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VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMITTAL

March 24, 2026

Michael Belush, Planning & Design Officer
Planning Department
City of Miami Beach
1700 Convention Center Drive, 2nd Floor
Miami Beach, Florida 33139

Re: **Updated Variance: HPB25-0645**
Certificate of Appropriateness for the Property
Located at 235 Washington Avenue

Dear Mr. Belush:

This firm represents 235 WASHINGTON LLC (the "Applicant"), the owner of the property located at 235 Washington Avenue (the "Property") in the City of Miami Beach ("City"). Please allow this letter to serve as the Letter of Intent supporting a request to the Historic Preservation Board ("HPB") for a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of the two-story structure and design of the proposed open space to serve the abutting school use, providing an integrated, safe and functional area for students, and a variance from Section 7.2.15.2.g of the Resiliency Code to allow a 0-foot front setback for an architectural element designed as an homage to the frontage position of the historic building.

Property Description. The Property is a midblock lot on the east side of Washington Avenue between 3rd Street and 2nd Street. The Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser identifies the Property with Folio No. 02-4203-003-1070. The total lot area is approximately 6,500 square feet in size, and surrounded by a variety of uses. The Property is zoned "Medium-High Density Residential Performance Standard" District ("R-PS3") and is also located within the Ocean Beach Local Historic District.

Existing Structure. As is set forth in detail in the professional Historic Resources Report prepared by Deborah Griffin and Steven G. Avdakov, R.A. of Heritage Architectural Associates and submitted with this Application (the "HRR"), the Property contains a two-story contributing structure built in 1938. See Figure 1, Historic Properties Database Excerpt, below.



Figure 1, Historic Properties Database Excerpt

The original architect was B. Kingston Hall. As explained in the HRR, the Parkside Hotel contained 48 rooms, and due to its modest size, it was not one of the hotels leased by the U.S. Army during World War II. See HRR at 10. The site served as a budget hotel in the post War years, until in the early 2000's, the Property was used as the Jazz Hostel and then as the South Beach or SoBe Hostel. *Id.* A seafood restaurant and bar operated out of the site until closing in 2019. *Id.* The building is presently nonconforming with regards to the Resiliency Code requirements relating to setbacks and there is no current landscaping or opportunity for water retention on the site. As an homage to the original structure, the Applicant proposes an architectural element to evoke the character and proportions of the original structure.

The HRR includes a detailed architectural and current condition description, setting out details of the Property and the surrounding neighborhood. See HRR at 7-9 and at 18-29. To the immediate north of the Property, the private school owned and operated by the Applicant – BaseCamp305 (the "School") – is under active construction. *Id.* at 8. Notably, to the immediate south of the Property is Washington Park, which is owned by the City and features a small police office building and greenspace.

Project. The Applicant is proposing to demolish the existing structure and improve the Property with landscaped open space that will serve the students at the new adjacent School now under construction at 251 Washington Avenue. The proposed recreational open space, benches, hardscape, fence, and an architectural element designed as an homage to the original structure will serve as a much-needed playground and outdoor space for exercise and recreation as an integral part of the abutting School (the "Project").

The front / west elevation facing Washington Avenue and the rear / east elevation facing the alley will be fenced and amply landscaped. These landscape improvements will further enhance the site's compatibility with surrounding civic uses. Along Washington Avenue, the Project introduces two Pigeon Plum trees and two Allspice trees, reinforcing and complementing the existing Live Oak canopy. Additional native shrubs, including Red Stopper, White Stopper, Jamaica Caper, Maidenbush, Key Locustberry, Broombush, and Dwarf Fakahatchee grass, will be provided along both Washington Avenue and Collins Court to create a cohesive, resilient, and visually appealing landscape edge. The Project will also incorporate an elegant historic display to honor the original Parkside Hotel in order to preserve and recognize the history of the site within the Ocean Beach Local Historic District.

The perimeter design incorporates a uniform 7-foot aluminum picket fence and coordinated solid aluminum gates, consistent with the School's fencing system and providing secure, controlled access from both Washington Avenue and the alley. Benches will be provided within the open space to support passive recreation, student supervision, and general usability during school programming. To comply with the Code's height allowances, the fence is set back four feet from the front property line, permitting a maximum height of seven feet (and avoiding the need for a variance).

