



Cultural Resources Review Board

CULTURAL RESOURCES REVIEW BOARD

Dr. Leslee Keys (Chair)
Susan Schjelderup (Vice Chair)
Robert Olson
Janet Jordan

Blair Knighting
Christine Newman
Nick Jonihakis

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

4040 Lewis Speedway
Conference Room 1
Commissioner Sarah Arnold, BCC Liaison
Megan Wright, Staff Support

Monday, April 14th, 2025, 1:30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

STAFF PRESENT:

Megan Wright, Environmental Specialist
Ryan Mauch, Environmental Supervisor
Michael Lagassé, Environmental Manager
Kealey West, County Attorney

PUBLIC PRESENT:

Dawn Watkins
Jason Watkins
Anastasia O'Connor
Cathy Aissen
Doug Clay
Courtney Brown
Robert Brown
Barb Brown
Cynthia Knoche
Maureen O'Connor
Rob Bruno
Joe O'Connor
Vivian Browning
Georgia Katz
Sacha Martin



Mike Cumpton
Sallie O'Hara
Joe Van Rooz
Cindy Campbell Taylor
Michelle Murphy
Keith Willard
Rick Ambrose
Chuck Labanowski
Rick Johnston
Tejal Patel
Mike Koppenhafer
Noah Hertz
Linda LaCerva
Mike Kilgallon
Barbara Jenness
Liz Ryan
Ed Slavin
Nancy Watson
Doug Clay
Joanne Conrad
Jessica Clark
Stuart Korfhage
Briana Brownlee

- ❖ Chair Keys called the meeting to order at 1:30pm.
- ❖ Nick Jonihakis completed the roll call for CRRB Members.
- ❖ Chair Keys read the Civility Clause.
- ❖ General public comment for items not on the agenda – 3 minutes per speaker
 - Ed Slavin spoke about previous County employee Trey Asner and the Former Detention Center and its role in the Civil Rights Movement.
- ❖ Approval of meeting minutes from December 9th, 2024 and February 10th, 2025 meetings.
 - Motion by Mr. Olson, second by Vice Chair Schjelderup. Vote of 7-0.
- ❖ Approval of current agenda
 - Motion by Christine Newman, second by Vice Chair Schjelderup. Vote of 7-0.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **50 Vilano Road, Magic Beach Motel Demo Permit Application, Cultural Resource Management Plan**

a. Ex-parte communication –

1. Chair Keys disclosed that Rick Johnston emailed her in October of 2024, and called her in December of 2024 stating he had been told to contact her to help him demolish the Magic Beach Motel. She replied that she did preservation. Representatives from First Coast News – Jessica Clark, the St Augustine Record –



Lucia Viti, Jacksonville Business Journal – Stuart Korfhage, and Melissa Wyllie of the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation contacted Chair Keys. Sacha Martin left a voice message stating that Sallie O’Hara intended to present slides during this meeting.

Ms. Jordan disclosed that she attended the Vilano Main Street meeting that was held on March 19th and has driven by the motel several times.

Ms. Knighting also received correspondence from Mercedes Harrold, a representative from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation that included information about the Magic Beach Motel demolition permit.

Mr. Olson attended a meeting held by the North Beach Civic Alliance where the motel was discussed.

Ms. Newman spoke with a community member, Trey Asner, about this topic. Ms. Newman has been tracking public posts on Facebook regarding this topic.

Vice Chair Schjelderup visited the motel and after presenting full credentials to the reservations clerk, requested a quick visit to any vacant motel room. It was not provided.

Mr. Jonihakis received the same correspondence from a representative from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation and had driven past the motel.

- b. Presentation by Rick Johnston and Mike Koppenhafer
 1. Presented findings from Florida Master Site File, attachment six, which was a 2022 survey that stated that it is recommended that the Magic Beach Motel was ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The motel was originally constructed in 1951 and was a 10-unit hotel, during a time that motor courts were gaining popularity. In 1999, a new, neon sign was constructed and placed on the motel. There was a large-scale rehabilitation in 2012. Historic signs were removed, the historic restaurant had an addition of a second story. In 1989, a pool was added. The concrete is 70 years old. The west side of the property was replaced with a Pizza Hut. The current structure of the motel doesn’t allow for rehabilitation to today’s standards and codes. Alternative solutions are required. The motel is along the Vilano CRA (Community Redevelopment Area) and Vilano Main Street borrowed money on bonds that must be serviced. The current tax base does not meet that need, and those numbers are going to come due. Johnston and



his team believe that rehabilitation of the motel will help achieve that result. They developed a CRMP [Cultural Resources Management Plan] to the County and made revisions. The staff did a great job of assembling materials.

