

April 10, 2025

Dr. Leslee Keys(Chair)  
Susan Schjelderup (Vice Chair)  
Blair Knighting  
Robert E. Olson  
Nick Jonihakis  
Christine Newman  
Janet Jordan  
4040 Lewis Speedway  
St. Augustine, Florida 32084

Dear Cultural Resources Review Chair, Vice Chair, and Board Members:

This letter is in support of the preservation of the Magic Beach Hotel.

I was the County land planner and first Main Street Executive Director, that worked with “the community” to establish the Town Center for about 10 years from around 2000 – 2010. As a first-generation Floridian, I have fond memories of being with my father doctor going on night house calls at the beach, sitting in the back seat and seeing mom and pop motels nestled in the palms with the neon lights glowing... magical... and still are ....and an integral part of Florida’s history. The Magic Beach and other related historic buildings in Vilano are our character our place.

I was there from the beginning through:

- Creation of Main Street which was done to preserve the historic buildings and maintain the funky character of Vilano Beach
- The award-winning Vision Plan and Town Center Master Plan,
- Establishment of the Community Redevelopment Area(CRA),
- Creation of the Comp Plan and Architectural Design Code And a lot of other major accomplishments in between....

All of this and much more accomplished through a successful partnership between the Community and Federal, State, Regional and Local governments.

The multi-agency efforts resulted in receipt of \$ 7 or more in tax funded grants for projects, from planning studies, CRA Finding of Necessity, brochures, pavilions, nature boardwalk, beach front recreation area and on and on not to mention the volunteer hours that added a small fortune in labor. Also, the additional \$12.5 million through the CRA tied to historic preservation plan. The Master Plan is a New Urbanist traditional downtown, like Winter Park, Naples, Fernandina Beach, all of which are incredibly economically successful .

This unique authentic art deco buildings in the Town Center are the core of the overall Master Plan and are the key to a successful downtown. Further it establishes the “character” of the area which in Vilano is tied to Vilano’s uniquely funky historic Art Deco Mimo buildings. Unique enough to be

designated a National and Florida Main Street and for Hollywood icon Aaron Spelling to set a pilot TV show at the Magic Beach and most recently a 2025 six-time Golden Globe nominated TV show Three Body Problem by the creators of The Game of Thrones, a world-renowned TV show. The Magic Beach is an iconic structure and is the gem of the art deco buildings in Vilano. Successful downtowns maintain their historic core and build off of them. Further it is well established that affluent customer desire authenticity. The Economic Plan determined this is key component to becoming an economically viable downtown.

These are my comments, as follows:

First, as planner I take community input very seriously. I would be remiss if I did not mention (much to my dismay) the Main Street meetings and Board decision making process was not a transparent process or did not include meaningful community input.

At the Main Street February meeting the Main Street representative made it clear that “no” discussion of the Magic Beach was allowed. It was announced the March meeting would be a presentation by the Developer. Also, the Board mentioned they were meeting with the Developer on a plan. I believe many community members, including myself, based on past dealing with Snapper’s project and brief interactions with Board member that they were working on a similar adaptive reuse of the Magic Beach. Also, traditionally the Board does not support a project without community support so many thought the worst that could happen is they would remain neutral. Prior to the Developer meeting on March 19<sup>th</sup> I was told by several Board members that the Board decided to demolish. The Board should have sent the rendering and provided the Board decision with documentation to support their decision in the emailed developer meeting community notice. They did not. At the March 19<sup>th</sup> meeting the Main Street Reps did the majority of the presentation for the developer starting with making it clear to demolish was way to go ..reasons ..this project better than last and Magic Beach not structurally sound... developer presented a rendering Comments were taken.

However NO vote was taken of the community nor was the survey done as one of the speakers pointed out that they requested. The meeting closed with Board Rep announcing their decision was to demolish. The meeting was a formality. The board should have remained neutral. This was not a transparent process nor did it include meaningful community input. This decision is totally contradictory to the intent of the Master Plan and the Main Street principle to preserve the historic structures, specifically the most significant one in the Town Center.

