

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1
August 23, 2016
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Frank Quesada
Commissioner Jeannett Slesnick

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Historic Preservation Officer, Dona Spain

Public Speaker(s)

F. W. Zeke Guilford
ElizaBeth Guin

Agenda Item E-1 [0:00:00 a.m.]

Case File LHD 2016-08

Frederick J. Kent (through counsel F. W. Zeke Guilford, Esq.), the applicant, has filed an appeal to the Coral Gables City Commission from the decision of the Historic Preservation Board at its regular meeting held on Thursday, June 16, 2016, which granted local historic designation to the property located at 229 Ridgewood Road, legally described as Lots 9 & 10, Block 2, Coconut Grove Manor, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 17, at Page 19 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. (Ayes: 7, Nays: 0).

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Mayor Cason: Now we'll move on to Item E-1, which is an appeal. City Attorney.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. This is Case File LHD 2016-08. This is an appeal before the City Commission from the Historic Preservation Board. The appeal is brought by Frederick J. Kent (through counsel F. W. Zeke Guilford, Esq.), the applicant, has filed an appeal to the Coral Gables City Commission from the decision of the Historic Preservation Board at its regular meeting held on Thursday, June 16, 2016, which granted local historic designation to the property located at 229 Ridgewood Road, legally described as Lots 9 & 10, Block 2, Coconut Grove Manor, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 17, at Page 19 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida. The Historic Preservation Board voted 7-0 in favor of historic designation. The Mayor has determined that each side will receive ten minutes. There was a request by the appellant, through Mr. Guilford, for an additional five minutes. So, the Mayor's granted fifteen minutes to the appellant. It's a strict fifteen minutes, so the clock should be put on, Mr. Clerk. In addition, before Mr. Guilford begins, what's before you is an appeal from Historic Preservation Board. It's not a new hearing, so there'll be no new evidence presented. All you'll hear today are arguments on both sides. The criteria that you're looking at is in 3-1103. You have a -- the whole record has been presented to you in your packets, and each side needs to argue to you from what's in the record. 3-1103 has a number of criteria for designation of historic landmarks or historic districts. The two that have been proffered by City staff before the Historic Preservation Board are based on architectural significance. It's that this particular property portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one or more distinctive architectural styles and embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or period or method of construction. You would just need to find that one of those exists for this to be designated as an historic property. Ultimately, your authority is to affirm -- you can affirm the Historic Preservation Board, you can affirm with conditions of approval, you can override. You do have the authority to override the decision of the Historic Preservation Board, thus finding this not historically significant. Or, if you think further proceedings are necessary, you can remand to the Historic Preservation Board for further

proceedings. Typically, you would provide instructions as to what you want them to look into. Once again, one other issue I'd like to raise is I've given a legal ruling, an opinion that the historic designation determination is separate from the one of whether there's an economic hardship or not. Our Code does allow a finding of economic hardship related to a historic property -- historically designated property. So, for example, if this property is determined to be historic, the applicant -- the appellant, in this case -- but the applicant can seek to a special certificate of appropriateness, pursuant to our Code, for demolition based on economic hardship, and that will go before the Historic Preservation Board and then would ultimately come before you. So, that issue is not before you today. But I want to be clear for the record that that issue can still be decided. Now, if you find that this is not historically significant, then that issue would not come before you because you would -- you -- essentially, that special certificate of appropriateness would not be required at that point. The property could be -- the residence on the property could be demolished, the home -- the single-family home could be demolished. If you do find it historically significant, then a special certificate of appropriateness for demolition could be sought. That would go to the Historic Preservation Board, and then back to you. So, I want to be clear for the record that that's still an available remedy, but that's not before the Commission today. With that, I would turn it back to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Cason: Is the City going to present first? You're going to go first? Go ahead.

F. W. Zeke Guilford: Alright, good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. For the record, my name is Zeke Guilford, with offices at 400 University Drive, representing Mr. Frederick Kent, the owner of the property located at 229 Ridgewood Road, on his appeal of the designation of this property. Mr. Mayor, when I first heard that the staff was designating this property because it was of Minimal Traditional style, I frankly, in 30 years of practice and representing developers, architects, and homeowners, I had never heard that term. It was like an oxymoron. How are you traditional and minimal all at the same time? But in short, what is Minimal Traditional architecture? It actually occurred during the period between the Great Depression and World War II. And what it did was it essentially took -- it eliminated all the details that we

find in our beautiful Mediterranean houses on North Greenway and South Greenway and basically stripped it of all of its ornamentation and basically left you with essentially a box. In 2000 and 2004, the City requested a company by the name of Janus to do a report on two specific areas of the City. And in that, they actually have a section called Minimal Traditional. That report says Minimal Traditional is a combination of influences such as Tudor or Colonial Revival. This house is neither one. And I know staff is going to go through and tell you what elements this does meet with Minimal Traditional, but I'm going to tell you which ones it doesn't. First and foremost, it says that it must have a continuous concrete slab. This house has wood joist, and I'll get back to that in a minute. It talks about low pitch, cross gabled or hipped roofs. A large portion of this house, the garage, is a flat roof. That is not part of the vernacular of this. It talks about vents -- decorative vents in the gables ends of the roof. This has no vents. It talks about -- shutters are an important item of this vernacular. There's only shutters on four of the thirteen windows. It talks about rafter tails, which are not part of this. It talks about brick planters, which are not part of this. It talks about arched entryways, which is not part of this. It talks about the roofs having minimal or no overhang. We have a standard overhang. And what's important through this is that it talks about it being one-story, and that's going to be very important in a minute. The sizes of these houses were very small because you have to remember you're coming out of the Depression, so people did not have a lot of money, so they were building little houses, and the staff report says two, three bedrooms. And they were on small -- for the most part, small lots. This is important because at the Historic Preservation Board, they asked staff and said, would you allow a two-story addition to this house? Well, this house is approximately 2,000 square feet, 1,800 square feet. You could build a 4,000 square foot addition. Now, I don't know how a 6,000 square foot house that's two stories, that then basically embodies the Minimal Traditional architectural style because they're small and one story. Those are two critical elements of this style. Now, also in your packet I have, which was given to the board, other photos of houses that were constructed during this period of time in the '30s. All those houses maintain the architectural detailing that staff said is contained in this, and I'm not going to go through it because of the time. But what's important about that is all of them are better -- have better architectural integrity than this house, and that's going to come up a little bit

