
MORNINGSIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Designation Report



City of Miami

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Bay Shore

Current Name:

Morningside Historic District

Location:

The area generally bounded by N.E. 60 Street on the north, Biscayne Bay and Morningside Park to the east, the rear lot line between N.E. 55 Street and N.E. 53 Street on the south, and Biscayne Boulevard on the west (see attached map).

Present Owner:

Multiple Owners – complete list of owners is available in the Planning Department.

Present Use:

Residential, commercial

Present Zoning District:

RS-2/2, R)-3/6

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

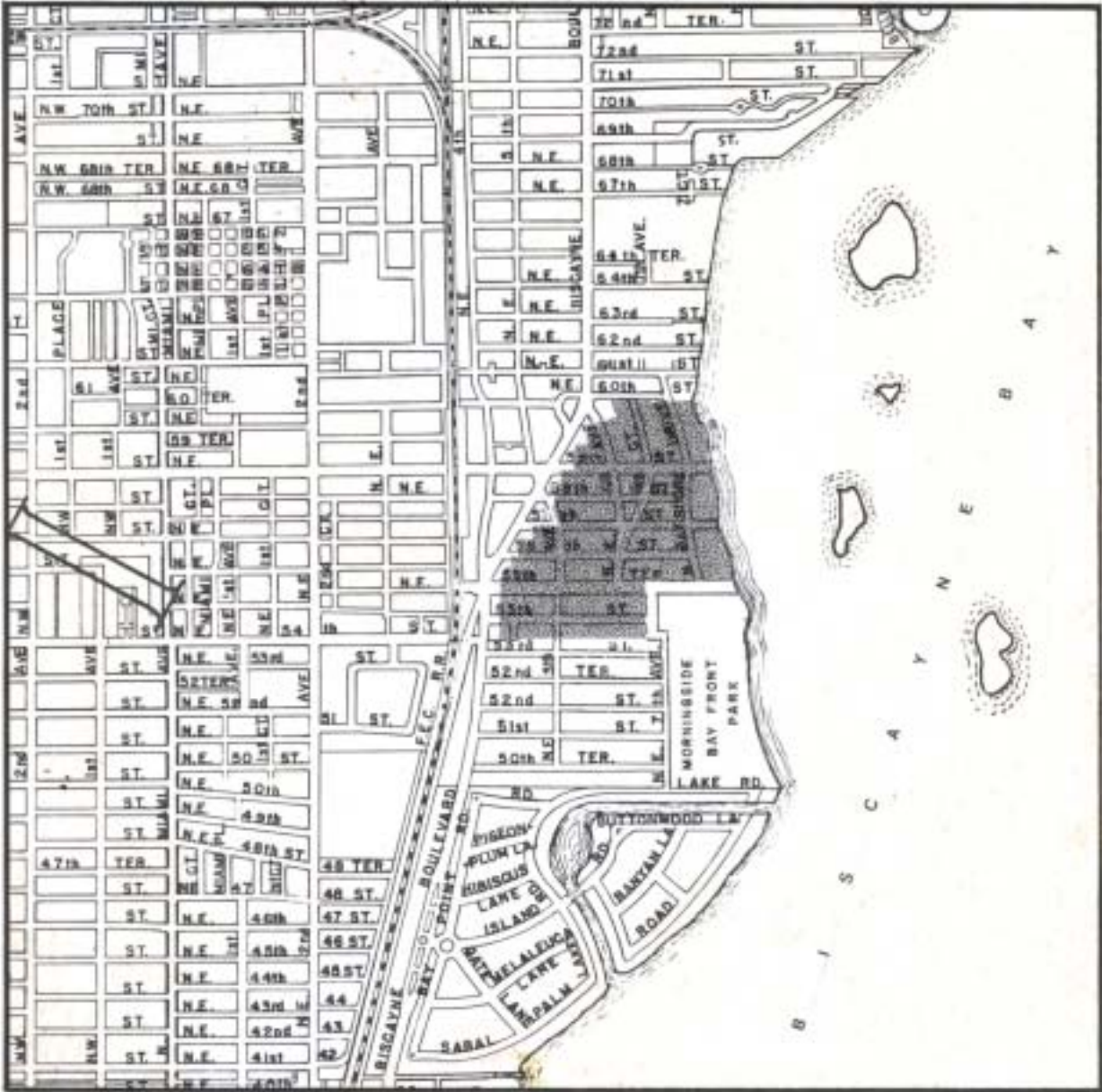
Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

The boundary of Morningside Historic District is shown as the heavy line on the attached map entitled "Spring Garden Historic District - Site Plan."

