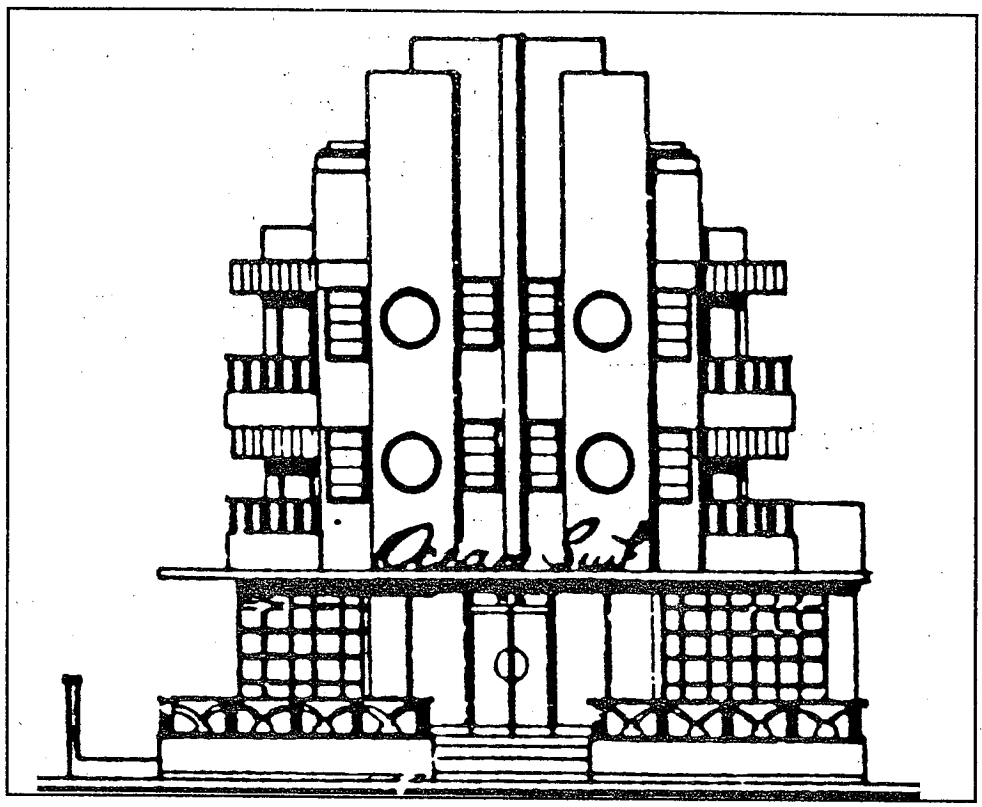
HARDING TOWNSITE/SOUTH ALTOS DEL MAR HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESIGNATION REPORT



Ocean Surf Hotel, 7436 Ocean Terrace, Designed by Anton Skislewicz, 1940
Illustration by Richard Rickles

Prepared By:
City of Miami Beach
Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division
1996

CITY OF MIAMI BEACH

HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION REPORT

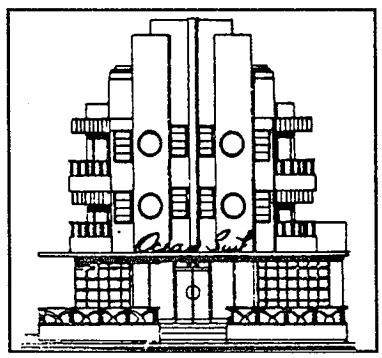
FOR

THE HARDING TOWNSITE/SOUTH ALTOS DEL MAR HISTORIC DISTRICT

Prepared by:

CITY OF MIAMI BEACH PLANNING, DESIGN AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

MAY 1996



Ocean Surf Hotel, 7436 Ocean Terrace, Designed by Anton Skislewicz, 1940
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PROPOSED HARDING TOWNSITE/SOUTH ALTOS DEL MAR HISTORIC DISTRICT

DESIGNATION REPORT

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I. REQUEST

At its April 13, 1995 meeting, the City of Miami Beach Historic Preservation Board noted the positive impact that historic preservation has had in the National Register Architectural ("Art Deco") District. The Board further noted the important role that historic preservation could play in stimulating and enhancing similar economic and community development activity in the City's historic northern commercial, resort, and residential districts while preserving the special character of those areas. Citing the success of the locally designated Ocean Drive/Collins Avenue Historic District and recognizing the many architectural parallels with Ocean Terrace and Collins Avenue north of 72nd Street, the members of the Board expressed concern over the loss of historically significant structures and sites in that northern area of the city. Accordingly, the Board directed the staff of the Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division to prepare a preliminary evaluation and recommendation relative to the creation of a new northern Miami Beach historic district.

At its meeting on May 11, 1995, the Historic Preservation Board reviewed the preliminary evaluation and recommendation prepared by staff and found that the structures and sites located along Ocean Terrace and Collins Avenue, between 73rd and 75th Street, met the designation criteria listed in Section 19-5 of Zoning Ordinance No. 89-2665. The Board further noted the clear significance of the original southern Altos Del Mar residential lots and grid plan between 75th and 77th Street to the successful early development and defining character of northern Miami Beach, and observed with regret that this area had not been included within the boundaries of the local Altos Del Mar Historic District when designated in 1987.

Accordingly, the Board directed the staff to prepare a designation report relative to the creation of a new northern Miami Beach historic district generally in the area of the eastern portion of Harding Townsite (named after its initiator in 1921, President Warren Harding), along Ocean Terrace and Collins Avenue north of 73rd Street, and directed staff to advise if the original street grid, residential lots and single family structures of south Altos Del Mar along Collins Avenue and Atlantic Way, between 75th and 77th Street, should be included as part of the proposed historic district. The Board noted in particular, that historic designation of the south Altos Del Mar area may be essential to preserving the historically significant and unique single family residential character of the neighborhood north of 75th Street as well as the historically open public access corridors to the beach provided by the original street grid. The Board, indeed, noted that the public's understanding of the early development of northern Miami Beach would clearly benefit if the northern boundary of the proposed district was made co-terminus with the southern boundary of the existing Altos Del Mar Historic District, thus eliminating a historically inaccurate and confusing physical separation of the two areas.

At its May 9, 1996 meeting, the Historic Preservation Board directed the staff to schedule and publicly notice a June 1996 public hearing to consider and vote on the proposed designation of the

Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District.

II. DESIGNATION PROCESS

The process of historic designation is delineated in Section 19-5 of the Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance. An outline of this process is provided below:

Step One: A request for designation is made either by the City Commission, Historic Preservation Board, other agencies and organizations as listed in the Ordinance, or the property owners involved. Proposals for designation shall include a completed application form available from the Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division.

Step Two: The Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division prepares a preliminary review and recommendation for consideration by the Board.

Step Three: The Historic Preservation Board considers preliminary evaluation to determine if proceeding with a designation report is warranted.

The designation report is a historical and architectural analysis of the proposed district or site. The report:

1) describes the historic, architectural and/or archeological significance of the property or subject area proposed for Historical Site or District designation;

2) recommends Evaluation Guidelines to be used by the Board to evaluate the appropriateness and compatibility of proposed Developments affecting the designated Site or district; and

3) will serve as an attachment to the Zoning Ordinance.

Step Four: The designation report is presented to the Board at a public hearing. If the Board determines that the proposed district satisfies the requirements for designation as set forth in the ordinance, the Board

transmits a recommendation in favor of designation to the Planning Board and City Commission.

Step Five: The Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the proposed designation, and shall consider the proposed historic designation as an amendment to the zoning ordinance amendment and, subsequently, transmit its recommendation to the City Commission.

Step Six: The City Commission may, after two (2) public hearings, adopt an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance which thereby designates the Historic Preservation Site or Historic District.

III. RELATION TO ORDINANCE CRITERIA

In accordance with Section 19-5(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, eligibility for designation is determined on the basis of compliance with listed criteria set forth below.

1. The Historic Preservation Board shall have the authority to recommend that properties be designated as Historic Buildings, Historic Structures, Historic Improvements, Historic Landscape Features, Historic Interiors (architecturally significant public portions only), Historic Sites or Historic Districts if they are significant in the historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic or archeological heritage of the City of Miami Beach, the county, state or nation. Such properties shall possess an integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association and meet at least one (1) of the following criteria:

    a. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of Miami Beach, the county, state or nation;

    b. Association with the lives of Persons significant in our past history;

    c. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction;

    d. Possesses high artistic values;

    e. Represent the work of a master; Serve as an outstanding or representative work of a master designer, architect or builder

who contributed to our historical, aesthetic or architectural heritage;

f. Have yielded, or are likely to yield information important in pre-history or history;

g. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

h. Consist of a geographically definable area that possesses a significant concentration of Sites, Buildings or Structures united by historically significant past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development, whose components may lack individual distinction.

2. A Building, Structure (including the public portions of the interior), Improvement or Landscape Feature may be designated historic even if it has been altered if the alteration is reversible and the most significant architectural elements are intact and repairable.

The proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District is eligible for designation as it complies with the criteria as outlined above.

