



Growth Management Department

ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION REPORT

Cultural Resources Review Board

50 Vilano Road Cultural Resource Management Plan

To: Cultural Resources Review Board

From: Megan Wright, Staff Liaison, Cultural Resources Review Board

Date: March 26, 2025

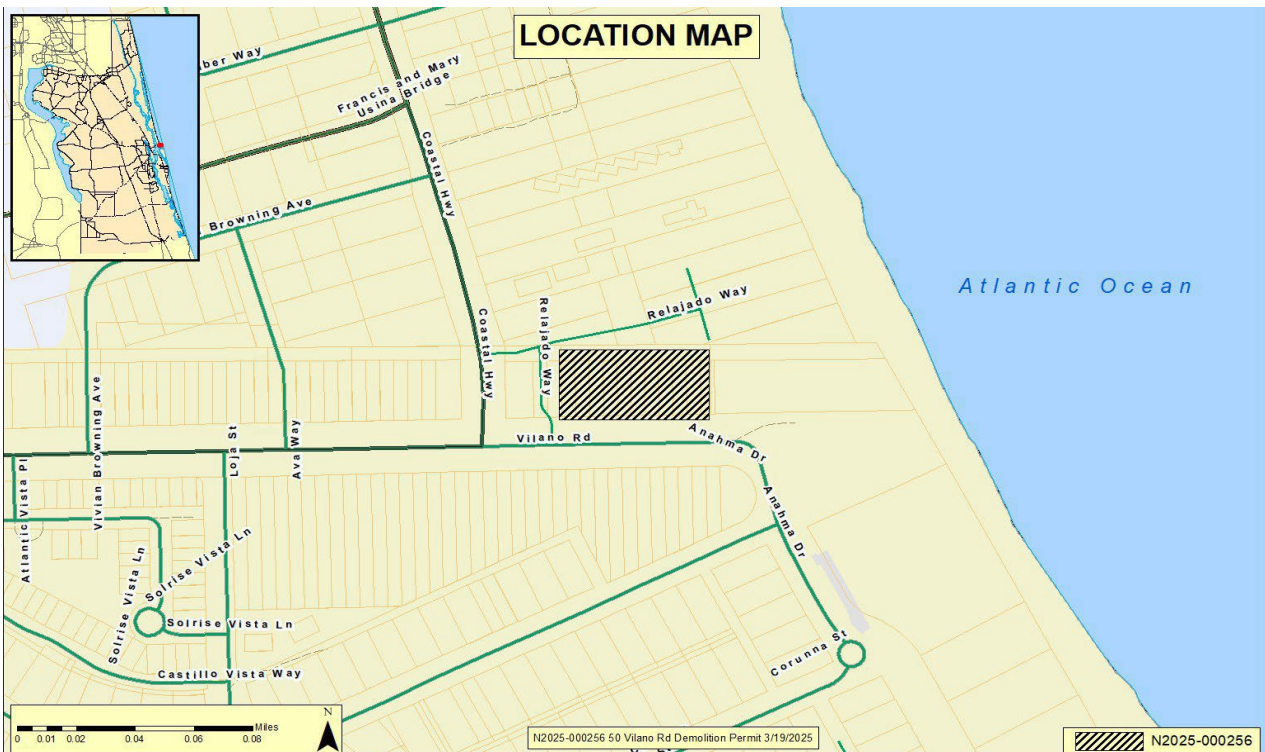
Subject: Demo Permit N25-256, 50 Vilano Rd., Magic Beach Motel for Consideration of by the Cultural Resources Review Board

Hearing Dates: Cultural Resources Review Board – April 14, 2025

Commissioner District: 5

MAP SERIES

Location: 50 Vilano Rd, St. Augustine, FL (Vilano Beach)



Aerial Imagery



Historic post card (1950s)



Current photo of exterior



Historic photo of the resource (1950s)



2-Story addition (east side)



SUMMARY

The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach. This structure is within the Vilano Beach Town Center, Vilano Road Main Street and the North Coastal Overlay. The resource is identified within the Florida Master Site File (#SJ03937). The T-Shaped 10-room original structure was built in 1951 in the Late Moderne style by Cesidio Tucella, who was an Italian immigrant. The classic period for the Streamline or Nautical Moderne was 1930 to 1945. Another local example of the style in the St. Augustine vicinity was Marine Village including the Dolphin Village and Penguin Bar in Marineland, Florida, along Highway A1A near the St. Johns/Flagler County line.

The Magic Beach Motel has had several alterations and additions since originally constructed. The resource was also designated as a Significant Cultural Resource by the Cultural Resources Review Board (CRRB) in 2021.

A demolition permit application was submitted by the current owner of the Motel to the St. Johns County Growth Management Department in January 2025 which has been reviewed by staff consistent with the requirements of the County's Land Development Code (LDC). In light of the significant cultural resource status of the Motel, staff requested an additional historic survey and mitigation alternatives to address the effect to the historic resource.

Historic Architectural Building Survey Report

The Historic Architectural Building Survey (HABS) report submitted by the applicant (Historic Property Associates, March 2025) includes further details about the architectural style of the resource. The survey states that in the post-World War II period the Streamline Moderne was largely out of fashion, as architects transitioned to the increasingly popular International Style. The Late Moderne Style borrowed the horizontality, curved canopies and curved corners from the Streamline Moderne Style and combined them with the more restrained, austere International Style. According to the National Register of Historic Places, Late Moderne is an accepted description for buildings dating from the post-classic period incorporating elements of the style. The Late Moderne was popular particularly in Florida during the Post-World War II period. When originally constructed in 1951, the Blue Ocean Motel was essentially a non-architect designed masonry vernacular motel with applied ornamentation associated with the Late Moderne Style. The exterior of the Blue Ocean Motel features a horizontal orientation, turned corners and cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in a frieze below the roof line.

By 1953, the motel had a detached restaurant with the same Moderne detailing as the original motel. A two-unit wing c. 1962, which uses the detailing on the original portion of the motel, is located on the west side of the lobby. All of the original doors and windows have been replaced and the original entrance has been remodeled. The port cochere was added to the main entrance c. 1962 based on a review of historic photographs and postcards. The style of the building was further complicated by a 1999 neon sign and a 2012 room addition housing motel rooms designed by architect Les Thomas, in an accurate interpretation of the classic Streamline Moderne style.

A 2001 historic resource survey recorded the Magic Beach Motel in the Florida Master Site File and evaluated potential districts in the county for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The resource located at 50 Vilano Road was considered individually ineligible for listing on the NRHP at that time. In 2009, an updated historic structure Florida Master Site

File form was recorded as part of a survey by Brockington and Associates, Inc. The 2009 survey also listed the Magic Beach Motel as individually ineligible for listing on the NRHP. In 2021, as part of a review for a redevelopment application for the property where the resource is located, the Cultural Resource Review Board (CRRB) provided documentation designating the Magic Beach Motel as a Significant Cultural Resource per section 3.01.04.C of the land development code (LDC). Finally, in 2022, a historic structure survey of A1A by GAI Associates considered the Magic Beach Motel as potentially eligible as a contributing resource to a potential historic district.

