



# Growth Management Department

## ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION REPORT

### Cultural Resources Review Board

### 50 Vilano Road Cultural Resource Management Plan

**To:** Cultural Resources Review Board

**From:** Megan Wright, Staff Liaison, Cultural Resources Review Board

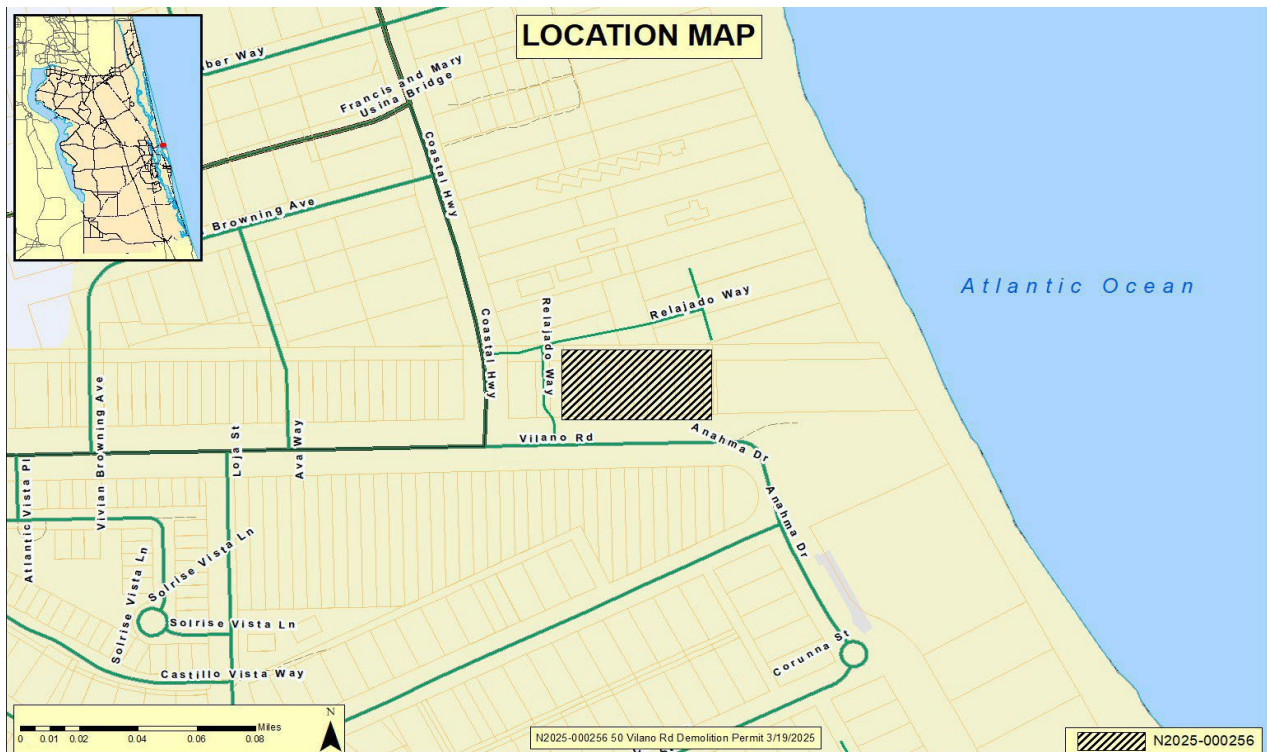
**Date:** June 10, 2025

**Subject:** Demo Permit N25-256, 50 Vilano Rd., Magic Beach Motel for Consideration of by the Cultural Resources Review Board

**Hearing Dates:** Cultural Resources Review Board – April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Cultural Resources Review Board – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Commissioner District:** 5

