

# Letter of Intent

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Prepared by:

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## Letter of Intent

622 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Building and Site Restoration

To: City of Miami Beach Historic Preservation Board  
1700 Convention Center Drive  
Miami Beach, FL 33139

From: Neal R. Deputy, Architect (Applicant)  
1446 Jefferson Avenue  
Miami Beach, FL 33139

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01) OBJECTIVE:

It is the intent of this proposal to present a strategy to convert the long-abandoned Fourplex and grounds at 622 15<sup>th</sup> Street into an attractive, historically accurate, and economically sustainable enterprise. In order to achieve this overriding goal, we ask that the Board reclassify the garage building at the rear of the site from contributing to non-contributing, allow its demolition, and approve the site plan contained within the drawings.

It is also the applicant's intent to replace the garage structure at rear with a new building containing three two-bedroom apartments. The proposed new construction to replace the garage building shall adhere to modern methods of structure and design while honoring the existing Fourplex in scale, color, materials, fenestration, and composition.

02) APPLICATION DETAILS:

The property at 622 15<sup>th</sup> Street has been uninhabited since the current owner acquired it in 2012. For numerous reasons the Owner, who lives abroad, has been unable to renovate the property per his original intention. As such the condition of the buildings and grounds are in a state of advanced neglect and present an eyesore on a block where every other property has been renovated.

Ancient roofs and broken tiles, leaking windows and doors, pipe penetrations and lack of proper drainage have combined to allow significant water infiltration into the structure of the building. Subsequent rot and damage to wooden structural members, advanced mold, falling plaster, and lack of attention to mechanical and life safety systems have created, in my opinion, a threat to public safety.

As a preservationist, it is my goal to see the existing Fourplex and the site returned to a condition that is an asset to the street, the neighborhood, the City, and the Ownership. Within our plans for the restoration of this historic structure is the intention to recreate the covered front porch and portecochere that appear in the original drawings but were never built (see Historic Resources Report). Additionally, we propose;

A) The restoration of all existing roofs as well as the wood bracketing, barrel tile, eaves, and roof detailing that give the building its character.

B) Replacement of all existing windows and doors with impact rated products in styles and composition derived from the original microfilm drawings. All replacement exterior doors shall be full

height impact rated with single lights.

C) Relocating all existing AC compressors at grade to the roof and shielding them behind the existing parapet walls.

D). Relocating all accumulated exterior plumbing pipes and electrical conduits to the interior walls.

E). Repairing and patching all existing exterior stucco as required and repainting the entire structure.

F). Reducing the Existing 20-foot curb cut to 12 feet.

G). Providing professionally designed and coordinated landscape and hardscape plans, based on salt tolerant, highly water-absorbent, native, or Florida-friendly plants, resiliency, and storm water retention to augment the design intent of the site and building composition.

### 03) HARDSHIPS:

The primary hardship facing the site is economic. The feasibility and costs of fully restoring the existing main quadruplex building at the street *and* the existing garage building to current historic, building, and life safety standards- not to mention the costs of a fully renovated site and attendant infrastructure- cannot be supported from the income of five one-bedroom apartments alone. It is a losing proposition. However, if the garage building in the rear can be replaced with three new two-bedroom apartments of modern construction the development scenario approaches feasibility by current pro-forma studies. The buildings would likely need to be sold as condominiums to recoup significant losses to date and although the risk scenario is great, the Owner is willing to commit to the building & site improvements. The Owner's devotion to Miami Beach is real (he owns multiple properties here) and he believes the benefits of the proposal merit the sacrifice.

### 04) REQUESTED VARIANCES:

In order to fulfill the promises of our proposal we would request four minor variances.

