Beyond the Theme: Community Revitalization-Based Preservation Planning Approaches for Multiple Property Designations

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Abstract
Multiple Property Submissions (MPS) were established in 1977 as a form of designation under the National Register of Historic Places and are dependent on historic contexts and thematic building types/styles as grounds for significance. This reliance on historic context opened the doors for nominating several vernacular or commonplace buildings and allowed for a more objective approach to evaluating the significance of historic resources. As a form of designation reliant upon local historic contexts that simultaneously contribute to broader national contexts, these frameworks were intended to feed into planning initiatives such as tourism, local oral histories, and educational programming. Tangible links between significant events that have shaped the places and society we live in today have the potential to enrich and strengthen communities through active use and planning. As such, this thesis focuses on a city with a MPS and examines the implications of this designation and its potential to tie into planning initiatives aimed toward revitalization. The city of Opa-locka, located approximately ten miles northwest of Miami, Florida, was designed under an Arabian Nights theme complete with a progressive master plan based on Garden City principles. Today, Opa-locka is said to contain the largest collection of Moorish Revival style buildings in the United States and is also a city in need of revitalization due to a depressed economy and weak tax base. Can Opa-locka retain and promote its historic architectural heritage and supportively grow beyond its original Arabian Nights theme?

This thesis proposes a framework and recommendations for a community revitalization-based preservation plan for the city’s historic resources based on historic planning practices, case studies, and interviews. A community revitalization-based preservation plan would result in a plan cognizant of the area’s needs that would aim to leverage the MPS designation and build beyond its highlighted contexts to endorse the economic benefits of historic preservation. While this work focuses on the city of Opa-locka, the methodologies and recommendations can serve as a case study for revitalization efforts in similar types of municipalities with strong architectural themes or historic character derived from resources listed under a MPS.

Keywords
multiple property submission, community revitalization, opa-locka, moorish revival, preservation plan

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BEYOND THE THEME:
COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION-BASED PRESERVATION PLANNING APPROACHES FOR
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DESIGNATIONS

Latishia M. Allen

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who work tirelessly for the betterment of our communities.
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INTRODUCTION

Located approximately ten miles northwest of Miami is the city of Opa-locka, a city once referred to as “The Baghdad of South Florida” (Fig.1). Originally designed in 1926, the city’s architectural style is based on the literary work *Arabian Nights*, complete with a progressive master plan and street names such as Ali Baba Avenue and Sharazad Boulevard, named after the work’s most famous characters (Fig.2). Today, Opa-locka is said to contain the largest collection of Moorish-Revival style buildings in the United States and is slated to receive over twenty-two million dollars in Federal and State funding over the next two years to support community revitalization efforts.

Sixty-two of the approximately one hundred original Moorish-Revival style buildings remain today within the four square mile city. However, this former fantasy land is now infamous for its poverty-stricken and crime-laden community. The state of Florida, along with federal agencies such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), have recognized Opa-locka as an area in critical need of revitalization, and a considerable amount of funding, in addition to the twenty-two million dollars, has been awarded to the city in the past year towards these efforts.

Fig.1: “A New City,” Advertisement for Opa-locka, 1925
(Source: Miami-Daily News, January 1925)
Fig. 2: Map of Opa-locka and surrounding areas (Source: Author, 2011)
This rapid influx of redevelopment initiatives in the area places the city’s historic resources in a critical position. Plans for revitalization have indirectly touched on historic preservation approaches as a means to revitalization. However, local planning policies lack the teeth to adequately protect Opa-locka’s historic resources. According to Miami-Dade County’s Historic Preservation Ordinance, municipalities incorporated prior to 1982 were given the option of adopting their own municipal historic preservation ordinance or being governed by the County’s ordinance. Nine municipalities, including Opa-locka, chose to enact their own preservation ordinance. Florida’s minimum compliance standards for a historic preservation ordinance include: establishment of a preservation review board, adoption of procedures for designation, and establishment of economic incentives for preservation.¹

Due to financial constraints and staff limitations, Opa-locka does not currently have an active preservation review board. As set forth in Section 16A-3.2 of the County ordinance, the Director of the Miami-Dade County Historic Preservation Office (herein the “HPO Director”) is given the authority to “initiate or appear as a party” in proceedings related to designated properties and has the authority to grant or deny certificates of appropriateness related to alterations of designated properties. With over thirty-five municipalities in Miami-Dade County, the HPO Director must rely on municipal preservation staff to keep the county office informed on preservation related activities in the city. With twenty buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places and several historic sites not yet locally designated in the city, Opa-locka is in need of a preservation plan that will support revitalization efforts and simultaneously streamline preservation goals to encourage a more manageable and active preservation program.

The Moorish-Revival buildings are recognized as an asset in the city and today stand alongside modest masonry vernacular and Mediterranean Revival style buildings in addition to modern interpretations of the original “Moorish” style. Can Opa-locka retain and promote

its historic architectural heritage and supportively grow beyond its original *Arabian Nights* theme? This thesis seeks to find ways in which Opa-locka can continue to promote its unique architectural heritage yet responsibly develop alongside this dominant theme beyond mere duplication of Moorish style elements. This thesis thus (1) provides the historic context of Opa-locka’s development, (2) identifies planning practices from its inception to today, and (3) proposes a framework and recommendations for a community revitalization-based preservation plan for the city’s historic resources. While this work focuses on the city of Opa-locka, the methodologies and recommendations can serve as a case study for revitalization efforts in similar types of municipalities with strong architectural themes, along with areas where the primary historic character derives from resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places under a Multiple Property Submission.

Numerous reports highlighting the economic benefits of historic preservation have recently come to the forefront of discussion in the field. Donovan Rypkema’s work has illuminated multiple economic benefits of historic preservation including: job creation spurred by local rehabilitation efforts, heritage tourism, small business incubation, downtown revitalization, neighborhood stability, and neighborhood diversity. Each outcome appears to be a positive benefit that could serve to revitalize an economically depressed area. However, how can municipal officials prioritize these goals to ensure they meet the needs of the city? While many historic preservation initiatives can help the economic stability of neighborhoods in the long term, few programs aside from low-income tax credits are directly targeted to serve low-income neighborhoods. Stephanie Ryberg’s dissertation titled *Neighborhood Stabilization through Historic Preservation: An Analysis of Historic Preservation and Community Development in Cleveland, Providence, Houston, and*

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Seattle, touches on the unique tensions and commonalities between the roles Community Development Corporations (CDCs) play in cities and historic preservation goals. One of Ryberg’s conclusions proposes a collaborative effort between CDCs and preservationists that moves beyond mere designation and aims to “embrace the broader definition of ‘preservation’ that values: uses, activities, traditions, history, and the built environment.”

A community revitalization-based preservation plan at this stage in Opa-locka’s development would result in a plan cognizant of the area’s needs that would aim to support appropriate physical rehabilitation of historic resources and facilitate the aforementioned economic benefits of historic preservation. Currently, the only National Register listings in Opa-locka are part of a Multiple Property Submission that includes twenty of the city’s sixty-two remaining 1920s Moorish-Revival structures. However the city’s history does not stop there. After eighty-five years since its original foundations, shifting demographics have resulted in a disconnection between the architectural significance of the original Moorish-Revival structures and the current residents of Opa-locka. In the early beginnings, Opa-locka was predominately a white middle-class community. Nearly sixty years later, by the 1980s, the white middle class community was replaced by an African-American middle-class to working poor community. According to 2010 census data, Opa-locka is predominantly an African-American and Hispanic community; 65% black and 35% Hispanic. Identifying historic resources relevant to the current community is a critical component in promoting stewardship and a sense of patrimony in the community.