1. Staff finds the proposed district to be in conformance with designation criteria as specified in section 19.5 of the Zoning Ordinance for the following reasons:

   A. <u>Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of Miami Beach, the County, state or nation:</u>

   The proposed district represents the first inhabited settlement on Miami Beach, the result of an 1875 Federal mandate for a manned Life Saving Station on what today consists of Harding Townsite and part of the Altos Del Mar Subdivision. It is also the site of the first platted subdivision on north Miami Beach, known as the Altos Del Mar Subdivision, platted in 1919. Because of the role the site played in matters of United States national maritime safety and law enforcement, as well as its pivotal role in the development of the northern confines of the City of Miami Beach, Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar significantly contributes to the history of the development of the City.

B. Association with the lives of Persons significant in our past history:

Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar is associated with three United States Presidents: Ulysses S. Grant, whose mandate founded the coastal Life Saving Station Reservation in 1875; Warren Harding, whose mandate returned much of the life saving station to the public domain and advanced the development of north Miami Beach through the townsite known as Harding Townsite, platted in 1922; and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who signed the Congressional mandate of 1941 releasing the southern part of the reservation to the City of Miami for public domain use as a recreational park. In addition, the proposed district is directly associated with three of the most important real estate developers in the history of Miami Beach, brothers Smiley, Bethel and Johnson Tatum, prolific and highly prominent developers in the Miami area and its southern environs, and with the ensuing Altos Del Mar Subdivisions #1 through #6 played a major role in the development of North Beach.

C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction:

The proposed district contains an array of architectural styles, including a number of significant Art Deco and Post World War II architectural styles, plus many transitional styles (containing elements of two or more styles). These styles collectively trace the historical progression of architectural design and construction in northern Miami Beach from the Mediterranean-Art Deco Transitional Style and Art Deco through the Post-World War II Era, and includes excellent examples of 1950's and early 1960's design.

D. Possess high artistic values:

The Art Deco and Post-World War II buildings within the proposed historic district possess artistic value in exterior building design, detail, ornamentation, interior design, and site features. Special materials and architectural features found in the proposed district include patterned terrazzo floors, Keystone feature panels, Vitrolite, etched glass, glazed terra cotta tiling, and stainless steel detailing. Many of the buildings within Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar reflect not only the architectural trends of the 1930's, but also the changing tastes and economic affluence of the Post-World War II American vacationing public.

E. Represent the work of a master designer, architect or builder who contributed to historical, aesthetic or architectural heritage:

In the context of the proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District, the term "Master" shall relate to architects. Works by significant Miami Beach Architects Albert Anis, Harry O. Nelson, John and Coulton Skinner, V. H. Nellenbogen, Robert Collins and August Geiger (Carl Fisher's Architect) lie within the proposed district.

F. Have yielded, or are likely to yield information important in pre-history or history:

The proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District traces the earliest development of not only Miami Beach, but also the greater Miami area. The first structure on Miami Beach was the Federal Life Saving Station Reservation's Biscayne House of Refuge, built in 1875. It was the sole inhabited site on northern Miami Beach for over a quarter century and served national maritime and wartime safety interests until the time the Tatum Brothers initiated development of Altos Del Mar in 1919, one of the City's earliest platted developments that opened up development on North Beach.

G. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places:

There is currently no individually nor collectively designated site(s) or structure(s) listed in the National Register of Historic Places within the proposed boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District.

H. Consists of a geographically definable area that possesses a significant concentration of Sites, Buildings or Structures united by historically significant past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development, whose components may lack individual distinction:

The proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District consists of a geographically definable area which represents three unique and distinctly different land uses in the early development of north Miami Beach; 1) its first commercial/retail district; 2) its first oceanside hotel district; and 3) its first seaside single family residential district. Significant architectural examples of each still define the special low scale character of this community. Not every building in the historic district may possess a high level of architectural significance when viewed by itself, but when viewed together with its

neighboring buildings and open spaces, it reinforces the unified aesthetic image which defines this community's special, low scale historic urban character and clearly sets it apart from the high rise development immediately to its south.

2. Altered structures within the proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District Boundaries may be designated historic structures if alterations are readily reversible and/or significant architectural elements are intact and repairable. In addition, staff expands its findings to include buildings which are contributing, despite alterations, as important factors in maintaining the special character of the neighborhood.

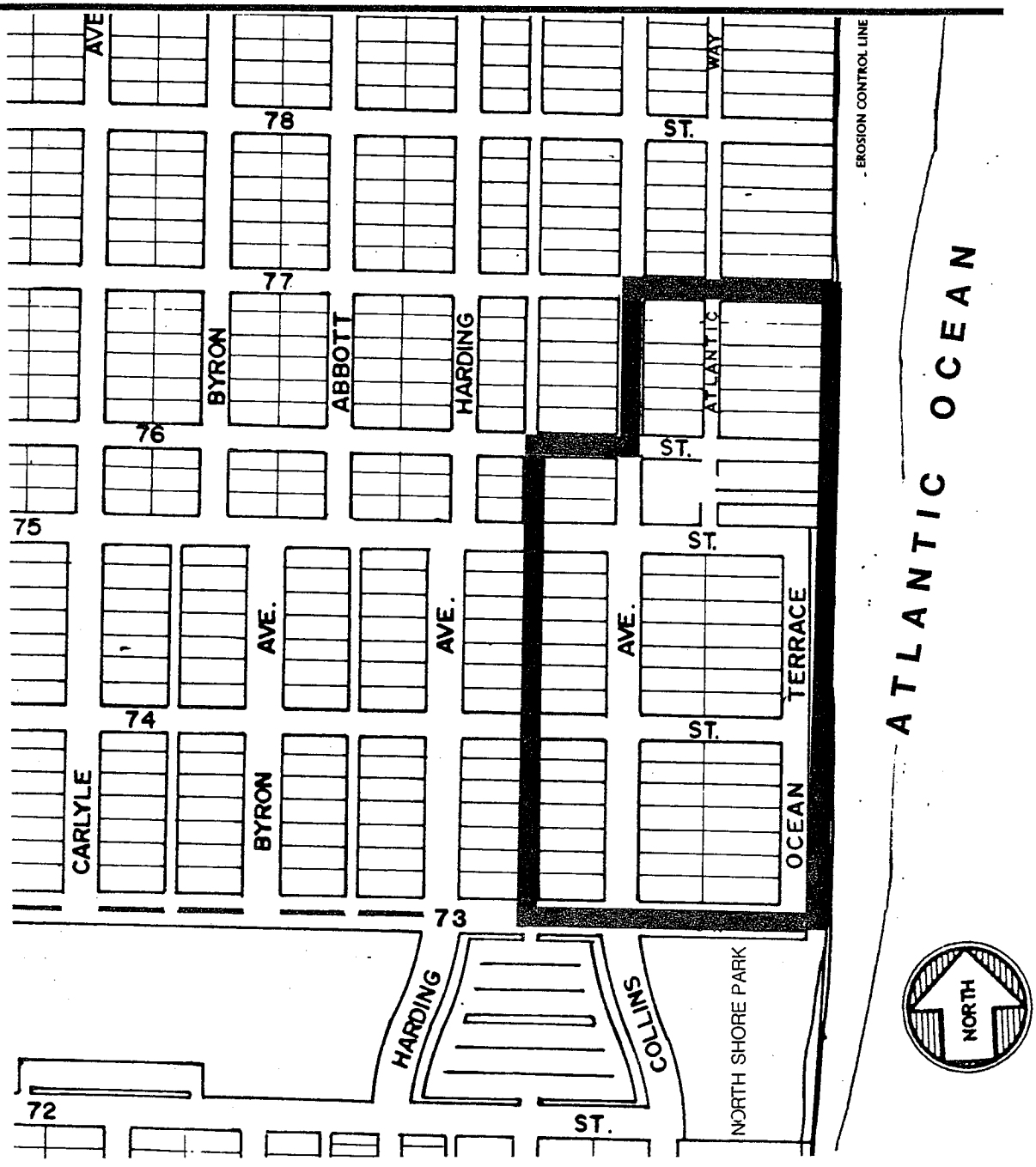
IV. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BOUNDARIES

The proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District includes parts of the original ten acre Atlantic Beachfront strip of the former Federal Life Saving Station which later became Harding Townsite as well as part of the initial Altos Del Mar Subdivision. The location of these boundaries has been determined through careful historical research and architectural investigation. The boundaries define a geographic area south of the North Shore Recreation Area which possess a significant concentration of buildings and sites representative of the earliest development on North Beach, exemplifying the said area's important role in United States national maritime safety activities as well as Pre War and Post War resort community development on Miami Beach. A detailed description of the proposed boundaries is as follows:

> The boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District commence at the intersection of the center line of Collins Court and the center line of 76th Street; thence run Easterly along the center line of 76th Street to the center line of Collins Avenue; thence run Northerly along the center line of Collins Avenue to the center line of 77th Street; thence run Easterly along the center line of 77th Street to the Erosion Control Line of the Atlantic Ocean; thence run Southerly along the Erosion Control Line of the Atlantic Ocean to the center line of 73rd Street; thence run Westerly along the center line of 73rd Street to the center line of Collins Court; thence run Northerly along the center line of Collins Court to the point of commencement, at the intersection of the center lines of Collins Court and 76th Street.

