



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

**#18-0988**

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

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

**DATE:** November 20, 2018

**TITLE:** Quasi-Judicial Resolution Approving a Historic Landmark Designation of  
the Building Commonly Known as the “Bender Residence” Located at 1100  
SW 6th Street, HPB Case No. H18017, Applicant: Tom Forney

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**Recommendation**

It is recommended the City Commission consider the request to designate the Bender Residence located at 1100 SW 6th Street, as more specifically described in the legal description in Exhibit 5, as a historic landmark building in accordance with the criterion in Sections 47-24.11.B.6(c) and 47-24.11.B.6(e) of the Unified Land Development Regulations (ULDR).

**Background**

An application for the historic designation of the structure located at 1100 SW 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Fort Lauderdale, Florida was filed on August 17, 2018, by Tom Forney (Exhibit 1). The application includes a historic designation report describing the history and significance of the structure which was written by Ellen Uguccione, historic preservation consultant for the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society. Additionally, within the application a legal description and property survey is provided for the designation of the main house only and it is not the intention of the applicant to include the entire site.

The application was originally scheduled for the October 1, 2018, Historic Preservation Board (HPB) meeting, but was deferred to the next agenda since the meeting was not held due to lack of quorum. On November 5, 2018, the HPB reviewed the application and recommended by a vote of 9-0 that the City Commission approve the landmark designation.

Due to the rescheduling of this item on a subsequent HPB agenda and the brief period of time between the HPB Meeting and the City Commission Meeting, draft minutes are not currently available.

The HPB considered the staff memorandum prepared by Trisha Logan, Planner III, HPB

Liaison (Exhibit 3). The staff report concludes that the Bender Residence meets the criteria for designation under Section 47-24.11.B.6 of the ULDR.

As part of the discussion of this item, the property owner and applicant, Mr. Tom Forney, summarized his request and voiced support of the designation application. Chair Kyner commented on his fascination with the house and that it is unlike any other property in the City of Fort Lauderdale. The HPB concluded that the property meets the criteria for designation and voted to recommend approval of the request of historic landmark designation.

**Summary of City’s Historic Consultant Memorandum**

The residence at 1100 SW 6th Street has a long and distinguished history, with connections to Florida pioneers, Europe, civic leaders and the aristocracy. Overlooking the South Fork of the New River, pioneers Harry and Lucy Bender (originally from Logansport, Indiana) would begin its construction in 1924, utilizing concrete and reinforced steel to build a virtual “bunker” in conjunction with two frame structure that were extant on the property at the time. The Bender Residence would easily survive in the strongest of hurricanes because of its construction, rarely used during this period of South Florida’s history. Lucy Bender had spent four years in Europe, and was enamored with the designs for the grand homes found there. One journalist called the design for this residence as “a cross between a Spanish and Italian villa.” In the 1960s, the home was sold to the Countess Astrid Grabowski-Dewart, whose pedigree is astounding as she is related to the first King of Poland. The Countess fled from the Nazis beginning in 1939 with the occupation of Poland and she relocated to Yugoslavia, Hungary, and then to Paris where she learned the art of fashion design from a leading French couturier. After arriving in the United States, and particularly Fort Lauderdale in 1966, she bought the former Bender Residence and made improvements to its already impressive design. The residence became palatial in character, and survives in a pristine setting, on an estate comprised of three lots in the Riverside neighborhood of Fort Lauderdale.

**Criteria for Historic Designation**

ULDR, Section 47-24.11.B.6	Staff Response
<i>c. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the city, state, or nation;</i>	Harry S. and Lucy E. Bender were Midwesterners who became local South Florida pioneers. They chose to winter in Fort Lauderdale as early as 1919, enduring the long and arduous trek from their home in Logansport, Indiana. By 1924 the Benders began construction on their permanent home which was completed in 1926. Their home was sited on a large parcel of land in the Riverside Addition and was covered in dense, lush vegetation fronting directly on the south fork of the New River. Mr. Bender was a highly respected businessman who was actively engaged in civic affairs, while Mrs. Bender was intent on making