Methodology

This thesis is a continuation of the author’s research work as an intern in Opa-locka, Florida, this past summer with the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC). The OLCDC is a non-profit organization that has actively served the city of Opa-locka for over thirty years. As part of the Miami-Dade Neighborhood Stabilization Program Consortium in 2010, the OLCDC was awarded over twenty-two million dollars of funding under HUD’s Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). The NSP funding received is intended to be used toward efforts related to the rehabilitation of foreclosed or abandoned properties in Opa-locka for use as affordable housing. Because the OLCDC recognizes the value of the historic Moorish-Revival resources in the city, the author’s summer work with the OLCDC focused on obtaining primary documentation related to the history of Opa-locka and conducting a reconnaissance level survey of the original residential 1926-27 residential structures extant in the city. The OLCDC intends to purchase as many of the historic Moorish-Revival residential properties as possible and rehabilitate them for use as affordable housing.

Research efforts over the summer provided a strong base of primary and secondary research on the original development of Opa-locka. The Special Collections Division at the University of Miami holds the largest collection of original documentation related to the development of Opa-locka. Drawings by Bernhardt E. Muller, Opa-locka’s original architect, have been cataloged and preserved within the collection. Additional items include original specifications, plats, watercolor renderings, newspaper advertisements, and historic photographs. The University of Miami also holds the original files related to the 1980s National Register designation of Opa-locka’s original Moorish-Revival structures within the Michael Maxwell Collection. Maxwell was a consultant hired by the city of Opa-locka to survey and write National Register nominations for the historic properties. The author photographed many of the files in both of these collections and identified over twenty-four secondary sources related to the early development and architectural style.

7 Referred to as “NSP2,” the second round of federal funding under the initiative.
found in Opa-locka (See Bibliography).

While a fair amount of work has been written on the architectural style found in Opa-locka, few resources discuss the master plan of the city designed by Clinton Mackenzie, a planner based in New York. Glenn Curtiss, the developer of Opa-locka, envisioned a self-sustaining planned community, a concept that paralleled ideas generated by the *Garden City* movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One source on the development of Opa-locka claims that Mackenzie’s master plan for the city was so impressive that had it been fully executed, Opa-locka might have succeeded after the Great Depression. A book published by Mackenzie in the 1920s, *Industrial Housing*, showcases several plans and discusses the ways in which housing and master plan designs can improve the quality of life within cities. Examples of Mackenzie’s successful planning projects yield lessons for redevelopment according to the original plan in Opa-locka.

This thesis includes case studies of areas similar to Opa-locka from a general thematic development and community revitalization standpoint. For example, Coral Gables, in Miami-Dade County, was originally designed with an architectural theme based on Washington Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* and is recognized as a Certified Local Government independent from Miami-Dade County’s jurisdiction. Looking into incentives and programs utilized by Coral Gables provides insights into possible recommendations for Opa-locka. Santa Fe, New Mexico is an example of a city with a strong historic architectural style and continued use of this style with new construction raises issues related to authenticity and the duplication of architectural motifs. The Spanish-Pueblo style dominates the city of Santa Fe and is in stark contrast to its modern architecture; some argue

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that “the city has become an adobe theme park.”\textsuperscript{10} Investigations into Santa Fe’s preservation practices aimed towards mitigating these tensions shed light on possible new construction design regulations for Opa-locka. The case study section also includes a community strengthening preservation plan in Washington State, garden city infrastructure preservation in Mariemont, Ohio, and a cautionary example of a city with an eroded early twentieth century Venetian theme in Venice, California.

After assessing preservation plans and practices in various areas, this research was then used to inform discussions with the OLCDC to develop a prioritized list of community needs to determine what preservation approaches would be most beneficial to the revitalization of Opa-locka. The final component of this thesis focuses on a preliminary framework for a preservation plan that fuses community revitalization and preservation initiatives in Opa-locka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domes, minarets-like towers, and crenellated parapets define sporadic sections of the skyline in Opa-locka. While the majority of these buildings were constructed as part of the city’s original development in 1926, a handful of these structures were designed in the late 1990s. This unique architectural style found in Opa-locka is based on the theme established for the development in the 1920s based on the then-popular literary work, *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as *Arabian Nights*. Under extreme pressure to compete for the attention of home buyers and investors amidst the 1920s real estate boom in Florida, Glenn Curtiss elicited the expertise of Clinton Mackenzie and Bernhardt Muller to design a city that would feature the best example of city planning and the most beautiful architecture. After over eighty-five years, less than half of the approximately one-hundred buildings constructed as part of the original development remain, yet Opa-locka is said to hold the largest collection of Moorish Revival architecture in the United States. While sixteen of the most intact examples are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, few policies protect or promote these structures. Geographically dispersed throughout the center of an economically depressed city, these resources require a new strategic framework that will both stabilize and actively integrate these distinct structures into the urban fabric.

The following literature review is divided into two parts: historic context and preservation planning practices. Part One examines literature pertaining to the development and historic context of Opa-locka within the 1920s speculative real estate boom, first focusing on Opa-locka’s development, and then looking at influential movements in the early 20th century that informed Opa-locka’s development. Part Two examines contemporary literature on community revitalization and historic preservation and design standards in changing environments. These sources will inform recommendations made for the city’s historic resources.

History of Opa-locka

The earliest publication providing a comprehensive overview on the development of Opa-locka was written in 1976 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the city. *A Dream of Araby: Glenn H. Curtiss and the Founding of Opa-locka* is a narrative based on first-hand accounts from residents, newspaper articles, and memoirs on the development of Opa-locka. Written by Frank S. Bush-Fitzgerald, the son of Frank S. Bush, a partner in the city’s development, this publication is largely based on the unpublished manuscripts of the author’s father. The account is divided into four chapters and covers the initial conception of Opa-locka, construction of the city between 1926 and 1930, and Opa-locka’s decline from 1931-40. It ends with the city’s status in the 1970s and the author’s personal hopes for regeneration. Fitzgerald-Bush states that while the vision for Opa-locka and its construction momentum ended with the 1929 market crash and the death of the city’s visionary Glenn Curtiss in 1930, its status in the late 1970s was a result of the burgeoning growth of [Miami-] Dade County. Fitzgerald-Bush claims that by the 1970s, less than half of the residents in Opa-locka had lived in the city for more than half of the city’s history. As a result of this cultural memory loss, the author goes on to say that the remaining residents familiar with the city’s history “are not widely supported in their efforts to preserve the best of the past and plan for the best of the future.” Fitzgerald-Bush’s account of 1920s development and declining condition of the city by 1976 provides great insight into the prominent players in the city’s development and its local context.