Chair Keys requested the applicant's address. Mr. Johnston replied that his business address for this project is 80 Vilano Road.

Mike Koppenhafer is with Fisher | Koppenhafer Architecture and Interior Design, Cypress Creek Drive, Jacksonville. The CRA calls for a mixed-use area to generate interest. The 50% rule in the building department states that if you improve the building more than 50% of the building's current value, the building must be brought up to code. The building is 74 years old. This structure is east of the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL), which would require it to be raised out of the flood zone and to put it up on pilings. No way to do this with a one-story building. After doing that, the plumbing, electrical and more would need to be revamped, and the structure would need to be renovated to an economic means that would allow return from that rehabilitation, as well as meeting codes. There are a few historic components in the structure that are worthy of salvaging. Charming elements can be brought out and installed in a new building onsite.

Johnston explained that his team is relying on the CRRB Members and their expertise to understand how to move forward with developing a project in a good way. Snappers AKA Barrancottos located at 165 Vilano Road is a County Landmark. The structure owner secured parking waivers and tax credits. The new renderings do not show preservation other than preserving the bones of the structure. Johnston states that it was specifically purposed for utilization in today's standards. He explained that his team will incorporate the design components such as the flamingoes and art murals or he will give them to other agencies, offer them to the community. They would catalog everything.

The finished floor elevation of a structure that is built east of the CCCL is 15 feet above sea level, which is dictated by the State. The motel is 9.5 feet above sea floor level and it would be impossible to meet that criteria of 15 feet. The redevelopment would deliver heads in beds instead of transient visitors. This would also help the other hotels in the area because nobody is diving down on rates. This area is a CRA not a certified historic district. Vilano Beach Main Street voted to approve. The project is engaged lock and step with the County.

Tejal Patel represents the ownership of the motel. The motel was purchased in May



of 2022, and he feels his team should've done more due diligence on the structure. He has been in the business for 25 years. He had a vision of entering into that agreement, renovating the motel, spending a significant amount of money renovating it. Once they started to dig into the building, the electrical, plumbing and roof all needed to be replaced. The owner is barely breaking even and they are at a point where they need to make a decision about what is coming next. This structure is over 70 years old, and these structures do have a life span. This motel is not delivering a product that the customer wants. Room size and parking are iffy.

c. Public Comment on Agenda Item #1

1. Sallie O'Hara – completed a Designated Speaker Form to speak on behalf of 12 citizens, allowing for five minutes of speaking. Ms. O'Hara was formerly Executive Director for Vilano Beach Main Street for 11 years and has been involved in multiple projects in Hastings and Vilano Beach. As part of the Vilano Beach Community Revitalization Agency (CRA), public participation in decision making is required, with a focus on historic preservation and neighborhood revitalization. She expressed that the full community needs to be involved
2. Georgia Katz spoke in opposition to the demolition of Magic Beach Motel. She noted that she was the first Vilano Beach Main Street Manager and had been a County staff in the Planning Department. Meaningful adaptive use should be the goal. Ms. Katz spoke about floodplain and elevation issues and reuse of the building.
3. Mike Cumpton, North Beach Community Alliance, spoke in opposition to the demolition and provided a survey of 210 citizens, demonstrating opposition by 74.76%.
4. Joanne Conrad spoke in opposition to the demolition of Magic Beach Motel, with focus on the lack of future site plans and a traffic study.
5. Cathy Aissen spoke in opposition to the demolition, with focus on safety for emergency vehicles accessing Vilano / Vilano bridge, a lack of future site plans and a traffic study.
6. Sacha Martin spoke in opposition to the demolition. Ms. Martin spoke about the meaning of preservation, quoted from the LDC about Significant Cultural Resources as important community assets, and the need for an independent structural engineering study for confirmation of the engineering data presented.
7. Keith Willard spoke in opposition to the demolition. Mr. Willard is a member of the North Shores Improvement Association, Vilano Beach Main Street and lives adjacent to Vilano Road.
8. Michelle Murphy, current President of Vilano Beach Main Street. Ms. Murphy serves on the CRA Steering Committee and the Porpoise Point Board of Directors.