later. So, if you have these other houses that are better architecturally, do we really need to keep this one? Staff did a long presentation of the architect -- and I know the architect is not really part of the reasoning that they determined this house to be historic. But what's important is, is that this architect did -- Mr. Robert Smith did a lot of houses during this period. He did a lot on Miami Beach. He did two particular to the City of Coral Gables. One was Java Head, which was the former house of Dr. and Sally Jude, which is a spectacular example of this period. And also, you have -- I believe it's called the Montgomery Museum, which is part of Fairchild Tropical Gardens, again, done by Mr. Smith, much better architectural integrity than this house. I was going to have Dr. Smith talk, but I'm going to paraphrase what he said in the record. Dr. Smith is obviously Robert Smith's son. He's actually here with me today if you have any questions of him. He said, listen, this is not my father's good work. He says, actually, really, it's kind of a poor quality of his work. And I would recommend that you allow this house to be demolished. And you can ask him yourself. He talks in the record about the ornamentation and going and seeing the steel being bent. This house has none of those details. So, I'm going to take a minute and say how did we get here. Well, first, Mr. Kent is no longer able to maintain this house. He doesn't have a wife or children to help him. Mr. Kent hired a realtor to list this house. They received over five contracts, I believe. You have those in your package as well. The first contract, if I'm correct, was for over a million dollars, but it was just for the lot. That person went to the City of Coral Gables, asked for a historical significant letter. The Department determined it to be historically significant, and therefore, the buyer walked away. There were several other contracts more than a million dollars for the lot only. Those contractors have either walked away or are waiting to determine the outcome of this proceeding. The only contract we received that maintains the house was for \$800,000, and that was subject to inspections. But let me go back. We also have in your package the broker's analysis, both his land value and -- with the house and those -- that analysis backs up these contracts that we have been receiving. Now, that report that you have in your package regarding the condition of the house, basically, 162 pages and provides that it needs, at a minimum, \$150,000 of repairs. That report provides that it needs all new electrical, plumbing, air conditioning. There's evidence of mold in the house. The floor joists are being held up -- if you looked at the pictures -- by concrete blocks. There are

sections of the floor you could fall through. The floor has buckled because of water damage and water leaks. The roof is leaking. That doesn't take into account that if you put an addition on here, are there columns in place. Does high beam have to be removed? Does the foundation have to be resupported? That is not contained in this report, but I can tell you, if you're more than 50 percent, you need to bring that section up to Code, roof ties, et cetera. Basically, you would have to take this down to the four walls and start over. You know, one board member said, this is demolition by neglect. I disagree with that board member. What we have here is a gentleman who's of advanced age who can no longer maintain it, nor does he have the financial capabilities of maintaining it. Now let's talk about Mr. Kent. As I say, Mr. Kent is elderly. He's 88 years old. This house has been in his family since 1947. All the equity he has is in this house. His goal was to move out of this house into an adult living facility and live out the remaining number of his years. What he doesn't want to do is worry about whether he's going to have enough money to support him during the remainder of his life. And what we're talking about the difference between with this house and without the house is a considerable amount. Now, Mr. Mayor, we're going to ask you and you Commissioners to overturn the decision of the Historic Preservation Board. But I think there's a bigger question here. And that question is, are you going to designate every property regardless of whether it's good architecture or bad? Are you going to designate every property whether it's in great condition or poor condition? Is a property that basically you can pick off the list of it has these elements, does it really make it historically significant? And does it represent Coral Gables' past and what you want to preserve? I'm here to tell you that this is not good architecture. It's falling down. It does not advance our goals of a Mediterranean city, and I'm going to paraphrase our City Manager who just spoke of the architectural property that just came before me when she said the Mediterranean design is the signature of our city. Is Minimal Traditional something that is important and something that we want to keep? This was a period of time that really people could not afford to do things. You know, it's funny. There's a book called Preserving Our Past: A Guide to Historic Preservation in Coral Gables, written by Ellen Ugucioni. Ellen Ugucioni was the first Historic Preservation Officer of our city. And what's funny is that every illustration in this book is of old Spanish and Mediterranean. There is not one other architectural design or -- that is in

this book. So, Mr. Mayor, I, again, ask you -- actually, if you go and you walk down these halls, you have pictures of Mediterranean. You go down on the first floor, there's pictures of Mediterranean. You go to the Planning Department, they have like murals of City Hall and the Biltmore, and they say that is what we want you to build like. We give bonuses to building Mediterranean. That's our past, not Minimal Traditional. So, what I'm asking you to do today is to please take a house that is not deserving of designation. This is not the best example. Even if you said Minimal Traditional in this period of time was important to the City, this wouldn't take every single house. We should take the best examples because what's coming up next is you have the ranch styles that are coming behind this. Is every ranch house historically significant because it's of ranch style? I would say no. Please, we're asking you to please let this house go today. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor and Commissioners.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Guilford: Again, Mr. Mayor, I have the realtor here, Ms. Anne Platt. I have, again, Dr. Smith, if you have any questions of them. But we're all available to answer any questions.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you. Dona.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So, Dona, I'll start you with a question.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Okay.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I think it was Ms. Guin in the -- at the board meeting that said that I believe there were 600 homes that this architect designed in South Florida, I believe, in the '30s and '40s, I think is what I read here. Should we designate everything?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We don't designate everything. I mean, the vast...