The second comprehensive writing on Opa-locka was published in 1998 by Catherine Lynn, an Assistant Professor of Historic Preservation at the University of Miami. Building on the primary sources presented in Fitzgerald-Bush’s publication, “Dream and Substance: Araby and the Planning of Opa-locka” provides an in-depth investigation into Opa-locka’s development and focuses primarily on its design and architectural style. Lynn discusses the origins of the Arabian

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Nights theme within a broader context, looking into the basis for choosing a fictional theme and the popularization of the tale by the 1920s. The fictional tales that unite under the Arabian Nights title (also referred to as One Thousand and One Nights) were released in several iterations and editions throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While each edition captured the attention of children and adults, Lynn discusses the critical role played by the portrayal of the tales on the stage and movie screens. The Thief of Bagdad: An Arabian Nights Fantasy, starring actor Douglas Fairbanks, released in 1924 brought awareness of the tales and promoted the fantasy to the audience Curtiss needed to buy homes in Opa-locka. Lynn speculates that the theme was most likely a result of “meetings and discussions among developers, architects, and planners who were competing with others of their kind during Florida’s real estate boom.” Lynn goes on to state that Opa-locka’s theme-centered design was modeled on George Merrick’s 1922 development in Coral Gables, which was based on Moorish motifs from Spain found in illustrations from Washington Irving’s Legends of the Alhambra.

The second half of Lynn’s publication examines the original architectural drawings and construction files with Bernhardt E. Muller’s collection held at the University of Miami Archives. This collection features over nine hundred architectural drawings and also includes correspondence and specifications related to construction. Lynn catalogues the collection by weaving together the stories of Opa-locka’s early design stages based on specific stories from Arabian Nights, construction, and the city’s unrealized future.

13 Lynn, 169.
14 Ibid., 166.
15 Ibid.
Over the years articles written about Opa-locka have focused on the city’s distinct architectural style. Few resources are dedicated to the master plan on which these building stand and were purposefully located. The master plan for the city and its architecture were equally intended to attract home buyers and investors. Today, the original layout remains largely intact in the city. As future plans for development are made in the city, a full understanding of the original and character-defining aspects of the 1926 master plan could potentially provide avenues for restoration and redevelopment. Originally designed as a self-sustaining development, the master plan incorporated attractive amenities for its residents. Several articles released at the time of Opa-locka’s development reveal details of the plan created by planner and architect Clinton Mackenzie of New York. Referred to as the “City Progressive,” the plan for Opa-locka was complete with civic centers, parks, public buildings, a golf course, residences, commercial and industrial sections and a train station. The final portion of Catherine Lynn’s publication discusses the origins and importance of Mackenzie’s master plan for Opa-locka. Lynn discusses Mackenzie’s background as the director of the National Planning Association and Tenement House Commissioner for New Jersey, and goes on to suggest that Opa-locka’s master plan was based closely on a design found in a book published by Mackenzie on the industrial town of Kingsport, Tennessee. Lynn also speculates that Mackenzie’s planning was so impressive that had it been followed after the 1920s, the city might have recovered after the Great Depression, similar to Coral Gables, the city after which its plan was modeled.

Few comprehensive sources are available on Mackenzie’s career. However, a number of passing mentions of the architect/planner reveal key information about his training and the basis

17 Lynn, 187.
for Opa-locka’s master plan. Mackenzie was trained as an architect at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and later went on to work with America’s renowned town planner, John Nolen. 18 Nolen’s book *New Towns for Old*, discusses Nolen and Mackenzie’s collaborative plans for Kingsport, Tennessee and Mariemont, Ohio. 19 Both Nolen’s publications on town planning combined with Mackenzie 1920s book *Industrial Housing*, provide insights into the philosophies guiding Mackenzie’s plan for Opa-locka. Largely influenced by the Garden City Movement, both Nolen and Mackenzie detail the notions of small-scale comprehensive development in their publications. Nolen’s first book, *Replanning Small Cities*, discusses the need for comprehensive planning in small cities to provide areas with adequate facilities for the “common good.” Nolen goes on to say that this type of planning “establish[es] the individuality of a city, – to catch its peculiar spirit, to preserve distinctive flavor, to accent its particular physical situation.” 20

More recent publications on twentieth century planning, such as Mel Scott’s book, *American City Planning Since 1890*, discuss the “booming twenties” in the United States. Scott discusses the unique circumstances of Florida in the 1920s, during which time speculative building was rampant. This publication also details John Nolen’s work in Florida during the mid-1920s and discusses his opinions on the state’s need for comprehensive planning to mitigate potential mistakes due to “speculative fever.” 21 This and other books on 20th century planning, such as *Planning in the Twentieth Century American City*, edited by Mary C. Sies and Christopher Silver, place Opa-locka within early-twentieth century planning philosophies focused on comprehensive planning that sought to affect a range of problems typically associated within cities, including those in the social and economic realm.


Tourism

In a 1926 article, Opa-locka’s original architect Bernhardt E. Muller discusses specific stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* on which the most important buildings in the city were based. In discussing this theme, Catherine Lynn states that this thematic development “pre-Disneyed Disney” in many ways by almost twenty-five years. Advertisements geared toward attracting new residents also encouraged visitors to see Opa-locka for themselves. Not only was the architecture based on *Arabian Nights*, the city also hosted an annual *Arabian Nights Festival*. Residents from the community gathered dressed in costume and paraded down the streets. In understanding the shift that occurred by the 1950s, by which time residents no longer socially embraced the *Arabian Night* theme, possible connections can be made to the disconnect between the residents and the architect. Susan Nance’s book, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935*, discusses the ways in which several generations for over one hundred and fifty years have capitalized on traditions and styles from North Africa and the Middle East for financial benefit. Nance discusses trends during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, surrounding a “‘commodity self’ ...in which consumers who might feel powerless to challenge capitalism more broadly made the best of it by embracing a ‘therapeutic world view’ that suggested one could find satisfaction and identity through goods.”

Community Revitalization + Historic Preservation

Out of the approximately one hundred structures constructed in Opa-locka between 1925 and 1927, twenty properties located in Opa-locka, all constructed as part of the original construction, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places under a Multiple Property

23 Lynn, 167.
Submission. Though development based on an Arabian Nights theme ended by the 1930s, significant structures that tell the city’s 20th century developmental history are interspersed throughout the city. As the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC) focuses on revitalizing this economically depressed area, a critical question becomes how Opa-locka’s rich architectural history and planning will be incorporated into their strategy.

In the past decade, historic preservation advocates have emphasized a dialogue surrounding historic buildings that places preservation at the front lines of protecting and revitalizing neighborhoods. Donavan Rypkema’s The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide, presents a series of arguments centered on the economic benefits of historic preservation in communities. The benefits addressed in the book include: job creation, downtown revitalization, heritage tourism, and small business incubation.25 These arguments present strong cases that can be endorsed by the OLCDC or other organizations to encourage the city’s government to allocate resources toward establishing a more active historic preservation program.

Another publication sponsored by the National Trust, “Rebuilding Community: A Best Practices Toolkit for Historic Preservation and Redevelopment,” begins with the following statement from then President of the Trust, Richard Moe: “Abandoned buildings can break a neighborhood’s heart. Demolished buildings can destroy its soul.”26 This publication highlights preservation plans that are “the basic foundation for successful community building.”27 The Trust specifies the following actions for an effective planning process: community assessment of neighborhood assets, resources, problems, needs and desires; a survey of historic resources;


analysis of economic, physical, and demographic conditions. The publication goes on to present a series of case studies for each tool they outline including: public policy changes, financing options, marketing strategies, partnerships, design, and adaptive use approaches. An example of an “Artist Overlay District” that allowed for the rehabilitation of buildings for artists to both live and work in Lowell, Massachusetts, presents an interesting option that might help Opa-locka revitalize its historic city center. Currently without mixed-use zoning, an overlay would allow for these types of uses to add vitality to the historic core.

