

April 11, 2025

Sent via email: Megan Wright at emailmwright@sjcfl.us

Dr. Leslee Keys (Chair)

Susan Schjelderup (Vice Chair)

Robert Olson

Blair Knighting

Christine Newman

Janet Jordan

Nick Jonihakis

Dear Cultural Resource Review Board:

I am writing to you as a professional Architectural Historian/Historic Preservationist with family ties in St. John's County (SJC) for more than a century. We continue to maintain a second home in SJC due to this connection and the environmental and cultural resources unique to the area. This is why I am concerned about the proposed demolition of the Magic Beach Motel.

As the former Florida Main Street Coordinator, I was deeply involved in the designation of Vilano Beach as a Florida Main Street program in 2003. At that time, Vilano Beach's mid-20th century historic resources were recent compared to other program areas in the state. The Magic Beach Motel, built as the Blue Ocean in 1951, was a major component in designating the cluster of historic structures in Vilano Beach as a Florida Main Street community. SJC subsequently supported these efforts through land development codes that outlined incentives for historic preservation and additional funding to the program.

I'm also concerned about the preemptive mitigation plan and Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) submitted as part of the demolition request. I have completed HABS surveys and the March 13, 2025 short form report does not meet HABS standards in several key areas:

- The short form is used in cases wherein research time is limited, or research yields little information on the building. This is not the case with the Magic Beach Motel.
- The report addenda do not satisfy the required graphical (measured drawings, large-format photography) documentation. Regardless of level (I, II or III) or format (short or outline), large-format photographs are required. The 2012 renovation plans do not suffice as measured drawings of today's extant structure. Lidar recordation would be ideal too.
- The report does not name a Secretary of the Interior qualified professional which is typical, along with methods used and the general reason for generating the report.

Once demolished, none of this physical documentation can produced retroactively. Additionally, no structural engineer report provides information about current conditions.

Vilano Beach's remaining mid-century residences and commercial properties represent Florida's historic tourism industry, which is becoming increasingly endangered due to development and natural disasters. I encourage the adaptive reuse of the motel and its incorporation into the design of any new development. I also encourage appropriate documentation prepared and reviewed by qualified cultural resource professionals.

Thank you for your volunteer service to SJC and your consideration.

Laura Lee Corbett



Outlook

4/14/2025 CRRB Meeting - Magic Beach Motel

From Laura Lee Corbett <corbettlauralee@gmail.com>

Date Fri 4/11/2025 10:20 AM

To Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>

 1 attachment (78 KB)

Save the Magic Beach.pdf;

Ms. Wright,

Attached is a letter with my concerns regarding the proposed demolition of the Magic Beach Motel. Please forward to the CRRB for review ahead of Monday's meeting.

Thank you.

--

Laura Lee Corbett
Historic Preservation Consultant
1422 Devils Dip
Tallahassee, FL 32308
850.264.4611



Outlook

Magic Beach Motel

From Laura Lee Corbett <corbettlauralee@gmail.com>

Date Fri 4/11/2025 10:25 AM

To BOCC Office <boccoffice@sjcfl.us>

Cc Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>

 1 attachment (78 KB)

Save the Magic Beach.pdf;

Dear St. Johns County Commissioners,

Attached is a letter to the Cultural Resource Review Board with my concerns regarding the proposed demolition of the Magic Beach Motel.

Thank you for your service to the community.

--

Laura Lee Corbett
Historic Preservation Consultant
1422 Devils Dip
Tallahassee, FL 32308
850.264.4611



Outlook

CRRB Meeting, April 14, 2025 (Magic Beach)

From Mercedes Harrold <merci.elena@gmail.com>

Date Thu 4/10/2025 10:54 PM

To Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>

Cc Commissioner Christian Whitehurst <bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Sarah Arnold <bcc2sarnold@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Clay Murphy <cmurphy@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Krista Joseph <bcc4kjoseph@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Ann Taylor <ataylor@sjcfl.us>

 1 attachment (4 MB)

Keep the Magic in Magic Beach(1).pdf;

Good evening,

Attached is a letter with my concerns about the Magic Beach demolition. Please forward to the CRRB for review.