01). The Applicant requests a modification of the required Front Yard Setback (20'-0") and/or the **existing** Front Yard Setback (15'-0") to 11'-4". This modification will allow for the Staff recommended construction of the originally designed (but never built) front arcade, arched entryway, and side yard Porte-Cochere per the original microfilm drawings. This addition or "completion" of the original Architect's design intent will greatly enhance the streetscape, the building elevations, and the site composition. Please see Sheet EX-6 in the drawing set for elevation comparisons. This addition will also further obscure views of the proposed new construction in the rear. Please see Variance &1 & #2) Diagram on page 5.

02) The Applicant requests a modification of the required Front Yard Setback for at grade parking of 20'-0" to 11'-4". This variance is part and parcel of constructing the original arcaded porch, entryway, and porte-cochere that appear in the original microfilm drawings. The Porte-Cochere by its very nature is intended to provide a covered parking space, thus the necessity for this variance.

03) The Applicant requests a modification of the required rear yard setback from the required 10'-0" to 5'-0". This modification will allow the Owner the same development rights currently enjoyed by the adjacent and neighboring properties. Please see Survey (Drawing Sheet C-02). Our overall proposal would be impossible without this modification as the resultant allowable footprint of the proposed new building would be insufficient to provide an economically viable enterprise. Please see Variance #3 Diagram on page 6.

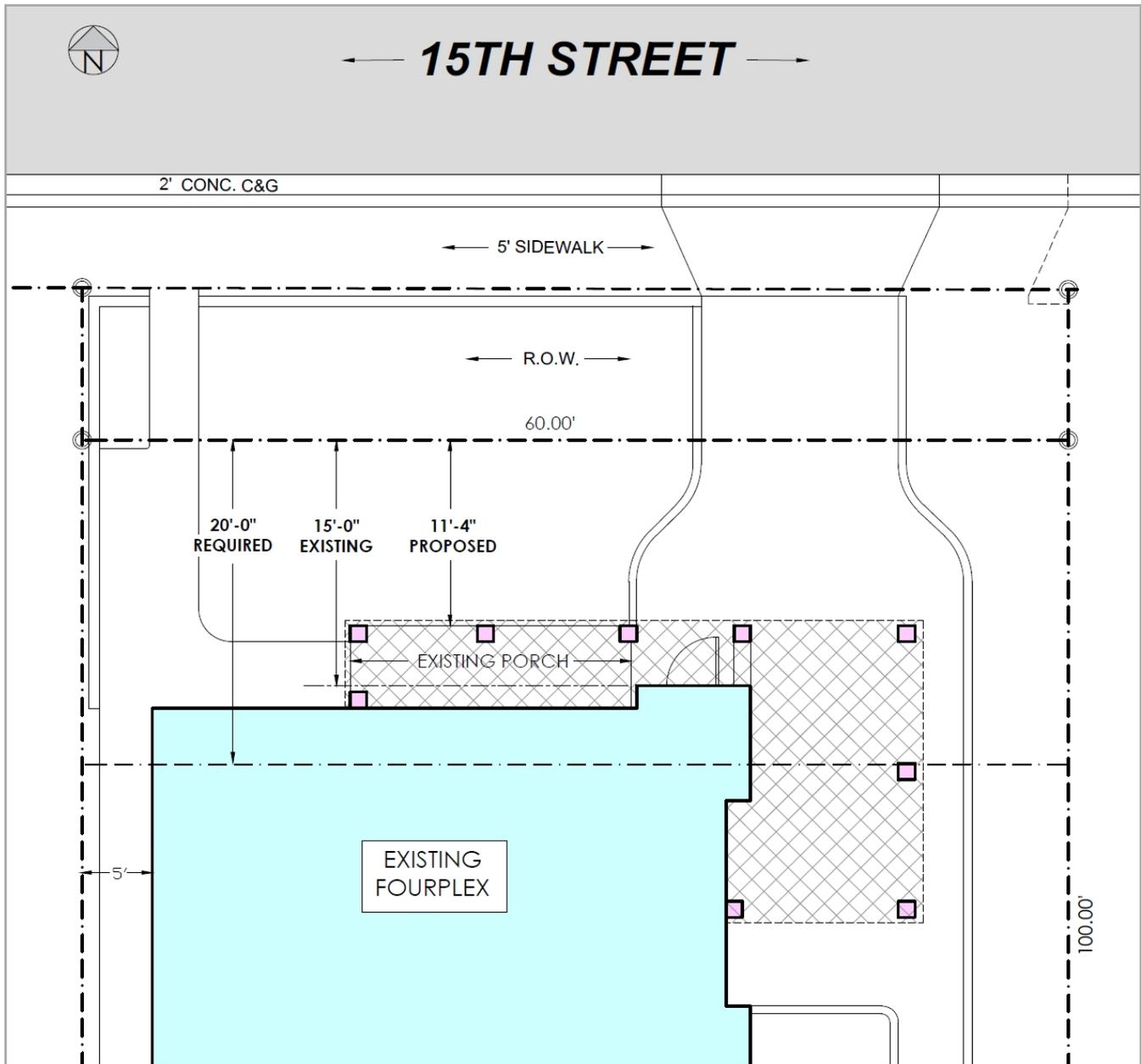
04) Finally, we are requesting a reduction in the minimum average "New Unit" size from 800 square feet to 771 square feet. This is the result of;