**CDCs Using Historic Preservation**

The partnership tools outlined in the National Trust publication are at the heart of Stephanie Ryberg's 2011 dissertation titled, *Neighborhood Stabilization through Historic Preservation: An Analysis of Historic Preservation and Community Development in Cleveland, Providence, Houston, and Seattle*. Ryberg looks into the relationship between community development corporations and historic preservation. She states that although both entities have been recognized independently by scholars and have overlapping objectives to promote neighborhood stabilization, “the connection between them remains understudied in academic research.” This dissertation investigates the commonalities between these two entities and identifies ways in which CDCs commonly utilize historic preservation tools with little acknowledgment of the fact. Ryberg suggests that the inherent small-scale incremental approach of preservation tools “makes a unique contribution to neighborhood stabilization and improves CDCs effectiveness and sophistication.” Through a national scan of CDCs, Ryberg identified common preservation tools utilized by CDCs and found that “CDCs use preservation to further two key aspects of neighborhood stabilization: improving socioeconomic conditions and reinforcing the heritage and cultural identity of community

29 Ryberg, vi.
30 Ibid.
members.” Ryberg’s recommendations include a more cohesive partnership between historic preservation initiatives and CDCs actively implementing historic preservation tools.

**Design Standards in Changing Environments**

The current historic preservation ordinance in Opa-locka provides financial incentives for new construction that incorporates “Moorish Motifs” identified by the city, including crenellated parapets, and domes. Although some of the architecture constructed under these guidelines outside of the original 1926-29 construction period of Opa-locka, holds significance of its own as part of the city’s development, a proliferation of poorly constructed designs with these motifs could potentially diminish the integrity of the original structures. Opa-locka’s strong architectural theme presents a design challenge for new construction. Santa Fe, New Mexico is a city also faced with design challenges related to a strong architectural style and raises questions of compatibility in relation to its historic resources.

A compilation of published essays on this topic was printed in 2009, *Design and Historic Preservation: The Challenge of Compatibility*. Many of the essays challenge the implementation of design guidelines in historic districts and the design review process. An essay by James Hare, “Exaggerated Reverence for the Past,” discusses the design challenges of Santa Fe and the limitations set by design guidelines in the area. Some fear that Santa Fe’s design review ordinance promotes a “false architectural environment” and identity for the city. Hare goes on to warn against a review process that focuses merely on aesthetics and does not equally weigh architectural integrity. In speaking with architects in Santa Fe, Hare presents their recommendations that “the guidelines would not be necessary if the ordinance simply required all new construction to be executed in adobe. The result...would be a new architecture that...complements existing buildings....because

31 Section 6-14 City of Opa-locka Arabian Motif Architectural Regulation, 1990

of the limitations inherent in the building material.” 33 These alternatives highlight possible ways that Opa-locka can maintain a cohesive yet inspired architectural style that responds to its current context.

Reinforce Cultural Identity of Neighborhoods

While it is possible to rely too heavily on a theme and overshadow styles of architecture that the community identifies with, Ryberg also claims that historic resources as assets contribute to socioeconomic improvement goals...to build and reinforce the cultural identity of neighborhoods.” 34 An international source on urban regeneration addresses the importance of identity within urban areas. “Managing Urban Identities: Aim of Tool of Urban Regeneration,” claims that the phenomenon of urban identity can help “improve the image of a city.” 35 The report outlines three types of urban identity networks: the HERO – heritage as opportunity; NeT-TOPIC – transformation processes in peripheral cities of metropolitan areas; and REPAIR – realizing the potential of abandoned military sites. The most applicable “network” to Opa-locka would be the HERO urban identity network. With some cultural heritage resources already in place, the recommendation for this network is not to make these resources museums, “but a living, future-oriented organism adapting carefully to the needs of businesses and people, building up and maintaining the local identity of the place.” These recommendations promote a distinctive character already in place in Opa-locka when compared to other cities. However the city is in need of a common identity within the city that moves beyond its architecture.

33 Hare, 56.

34 Ryberg, vi.

Conclusion

The future of Opa-locka’s historic resources is reliant upon preservation planning approaches that seek to revitalize the city through flexible policies, partnerships, innovative design standards, and place-making strategies that promote a strong identity for the city. The topics outlined above are discussed in further detail throughout the thesis and inform its final recommendations made for the city’s historic resources. Interviews with key stakeholders in the city further guide final recommendations.
HISTORY OF OPA-LOCKA

Before construction commenced in Opa-locka, numerous influences played a role in its formation. These influences include the city’s visionaries Glenn H. Curtiss and James H. Bright, the 1920s real estate boom in Florida, and early twentieth century city planning initiatives. The city’s founding is due almost entirely to the vision and impetus of Glenn Curtiss, aviation pioneer turned real estate entrepreneur (Fig.3). Prior to settling in Florida, Curtiss had already made quite a name for himself, beginning as a bicycle shop owner in Hammondsport, New York in the late 1890s and going on to set records and create new technologies in the field of aviation. After having visited Florida numerous times throughout his career, Curtiss decided to retire near Miami with his wife Lena Pearl Neff around 1916.36 Seeking land to establish a flying school, E.G. Sewell, then the president of Miami’s Chamber of Commerce, purchased the property and set up the Curtiss Aerodrome Company in 1917 as the first airfield in Florida.

Commerce, suggested that Curtiss contact James Bright, a rancher and landholder in the area. 37 Bright operated the largest dairy and cattle ranch in South Florida and after visiting it Curtiss and Bright formed a partnership, known as the Curtiss-Bright Ranch Company. 38

This partnership proved to be lucrative and by 1921 the company had expanded to the north and west of Miami with land holdings totaling 120,000 acres. 39 By this time Florida’s 1920s land boom was just beginning to take hold in Miami and Curtiss seized the opportunity to divide and develop vacant land held by the company. Though reluctant, Bright inevitably agreed and in 1921 the Curtiss-Bright Company set out on their first real estate venture, the development of Hialeah. Planned with a “Spanish” architectural style and theme, Hialeah expanded rapidly. Within just ten days the company sold over one million dollars worth of lots. Much to Curtiss’s dismay, the city grew irregularly and the opening of the Hialeah Race Track inevitably led to unwelcomed notoriety as gamblers frequented the area. 40 Less than three years later, by 1924, Curtiss and Bright had set out on another venture just south of Hialeah, called Country Club Estates. Known today as Miami Springs, this development was intended to build from lessons learned with their first development.

Taking note from nearby developer George E. Merrick and his flourishing development to the south, Coral Gables, Curtiss and Bright chose a similar model with which to develop Country Club Estates. Considered his greatest achievement, Merrick planned Coral Gables to be “America’s Most Beautiful Suburb” complete with a master plan and an architectural theme intended to be harmonious with one another. According to the Coral Gables Corporation’s Warranty Deed,

37 Alden Hatch, Glenn Curtiss: Pioneer of Aviation: The Most Important Figure in the History of Flight, (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press), 263.
39 Burnett, 60.
40 Fitzgerald-Bush, 2.; Burnett, 60.
all buildings were to be “constructed of Spanish, Venetian, Moorish, Italian, or other similarly harmonious types of architecture.” Having never traveled to the regions where these architectural styles were prominent, Merrick relied on publications such as Washington Irving’s *Legends of Alhambra*, first published in 1832, to visualize and emulate common architectural details and setting. To tie the publication and the suburb closer together, major thoroughfares were given names associated with places noted in the publication such as Alhambra and Granada. A well-executed theme had the potential to boost sales by creating readily identifiable and idyllic settings to market to potential buyers. Inspired by this successful model and by the direct competition it posed in the real estate market of South Florida, Curtiss and Bright embarked on their second venture and developed Country Club Estates. Intended to be a “residential paradise,” the Curtiss-Bright Company fashioned a development with rigorous zoning and a Spanish-Pueblo architectural theme.