Significance

50 Vilano Road, originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel and now known as the Magic Beach Motel, is a masonry lodging facility constructed in 1951. On December 6, 2021 it was designated a “Significant Cultural Resource” by the St. Johns County Resource Review Board (CRRB).

The Cultural Resource Review Board under the criteria set forth in the St. Johns County Land Development Code (LDC) Section 3.01.04C designated the building based on the following:

1. The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is 50 years old or older having been constructed in 1951, LDC Section, 3.01.04.C.2.
2. The Magic Beach Motel encompasses four of the seven qualities of Integrity with Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:
3. The Magic Beach Motel meets four of the nine additional criteria listed in LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2.

County Procedure

County staff began the discussion with the site representative of the Magic Beach Motel in late 2024. Several discussions took place with the owner’s representative and included the potential for preserving the structure and the several programs that incentivize the preservation of the resource including National Register nomination, available state and federal grant programs, seeking St. Johns County Landmark status and the County ad-valorem tax exemption program.

Demolition application

County staff received a demolition permit application for the resource on January 15th, 2025. County staff reviewed the application and historic associations with the Significant Cultural Resource and requested a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and a Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP) to be submitted by the applicant for review pursuant to Section 3.01.04.F.1, LDC.

Proposed demolition of the structure is considered an adverse effect, consistent with Section 3.01.04.E. The requirement for a HABS survey is to document the architecture and historic associations with the resource and the CRMP plan provides mitigation alternatives to an adverse effect to a significant cultural resource.

Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP)

Criteria to be considered when establishing the mitigation alternatives in the CRMP are listed in Section 3.01.04.F.2:

- a. The historic or architectural significance of the building

- b. The importance of the building to the ambience of a district
- c. The likelihood of the site to yield information important in history
- d. The difficulty or impossibility of reproducing such a building because of its design, texture, material, detail, or unique location
- e. Whether the resource is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in the neighborhood, the County, or the region
- f. Whether there are definite plans for the reuse of the property and the effect of those plans on the character of the surrounding properties
- g. Whether reasonable measures can be taken to save the building or other destruction
- h. If relocation of a structure or object is proposed, consideration shall be given as to whether the proposed relocation area is compatible with the historical and architectural character of the structure, and whether the structure can be moved without significant damage to its physical integrity
- i. If a Significant Cultural Resource is to be destroyed, the County shall have the option to salvage significant features and data to ensure their preservation.

The CRMP, provided by Paul Weaver of Historic Property Associates, Inc. in association with Matthews Design Group and Fisher/Koppenhafer, Architects (March, 2025) via the applicant, was reviewed by staff and provides two mitigation alternatives (efforts) to mitigate the adverse effect to a significant cultural resource.

CRMP Statement on contribution to potential historic district:

“The building is separated from the main concentration of older buildings at the west end of Vilano Road and is surrounded by seven non-historic buildings. In fact, the historic character of Vilano Road has been substantially diminished since first recorded in the Florida Master Site File in 2001 with the demolition of several buildings, the Lazy Sands Bar and Newt’s Vilano Motel being examples, and new construction which is of a different scale and mass than the small-scale commercial buildings traditionally located there. No formal written opinion as to the eligibility of the Magic Beach Motel for individual National Register listing or as a contributing property to a National Register District has ever been sought.”

Justification for demolition provided by CRMP:

“The factors driving demolition and not preservation or rehabilitation of the structure includes rising insurance and financing costs, increasing preferences for larger units with more amenities based on industry-wide standards and functionally obsolete designs and mechanical systems. Additionally, the plan states that the site of the existing buildings is generally low in elevation (Staff: roadway estimated at ~7-8 feet above sea level and structures ~10-feet above sea level) and prone to flooding in extreme conditions such as hurricanes. The natural rising sea level from the Atlantic Ocean means that the buildings, which were built slab-on-grade will likely experience more frequent flooding. The eastern half of the historic building is seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL). This area falls in [FEMA] Flood Zone X and X-shaded which is susceptible to storm flooding. Current building codes require the State of Florida establish finish floor elevation (FFE) and deep file foundations. In addition, FEMA regularly revises maps to designate more flood prone areas, while further raising the expected flood elevations and minimum freeboard requirements above FEMA flood elevations.”

Mitigation Effort 1:

Relocation or raising the existing building. This mitigation alternative is not considered by the applicant to be feasible due to the size of the resource and its slab-on-grade construction.

Mitigation Effort 2:

Demolition of the structures onsite with salvage, providing that the owners are committed to the following salvaging and repurposing of elements from the Magic Beach Motel as follows:

1. Flamingo Plasterwork pieces will be incorporated into the façade of the replacement building.
2. A Tribute Area will be established in the new building with Historic Photography and Memorabilia.
3. The Magic Beach neon sign will be relocated to a landscaped area on property.
4. The owner will further determine whether and how to incorporate significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings, such as the interior room murals by Artist Gerome Barret, or to allow bona fide nonprofits or agencies with subject matter interest or expertise to salvage historically significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings prior to demolition. The owners will contact St. Johns County staff to notify and provide a specific plan for preservation, recordation, and incorporation of significant elements consistent with the approved CRMP. Murals by Gerome Barret are of unknown date and of undetermined historic, artistic or cultural significance. They are painted on plaster walls so their preservation may be problematic. Owners will make good faith effort to work with any interested party to salvage the murals.

CRMP Conclusion:

The history of the Magic Beach Motel has been comprehensively documented through an Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The HABS includes a history and physical description, photographs of the building and site features and digitized copies of the 2012 architectural drawings which thoroughly document the complex before and after the 2012 renovations and recent photographs

The owners are ready to receive a recommendation of approval by the CRRB and subsequent approval of the demolition permit by staff, while following Mitigation Effort 2 in the CRMP.

CORRESPONDENCE/PHONE CALLS

Mr. Rick Johnston has been the representative for the applicant and point of contact. Before and after the demolition application for the structure in January 2025, Mr. Johnston has communicated via phone calls, email and site meetings with County staff. There have also been multiple citizens who have requested documents via email and by phone regarding the status of the demolition permit application and associated cultural resource review process undertaken by staff.

STAFF ACTION

Upon the recommendation of the Cultural Resources Review Board, County staff will proceed with either approval, approval with changes or denial of the CRMP and the demolition permit application and will notify and/or coordinate with the applicant on recommended mitigation alternatives.

BOARD ACTION

RECOMMEND APPROVAL: Motion to recommend approval of the proposed mitigation alternatives included in the submitted Cultural Resource Management Plan for the demolition permit application for commercial structures located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach, finding the plan sufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and recommending staff to proceed with approval of the Cultural Resource Management Plan and demolition permit with the added conditions within the Plan.

RECOMMEND APPROVAL WITH CHANGES: Motion to recommend approval of mitigation changes proposed by CRRB and agreed to by the applicant to the proposed mitigation efforts included in the Cultural Resource Management Plan for the demolition permit application for commercial structures located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach, finding the modified plan sufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and recommending staff to proceed with approval of the Cultural Resource Management Plan and demolition permit with the added conditions within the Plan as modified.