- a) A very small site (60' x 100').
- b) Meeting all the varied Side Yard Setback requirements.
- c) Maintaining the required 10'-0" separation between the historic Fourplex and the new construction.
- d) Honoring the RM-1 three-floor height restriction.

With a rear yard setback variance to 5'-0" we can maintain unit sizes of 802 square feet, 788 square feet, and 722 square feet, respectively (for an average of 771 square feet). See Existing and Proposed FAR shaded Diagrams on Drawing Sheets A-04 & A-05 for additional information

*Variance diagrams are presented on the following pages*

VARIANCE #1 & #2 DIAGRAM

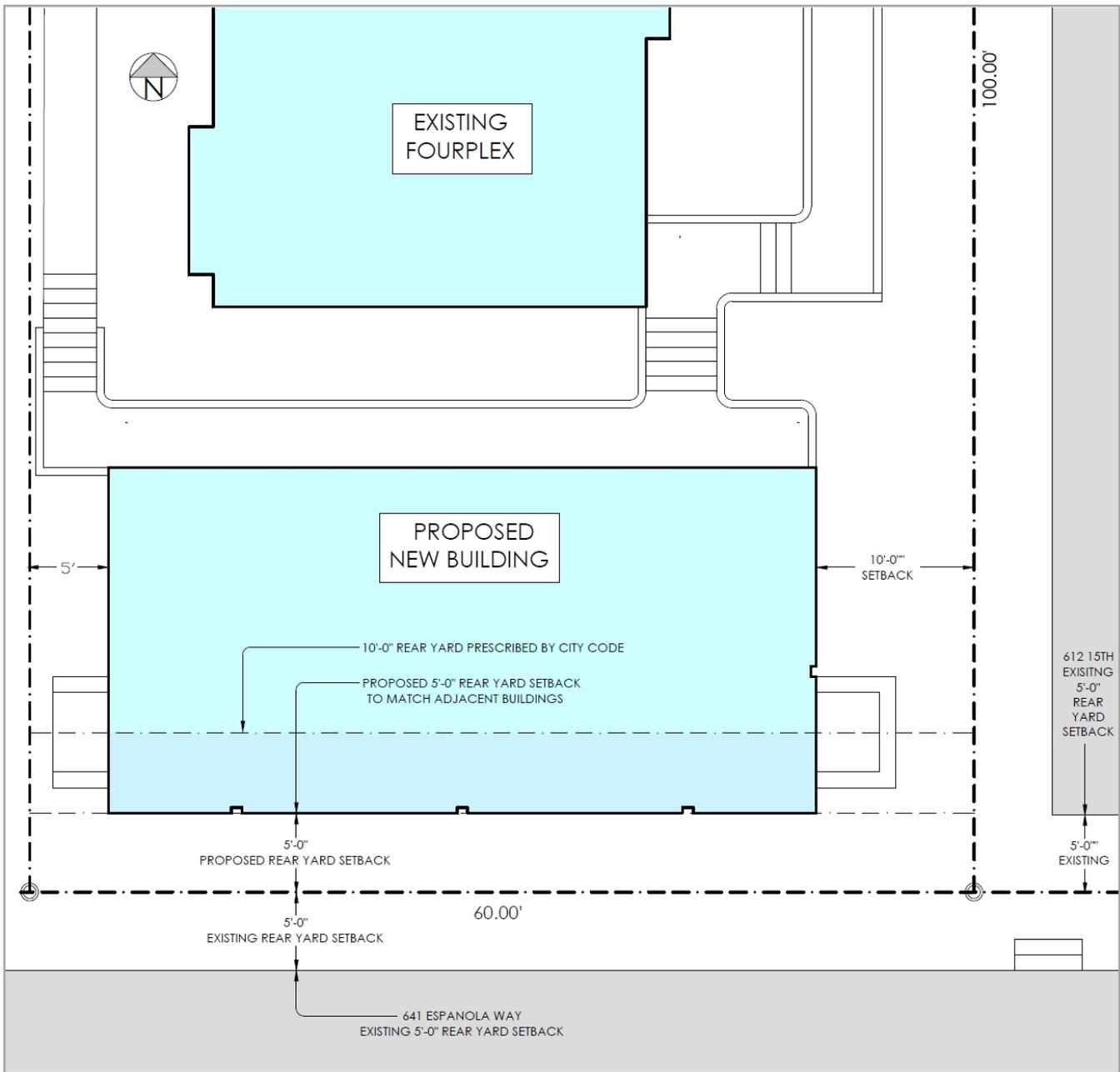


**VARIANCE #1 & #2 DIAGRAM**

REDUCTION OF EXISTING FRONT YARD SETBACK FROM 15'-0" TO 11'-4"

- 1) The Applicant requests a modification of the Code required 20'-0" front yard setback and/or the existing front yard setback (15'-0") to 11'-4".
- 2) This modification will allow for the construction of the original arcaded porch, entryway, and porte-cochere that appear in the original microfilm drawings (see Historical Resources Report) but was never built.
- 3) The addition or "completion" of the original Architect's design intent will greatly enhance the streetscape, the building elevations, and the site composition. Please see Drawing Set sheet EX-6 for for comparisons.
- 4) This addition will also further obscure the view of the new construction proposed for the rear of the site. Please see 3D model scenes in the Drawing Set.

VARIANCE #3 DIAGRAM



**VARIANCE #3 DIAGRAM**

REDUCTION OF THE CODE REQUIRED REAR YARD SETBACK FROM 10'-0" TO 5'-0"

- 1) The Applicant requests a modification of the Code required 10'-0" rear yard setback to 5'-0".
- 2) This modification will allow the Owner the same development rights currently enjoyed by the adjacent and neighboring properties.
- 3) Fulfilling the overall proposal would be impossible without this modification as the size of the proposed new building would be insufficient to provide an economically viable enterprise.

05) SEA LEVEL RISE AND RESILIENCY PLAN;

From Sec 133-50 of the Municipal Code the following criteria shall be adhered to during the planning for the proposed demolition, renovation, and new construction phases of the proposed project.

01) A recycling or salvage plan for the proposed partial demolition shall be provided.