Less than one year after construction began at Country Club Estates, Curtiss invested in his final and most elaborate development northeast of both Hialeah and Country Club Estates. At the peak of the Florida real estate boom in 1925, Curtiss began his next endeavor on a swath of land known by its Seminole name, *Opatishawockalocka*. Sources suggest that the term given to the area by Seminole tribes translated to the English term “hammock” meaning, a “thickly-wooded tract of land in the midst of thinly-grown pine or oak forest.” Inevitably shortened to Opa-locka, Curtiss saw this new investment as an opportunity to go beyond a mere residential development and sought to establish a self-sustaining community. Opa-locka was favorably positioned

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42 Millas, 16.; Lynn, 167.

43 Lynn, 167.

44 Burnett, 60.

between burgeoning industries and urbanization to the south in Miami and nearby agricultural lands to the north. Opa-locka’s positioning sparked Curtiss’s vision that Opa-locka could serve an intermediary role as a receiver and distributor of goods for the region.46 During the autumn months of 1925, Curtiss began to plan what he said would be “the most perfect city that planning and engineering could achieve, and the most beautiful that the art of man could conceive.”47 To this end, Curtiss recognized that this plan was not enough; he knew that the city was also in need of an architectural style that would surpass neighboring developments to attract investors and homebuyers.

One critical choice endorsed by Curtiss that inevitably led to the city’s distinct character was the decision to base the city on an Arabian Nights theme (Fig.4). Also known as One Thousand and One Nights, the book, published in numerous volumes and editions, is a compilation of tales based on ancient stories from Persia, Egypt, India, and China. These stories coalesced under the frame story of Sharazad, the wife of King Shahryar, who, for fear that she would be killed, told the King a new captivating tale every night for one thousand and one nights to spare her

46 National Register of Historic Places, Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area, Opa-locka, Miami-Dade County, 8:1.
47 Fitzgerald-Bush, 3.
Several articles and publications written about Opa-locka speculate on the actual source of inspiration for the theme chosen for Opa-locka. Credit has been given to Curtiss, Bernhardt Muller, and the wife of Frank S. Bush, friend of Curtiss and contractor for the city.49

Void of a sole proprietor, it can be assumed that numerous factors played into the realization and popularity surrounding the Arabian Nights theme fully supported by its chief investor, Curtiss, Bernhardt Muller, the chosen architect, and inevitably landowners who chose to build homes in the city. The 1924 release of the highly acclaimed silent film The Thief of Baghdad, based on a tale from Arabian Nights, heightened the popularity of the tales in the United States and abroad and simultaneously provided audiences with a palatable depiction of the imagery conjured by these tales (Fig.5). Curtiss’ choice to embrace an Arabian Nights theme closely resembles the model used by George Merrick in Coral Gables inspired by Legends of Alhambra. However the choice to model Opa-locka after an ancient fictional tale transformed the notion of thematic developments at this time. In many ways Opa-locka’s fictional theme “pre-Disneyed Disney” by more


49 Fitzgerald-Bush, iii; Lynn, 166; “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area National Register Nomination,” 8:2.
than twenty-five years.50

This fictitious theme made authenticity, dependable construction, and deliberate configuration imperative to grounding and executing Opa-locka. If the city was intended to be a suitable location for homeowners and their families Curtiss needed to find ways to substantiate the fantasy portrayed on the movie screens and in literature, yet still endorse its exotic appeal. Bernhardt E. Muller, a classically trained architect, and George Clinton Mackenzie, a classically trained architect and experienced planner, were selected by Curtiss to work on the project and added professional expertise to the architecture and its master plan. Newspaper articles printed around the time of initial construction in 1925 touted Opa-locka as “The City Substantial,” adding to its monumentality (Fig.6).51 However, tensions between the fantasy and reality of Opa-locka can also be seen in this 1926 article titled, “Beauty in Building: Permanence in Plan”:

50 Lynn, 167.


Fig.6: The City Substantial, 1926 (Source: Miami Daily News, University of Miami, Special Collections, BMC)
City of The Arabian Nights...on an architectural theme especially fitted to subtropical Florida- approaches in structure and conception the delicate beauty and marvelous endurance of the famous Taj Mahal. No “flats” or Arabian scenes built for moving picture “sets” but solid, massive structures designed to live for generations to come.  

By December of 1925, Curtiss formed the Opa-locka Company with his half-brother G. Carl Adams and soon after construction began. In an effort to avoid the pitfalls associated with Curtiss’s previous developments – Hialeah and to a certain extent Country Club Estates – great attention was paid to developing a master plan with which the vision of the city would come to fruition on the ground. Curtiss saw the potential for Opa-locka to become a self-sustaining city complete with all of the components necessary to achieve both success and beauty. An advertisement published in 1926 likened Opa-locka to the city of Washington, D.C. on the basis that, like D.C., Opa-locka would be beautiful because it “was planned and built to be beautiful.” The advertisement published in the *Miami Daily News and Metropolis* goes on to detail Opa-locka as “emphatically and intentionally A City of Parts.” Seven parts are further detailed in the advertisement: town planning and street arrangement, landscaping, golf and recreation, public utilities, architecture, transportation, and industry. The master plan fashioned to feature these “parts” was designed by George Clinton Mackenzie and platted by Daniel E. Clune, an engineer who had worked on the master plans for Hialeah and Country Club estates.

Mackenzie had trained as an architect at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in the late 1890s and went on to design both structures and master plans. Author of the publication *Industrial Housing*, Mackenzie was highly influenced by the late nineteenth century *Garden City* movement and the concepts applied to city planning in the United States brought forth by John Nolen and other notable figures in the field. Mackenzie worked closely with John Nolen in Kingsport, Tennessee.

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54 “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area National Register Nomination,” 8:5.
and again in Mariemont, Ohio. Working to alleviate the ills associated with urban industrial cities, the Garden City movement focused on designing cities that actively integrated communities with surrounding natural environments on a “human scale” making them more efficient and livable.\textsuperscript{55}

Mackenzie’s design for Opa-locka was often referred to as the “City Progressive” for its basis on the concepts listed above.\textsuperscript{56} The city plan went beyond the typical gridded street arrangement and incorporated curvilinear main roadways radiating from the center of the city where the Administration Building, zoo, and fire station were sited (Fig. 7). Mackenzie also strategically located civic centers, public buildings, a golf course, residential and commercial areas, industrial sections, and the location of the Seaboard Airline Railroad station.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Master Plan of Opa-locka designed by Clinton Mackenzie, 1926 (Source: Lynn, 187)}
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\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
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Administration Building, the headquarters of the Opa-locka Company and zoo were located in the center, many of the main points of interest such as schools, churches, and banks were dispersed throughout the Mackenzie’s master plan was not the only progressive component in the overall scheme for Opa-locka. Bernhardt E. Muller’s designs based on the Arabian Nights theme set for Opa-locka were anything but conventional.