RECOMMEND DENIAL: Motion to recommend denial of the Cultural Resource Management Plan, finding the plan to be insufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and providing an explanation for the recommendation and further guidance to the applicant.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Staff Report inclusive of HABS and CRMP

Attachment 2 - Demolition Application N25-256; 50 Vilano Rd., St. Augustine, FL (Vilano)

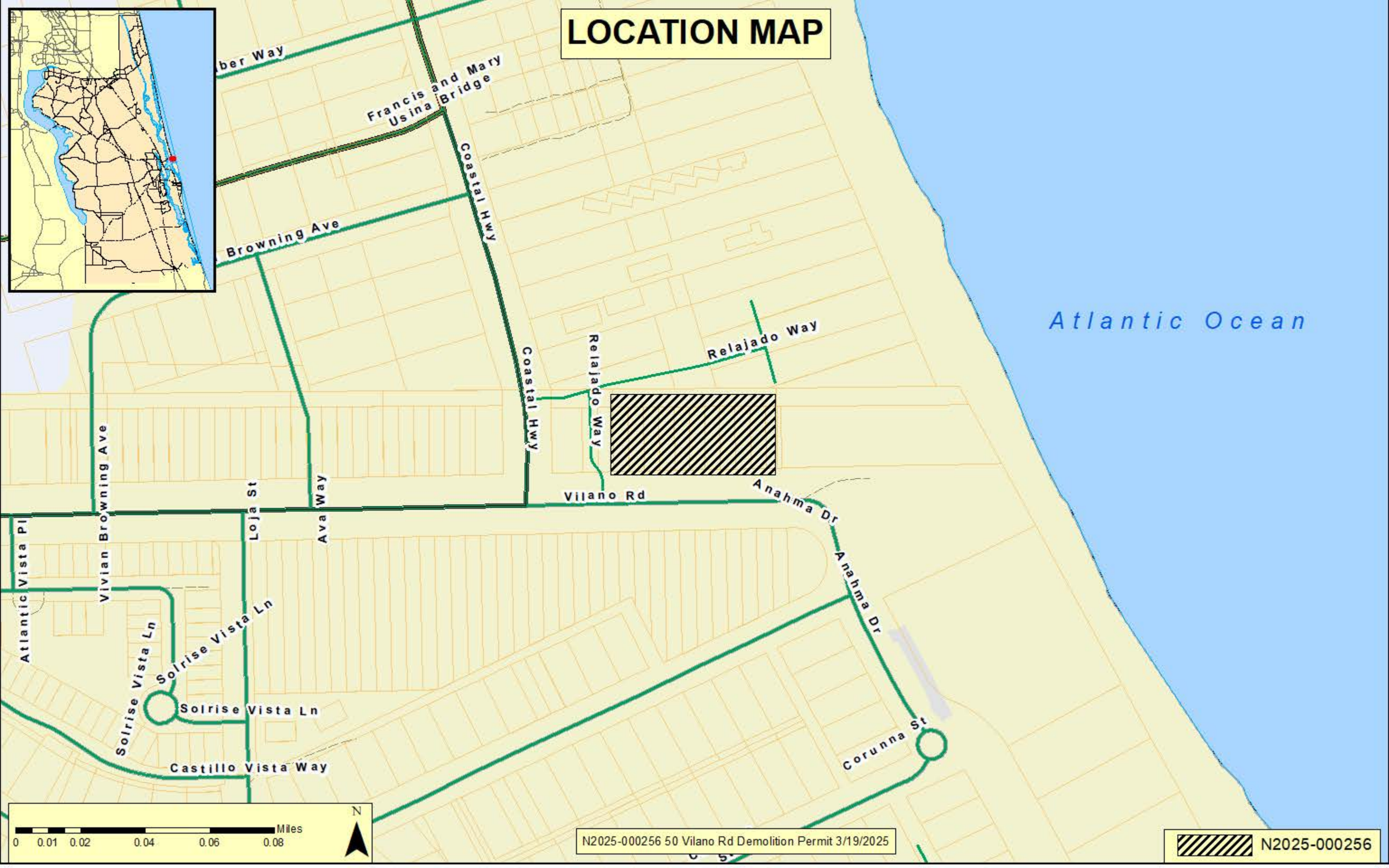
Attachment 3 - Exterior and Interior Photos

Attachment 4 - Public Correspondence

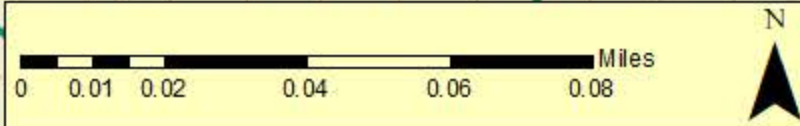
Attachment 5 - Significant Cultural Resource Resolution (2021)

Attachment 6 - Florida Master Site File sheets and documents


LOCATION MAP



Atlantic Ocean



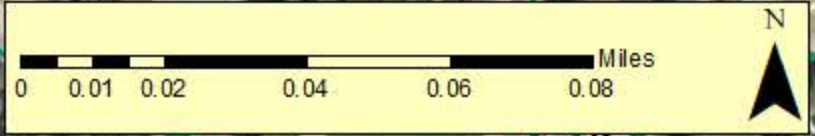
N2025-000256 50 Vilano Rd Demolition Permit 3/19/2025

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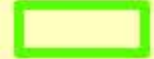
AERIAL MAP



Atlantic Ocean



N2025-000256 50 Vilano Rd Demolition Permit 3/19/2025

 N2025-000256

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BLUE OCEAN MOTEL/MAGIC BEACH MOTEL
50 VILANO ROAD
VILANO BEACH, FLORIDA



Historic Property Associates, Inc. in Association with Mathews Design Group

Fisher/Koppenhafer, Architects

March 13, 2025

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY SHORT FORM

Location: 50 Vilano Road, formerly SR A1A, Vilano Beach, FL

Owner: Vilano Beach Lodging, LLC, et al, Pbkjax2LLC, Abjax, LLC

Present Use: Motel

Significance:

50 Vilano Road, originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel and now known as the Magic Beach Motel, is a masonry lodging facility constructed in 1951 along Florida State Road A1A. On December 6, 2021 it was designated a “Significant Cultural Resource” by the County Resource Review Board (CRRB). It has been recorded in the Florida Maste Site File as #SJ03937.

The Cultural Resource Review Board under the criteria set forth in the St. Johns County Land Development Code (LDC) Section 3.01.04C designated the building based on the following:

1. The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is 50 years old or older having been constructed in 1951, LDC Section, 3.01.04.C.2.
2. The Magic Beach Motel encompasses four of the seven qualities of Integrity with Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:
3. The Magic Beach Motel meets four of the nine additional criteria listed in LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:

Criterion:

c. Exemplifies a historic, cultural, political, economic, or social trend of St Johns County, the State of Florida, or the nation.