HC Zoning Classification:

Historic District

MORNINGSIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT



location

MORNINGSIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT



Site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

The Morningside Historic District is significant to the history of architecture, landscape architecture, and community development in Miami. Developed primarily between 1922 and 1941, Morningside contains a wealth of Mediterranean, Art Deco, and vernacular style houses that reflect the diversity and direction of architectural design during the 1920's and 1930's. Morningside is one of Miami's best planned subdivisions, featuring wide, tree-lined boulevards that contribute to the character of the area. This neighborhood was envisioned as an exclusive, residential community, and its amenities and location on Biscayne Bay attracted many influential and prominent local residents. One of Miami's most intact historic neighborhoods, Morningside is the City's best remaining example of a boom-era suburb.

As Miami's population expanded during the late 1920's and early 1930's, new subdivisions reached northward along Biscayne Bay. IN 1922, a large, undeveloped bayfront tract near the northern city limits was platted. Called Bay Shore, this area was subdivided by the Bay Shore Investment Company and was the first of three phases that would be developed by the company between 1922 and 1924.

James H. Nunnally, president of the Bay Shore Investment Company, envisioned Bay Shore as an exclusive residential community and planned for every modern convenience. Before the first lot was offered for sale, the subdivision was fully developed: streets, which bore such names in the community's infant years as Toxaway, Hibiscus, Cocoanut, and Albermarle, were paved and curbed; parkways were curbed and planted with trees and foliage; trees, foliage, shrubbery, and grass were planted between sidewalks and curbs; and street lighting was laid in underground conduits. As a promotional brochure, published in 1924, boasted:

Thoughtfulness was the motto. Not one single feature of highly modernized improvements was to be left for future residents to provide. They were to get a finished homesite, with every utility – water, light, gas, and sewerage – provided in the most scientific manner Every feature which might tend toward comfort, convenience, dignity, and beauty was incorporated in the plan of development, and no detail was left unattended when the property was finally pronounced ready for delivery.

At a time when many lots in other Miami subdivisions were being sold undeveloped and unimproved, Bay Shore was notable for its carefully conceived plan for development.

The exclusiveness of the area was also guaranteed by the deed restrictions that the developers attached to each lot. These restrictions specified the minimum price of each house, ranging from a low of \$7,000 inland to \$13,000 along the Bay. Duplexes, apartment, and hotels were prohibited, as were houses constructed of wood. Building setbacks and lot frontage were also regulated, and the developer required that all plans be submitted for approval prior to construction.

Although Bay Shore developed steadily during the boom and even the Depression, the area witnessed its greatest building expansion between 1936 and 1941. In 1936 the neighborhood was expanded, and a small area south of Bay Shore, along N.E. 55 Street and N.E. 55 Terrace, was subdivided as Bayshore Plaza by Islands Incorporated. Although the houses were often smaller than those in the earlier subdivision, similar deed restriction guaranteed a continued high level of development.

Houses constructed in the Morningside Historic District reflect the eclecticism popular in the early twentieth century. The earlier buildings in the district are predominantly Mediterranean Revival in style, while structures built in the 1930's and early 1940's are frequently Art Deco. Outstanding examples of both styles are found here.

Morningside also features a large number of masonry vernacular buildings that frequently utilize elements of several styles. An unusual Tudor Revival style house and one of the City's best examples of Mission style architecture add to the area's architectural diversity.

Many of the buildings in the district utilize a variety of local materials, such as keystone and oolitic limestone, and decorative tropical motifs. Especially prevalent are wrought iron screen doors and precast concrete vents displaying palm trees, flamingos, and pelicans.

The Morningside Historic District features the work of more than 40 well-known local architects. Kiehnel and Elliott, who introduced the Mediterranean Revival style to South Florida, designed several houses, including those at 463 N.E. 55 Terrace, 527 N.E. 56 Street, and 759 N.E. 57 Street. Marion Manley, South Florida's first known female architect, designed the house at 598 N.E. 56 Street. The works of Gene Baylis, L. Murray Dixon, H. George Fink, Martin Hampton, Gordon Mayor, V.H. Nellenbogen, Paist and Steward, and Robert L. Weed are also represented here.