The northern boundary of the proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District is substantially co-terminus with the southern boundary of the existing Altos Del Mar Historic District.

The described boundaries, as recommended by the Planning Design and Historic Preservation Division, are shown on the following proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District Map (Map 1).



Map 1: **Proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District Boundaries as recommended by the City of Miami Beach Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division.**

V. PRESENT OWNERS

Multiple owners including private individuals and development corporations. A list generated from the 1994-1995 Dade County Tax Assessment Records is available from the City of Miami Beach Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division.

VI. PRESENT USE

The predominant current use is commercial, followed by hotel, parks and recreational, institutional and residential use.

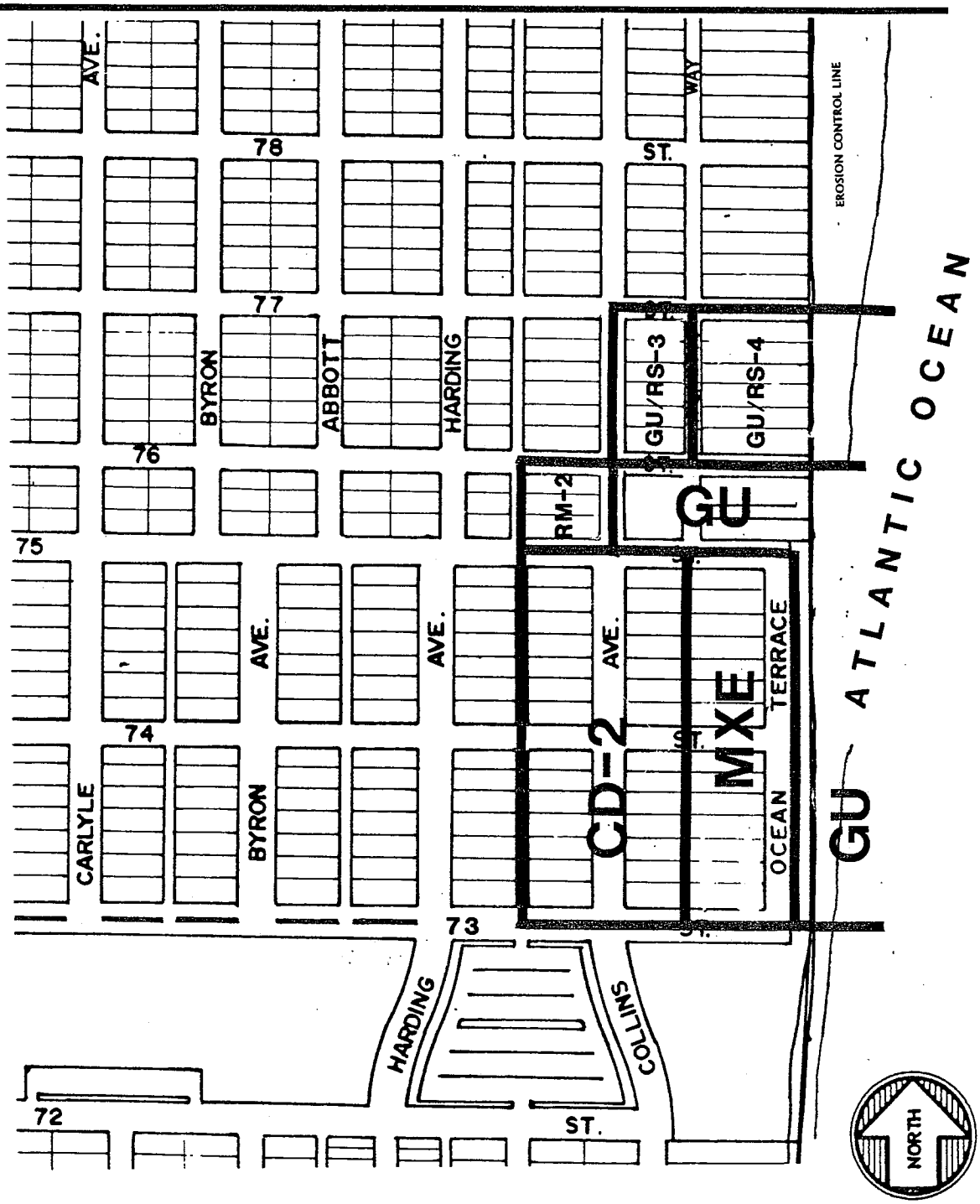
VII. PRESENT ZONING

The majority of the nominated district is zoned as commercial and mixed use entertainment. The proposed boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District also include within them single family residential and medium density multi-family residential zoning districts. Those sites which are owned by the City are zoned GU.

Established Zoning Districts within the proposed boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District are as follows:

CD-2	Commercial, Medium Intensity
GU	Government Use
MXE	Mixed Use Entertainment
RM-2	Residential Multi-Family, Medium Intensity
RS-3	Single Family Residential
RS-4	Single Family Residential

Please refer to the zoning map (Map 2) for further reference.



Map 2: **Zoning Districts within the boundaries of the proposed Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District.**

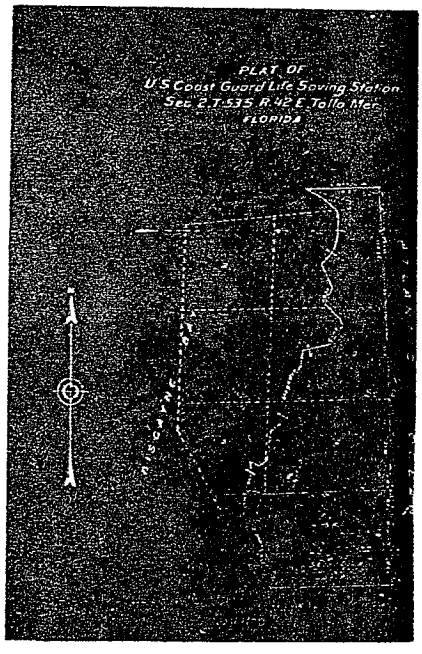
VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed district lies within the original U.S. Federal Life Saving Station Reservation, later platted as Harding Townsite and Coast Guard Station, and includes the southernmost lots of the initial Altos Del Mar Subdivision, platted in May, 1919 by the Tatum Brothers, prominent Miami developers who established the Tatum's Ocean Park Company for the purpose of developing Miami Beach's north shore.

The Harding Townsite area itself is truly unique in the history of Miami Beach in that its ultimate creation and development resulted from the direct involvement of three American presidents starting with its inception as a tract of land reserved for Life Saving purposes by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1875:

> Executive Order dated July 28, 1875, reserved for Life Saving purposes a ten acre strip of land along the east, or ocean, side of Lot 6, Section 2, Township 53 south, Range 42 east, Tallahassee Meridian, Florida. [1]

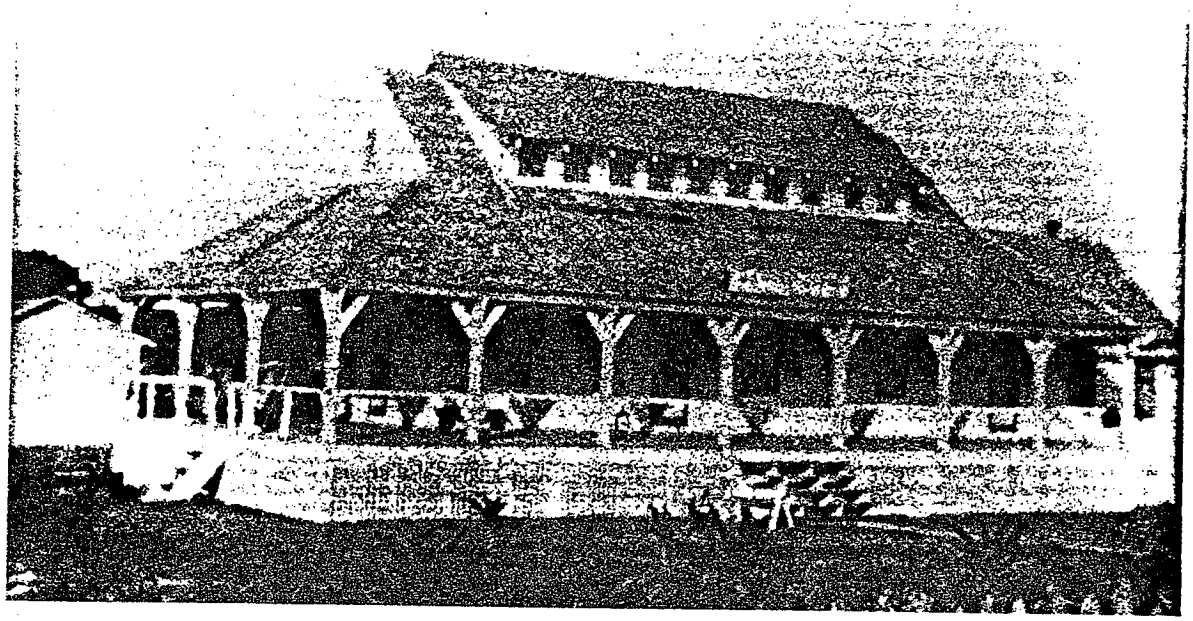
The Secretary of the Interior, by letter dated April 25, 1891, made a temporary reservation of the balance of the same Lot 6, pending the procurement of the proper description of the tract of land desired for use in connection with the Biscayne Bay House of Refuge.[2]