Thank you in advance,
Mercedes

Re: CRRB Meeting, April 14, 2025 (Magic Beach)

From Mercedes Harrold <merci.elena@gmail.com>

Date Fri 4/11/2025 7:18 AM

To Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>

Cc Commissioner Christian Whitehurst <bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Sarah Arnold <bcc2sarnold@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Clay Murphy <cmurphy@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Krista Joseph <bcc4kjoseph@sjcfl.us>; Commissioner Ann Taylor <ataylor@sjcfl.us>

Hello,

Wanted to follow up with this.

I wanted to make sure I prepared a response before the meeting, but after sending the email, I rechecked the additional documents online and I am "retracting" two comments about the author of the HABS report and photos. Paul Weaver's name is listed after the references and there are updated photos. My apologies for missing these details.

I still think this documentation should not be completed as a HABS short form, unless there is justification. I also still do not see updated measured drawings, but they may be in the attachments.

If the applicant and author can point out deficiencies that they would like to draw attention to in the photos, I think that would be helpful. Otherwise, the photos appear to show a clean, older retro motel with lovely features, some of which are original.

Thanks for uploading all the documents online!

Sincerely,
Mercedes

> On Apr 10, 2025, at 10:51 PM, Mercedes Harrold <merci.elena@gmail.com> wrote:

>
> Good evening,
>
> Attached is a letter with my concerns about the Magic Beach demolition. Please forward to the CRRB for review.
>
> Thank you in advance,
> Mercedes
>
> <Keep the Magic in Magic Beach(1).pdf>
>
>

ARTICLE III SPECIAL DISTRICTS

PART 3.00.00 GENERALLY

The following Special District standards are to be applied to the mapped zoning districts as overlay regulations in the manner prescribed in each Special District below. The purpose of each special district is to regulate Development within each district in a manner that is in keeping with the special circumstances of the district.

PART 3.01.00 CULTURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION

Sec. 3.01.01 Generally

A. Purpose

1. The purpose of these Cultural Resources regulations is to establish procedures, consistent with the Florida Historical Resources Act (Chapter 267, F.S., as amended), related to the identification and protection of Cultural Resources within unincorporated St. Johns County. These regulations are to be read in harmony and consistently with the intent and powers established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*), and Chapter 267, F.S. as it is the express intent that these regulations locally implement the Florida Statutes. These procedures shall provide for the establishment of a Cultural Resource Review Board in accordance with Federal Regulations 36 CFR 61.5 (c) (2), as amended, and for the identification and documentation of Cultural Resources within the County; the subsequent designation of certain Cultural Resources as Significant Cultural Resources or as St. Johns County Landmarks; the review of plans and Development projects for effects to Cultural Resources, and the protection to the maximum extent practicable of Cultural Resources in St. Johns County.
2. The Cultural Resources of St. Johns County are important community assets that enrich the lives of citizens and visitors alike. Certain Structures, Buildings, objects and sites within St. Johns County possess a special public interest and are important resources to understanding the heritage and historical development of the area. As such, these Cultural Resources, and in some cases their environs, should be designated as Significant Cultural Resources. Such Significant Cultural Resources should, to the extent possible, be maintained and protected in order to benefit the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public. It is also recognized that harm or reasonably preventable deterioration of Cultural Resources on any property located within unincorporated St. Johns County constitutes harm to the public welfare.

Formats

HABS has developed a short format and an outline format to guide historians in researching and writing reports. Determining whether to use the short form or longer outline format depends on the complexity of the building or site, the amount of information available, and the allocated time to work on the project. **At a minimum, each building or site should have a short format report accompanying the graphical (measured drawings, photographs) documentation.**

The **short form** report is several pages in length and has prescribed entries. It should be used in cases wherein research time is limited or research yields little information on the building.

The short form can also be the basis for a **field survey** form, wherein large numbers of historic buildings need a concise and consistent assessment, either as part of documentation for a complex of buildings such as military base, college campus, or farmstead, for an historic district or region, or as part of an initial study of a category of buildings wherein one or two representative examples will be extensively recorded. The short form categories would then be adapted to include not only the name of building, surveyor (historian), and sponsoring organization, and the location, but also prevailing structural types, repetitive features or the unusual ones, materials, condition, plan and site layout, buildings uses and so on, making for a field survey form that anticipates shared characteristics and notes the material evidence that will later influence a determination of historical, architectural, and technological importance. Recent examples of field surveys include the Quaker Meeting House study (1997-99) and the Philadelphia Carnegie Library study (2007-08). A sample survey form from the Quaker Meeting House survey and one from the Philadelphia Carnegie Library project are in Appendix E.