**MAP SERIES: Location:** 50 Vilano Rd, St. Augustine, FL (Vilano Beach)



**Location:** 50 Vilano Rd, St. Augustine, FL (Vilano Beach)



**Historic post card (1950s)**



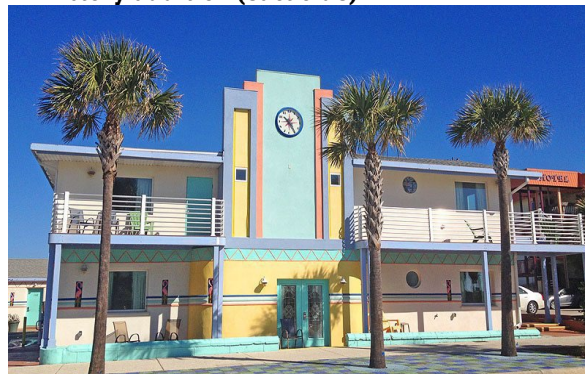
**Current photo of exterior**



**Historic photo of the resource (1950s)**



**2-Story addition (east side)**





## **SUMMARY**

The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach. This structure is within the Vilano Beach Town Center, Vilano Road Main Street and the North Coastal Overlay. The resource is identified within the Florida Master Site File (#SJ03937). The T-Shaped 10-room original structure was built in 1951 in the Late Moderne style by Cesidio Tuccella, who was an Italian immigrant. The classic period for the Streamline or Nautical Moderne was 1930 to 1945. Another local example of the style in the St. Augustine vicinity was Marine Village including the Dolphin Village and Penguin Bar in Marineland, Florida, along Highway A1A near the St. Johns/Flagler County line.

The Magic Beach Motel has had several alterations and additions since originally constructed. The resource was also designated as a Significant Cultural Resource by the Cultural Resources Review Board (CRRB) in 2021.

A demolition permit application was submitted by the current owner of the Motel to the St. Johns County Growth Management Department in January 2025 which has been reviewed by staff consistent with the requirements of the County's Land Development Code (LDC). In light of the significant cultural resource status of the Motel, staff requested an additional historic survey and mitigation alternatives to address the effect to the historic resource.

## **Historic Architectural Building Survey Report**

The Historic Architectural Building Survey (HABS) report submitted by the applicant (Historic Property Associates, March 2025) includes further details about the architectural style of the resource. The survey states that in the post-World War II period the Streamline Moderne was largely out of fashion, as architects transitioned to the increasingly popular International Style. The Late Moderne Style borrowed the horizontality, curved canopies and curved corners from the Streamline Moderne Style and combined them with the more restrained, austere International Style. According to the National Register of Historic Places, Late Moderne is an accepted description for buildings dating from the post-classic period incorporating elements of the style. The Late Moderne was popular particularly in Florida during the Post-World War II period. When originally constructed in 1951, the Blue Ocean Motel was essentially a non-architect designed masonry vernacular motel with applied ornamentation associated with the Late Moderne Style. The exterior of the Blue Ocean Motel features a horizontal orientation, turned corners and cast plaster flamingos inset into the concrete walls, 3 streamlined moldings, and a triangular patterned motif in a frieze below the roof line.

By 1953, the motel had a detached restaurant with the same Moderne detailing as the original motel. A two-unit wing c. 1962, which uses the detailing on the original portion of the motel, is located on the west side of the lobby. All of the original doors and windows have been replaced and the original entrance has been remodeled. The port cochere was added to the main entrance c. 1962 based on a review of historic photographs and postcards. The style of the building was further complicated by a 1999 neon sign and a 2012 room addition housing motel rooms designed by architect Les Thomas, in an accurate interpretation of the classic Streamline Moderne style.

A 2001 historic resource survey recorded the Magic Beach Motel in the Florida Master Site File and evaluated potential districts in the county for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The resource located at 50 Vilano Road was considered individually ineligible for listing on the NRHP at that time. In 2009, an updated historic structure Florida Master Site

File form was recorded as part of a survey by Brockington and Associates, Inc. The 2009 survey also listed the Magic Beach Motel as individually ineligible for listing on the NRHP. In 2021, as part of a review for a redevelopment application for the property where the resource is located, the Cultural Resource Review Board (CRRB) provided documentation designating the Magic Beach Motel as a Significant Cultural Resource per section 3.01.04.C of the land development code (LDC). Finally, in 2022, a historic structure survey of AIA by GAI Associates considered the Magic Beach Motel as potentially eligible as a contributing resource to a potential historic district.

### **Significance**

50 Vilano Road, originally known as the Blue Ocean Motel and now known as the Magic Beach Motel, is a masonry lodging facility constructed in 1951. On December 6, 2021 it was designated a "Significant Cultural Resource" by the St. Johns County Resource Review Board (CRRB).

The Cultural Resource Review Board under the criteria set forth in the St. Johns County Land Development Code (LDC) Section 3.01.04C designated the building based on the following:

1. The Magic Beach Motel, formerly known as the Blue Ocean Motel, is 50 years old or older having been constructed in 1951, LDC Section, 3.01.04.C.2.
2. The Magic Beach Motel encompasses four of the seven qualities of Integrity with Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling. LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2:
3. The Magic Beach Motel meets four of the nine additional criteria listed in LDC Section 3.01.04.C.2.