Vice Mayor Quesada: I saw you actually -- I'm sorry to cut you off. I saw you had also stated at the board meeting that you didn't believe that we had designated anything -- any other similar home of this architect previously.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well, because this is a smaller, more modest home than the ones that are designated. There may be others out there that we haven't designated. I mean, the Janus report that talked about Minimal Traditional style, that didn't review this area of the city. That wasn't part of it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Got it.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Having said that, we get at least five a week for demolition requests for significance determinations, and the vast majority of them we don't designate. We don't believe they're significant.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Well, I know that our departments are very reasonable.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I don't want the perception out there that we're...

Vice Mayor Quesada: No, no.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Unreasonable and everything that comes to us is going to be designated because that's just not true.

Mayor Cason: Are you saying that the vast...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We allow most of the houses and the properties to come down because they're not historically significant. We only save those that we believe are important to save for future generations. We don't save the majority of homes.

Commissioner Lago: Since we're on that, let's -- I like to deal in facts and numbers. Give me a rough percentage in reference to the individuals that apply for letters of historic designation versus the ones that are approved or actually designated for demolition or for historic designation. What would you say?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And I looked that up.

Commissioner Lago: I'm not going to hold you to it.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I'm trying to go back through my memory because I remember another case came before -- and I'm saying -- Cara just said one in twenty. I think it's less than that. I think it's a lot less than that. I think we've had over a thousand submittals and, gosh, I don't know how much.

Commissioner Lago: I'm not going to hold you to it. I just think it's important to put that information like we had at the last meeting...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I can get that information for you before the end of the meeting.

Commissioner Lago: Where we discussed variances and we discussed as-of-right projects. I think it's important to get that information on the record so that people are aware of exactly, you know, what the real numbers are.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Right.

Commissioner Lago: Because I can't remember the last time -- and I don't know if my colleagues can tell me -- when was the last time we had one of these come before the Commission?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well, I know. I mean, that's the thing. It's rare.

Commissioner Lago: I think this may be my first...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: A lot of that is...

Commissioner Lago: In three and a half years.

Mayor Cason: We had one with the...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah with the house...

Mayor Cason: In Cocoplum, or where was it, the...

Commissioner Lago: Oh, no, I'm sorry. The one that was -- the one on the waterway, I apologize.

Mayor Cason: It was set up for an art...

Commissioner Lago: This is the second one.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yeah, this is the second one.

Mayor Cason: How many of these with this style have been designated in the last five years?

City Attorney Leen: We had the Alfred Browning Parker house, too.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes, that's right.

Commissioner Lago: Yeah, that's the one.

City Attorney Leen: Is that the one you're talking about?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's what they're referring to (INAUDIBLE)...

City Attorney Leen: And then before that, we had a small house. This was like four years ago. Remember, it was very contested.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's 745 Minorca.

City Attorney Leen: Yes.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But actually, that was purchased by the contractor and they're now restoring it, so that was a win-win for everyone involved.

Vice Mayor Quesada: That's great. And I got to say -- I just want to give it a little more color. Also, at the board meeting, you did say that we had a Finch building that was demolished recently because you guys didn't feel that it met the...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Oh, the H. George Fink building.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We took that to the board. And although it was designed by an outstanding architect, it was one of his better works and they allowed it to come down, so we're reasonable. The staff is reasonable; the board is reasonable. I just made -- need to make...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Okay, so then that transitions to my next...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Okay.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Topic.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Go ahead. No, no, no. I appreciate it.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Sorry if I'm pulling you -- but I think you're going to hit these points anyway, so I guess I'm just pulling you in my path. The elements -- so, Mr. Guilford was talking about the elements that are missing from the Tudor style and different styles that he said previous -- I think it was page 9 of the board meeting. Also, Ms. Guin goes into it as well about how this house embodies all those different styles. Is there an issue with the fact that some of the elements are missing, as Mr. Guilford pointed out? Does that...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: No.

Vice Mayor Quesada: It doesn't matter?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: No. No, that's not part of the style. And specifically, he was talking about architectural integrity, and that is -- Elizabeth Guin did actually the staff report and so she can...

Vice Mayor Quesada: I'm sorry if I was slaughtering your last name. Is it Guin?

ElizaBeth Guin: Guin.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Guin, sorry about that.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And it's Elizabeth with a capital B.

Ms. Guin: Just to confuse everyone.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Just to confuse everyone.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Okay. Well, it's worked.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: But she can address that issue. It certainly is part of this style, and ElizaBeth, go ahead.

Ms. Guin: Yeah, the Minimal Traditional style was, as he spoke of, an affordable sort of small home, but these were meant to be well made and they were meant to be forward-looking home, sort of having the modern aesthetic, but bringing in elements from previous styles. So, what we see here in South Florida with Minimal Traditional is we see the influence of Art Deco. We see the influence of the Mediterranean Revival, and that's what you see in this home. What you see nationwide, Art Deco and Mediterranean Revival, those weren't styles that were popular in other parts of the country. So, you see the Colonial Revival and the Tudor in this style more prevalent

in other parts of the country. And so -- and that's part of what we're talking about, the overall characteristics of the style versus what we see here.