Next the concern is the double standard to have adaptive reuse on the Snapper Restaurant and not the Magic Beach, this Main Street designated iconic building is probably in much better structural shape. There is no preservation structural engineer report or recent photos to support the statement the Magic Beach is a structurally unsound building. In 2011 major renovations were made to the Magic Beach with the support of the County. There may be some maintenance issues however that does not deem a building structurally unsound. This building is a functioning motel which appears to be busy on a consistent basis. This building was not up for sale until the owner was approached by the developer to address his parking needs for his commercial project.

The underlying planning issues must be acknowledged as they are directly related to the reason the applicant is making this request to demolish. That is the applicant could not meet the parking requirements for the commercial structure proposed originally with the residential. Unfortunately the Land Development Code was written to give incentives to bring the development including \$12.5 million infrastructure, stormwater management system, TDR's and in the Code allow the waiver of a Planned Unit Development (PUD). The PUD requires an overall project development plan for the residential and commercial project. In the original project plan the developer presented the residential and commercial together however he needed more parking for commercial so he opted out the commercial. The developers answer to meet parking requirements was to demolish Magic Beach. Classic case of Pink paradise put up parking lot and don't know what you've lost until its gone,,, in our case the Town center's treasure and core the Magic Beach. If the project had gone through a PUD the residential could of been reduced to accommodate the parking. In hindsight it was short sighted, to not require a PUD now seems quite sad that our benevolence is being used to allow one development to compromise all the community and federal state regional and local financial investment effort and dedication.

Traffic and parking were issues raised in the last go around on this which was a major undertaking. The county has not addressed these issues. These planning issues must be addressed as these are at heart of this demolition request. This should not be considered a permit issue but a planning issue. The county needs to consider having a traffic and parking study done as soon as possible to rectify these major concerns as it affects every existing and future project in Vilano not to mention the everyday use by locals. it is recommended the County do a moratorium to allow for time to revisit these issues and come up with proactive planning solutions instead of forcing a demolition permit - find a way to protect and not demolish the Magic Beach. Simultaneously a mechanism or mechanisms and funding sources to purchase the structure through the CRA and or with a nonprofit. required and also policies that encourage the preservation of historic. Of note there are Policies in the Comprehensive Plan that allow reduced or eliminated parking in exchange for Historic Preservation.

However, if the County does not proceed with addressing these critical planning issues, The biggest concern is the need to have adaptive reuse of the Magic Beach structure. The "conceptual" building does not reflect the "character" or essence of the Magic Beach because it can't it is a ONE of a kind and you can't replace "authenticity". This would be a compromise between the developer and the Community to meet both needs. The Community and federal state regional and local agencies for 25 years have been invested financially and in blood sweat and tears to the plan to preserve the Magic Beach. Therefore, if there is justice and with mutual respect, somehow all this blood sweat and tears and \$\$\$\$\$ would be acknowledged and accommodated through a project plan to use adaptive reuse similar to the Snappers Restaurant project to achieve mutual goals . We will all live in Vilano and it would be better to live together as good neighbors. This is a reasonable compromise between the developer's property rights and very long-term Community and governmental agency efforts and investment.

A note that there is nothing guaranteed that this project would be approved. There are Comprehensive Plan issues that need to be addressed. Please see attached Vilano Beach Town Center Comprehensive Plan Objective A.3.2 highlighted Policies and related LDC Building Type Map. That will need to be met. Also, there are Land and the land development architectural standards. The conceptual building does have challenges. The point is if demolished before development approval is given and construction is imminent... there will be another vacant lot sitting there for years and more importantly the loss of our

gem the Magic Beach. Further if the development does not occur and the building is still there then measures to try and save it could be pursued. Therefore, a condition to ensure that it cannot be touched until the development approval and proof of construction will occur needs to be required. To live with the destruction of the Magic Beach for no reason would be unthinkable .

