

ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Cultural Resource Review Board

BOARD

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



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

County Auditorium
500 San Sebastian View

Commissioner Sarah Arnold, BCC Liaison
Megan Wright, Staff Liaison
Mike Lagasse, Environmental Manager
Kealey West, Snr. Assistant County Attorney

Monday, June 30th, 2025, 1:30:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Leslee Keys (Chair)
Nick Jonihakis
Blair Knighting
Christine Newman

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Susan Schjelderup (Vice Chair)
Robert Olsen (Resigned)
Janet Jordan (Resigned)

STAFF PRESENT:

Megan Wright
Kealey West
Mike Lagasse
Ryan Mauch

- Call meeting to order at 1:30pm
 - Reading of the Civility Clause
- (2:40)
- Public Comments

Sallie O'Hara: Recommended the Board advance the National Register nomination of the Vilano Beach Center as a Vilano Historic District. Requested this be an agenda item for the next meeting. She urged the CRRB not to allow for the County Landmark at 165 Vilano Road to approach demolition by neglect, inviting the Board to draft legislation and use Jacksonville's new ordinance as a model. She noted the stronger penalties for demolition of historic properties as per Senate Bill 582 that just passed. She requested that St. Johns County resubmit during the next cycle applications for the two Small Matching Grants that were not funded during this cycle.

Trey Asner: Recommended the historic St. Johns County Jail be given landmark status as it is an integral element in the story of the civil rights movement and has direct connection to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Advised he has already submitted the recommendation application to the County.

Ed Slavin: Supports the recommendation of the historic St. Johns County Jail be given landmark status.

David Nolan: Supports the recommendation of the historic St. Johns County Jail be given landmark status. Mentioned a list of Black History Sites for the CRRB to consider preserved for future generations and the relationship to the Florida Black History Museum.

Staff (Ms. Kealey West): Welcomed Commissioner Sarah Arnold and explained that Commissioner Arnold is the liaison member to CRRB on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners and is a non-voting member for the CRRB.

Clarified, for the CRRB Board, as to what agenda item is being considered at this meeting. In the Staff Report, the Board's consideration is limited to the Cultural Resource Management Plan that is part of the Demolition Permit. This Board does not make any type of judgement on the Demolition Permit for two reasons.

Explained it is not within the purview of the CRRB Board under the Code. In 2024, the Florida legislature passed a law that pre-empts local governments regarding its view of Demolition Permits for certain structures totally or partially in the coastal construction line.

Explained the Demolition Permit review is limited to those undertaking an administrative review for compliance with the Florida Building Code, the Florida Fire Prevention Code and the Life Safety Code. Hence the Demolition Permit is an administrative review, and the Cultural Resource Management Plan is now before the CRRB.

Advised Board members to disclose detailed ex parte information on this agenda item that includes site visits, emails, phone calls and any communication with the applicant or interested parties.

Minutes: Minor changes were requested to the April 14th meeting minutes, so it was agreed they be held for approval until the August meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Magic Beach Motel – 50 Vilano Road: Demolition Permit Application and Cultural Resource Management Plan.

Staff: Ms. Wright presented a timeline slide for what has been reviewed the past five months.

January 15th, 2025, a Demolition Permit was filed by the applicant.

March 13th, 2025, St Johns County requested an Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and a Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP).

March 13th, 2025, a Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP) was received.

April 14th, 2025, CRRB meeting requested a structural evaluation and made a motion to “defer the decision regarding the CRMP, seeking additional information from the applicant, to include preservation of the building”

May 12th, 2025, and May 13th, 2025, the County received the HABS and CRMP and 5 reports that addressed structural floodplain, architectural and economic reports, with reviews of the structure from various consultants. These were reviewed by County staff.

June 26th, 2025, the County received an email response of review from the State Historic Preservation Officer who did review the CRMP.

June 30th, 2025, the CRRB is asked to review and make recommendations to approve the CRMP or approve it with modifications or deny the CRMP with reasoning, in support of what Ms. West has presented.

All Board members disclosed ex parte communication.

(24:37)

Applicant: Joe Van Rooy, (9471 Baymeadows Road, Suite 101, Jacksonville), presented additional studies regarding the physical condition and operation of the Magic Beach Motel. Explained they had engaged two architects, a structural engineer and an engineer specializing in coastal construction line matters along with an economist. All the reports have been filed and submitted to the County.

The reports of architects and engineers conclude that the Florida Building Code, herein referred to as the 50% rule, does apply to the building and describes various construction and mechanical deficiencies. The repair of which would invoke the 50% rule. The art deco style facade of the motel is Styrofoam based synthetic stucco that is deteriorating, cracking and leaking.

The economic report, after reviewing the financials of the motel, concludes that the present value of cash flow from the operation of the motel is a negative \$1.7 million. Motel operations lose money yearly.