The **outline format** prescribes the historical information and physical aspects of the building, complex of buildings, or site to be discussed, *although topics within the sections can be expanded or omitted as appropriate*. The first section of the outline addresses the physical history of the building, including significant dates in the initial planning and construction as well as in later alterations, plus names of the designers and suppliers. The historical context of the building is also addressed here. The second section concerns the architectural information, with categories intended to produce an analysis and description of the building form as it exists at the time of the site visit. Also in this section is a component for some discussion of the landscape including designed elements and plan, as well as reference to outbuildings and supporting structures on site. The final section of the outline is

HABS History Guidelines
(page 3)

bibliographic in nature, including all sources of information as well as other potential resources not investigated, as appropriate.

For groups of buildings, such as those in a complex or those surveyed for a historic district or as representative types from a particular region, different questions must be asked than for an individual structure. Try to include the following information: 1) Physical context, that is how it relates to the surrounding environment; 2) Historical context, primarily concerning the buildings' relationship to the historical development of the surrounding area and to trends in local and national histories; 3) Specific historical data, including the dates of initial planning and development, any changes in plan and evolution, individuals such as architects, city planners, and developers, associated with the site studied, and associated historical events; 4) Physical description of the site according to the original plan, as it has changed over time, and as it is at the present. For individual buildings or structures identified as part of a complex, these broader questions frame the overall narrative but information on the specific buildings within the complex must also be included in the supporting reports submitted for those individual buildings and structures. The HABS Washington Office or the NPS regional offices can offer guidance on a case-by-case basis.

Regardless of the format selected, the historical report should be written in simple language, without excessively specialized terminology. HABS follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines, which are simplified in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. For architectural terms, Cyril L. Harris, *Historic Architecture Sourcebook*, or the *Geddy Art History Information Program's Art & Architecture Thesaurus* can serve as guides. Grammar and punctuation conventions observed by HABS are found within these guidelines. Indicate sources for all information in footnotes following the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and cross-reference relevant measured drawings, photographs and other historical reports in the HABS/HAER/HALS collection. All historical reports are to be prepared on a computer using Microsoft Word software and submitted in hard copy and electronic forms. The reports are single-spaced. Keep formatting simple, adding images, tables or charts as appendices at the end of the report. If historic images are used, a copyright release form must be obtained from the repository or owner of the image in advance of submission. The copyright release form is included as an appendix to this document and pdf versions of the form can be obtained from the HABS Washington Office.

April 10, 2025

Sent via email

Dr. Leslee Keys (Chair)
Susan Schjelderup (Vice Chair)
Robert Olson
Blair Knighting
Christine Newman
Janet Jordan
Nick Jonihakis

Dear CRRB:

I am a professional archaeologist/historic preservationist, and previously served as the St Johns County Cultural Resources Coordinator from 2018-2021, which was one of the highlights of my career. I wish I could be with you all at the meeting, but want to thank you for your time and thank the County for posting documentation on their website that will go before you all. I am providing a brief summary of the history of the Magic Beach, its surroundings, and my involvement. I also have some questions and comments that I would respectfully request you consider.

Questions/Comments:

- The staff report mentions the documentation was prepared by Paul Weaver, who is a someone I am familiar with, but the provided reports do not list an author.
- There is a provided HABS short form, which according to NPS guidelines does not seem appropriate for this particular project, as those forms are intended for projects with limited time for documentation or where limited information is available for research. According to the staff report, the staff has been helping the developer move forward through the demolition process for approximately 6 months.
- This is not a true HABS report following National Park Service (NPS) guidelines. While the County has accepted similar style reports for demolitions, has this style of report been accepted for demolition of other Significant Cultural Resources?
 - A full HABS report should be completed, or information why the applicant feels the short form is appropriate.
 - The HABS report should have the historian clearly listed.
- The HABS report also requires measured drawings and photographs, and the provided plans and photographs appear to be from the rehabilitation, making them over a decade old.
 - Although the past documentation could be useful as supplemental information, current information should be provided that documents current conditions.
- Where are the supporting materials for the claims that other mitigation options were pursued?
 - No advertisement that the structure was offered for sale to be moved.
 - No quotes for costs to move structure.

County Landmark Designation of the former Barrancotto's restaurant, now Snappers, and renovation of Haley's Court as a boutique hotel. Yet now in 2025, proposed demolition of the Magic Beach Motel is back on the table.