### **County Procedure**

County staff began the discussion with the site representative of the Magic Beach Motel in late 2024. Several discussions took place with the owner's representative and included the potential for preserving the structure and the several programs that incentivize the preservation of the resource including National Register nomination, available state and federal grant programs, seeking St. Johns County Landmark status and the County ad-valorem tax exemption program.

### **Demolition application**

County staff received a demolition permit application for the resource on January 15th, 2025. County staff reviewed the application and historic associations with the Significant Cultural Resource and requested a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and a Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP) to be submitted by the applicant for review pursuant to Section 3.01.04.F.1, LDC.

Proposed demolition of the structure is considered an adverse effect, consistent with Section 3.01.04.E. The requirement for a HABS survey is to document the architecture and historic associations with the resource and the CRMP plan provides mitigation alternatives to an adverse effect to a significant cultural resource.

### **Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP)**

Criteria to be considered when establishing the mitigation alternatives in the CRMP are listed in Section 3.01.04.F.2:

- a. The historic or architectural significance of the building

- b. The importance of the building to the ambience of a district
- c. The likelihood of the site to yield information important in history
- d. The difficulty or impossibility of reproducing such a building because of its design, texture, material, detail, or unique location
- e. Whether the resource is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in the neighborhood, the County, or the region
- f. Whether there are definite plans for the reuse of the property and the effect of those plans on the character of the surrounding properties
- g. Whether reasonable measures can be taken to save the building or other destruction
- h. If relocation of a structure or object is proposed, consideration shall be given as to whether the proposed relocation area is compatible with the historical and architectural character of the structure, and whether the structure can be moved without significant damage to its physical integrity
- i. If a Significant Cultural Resource is to be destroyed, the County shall have the option to salvage significant features and data to ensure their preservation.

The CRMP, provided by Paul Weaver of Historic Property Associates, Inc. in association with Matthews Design Group and Fisher/Koppenhafer, Architects (March, 2025) via the applicant, was reviewed by staff and provides two mitigation alternatives (efforts) to mitigate the adverse effect to a significant cultural resource.

CRMP Statement on contribution to potential historic district:

“The building is separated from the main concentration of older buildings at the west end of Vilano Road and is surrounded by seven non-historic buildings. In fact, the historic character of Vilano Road has been substantially diminished since first recorded in the Florida Master Site File in 2001 with the demolition of several buildings, the Lazy Sands Bar and Newt’s Vilano Motel being examples, and new construction which is of a different scale and mass than the small-scale commercial buildings traditionally located there. No formal written opinion as to the eligibility of the Magic Beach Motel for individual National Register listing or as a contributing property to a National Register District has ever been sought.”

Justification for demolition provided by the CRMP:

“The factors driving demolition and not preservation or rehabilitation of the structure includes rising insurance and financing costs, increasing preferences for larger units with more amenities based on industry-wide standards and functionally obsolete designs and mechanical systems. Additionally, the plan states that the site of the existing buildings is generally low in elevation (Staff: roadway estimated at ~7-8 feet above sea level and structures ~10-feet above sea level) and prone to flooding in extreme conditions such as hurricanes. The natural rising sea level from the Atlantic Ocean means that the buildings, which were built slab-on-grade will likely experience more frequent flooding. The eastern half of the historic building is seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL). This area falls in [FEMA] Flood Zone X and X-shaded which is susceptible to storm flooding. Current building codes require the State of Florida establish finish floor elevation (FFE) and deep pile foundations. In addition, FEMA regularly revises maps to designate more flood prone areas, while further raising the expected flood elevations and minimum freeboard requirements above FEMA flood elevations.”

Mitigation Effort 1:

Relocation or raising the existing building. This mitigation alternative is not considered by the applicant to be feasible due to the size of the resource and its slab-on-grade construction.

Mitigation Effort 2:

Demolition of the structures onsite with salvage, providing that the owners are committed to the following salvaging and repurposing of elements from the Magic Beach Motel as follows:

1. Flamingo Plasterwork pieces will be incorporated into the façade of the replacement building.
2. A Tribute Area will be established in the new building with Historic Photography and Memorabilia.
3. The Magic Beach neon sign will be relocated to a landscaped area on property.
4. The owner will further determine whether and how to incorporate significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings, such as the interior room murals by Artist Gerome Barret, or to allow bona fide nonprofits or agencies with subject matter interest or expertise to salvage historically significant elements, features, fixtures and furnishings prior to demolition. The owners will contact St. Johns County staff to notify and provide a specific plan for preservation, recordation, and incorporation of significant elements consistent with the approved CRMP. Murals by Gerome Barret are of unknown date and of undetermined historic, artistic or cultural significance. They are painted on plaster walls so their preservation may be problematic. Owners will make good faith effort to work with any interested party to salvage the murals.