The various reports disclose in evidence a building, that due to its location east of the coastal construction line, with the elevation of the project being about 8 feet lower than current code requirements, and the construction with poor construction methods and quality initially plus its present condition, that renovation is not a reasonable option. To continue operation of the motel is not economically feasible.

The Mitigation Plan Alternative 2, by Mr. Paul Weaver, includes a replacement building incorporating architectural elements of the Magic Beach Motel including the plasterwork flamingos, a tribute area used to relocate the sign.

Chair, Dr. Leslee Keys: Expressed thanks to Mr. Koppenhafer for his remarks that recognized that the application is from a group outside St. Johns County and addressed his remark about 50 years not being historic. Explained that the 50-year rule is a standard established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 so that properties under consideration are recognized as historic and have verifiable and established historical significance. Quote *"50 years is a general estimate of the time needed to develop perspective and evaluate significance. This guards against the listing of properties of passing contemporary interest and ensures the national register is a list of truly historic places"*.

As stated in numerous public and support documents since May 2021, Magic Beach Motel is a historic structure and designated as a historic cultural resource.

Explained that the building is being maintained and has confirmed with the County Code Enforcement that it meets the County Code.

Chair, Dr. Leslee Keys: Raised concerns that regional, northeast Florida consultants were not used in assessing the building.

Mr. Joe Van Rooy: Explained that three of the five were local consultants.

Various discussions occurred between Board members and the Applicant with regard to the existing building code, that water can be directed away from the building and that repairs can be made to the structure, and the site, rather than replacing the building. The board raised concerns as to why the short form and not the large-scale format drawings and photographs were not provided for mitigation for the HABS report.

(42:00)

Public comment:

Carolyn Covert, (51 B Beachcomber Way, St Augustine 32084): OPPOSED wants to retain the historic structure.

Joanne Conrad, (211 Third Street, St Augustine 32084): OPPOSED against the demolition of Magic Beach Motel. Concerned about lack of parking in the area.

Linda La Cerva, (301 Genoa Road, St Augustine 32084) Explained her role on the Vilano Beach Main Street Board of Directors. That Vilano Beach Main Street is the only main street in all of Florida that is not a city or a town. It is a CRA (Community Redevelopment Area). That the Vilano Beach Main Street Board members have all devoted and volunteered thousands of hours to maintaining the historic nature of Vilano. Supports what the CRRB committee deems today as culturally significant will remain. Supported the option of preserving what is culturally significant from the Magic Beach Motel.

Barbara Jenness, (6 Sandpiper Dr, St Augustine FL 32080): OPPOSED, explained that in April 2025 the MBCA conducted a survey of the community in North Beach and 75% were against demolition of Magic Beach Motel. Provided a graphic showing the survey results. Read a statement from Debbie Dickinson, the President of MBCA. Quote: *"Stop destroying communities and neighborhoods with over and inappropriate development. Do not allow the destruction of culturally significant structures when developers' plans are not known and not approved"*. Wants to retain the "Magic" in Vilano.

Maureen O'Connor, (4260 Myrtle St, St Augustine FL 32084): OPPOSED to Magic Beach Motel demolition. Explained the historic nature of the motel and that it has been filmed in major movies and TV productions. Explained that when the current owners purchased the property in May of 2022 that they publicly stated they had no plans to change the ironic vintage motel aside from some general repairs and renovations. Now residents of Vilano Beach are facing the loss of this iconic building. Concerned about parking and traffic issues caused by any new development.

Sasha Martin, (133 Coastal Hollow Circle, St Augustine, FL 32084): OPPOSED. Provided historic and cultural reasons as to why Magic Beach Motel needs to be saved and not demolished. Asked the auditorium audience to stand to show who agrees to the preservation of the building.

Keith Willard, (66 Ferrol Road, Vilano Beach, FL 32084): OPPOSED. Explained that the flooding in his area has been nonexistent for the past 24 years and that several people, in the vicinity of Magic Beach Motel, who had lived there since 1956 had not had flooding even during hurricanes. Explained that in the years between 2006 and 2008, when the Vilano Town Center was being developed a new large underground stormwater and irrigation filtration system was constructed to service the entire town center. It is underground just a block from Magic Beach Motel that has been there for almost 75 years and is still standing.

James Sleheland, (476 Pullman Circle, St Augustine FL 32084): OPPOSED. Mentioned that the motel may need maintenance and repairs due to its age but not demolition. Pointed out that Magic Beach Motel is grandfathered regarding construction requirements and hence the 50% rule referred to does not apply to maintenance or restoration of historic buildings.

Paula Childress, (1255 Ponce Island Drive, St Augustine FL 32085): OPPOSED. Had a career in the hotel industry, including elite hotel chains. Mentioned that Magic Beach Motel has 24 guest rooms and is eligible for landmark status and national historic recognition as well as historic district recognition. Recommended the owners create new ways to reduce the costs for maintenance to ensure it becomes profitable.