<p><i>e. Its value as a building recognized for the quality of its architecture, and sufficient elements showing its architectural significance;</i></p>	<p>their home the center of the social circle in the city.</p> <p>The Bender Residence, as later renovated and added onto by the Countess Grabowski is an architectural anomaly rather than a portrayal of any one recognized, traditional style of architecture. It was the personalities of its owners that make 1100 SW 6th Street, first an idealized version of a Mediterranean palace and later into a grand Eastern European home that reflected an aristocratic pedigree. The residence, as it stands today is found to have more than sufficient integrity to qualify it as a historic landmark. Available records cannot provide us with detailed information about changes to the home, but most probably, with the exception of the grand staircase, they were interior in nature. The residence is a rare, surviving example of a home whose style was directly influenced by the desires of its owners. Its unusual qualities speak directly to the personalities of the owners and is a one-of-a-kind design in the City of Fort Lauderdale.</p>
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### **Building Description**

The residence built by the Benders between 1924 and 1926 was substantial, reflecting the nature of the environment they were in, and perhaps some influences that came from the Midwest where the Bender's had met and married, and where Harry Bender accumulated his wealth. Their residence on the river was constructed of concrete and reinforced steel—said to be the first of its kind in the area.

The design for the home was unlike anything else built during that period. Lucy Bender is said to have spent four years in Europe, and was especially fond of the architectural designs she experienced there. Her instructions to the builders were to create “a cross between a Spanish and Italian villa.” Descriptions of the interiors speak to massive, ornate chandeliers and large open rooms with wrought iron embellishments throughout.

The residence faces north onto SW 6th Street and is set back from the roadway so it is closer to the New River. A circular drive extends across the property for ingress and egress. Presently there are the partial remnants of a coral rock wall on the front property line, however its' severely deteriorated condition, and its compromised integrity are not a part of this report.

In the previous history there are references to the both Mrs. Lucy Bender and the Countess Grabowski seeking a residence that had both references to European architecture, and a presence worthy of their stature. The result was a curious amalgam of design elements.

This two-story residence is impressive, while at the same time has “oddities” that can be assumed to be the result of either Mrs. Bender, or more likely Countess de Grabowski. The center bay, the focus of the composition, is approached by a series of risers that extend outward and terminate in two flanking piers. The stairs are faced in a limestone. This grand staircase, is not functionally unnecessary as the home is built at grade and is not elevated from the ground. As a result, the opening into the foyer, because it is so high required staircases on the interior that lead both upward and downward.

Beside the spectacular staircase which is disproportionate to the home, the eye focuses on the flat roof canopy above the entrance which extends the length of the double doorway, and is attached to the home with scalloped brackets. The roof is not actually flat but attempts to comport itself into a mansard roof. The space required to achieve that slope is simply not physically there. Another inexplicable detail is a smaller flat roof, with the same bracket detail that surmounts the larger flat roof canopy. The smaller, secondary roof structure serves no practical purpose in protecting occupants from inclement weather.

The arrangement of the bays of the house is symmetrical with the main entrance flanked by two garage bays. This photo provides a good detail of the ornate brackets that are below the eaves which extend out a considerable distance from the hip roof.

### **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 proposed application meets the criteria in Section 47-24.11.B of the ULDR. If the City Commission determines that 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, however the applicant has provided a legal description of the structure of the main house only. As a result, once the City Commission approves the landmark designation, the structure will be subject to the provisions set forth in the 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 HPB 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, 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 Application

Exhibit 2 – Bender Residence Historic Designation Report

Exhibit 3 – HPB Staff Memorandum

Exhibit 4 – Waiver of 30-Day Mail Notice Requirement

Exhibit 5 – Sketch and Legal Description

Exhibit 6 – Resolution Landmark Designation - Approving

Exhibit 7 – Resolution Landmark Designation – Denying

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Prepared by: Trisha Logan, Planner III

Department Director: Anthony Greg Fajardo, Sustainable Development