



**CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
City Commission Agenda Memo
REGULAR MEETING**

#15-1428

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Lee R. Feldman, ICMA-CM, City Manager

DATE: November 17, 2015

TITLE: Quasi-Judicial – Resolution Approving a Landmark Designation – Towers
Apartments/Towers Retirement Home, 824 SE 2nd Street – Case Number
H15023 (FMSF# BD01504)

Recommendation

It is recommended the City Commission consider the request to designate the Towers Apartments/Towers Retirement Home and property located at 824 SE 2nd Street as a historic landmark.

Background

An application for the historic designation of the structure located at 824 SE 2nd Street, Fort Lauderdale, Florida was filed on July 27, 2015, by Steven M. Glassman, President of the Broward Trust for Historic Preservation, Inc., and is attached as Exhibit 1. On August 31, 2015, the Historic Preservation Board (“HPB”) reviewed the application and recommended by a vote of 8-0 that the City Commission approve the landmark designation. HPB minutes are attached as Exhibit 2.

The HPB considered the memorandum prepared by Merrillyn Rathbun, the City’s Historic Preservation Consultant (Exhibit 3). Ms. Rathbun qualifies as a history and architectural history professional in accordance with the National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior’s Professional Qualifications Standards for Architectural History as published in 48 Federal Registry 44716-01, previously published in the Code of Federal Regulations 36 CFR Part 61. The consultant’s report concludes that the Towers Apartments/Tower Retirement Home meets the criteria for designation under Section 47-24.11.B.6 of the Unified Land Development Regulations (“ULDR”) under criterion a,c,d, and e.

In addition to the submission by the applicant and the City’s Historic Consultant memorandum, the HPB also considered information from party interveners. The property owner, Mark Nelson of Towers Retirement Home, Inc. is not the applicant for this Landmark Designation. Legal Counsel, Stephen K. Tilbrook of Grey Robinson, representing the owner submitted testimony objecting to the request and is attached as Exhibit 2.

Summary of City's Historic Consultant Memorandum

The Consultant's report notes that the Towers Apartment Hotel is located in the Beverly Heights neighborhood, which was formerly part of Colee Hammock. The real estate firm of Hott and Dye purchased Colee Hammock and subdivided it into two subdivisions. In 1922 Hott and Dye formed the Beverly Heights Corporation to re-subdivide one tract to form the Beverly Heights neighborhood. The most important physical feature of the new subdivision was the Himmarshee Canal, a canalized natural slough which bisected the area. In 1925, the Erkins Family purchased land in Beverly Heights, along the Himmarshee Canal to build the Towers Apartment Hotel.



Fig. 1. The Towers Apartments. Under construction 3/2/1925.

The Erkins were a prominent family from Cincinnati, Ohio. They first wintered in Florida at St. Augustine in 1881. The Erkins spent the winters of 1904 through 1914 at the Royal Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach. Albert Erkins (A.W.) spent most of his time in Florida exploring the area. The family had money to invest in property. Albert first came to Fort Lauderdale in 1912. In January of 1919 he made a return visit; he liked the area and he bought some land. In 1923, Albert organized the Sunset Investment Company. The same year he built the Sunset Theatre and office building. Albert's mother, Mrs. Ida Erkins, came to town for the opening of the Sunset Theatre. Impressed with her son's accomplishment and the town, she purchased some property for a home.

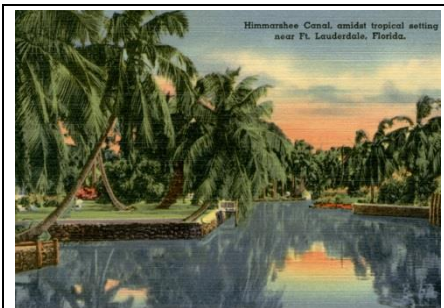


Fig. 2. Himmarshee Canal

Historic Context

In the first three months of 1925, architect Francis Luis Abreu had seven important projects, including the Towers Apartments and Casa Sonriendo, Mrs. Erkins' riverfront home, which were either commissioned or under construction. In 1921, Abreu had come to Fort Lauderdale shortly after his graduation from Cornell University's College of Architecture. The architect's father, Diego Abreu, the owner of a Cuban sugar plantation, had just purchased a cottage in the Colee Hammock neighborhood after spending a winter (1920-21) vacation in a house on Fort Lauderdale beach. At the time the town was beginning to attract property investors and developers. The elder Abreu may very well have thought that the town would be a good place for his son to begin his career.