Original Plat of Federal Life Saving Station Reservation
Historical Museum of South Florida Archives

The Biscayne Bay House of Refuge was designated as Station 5, District 7, of the United States Federal Life Saving Service. According to the 1879 Annual Report of the Life Saving Service, these houses of refuge along the east coast of Florida "contemplate no other life saving operations than affording succor to shipwrecked persons who may be cast ashore, and who, in the absence of relief, would be liable to perish from hunger and thirst in that desolate region. Crews of surfmen are not needed here, but the keepers and members of their families are required to go along to the beach, in both directions, in search of castaways immediately after the storm."[3]

The House of Refuge was the sole structure on this reservation for almost fifty years. As the nation grew more prosperous and development on Miami Beach spread northward, the activities of the station's keepers had expanded to include more smuggler apprehension and monitoring other maritime activity in addition to life saving.



Biscayne Bay House of Refuge as it appeared circa 1921
City of Miami Beach Archives

By 1921, with the need for life saving stations lessened by the advent of modern navigational aids and a quickly developing inhabited Florida coastline, President Warren Harding restored a portion of the original Life Saving tract to the public domain for the creation of a new townsite. Executive Order No. 1589 dated March 11, 1921, reserved a strip of land 500 feet in width along the south side of Lot 6, and extending from the Atlantic Ocean to Biscayne Bay, for the Coast Guard, which had succeeded the Life Saving Service in 1915:

> "I do hereby release from withdrawal and restore to the public domain, subject to the public land laws of the United States and to the jurisdiction of the Interior Department, the balance of said land embraced within Lot 6, Section 2, Township 53 south, range 42 east, Tallahassee Meridian, Florida, outside of July 28, 1875 and April 6, 1891, which are in part hereby vacated."[4]

In 1922 the U.S. Department of the Interior surveyed and platted most of the land into 133 lots to be known as the Harding Townsite, named after its founder, President Harding. With land speculation in Miami Beach reaching a peak in 1924, the Department of the Interior auctioned off 128 of the lots at prices well above their appraised value. Infrastructure improvements passing through the Harding Townsite properties to subsequent developments to its west and north helped further development of the area. On January 12, 1926, permission was granted by the Coast Guard to the City of Miami Beach and to the Tatum Brothers developers to cross the reservation of the Biscayne Bay House of Refuge, still under federal jurisdiction, with underground service pipes for water, sewer, telephone, and electric conduits, under certain restrictions and with certain reservations.[5] The extension of these improvements helped propel the development of Altos Del Mar and other platted neighborhoods to the north of Harding Townsite.

In 1926 Miami Beach was devastated by a major hurricane, wreaking havoc on many of the beach's structures and fueling a temporary flurry of rebuilding afterwards. The damaged Biscayne House of Refuge was not rebuilt and was demolished in November of 1926.[6] It was less than a year later that the Coast Guard found the station site obsolete, given it's proximity to the booming nearby development of southern Miami Beach. On March 3, 1927, the last log states: "Owing to station being torn down and having no orders from [the] District Commander, log for this station being discontinued this date. /s/ Lawrence F. Tutew." [7]

Despite operations ceasing at the Biscayne House of Refuge Station, the Coast Guard, anticipating the potential use of the site as a result of improving aviation technology for rescue purposes, kept a position of maintaining ownership of the reservation. In May 1927, the Coast Guard advised Senator Fletchter of Florida in response to an inquiry about the site "that the Coast Guard has no present intention of abandoning the reservation and recommending its restoration to the Public Domain." [8]

With the Coast Guard's Harding Townsite property sitting idle, strewn with overgrown vegetation and debris, many in the community appealed to the Coast Guard to donate the land to the public domain. An intensive effort arose by the City of Miami and the City of Miami Beach to acquire the former life saving station property for a park. In May 1928 the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce advised the Commandant of the Coast Guard that it was endeavoring to work out a plan by which the now 22 acres of land owned by the Coast Guard could be utilized and asked if it would be satisfactory if a station be built on the first half of the ocean side, leaving the other half for ocean bathing.[9] He received the same reply given to Senator Fletcher a year earlier: that the Coast Guard had no intention of abandoning the reservation.[10]

On March 21, 1929, the persistent Miami Chamber of Commerce addressed Mrs. Ruth Bryan Owen, U.S. House Representative for Florida, as follows:

> "Now that we have had a change in administration, we again desire to take up the matter of securing the 22 acres formerly used as a Coast Guard Life Saving Station, located at the northern limits of Miami Beach, for a park for the people of Dade County."[11]

On March 28, 1929, the Miami Chamber of Commerce wrote the Coast Guard Commandant again requesting the use of the reservation as a park. Referred to Commander Section Six Base at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, that officer replied:

> "In view of the growth of the City of Miami and the increase in property values in this location, it is suggested that the strip of land owned by the Government is of considerable value. Personally, the Commander Section Base Six would not recommend the reestablishment of the House of Refuge on the present property . . . [and] there is no present intention of the Coast Guard abandoning the reservation or recommending its restoration to the public domain."[12]

The Miami Chamber of Commerce was not to be easily gainsaid. On April 8, 1929, the Chamber wrote the Acting Commandant, describing the reservation, "As it now stands, millionaires homes are approaching it on both sides and it is an unkempt and unsightly plot of land standing directly in the path of progress north and south."[13] The Coast Guard promised to look into the matter of cleaning up the plot.[14]

The pressure continued. On September 20, 1929, the Boy Scouts of America, Dade County Council, sought to lease the reservation at $1.00 per year but again received the same answer. Real estate men applied through their Senators. Their answer was the same.[15]

It was on January 30, 1931, that a memo appears in the file regarding one of these proposals:

> "It is my personal opinion that in view of the development of aviation in the Coast Guard, this piece of property should be retained by the Coast Guard for the purpose of a landing field, which in my opinion, will be required by the Coast Guard within the next few years."[16]

The Coast Guard Air Station, however, was subsequently established at Dinner Key, in Coconut Grove.

The onset of the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression may have slowed development on Miami Beach, but it certainly did not quell the desire of Miami area residents to acquire the vacant Coast Guard property for public domain use. On December 2, 1931, the Solicitor of the Interior Department finally wrote the Honorable Ruth Bryan Owen,

Representative from Florida, enclosing an opinion of one of his attorneys "that the head of the department controlling the reservation may permit the use of such reserved lands so long as that use does not create rights not revocable should the public interest require that the premises be recaptured."[17] As the reservation was under the Treasury and not the Department of the Interior, however, he advised the Congresswoman to take the matter up with that Department. Mrs. Owen wrote the Secretary of the Treasury about this and he referred the matter to the Solicitor of the Treasury, asking whether action by Congress would be necessary to lease the land for park purposes. The solicitor replied "in the absence of a showing that any benefit will accrue to the Government by the granting of a revocable license in this case it is my opinion that the Secretary lacks authority to grant such a license."[18]

On January 2, 1932, the Commandant wrote Mr. Maxam, Coast Guard Chief of Operations:

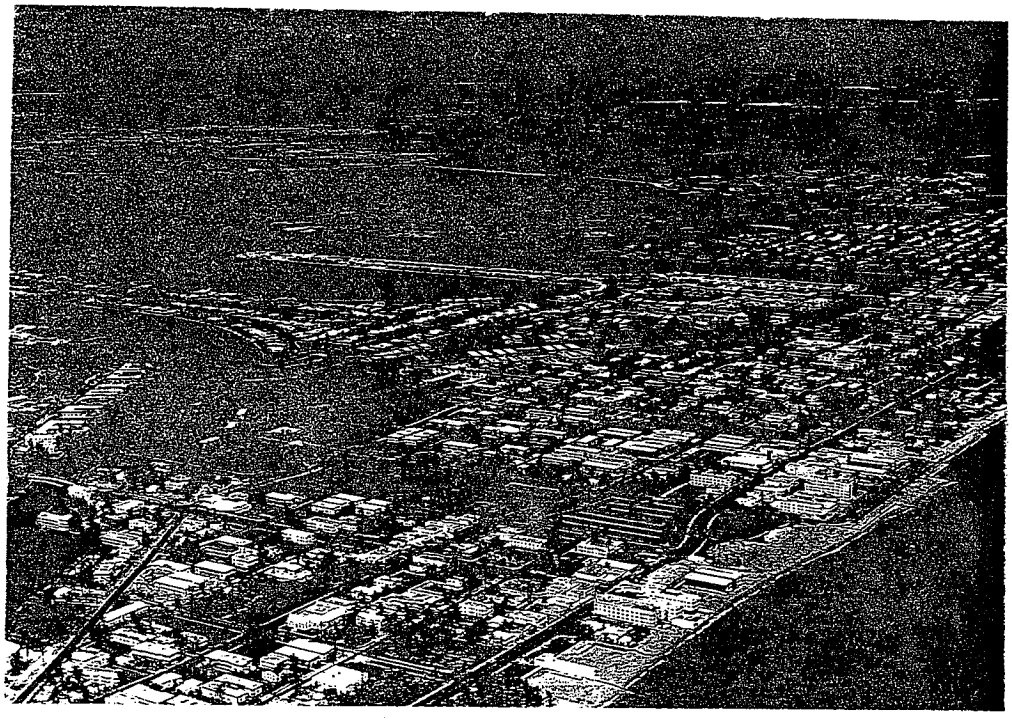
> "I am fed up with this problem and am sure that pressure will continue to make us grant the request. As a matter of fact, our case is not particularly strong because, of course, we are not actually using the property, and I see no immediate prospects of our having use for it. In the meant time I presume it is overgrown with weeds and brush, and it will be a constant expense and trouble to clean it up. I saw Assistant Secretary Lowman and told him I decided that we would not object to a proper revocable license if the same can be granted."[19]