The designs that inevitably transpired for the main buildings and residences in Opa-locka were far from Muller’s typical designs. Classically trained at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, Muller’s design portfolio prior to Opa-locka showed a predilection toward an eclectic Tudor Revival style, referred to in many publications referencing his work as the “Robin Hood” style (Fig.8). As previously mentioned, although it is debated whether or not Muller came up with the original concept for the architectural theme of Opa-locka, articles published around the time of construction reveal Muller’s strategy and some glimpses into the basis for his designs. A quotation from Muller in 1927 reveals his initial strategies for each design:

…I described to him how we would lay the city out on the basis of the stories, using a story for each of the most important buildings, naming the streets accordingly...The style of architecture would be governed by the county in which the story was supposed to have taken place...For the Administration Building we used the story of “The Talking Bird” and although the scene is Persian, we did not adhere to Persian architecture, as this building is the main one in the development and we felt it should be a composite of most of the types of architecture to be used. For the Hurt Building we used the “Stone City.” For the Archery Club, “Prince Ahmad and the Fairy Peri-Banu” was used; for the Bank, the “Tale of Zayn al Asnam;” for the Golf Club, “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves;” for the Hotel, “Aladdin and His Lamp.”

In choosing to base each of the main buildings on the style of architecture found in the region in which the tale was set, Muller afforded himself a palette of architectural features to draw from and incorporate. Muller later admitted during an interview in 1955 that much of the credit for the “Arabian-Persian” architecture found in Opa-locka is due in large part to his wife.


In an effort to accurately execute the styles found in the regions he sought to emulate, his wife was tasked with “...delving into books, doing research...” on the various style of architecture. Although the exact publications Muller pulled from for inspiration are not known, renderings found in his collection of drawings related to Opa-locka bear striking resemblances to David Roberts’s publication *Egypt & Nubia: From Drawings Made on the Spot*, (1846-49) (Fig.9). Additionally, World Fairs and Expositions featured exhibits from Islamic regions, making Islamic architecture and traditions accessible to the public and artists alike through visitation and publications. Examples of such exhibitions include the Tunisian Palace at L’Exposition Universelle of 1889 in Paris and the *Street in Cairo Exhibit* at Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbia Exposition.

Iconic Islamic structures featured throughout these publications and illustrations included: El-Walid in Damascus (705-732) displaying Arabic architecture; the Great Mosque in Cordoba (786-

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Fig. 9: Comparison - Left: Opa-locka, Drawing of lighting fixture, by Bernhardt Muller (Source: University of Miami, Special Collections, BMC), Right: Drawing of the Interior of Mosque of the Sultan El Ghoree, 1838 (Source: New York Public Library Digital Collect, http://digitalgallery.nypl.org)

Fig. 10: Comparison - Left: Image of Opa-locka Administration Building, Courtyard, c. 1926 (Source: University of Miami, Special Collections, BMC), Right: Still from silent film, Thief of Bagdad, 1924 (Source: McDonough, 16)
976) and Alhambra in Granada (1248-1279) displaying Moorish architecture in Spain; Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo, Egypt (970); Tomb at Soltaniyeh (Soltanieh) in Iran (1313), displaying Persian architecture, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey (532-1453) displaying Turkish architecture; Taj Mahal in Agra, India (1632). By the mid-1920s cinematic stage sets were also becoming sources of inspiration for design. Traces of the stage-design for the silent film *The Thief of Baghdad* can be found in the courtyard areas of Muller’s design for the Administration Building (Fig.10).

The stew of literary, cinematic, and illustrated traveler’s accounts provided Muller with abundant precedents to aid in bringing forth archetypal architectural elements in his designs for Opa-locka (Fig.11). Muller’s designs featured eclectic applications of crenellated and battered walls, domes, minarets, horseshoe and ogee arches, and mosaics. Though on the surface these structures were intended to add to the *Arabian Nights* theme, the interior configurations of their plans show little to no association with their Eastern prototypes. The residential structures constructed were

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typically one-story and featured a rectangular plan typically with a “port-cochere.” Renderings found in Muller’s collection held at the University of Miami reveal additional styles of houses that were never constructed, such as a small “oriental house”, a cottage with a thatched roof, and a “Hurricane Proof” house.

Muller’s designs began to transform the sandy terrain of Opa-locka into an *Arabian Nights* vision in December of 1925. Construction began at a rapid pace at the end of 1925 and continued at this rate into 1926, with the bulk of the civic buildings and amenities constructed by the summer of 1926. The Opa-locka Company’s headquarters were located in the Administration Building, centrally located in the development (Fig.12). In an effort to attract attention from the surrounding cities, the Opa-locka Company also set up offices at 132 Flagler Street in Miami. By 1926 perspective buyers entering the city by the bus load encountered some of the most prominent

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63 Not the formal port-cochere commonly associated with nineteenth century mansions.

buildings and amenities including the Administration Building, zoo, archery club and pool, observation tower, and fire and police station. On May 14, 1926 the Municipal Charter for the subdivision of Opa-locka was officially voted on and approved by twenty-eight registered voters residing in the area at the time.

In September of 1926, in the midst of construction, South Florida was hit by a powerful hurricane that caused severe damage in the region. However much of Opa-locka went relatively unscathed by this natural disaster, with the exception of some domes and minaret-like towers. Press related to the hurricane touted minimal damages from the storm in Opa-locka, further validating the “City Substantial” tagline. Construction continued following the hurricane and by December of 1926 a special census was conducted and revealed

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66 Fitzgerald-Bush, 10; Bernhardt Muller Finding Aid, Opa-locka, Florida (cont.)

67 A drawing from Bernhardt Muller’s collection at the University of Miami features a rendering of a Miami Daily News “Hurricane Proof” House. There is no date on the drawing so it is unclear if all of the houses were constructed to be “hurricane proof” before or after the storm of 1926.; Clark Ash, “Opa-locka: A Page From Arabian Nights,” Florida Living Magazine of the Miami News, April 5, 1959, 6.
280 residents living Opa-locka.\textsuperscript{68}

One of the biggest feats, considered by Curtiss to be the key to Opa-locka’s prosperity, was the positioning of the Seaboard Airline Railway through the city. Curtiss persuaded the railway owners to curve and run the line into Opa-locka, making it the first station north of Miami.\textsuperscript{69} As early as March of 1926, advertisements touted Miami as the “gateway to the Miami Zone and South Florida.” (Fig.13)\textsuperscript{70} Given the station's close proximity just blocks away from residential, commercial, and industrial areas in Opa-locka, the railway was considered to be the access needed to elevate the city. The official arrival of the railroad on January 8, 1927 was marked with an

\textit{Fig.14: Arabian Nights Fantasy, Wheeler House, 1927, (Source: University of Miami, Special Collections, BMC)}

\textsuperscript{68} “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area,” Nomination 8:7; According to the Bernhard Muller Collection Finding aid, the census results originally reported a total of 251 residents, however this total did not include 29 black residents listed on the census.; Varona, “Historical Sketch: Opa-locka, Florida,” in the Bernhardt E. Muller Collection.


elaborately staged celebration known as the “Arabian Nights Fantasy,” complete with residents
dressed in “Arabian” costumes and riding camels and horses (Fig.14).71