The Community has made it clear they want to Save the Magic Beach. Presently an application to the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation application is being looked at to list this property as one of the most endangered historic properties in the State of Florida. This is a very very very Special Place...and deserves protection. Please see attached Petition (collected in only one day).


The value of \$\$\$\$\$\$ of the community effort and Federal state regional and LOCAL governments dedication to this effort you cannot put a dollar value on it is invaluable. So it is very very important to recognize that this application would not have been possible without these efforts over this multi- year Master Plan effort .

In closing, the Master Plan has not been implemented as it should have been in many ways but the one thing was thought that the Magic Beach would always be there as the Heart of the downtown. It would hold on to our "Vilano's" funky sense of place... our one of kind authentic come find this special place place!!!! As stated in the St. Johns County Comprehensive Plan Objective A.3.2 "The Vilano Beach Town Center vision (*Master Plan*) is to create a place that maintains a small beach town "community character" through the delicate balance of the "old" with the new." A demolition permit process should not be allowed to compromise these hard-earned efforts and undermine the heart of the Master Plan. This building deserves a higher degree of scrutiny and effort to ensure it's protection.

I respectfully request the following CRRB DENY the request to demolish the Magic Beach and or consider recommend alternatives to work with County to consider planning studies to address underlying planning issues and related actions, e.g. moratoria To Save The Magic Beach, and if studies aren't done to work with developer to provide a plan that uses adaptive reuse of The Magic Beach building, and include a condition that does not allow any of the building to be destroyed until the County gives approval of the development plan and there is proof of development to occur.

Thank for your consideration of my comments and recommendations, I am,

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Georgia Katz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Georgia Katz

2601 Seagate Lane

St. Augustine, Florida 32084

### Objective A.3.2

#### Establishment of the Vilano Beach /Town Center Mixed Use District

The model for the creation of the Town Center Mixed Use land use designation is the Vilano Beach Town Center Project, a Waterfronts and Main Street Florida Community. This project began with a vision process accepted by the County and with technical and financial support from the State Land Planning Agency and other state, regional, and federal agencies. This effort is recognized by the state as a model for sustainable growth and successful and proactive partnering between the community and government.

↑ The Vilano Beach Town Center vision is to create a place that maintains the small beach town community character through the delicate balance of the old with the new. The Vilano Beach Town Center provides a mixture of residential and commercial uses that provides goods, services, and places for a synergetic life style center for residents and visitors, alike.

The Vilano Beach Town Center contains a Main Street that will be developed with a range of commercial uses, grocery store, drycleaners, hotels professional offices, restaurants, specialty retail, and art galleries. The second and third floor will allow for commercial uses, however, it will also allow for residential uses to that support a Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) concept, for example, live work opportunities. Hotels and motels, including extended stay and Bed & Breakfast, is allowed but shall not exceed commercial or residential uses within the Town Center.

The Vilano Beach Town Center has terminus at the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal Waterway. Structures and businesses shall be built and designed to promote the character of a beach community, to view the natural beauty of the area, i.e., scenic vistas of downtown St. Augustine, the Intracoastal and the Atlantic Ocean, sunrises and sunsets of the area, and take advantage of coastal breezes.

The community civic pavilions located at the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway are envisioned to be the hub for social and cultural activities for the surrounding community and visitors. These pavilions help make the area a lively and fun place to live and visit.

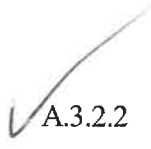
#### Policies:

##### ✓ A.3.2.1

The Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District shall be implemented through the St. Johns County Land Development Code by the following regulatory framework:

- ✓ a. A Regulatory Plan for the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District (a graphic document that maps the location of all streets and alleys, the building types to be accommodated, and the location of any public open space and required civic sites) and
- ✓ b. Development Regulations for the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District (defining the Building Types, and for each type:

Building Placement, Building Uses, Architectural Standards, Building Preservation, Sign Standards, Parking and Loading Standards, and Landscape Standards).