9. Barbara Jenness from the North Beach Community Alliance spoke in opposition of the demolition, on behalf of 210 people. Ms. Jenness inquired on future site plans and stated that seven is the greatest number of units that can be provided. She elaborated that with exemptions, 13 would be possible which contradicts the current proposal of 20, raising the question of the future site being condos/townhomes or motel/hotel.
10. Mike Kilgallon spoke in support of looking at the issue from a different perspective. Mr. Kilgallon raised the idea of a communal purchase it and to create a non-profit.
11. Linda LaCerva spoke in support of the demolition. Ms. LaCerva supported possible future site plans to a degree, wherein the new structure's first floor is retail, with a salon, pack and ship with a 400-700 square foot retail space for Vilano Beach Main Street.
12. Anastasia O'Connor spoke in support of the demolition. Ms. O'Connor welcomed proposed new business and residences that fit in with Old Florida architecture.
13. Cindy Campbell Taylor past president of Vilano Beach Main Street, spoke in opposition to the demolition bringing up the need to see future site plans and emphasis on the rehabilitation of Haley's Court.
14. Dawn Watkins owned and operated a restaurant inside of Magic Beach Motel, however the café could not be sustained due to a ceiling collapse during Hurricane Helene.
15. Rick Ambrose spoke to share his experience with filming at Magic Beach Motel. The Motel was chosen by the crews responsible for "Game of Thrones" and for a Netflix series "3 Body Problem" bringing 160 people who stayed in 5 hotels in Vilano Beach and St. Augustine and ate at local restaurants. This started with the Aaron Spelling Team for "Safe Harbor" with Gregory Harrison and Rue McClanahan which lasted 13 episodes. Commercials, independent films.
16. Doug Clay spoke in opposition to the demolition, emphasizing that previous owners have made commitments to the property's maintenance.
17. Joe O'Connor expressed mixed feelings about Magic Beach and supports new development.
18. Ed Slavin spoke in opposition to the demolition, encouraging rejection of the CRMP from the CRRB and supporting emergency landmark designation. Mr. Slavin also commented on the lack of addresses and names on record from Johnston and Koppenhafer.
19. Vivian Browning, past president of Vilano Beach Main Street and North Shore Improvement Association, spoke in favor of the demolition, citing private property rights.



d. Rick Johnston and Mike Koppenhafer

Mr. Johnston addressed the audience's statements and questions, with focus on traffic, correspondence, public feedback throughout the process, structural integrity of the motel. Mr. Johnston asked for feedback on the Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP).

Mr. Koppenhafer asked what the cultural significance was of the building. Mr. Koppenhafer asked for feedback from the Board to diligently try to include into his drawings for what would replace the motel. He said that he could not state what would go on the site as that had not yet been determined.

e. CRRB Board Comments on CRMP and Presentation

Mr. Olson inquired about the neighboring property to the North of the motel, if Magic Beach Motel was needed for parking for the Colonia development. Mr. Johnston replied that it was not.

Mr. Olson also inquired about the process of the CRRB's approval or denial of a motion to support the CRMP. Mr. Olson asked about the involvement of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), if its approval was required for demolition, and TIF funds of Vilano Beach.

Mr. Olson mentioned the 2002 establishment of Vilano Beach Main Street and the 2011 plan. He recommended options and alternatives to demolition, what are they? Community of character is the goal of the Vilano Beach Town Center Plan, Art Deco/Old Florida feel, and this plan encourages owners to save buildings. Owners should investigate way to look at alternatives.

Ms. West, OCA, replied that review of the documents is overseen by the CRRB, not the CRA. The CRRB's recommendation of the CRMP can be appealed to the County Commissioners, but the decision today is before the CRRB. She stated that the documents from 2002 and 2011 were not germane to the decision of the CRRB. The TIF funds go to the plan.

Ms. Knighting asked about structural integrity of the building as no information had been provided. She asked the owner, Mr. Patel, about the history of flooding and wind damage. He responded that the rear of the property gets water and during Hurricane Helene the roof came off. It has been replaced. She further inquired about the feasibility of rehabilitation of the building.