In his early days in the area, the young architect took what work he could find. He did some work in Palm Beach County¹ and in later years he was acquainted with Addison Mizner, but there is no evidence that Abreu ever worked for him. Family sources think that he may have worked as an on-site architect for Joseph Young in Hollywood. By 1923, the young architect was able to open an office in town; his was the second permanent office to be opened by a registered architect in Fort Lauderdale. Although Abreu sought, and received, many commercial and public commissions, he was a "society" architect; he had a wide social acquaintance and received many of his important commissions from his society friends. The architect established relationships with important men of the town. Ross Clark, a real estate investor, land owner and developer of the Placidena project became a patron and close personal friend. Pioneer developer Tom Bryan commissioned a number of projects from the young architect including a home in Colee Hammock and a number of commercial projects. In later years (1926-28) Bryan, through his political connections, was able to steer several important municipal projects to Abreu, including the municipally owned Fort Lauderdale Golf and Country Club clubhouse, the 1928 beach casino and swimming pool, and Fire Station No. 3 in the Waverley Place (SBHD) neighborhood. In 1928, while the town was suffering through the economic deprivation caused by the after effects of the 1926 hurricane, Abreu was lured to Sea Island, Georgia, to re-establish his career. Alfred Jones, the Sea Island developer, had visited Fort Lauderdale where he saw the new casino, recognized the architect's talent and told Abreu that he could find work at Sea Island. Although Abreu continued to take occasional commissions in town throughout the 1930's, he moved his office to Georgia and established offices in Sea Island and Atlanta.

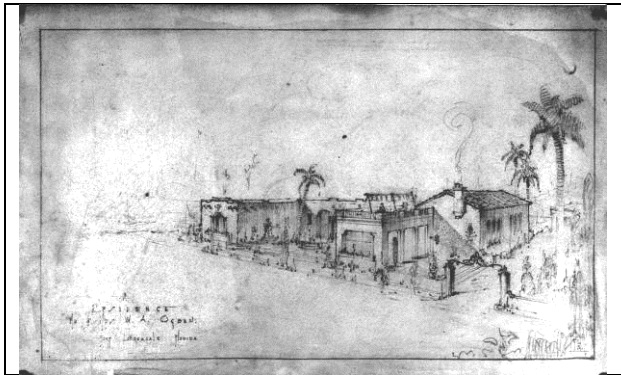


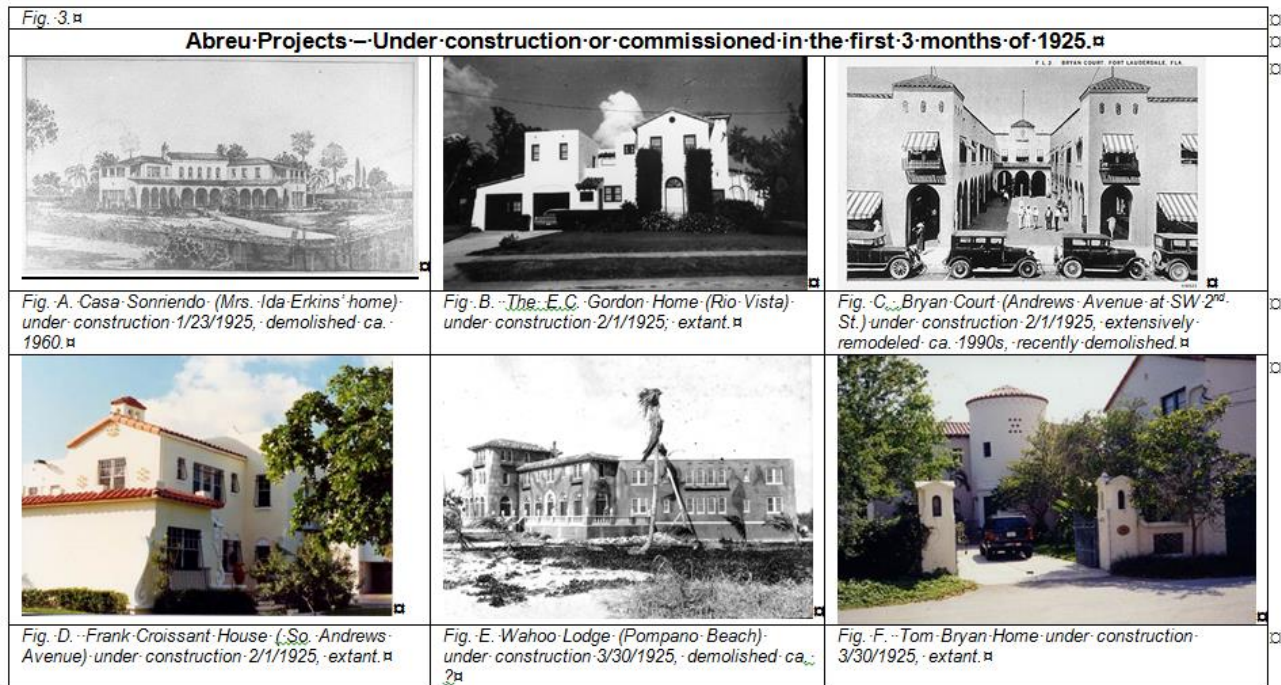
Fig. 4 Ogden House, designed by Abreu for Mrs. Erkins' daughter and son-in-law, built on Idlewyld, now demolished.