Commissioner Lago: I know you -- do you have a presentation you want to go through, right, a PowerPoint presentation?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I just have points. We have a PowerPoint that talks about the house. We certainly can do that.

Commissioner Lago: If you don't mind, I mean, I know -- unless the Vice Mayor...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yeah. (INAUDIBLE). I'm sorry about that.

Commissioner Lago: Has any more...

Mayor Cason: Go ahead and make your presentation.

Commissioner Lago: Again, I just want to -- I want to really understand a little bit more because I want to understand what is -- what are the points that drew the board to vote 7-0.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I appreciate that.

Commissioner Lago: My appointment was not there. I think he showed up to the meeting late from the meeting minutes and from my phone call with him. But I want to understand why there was a 7-0 vote in reference to designating this home. I kind of need to get more -- I'm not a professional when it comes to historic designation, so at the end of the day, I lean on you, your staff and the board members to really guide at least myself...

Mayor Cason: So, run through the presentation...

Commissioner Lago: You know, in this element.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Okay.

Mayor Cason: And then we can have more questions.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Before ElizaBeth does the presentation, I just want to make a couple of points that Mr. Guilford discussed. As far as the offers -- and again, the contracts really shouldn't enter in on this because this is whether or not it fits the criteria. The first offer -- just to go through them -- was \$925,000. I did the significance determination on May 2.

Commissioner Lago: But let me ask you a question.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's when it was issued.

Commissioner Lago: And I'm sorry to interrupt you.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: And I don't know if anybody else has this question. Why are we even discussing money?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well, because he was saying that there were five that were eliminated because of the significance determination. They were done prior to the significance determination. March 14 was the offer date of that. I issued my letter on May 2. So, I'm not sure why the seller didn't accept it. The next one was March 17. That was \$1,052,000. Again, prior to May 2.

Commissioner Lago: What is the lot size? What's the lot size, Dona?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Pardon me?

Commissioner Lago: The lot size. What is the lot size?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I'm not sure. 16,100. And the third one was April 2; again, prior to May 2. So, there was only one that was -- wanted the land only that when the significance determination was done, they backed out of the deal or they're waiting for it, but anyhow, that didn't go through. And the seller was asking \$850,000 and was offered \$800,000, so I just need to put that on the record because the majority of those was done before the significance determination and they backed out, some because they were getting a divorce and they withdrew the offer. So, it wasn't necessarily because of the significance determination. And he mentioned the estimated cost of repairs at \$150,000. If you look through that item that he has, they have impact windows. They've got kitchen countertops, a remodel of the kitchen, baseboards, HVAC. The structural foundation he was talking about, by his own determination, was \$12,750, so you just need to realize that. So, ElizaBeth, do you want to go over the architectural style? If they'll -- if you'll pull up the PowerPoint, I don't think it'll take too long and that'll give you a better idea of what we're talking about.

Commissioner Lago: Before we hit the PowerPoint, I wanted to get Commissioner Slesnick's advice or, you know, expertise in reference to residential real estate because I'm just shocked at \$1,052,000, but I know the lot is pretty significant. But for a home that probably needs a few hundred thousand dollars of work or renovations, that's a pretty hefty number.

Commissioner Slesnick: It is, but I'm getting a listing coming on next month that's on a little bit larger lot than that and we're asking \$1,400,000, and the house is historic, but it's a worthy historic home, but it needs a couple hundred thousand put into it.

Commissioner Lago: Well, thanks for the education. That's a lot of money.

Commissioner Slesnick: Real estate is going well in Coral Gables.

Commissioner Lago: I know. I just didn't think that, you know, we're talking about a pretty significant square foot number. Again, you got to take into account the 16,000 square foot lot.

Commissioner Slesnick: We aren't -- City Attorney, we aren't discussing economic hardship today. We're just going on historic...

Commissioner Keon: Just historic.

City Attorney Leen: Yes, just on the historic significance. Even the issue of its condition is something that is considered later when you seek -- because you can seek demolition for reasons other than economic hardship too. There's like several criteria that is looked at, so that issue will still -- could come before you in the future. I do believe you could consider the condition to an extent because there is some general language saying that you're -- when you're making the historical significance determination, you look at how this fits -- I can read you the sentence, but the -- you know, you're looking at -- you look to see if one of the eligibility criteria is present, and then you make a general determination that this is something that should be preserved as an historic landmark because it fits into -- I believe it says the cultural, historical fabric of the city. But I can read you the specific sentence. But I would focus most of the inquiry, in my view, on the significance of this property, even if it's not in the best state because it could still be historically significant. It just means that -- like when you get to the later determination of whether to allow the demolition, that's when you look at is this the only property like this in the neighborhood. Is this something that really needs to be preserved? Is this deteriorating? Is there a public safety concern? Is there economic hardship? All those things are then considered together in determining whether this is a property that has to be maintained or whether it will be allowed to be demolished.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And to that point, the Zoning Code is very specific on what they need to give to the Historic Preservation Board. There are certain things that they have to give for economic hardship and the Board has not reviewed that. So, I would just ask, if that's a concern of yours, have it go to the Historic Preservation Board. Have them rule on that, and then that can come to you on a separate issue.

City Attorney Leen: If I may, the general standard that you're applying is in order to qualify for designation as a local historic landmark or local historic landmark district, individual properties must have significant character interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological aesthetic or architectural heritage of the city, state or nation.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And again, the Historic Preservation Board has allowed buildings to be demolished because they've been in such bad disrepair that they were unsalvageable.