To complement the proposed fencing and recreational space programming, the Project also incorporates an architectural element designed as a subtle homage to the original Parkside Hotel. This element is intended to reflect the character and proportions of the original structure and maintain a similar historic spatial relationship along the street. Positioned at the front property line, the architectural element will serve as a visual marker and entry feature, reinforcing the established urban fabric along Washington Avenue. The placement of this element also ensures that the maximum amount of usable open space is preserved for use by students of the adjacent School.

For the interior of the site, a play and recreation area is planned. While use of sod was studied, the practical demands of maintaining the turf after high use, the requirement to ensure an even, clean area for the students, as well as the requirement that the surface

maintain a consistent degree of “give” for student safety all require use of artificial turf for this area. The open-space area will be surfaced with pervious synthetic turf system specifically engineered for high-traffic school environments and designed to withstand continuous youth recreation while providing superior shock absorption, rapid drainage, and long-term durability, thereby enhancing overall student safety during daily use (TigerTurf Everglade Spring Pro). As the enclosed plans depict, the turf will be striped to create two mini soccer fields to support structured play, physical education programming, and informal recreation throughout the school day. The TigerTurf product is certified for safe school playground use, and features a blend of field and lime green tones, with a brown thatch at the base, providing a very natural appearance.

Collectively, these improvements ensure seamless physical and operational integration between the Property and the abutting School, providing safe, functional, and intentionally designed open space for future students.

Compliance with Certificate of Appropriateness Criteria. An examination of the submitted architectural drawings for consistency with the certificate of appropriateness criteria (including aesthetics, appearances, safety, and function of any new or existing structure, public interior space and physical attributes of the project in relation to the site, adjacent structures and properties, and surrounding community), reveals that the Project satisfies the applicable criteria for demolition and new development in a local historic district. With the introduction of the new School to the immediate north, and Washington Park to the immediate south, the uses on the block are much more civil and institutional. The civil and government uses on this block are more consistent with the proposed additional open space, new landscaping, and secure fence.

The Project introduces open space and landscaping that soften the streetscape and enhance the pedestrian experience along Washington Avenue, not to mention provide access to outdoor play and exercise for the children of the new School. The proposed improvements are consistent with the character and scale of the surrounding uses and maintain the historic district’s overall visual continuity. The inclusion of the proposed architectural element further reinforces the historic context of the site by referencing the original building placement and maintaining a similar spatial relationship along Washington Avenue. In this respect, the requested variance enables a design outcome that is consistent with the intent of the Certificate of Appropriateness criteria and enhances the overall compatibility of the Project.

Structural Condition. The Applicant retained Youssef Hachem Consulting Engineering to conduct a structural analysis of the structure and prepare a Structural Condition Assessment Report (the "Structural Report"), which is included in the application materials. The Structural Report documents multiple site inspections, photographic documentation, and laboratory testing performed by NV5, Inc. to evaluate the feasibility of preservation of the structure. See Structural Report at 3. Based on site observations, a review of available City and County records, and material testing, the Structural Report concludes that the structure exhibits widespread structural deterioration, with several primary structural systems in poor condition, and does not comply with current building code requirements. Collectively, the conditions on the Property result in a situation that cannot be reasonably addressed through repair or rehabilitation, and Professional Engineer Youssef Hachem recommends complete demolition. *Id.* at 7, 11, and 12.

Wood and Concrete Structural Components. The structure consists of a masonry and wood structural system typical of 1938 construction. The roof waterproofing system has failed in multiple locations, resulting in prolonged moisture intrusion and deterioration of wood framing members. The Structural Report identifies moisture-related rot, sagging, and deflection of wood members, including roof framing, floor joists on all levels, and interior load-bearing stud walls, many of which are described as being in fair to poor condition. Evidence of active termite infestation and termite-damaged wood members, including within load-bearing walls, was also observed. *Id.* at 6 and 11.

Concrete structural components exhibit cracking, spalling, and delamination throughout the building. Laboratory testing confirms that the concrete compressive strength ranges from approximately 1,480 PSI to 2,560 PSI (2,005 PSI average), which is significantly below current Florida Building Code standards. Testing also identified elevated chloride content and deep carbonation, resulting in corrosion of reinforcing steel and further degradation of the concrete structural system. *Id.* at 7, 9, and 10. Previous repair efforts were observed throughout the structure; however, the Structural Report notes that these repairs have failed and exhibit re-cracking, further demonstrating the systemic nature of the deterioration. *Id.* at 6.

Foundations and Flood Elevation. The building is supported by shallow foundations and concrete stem walls that are inadequate to meet current code requirements. The finished floor elevation of the structure is approximately 6.1 feet NGVD, which is below the FEMA base flood elevation of 8.0 feet NGVD and below the elevation required for new construction. See Structural Report at 11.