Opa-locka continued to grow slowly following the “Arabian Nights Fantasy” event and
was officially chartered as a city on May 1, 1927. Unfortunately, Opa-locka’s elevated status as
a city closely coincided with the collapse of the 1920s land boom in Florida. By midsummer of
1927, Curtiss ordered that all buildings currently under construction be completed. However,
any new construction was suspended until economic conditions improved.72 In keeping with the
diverse geographic spread of the tales from Arabian Nights, future plans for Opa-locka included
the construction of an Egyptian, Chinese, and English section. However, these plans were never
realized (Fig.15).73 The onset of the Great Depression compounded by Glenn Curtiss’s death in

Fig.15: Proposed Hotel Aladdin, by Bernhardt Muller, 1929 (Source: University of Miami, Special Collection, BMC)

71 “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area,” Nomination, 8:7


Nomination, 8:7.
1930 resulted in the end of Opa-locka’s development according to its master plan and overall architectural vision. In the late 1930s the Opa-locka Company was sold to the United States Navy, for the expansion of the Naval Air Station that already had a small presence at the airport in the city (Fig.16).74

The Navy’s increased presence in Opa-locka and the start of U.S. involvement in World War II in 1941 marks the beginning of the city’s tumultuous relationship with the military and its ultimate decline. Military expansion within the city greatly changed its atmosphere. During World War II the city’s population increased exponentially with the Navy’s expansion and accordingly several structures were hastily constructed to accommodate growth. In the midst of the Navy’s development several of Opa-locka’s prominent original structures were demolished and once public areas such as the golf course, swimming pool, and park were taken over for military use.75 New residential and commercial construction was typically low-cost and ignored the Arabian

74 “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area,” Nomination, 8:7
75 “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area,” Nomination, 8:7
Nights motif previously employed. Between 1940 and 1950, Opa-locka’s population increased from 500 to over 5200.76

Following the war the Navy withdrew from Opa-locka and left a large void in a city once buzzing with military industry and life. In an effort to revitalize the city and restore lost revenue, the Opa-locka Company and Nastores, Inc., made a considerable investment and leased facilities from the Navy with the intent of locating light industries in these buildings. This endeavor attracted over one hundred new businesses and eventually stabilized conditions in the city. The Navy threatened to restore their tenancy of these building first in 1947 and finally made good on this threat in 1952, pushing out newly established businesses. Reactivation of the military base generated industrial growth, echoing the prosperity it brought to the city during World War II for six years until the military pulled out of Opa-locka again in 1958. 77

Fluctuations in population and economic growth as a result of such inconsistency military operations in the city took a considerable toll on Opa-locka’s development between 1930 and 1960. Instability created by the military coupled with the growth of Miami and its surrounding regions stymied Opa-locka’s growth and economic prosperity. During an interview in 1959 Berhardt E. Muller called the subsequent constructions beyond the 1930s “a disgrace.” Muller went on to say that the city could still be what he and Curtiss worked to realize in the 1920s and strongly encouraged that the original plan should be followed. 78 After the 1960s Opa-locka’s population continued to decline and the economy remained depressed. By the 1980s, a strong demographic shift had taken place in the city; a once predominantly white middle class population had been replaced by black middle-class and working class families. By this time Opa-locka witnessed an economic resurgence coupled with a growing constituency around the preservation


78 Bloender, “Architect Believes In City: ’It Can Still be Done, Muller Tells Opa-locka.”
and revitalization of the city's prominent historic structures. During this time the population of Opa-locka reached 15,000 and rapid residential constructions began to accommodate growth. In 1987 the Administration Building underwent a major renovation to accommodate Opa-locka's City Hall. Soon after in 1991, the Hurt building was rehabilitated by the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation, their offices remain there today (Fig.17).

During the mid-1980s the presence of illegal drug activity and violent crimes became rampant in the Magnolia North neighborhood of Opa-locka. Referred to as the “Triangle,” this community became infamous for high crime rates that were said to be the highest in all of South Florida. Considerable efforts were made in 1987 to decrease crime and restore the city’s reputation. The housing market crash of 2008 exacerbated an already depressed economy and weakened the tax base in Opa-locka.

80 Carras, A-3.
A deficit of job opportunities, high vacancy rates, low tax revenues, and poor socioeconomic conditions are just some of the issues Opa-locka is facing in the twenty-first century. The city’s precarious state and sub-par living conditions for its residents has been brought to the attention of Miami-Dade County and Federal entities. Due to efforts spearheaded by the city government and the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation, the city was awarded over $22 million dollars from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. Additional efforts have been made in the city to spur growth and rehabilitate existing infrastructure to revitalize the city and embrace its past and present cultural heritage.

81 Carras, A-3.
The historic context outlined above reveals that Glenn Curtiss’s vision for Opa-locka was far more than a mere pursuit to create a city with fantastical architecture. The design of Opa-locka’s original architecture and master plan responded to significant movements of the early-twentieth century in planning and architecture that shaped South Florida and the United States as whole. An understanding of the interplay of these forces grounds Opa-locka’s historical significance as a product of the 1920s land boom development in South Florida, its original architecture as an example of second wave Moorish Revival style, and its master plan a page in the history of garden city development in the United States.

Florida Real Estate Boom

Much of the impetus for the development of Opa-locka and its overall design stemmed directly from the hastened real estate climate in Florida during the 1920s. Post World War I between 1924 and 1926, Florida experienced exponential growth in population and a rapid increase in land development. Referred to as both the “real estate boom” and the “land boom,” Florida’s inflated real estate market in the 1920s resulted in a population increase from 968,470 in 1920 to 1,468,211 by 1930. While the population rose for the entire state, South Florida witnessed the greatest surge in new construction and development during this time. Miami-Dade County, then referred to as Dade County, witnessed a population increase from 43,000 to 143,000 between 1920 and 1930. A growing interest in Florida by the 1920s was the result of several factors including: extended roadways and railways, desirable sub-tropical climates, accessibility by automobile from the Northeast, and no taxes on income or inheritances. By this period in South Florida's history much of the land outside of Miami remained undeveloped and proved to be ideal

84 Tebeau, 383.
for extensive development projects such as Coral Gables, Hialeah, Country Club Estates (Miami Springs), and Opa-locka.

The city of Miami owes much of its early prosperity to real estate and railroad tycoon, Henry Flagler. Often referred to as the Father of Miami, Flagler spurred tourism in the area with the design and construction of the Royal Palm Hotel (no longer extant) that attracted numerous visitors to the area. Miami became heavily associated with leisure as many upper-class vacationers found their way there and then established permanent and winter homes in the area. By the 1920s tourism and real estate became the predominant industries in Miami, with tourism spurring new real estate development. During the 1920s for many upper class Americans a new subculture formed that centered on higher standards of living, leisure, and sightseeing. These new trends combined with initiatives dedicated to the drainage of the Everglades and the development of Miami Beach spurred tourism and inevitably led to speculative real estate development in South Florida. Flagler Street became the main thoroughfare in Miami where real estate agents marketed developments in the Greater Miami area. Accounts from 1925, detailing the phenomenon on Flagler Street, note that the sidewalks were nearly impassable and that the only businesses on the street were dedicated to real estate transactions (Fig. 18).

Opportunistic ventures cropped up all over the South Florida landscape, with each new development trying to outshine its closest competition. Coral Gables was the first development that went beyond a mere opportunistic venture capitalizing only on tourism and leisure and sought to provide a place where residents could comfortably work and live permanently. Established

85 Nijman, 12.


87 Nijman, 24.

88 Nijman, 21.

89 George, 34.
by George Merrick, this development featured rigorous zoning and building codes and set the precedent for Opa-locka (Fig.19). The speculative climate in Florida reached its peak by 1925, by which time market prices began to decrease and the market became stagnant. Soon after in the fall of 1926 a devastating hurricane destroyed numerous buildings in its path and halted construction. Devastation caused by the hurricane resulted in capital losses and spurred thousands of investors to disinvest in several real estate ventures.90 Rapid disinvestment inevitably led to the real estate market collapse in 1926, ending Florida’s boom period development.