The House of Refuge site was finally, in 1941, by authority of Congress, exchanged for a site on Causeway Island, in Biscayne Bay, for the use of the Coast Guard.[20] Ironically, because the original Life Saving Station Reservation charter of 1875 prohibited the sale of any portion of the Reserve, Congress, in 1941, had to grant the land to a local land reclamation contractor, the Paul Smith Construction Company, in exchange for creating the site for a new Coast Guard station on Causeway Island. The contractor was then able to sell the exchanged land in north Miami Beach to the City of Miami Beach for a public park. However, the park license was granted to the City of Miami and subsequently had to be sold to the City of Miami Beach.[21] As of 1941 control of the property was under the auspices of the City of Miami Beach.

In the late 1930s, the effects of the Depression trickled down to Miami Beach. Many of the financially strapped Harding Townsite lot owners sought Congressional relief, contending that the prices they had paid for their lands in 1924 were unreasonably inflated. Congress agreed, passing bills in both the House and the Senate dispensing the obligations of many of the buyers. President Franklin Roosevelt did not agree with the proposed bail out, and vetoed the bills on March 15, 1940.[22] Remarkably, despite President Roosevelt's veto and possibly as a result of it, development proceeded at a brisk pace following World War II. Post War prosperity brought non-stop development to North Beach. By 1954 Harding Townsite was nearly completely developed.

The townsite evolved true to its name, creating a low scale multi-family residential district to the

west, and a compact commercial/recreational district to the east. Both districts complimented and served the commercial needs of surrounding developments quite well, including the Tatum Brothers' residential development of Altos Del Mar, just to the north of Harding Townsite. The eastern district was replete with banks, shops, theaters, restaurants, and Art Deco influenced oceanside hotels akin to those on popular Ocean Drive on South Beach. Master architects such as Albert Anis, Harry O. Nelson, John and Coulton Skinner, V.H. Nellenbogen, Robert Collins and August Geiger, all known for their outstanding works in south Miami Beach, joined in the designing of the townsite's commercial structures and hotels between 1938 and 1954. Their buildings epitomized the late Art Deco through Post World War II Modern period in Miami Beach.



The area known as Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar as seen from the air in 1951
Historical Museum of South Florida Archives

The Harding Townsite commercial/recreational district contained all of the amenities of a small town, servicing the desires and needs of local residents and seaside tourists alike. Today, much of the architecture remains, albeit sometimes under later cosmetic layers still waiting to be pealed away. The unique compactness and charming scale of this pleasant oceanside district, however, still remains very much intact.

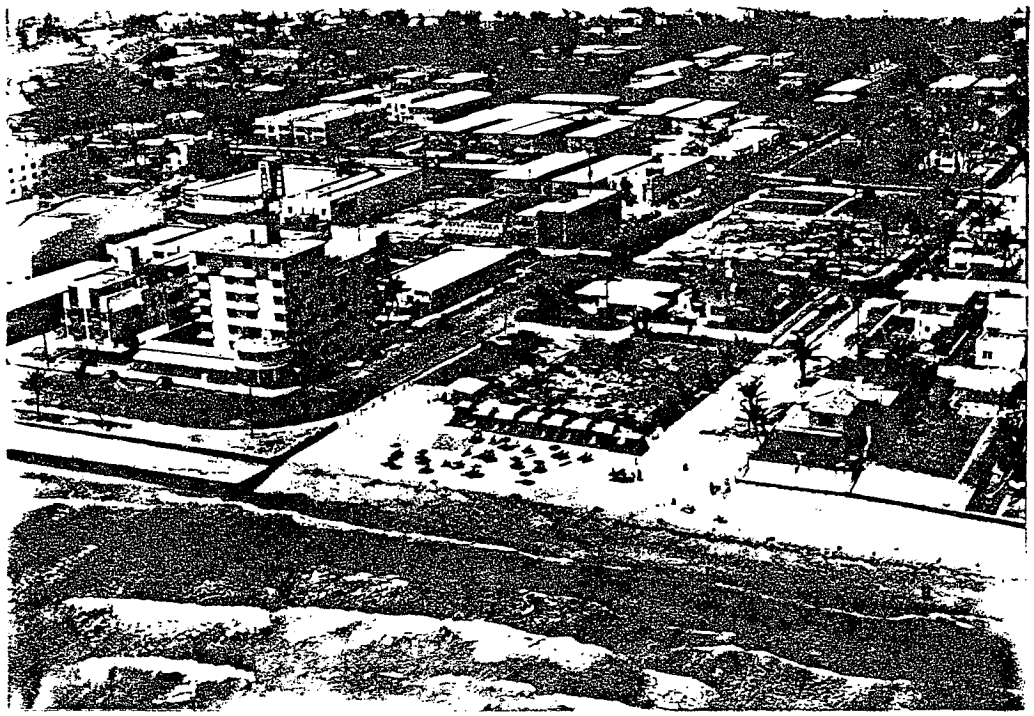
The Altos Del Mar subdivision arose just north of the platted Harding Townsite and incorporated parts of the original Federal Life Saving Station reservation. Altos Del Mar was developed by the Tatum Brothers, Smiley, Bethel and Johnson.

The Tatum brothers came to Miami at the turn of the century, and over the next several years filed plans for large subdivisions all over Dade County.[23] The Tatum Brothers were particularly known for the early efforts involving dredging and development of Everglades swampland and their accompanying promotional activities. For example, they filed a plan in 1911 for a large settlement called "Detroit," carved from 22,000 acres of swampland purchased from the State. Although a canal was cut to drain the seasonally inundated land, ten acre parcels were offered for sale long before they were ready for development. Originally called "New Detroit," the name arose from the site of one of the earliest Florida land sale promotions, conducted by the Tatum Brothers sales representative Edward Stiling in Detroit, Michigan. The successful sales campaign attracted thirty families to settle in "Detroit," which new citizens voted to name Florida City when it was incorporated in 1914. This eagerness for sales exhibited by the newly formed company gave way in later years to a more restrained approach befitting the successful image of the then established company, as the Tatums apparently eschewed the promotional gimmicks employed by others less financially secure. A 1924 newspaper advertisement noted of the Tatum brothers that "while we do not run boat or sight-seeing trips, our salesmen will gladly show you the properties on any week day,"[24] and challenged investors to "compare [Altos Del Mar] with any others and see why Tatum properties are BOUGHT, not sold."[25] The Tatum Brothers also enjoyed a fine reputation as developers of the Lawrence Park Subdivision, one of Miami's most popular residential neighborhoods platted in 1912. Thus it is with an established reputation for both land sales an promotion that the Tatums sought to develop the North Shore, eventually coming to dominate the area's development and establishing standards by which future subdivisions would be judged.

Altos Del Mar, or Highlands of the Sea, was a very early attempt at residential subdivision on Miami Beach, and is particularly important for the role it played in opening up the City's North Shore and its environs to development. The original Altos Del Mar subdivision ran from 75th Street to 83rd Street and included both sides of Collins Avenue. The main focus of the neighborhood, however, was the newly created Airoso Way, running between Collins Avenue and the beach, creating 250' deep oceanfront lots, and 125' lots between Airoso Way and Collins Avenue to the west. The aptly named Airoso Way--Spanish for breezy, was changed to Atlantic Way in 1929. Similarly, the east-west cross streets lost their romantic floral names to the more uniform numbered streets.

The Tatum Brothers followed up the initial Altos Del Mar Subdivision with Altos Del Mar No.2 (1919), No. 3(1923), No. 4(1925), No. 5(1923) and No.6 (1924), eventually being responsible for the subdivision and platting of virtually the entire area between 75th Street in Miami Beach

and the northern Dade County line. Included, in addition to a significant portion of Miami Beach's North Shore, was most of the present day towns of Surfside, Bal Harbor Village, Sunny Isles and Golden Beach. The original Altos Del Mar subdivision produced the seed around which the North Shore would develop, as others soon followed the Tatum Brothers lead and, based on the success of the pioneer subdivision, filed plats of their own. The Tatum's eventually completed their development of the area after the close of WWII when they filed the Tatum Waterway Subdivision in 1946.