Commissioner Slesnick: Dona, this -- down the street from this house, isn't there another -- two newer constructed homes that -- where a lot was split, where an old house came down?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I believe so.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yeah.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes, absolutely.

Commissioner Slesnick: Closer to Le Jeune.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That actually came to us as a historic significance determination, and we determined that it was not...

Commissioner Slesnick: You did not determine that -- and then the lot was...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And that was allowed to be demolished...

Commissioner Slesnick: It was torn down and the lot was split.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And then they split the lot.

Commissioner Slesnick: Because it was a big lot.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's right. Thank you for pointing that out.

Commissioner Slesnick: You're welcome.

Mayor Cason: Make the presentation.

Ms. Guin: I'll go through a portion of the presentation that was given to the Historic Preservation Board. So, Minimal Traditional style, as we talked about, came about in the '30s and '40s. It was a New Deal era style. It was for more affordable homes, two- and three-bedrooms and was prevalent across the nation. The key factor was it combined the restrained features from earlier house styles while adhering to the modern aesthetics. So, the modern aesthetic was much more streamlined, much more horizontal. It was meant to be forward-looking. It was modern, but also, it was a home. And there was a big push after the New Deal to have small homes, to make those affordable for folks. And there was a lot of federal programs, and this style is what came out of that. So, to make it a home, what they were bringing in were elements from previous styles. And what we see is that that occurred in different ways in different parts of the country early on in the '30s. And so what we see with the Ridgewood home is very much a regional influence of the Minimal Traditional. The homes were meant to

be well-built. These were not sort of scaled down versions of a previous style. These were meant to be something different. They focused on practicality. They had attached garages. In the 1920s, it was detached. Here we see the garages become attached as a different housing form. In the Minimal Traditional, it's something that's pulled back. It's not upfront like the Ranch. And we see more modern conveniences. So, if we look quickly, what was happening in Coral Gables during this time period, you see here, 1925, we have a lot of building going on. We see the big drop after the hurricane, and then as the economy dropped, so does the building permit dollars. Then we see the uptick here later in the '30s, and that's where we're beginning to build something different. We're not going back to the Mediterranean Revival. We have this new style, and that's what we begin to see here in Coral Gables. Here's an aerial view. You can see where Ridgewood -- this is 1948. You'll see this is a pretty undeveloped area still with our structure built in 1938. And then by 1950s, this area is built out, and that's a different housing stock. That's when we begin to see the Ranch. So, that point -- one of the points that we're making here is that with this style, there were not a lot of building going on at this time period. What we have here is a really well-developed, nice example of this style and we don't have that many of them in Coral Gables. And one of our purviews as historic preservationists is preserving the story of Coral Gables. The Minimal Traditional style is flexible and embraced elements from previous styles. And what we see here in Ridgewood is the Mediterranean Revival. We see Art Deco, and we also see the Prairie style, which Robert Fitch Smith, a national architect, that one of his -- he was a great admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, and so we see pieces of that style also coming in. Here's a current shot of the home. You can see there's a lot of vegetation. The home is very low-slung, modern, horizontal. It has that more modern feel, very different than the vertical Art Deco and the Mediterranean Revival that came before. The only addition to the home was in 1953, with an additional garage done by the same architect. You can see the home, very quickly, it steps back, and that was important in this style, making the style more home-like, more human, instead of a long -- with no breaks. Here we have the 1926 permit. And because there's a lot of vegetation on the property, this sort of gives you a nice overview of the front of the house, very horizontal in nature, the banding of the windows. Here's some of the Art Deco influences. What you have going on here is actually scoring in the

stucco to help create -- emphasize the horizontality of the structure, which is very important to the style. You can see here we have the corner windows, Art Deco influenced, and the chimney, which we'll have better close-ups later, very prominent feature which was part of more of the modern aesthetic and more of the Prairie style. You see here the Mediterranean barrel tile roof that has the Mediterranean Revival, done in white, matching with the stucco, again emphasizing, you know, this home, this modern aesthetic of hugging the landscape. And then, done with the highlights in yellow, the broad, horizontal banding. You see the very wide eaves and the barge board in the beginning. As we move over here, we have an Art Deco hood, which you'll see a better picture of in a moment. And with the detailing in this home is really quite nice, as you bring all the blending of these styles into the modern aesthetic and that's what makes this home special. Here you see the Art Deco hood. I don't know if you can see the scoring here in the stucco. And here we are here -- and the scoring ends at the end of the hood, so as we move towards the chimney there's some very nice Art Deco features here. You can see the waves, the lines, the Art Deco influences. Walking around the house here, so you can see how the house has all these different influences coming together into this modern aesthetic. Here's your corner window for Art Deco, built in planters. These are features that we become used to in the Ranch style, but we haven't seen these before. This is something new. This is something modern, and this is the beginning of that, and that's part of the story that this house has to tell. This is the back of the house. So, the single-family home at 229 Ridgewood is a significant example of the Minimal Traditional style with overall massing and articulation of Prairie style architecture. It harmoniously incorporates features from both Art Deco, with the large eyebrow window and chimney detailing, and the Mediterranean Revival with its barrel tile roof. Smith's attention to the detailing of these influences with the restrained context of the modern aesthetic resulted in a distinctive interpretation of the Minimal Traditional style.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Do you have any other questions?

Vice Mayor Quesada: Go ahead.

Mayor Cason: So, you're saying that you have allowed the demolition of this style before?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I don't know specifically about this style before.