CRMP Conclusion:

The history of the Magic Beach Motel has been comprehensively documented through an Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The HABS includes a history and physical description, photographs of the building and site features and digitized copies of the 2012 architectural drawings which thoroughly document the complex before and after the 2012 renovations and recent photographs

The owners are ready to receive a recommendation of approval by the CRRB and subsequent approval of the demolition permit by staff, while following Mitigation Effort 2 in the CRMP.

**CORRESPONDENCE/PHONE CALLS**

Mr. Rick Johnston has been the representative for the applicant and point of contact. Before and after the demolition application for the structure in January 2025, Mr. Johnston has communicated via phone calls, email and site meetings with County staff. There have also been multiple citizens who have requested documents via email and by phone regarding the status of the demolition permit application and associated cultural resource review process undertaken by staff.

**STAFF ACTION**

Upon the recommendation of the CRRB, County staff will proceed with either approval, approval with changes or denial of the CRMP and the demolition permit application and will notify and/or coordinate with the applicant on recommended mitigation alternatives.

**Staff Report Update post-April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 CRRB meeting**

The CRRB met on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and the applicant presented history, photographs and architectural findings on Magic Beach Motel. Mr. Rick Johnston was joined by project architect, Mike Koppenhafer and the owner's representative, Tejal Patel. Nineteen citizens spoke during public comments. The CRRB Members voted unanimously to defer the CRMP review to the next CRRB meeting, with the recommendation that the applicant provide structural reports on status of the structure to address preservation and/or rehabilitation. On May 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, the applicant submitted a total of five reports which are outlined below to address the above motion.

**Building Evaluation and Feasibility Report – Magic Beach Hotel, Vilano Beach, Florida  
Fisher & Koppenhafer**

The survey is dated April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, by Mike Koppenhafer, AIA from Fisher | Koppenhafer Architecture and Interior Design, and was received by County Staff on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Koppenhafer observed major issues with the structure and divides those issues into five categories: building elevation, poor existing construction conditions, roofing and wall conditions, electrical system and conditions and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/accessibility. Forty-two photographs of the exterior and interior of the Magic Beach Motel are included with captions describing the status of structural components. The feasibility of reusing the building is addressed with focus on the Florida Building Code 50% Rule. "The current value according to the property appraiser's office of the building is \$1,056,392. So once the owner spends approximately \$527,000, they must bring the entire property up to current code. \$527,000 does not as far as it once did and in my opinion any renovation to the building would significantly exceed this figure." Koppenhafer concluded with nine bulleted points, outlining the limiting constraints of FEMA elevation, ADA accessibility, upgrading the structural connections, and expansion of guest rooms and guest bathrooms.

**Building Evaluation and Feasibility Report – Magic Beach Hotel, Vilano Beach, Florida  
Prepared for Mr. Joseph J. Van Rooy, Esquire, Van Rooy Law, L.P. Prepared by Tony  
DiNardo, CPA, Senior Associate, Hank Fishkind, Ph.D.**

This analysis is dated May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and received by County Staff on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The analysis was prepared for Mr. Joseph J. Van Rooy, Esquire - Van Rooy Law, L.P. and written by Tony DiNardo, CPA, Senior Associate and Hank Fishkind, Ph.D. from Fishkind Consulting. DiNardo and Fishkind performed a Jacksonville Beaches Submarket Analysis, including Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, and Vilano Beach. DiNardo and Fishkind utilized market performance metrics of Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) and Average Daily Rate (ADR). The market competitiveness of the Jacksonville Beaches Submarket was graphed with the variables RevPAR, RevPAR by [economic] class of tourists, ADR, ADR by class of tourists, occupancy, and occupancy by class, in relation to the years 2020 – 2025. Property valuation was configured with the following analysis: "At the market capitalization rate of 8.75%, the total value of the Motel (land, building, and intangible business value) is - \$475,394. The St. Johns County Property Appraiser estimates the value of the Motel's land at \$1,247,540. Subtracting the value of the land from the total value of the Motel (building, land, and intangible business value) produces an estimated value for the Motel's building of - \$1,772,934". Reasons for the justification of demolition are addressed and include increasing insurance and construction cost trends and elaboration on financial costs such as loans and investments. Lastly, mitigation measures for demolition are explored with a focus on archival documentation and commemorative recognition.