Ms. Newman inquired about the applicant's development to the north and where the Pizza Hut had been. No images had been provided for future plans and traffic patterns for the area where the Motel is. She asked about images. Mr. Johnston stated that there were no images.

Chair Dr. Keys began with questions regarding qualifications of Mr. Koppenhafer. During a project that he was involved with in downtown St Augustine, he discussed with Dr Keys his lack of experience in historic preservation and had asked for a meeting about another project so that he could begin to learn.

She addressed the section of the CRMP regarding the potential of a National Register of Historic Places discontinuous district, as buildings are not required to be adjacent to each other. National Register listing had not been attempted for the area, but could be done. An eligible contributing building in a historic district has the same rights and responsibilities as does an eligible individual building. The building as locally significant could be preserved using tax incentives. Mr. Johnston asked a variety of historic preservation questions about National Register listing and property takings to which the Chair responded.

Dr. Keys also discussed the likelihood of rehabilitating the structure with the owner's representative Tejal Patel. She asked about the maintenance of the building. Mr. Patel stated that they have met all code requirements to operate a hotel. He stated that the investment that was needed to continue to make the building viable and meet contemporary needs cannot be done for the property. Dr. Keys reviewed her questions on the CRMP.

Vice Chair Schjelderup asked for clarification on rehabilitation and raising the building. Koppenhafer explained the 50% rehabilitation code wherein when the structure is repaired at least 50% of its value, the entire building needs to be brought up to code.

Ms. Knighting clarified that historic structures are exempt from the 50% rule.

Mr. Olson quoted from the Vilano Beach Town Plan to look at alternatives to fully scraping away the building and adding a couple of flamingos. He explained that the demo permit raises the land value and does not take into consideration community needs. The County has put in about \$13 Million in infrastructure in this area. He supported the idea that there is not enough support in the CRMP to make a motion at this meeting.



Mr. Koppenhafer questioned the relevance of the historic and cultural facts of the structure, asking County staff if the building was historic. Mr. Mauch replied that it is a historic building.

- ❖ Motion to defer the decision regarding the Cultural Resource Mitigation Plan, seeking additional information from the applicant, to include preservation of the building. Made by Mrs. Knighting, second by Ms. Jordan. Vote of 7 – 0.

- ❖ **Board Member Reports**

- Dr. Keys provided a handout with the following text:

“St. Johns County Jail/Annex/Detention Center – County communication from Administrator Andrews and corresponding news stories about possible demolition of this 1951 building. On March 4, I requested and toured the building with Dan Whitcraft, Director, Facilities Management Department, and two deputies. The most recent communication is that the demolition is not a consideration at this time; a proposal for rehabilitation of the building for staff offices is under consideration; and I provided information about the Special Category grant cycle that just opened. The building is structurally sound and stable, but in need of interior rehabilitation.

Florida Black History Museum (FBHM) – The Board of County Commissioners, through the Tourist Development Council, retained my services and those of Alesia Wilbekin, Executive Director of the FBHM Foundation, to evaluate four black history museums for relevance to the Florida project and provide detailed reports: International African American Museum (IAAM), Charleston; National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR), Atlanta; MLK, Jr. National Historic Site, Atlanta; and the Legacy Museum, Montgomery.

Related: Florida Senator Tom Leek Files Bill to Support St. Johns County’s Proposed Florida Black History Museum
<https://www.sjcfl.us/senator-leek-files-bill-supporting-sjc-black-history-museum/#:~:text=Johns%20County's%20Proposed%20Florida%20Black%20History%20Museum,-4%20February%202025&text=On%20February%203%2C%202025%2C%20Florida,Florida%20Museum%20of%20Black%20History>

SAHS and Flagler College: Dr. Martin Dubrow presentation on Civil Rights in St. Augustine, April 7, Markland House

Women’s History Month – City of St. Augustine Proclamation



America 250 – As part of the national events in honor of the United States’ upcoming 250th anniversary, that began in Boston in 2023 for the 250th of the Boston Tea Party, local officials began a series of events in 2025 in St. Johns County. A “Liberty Tree” was designated at the St. Augustine Historical Society’s (SAHS) Oldest House garden.

On March 18, I made a presentation, “Celebrations and Commemorations: Engaging the Public in History” for the SAHS at the School Board Building Auditorium.