The Magic Beach Motel, formerly the Blue Ocean Motel, was economically significant to St. Johns County because the building has been used for commercial purposes since it was constructed in 1951. It is associated with historic State Road A1A, now designated AIA Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway, a National Scenic Byway (FIGURE 1). A1A is recognized as a center of beach culture in Florida and the United States. It was known for its lush semi-tropical scenery and ocean vistas. In 2024 AIA from Key West to the Georgia state line was designated the Jimmy Buffet Memorial Highway. Small family-owned motels such as the Blue Ocean Motel, located in a beach environment, adjacent the Atlantic Ocean, were a part of this beach culture. The Blue Ocean Motel provide lodging for fishermen, beachgoers and surfers visiting Vilano Beach in the 1950s and 1960s, before falling into decline. In 1999 episodes of the short-lived Warner Brothers television series Safe Harbor were filmed at the property, and the motel subsequently became known as the Magic Beach Motel. In 2021-2022 Magic Beach Motel was filmed as part of the Science Fiction Series “3 Body Problem,” Season 1, Episode 8. It has been a component of the Vilano Beach tourist economy since it was originally constructed.

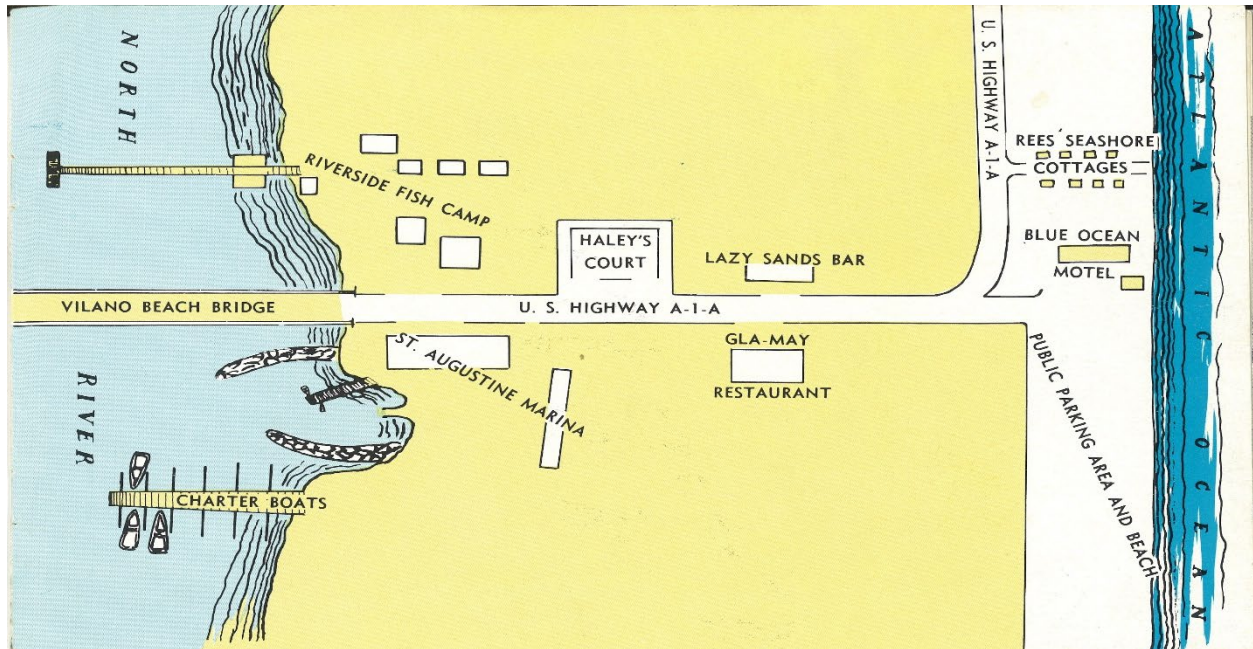


FIGURE 1: VILANO BEACH, C. 1957 SHOWING ORIGINAL CONFIGURATION OF A1A

d. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, period or method of Construction.

The Magic Beach Motel is best described as an example of the Late Moderne style (Figure 2). The classic period for the Streamline or Nautical Moderne was 1930 to 1945.¹ Probably the best local example of the style in the St. Augustine vicinity was Marine Village including the Dolphin Village and Penguin Bar Marineland (Figure 3). This complex of buildings was designed by St. Augustine architect Francis A. Hollingsworth, AIA and located on A1A south of the city near Summer Haven. In the post-World War II period the Streamline Moderne was largely out of fashion, as architects transitioned to the increasingly popular International Style. The Late Moderne Style borrowed the horizontality, curved canopies and curved corners from the Streamline Moderne Style and combined them with the more restrained, austere International Style. According to the National Register of Historic Places, Late Moderne is an accepted description for buildings dating from the post-classic period incorporating elements of the style. The Late Moderne was popular particularly in Florida and Southern California during the Post-World War II period.² When originally constructed in 1951, the Blue Ocean Motel was essentially a non-architect designed masonry vernacular motel with applied ornamentation associated with the Late Moderne Style. The exterior of the Blue Ocean Motel features a horizontal orientation, turned corners and cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in a frieze below the roof line. The style of the building was further complicated by a 1999 neon sign and a highly accurate 2012 room addition designed by architect Les Thomas, AIA in a modern, more accurate interpretation of the classic Streamline Moderne.

¹ John J.G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture, (American Association for State and Local History: National Register nomination," 1996

² NRHP registration form, Bullock's Pasadena, Pasadena, California, listed 1996, NRIS/#96000776