The southern lots of the Altos Del Mar Subdivision start at 75th Street and are coterminous with the northern parts of Harding Townsite, as seen in this 1951 photograph. Notice the transition from the mostly hotel and commercial Harding Townsite to the more residential southern lots of the Altos Del Mar Subdivision.

Historical Museum of South Florida Archives

Platted in 1919, the initial success of the Altos Del Mar subdivision was limited to land sales, as the neighborhood did not see the construction of its first home until six years later in 1925. in construction can probably be best explained by the subdivision's isolated location at orthern reaches of the City's limits. Land sales, however, experienced no such lag, as el Mar and each ensuing development of the Tatums Ocean Park Company was an te and unqualified success, and properties exchanged hands at a rapid pace. The Tatum

No! It became part of Miami Beach in July 1924, when the city limits were moved to 87th Terrace (from 46th st.)! - CK

Brothers Company (realtors) was established in 1883 to handle sales in the developers' subdivisions, with a main office in downtown Miami and a Beach office at the corner of 5th Street and Meridian Avenue. The 1924-1925 issue of the Miami Beach City Directory notes "we [Tatums] handle everything in real estate"[26] and procalimed "our specialty, Miami Beach Lots."[27] The Tatums did not, however, maintain an exclusive right to sales, and a 1923 real estate column notes sales of five lots in the Altos Del Mar Subdivision by B.E. Rainey from his office at 213 5th Street noted that "Mr. Rainey is looking for a big season."[28]

Initially at least, the subdivisions of Altos Del Mar seemed created more for investors than for homeowners, and it is "investment opportunities"[29] and "the ready resale of Tatum Properties"[30] which were stressed over other features such as price, climate or location. Advertisements boasted "We have made tremendous profits for all our buyers"[31] and warned potential buyers of Altos Del Mar lots, "Don't wait until they are gone."[32] For those unfamiliar with the Tatum Brothers reputation, it was noted that references could be obtained from "any bank or individual."[33]

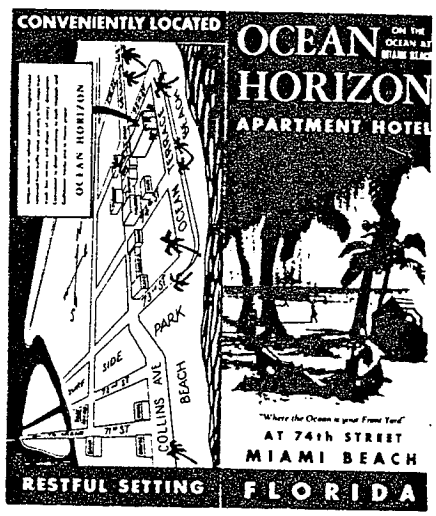
A 1924 newspaper advertisement for Altos Del Mar No. 6 boasted "Several investors in No. 5 made one hundred percent profit on their investment in 30 days"[34] and noted that "No building lots ever placed on the market in either Miami or Miami Beach have made such phenomenal records for quick and unusual profits as have...Altos Del Mar Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5."[35] The ad went on to note that the No. 6 Subdivision, just six weeks old at the time, was already 70% sold."[36]

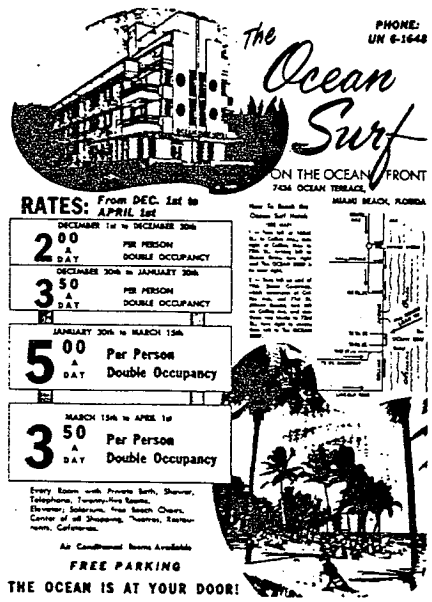
IX. ARCHITECTURAL BACKGROUND

An analysis of the area within the proposed boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District illustrates a continuous development of modern architectural styles built up over time. There is an especially significant concentration of Post-World War II architectural styles along Ocean Terrace and Collins Avenue. A visual cohesiveness showing the logical progression of architectural styles in the area exists, as well as does a unique display of how the changing tastes and prosperity levels of the vacationing American middle class affected materials used in resort architecture in the mid-Twentieth Century.

Inventory of Architectural Styles in the Proposed District

Mediterranean Revival-Art Deco Transitional (late 1920's-mid 1930's)	1
Art Deco (1930s-early 1940's)	7
Moderne (1930s-1940s)	1
Post World War II Transitional Art Deco (ca. post-WWII-1960)	11
Post World War II Modern (ca. post WWII-1965)	5
Garden Style (1940s-1965)	1

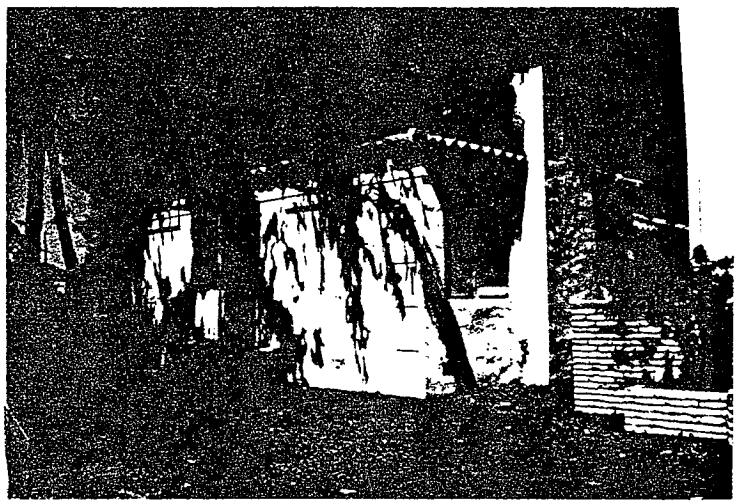




Advertisements such as these promoted Ocean Terrace in Harding Townsite as a secluded and modern Post-War tropical resort.

Historical Museum of South Florida Archives & Ocean Surf Hotel Corporation

Mediterranean Revival - Art Deco Transitional ("Med-Deco")
(ca. late 1920s - mid 1930s)



7609 Collins Avenue

"Med-Deco" was a synthesis of Mediterranean Revival form and Art Deco decorative detail throughout Miami Beach. This unique hybrid style became a fascinating bridge between the "familiar" and the "new" as the allure of Art Deco found its way into the Beach's architectural vocabulary. Clean ziggurat roof lines and crisp geometric detailing replaced scrolled parapets, bracketed cornices and Classical features on structures of clear Mediterranean Revival form. Likewise, sloped barrel tile roofs rested gracefully on edifices with spectacular Art Deco entrances and facade treatments.

Some of the most celebrated architects in Miami Beach designed structures in this brief-lived style, including V. H. Nellenbogen, Henry Hohauser and T. Hunter Henderson.

The predominant exterior material of Med-Deco was smooth stucco with raised or incised details. Featured stucco areas were often patterned or scored. Keystone, either natural or filled and colored, was frequently used to define special elements. Windows ranged from wood and steel casement to wood double hung.

Remaining Examples of "contributing structures" in this style include:

Collins Avenue no. 7609

Art Deco Style

ca. late 1930s - early 1940's

7436 Ocean Terrace--Ocean Surf Hotel

Art Deco is considered one of the first twentieth century architectural styles in America to break with traditional revival forms. It emanated largely from the impact of the 1925 Paris *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes,* a design fair celebrating the reconciliation between the decorative arts and advancements in technology and industry.[37] Architects searching for design "purity" became eager to explore new possibilities afforded by the rapidly evolving Machine Age.[38] An architectural style unfolded which looked to both the past and the future for its design inspiration.

Building forms in the Art Deco style were typically angular and clean, with stepped back facades, symmetrical or asymmetrical massing and strong vertical accenting. The preferred decorative language included geometric patterns, abstracted natural forms, modern industrial symbols and ancient cultural motifs employing Mayan, Egyptian and Indigenous American themes.