Doug Clay, (113 Coastal Hollow Circle, St Augustine FL 32084:) OPPOSED, provided a photo of the Motel with the sign that is no longer working. Explained that many things were no longer working at the motel due to a lack of maintenance. Would like to see the iconic building restored and kept for future generations.

Ellery Freeman, (90 Colon Ave, St Augustine FL 32084): OPPOSED, wants to see the Motel preserved for historic reasons.

Cynthia Robinson, (1703 Windjammer Lane, St Augustine, Florida): OPOSED, wants to retain the art deco flavor of the community. Wants to retain the murals and the sign.

Ed Slavin, (PO Box 3084, St Augustine FL 32085): OPPOSED, explained the Magic Beach Motel is not a registered historic structure by any federal or state definition. It is a 1951-year-old building. Recommended the Motel be landmarked and preserved.

Cindy Campbell Taylor, (32 Vernon Road, St Augustine FL 32084): OPOSED, wants to protect the quality of life of the community. Economic vitality is important, yet it needs it to be an orderly, transparent process. We need to be presented with alternatives to demolition.

Sallie O'Hara, (PO Box 6, St Augustine FL 32085) OPPOSED to the demolition permit and considered that the administrative review for the CRMP is deficient. The property is not openly listed for sale. Voiced concern that this demolition permit is about recovering a questionable investment.

Vivian Browning, (30 Beach Way, Vilano St Augustine 32084). OPOSED. Founding President of Vilano Beach Main Street. Mentioned the various buildings they have preserved for the Vilano Community. Recommending the Magic Beach Motel building be preserved.

Trey Asner, (3425 SW 2nd Avenue, Gainesville FL 32607). OPOSED. Explained that two previous Cultural Resource coordinators for the County have recommended against the demolition of Magic Beach Motel due to the historical significance of the building. Explained it is a unique mid-century, post war modern structure left in St Johns County. It provides a sense of place, of age and community. Recommends listening to the State Historic Preservation office to take more time to explore more options with the applicant and with the public.

Dr. Leslee Keys stated that Magic Beach Motel has been nominated to the "11 to Save" list for the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation.

(1:35:00)

Rebuttal: Mr. Johnson, representing the applicant, explained they have provided a CRMP. Referenced the Staff Report that included a synopsis prepared by St Johns County staff and various officials, the document the letters that people referred to. Explained they have provided a CRMP and a study that was deemed sufficient by County Staff. Explained that the CRMP for mitigation and the HABS drawings and defining memorial space proposed are appropriate. Explained a history of the various surveys and that 2022 the County consultants considered the Magic Beach Motel as a potentially eligible and a contributing resource to the district. Explained the various reports they were asked to submit.

Various discussion occurred between Staff and the Board members with regard to the wording of the motion.

Various discussion occurred between the Board members and Staff with regard to the applicant providing the written application for the CRMP and that is has been included as written in the Staff Report.

Further discussion occurred between the Board members with regard to the feasibility study not meeting CRMP requirements, lack of addressing cultural significance and comparison to other such as The Local Motel that is very successful and similar to the Magic Beach Motel.

(1:43:00)

Motion by Mr. Nick Jonihakis, seconded by Dr. Leslee Keys, carries 4/0, to recommend DENIAL of the Cultural Resource Management Plan for Magic Beach Motel, 50 Vilano Road, that was submitted, finding the plan to be insufficient in addressing alternatives. The Chair asked if the CRRB record would be provided to the BCC. Ms. West replied no, stating that the application can be appealed to the BCC as a de novo hearing.

- **Staff Reports:**

Ms. Megan Wright: Advised that On May 9th, 2025, the Fort Mose State Park did a ribbon cutting for their Reconstructed fort.

St. Augustine Historical Society rehabilitated a research library and opened their doors for appointment, starting on June 6th, 2025.

Janet Jordon and Bob Olsen have resigned their CRRB positions. The two vacancies were posted on June 6th, 2025, and will be pulled on August 4th, 2025.

- **Board Reports:**

Dr. Leslee Keys: Mentioned the week kicks off America 250 years celebration and that there will be a proclamation related to that at the County Commission meeting on July 22nd, 2025. Provided a short history relating to St Augustine at that time.

Motion to adjourn the meeting by Mr. Jonihakis, seconded by Ms. Newman, carries 4/0, at 3:32pm.

Minutes approved on the _____ day of _____, 2025.

Chair / Vice-Chair

Clerk, Growth Management *For more detailed Minutes, please visit the St. Johns County GTV video recording: [Jun 30, 2025 Cultural Resources Review Board - St. Johns County, FL](#)