A.3.2.2 The Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District was developed pursuant to the objectives set forth in Goal A.3 the policies included under objective A.3.1. Per the regulatory framework laid out above and the land area included within the district, the build-out of the Vilano Beach TCMUD will not exceed:

Retail Office	33%
Residential	33% or limited to 8 units per acre as averaged over the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District.
Hotel/Motel	30%
Civic	4%

A.3.2.3 The Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District shall be exempt from the civic space requirement listed in Policy A.3.1.20.

A.3.2.4 Structures shall be built to preserve the Vilano Bridge view shed for aesthetic and economic purposes.

A.3.2.5 Economic Redevelopment Residential Units Exchange program shall allow exchange of residential unit rights between properties (sending and receiving properties) within the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District so long as any exchange of residential units results in an equal reduction of residential unit rights from a sending property located within the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District based on the boundary of the District as adopted in 2015 as shown on Exhibit 3.2.5.E below, and pursuant to implementing regulations of the County's Land Development Code. In no case shall an exchange of residential units result in a maximum density on any receiving site exceeding 16 units/acre.

A.3.2.6 In an effort to promote the preservation of historic "landmark" structures that establish the unique historic character and "sense of place" in the Vilano Beach Town Center, property owners may consider the following options:

- (a) Incentives for owners who restore and preserve a qualified historic structure on the property. These incentives include:
  1. Increase in the Floor Area Ratio of the buildable property from 0.80 to 1.5, excluding the floor area of the historic structure.

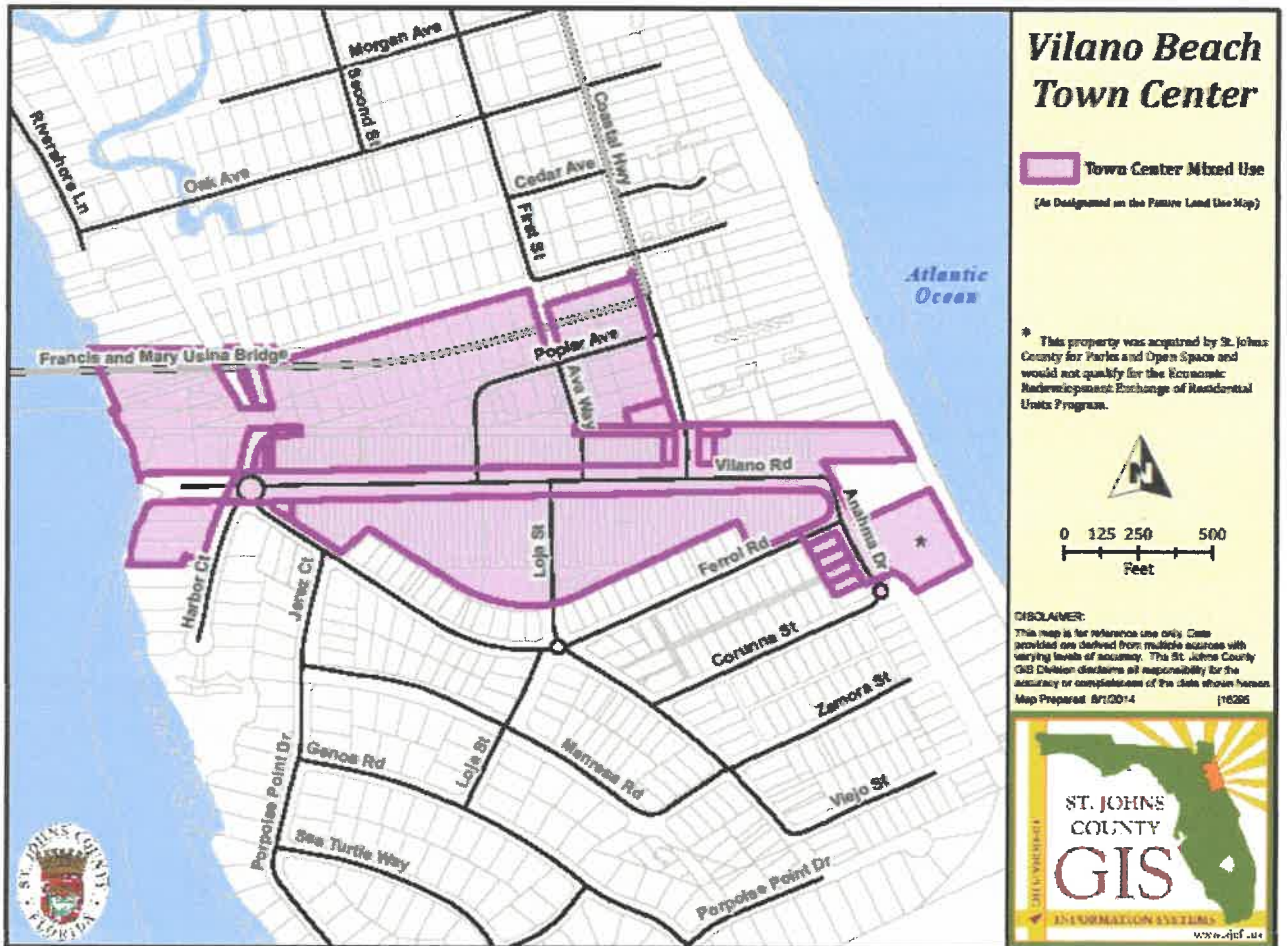
2. Increase in the Impervious Surface Ratio of the buildable property from 0.75 to 0.90, excluding the historic footprint.
  3. Elimination of parking requirements for Commercial/Retail/Office uses if buildable property is under 30,000 square feet.
  4. A fifty percent (50%) reduction of parking requirements for Commercial/Retail/Office uses if buildable property is over 30,000 square feet.
- (b) Additional opportunities supporting the preservation and restoration of qualified historic structures include Historic Preservation Ad Valorem Tax exemptions for a 10-year period, the Economic Redevelopment Residential Units Exchange Option, and potential building code waivers.