Summary of select dates associated with the motel:

- 1951: Blue Ocean Built
- 1999: featured in the tv show Safe Harbor, renamed "Magic Beach"
- 2001: a county-wide survey recommended the building was not individually eligible for listing in the National Register; however, at that time, the building was at or almost 50 years old, the general threshold for a "historic" building.
- 2002-2003: Vilano Beach promoted the Magic Beach as a significant feature while applying to become a designated Main Street program, and has been consistently highlighted as a feature of the Main Street area since its designation, including in promotional materials, like their own website (still on there right now), and as recently as November 2024 via their own social media pages, and the state's Main Street social media pages.
- 2010-2012: the structure underwent extensive rehabilitation under the supervision of a professional architect with historic preservation experience
- 2013: Secretary of State awarded the Magic Beach Motel, Vilano Beach Main Street, St Johns County, North Shores Improvement Board, North Shores Corridor Design Review Board, Harry Scherwinski, and Les Thomas Outstanding Florida Main Street Private-Public Partnership Honor Award.
- 2021: A staff report indicated the Magic Beach Motel is a Significant Cultural Resource, and qualifies as a County Landmark under the Land Development Code (LDC). CRRB designated it as Significant Cultural Resource under the LDC.
- 2022: a local historic properties survey contracted by the county, using state grant funds, identified the Magic Beach as a contributing resource to a potential National Register Historic District.
- 2025: the LDC guidelines for Historic Preservation (Special Districts) and the Vilano Beach Town Center both include historic preservation as a goal.
- April 9, 2025: rooms are still being advertised with rates ranging from \$94.99-\$159.99.

I believe that property rights are important, but I also believe in the County's LDC, which provides guidelines for preserving St Johns County's historic resources. In the County's own words:

"The Cultural Resources of St. Johns County are important community assets that enrich the lives of citizens and visitors alike. Certain Structures, Buildings, objects and sites within St. Johns County possess a special public interest and are important resources to understanding the heritage and historical development of the area. As such, these Cultural Resources, and in some cases their environs, should be designated as Significant Cultural Resources. Such Significant Cultural Resources should, to the extent possible, be maintained and protected in order to benefit the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public. It is also recognized that harm or reasonably preventable deterioration of Cultural Resources on any property located within unincorporated St. Johns County constitutes harm to the public welfare."



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, October 1,
2013

Contact: Brittany
Lesser
850.245.6522

Winners of the Secretary of State's 2013 Florida Main Street Awards Announced

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – Secretary of State Ken Detzner announced the recipients of the Secretary of State's 2013 Florida Main Street Awards. These awards were presented on September 19, 2013, at the Florida Main Street 2013 Annual Conference held in Vilano Beach.

"I am proud to recognize the activities and accomplishments of this year's honorees," said Secretary Detzner. "Their sincere focus on preservation and contributions to Main Street programs across the state are essential to the revitalization of Florida's traditional commercial districts."

Outstanding Local Florida Main Street

Supporter: *Honor Award*— Sandy Chavez, (MainStreet DeLand Association); *Merit Awards*— Vivian Browning (Vilano Beach Main Street) and Scott Locke (St. Cloud Main Street)

Outstanding Florida Main Street Private-Public

Partnership: *Honor Award*— Magic Beach Motel (Vilano Beach Main Street, St. Johns County, North Shores Improvement Board, North Shores Corridor Design Review Board, Harry Scherwinski, Les Thomas)

Excerpts from the Press Release for the 2013 award.

"At the moment, we're just focused on operating the property," said Sonny Bhikha, a principal with Shivam Properties.

Magic Beach as boutique motel, May 2022.

St. Johns County Approves \$58,000 for Continued Support of Vilano Beach Main Street Programs

During the Oct. 17 regular meeting, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners convened as the St. Johns County Community Redevelopment Agency to approve an agreement with Vilano Beach Main Street, Inc. (VBMS) for \$58,000 to continue support of the non-profit organization's dedication to enhancing, promoting, and preserving the historic character of the Vilano Beach Town Center and surrounding areas.

SJC provides financial support to preserve the historic character, October 2023.



Vilano Beach Main Street



Nov 15, 2024 · 🌐

Thank you [Florida Main Street](#)! The Magic Beach Hotel is very special and adds so much charm to [Vilano Beach Main Street](#)!