*At this time, we are examining the feasibility of recycling existing windows and doors to inland locations, salvaging viable lumber, and using the proposed demolished building as stable fill to raise the overall site elevation as a partial strategy against sea level rise.*

02) *All proposed replacement windows shall be hurricane proof impact windows.*

03) *Where feasible and appropriate, passive cooling systems, such as operable windows, shall be provided.*

04) *Resilient landscaping (salt tolerant, highly water-absorbent, native, or Florida-friendly plants) shall be provided, in accordance with chapter 126 of the City Code.*

05) *The project applicant shall consider the adopted sea level rise projections in the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Action Plan, as may be revised from time-to-time by the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact. The applicant shall also specifically study the land elevation of the subject property and the elevation of surrounding properties.*

06) *The ground floor, driveways, and garage ramping for new construction shall be adaptable to the raising of public rights-of-way and adjacent land, and shall provide sufficient height and space to ensure that the entry ways and exits can be modified to accommodate a higher street height of up to three additional feet in height.*

07) *As applicable to all new construction, all critical mechanical and electrical systems shall be located above base flood elevation. All redevelopment projects shall, whenever practicable and economically reasonable, include the relocation of all critical mechanical and electrical systems to a location above base flood elevation.*

08) Existing buildings shall, wherever reasonably feasible and economically appropriate, be elevated up to base flood elevation, plus City of Miami Beach Freeboard.

*Considering the deteriorated (fragile) state of the building and the economic hardship it would present, it is not possible to raise the existing building 4 feet in order to meet the base flood elevation (8'-0") plus 1'-0" Freeboard.*

10) When habitable space is located below the base flood elevation plus City of Miami Beach Freeboard, wet or dry flood proofing systems will be provided in accordance with chapter 54 of the City Code.

*All new construction shall meet the base flood elevation criteria plus 1'-0" Freeboard. All new or relocated mechanical and electrical systems within the proposed renovated Fourplex shall be located above the base flood elevation criteria plus 1'-0" Freeboard.*

11) *As applicable to all new construction, stormwater retention systems shall be provided.*

12) *Cool pavement materials or porous pavement materials shall be utilized.*

13) *The site and building design shall minimize the potential for heat island effects on-site.*

*End of Preliminary Sea Level Rise and Resiliency Plan*

06) SUPPORT FOR RECLASSIFICATION.

It is the applicant's belief that the garage building at the rear of the site, although currently deemed contributing, does not meet the definition of contributing as defined in section 114-1 of the City Code and would request that the Board consider that the structure has undergone;

I. A Change of Use

II. Significant Additions and Alterations

III. Loss of Typological Clarity

I. Change of Use

While a Change of Use may have no impact on a Contributing structures appearance, in this case the conversion from a garage to an apartment has significantly changed the nature of the primary facade. Automobile sized opening(s) have been closed up and new pedestrian scaled door(s) added (see page 14). Other openings have likewise been modified to allow the space to function as a habitable apartment. This Change of Use was granted after the fact in 1956 according to the original Building Card. The work was performed by the Owner at some point prior to 1956.

It is evident that the garage structure was indeed originally constructed as a garage by the slab on grade, the biasing of the main building to one side of the site to allow auto access to the rear garage (a popular 1920's strategy), the curb cut at the street aligned with the garage building, and the "ghosts" of former opening(s) of automotive scale.

It is assumed that the original garage structure was built contemporaneously with the Fourplex that fronts 15<sup>th</sup> Street although no original plans for the garage structure can be located. Additionally, the Fourplex was altered from the original Duplex design (per the original Building Card and original plans herein). It is not apparent from the Building Card that any of these modifications were ever permitted so the extent and precise nature of the modifications to the garage building are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. Nonetheless, we have provided an educated guess of how the garage building may have originally appeared and how it looks today (see page 14).

## II. Significant Additions and Alterations

While it is arguable that the most significant architectural elements are the decorative scrollwork and barrel tile veneer on the primary facade, they are the only elements on the primary facade that remain intact. No other features survive unless one assumes that the few surviving raised window sills accurately reflect the width of the original windows on the second floor (see attached photographs). It is also possible that the center entry location is original judging from the 1949 photograph which is, however, 25 years after the building was, perhaps, constructed.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving plans of the garage building, so it is not possible to make an accurate assessment of what is original and what is an addition or alteration. One could assume that the original building plan was a simple rectangle, based on the cornice line and dimensions (approximately 20' x 24') but it is questionable if the interior layout of the spaces supports this. Additionally, the stair to the second-floor apartment is located outside the rectangle (perhaps because there were two garage doors, one for each residence in the duplex). This “new” stair is capped by a second-floor barrel tile roof in contrast to the parapet roofs that predominate on site.