FIGURE 2: ORIGINAL 10-UNIT BLUE OCEAN MOTEL, 1951

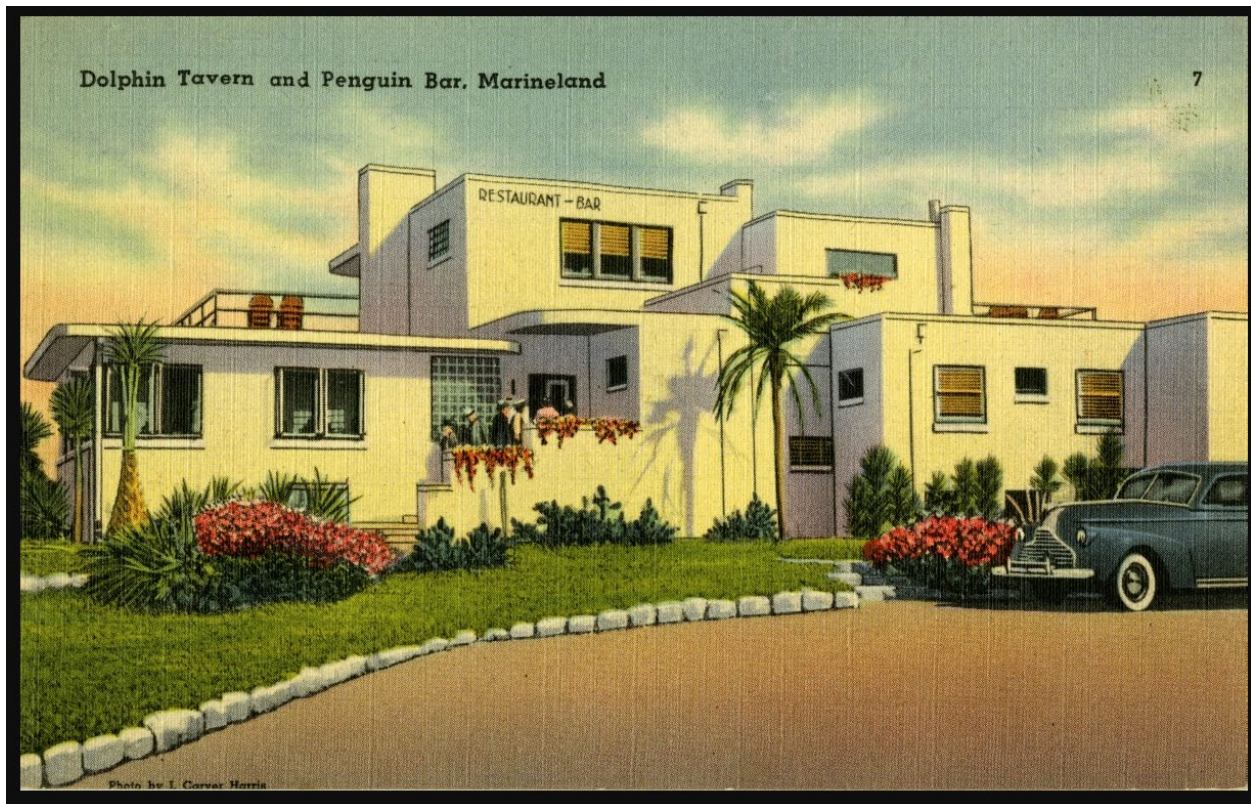


FIGURE 3: DOLPHIN TAVERN AND PENGUIN BAR, MARINELAND, LATE 1940S

g. Has value as a Building that is recognized for the quality of its architecture and that retains sufficient features showing its architectural significance.

The Magic Beach Motel does retain features associated with the Late Moderne style. These include cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in the frieze below the roof line. It has, however, undergone significant alterations since originally constructed. By 1953 the motel had a detached restaurant with the same Moderne detailing as the original motel. The restaurant has been heavily remodeled most recently by a 2012 two story building housing motel rooms (Figure 5). The historic signage has been removed and replaced by a c. 1999 neon sign (Figure 6). All of the original doors and windows have been replaced and the original entrance has been remodeled.



FIGURE 4: MODERNE DETAILING, EAST WING



FIGURE 5: 2012 STREAMLINE MODERNE ADDITION BY LES THOMAS, AIA



FIGURE 6: 1999 MAGIC BEACH MOTEL SIGN

- i. Is a geographically definable area or neighborhood united by culture, architectural styles or physical development, which has historic or cultural significance in the community.

The Magic Beach Motel is in Vilano Beach, a non-incorporated mixed-use area of St. Johns County east of the City of St. Augustine (Figure 7). The area consists of small-scale commercial buildings, including motels, restaurants and businesses catering historically to summer beach tourism. These businesses were concentrated on Vilano Road along the course of Florida Highway A.I.A. In adjacent areas beyond this commercial core were small residences and beach cottages. The Cultural Resource Review Board found the area sufficient to meet Criterion I in 2021. A 2001 Architectural Survey of St. Johns County by Environmental Services recorded the Magic Beach Motel in the Florida Master Site File and provided an evaluation of potential districts in the county for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. 50 Vilano Road was not considered part of a potential National Register District. In 2009 an updated form was recorded as part of a Cultural Resources Survey of St. Johns County by Brockington and Associates, Inc. The 2009 form and survey agreed that Magic Beach Motel was not eligible as part of a National Register District. Nonetheless, in 2022, a historic resources survey of State Route A1A by GAI Associates considered the Magic Beach Motel as a potential contributing resource to a historic district (Figures 8 & 9). However, the building remains some distance from the main concentration of older buildings at the west end of Vilano Road and is surrounded by seven non-historic buildings. The historic character of Vilano Road has been substantially diminished since the Magic Beach Motel was first recorded in the Florida Master Site File in 2001. Several buildings, including the Lazy Sands Bar and Newt's Vilano Motel, have been demolished, and new construction, such as the Hyatt Place Hotel, which is of a different scale and mass than the small-scale commercial buildings traditionally located there, have been undertaken. At present there has never been a formal written opinion from the Florida Division of Historical Resources as to the eligibility of the Magic Beach Motel for individual National Register listing or as a contributing property to a National Register District.

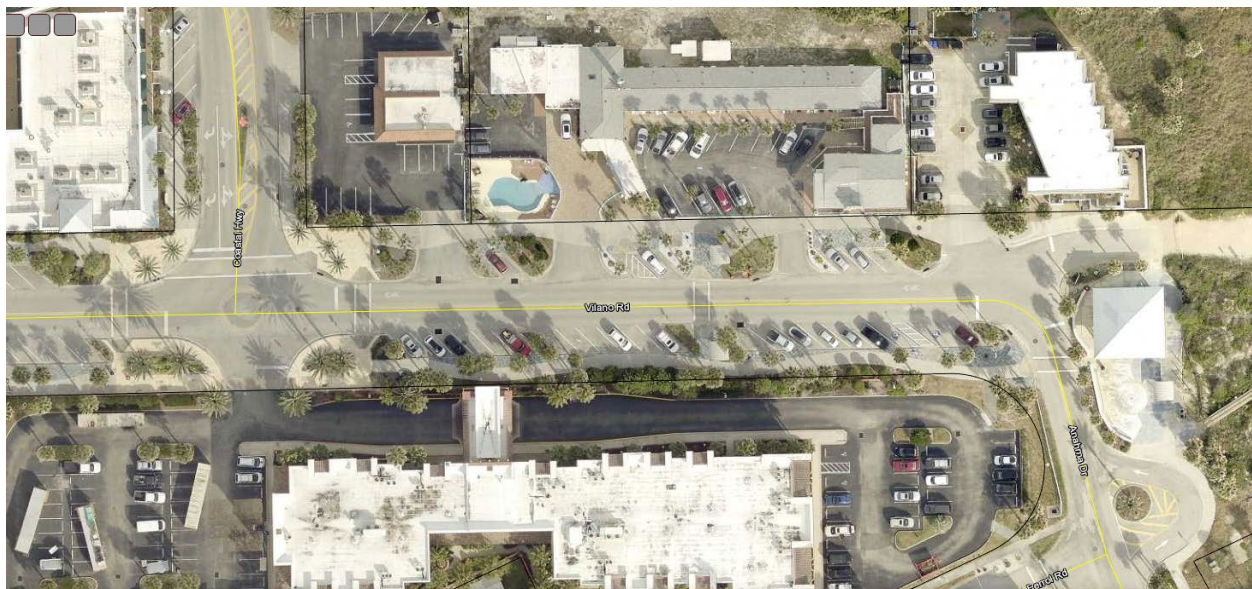


FIGURE 7: CURRENT SETTING OF MAGIC BEACH INCLUDING PUBLIX PLAZA, HAMPTON INN AND OTHER MODERN BUILDINGS



FIGURE 8: STUDY AREA/POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT, VILANO BEACH, 2022



FIGURE 9: STUDY AREA/POTENTIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT, VILANO BEACH, 2022

Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1951
2. Architect, builders: Tuccella, Cesidio (builder)
3. Original and subsequent owners:

50 Vilano Road was originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel. Cesidio C. Tuccella and his wife Minnie Smith Tuccella purchased the property in 1950 and completed construction of the motel in May, 1951. Mrs. Tuccella died in St. Augustine in 1964, and her husband retained the property until 1969 when he sold it to Art and Thelma McGinnis. In 2011 Remy and Earl Jensen purchased the property and retain ownership today.