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) – In February, as part of a team of three, I participated in a training session for the Petersburg, VA historic preservation commission and related municipal office staff.

Florida Trust for Historic Preservation (FTHP) – I serve as a Trustee Emerita and an active member on the NE FL Regional Council and the statewide Hurricane Committee. We made plans for actions related to the 2025 hurricane season.

Resilient First Coast Collaborative – I am the sole historic preservation professional who participates. I serve on the Economic Resilience Committee, too. We are in the midst of creating a resilience plan. Part of the research was a “listening session” with members of the shrimping industry to learn of impacts from sea level rise and water disasters.

Climate Central – US Coastal Risk Map and Analysis <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/new-us-coastal-risk-map-and-analysis>

Traditional Building Conference Series: St. Augustine – I participated in the conference that brought about 100 people from throughout the US, including materials vendors, to the community to learn about the historic construction techniques and materials, historic properties, archaeological sites, and current threats to those resources.

St. Benedict the Moor Schoolhouse/St. Joseph Neighborhood Center – This remarkable restoration project was completed by the Sisters of St. Joseph over a 3-year period, including securing more than \$5M for the effort. I volunteered to prepare their statewide preservation award nomination. A decision is forthcoming. The project will be receiving the Herschel Shepard Historic Preservation Award from the SAHS on May 25 as part of Preservation Month.

St. Augustine Lighthouse 150th Anniversary – I will be making a presentation Gilded Age tourism on April 24 at Memorial Presbyterian Church as part of the speaker series: “History In the Shadow of the Tower: The Rise of Florida Tourism” supported by the Florida Humanities Council, Florida Arts Council and other sponsors.



Beaches Museum, Beaches Area Historical Society – In honor of Jean Ribault’s anniversary on May 1 of reaching the body of water he named the “River of May” – the St. Johns: “Preserving Florida’s Heritage in an Era of Rising Seas”

Florida Planning and Zoning Association – This conference will be at the Casa Monica Hotel from Jun 4-6. I will be presenting and providing tours.”

❖ **Staff Member Reports**

- Mr. Jonihakis’ term expired in six days. Staff examined applications for this board and he is the qualified applicant out of the pool. With CRRB consent, his appointment will be sent to the BCC consent agenda on 5/6.
- Proclamation date for may for Historic Preservation Month in May. That will be stated on 5/20 at a special evening meeting which begins at 5 pm.
- The discussion for the demolition application for the Former Detention Center has been delayed.
- The County Landmark located at 165 Vilano Road, aka Barrancottos, is waiting for a construction fence to be erected shortly. Ms. Wright is taking frequent photos of the structure.
- The County Landmark at 107 E. Cochran Ave, aka Old Hastings Jail, has had pavers put down.
- Comprehensive Plan update –2/18/25 GTV meeting and time stamp 1:53:06 begins the section titled, “Recognize, Protect and Enhance Historic Resources”. The slide had the following list: “1. Be resilient against natural disasters 2. Increase opportunities to learn about and promote historic resources/cultural programming 3. Maintain/preserve existing historic sites and trails 4. Ensure historic resources are resilient to sea level rise 5. Increase resources devoted to historic preservation”. Chris Doughterey, the presenter mentions historic resources again at timestamp 1:59:00 under the category of “Preserve natural resources”. They are developing goals, objectives and policies drafts this spring. And will hold a transmittal aka public hearing in summer.
- On March 11th, the Florida Senate Community Affairs Committee voted in support of The St Johns County and their efforts to make West Augustine the home of the state’s first Black History Museum.
- Strategic planning link: [st.johns-county-strategic-plan_final_feb-13-2025-not-high-res-1.pdf](#) and SJC Strategic Plan - St. Johns County
- History Harvest event on April 11th hosted by County staff Kelly Ussia, 904-209-0335 where a “community-driven event where we invite you to bring your treasured photos, documents, and heirlooms to help preserve and share the rich history of our county. These items will be scanned/documented as part of a collective effort to create a digital archive that will tell the story of St. Johns County for future generations. Please note that you will retain ownership of the materials; we will simply be making copies or taking photos to document. We are also capturing oral histories from local residents—your memories, stories, and experiences.”
- Ms. Newman recommended that Florida Public Archaeological Network and the St Augustine Archaeological Association be invited to events like this moving forward.