



# MIAMI BEACH

City of Miami Beach, 1700 Convention Center Drive, Miami Beach, Florida 33139, www.miamibeachfl.gov

## COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Matti Herrera Bower  
and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: April 11, 2012 

SUBJECT: Referral to Planning Board – RM-3 Regulations Concerning Attached and Detached Additions to Buildings in the Architectural District

### ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION

Forward the proposed ordinance to Planning Board for its review and recommendation and to the Historic Preservation Board for its review and input.

### SUMMARY

At the March 28, 2012 meeting, the Land Use and Development Committee had a discussion regarding an amendment to the City Code related liberalize the existing five (5) story limitation on additions to oceanfront properties in the RM-3 Architectural District (between 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Street.) According to their letter (attached,) the South Seas, an existing Art Deco hotel, is contemplating a renovation program, and would like to build an addition within the existing footprint of the historic hotel. Currently that addition would be limited to a one story rooftop addition, meeting line of sight requirements.

The tallest portion of the existing building is seven stories, and the proponents desire is to construct an addition at least that tall, adjacent to the existing structure. This is not permitted under today's code, and a code amendment would be necessary to implement these proposed plans.

Note that a previous ordinance amendment was adopted by the City in 2007, which would allow a similar type of expansion, but only to increase the size of existing hotel rooms. However, this existing provision would not apply to the South Seas proposal, as it intends to add several floors of new hotel rooms. The applicant points out that their proposal also eliminates an equal number of rooms within the existing building, converting them to other hotel back of house uses and accessory commercial uses, which would not actually result in an increased number of rooms.

The amendment as proposed by the South Seas, would remove the requirement that the additions over one story or higher than 50 feet can only be for increasing the size of existing units, but would keep a restriction that an overall increase in the number of units could not be increased.

JMG/JGG/RGL/ML 

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Agenda Item C4D  
Date 4-11-12

VIA HAND DELIVERY

March 14, 2012

Richard Lorber, Director  
Planning Department  
City of Miami Beach  
1700 Convention Center Drive, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Miami Beach, Florida 33139

Re: Proposed Amendment to RM-3 Regulations Concerning Height of Proposed Additions to Oceanfront Hotels

Dear Richard:

This firm represents South Seas Hotel Corp. ("South Seas"), the long-term lessee of the South Seas Hotel located at 1751 Collins Avenue ("Property"). South Seas is supportive of an amendment to Section 142-246 of the City Code to allow for additions to buildings in the Architectural District (oceanfront properties between 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Street) of RM-3 zoning district to exceed five (5) stories under certain conditions. Please consider this South Seas' letter explaining its position and why the amendment is needed.

Description of the Property. The Property is located in the National Register Architectural District on the east side of Collins Avenue, north of 17<sup>th</sup> Street. The Property is located in the RM-3 zoning district. The South Seas was designed by renowned Miami Beach architect, L. Murray Dixon, and the original construction was completed in 1941. Subsequently, a rear addition and new façade were designed by another important architect, Melvin Grossman, and was constructed in 1954.

The South Seas is currently owned and managed by an ownership group headed by John Taft and Tom Glassie, Jr., who succeeds his father Thomas Glassie, who recently passed away. Since Mr. Glassie's passing, Mr. Taft has become more intimately involved with the South Seas and exploring ways to make it a more successful hotel. It is important to note that Mr. Taft and Mr. Glassie have been involved in Miami Beach, and historic buildings in particular for almost three decades. In 1985, they visited Miami Beach and fell in love with it. Shortly thereafter, they purchased the Avalon, Penguin, and Majestic Hotels, which they managed for several years. Later, they

purchased the National and managed it between 1993 and 1996. They have also been supporters and participants of Art Deco Weekend, since its inception – including their well-known classic car that is displayed in front of the Avalon during the weekend, and later rides in the parade. In addition to Miami Beach, they have been involved in the restoration and management of several historic buildings in New England and Manhattan.

Description of Development Program. The South Seas Hotel is in need of some upgrades and the proposed redevelopment of the Property will provide a significant improvement and allow it to be competitive with other newly renovated hotels in the area. Allan Shulman's office was engaged to handle the proposed renovation, which was designed to add more usable amenities and improved guest rooms within the existing footprint of the historic hotel. After meeting with Planning Department staff and City administration, it was determined that a code amendment would be necessary to implement these proposed plans. The proposed code amendment will expand on Ordinance No. 2007-3589, a prior amendment to the same section, which allowed expansions beyond 5 stories only if no additional units were created. One of the conditions in the 2007 ordinance states that "the proposed addition shall consist of the additions greater in height than existing hotel units only and shall not result in an increased number of units." Staff has interpreted this to mean that the addition can only include construction physically expanding existing hotel units, and not occur anywhere else on the structure.

The proposed amendment will remove the requirement that the additions must increase the size of existing units, but still would not allow for an increase in the number of units at any building proposing a redevelopment pursuant to that section. Of the oceanfront properties between 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Street in the RM-3 District, very few could actually take advantage of the ordinance because they have no more available floor area (pursuant to an analysis performed by Mr. Shulman's office, which identified only the Richmond Hotel and the Shore Club as affected hotels with enough available floor area). However, it is critical for the City's important historic hotels to be able to redevelop and continue to improve in a responsible and historically appropriate manner. This code change will allow the South Seas, and other hotels in the district with available floor area, to be able to compete with other new hotels, by providing its guests with better facilities and better back-of-house, as well as improving the existing units in the building. In order to make these changes and amenities cost-effective, the hotel needs to expand and improve the existing units to bring them in line with other hotels on the beach.

The only way to make the proposed improvements to the South Seas viable is to allow for a height greater than 5 stories (but no greater than the existing roofline of the

existing oceanfront tower, which in this case is approximately 101' 8", plus the parapet). If the City does not adopt the amendment, the owner could still build a detached five-story addition in front of the oceanfront tower (between the rear property line and the existing building) as this would not need a code change. However, we believe that the proposed alternative is a better way to go. In addition, we have met with the Miami Design Preservation League (MDPL) several times, and have listened to their thoughtful guidance with regard to the proposed amendment. At our last meeting with MDPL, the focus of the discussion was mostly concerning whether the existing, long standing façade was more appropriate than a replication of the original 1941 façade, not whether the proposed development was appropriate.

The Applicant continues to work with City Administration and Planning Department staff with regard to the proposed amendment and development plan. The previous plan had eight (8) floors in the addition, but through working with City Administration and Planning Department staff, the Applicant has agreed to an alternate plan that reduces the proposed addition to seven (7) stories, but allows some additional construction in the cabana area. This reduction goes a long way in achieving compatibility with neighboring buildings.

The renovation of and addition to this Property, as well as the approval of this proposed code amendment, will allow for the continued use of this historic property as a successful hotel in Miami Beach, in a more efficient and productive manner. We look forward to your favorable recommendation. If you have any questions or comments, please call me at 305-377-6238.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Marrero