Florida Main Street 🌐

Nov 15, 2024 · 🌐

Our Business Spotlight today for our November Program of the Month [Vilano Beach Main Street](#) is possibly the most infamous land... [See more](#)



Originally built in 1951 and operating as the Vilano Beach Motel, this vibrant and charming motel got its name from its use as a set location for the 1999 Warner Brothers TV series titled *Safe Harbor* starring Emmy winner, Golden Globe nominee, and Golden Girl **Rue McClanahan**.

Set in fictional Magic Beach, Florida, this series follows a widowed sheriff and his three sons living with Grandma Loring (McClanahan) who owns the motel.

The neon sign with bunnies jumping from a hat pay homage to her husband's career as a magician.

Locals recall being curious about the sheriff's patrol car sitting in the driveway during the 8 months of filming.

The Magic Beach Motel has since been renovated and modernized for today's tourists but maintains its retro-kitsch aesthetic with flamingos, bright colors, art deco details, and the unmistakable neon sign.

April 13, 2025

Dr. Leslee Keys
Chair
St. Johns County Cultural Resources Review Board

Dear Dr. Keys and member of the committee,

The Magic Beach Motel a key building in the Vilano Beach Town Center coming before the Review Board April, 14, 2025. *The developers request is a vote in favor of tearing down the Magic Beach Hotel in Vilano Beach*

As the architect for the original renovation of this iconic property I have looked at this property and it does not warrant demolition in its current condition.

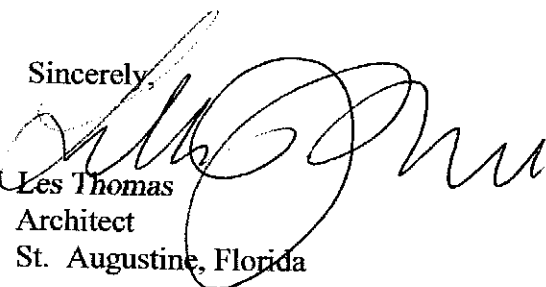
The Vilano Beach Town Center Committee has spearheaded the movement to bring back the *original experience of a Florida beach community*. As recipients of grants and funding since 2007 the area has been brought back to life with a grocery store, restaurants, bars and businesses all of which addressed the Art Deco and beach style theme.

Many days and evenings residents and visitors alike marvel at the experience the town center provides. Enjoying the sea breeze while taking pictures with the signature decorative flamingos at the Magic Beach Motel and walking down to The Bluebird of Happiness restored statue which anchors the pier at the west end is much appreciated *experience of days gone by*.

There are only a few buildings which anchor the original street scape of the town center. Destroying one of the key buildings which most closely represents the original Florida beach theme through its architectural style, decorative features, signage, colors and interiors represents a severe threat to one of the few historic properties in St. Johns County. It threatens the entire concept of the Vilano Beach Town Center restoration which draws locals residents and visitors alike to enjoy its old *Florida beach town ambience*.

I'm sorry I can't attend the meeting today, but hope many others do to voice their opposition to the requested demolition of this important architectural and cultural icon in Vilano Beach.

Sincerely,



Les Thomas
Architect
St. Augustine, Florida

From: [Megan Wright](#)
To: [Ryan Mauch](#)
Subject: Fw: Magic Beach Motel
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 8:17:00 AM

From: Victoria Lauren Gural <victorialaurengural@yahoo.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 12, 2025 2:29 PM
To: Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>
Subject: Magic Beach Motel

Megan Wright,
Hi there!

You don't know me, but I implore you not to demolish magic beach motel. It's an amazing art deco motel with architectural greatness we truly do not build anymore, and it should be protected. It is an amazing landmark, not only in design but honestly culturally, and needs to be treated as such.

In 2025 we have already lost too many amazing hotels and motels around the US to getting overhauled into boxes or knocked down altogether, please do not let this one be next. Please.

Have a magical day,
Victoria Lauren, LMT
Siren Studios

From: [Megan Wright](#)
To: [Ryan Mauch](#)
Subject: Fw: Magic Beach Motel
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 8:17:09 AM

From: Ariana DiGregorio <arianadigregorio@icloud.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 12, 2025 2:06 PM
To: Megan Wright <mwright@sjcfl.us>
Subject: Magic Beach Motel

Dear Morgan Wright,
Please do not allow them to demo the Magic Beach Motel! It has historical and cultural significance and is a piece of art. Thank you for your time!
Florida Resident, Ariana DiGregorio