In addition to the quality of its buildings, the Morningside Historic District is also significant for its landscape architecture. Inspired by the designs of other suburbs and estates throughout the United States, the developers adapted these ideas to take full advantage of Miami's wealth of tropical trees and plants. After more than 4,000 trees had been planted, the subdivision presented the following appearance in 1924:

A typical street intersection shows the wide parkway in the center of each boulevard, dividing traffic. In the center of the intersection is a circular island, graced with shrubbery. Between curbing and sidewalk is a wide greensward with trees and foliage. All corners are curved and foot crossings set back to increase the park effect of the view up and down the boulevard. Boulevards run at graceful angles and the parkways are of varying width and differ in floral adornment. Everywhere the view is like overlooking an immense garden, through which wind attractive passageways.

Today, Morningside contains a representative collection of the plant material used in residential landscaping over the past 60 years, and large numbers of trees continue to be planted in the area.

From its inception in 1922, Morningside has been home to many prominent and influential local residents. James H. Nunnally, president of the Bay Shore Investment Company, built his own house on the Bay in 1927. Other developers and financeers have also lived here, including Paul Scott, an attorney and president of the Biscayne Boulevard Company and the New Miami Shores Corporation, and Henry H. Filer, president of the Filer-Cleveland Company.

Many politicians and government officials built home in Morningside, including Frank Wharton, an early mayor and city manager during the 1920's; Perrine Palmer, a later mayor; and William Lehman, current U.S. congressman.

Laura Cushman, one of Florida's most respected educators and founder of The Cushman School, continues to live in the house built by her father in 1925. Sidney Meyer, secretary-treasurer of Wometco Theaters, built a house in Morningside, as did Harold Steward, a local architect with eth prominent firm of Paist and Steward. Lawyers, physicians, realtors, business magnates, and other executives have populated Morningside throughout its history.

The Morningside Historic District stands today as one of Miami's most intact historic neighborhoods. Despite the number of post-1941 buildings in the area, Morningside retains a high degree of historic and architectural integrity. This is due, in part, to the fact that most later buildings are not intrusive, but respect the earlier structures in scale, setback, materials, and workmanship. The majority of neighborhood residents recognize the special character of the area and desire its continued preservation.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Morningside Historic District is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

The Morningside Historic District has been home to many of Miami's prominent and influential citizens. These individuals have been important in such fields as politics and government, community planning, commerce, education, law, architecture, and communications.

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

The Morningside Historic District is Miami's most intact historic neighborhood and is the City's best remaining example of a boom era subdivision. It reflects the type of development activity that occurred in Miami during the early 1920's.

4. Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one or more distinctive architectural styles.

The Morningside Historic District reflects the diversity and direction of architectural design during the 1920's and 1930's. The neighborhood contains a wealth of Mediterranean Revival, Mission, Art Deco, and vernacular style buildings.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The Morningside Historic District contains a number of outstanding examples of Mediterranean Revival, Mission, Art Deco, Tudor Revival, and vernacular style buildings.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

The Morningside Historic District contains several fine examples of the work of Miami's prominent architects. Kiehnel and Elliott, Marion Manley, Paist and Steward, V.H. Nellenbogen, L. Murray Dixon, and H. George Fink are represented here.

8. By being part of or related to a subdivision, park, environmental feature, or other distinctive area, should be developed or preserved according to a plan based on a historic, cultural or architectural motif.

The Morningside Historic District is one of the most distinctive subdivisions in northeast Miami. The area's historic and architectural character should be preserved as a reminder of Miami's past.

III. DESCRIPTION

Morningside Historic District is a well-defined residential area located in northeast Miami on Biscayne Bay. Encompassing an area of approximately 100 acres, the district includes 218 buildings, all of which are detached, single-family houses. A wide variety of architectural styles is represented here, including Mediterranean Revival, Mission, Art Deco, and vernacular. Morningside is also noted for its wide, tree-lined boulevards and its plentiful, flowering trees and lush foliage.

The Morningside Historic District is comprised of three subdivisions that were platted between 1922 and 1924 and a later subdivision, platted in 1936. The earlier subdivisions were laid out with irregular lot lines and streets running in a diagonal direction to assure each homesite a view of the Bay and the full effect of its cooling breezes. Inland lots are generally 60 feet wide, with larger estates along Biscayne Bay.

A majority of houses in the district were constructed between 1922 and 1941, the area's major period of significance. Approximately 42 houses were built during the boom era (1922-1926), while 31 were constructed during the bust and Depression (1927-1935). The greatest period of activity occurred before World War II, with 73 houses built between 1936 and 1941. Construction came to a virtual halt during the war years, with only two houses built, but resumed in 1946. Since 1946, 70 buildings have been erected.

A majority of post-1941 buildings are small, single-family residences that respect the architectural character of the district. Few major intrusions have been constructed here.