A.3.2.7 Vendors may be allowed pursuant to the Land Development Code.

A.3.2.8 Due to the fact that financial institutions are appropriate for the Vilano Beach Town Center Mixed Use District (VBTCMUD) and that modern financial institutions are typically built with a drive-in and drive-up facility, the County may approve drive-in facilities attached to neighborhood-serving financial institutions and such financial institutions with drive-in/drive-up facilities may only be located within the area of the VBTCMUD bounded by Vilano Road, Coastal Highway, and Poplar Road. Prior to a drive-in and drive-up facility being permitted the County shall amend the Land Development Code to include standards and procedures to implement this policy.

1. Drive-in and drive-up facilities may only be allowed as accessory to a neighborhood serving financial institution.
2. Based on the size and configuration of the block, its location within the VBTCMUD, the fact that this particular block already attracts significant vehicular traffic due to the size and use of the retail development, and the configuration of the buildings and parking currently thereon, which allow the site and design requirements described below, and to preserve the Vilano Beach Town Center ideals, a drive-in and drive-up facility may only be located within the block of the VBTCMUD bounded by Vilano Road, Coastal Highway, and Poplar Road.
3. The drive-in and drive-up windows may not be visible from Vilano Road or Coastal Highway. The drive-in and drive-up windows must be located in the rear of a building or the interior of a parking area

