Coral Gables Museum was passed on second reading, and will allow enclosure of the breezeway between the two buildings.

The City Commission July 29 meeting will consider on second reading a Zoning Code text amendment that will require that applications that come before the Board and fail to achieve a quorum vote come back at the following Board meeting for full Board consideration.

Regarding Segovia and Coral Way landscaping, Public Works has not yet provided updated information.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

It was agreed that the policy issue regarding demolition requests for historically-designated houses would be addressed at another meeting. Ms. Kautz will research issues for discussion at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kara N. Kautz
Historic Preservation Officer