Architecturally, the Morningside Historic District reflects the diverse styles of the early twentieth century. Mediterranean Revival style buildings predominate and are generally two stories in height. These buildings feature round arched windows, cornice moldings, decorative tiles, wrought iron work, and the ubiquitous Mission tile roof.

Although Mediterranean Revival style houses continued to be built in the 1920's and 1930's, the Art Deco style increased in popularity during the late 1930's. Characterized by a linear or angular composition, these buildings feature stylized decoration around windows and doors, a prominent entryway, and glass block.

Masonry vernacular style houses were built throughout the area's development. While some vernacular houses are virtually stripped of ornamentation, others feature a combination of styles that defy classification.

The majority of the buildings in the district have been altered. Typical alterations include the installation of contemporary windows, doors, roofing, and awnings, and the addition and/or enclosure of porches, garages, and porte-cocheres.

Several houses have been more significantly altered by the removal of important architectural features. Despite these alterations, however, the original character, massing, and setback of most houses within the district has not changed.



Morningside Historic District
Northwest corner of N.E. 59 Street and N. Bay Shore Drive
1984



Morningside Historic District
Westerly view of N.E. 58 Street at N.E. 6 Avenue
1984



Morningside Historic District
Northeast Corner of N.E. 56 Street and N.E. 6 Avenue
1984



Morningside Historic District
North Bay Shore Drive Between N.E. 59 Street and N.E. 60 Street (facing northeast)
1984



Morningside Historic District
Northeast corner of N.E. 59 Street and N. Bay Shore Drive
1984

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Morningside Historic District is a stable residential neighborhood of detached, single-family homes, with commercial uses along Biscayne Boulevard. The houses are primarily owner-occupied, and the majority are well cared for. Morningside survived the suburban flight of the 1950's and 1960's and is now attracting younger residents. A major focal point of Morningside is Morningside Park. Located outside the historic district, the park is a 42-acre expanse along Biscayne Bay.

The Morningside Civic Association is an active neighborhood group that monitors neighborhood activities and lobbies for improvements. The Association represents the entire Morningside area, which includes a newer area south of the historic district. A trouble spot in the neighborhood is Biscayne Boulevard and its problems with prostitution and drugs. Although efforts have been made to improve the situation, the perception of crime still lingers.

Conservation Objectives:

Historic district designation is intended as a tool to preserve the character of Morningside and protect it from undesirable encroachments. As originally proposed by the Planning Department, the district included all property east of Biscayne Boulevard and between N.E. 55 Street and N.E. 60 Street. Both the Heritage Conservation Board and the Planning Advisory Board approved these boundaries as presented. However, in the course of the public hearing process, the Planning Department discovered opposition to the district from some owners of buildings on Biscayne Boulevard, mostly owners of buildings that are not historic.

Although the Planning Department continues to stand by its original recommendation, the Department has also presented an acceptable alternative. This alternative would follow the existing zoning boundary and thus would exclude all properties on Biscayne Boulevard from the historic district. This alternative was approved by the City Commission on First Reading. This alternative was revised on Second Reading to exclude one additional property adjacent to the Biscayne Boulevard frontage.

These conservation objectives for the Morningside Historic District can best be achieved by maintaining the present residential zoning within the neighborhood. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the properties. The Planning Department also intends to propose the application of an SPI district for those Biscayne Boulevard properties to encourage quality redevelopment through zoning incentives.

V. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the Morningside Historic District have been drawn to include that portion of the present Morningside neighborhood which contains a predominance of buildings constructed between 1922 and 1941. The boundaries also follow those of the original Bay Shore subdivisions, platted between 1922 and 1924 (located east of Biscayne Boulevard only), and the Bayshore Plaza subdivision, platted in 1936. Although platted later, Bayshore Plaza contains houses similar in age and architectural style to those in Bay Shore.

Specifically, N.E. 60 Street was selected as the northern boundary because of the historical factors mentioned above and because the area north of this street contains few historic buildings. On the east, Biscayne Bay and the Morningside Park form natural physical boundaries. The rear lot line between N.E. 55 Street and N.E. 53 Street was selected as the southern boundary for historical reasons and because the majority of houses south of this line were constructed after 1941. The existing zoning boundary was selected as the western edge, thus excluding all commercial properties on Biscayne Boulevard. Lot 5 of Block 16 of the plat of BAY SHORE UNIT NO. 2 (9-98), which abuts these commercial properties, is also excluded.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

The major exterior surfaces subject to review shall include all facades visible from a public right-of-way.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

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