Ms. Guin: I'm not aware of...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I'm not sure. That's not what I'm saying. We have allowed the demolition of homes that have fallen into disrepair and that are too far gone to salvage. I would have to go back and see whether we allowed one of these to come down. I honestly don't remember doing that.

Mayor Cason: Would this house be eligible for the tax credits that we've given...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Mayor Cason: Frequently for...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes, absolutely. In fact...

Mayor Cason: Somebody buys it to rehab.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Whatever they do to this house would be restoration. It would be a very good candidate. And whatever -- I'll say this again and I keep saying this to people. When you buy a historic home, it's not set in stone that it stays that way. You can do a very large addition. You can max out the FAR on the site. You just have to do that in a certain way, so they can certainly add a very large addition, if someone purchases this house, to be able to max out the FAR.

Commissioner Slesnick: Dona. Go ahead. I'm next.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So, I'll just tell you. I don't like it. But I know that...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's not a criteria.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I know. I know it isn't. I know it isn't. And I know you guys have a tough job determining what is and what isn't. So, that's why I've read the board meeting record over and over. Sometimes I feel like, the board meeting record, you guys get more into detail of the historic significance of it, so that's why I've gone through it a bajillion times. And I'm just going to call you Ms. G, I apologize.

Ms. Guin: That's okay.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I don't want to mispronounce your last name again.

Ms. Guin: Guin.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: ElizaBeth.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Elizabeth with a capital B. So, you know, you state something here that is troublesome for me. You said it's an everyday sort of two-bedroom home. It's just sort of a mainstream house and we need examples of that too, as well as the exceptional ones. So, you know -- and Mr. Parsley at one -- there's a conversation of what's exceptional and what's not, and we had it earlier. I mean, H. Fink is a...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Right.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Perfect example. That's why I brought it up earlier, which is, you know, we love him as an architect in the City -- actually, the previous item was really preserving...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Right.

Vice Mayor Quesada: One of his more famous buildings and designs, which we love.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: He had a very long career. He went from designing Mediterranean style architecture into becoming a modernist.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So, my concern is, even if this building was -- even if this home was perfectly preserved and it was pressure washed -- I looked through the inspection report. I was reading through that as well. I just -- I guess in my mind -- it's not one of the criteria, but it's something that I think about that helps me understand the criteria. If I'm driving by and I'm a tourist and I look and I go, oh, that's an interesting historical home, it doesn't pop for me, and I know it's not part of the criteria, but...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: You should drive along Campina Court.

Vice Mayor Quesada: I'm sorry?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Campina Court is in the northern area of the City, and they're all post-war homes that we've designated as a district, so this has been done before. They're very modest homes, one-story. And they came to us -- the owners came to us a few years ago, quite a few years ago and asked whether or not they would qualify as a district. And because they were post-war modern homes, we did.

Vice Mayor Quesada: But if we start designating homes that we even admit are just mainstream homes and they're not the exceptional ones, then we run into that slippery slope of how many of those 600 in South Florida that are just mainstream homes and not exceptional that we should be

keeping. And then also, with the fact of the family saying it's not one of the exceptional homes, that's -- as you can tell, that's where I'm leaning. I'm leaning towards reversal of it.

City Attorney Leen: I just need to add something. You are allowed to consider aesthetics. That's one of the criteria. In this particular case, the two criteria that were proffered by staff were architectural, not aesthetic. But aesthetics is one of the things you can consider. It's one in the list.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Well, I'm using the term aesthetic interchangeably with architecture.

Commissioner Lago: But I don't know if you -- I agree with certain points you're making, Vice Mayor, but I think the home is beautiful, in my opinion. When you look at...

Vice Mayor Quesada: That's not one of the criteria.

Commissioner Lago: I know it's not. But when you look at...

Mayor Cason: Aesthetically beautiful.

Commissioner Lago: And I'll tell you why. When you look at my home, for example, it's a Ranch style home. It has a modern flair to it, but you know it's Ranch when you look at it. Again, the windows haven't been replaced. It has that kind of modern touch to it. But if you see a lot of the homes that are being built or being designed, I think they go overboard and we need to pull that back in regards to the modern look, especially in my neighborhood. There's two townhomes that are being built that have already gotten contacted by individuals and said they're way too modern. I'm not trying to go South Beach modern, but I think that this is the type of home that, in my opinion has -- I think, a lot of people look at this home and say I would like to see something like that. It has a lot of Art Deco touches to it. I think it's sleek. It's very clean.

In my opinion, if it's done right and it's fixed up, I think that the home would look spectacular, including the lot size.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And it's a unique place in the history of Coral Gables.

Commissioner Lago: It's very easy just -- it's very simple just to knock it down and build something else. But I think that it has potential, in my opinion.

Commissioner Slesnick: I just would like to say, Dona, you know how preservation's in my soul and all my family's involved in historic preservation...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes, I know.

Commissioner Slesnick: And I was on the Board for six years. And usually, I don't agree with Mr. Zeke Guilford on a regular basis.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Is this going to be an exception?

Commissioner Slesnick: But this is an exception. And I agree with about 100 percent of what he said. I think this is a cute bungalow. It's only a two-bedroom. And in Coral Gables these days and since the 1920s -- 30s, most houses have three bedrooms. So, it's very hard to sell a two-bedroom house, especially one that's in somewhat of a disrepair. I think it's a cute, little house, but to me, it's on a street too where you have allowed -- the City has allowed other houses on lots this size to be split. You could really maybe even have two of the newer two-story townhouse type house on there on that street, which is very attractive and have sold. So, you're - - even though we have these neighborhood up in North Gables, this house is in a neighborhood of much more expensive homes. It's in -- I mean, almost every house on that block is a million plus, as seen by the offers that are coming in on it. And I just -- I think it's functionally obsolete, even though it's cute, but it doesn't have that much of a merit. The architect built much more

prestigious looking homes, both large and small, in Coral Gables, and this is not one of his finest examples. So, I just -- you know, I'm usually out there...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I appreciate that.