The Structural Report concludes that lifting the structure to comply with floodplain regulations is not feasible due to the deteriorated condition of the foundations, low concrete strength, corrosion of reinforcing steel, and compromised wood framing. Any attempt to lift or rehabilitate the structure would likely result in additional structural damage or failure. *Id.* at 11.

Summary of Findings. As documented in the Structural Report, the structure exhibits a moderate to bad overall structural condition, with multiple primary structural components in fair to poor condition, does not comply with current building code requirements, and would require a Level III alteration under the Florida Building Code. Given the extent of deterioration and the infeasibility of rehabilitation or elevation, the Structural Report recommends demolition of the structure. *Id.* at 12.

Variance Request. The Project substantially complies with the City of Miami Beach Resiliency Code (the "Code"). The requested variance is necessary to accommodate an architectural element intended to honor the historic building and its relationship to Washington Avenue. The Applicant seeks a variance to allow a 0' front setback where a minimum 5' setback is required pursuant to Section 7.2.15.2.g of the Code. Due to the Property's existing historic nature and the mitigating factors described herein, the Applicant respectfully requests approval of a variance from Section 7.2.15.2.g to permit the architectural element (the "Variance").

Satisfaction of Hardship Criteria. The Variance requested satisfies the hardship criteria pursuant to Section 2.8.3.a of the City Code, as follows:

- 1. Special conditions and circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, structure, or building involved and which are not applicable to other lands, structures, or buildings in the same zoning district;**

For this Variance, special conditions exist that are peculiar to the Property, in that the existing structure is nonconforming with respect to the required front setback and reflects a historic building line along Washington Avenue that differs from current Code requirements. The Property is being redeveloped as recreational open space to serve the adjacent School, which necessitates preserving usable open space within the site. As an homage to the original building, the Applicant proposes an architectural element that evokes the character and proportions of the original structure while maintaining a comparable historic spatial relationship along the street. Locating this element at the front property line allows it to function as a visual marker and entry feature, while avoiding encroachment into the recreational open space. These conditions are unique to the

Property and are not generally applicable to other properties that are not similarly transitioning from a nonconforming historic condition to an open space use while incorporating a design element that honors the original structure.

2. The special conditions and circumstances do not result from the action of the applicant;

The special conditions and circumstances do not result from the actions of the Applicant. The nonconforming front setback and historic building line along Washington Avenue are pre-existing conditions that are inherent to the Property and predate the Applicant's involvement. The proposed redevelopment, including the architectural element, is responsive to existing conditions and maintains the established urban fabric.

3. Granting the variance requested will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by these land development regulations to other lands, buildings, or structures in the same zoning district;

Granting the requested variance will not confer on the Applicant any special privilege that is denied to other properties in the same zoning district. The Code allows similarly situated properties, particularly those with historic or nonconforming conditions, to seek variances where appropriate. The requested variance allows the Applicant to maintain a comparable historic spatial relationship along the street and incorporate an architectural element, and does not grant any benefit beyond what is necessary to address the Property's unique conditions.

4. Literal interpretation of the provisions of these land development regulations would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same zoning district under the terms of these land development regulations and would work unnecessary and undue hardship on the applicant;

A literal interpretation of the provisions of the Code would result in unnecessary and undue hardship. Requiring compliance with the 5-foot front setback would push the architectural element further into the site, reducing usable recreational open space and undermining its function as an entry feature and visual marker. Moreover, strict compliance would prevent the Applicant from maintaining the historic building line along Washington Avenue, which would deprive the Property of a contextual design approach consistent with similarly situated historic properties.

5. The variance granted is the minimum variance that will make possible the reasonable use of the land, building or structure

The requested Variance is the minimum variance that will make possible the reasonable use of the Property. The architectural element is modest in scale and limited in scope, and its placement at the front property line is necessary to both preserve usable open space and maintain a consistent historic spatial relationship along the street. No greater relief is requested than is required to achieve these objectives. Any additional setback would compromise both the functionality of the open space and the cohesion of the structure's proposed design.

6. The granting of the variance will be in harmony with the general intent and purpose of these land development regulations and that such variance will not be injurious to the area involved or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare; and

Granting the Variance will be in harmony with the general intent and purpose of the Code and will not be injurious to the surrounding area or detrimental to the public welfare. The architectural element is designed to be compatible with the surrounding context and to enhance the streetscape along Washington Avenue. In addition, the redevelopment of the Property as recreational open space represents a reduction in intensity, and will not generate adverse impacts.