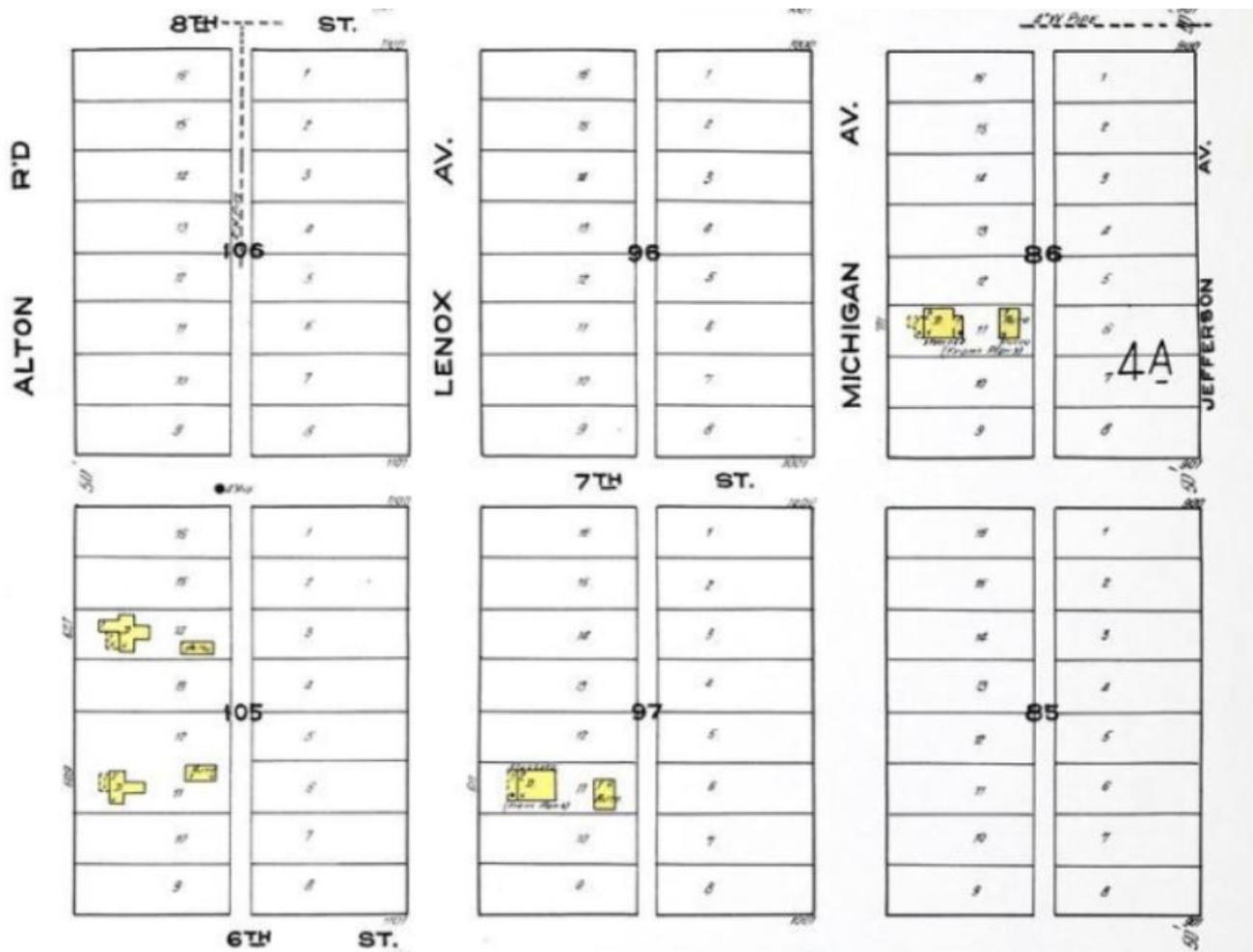
There is also a ground floor addition extending beyond the second-floor addition of no particular merit- less the raised stucco window sill reflecting the original second floor apartment windowsill. We also know that there was an exterior concrete stair added in 1959 according to the original Building Card.