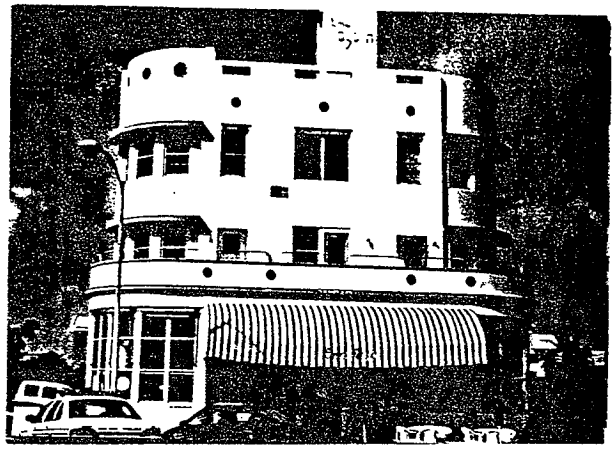
In Harding Townsite and its immediate environs a unique form of Art Deco employed nautical themes. Ocean liners and numerous related elements graced the exteriors and interiors of the new local architecture. The favored materials for executing this distinctive "art" decor included keystone, etched glass, a variety of metals, cast concrete, patterned terrazzo, and others. Today this distinctive design vocabulary, which further incorporated glass block, vitrolite and stunning painted wall murals, has become the hallmark of Miami Beach's internationally recognized Art Deco gems.

Remaining Examples of "contributing structures" in this style:

Ocean Terrace	no.	7436, 7450
Collins Avenue	nos.	7326, 7341-53, 7401-7409, 7418-7422, 7425-7427, 7611

Moderne Style (aka "Streamline" Moderne)

ca. 1930s-1940s



7300 Ocean Terrace--Olsen Hotel

As "Art Deco" evolved on the Beach in the 1930's, modern transportation and industrial design began to have an even greater impact upon new construction. The "streamlined" character of automobiles, airplanes, trains, buses, liners and even home appliances inspired powerful horizontal design compositions, accentuated by striking vertical features and punctuated by icons of the technological era. Continuous "eyebrows", racing stripe banding, radio tower-like spires, portholes, and deck railings like those found on grand ocean liners, were among the unique features to set this architecture apart from anything before it. The creative incorporation of nautical themes showed this form of Art Deco to be true to its origins in Ocean Beach.

Smooth, rounded corners often replaced sharp ones on Moderne buildings, especially on corner lots. "Eyebrows" swept around them as did other details. Street corners became inviting architectural focal points, whether the special treatment employed was based upon curves or angles.

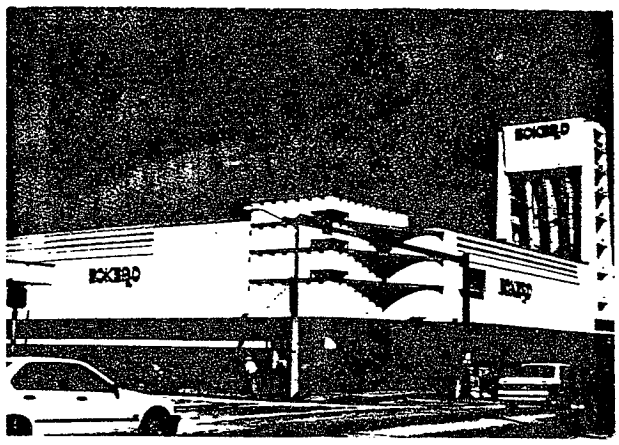
Like earlier Art Deco buildings, the Moderne style incorporated smooth and articulated stucco, architectural glass block, keystone and a variety of metals used in detailing. Predominating surfaces became smooth, planer and aerodynamic in character.

Remaining Examples of "contributing structures" in this style:

Ocean Terrace	no.	7300
Collins Avenue	nos.	7401, 7433

Post World War II Transitional Art Deco (aka Post War Deco)

ca. post World War II - 1960



7410 Collins Avenue--Food Fair Building (now Eckerd's)

Post War Deco drew significantly from the form and decorative vocabulary of both early Art Deco in Miami Beach and Moderne. Although single block massing was predominant the emphasis could be placed on either horizontal or vertical composition, dependent upon the size of the structure, the character of the site, and the will of the architect. Frequently, continuous eyebrows would be extended to form side or front canopies, either cantilevered or supported on their furthest edge by columns. New decorative materials were introduced which reflected changing tastes nationally, including brick, permastone, and cast architectural block in a variety of "open" patterns. The latter was particularly favored for rails and screen walls. Although steel casement windows were predominant, aluminum "awning" type windows began to appear later. Many of these delightful structures in Harding Townsite paid wonderful tribute to their architectural origins while effectively addressing changing times.

Remaining examples of "contributing structures" in this style include:

Ocean Terrace	nos.	7420, 7430
Collins Avenue	nos.	7246, 7309-7311, 7325, 7335, 7410, 7440, 7450-7452, 7605
Atlantic Way	no.	7601

Post World War II Modern Style (aka Post War Modern)

ca. post World War II - 1965

7400 Ocean Terrace--Ocean Front Apartments

The Post War Modern style in Harding Townsite exhibited many elements of its companion style of the period, Post War Deco, but clearly established a path of its own in terms of modern functional simplicity. Essentially the strong design personality of Art Deco, as it evolved over two decades on the Beach, significantly gave way to the dictates of function in the Post War Modern seaside resort architecture.

Floor plans were commonly reorganized from interior double loaded corridors to "open air" verandas on one side or more. Single block massing remained a dominant characteristic but new functional exterior elements profoundly impacted on design. Overhanging roof plates and projecting floor slabs became typical of the new "style" along with paired or clustered pipe columns to support them. Symmetrical staircases became significant exterior design features.

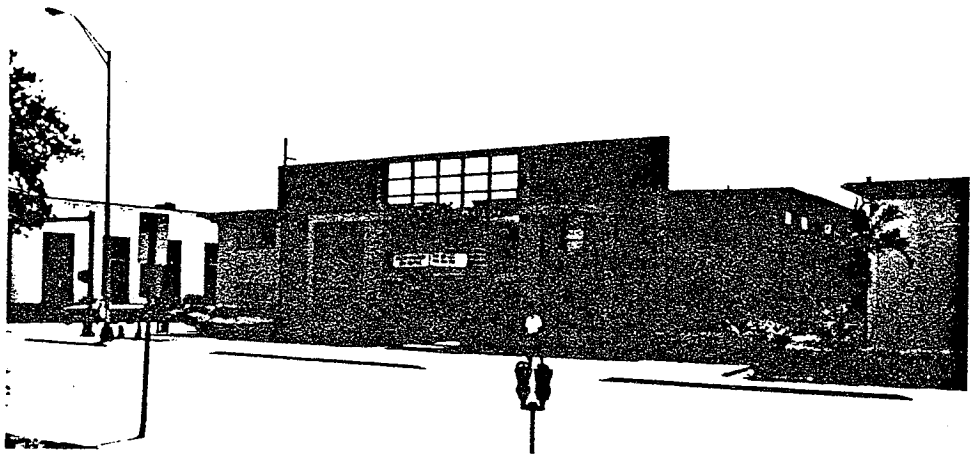
Additional design elements and materials were added to the architectural vocabulary, including rounded eaves, rock face feature areas, cast concrete decorative panels, and applied masonry elements denoting marine and nautical themes, such as seahorses and anchors.

Remaining Examples of "contributing structures" in this style:

Ocean Terrace	no.	7400, 7410
Collins Avenue	nos.	7409, 7417-7423, 7443

The Garden Style

ca. late 1940s - mid 1960s



7500 Collins Avenue--Pompeii Apartments

The primary defining characteristic of the Garden Style in Harding Townsite is that the entryway and public walkways are placed on the exterior, where they are open to the natural elements and surround a common outdoor area. A front entry leads to an open symmetrical staircase, ascending to the upper level(s). The roof usually overhangs open walkways below and may conclude in a rounded eave characteristic of late 1950s modern architecture in Miami Beach.[39]

Architectural ornamentation is generally modest and minimal in the Garden Style, normally consisting of cantilevered balconies with ornamental pierced block railings, and sometimes exuberantly detailed wrought iron rails on stairs and along open walkways. Occasionally a grand gabled roof visually rests on broad engaged pilasters.

In providing a large central open entry and situating the apartment units facing inward on a common open area, this important modern building style in Harding Townsite evokes a modern version of a sense of community facilitating greater social interaction and security for its occupants.[40]

Remaining Examples of "contributing structures" in this style:

Collins Avenue no. 7500

X. PLANNING CONTEXT

Development of Vacant Lots:

Examination of aerial photographs from the 1920s through the late 1950s, as well as survey books such as the 1952 G.M. Hopkins Company's Platbook of Miami Beach, Golden Beach, indicate that "open space" was historically a common factor in the development of Harding Townsite and South Altos Del Mar. The least amount appears to have occurred by about the late 1950's, when the area reached its peak development as a residential and commercial district. This openness was seen in a number of ways, including private landscaped vacant lots and gardens associated with hotels and single family houses, park areas and open public recreational spaces such as North Shore Park, and in the form of relatively broad avenues like Collins Avenue. Other open sites were protected by park provisions supported by federal warrant.

Historic District Designation Promotes:

Continuous Neighborhood Enhancement

The neighborhoods within the boundaries of the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District are characterized by a significant number of "contributing" buildings reflective of distinctive architectural and development patterns from the earliest days of Pre-World War II Miami Beach to the present. The Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar area still appears much as it did in its rich past, despite the effects of dramatically changed times. Many significant structures, once neighbored by open spaces or buildings of complimentary scale and character, remain very much dependent upon a compatible and supportive environment in the future, which promotes sensitively designed new projects.