7. The granting of this request is consistent with the comprehensive plan and does not reduce the levels of service as set forth in the plan. The planning and zoning director may require applicants to submit documentation to support this requirement prior to the scheduling of a public hearing or any time prior to the board of adjustment voting on the applicant's request.

The granting of this Variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and will not reduce levels of service. The proposed recreational open space is intended to serve the adjacent School and will enhance the pedestrian experience along Washington Avenue. The Project will not adversely impact public facilities or services and is consistent with the City's planning objectives.

Practical Difficulty. Granting the requested Variance will alleviate practical difficulties arising from the Property's unique conditions, including its existing nonconforming historic building line and the proposed redevelopment of the site as recreational open space. There are multiple practical difficulties associated with accommodating an architectural element that both honors the original structure and preserves usable open space for the adjacent School. Enforcing the strict letter of the Code would require the architectural element to be set back from the front property line, which would reduce the amount of functional open space and diminish the structure's effectiveness as a visual marker and entry feature. Moreover, strict compliance would prevent the Applicant from maintaining the historic spatial relationship along Washington Avenue, which is a defining characteristic of the Property. As a result, strict enforcement of the land development regulations would produce practical difficulties by limiting the Applicant's ability to both preserve meaningful open space and incorporate a contextually appropriate design element. The proposed architectural element will be modest in scale and designed to enhance the streetscape while remaining compatible with the surrounding area. Accordingly, the requested Variance is consistent with the spirit and intent of the Resiliency Code and will not be detrimental to the neighborhood.

Sea Level Rise and Resiliency Criteria. The Proposed Project advances the sea level rise and resiliency criteria in Section 7.1.2.4 of the Resiliency Code as follows:

1. A recycling or salvage plan for partial or total demolition shall be provided.

A recycling and salvage plan will be provided at permitting.

2. Windows that are proposed to be replaced shall be hurricane proof impact windows.

No windows are proposed.

3. Where feasible and appropriate, passive cooling systems, such as operable windows, shall be provided.

The Applicant will provide, where feasible, passive cooling systems.

4. Whether resilient landscaping (salt tolerant, highly water-absorbent, native or Florida friendly plants) will be provided.

All landscaping will be Florida friendly and resilient.

5. Whether adopted sea level rise projections in the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Action Plan, as may be revised from time-to-time by the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, including a study of land elevation and elevation of surrounding properties were considered.

The Applicant will proactively address sea level rise projections. The site will be properly sloped with the future crown of road and the surrounding properties.

6. The ground floor, driveways, and garage ramping for new construction shall be adaptable to the raising of public rights-of-ways and adjacent land.

The proposed open space ensures that the Property is adaptable to the raising of the abutting streets and adjacent land in the future.

7. Where feasible and appropriate. All critical mechanical and electrical systems are located above base flood elevation.

All future mechanical and electrical systems will be located above base flood elevation.

8. Existing buildings shall be, where reasonably feasible and appropriate, elevated to the base flood elevation.

Future development of the Property will be entirely new construction located well-above base flood elevation.

9. When habitable space is located below the base flood elevation plus City of Miami Beach Freeboard, wet or dry flood proofing systems will be provided in accordance with Chapter of 54 of the City Code.

No habitable space will be located below base flood elevation.

10. Where feasible and appropriate, water retention systems shall be provided.

Where feasible, water retention systems will be provided.

11. Cool pavement materials or porous pavement materials shall be utilized.

Cool pavement or porous pavement materials will be utilized where any new pavement is proposed.

12. The design of each project shall minimize the potential for heat island effects on-site.

Redevelopment of the Property will strategically minimize the potential for heat island effects on site. The additional open space will be predominately grassed surfaces, which are cooler than impervious surfaces.

Conclusion. Approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition and design, together with the requested front setback Variance, will permit a better use of the Property for future generations of Miami Beach residents. The Project is an integrated design that substantially complies with the Resiliency Code and is more compatible with surrounding uses, while preserving usable open space and honoring the site's historic character and the neighborhood's urban fabric.

Based on these reasons, the Applicant respectfully requests your review and favorable recommendation of this application. If you have any questions or comments with regards to the application, please call me at (305) 377-6231.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Larkin".

Michael W. Larkin

Enclosures

cc: Debbie Tackett
Paul C. Savage, Esq.
Mickey J. Marrero, Esq.
Roberto A. Alvarez, Esq.