4. Description:

Site

Originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel, Magic Beach is also recorded in the Florida Master Site File as 50 Vilano Road, Site Number SJ03937. It is located in a .8-acre parcel in Vilano Beach, Florida. The parcel is bordered on the south by Vilano Road and is one lot removed from the former Florida Highway AIA. Several blocks to the west on Vilano Road are one story commercial buildings associated with the early development of Vilano Beach. Immediately surrounding the Magic Beach Motel are multi-story hotel and commercial buildings. The building has been used as a commercial motel since May, 1951.

The main entrance to the property is from Vilano Road. Asphalt parking is located on the south side of the property. An asphalt paved parking lot covers most of the open space surrounding the building complex. A driveway consisted of concrete pavers leads to a vehicular canopy. Landscaping is utilitarian and austere and there are no historic features and no site features of noteworthy design. An irregular shaped, modern pool built in 1989 has been added on the west side of the property since the motel was originally constructed. It is sited on the southwest corner of the property and is surrounded by a vinyl fence.

Exterior

Blue Ocean Motel was constructed in 1951 as a ten-unit motel. It has a T-shaped ground plan and rests on a concrete slab on grade foundation. It features masonry structural walls and a low-pitched hip roof finished with asphalt shingles. A flat-roofed vehicular port cochere with tapered piers extends from the main entrance southeast. It features a 1999 neon sign with top hat and rabbits reading "Magic Beach Motel." The original entrance is on the south elevation into a lobby. It is flanked by block glass sidelights. The original portion of the exterior extends east from the lobby. The exterior features cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in the frieze below the roof line. Window and door openings in the original units are rounded characteristic of the Moderne style of the building. The original windows were wood, three light awning types. These windows have been replaced with 1/1 light SHS vinyl types c. 2012. The original doors have also been replaced, and the entrance has been remodeled.

There were several historic additions to the original building. A two-unit wing c. 1962, which repeats the detailing on the original portion of the motel, is located on the west side of the lobby. Window and door openings in the wing are squared rather than rounded distinguishing them from the original portion of the building. The port cochere was added to the main entrance c. 1962 based on a review of historic photographs and postcards.

Interior

The Magic Beach Motel was originally designed as a ten-unit hotel with an office. The interior featured terrazzo floors and tiled bathrooms with a different color scheme for each room. At an unknown date wall murals by Artist Gerome Barret were added to individual rooms. The original floor layouts, the bathroom tile schemes, and the murals are intact.



FIGURE 10: GEROME BARRET MURALS

Alterations

The Blue Ocean Motel, now known as the Magic Beach Motel, has undergone significant alterations since it was originally constructed. By 1953 the motel had a detached restaurant with the same Moderne detailing as the original motel. The restaurant has been heavily remodeled most recently by a 2012 two story building housing motel rooms. The historic signage has been removed and replaced by a c. 1999 neon sign. All of the original doors and windows have been replaced, and the original entrance has been remodeled.

Integrity

The Magic Beach Motel retains its integrity of location, remaining on its original site since it was constructed in 1951. However, the setting of the Vilano Beach has changed significantly in recent years. The building is isolated from the older buildings in Vilano Beach near the former bridge and is currently surrounded by more modern non-historic buildings, including the Publix Plaza and the Hampton Inn & Suites (Figure 7). The historic character of Vilano Road has been substantially diminished in the past several decades. Several older buildings, including the Lazy Sands Bar and Newt's Vilano Motel, have been demolished and more modern buildings, which are of a different scale and mass than the small-scale commercial buildings traditionally located there, have been constructed. Based on a finding of the St. Johns County Cultural Resource Review

Board, the Magic Beach Motel retains the integrity of its design, materials and workmanship. The Magic Beach Motel is an example of the Late Moderne style. The exterior features cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in the frieze below the roof line. The Board also found that the integrity of feeling was retained, although the character of Vilano Beach continues to change with additional new construction occurring since their review in 2021. The CRRB did not find that the integrity of association was intact.

History

Historic Context

Vilano Beach is located two miles east of St. Augustine just over the Usina Bridge, on a barrier island between the Atlantic Ocean and the Tolomato or North River. The locale was largely a fishing village with scattered settlement until construction of a railroad bridge from St. Augustine in the 1890s. The main pre-World War II development was the construction of the Grand Vilano Casino by developer August Heckscher in 1926. The following year Heckscher platted Vilano Beach Subdivision, and the first highway bridge was completed that year. The Casino was short lived. Damaged by a storm, it was demolished in 1938.

In the early 1950s small motels sprung up along Vilano Road, then Florida A1A. Construction of a new bridge in 1948 facilitated this development. The Blue Ocean Hotel, constructed in 1951, was among the first of these. An early motelier was Newt Haley. Like so many new residents, Haley was a serviceman initially stationed nearby during World War II. After the war, Haley returned and built Newt's Vilano Beach Motel and Haley's Court Motel across the street. In addition to the Blue Ocean, Newt's Vilano Beach Motel, and Haley's Court Motel, other buildings constructed along Vilano Road in the Late Moderne Style of the period include the GlaMay Restaurant, later known as Barrancotto's Roma Restaurant.

The character of Vilano Beach dramatically changed in the 1990s with the construction of the Francis and Mary Usina Bridge, part of the A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway. Named for a family whose roots date back more than 100 years in the history of Vilano Beach, the bridge is a fixed-span and always open to vehicle traffic. When the bridge was completed, A1A was re-routed north by passing the businesses on Vilano Road. Since that time efforts have been undertaken to revitalize Vilano Beach including implementation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program. According to a letter from Melissa Wylie, Executive Director of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, the Magic Beach Motel is an important component of the Vilano Beach Main Street program and the original designation of Vilano Beach as a National Main Street Community.³ The Florida Trust supported designation of the Magic Beach Motel as a "significant cultural resource" in December 2021.

Blue Ocean Motel/50 Vilano Road, Historical Narrative

³ See December 6, 2021 agenda package, St. Johns County Cultural Resource Review Board meeting.

50 Vilano Road was originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel. It was opened in May, 1951 and was owned by Cesidio C. Tuccella and his wife Minnie Smith Tuccella, having been purchased in 1950. According to an article in the St. Augustine Record on May 6, 1951, Cesidio Tuccella, the original owner, was the builder. Cesidio Tuccella was an Italian immigrant from Castel del Monte, Abruzzo, Italy. In his petition for naturalization, Tuccella was listed as a contractor.

Cesidio Tuccella did much of the construction of the motel himself or under his supervision. There are no other documented buildings which Tuccella constructed. Minnie Tuccella supervised the interior décor which had a Monterey Grey color scheme with red leather upholstery. All units had desks, sectional sofas, innerspring mattresses and tile bathrooms. The concrete block was provided by North City Stone Works in St. Augustine and the tile was supplied by Acme Tile Company in Jacksonville. By 1953 a restaurant, now highly altered, had been constructed in front of the motel on Vilano Road. Other historic additions were a wing with two additional rooms and a port cochere which were in place by 1962. Mrs. Tuccella died in St. Augustine in 1964. Her husband retained the property until 1969 when he sold it to Art and Thelma McGinnis. In the mid-1970s it was renamed the Vilano Beach Motel. Cesidio Tuccella died in St. Augustine in 1978. The building is one of the original 'motor-court' style motels that were so much a part of Florida small town beach communities during the late fifties and early sixties.