The review and approval of projects in the Historic District under the City's Design Guidelines and the Historic Preservation Ordinance will ensure smart development which is sensitive to the unique aesthetic character of the area and respectful of its early origins. Miami Beach has one of the finest and most progressive historic preservation ordinances in the nation. It was custom designed to address the special needs of a rapidly redeveloping historic seaside resort community with a view toward wise management of historic resources in tandem with appropriate new development. Historic designation will reinforce and promote continuous quality enhancement of the neighborhoods within the proposed Harding

Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic Ditrict just as it has done with remarkable success in the National Register Historic District in south Miami Beach and in the Altos Del Mar Historic District immediately to its north.

Increased Architectural Consideration

Historic district designation is a means of maintaining unified special character through increased architectural consideration when the construction of new buildings or additions to existing buildings are proposed.

Buildings, old and new, are usually the major defining elements in the makeup of a neighborhood's character. The special character of a neighborhood can be maintained and reinforced by highlighting and preserving the significant architectural features of its contributing building stock and by understanding and being considerate of those special qualities in the design of new construction and infill buildings.

Although some buildings within the boundaries of the proposed Historic District are more representative of specific "styles" than others, there is a sizable collection of twentieth century modern architectural periods here from the 1930's to the present day. In several instances individual buildings contain elements of more than one period, and often these acquired elements assume a significance of their own and lend yet another facet to the architecture of Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar.

In other instances a single contributing structure may not seem to possess a special significance when viewed by itself, but when viewed together with its neighboring buildings it reinforces a unified image of a distinct and attractive neighborhood contributing to the special character of the community's urban fabric. This is evident throughout the proposed historic district.

Historic District designation does not preclude the opportunity for appropriate new development to occur on existing vacant lots, it simply promotes compatible quality construction there.

Sensitive New Construction

New buildings and additions to existing buildings can blend into a neighborhood without imitating or trying to replicate an historic architectural period. By incorporating the important architectural qualities of a particular neighborhood into

contemporary design and properly siting the building, a new structure or addition can blend with its surroundings and be compatible with the neighborhood. In addition, by following existing design guidelines, renovations deemed appropriate by the Design Review and/or Historic Preservation Boards can be accomplished without being detrimental to the established character of the structure or to the neighborhood as a whole.

A number of elements work together to define not only a building's character but also a neighborhood. These elements include a building's scale, proportion, massing, directional expression, roof shape, placement on the lot, rhythm of openings, sense of entry, windows and doors, and materials and details. These basic elements found in all architecture and may vary to create different styles.

Understanding these elements and their relationship to each other is essential for designing compatible renovations, additions, and new buildings. Along with current Design Guidelines, historic district designation promotes an understanding of such design features and does not require or recommend reproductions of period architecture. To the contrary, compatible contemporary design is encouraged for new construction and additions.

Historic district designation affirms the Design Guidelines based on simplicity and design quality, and helps property owners make the most appropriate improvements to their properties.

Compatibility with the Character of the Historic District Which Positively Influences:

Proportion and Scale

Proportion deals with the relationship of the height to the width of the building and with the relationship of each part to the whole. Scale deals with the relationship of each building to the other buildings in the area, the part to the whole, as well as the scale of the pedestrian. When there is a combination of building types surrounding a project site, scale and proportion of the buildings closest to the proposed construction should be observed. Additions to buildings should respect the original scale and proportions.

Sense of Entry

Every building has an entry but each may be articulated differently. The entry may be a simple door or it could be steps and a door or it might be more strongly articulated by an enframement, a portico, porch, or other prominent architectural feature. If the existing buildings have a strong sense of entry, new construction should respect this.

Massing

Massing deals with the volumes created by the sections of a building. For example, a simple Moderne structure may be one mass but a Mediterranean Revival building with a tower, wings, hip roof, etc., has varied massing. Placing a boxlike structure in a neighborhood of articulated buildings may not be appropriate. Renovations or additions should respect the massing of existing buildings.

Roof Shape

There are several different roof types such as flat, shed, hip and gable. The type and pitch/slope determine the overall roof shape. If one roof shape is predominant, any new buildings should take into consideration this shape and design a new roof that is compatible with the others. Additions and renovations should not adversely affect significant roof shapes, particularly in public view.

Rhythm of Openings

Rhythm of openings refers to the number and spacing of windows and doors in a facade. Most Modern, Streamline and Garden-Style buildings have regularly spaced openings per floor. Other styles exhibit different rhythms. Any new construction should respect the predominant rhythm of other buildings in the area. Additions to an existing building should be harmonious with the original rhythm of openings. If renovations are planned, this rhythm should not be significantly changed by the removal or addition of openings.

Placement on the lot

A building may be close to the street or further back, parallel to the street or at an angle, and to one side or in the middle of the lot. Predominant siting patterns should be maintained, especially relative to front and side yard setbacks. In some

neighborhoods, structures are placed on the front property line, creating a "street wall"; new construction is encouraged to respect prevalent placement characteristics.

Directional Expression

A building may have a vertical emphasis in its principal facade(s), a horizontal emphasis, a balance of the two, or no directional emphasis at all. Additions to existing buildings and new infill construction should be compatible with the predominant directional characteristics of significant structures in the area.

Materials and Details

Materials and details used on a building form an important part of a building's style and character. Materials used on the walls and roofs of new projects should be compatible with those on existing buildings. The use of appropriate materials and textures help new buildings fit into existing neighborhoods and help additions to blend with the original architecture.

XI. PLANNING, DESIGN AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Criteria for Designation:** The Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division finds the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District in compliance with the Criteria for Designation listed in Section 19-5 (B) of the Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance, Ordinance Number 89-2665.

2. **District Boundaries:** At its May 11, 1995 meeting, in addition to concurring with the staff's findings relative to the historic significance of the eastern portion of Harding Townsite, the Historic Preservation Board requested that Division staff research the importance of the southern Altos Del Mar lots and original street grid north of 75th Street and east of Collins Court to the history and development of northern Miami Beach. The Board moved to direct the staff to make recommendations relative to designation of this area and particularly noted that historic district designation of south Altos Del Mar may be essential to preserving the historically open public access corridors to the ocean, provided by the original street grid, as well as the unique single family oceanside residential character of that area.

   Upon careful research and investigation, staff determined that the aforementioned south Altos Del Mar area was indeed of national and local historical and architectural significance. Although some lots were primarily vacant for some time, the area had an impact on United States Maritime Policy and City of Miami Beach development well into the mid-twentieth century. Additionally, staff found that the three remaining single family residential structures are fine architectural examples of their era and will significantly contribute to the special character of the area when restored. Staff further determined that the location of the existing library, on the east side of Collins Avenue between 75th and 76th Street, was the site of the original Biscayne House of Refuge Reservation, which played a significant role in the early maritime history of South Florida, and where structures have existed as early as 1875. Moreover, staff determined that the original street grid of this area, although not maintained completely accessible today, indeed provided direct public access to the beach from Collins Avenue and would still do so if properly restored and reopened.

   For the aforementioned reasons, staff recommends that the eastern portion of the Harding Townsite and the southern lots of Altos Del Mar be incorporated into the Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District and that the

historic street grid of south Altos Del Mar be re-opened in a carefully planned manner which preserves direct public access to the beach from Collins Avenue.

3. **Areas Subject to Review:** All building elevations and public areas of interiors, site and landscape features, public open space and public rights-of-way, including the Ocean Terrace park area. All vacant lots included within the boundaries of the historic district.

   Regular maintenance of public utilities, drainage, and mechanical systems, sidewalks and roadways shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

4. **Review Guidelines:** The Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division recommends that a decision on an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness shall be based upon compatibility of the physical alteration or improvement with surrounding properties and where applicable in substantial compliance with the following:

   a. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings as revised from time to time;

   b. Other guidelines/policies/plans adopted or approved by resolution or ordinance by the City Commission;

   c. All additional criteria as listed under Section 19-6 (C,2) of City of Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance 89-2665;

   d. City of Miami Beach Design Guidelines as adopted by the Joint Design Review/Historic Preservation Board October 12, 1993 and Amended June 7, 1994, and as may be expanded upon in the future.

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5. June 3, 1952 Letter account of history of Biscayne House of Refuge to Mr. Oliver Griswald, Chairman of Historic Sites and Markers Committee, Historical Association of South Florida, from Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Public Information Office, Washington, D.C. Historical Museum of South Florida Archives.

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12. April 14, 1929 Letter from Commander Section Six Base at Ft. Lauderdale, FL to Miami Chamber of Commerce. Historical Association of South Florida Archives.

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24. Advertisement, The Miami Herald, March 16, 1924. p.7-A.

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33. Advertisement, The Miami Beach City Directory, 1924-1925. Volume I. p.27.

34. Advertisement, The Miami Herald, March 16, 1924. p. 7-A.

35. Ibid.

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