Building Description

The Towers Apartment is a three story concrete building, with stucco wall cladding and a U shaped footprint. The building has a flat roof with a pent roof surround clad in barrel tile. It has a projecting pavilion with a gable roof centered on the street facing façade. A

¹ The Abreu designed and extant Royal Palm Apartments (ca. 1926) is now the oldest surviving apartment building in Boca Raton.

ground floor entry porch extends from the centered pavilion. The porch, which is supported by squared columns, has a flat roof and barrel tiled hip roof. At the third story on the courtyard side of the projecting wings of the building there are small corner tower enhancements.



Criteria for Historic Designation

ULDR Section 47-24.11.B.6	Consultant Response
a. Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural or archeological heritage of the city, state, or nation	CONSULTANT RESPONSE When first built, and for many years afterward, the Towers Apartments was the largest apartment building in Fort Lauderdale. It is one of the few examples of Abreu's commercial work remaining in the area.
b. Its location as a site of a significant local, state or national event.	CONSULTANT RESPONSE n/a
c. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the city, state, or nation.	CONSULTANT RESPONSE Albert W. Erkins was an important investor and developer in the early 1920's in Fort Lauderdale.
d. Its identification as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state, or nation.	CONSULTANT RESPONSE Francis Luis Abreu was a major architect for 1920's "Boomtime" Fort Lauderdale.
e. Its value as a building recognized for the quality of its architecture, and sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.	CONSULTANT RESPONSE The Towers is a significant example of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture.
f. Its distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.	CONSULTANT RESPONSE n/a
g. Its character as a geographically definable area possessing a significant concentration, or	CONSULTANT RESPONSE n/a

<i>continuity of sites, buildings, objects or structures united in past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development or</i>	
<i>h. Its character as an established and geographically definable neighborhood, unite in culture, architectural style or physical plan and development.</i>	CONSULTANT RESPONSE n/a

The consultant concludes that the Towers Apartments/Tower Retirement Home is perhaps the most important remaining commercial example of Francis Abreu's work remaining in the city and meets the criteria for designation under Section , 47-24.11.B.6 of the ULDR, under criterion a,c,d, and e.

Required Designation Process

Pursuant to Section 47-24.11.B.5 of the ULDR the City Commission shall hold a public hearing to consider the application, the record, and recommendation of the HPB review, and shall hear public comment and determine whether the proposed application meets criteria found in Section 47-24.11.B of the ULDR. If the City Commission determines the proposed designation meets the criteria, the City Commission shall approve the landmark designation by adopting a resolution accordingly. If the City Commission determines that the proposed designation does not meet criteria for designation, the City Commission shall deny designation.

The landmark designation shall automatically include the designation of the site upon which the landmark exists as a landmark site. As a result, once the City Commission approves the landmark designation, the property will be subject to the provisions set forth in, Section 47-24.11 of the ULDR. This includes the requirement that the property owner or designee shall obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness ("COA") from the Historic Preservation Board prior to undertaking any of the following actions:

- Alteration of an archeological site, new construction, demolition, or relocation.
- Alteration of the exterior part of a building or a structure or designated interior or portion thereof of a building or structure, however, ordinary repairs and maintenance that are otherwise permitted by law may be undertaken without a Certificate of Appropriateness, provided this work on a designated landmark, a designated landmark site, or a property in a designated historic district does not alter the exterior appearance of the building, structure or archeological site, or alter elements significant to its architectural or historic integrity.

Additionally, any future proposed impacts to the historic resource such as development of adjacent properties may require said properties to report to the HPB for review and comment.

Resource Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

Strategic Connections

This item is a *Press Play Fort Lauderdale Strategic Plan 2018* initiative, included within the Neighborhood Enhancement Cylinder of Excellence, specifically advancing:

- Goal 6: Be an inclusive community made up of distinct, complementary, and diverse neighborhoods.

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale Vision Plan 2035: We Are Community*.

Attachments

Exhibit 1 – HPB-H15023 Application

Exhibit 2 – 08/31/15 HPB Minutes

Exhibit 3 – City’s Historic Preservation Consultant Memorandum

Exhibit 4 – Resolution Landmark Designation – Approving

Exhibit 5 – Resolution Landmark Designation – Denying

Prepared by: Linda Mia Franco, AICP, Principal Planner, HPB Liaison

Department Director: Jenni Morejon, Sustainable Development