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**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

**LM-13-07
1481 West 6th Street**

GENERAL LOCATION: North Side of West 6th Street between Blue Avenue and Whitner Street in the Durkeeville/Midwest Side Neighborhood located northwest of Downtown Jacksonville

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, **LM-13-07**, sponsored by the property owner, Jeannette Myers.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- (A) At the request of the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department began preparing a designation application for the property located at 1481 West 6th Street.
- (B) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at 1481 West 6th Street as a Landmark was complete. As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed site. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of 1481 West 6th Street as a Landmark was published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication will be attached to this report.
- (C) If designated, any activity affecting the exterior of the property at 1481 West 8th Street will require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. Before issuing the Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission will review the proposed activity for consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Routine repairs and maintenance, alterations, and new construction not seen from the public right-of-way and other projects consistent with the Secretary's Standards can be pre-approved by the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department. However, the following activities will require a review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

1. Additions to historic buildings or structures.
2. Window replacement or major changes to or addition of door and window openings.
3. Demolition of all or part of historic buildings.
4. New construction and additions.
5. Enclosure of porch, porte-cochere, or garage.
6. Porch replacement.
7. Relocation of historic buildings.
8. Roof replacement with material different from existing or change in roof form.
9. Storefront restoration or replacement.
10. Other work that the Planning and Development Department has determined to be in conflict or potentially in conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards*.

(D) At the close of the public hearing, the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission shall determine, whether based upon the evidence, the application for 1481 West 6th Street meets the criteria for designation. In reviewing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet two of the seven criteria. The two criteria include the following;

1. Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.

Constructed in c.1926, the subject property at 1481 West 6th Street is one of the early residential structures built in Barnett's Subdivision, one of the many late nineteenth and early twentieth century plats that make up the Durkeeville/Mid-West Side neighborhood. Platted between 1905 and 1908, Barnett's Subdivision is roughly defined as Kings Road north to West Seventh Street on the east and west sides of Myrtle Avenue and from the railroad right-of-way west to Whitner Street. Barnett's Subdivision had been preceded to the west by Miller's Addition to Jacksonville (1887), Mimsberg's Subdivision, North LaVilla (1894), Payne's Subdivision (1888), Duval Investment Company (1887), and Griffin's Subdivision filed in 1882. The property constituting Griffin's Subdivision was purchased by Edwards Water College and later became the site of Centennial Hall. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Durkeeville/Mid-

Westside neighborhood was expanded by several major new subdivisions such as Replat of West Jacksonville Annex (1911), Jackson's Subdivision (1914), and Lincoln Place (1926). Establishment of these new subdivisions reflected the continued growth of employment opportunities resulting from industrial and railroad expansion west from Downtown Jacksonville. Because segregation had limited housing options, these new neighborhoods such as Barnett's Subdivision were created to provide additional residential opportunities for Jacksonville's African American community as it expanded north and west out of the historical confines of Downtown, LaVilla, Brooklyn, and Oakland.¹

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the new neighborhoods of Durkeeville/Mid-Westside began to attract members of Jacksonville's growing African American middle class that included educators, doctors, dentists, ministers, business owners, as well as those having stable blue-collar jobs such as industrial and railroad workers and skilled craftsmen. This historical pattern is reflected in the early occupancy and ownership of the subject property. The residence at 1481 West 6th Street was constructed in c.1926 by Thomas Franklin Myers, Sr. (1891 – 1964) reportedly for his bride, Nannie Ruth (1894 – 1974). Marrying Nannie Ruth in 1926, Thomas F. Myers was employed by the Jacksonville Terminal Company as a switchman working out of the Jacksonville Terminal.² The house was constructed with an extra room on the second floor that is accessed by back stairs. This room was for the use of visiting ministers, missionaries and other dignities since public accommodations for African Americans were very limited due to segregation. Thomas and Nannie Ruth Myers lived in the residence until their deaths in 1964 and 1974 respectively. The house is currently under the ownership of their granddaughter, Lynnette Myers.