In 1999 episodes of the short-lived Warner Brothers television series Safe Harbor were filmed at the property, and the motel subsequently became known as the Magic Beach Motel. The original historic signage was removed and a modern sign with the Magic Beach name was installed. In 2012 owners Remy and Earl Jensen undertook major renovations. Using designs of St. Augustine architect Les Thomas, a new two-story room addition was added to the former restaurant.

Sources:

Blumenson, John J.G. *Identifying American Architecture*, American Association for State and Local History: Nashville, TN, 1981.

Brockington and Associates, "Phase I Cultural Resources Survey St. Johns County Feasibility Study, St. Johns County, FL, 2009, Survey #20612.

Environmental Services, Inc. "St. Johns County Architectural Survey," 2001, Survey #6612.

Florida, US Naturalization Records for Cesidio Tuccella, District Court, Jacksonville, Jacksonville Petition and Records, Aug. 1940-June 1942 (Roll 185) Petition for Naturalization No. 2838.

Florida Master Site File, SJ03937, 2001; Update 2009 and 2022.

GAI, Associates, Inc. "Historic Properties Survey of A1A" 2022.

St. Augustine Record, May 6, 1951; March 23, 1964; March 1-2, 1978.

St. Augustine City Directories, 1951-1975.

St. Augustine Historical Society Vertical Files, Vilano Beach

St. Johns County Deeds, OR Book 310, p. 729

State of Florida. *Florida Death Index, 1877-1998*. Florida: Florida Department of Health, Office of Vital Records, 1998.

Historian: Paul L. Weaver, MA, President, Historic Property Associates, Inc. in association with Mathews Design Group and Fisher/Koppenhafer Architects.

Completion Date: March 13, 2025



FIGURE 11: LOCATION MAP, MAGIC BEACH MOTEL, 50 VILANO ROAD

ADDENDA:

PHOTOGRAPHS OF MAGIC BEACH MOTEL, PETER WILLOT PHOTOGRAPHER

HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND DOCUMENTS RELATING TO MAGIC BEACH
MOTEL, INCLUDING C. 2012 PHOTOGRAPHS BY ST. AUGUSTINE RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHER PETER WILLOT OF INTERIOR, INCLUDING GEROME
BARRETT MURALS

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS BY LES THOMAS, AIA, 2012 RENOVATIONS

MITIGATION PLAN
BLUE OCEAN MOTEL/MAGIC BEACH MOTEL
50 VILANO ROAD
VILANO BEACH, FLORIDA



Historic Property Associates, Inc. in Association with Mathews Design Group

Fisher/Koppenhafer, Architects

March 13, 2025

MITIGATION PLAN, Magic Beach Motel, originally known as Blue Ocean Motel, 50 Vilano Road, Florida Master Site File #SJ03937.

The demolition of the above-referenced building at Vilano Road will constitute an "Adverse Effect" to a Significant Cultural Resource as defined under LDC Section 3.01.04.E. Because the proposed project will cause an adverse effect, a Cultural Resources Management Plan will be required (LDC Section 3.01.04.F). The Management Plan shall at minimum provide the following:

(1) Potential impacts to the Significant Cultural Resource citing any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Significance:

50 Vilano Road, originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel and now known as the Magic Beach Motel, is a masonry lodging facility constructed in 1951. On December 6, 2021 it was designated a "Significant Cultural Resource" by the St. Johns County Resource Review Board (CRRB).

The Cultural Resource Review Board under the criteria set forth in the St. Johns County Land Development Code (LDC) Section 3.01.04C designated the building based on the following:

1. The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is 50 years old or older having been constructed in 1951, LDC Section, 3.01.04.C.2.
2. The Magic Beach Motel encompasses four of the seven qualities of Integrity with Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:
3. The Magic Beach Motel meets four of the nine additional criteria listed in LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:

Significance Criterion:

c. Exemplifies a historic, cultural, political, economic, or social trend of St Johns County, the State of Florida, or the nation.

The Magic Beach Motel, formerly the Blue Ocean Motel, was economically significant to St. Johns County because the building has been used for commercial purposes since it was constructed in 1951. It is associated with historic State Road AIA, now designated AIA Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway, a National Scenic Byway. AIA is recognized as a center of beach culture in Florida and the United States. It was known for its lush semi-tropical scenery and ocean vistas. In 2024 SR AIA from Key West to the Georgia state line was designated the Jimmy Buffet Memorial Highway. Small family-owned motels such as the Blue Ocean Motel, located in a beach environment, adjacent the Atlantic Ocean were a part of this beach culture. The Blue Ocean Motel provide lodging for fishermen, beachgoers and surfers visiting Vilano Beach in the 1950s and 1960s, before falling into decline. In 1999 episodes of the short-lived Warner Brothers television series Safe Harbor were filmed at the property, and the motel subsequently became known as the Magic Beach Motel. It has been a component of the Vilano Beach economy since it was originally constructed.

d. Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, period or method of Construction.

The Magic Beach Motel is best described as an example of the Late Moderne style. The classic period for the Streamline or Nautical Moderne was 1930 to 1945.¹ Probably the best local example of the style in the St. Augustine vicinity was Marine Village including the Dolphin Village and Penguin Bar Marineland. This complex of buildings was designed by St. Augustine architect Francis A. Hollingsworth, AIA and located on A1A south of the city near Summer Haven. In the post-World War II period the Streamline Moderne was largely out of fashion, as architects transitioned to the increasingly popular International Style. The Late Moderne style borrowed the horizontality, curved canopies and curved corners from the Streamline Moderne Style and combined them with the more restrained, austere International Style. According to the National Register of Historic Places, Late Moderne is an accepted description for buildings dating from the post-classic period incorporating elements of the style. The Late Moderne was popular particularly in Florida and Southern California during the Post-World War II period.² When originally constructed in 1951, the Blue Ocean Motel was essentially a non-architect designed masonry vernacular motel with applied ornamentation associated with the Late Moderne Style. The exterior of the Blue Ocean Motel features a horizontal orientation, turned corners and cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in the frieze below the roof line. The style of the building was further complicated by a 1999 neon sign and a highly accurate 2012 room addition designed by architect Les Thomas, AIA in a modern interpretation of the Streamline Moderne style. These later, non-historic period additions were more high-styled than the overall design and the individual features of the original building.

g. Has value as a Building that is recognized for the quality of its architecture and that retains sufficient features showing its architectural significance.

The Magic Beach Motel does retain features associated with the Late Moderne style. These include cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in the frieze below the roof line. The building has, however, undergone significant alterations since it was originally constructed. By 1953 the motel had a detached restaurant with the same Moderne detailing as the original motel. The restaurant has been heavily remodeled most recently by a 2012 two story building housing motel rooms. The historic signage has been removed and replaced by a c. 1999 neon sign. All the original doors and windows have been replaced, and the original entrance has been remodeled.

i. Is a geographically definable area or neighborhood united by culture, architectural styles or physical development, which has historic or cultural significance in the community.