Commissioner Slesnick: To save houses and I'm going against the grain and my daughter will shoot me, but...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Probably.

Commissioner Slesnick: I really think this needs to be torn down.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's why it's important for any potential buyer of these homes to understand that they can add to them and update them. We don't designate the interiors. They can gut the interior and turn it into whatever they want. It's just the exterior.

Commissioner Slesnick: But you're saying you can add to it, but then you're going to change the whole persona of that house being a bungalow, and especially on a 17,000 foot lot. They did that over on Sarto, where they took one of the 1940s houses and just surrounded it with a bigger Ranch style house. And you just have the one little front of the house. I mean, the front of the house could be the foyer for a much bigger home on this property. So, you're willing to allow that, but you don't want...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Well, it has to be done in a certain way. They'd have to go to the Board of Architects.

Mayor Cason: How many other examples do we have in the Gables of this style? I mean, a ball park.

Ms. Guin: Yeah, I don't know how many we have, but we don't have that many. And I think what's...

Mayor Cason: Five, fifty, a hundred, two hundred, five hundred?

Commissioner Slesnick: There weren't that many houses being built in that time.

Ms. Guin: There weren't that many.

Commissioner Keon: There weren't that many houses being built in the '30s.

Ms. Guin: And that's sort of why this house is, you know, sort of that turning point. It's our response with how did Coral Gables respond as it came out of the Depression and what were we building?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: And also, it hasn't been altered because most of the...

Ms. Guin: Yes.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Like if you get into the Ranch style homes, most of them have been altered. They've been Mediterranean-ized, and so this one is actually fairly unique because it's untouched.

Commissioner Keon: I think a lot of the Ranch style homes were modified because they're not a very attractive home. I mean, it's kind of a low-slung house that looks like the roof heights are too low. They were built en masse after World War II, after the soldiers had come to Florida and spent time at the beach and loved our weather and loved the palm trees and whatever else. They decided to stay and you needed a massive housing stock after World War II and there were GI

mortgages and there were a lot of things that drove the building in, you know, South Florida at that time.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yeah, I agree.

Commissioner Keon: You know, so I think we saw, you know, not particularly attractive homes that could be put up pretty quickly. They're not attractive homes. I mean, I think that's why we so support, you know, the alteration of a lot of those Ranch style homes, you know. You'd like to see maybe the roofs pitched a little more. You'd like to see, you know -- I mean, some of them -- I know the discussion over metal roofs never gains many -- you know, everybody reacts so strongly that we never really have a discussion about it, but a lot of them are more -- you know, could easily go that way and be far more attractive homes than they currently are. But you know, that's another...

Commissioner Slesnick: And those are the houses that are being torn down for vacant lots, and now new ones are being put up.

Commissioner Keon: Right, so I...

Mayor Cason: So, if this were torn down, there's still other examples? It's not like we lose the style in the Gables. There are others.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I honestly don't know the answer to that question. What we're doing now -- actually, the -- Richard Lopez, from the University of Miami, that George Hernandez mentioned, developed this app for an iPhone. They're doing a citywide survey for us from 19...

Ms. Guin: For houses built between '35 and '66.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: '35 and '66, and so that will capture -- because we don't know. We haven't done that survey.

Mayor Cason: But as far as you know, this is not the only example...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I don't believe it's the only example.

Mayor Cason: In the Gables of this style?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I don't believe it's the only...

Mayor Cason: So, even if this were to go down, there's still others that you can take even more careful look in the future...

Commissioner Keon: Right, but what is -- could you tell me what the setback -- what's the distance from the back of that house to the lot line?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: From the back to the lot line?

Commissioner Keon: From the back to the lot line.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Do we have the survey in here?

Commissioner Slesnick: There's a lot of space in the front and the back.

Commissioner Keon: In the back? No, in the back.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: There's a large space in the back. I don't know if we have the survey in here or not.

Commissioner Slesnick: It's a small house, even with the addition of the garage.

Commissioner Keon: Right. And you know, personally, I like the style of the house. I like that the garage is set back, you know...

Commissioner Slesnick: Me too.

Commissioner Keon: From the street. I think it looks like an old Florida home. It looks like the kind of home that existed...

Commissioner Slesnick: I think it's cute.

Commissioner Keon: You know, in the early part of -- you know, in the early years of the city or whatever, so I think it's attractive. But I don't think because I think it's attractive, you know, it needs to be designated. That's -- now we said that that's not -- it's not a district, so it's only in an individual house in the area that is being treated...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: That way. Yeah, I find it -- you know, I do truly appreciate your feeling on this house and the information you have provided us. But then I know that oftentimes, you know, there are things that could be -- that are historically or have other significance that us just driving down the street, we don't see. It takes some explanation. It takes someone to point it out to us. It takes someone to tell us that. I did -- I do think, you know, obviously this architect was a well-known, very well regarded, distinguished architect, and so it would give us a look at what he designed. But I think we've also see that this is not necessarily, you know, the best of his work or maybe the most emblematic of his work or whatever else, just like we see, you know, artists do, you know, lots of pieces. Some of it, if it were up to the artist, they would destroy, but

it has monetary, you know, value because it happened to be done by that artist. But tell you, it's not their best work either. So, I don't...