Architecturally, the original design of the subject property at 1481 West 6th Street reflects no particular high style and is commonly referred to as Frame Vernacular because of its construction. Notwithstanding their simple design, Frame Vernacular buildings are important since they represent vanishing examples of how rural and lay builders utilized simple and time tested construction principles, as well as local building materials such as southern yellow pine and cypress. These local materials were supplemented with manufactured products shipped by railroad such as sash windows, doors, and hardware to construct solid and functional spaces that worked well in the southern environment. Structures of this period also reflected the use of currently rare building materials such as superior old-growth pine that had been so heavily timbered as to be almost non-existent by the 1930's. Old growth pine is now only available from recycled lumber or sunken logs rescued from the oxygen

1 Summarized from the Historic Context – Durkeeville/Mid-Westside Neighborhood, Landmark Report - *Proposed Designation of 1504 North Myrtle Avenue, LM-02-5, August 22, 2002.*

2 Duval County Property Appraiser Record Card for 1481 West 6th Street has construction date of 1924. No building permit record was located.

Ancestry.com – Thomas Franklin Myers, Sr. and Nannie Ruth Myers.

deprived environment of muddy river bottoms. Variations of the Frame Vernacular style survived well into the twentieth century, particularly in the rural South, but have been progressively disappearing from the built environment.

Mr. Myers used an unusual decorative treatment on interior trim and front door surround by chiseling repeated grooves giving the appearance of finger impressions. The current owner, Lynette Myers, stated that, “*Grandpa carved his fingers prints to remind everyone that this was his home*”.³ In addition to representing an example of African-American folk art, the symbolism of the design may have West African, as well as Gullah/Geechee cultural influences. Gullah/Geechee culture is an African American tradition started primarily on coastal islands of South Carolina, Georgia and Northeast Florida. This unique folk tradition originated from former slaves, most from West or Central Africa, who were able to maintain many aspects of their original language and culture in the more isolated islands of the south Atlantic coast.

In preparing this report, no definitive relationship was confirmed linking the chiseled finger design found on interior trim and door surround of 1481 West 6th Street with West African and Gullah/Geechee cultural traditions.⁴ However, photographs of the trim work was forwarded by University of Florida graduate student, Heather Marie Thwing, to several art historians at the university with one noting that the finger design was very similar to a style of Gullah/Geechee cane carvings that frequently featured hand designs. In addition, one of the designs used on square corners and plinths of doors and window trim is reflective of the Adinkra Bese saka symbol of West Africa. Bese saka is interpreted as a “sack of cola nuts” a common cash crop in Ghana, as well as favorite treat of some native populations. The symbol is generally associated with abundance, affluence, power, and unity through agriculture and trade.⁵

7. *Its suitability for preservation or restoration.*

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially on-going neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration. Although vacant for many years and lacking on-going maintenance and

³Statement posted by Lynette Myers published May 20, 2013 on MetroJacksonville.com.

Letter from Mrs. Lynette Myers to Angela Schifanella, Chairman, Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, dated May 1, 2013.

⁴ Both Thomas F. Myers and Nannie Ruth Myers were born in South Carolina, but specific location in the state not determined.

⁵E-mails, Heather Marie Thwing to Joel McEachin dated June 10 and July 16, 2013.

www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra/bese.html.

upgrades, the residence is fundamentally sound and has few alterations. The most visible alteration to the residence was the application of the rolled asphalt product over the wood siding; however, this material can be easily removed usually with little impact to the historic fabric. The raised concrete slab on the front porch floor is also probably a latter addition, but had limited visibility and does not impact any character defining features.

In addition to some wood deterioration along sections of the sill plate on the east elevation, selective pieces of siding will also need to be replaced. Due to height and closeness to adjacent buildings, the condition of the roof was not determined, but evidence of water penetration was found on the second floor. The cheek walls on both sides of the front steps are pulling away from the steps and columns. Constructed of concrete block, the rear wall of the garage structure is in disrepair with a major crack running from the top to the ground. Although not evaluated, the windows and doors, which are boarded, will probably need to be restored or replaced as necessary.

If designated a local landmark, it is the stated intent of the property owner to have the house officially mothballed. Based on a general evaluation, mothballing of the subject property will need to address the roof leaks, secure the raised foundation, properly secure the windows and doors, cut back vegetation around the house and remove any debris found in the yard and under the house. Interior mothballing will require making the house broom clean, patch and strengthen any weak spots in the floors. Other requirements would include the preparation of an engineer/architect's report on its structural condition, as well as installing motion detection security lights on both the front and back of the house. The garage structure will need to be stabilized or removed.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this report, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of 1481 West 6th Street (**LM-13-07**) as a City of Jacksonville Landmark.