**Analysis and Report for Blue Ocean Motel/Magic Beach Motel 50 Vilano Rd. Vilano Beach, Florida by Don Crichlow and Associates**

This document is dated May 2025 and received by County Staff on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This letter was written by Don Crichlow, AIA from Don Crichlow and Associates. Crichlow offered no professional opinion on this matter and elaborated on two variables. First, he found that the property appears to be poorly maintained, with a focus on the need for paint and replacement of wood, as there are signs of wood rot. Second, the Finish Floor Elevation (FFE) throughout the structure consistently is below the 8'0" mean high tide marker. The St Johns County Building Code requires that FFE for all new structures in this zone to be 10'0" minimum. Crichlow offered three solutions to resolve the issues: "1) Leave the finish floor elevation as is and continue to operate the motel in the flood prone area; 2) Raise the finish floor elevation to the required 10'0" elevation; 3) Demolish the existing building and re-build at the required 10'0" level".

**Structural Inspection, Project: Magic Beach Hotel, Address: 50 Vilano Beach Rd St Augustine by Sabo Structural Engineering**

This report is dated May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and received by County staff on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and was written by Chris Sabourin, PE, from Sabo Structural Engineering. The report provides a structural opinion of Magic Beach Motel and an assessment of the structural and financial requirements to bring the building up to current code standards. Sabourin observed "several structural deficiencies, including wall cracks, exposed foundations, evidence of settlement, and substandard craftsmanship. These issues align with the observations outlined in the 'Building Evaluation and Feasibility Report' by Mike Koppenhafer, which [Sabourin has] reviewed and fully support[s]". The requirements for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) were addressed as follows: "The building rests on a shallow foundation, which does not comply with FDEP standards for CCCL construction, which require deep pile foundations. The first floor sits at approximately 10.0 feet NAVD [North American Vertical Datum], significantly below the required 17.2 feet NAVD elevation". Sabourin concluded by stating, "... bringing the existing building up to current building code standards is not a practical or economically feasible option".

**Magic Beach Hotel: 50 Vilano Road, St. Augustine Beach, FL. Building and Property Evaluation – Coastal Construction Regulations and Criteria from Elizabeth Fountain, J.R. Evans Engineering.**

This report is dated May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and was received by County Staff on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The evaluation was completed by Elizabeth Fountain PE, CFM from J.R. Evans Engineering. The report contains a Federal Emergency Management Area (FEMA) National Flood Hazard layer map, a Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) boundary map, a 2021 boundary survey, topographic map, and an FDEP100-year storm elevations chart. The report outlines the processes required for technical improvements to the existing Magic Beach Motel structure. Fountain states, "It is my professional opinion that any substantial repairs or upgrades to the Magic Beach Hotel building would trigger the Florida Building Code's Substantial Improvement/Substantial Damage (50% Rule), as outlined in Section 1612 of the Florida Building Code (FBC) and FEMA regulations. This would require the existing hotel structure to be demolished, and a new structure constructed in full compliance with the current Florida Building Code Chapter 3109 provisions for buildings located seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL), as well as with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Chapter 62B-33, F.A.C., which governs coastal construction".



## **BOARD ACTION**

**RECOMMEND APPROVAL:** Motion to recommend approval of the proposed mitigation alternatives included in the submitted Cultural Resource Management Plan for the demolition permit application for commercial structures located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach, finding the plan sufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and recommending staff to proceed with approval of the Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP) and demolition permit with the added conditions within the Plan, with support from structural reports.

**RECOMMEND APPROVAL WITH CHANGES:** Motion to recommend approval of mitigation changes proposed by CRRB and agreed to by the applicant to the proposed mitigation efforts included in the Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP) for the demolition permit application for commercial structures located at 50 Vilano Road in Vilano Beach, finding the modified plan sufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and recommending staff to proceed with approval of the Cultural Resource Management Plan and demolition permit with the added conditions within the Plan as modified, with support from structural reports.

**RECOMMEND DENIAL:** Motion to recommend denial of the Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP), finding the plan to be insufficient in addressing alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect on the resource and providing an explanation for the recommendation and further guidance to the applicant, which includes support from structural reports.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Demolition Application N25-256; 50 Vilano Rd., St. Augustine, FL

Attachment 2 – HABS Survey and CRMP (March 2025)

Attachment 3 – Additional Materials (CRRB Designation, Florida Master Site File information and photos)

Attachment 4 – Public Correspondence

Attachment 5 – Structural Surveys