Additionally, all of the windows within the structure have been replaced leaving (a) not one original window by which to judge the original type, division, or operation and (b) based on the surviving raised sills, none of the replacement windows are the same size as the originals (see following photographs).

Finally, the majority of the window openings on the south and east elevations have been blocked up and plastered over. One could not reinstate the original windows without significant guesswork- as well as reconfiguring the existing apartment interiors.

III. Loss of Typological Clarity

The majority of buildings built in the Flamingo Park district in the 1920s were residences as opposed to the apartment buildings that now predominate (see below). In that era, it was a very popular site strategy to bias the primary dwelling to one side of the lot to allow for automobile access to the rear of the site and the garage. The Sanborn map below is from 1921 and illustrates this popular typology. As the Maps include the word “A” or “Auto” one can reasonably assume that the rear buildings were identifiable as garages thereby creating an identifiable site typology between street, dwelling, and garage. Although many of these garages still exist and are recognizable as garages, thereby maintaining this typology, the garage building at 622 15<sup>th</sup> Street does not. As previously described, it’s loss of identity as a garage has erased this historic typology from the site.



In conclusion, it is our belief that the garage structure does not meet the criteria for “contributing” because there are no existing plans for the original structure and therefore;

- a. The original building footprint cannot be established
- b. there have been significant additions and alterations.
- c. Additions cannot be accurately segregated from original structure.
- d. Alterations to all window and door types and sizes- like removal of the garage door(s)- make restoring the true character of the building impossible as significant architectural elements, although perhaps repairable, are unidentifiable.
- e. The blocking up and plastering over the majority of the south and east facing windows makes sizes, types, divisions, and locations unknowable.
- f. The resulting loss of a coherent site typology has radically altered the historic legibility of the site.

*End*

Respectfully Submitted by:

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Neal R. Deputy Architect

Florida RA #0015514

## Existing Garage Building Photos



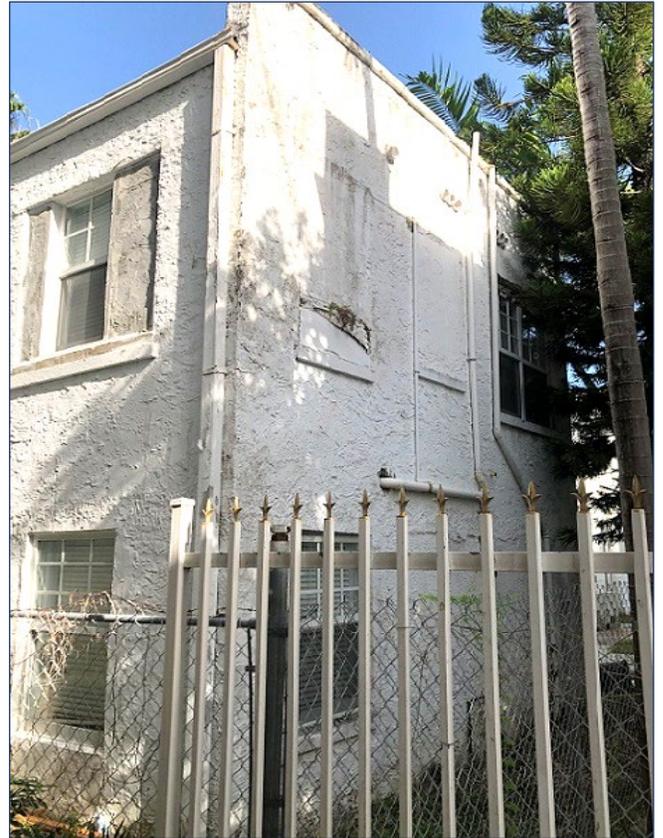
Northwest corner showing primary elevation and largely undocumented later additions. Note height and proximity of 641 Espanola Way.