EXHIBIT 3.2.5.E

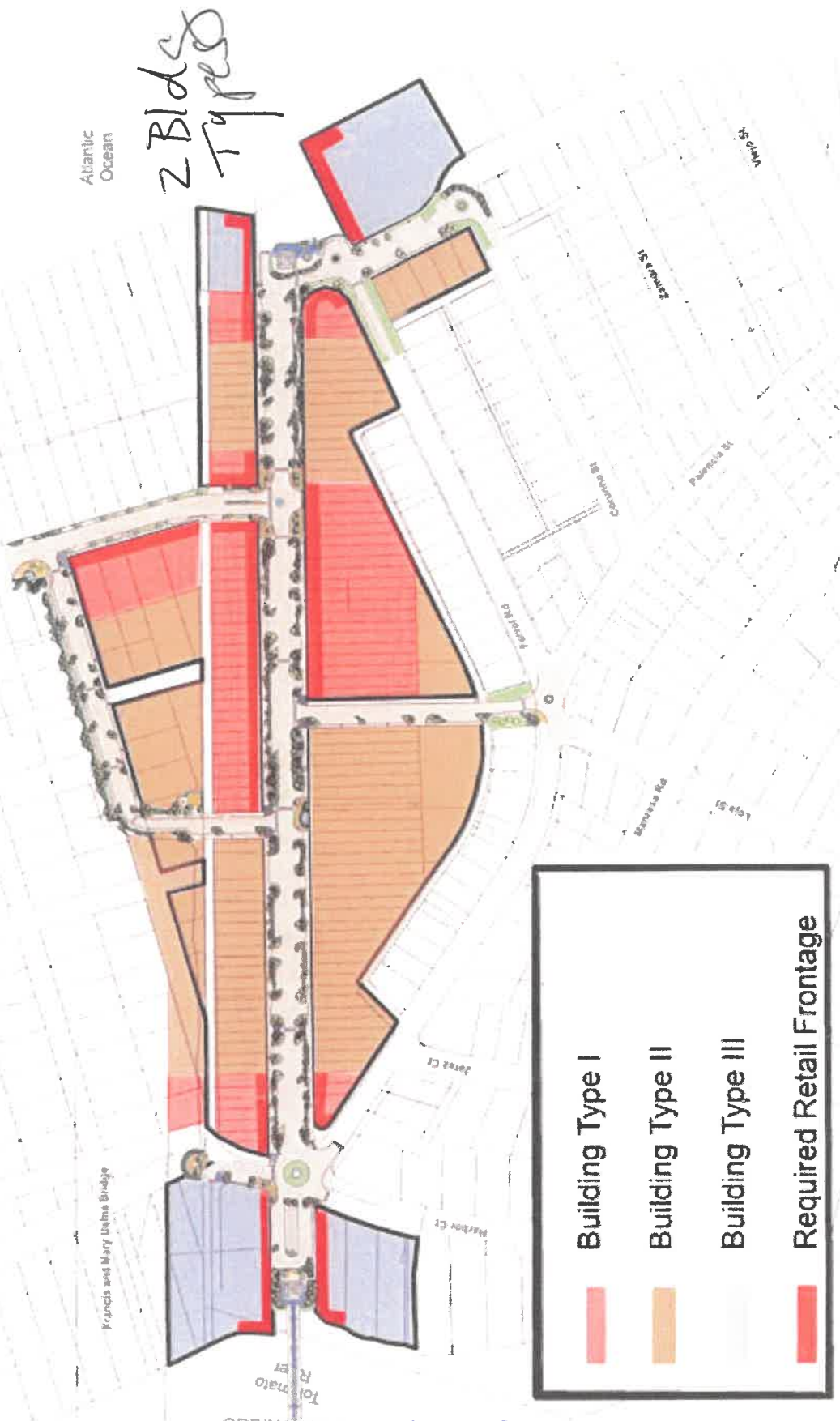






- Amendments:  
 Ordinance No. 2012-16 June 19, 2012;  
 Ordinance No. 2014-3 January 21, 2014;  
 Ordinance No. 2015-13 February 17, 2015;  
 Ordinance No. 2021-52 August 17, 2021;  
 Ordinance No. 2021-54 August 17, 2021;  
 Ordinance No. 2022-36 May 17, 2022;  
 Ordinance No. 2023-19 June 6 2023



# Regulatory Plan

## Vilano Beach Town Center Overlay District



	Building Type I
	Building Type II
	Building Type III
	Required Retail Frontage

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# Save The Magic Beach

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