The Magic Beach Motel is in Vilano Beach, a non-incorporated mixed-use area of St. Johns County east of the City of St. Augustine. The area consists of small-scale commercial buildings, including motels, restaurants and businesses catering historically to summer beach tourism. These businesses were concentrated on Vilano Road along the course of Florida Highway A.I.A.

¹ John J.G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture, (American Association for State and Local History: National Register nomination," 1996

² NRHP registration form, Bullock's Pasadena, Pasadena, California, listed 1996, NRIS/#96000776

In adjacent areas beyond this commercial core were small residences and beach cottages. Nonetheless, a 2001 Historic Properties Survey of St. Johns County provided an evaluation of potential districts in the county for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. 50 Vilano Road was not considered part of a potential district. In 2022 a historic resources survey of State Route A1A by GAI, Associates considered the Magic Beach Motel as a potential contributing resource to a historic district. However, the building is separated from the main concentration of older buildings at the west end of Vilano Road and is surrounded by seven non-historic buildings. In fact the historic character of Vilano Road has been substantially diminished since first recorded in the Florida Master Site File in 2001 with the demolition of several buildings, the Lazy Sands Bar and Newt's Vilano Motel being examples, and new construction which is of a different scale and mass than the small scale commercial buildings traditionally located there. No formal written opinion as to the eligibility of the Magic Beach Motel for individual National Register listing or as a contributing property to a National Register District has ever been sought.

Conclusion:

The history of the Magic Beach Motel has been comprehensively documented through an Historic American Buildings Study (HABS). The HABS study includes a history and physical description, photographs of the building and site features and digitized copies of the 2012 architectural drawings which thoroughly document the complex before and after the 2012 renovations.



MAGIC BEACH MOTEL, 50 VILANO ROAD, VILANO BEACH, FLORIDA

(2) Alternatives to any proposed demolition and options to mitigate adverse effects. Possible options include but are not limited to: establishment of a historic conservation easement, relocation of a historic structure, documentation of significant historic buildings following the Historic American Buildings Survey standards, and other preservation or mitigation alternatives.

Mitigation Effort 1: Relocation/raising of building. The site of the buildings is generally low and prone to flooding in extreme conditions such as hurricanes. The natural rising sea level from the Atlantic Ocean means that the buildings, which were built slab-on-grade, will likely experience more frequent flooding. The eastern half of the historic building is seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL). This area falls in Flood Zone X and X shaded which is susceptible to storm flooding. Current building codes require the State of Florida establish finish floor elevation (FFE) and deep file foundations. In addition, FEMA regularly revises maps to designate more flood prone areas, while further raising the expected flood elevations and minimum freeboard requirements above FEMA flood elevations. Given their size and slab-on-grade construction, the existing buildings cannot be raised or relocated. Additional factors driving demolition are rising insurance and financing costs, increasing preferences for larger units with more amenities based on industry-wide standards, as well as functionally obsolete designs and mechanical systems. As early as 2010, the St. Johns County Growth Management Department has expressed concerns about the safety and sustainability based on building code and flooding concerns (see Attachment 1). The Coastal Construction Line passes through a portion of the building and property (see Attachment 2). Any site demolition and/or redevelopment must meet current standards for the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) permitting through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) for activities on the seaward side of the CCCL which bisects the property.

Mitigation Effort 2: The owners have prepared a Historic American Building Survey (HABS) study which documents the historic significance and physical development of Magic Beach Motel. This study will be submitted to the SJC Preservation Officer as part of the mitigation plan. Once approved, the HABS will be recorded in the Florida Master Site archives and made available to other relevant archival repositories such as the St. Augustine Historical Society. The HABS study includes a history and physical description, photographs of the historic buildings and historic site features and digitized copies of the 2012 architectural drawings by Les Thomas, AIA which documented the existing building at that time. Furthermore, the owners are committed to the following salvaging and repurposing of elements from the Magic Beach Motel as follows (see also Attachment 3):

1. Flamingo Plasterwork pieces will be incorporated into the façade of the replacement building.
2. A Tribute Area will be established in the new building with Historic Photography and Memorabilia.
3. The Magic Beach neon sign will be relocated to a landscaped area on property.

The owner will further determine whether and how to incorporate significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings, such as the interior room murals by Artist Gerome Barret, or to allow bona fide nonprofits or agencies with subject matter interest or expertise to salvage historically

significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings prior to demolition. The owners will contact St. Johns County staff to notify and provide a specific plan for preservation, recordation, and incorporation of significant elements. Murals by Gerome Barret are of unknown date and of undermined historic, artistic or cultural significance. They are painted on plaster walls so their preservation may be problematic. Owners will make good faith effort to work with any interested party to salvage the murals.

(3) Schedule of any demolition, excavation, or an activity causing alteration to the Significant Cultural Resource.

The owners are prepared to pursue a demolition permit, while working with the St. Johns County Preservation Official on an acceptable mitigation plan as outlined in Item 2. Applicant proposes a schedule to complete the demolition within a term of three to six months after the April 14th, CRRB meeting.

(4) Provision of an adequate time to create additional recordation and documentation, and if appropriate, relocation of the resource. In the event that relocation of a resource is required, a minimum of ninety (90) days shall be allowed for such relocation to occur but no longer than one (1) year.

The owners have completed the HABS documentation phase of the Mitigation Plan. Relocation of buildings is not technically feasible or financially practical.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1

Robin E. Moore

From: Suzanne Konchan
Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2010 8:21 AM
To: Howard White
Cc: Robin E. Moore
Subject: FW: magic beach
Attachments: blueoceanmotel.jpg

I understand you both (Howard and Robin) have already been in communication. I pass this along to HT because I want to make sure the 10 year tax exemption program is something we aware of at all division levels. However, Robin, you need to be briefed by HT on the dangerous building concerns we have from a building code perspective that may make the rehabilitation of this structure very costly, perhaps impractically so.

Suzanne Konchan, AICP
Director, Growth Management Department
St. Johns County
4040 Lewis Speedway
St. Augustine, FL 32084
(904) 209-0712 ph
(904) 599-8917 mobile
(904) 209-0713 fax
skonchan@sjcf.us

MEMORANDUM FROM SUZANN KONCHAN, AICP TO ROBIN MOORE 07/14/2010

Attachment 3

Repurposing Features

Proposed elements from Magic Beach Motel:

1. Flamingo Plasterwork pieces incorporated into new façade
2. Tribute Area in Lobby with Historic Photography and Memorabilia
3. Relocation of neon Hotel Sign to landscaped area on property

The image displays a conceptual architectural plan and a 3D rendering of a repurposed building. The floor plan on the left shows a 'Drop Off' area, a 'Lobby', a 'Restaurant', and a pink-shaded '2. Tribute Area'. A 3D rendering on the right shows the building's exterior with a 'RETAIL' sign, a neon flamingo sign, and a landscaped area with a 'MAGIC BEACH HOTEL' sign. Red callouts 1, 2, and 3 link the plan to the rendering.

CONCEPTUAL PLAN FOR REPURPOSING ELEMENTS FROM MAGIC BEACH MOTEL