Southwest corner showing general decay and various styles and sizes of replacement windows.



View from site interior showing “ghosts” of previous openings and general visibility.



Southeast Corner illustrating an illegible mishmash of window & door reconfigurations.

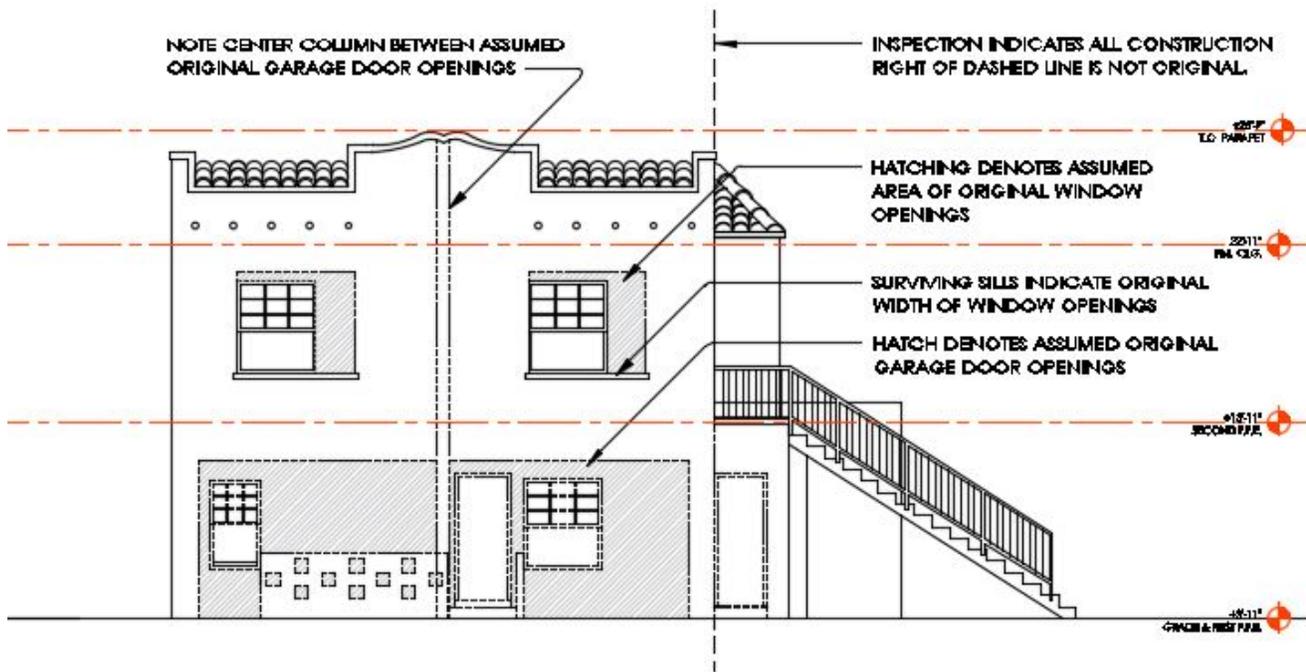
# Subject Building Elevation and Analysis



1  
LOI

EXISTING NORTH ELEVATION - GARAGE BUILDING

1/4" = 1'-0"



2  
LOI

EXISTING GARAGE BUILDING WITH HISTORIC ASSUMPTIONS

1/4" = 1'-0"