Mayor Cason: You want to make a motion?

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: That's why we didn't designate it based on the architect.

Vice Mayor Quesada: So...

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: It was based solely on the architecture.

Commissioner Keon: Well, but I don't -- I mean, and I think these styles...

Mayor Cason: Alright.

Commissioner Keon: This was early Florida -- it's hard for me to -- I -- you know, I wouldn't support this designation. I mean, I would tend to agree with...

Vice Mayor Quesada: You would or you would not?

Commissioner Keon: I wouldn't.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Oh, okay.

Commissioner Keon: No, I would, you know...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Commissioner, I got to be honest. I never know how you are going to...

Commissioner Lago: Well, I do know -- I know she was very adamant about not liking...

Commissioner Keon: I know, I see all those things...

Commissioner Lago: Ranch style homes, so I won't be inviting her to my house.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, I mean, I think the Ranch style homes...

Vice Mayor Quesada: She didn't want to go anyway, so it's okay.

Commissioner Lago: Pretty much secure on that one. I can tell you that.

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, but I think the Ranch style homes that people have redone...

Commissioner Lago: You got to come and see mine.

Commissioner Keon: Are very attract -- they're beautiful. I mean, I lived in a Ranch style home for years and years and years that I...

Commissioner Lago: But you got to be a little bit more clear.

Commissioner Keon: I've changed.

Commissioner Lago: You said you didn't like all Ranch styles. And now I feel I can't...

Commissioner Keon: Yeah, I don't like the basic style...

Commissioner Lago: Invite you over to the house.

Commissioner Keon: Of the Ranch we saw built in the 1950s, that post-World War II housing stock, you know, so...

Commissioner Lago: But it's funny because a lot of the people are looking for those style of homes...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Lago: Because they know that they can (INAUDIBLE)...

Commissioner Keon: I know as you go...

Mayor Cason: Listen, from my...

Commissioner Keon: To Schenley Park and you go across -- you see more of this minimal type homes.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I understand. I just -- I need to tell you that...

Commissioner Keon: They're smaller homes, smaller communities and whatever.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: We don't only save Mediterranean 1920s homes.

Commissioner Keon: No.

Mayor Cason: Right.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: I mean, those are not the only historically significant styles we have in the city.

City Commission Meeting

August 23, 2016

Agenda Item E-1 – Frederick J. Kent (through counsel F. W. Zeke Guilford, Esq.), the applicant, has filed an appeal to the Coral Gables City Commission from the decision of the Historic Preservation Board at its regular meeting held on Thursday, June 16, 2016, which granted local historic designation to the property located at 229 Ridgewood Road.

Commissioner Keon: I agree with you.

Commissioner Lago: And I agree with you.

Commissioner Keon: But I think there's some beautiful -- I mean, I think, like on North Greenway, there is a beautiful Art Deco type home.

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Quite a few.

Commissioner Keon: I mean, there's quite a few very -- I mean, that are beautiful examples of the particular style. You know, I don't -- it's nice.

Mayor Cason: Alright, look, we...

Commissioner Keon: I know that you support what we do...

Commissioner Slesnick: I move that we allow demolition.

Commissioner Keon: But I couldn't support it either. I can't...

Vice Mayor Quesada: So move to reverse the decision of the Board.

Commissioner Keon: Support this designation.

Commissioner Slesnick: Move to reverse...

Mayor Cason: First of all, this is a -- we have a public hearing. Do we have any cards? So we'll close the public hearing. Zeke, you want to say something else before we have a motion one way or another?

Vice Mayor Quesada: Well, there's a motion. I'm going to second it for discussion purposes, and then when he's completed we'll proceed.

Mr. Guilford: Mr. Mayor, I just want to clarify a couple of things and point out one other thing. They talked about the items that I talked about were up north. Those items that I referred to came out of the Janus 2000 and 2004 report done for the City of Coral Gables. There's also pictures in here showing the Tudor style garage with a gabled roof, a gabled roof for the element...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Mr. Guilford, I don't think you need to get into it.

Mr. Guilford: No, I understand, but I just want to clarify. Also, I'll be honest with you, I was confused about the contracts. Dona was absolutely correct. And I'll also tell you, in this report, there are 44 Minimal Traditional houses, I think, that kind of go to -- and again, this is only two small sections of the city. So, two of them have already been demolished, so there's already 42 other ones still in the city. And between 1933 and 1943, which is -- the house was built right in 1938, so I'm going five years before, five years after, which is this period, according to the Miami-Dade tax rolls, 778 permits were issued in the City of Coral Gables.

Mayor Cason: Okay. Well, I think from my perspective, that's important in my vote. So, you want to have a motion?

Commissioner Slesnick: We have a motion...

Vice Mayor Quesada: We had a motion and a second.

Commissioner Slesnick: And he seconded it.

City Attorney Leen: Just to clarify, the motion is to reverse which will...

Commissioner Slesnick: Reverse.

City Attorney Leen: Override the decision of the...

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

City Attorney Leen: Historic Preservation Board...

Vice Mayor Quesada: Correct.

City Attorney Leen: Finding this not historically significant.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Correct.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

Mayor Cason: So, Commissioner Slesnick made the motion and the Vice Mayor seconded.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Correct.

Mayor Cason: City Clerk.

Vice Mayor Quesada: Yes.

Commissioner Slesnick: Yes.

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Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: No.

Mayor Cason: Yes.

(Vote: 4-1)

Historic Preservation Officer Spain: Thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Mr. Guilford: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, thank you very much.

Mayor Cason: Thank you.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you.