Opa-locka straddled the flourishing real estate market of 1925 and the collapsed market of 1926. Despite the end of the fervor surrounding speculative real estate development, construction continued in Opa-locka. By the time the market collapsed in 1926, construction of the Administration Building (now known as City Hall) was nearing completion. Many of the buildings already constructed in the city survived the 1926 hurricane and development continued thereafter. Though Glenn Curtiss made tentative plans to halt further development in Opa-locka in response to the slowing real estate market, associates convinced Curtiss that this drop in activity was only

90 Nijman, 29.
temporary and encouraged him to follow through with plans for Opa-locka. After almost a year of continued development, the market showed no sign of recovery and construction came to a halt in Opa-locka. At the end of its development according to its original master plan, many of the roads laid out were constructed and approximately one-hundred buildings including commercial, recreational, and residential structures were erected.

Following the Great Depression, tourism and the real estate market escalated by the early 1930s. The real estate boom of the 1920s set the precedent for tourism, extravagance, and leisure.

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91 Burnett, 61.

in South Florida, an association much of the area retains today. Opa-locka’s development during the real estate boom and subsequent development following the depression characterizes the rise and fall of the real estate boom in South Florida.

*Moorish Revival Style Architecture*

The architectural style that transpired in Opa-locka based on an *Arabian Nights* theme was unprecedented in South Florida by the 1920s, yet the style did pay homage to local styles prevalent in area at the time. By the early twentieth century developers and architects in Florida were, for the most part, working with a blank canvas in terms of a local architectural style. In an effort to imbue Florida with an architectural style that would suggest “a brand-new place with Old World Charm,” designers turned to architectural styles and motifs associated with the Mediterranean.93

Florida’s sub-tropical climate and former Spanish rule during the sixteenth century provided a relevant connection to regions associated with the Mediterranean. The most prominent features associated with the architecture found in the Mediterranean employed in Florida included heavy barrel tile roofs and stuccoed surfaces (Fig.20).

According to a published definition of the style from the 1920s, the Mediterranean style was defined as:

Spanish, Italian, Moorish, Byzantine – Mediterranean types generally – instead of being archeologically segregated, are under the orchestral process merged, as were those golden threads long ago into a new, sun-loving style which, while eminently American in its plan and utilities, is never-the-less distinctly Mediterranean in its origins and spirit.94

Exotic to the United States, the use of this style with new construction in Florida attracted new residents and investors as new developments became striking and idyllic settings. As the Mediterranean style became ubiquitous in new developments springing up across Florida, Curtiss


recognized the need to employ a style that offered even more exoticism. Though the term Moorish Revival was not used during the 1920s to describe the architectural style in Opa-locka, it is classified as such today due to its use of architectural features associated with Islamic architecture.

Moorish Revival and Egyptian Revival styles feature architectural elements inspired by styles from the Middle East made popular first in Europe and later employed in the United States in two distinctive waves. The first wave began around the 1830s and resurfaced again in a slightly varied form by the 1920s. Often referred to in its first wave as “Oriental”, the Moorish Revival style was based on an eclectic application of architectural elements from Egypt, Turkey, and India. Much of what we consider Moorish Revival in the U.S. today derived from precedents in Spain and Morocco occupied by the Moors between the eighth and fifteenth century and applied Muslim elements to Spanish architecture.

Fig. 20: California Building, World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1892, Iowa State University Special Collections Department, flickr.com


96 Maxwell, 48.
Taken from precedents seen in publications and drawings from travelers, these elements were not applied in an archeologically correct fashion, but rather added as embellishments to local styles. This style of application was largely influenced by the High Victorian Gothic style popular in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century that employed ornate and eclectic exterior detailing. Examples of the first wave of Moorish Revival architecture in the United States include: *Longwood* (also known as Nutt’s Folly), in Natchez, Mississippi; *Olana* in Hudson, New York; *Iranistan* in Bridgeport, Connecticut (no longer extant) (Fig.22-23). This first wave of the Moorish Revival style waned by the 1860s.

The style’s next wave popularity in the U.S. by the 1920s was due largely to the emergence of the Mediterranean Revival style. While numerous factors may have influenced its resurgence in the 1920s, the first English translation of Arabian Nights in the 1880s, the *Cairo* exhibit at the 1893 World’s Columbia Exposition, and films based on tales from *Arabian Nights* made this style popular (Fig.21). The compilation of tales under the title *Arabian Nights* date back to seventh century Persia. Nearly seven decades later tales set in Egypt, India, and Arabia were included within the collection and

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Fig.22: General view of Olana, Hudson, NY, c.1971 (Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalogue, HABS)

Fig.23: Iranistan, Bridgeport, CT, c.1848 (Source: Boston University, http://www.bu.edu/av/ah/fall2008/ah382/lecture13/)
this set of stories formed what we know of today as the *Arabian Nights*, or *One Thousand and One Nights*. Many of the tales featured in this literary work are set in urban areas and accordingly their depiction on the movie screen ascribed feelings of romanticism to these areas.98

Made popular with tales such as *Allabad, The Arabian Wizard* (1901), *A Princess of Bagdad* (1916), *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (1917), and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1918), it was the silent film *Arabian Nights* (1924) that impacted the resurgence of the Moorish Revival style.99 Its elaborate six acre set, designed by William Cameron Menzies, simplified and utilized motifs associated with Islamic art and architectural styles found at the Alhambra Palace in Granada, and established a precedent for “Islamic” set design utilizing horseshoe arches, domes, pseudo-stalactites, and tile-work (Fig.24).100

The popularization of this style of architecture through cinematic productions spurred uses of this style during the 1920s for recreational oriented buildings such as hotels and movie theaters. Examples of this style in the U.S. include the Bagdad Theater in Portland, Oregon (1927), and the Fox Theater in Atlanta, Georgia (1929) (Fig.25). The Moorish Revival style architecture found in Opa-locka was a direct result of the popularization of *Arabian Nights* in the 1920s. The local Mediterranean style found in Opa-locka made Moorish Revival a readily adaptable style given its Spanish influences. The pairing of barrel tiled roofs with minaret-like towers and domes in much of the architecture designed in the 1920s in Opa-locka reveals the style’s second resurgence under the umbrella of the Mediterranean Revival style.

98 Nance, 37.
99 Lynn, 169.
Fig. 24: Thief of Bagdad Film Set, 1924 (Source: Vance, 166)

Fig. 25: Shrine Mosque and Fox Theater Postcard, Atlanta, GA, c. 1930 (Source: Zimmerman, 33)
Garden City Movement

Executing this Arabian Nights theme on the sandy and barren land that would become Opa-locka was not enough for Curtiss. He wanted his dream city to meet the needs of its residents both physically and mentally and he sought to create a self-sustaining development accessible to all social classes.\textsuperscript{101} Curtiss saw permanence in good planning and his decision to hire Clinton Mackenzie to design the master plan for Opa-locka inextricably linked the city to the most progressive innovations stemming from the Garden City movement of the 1920s in the United States.

Clinton Mackenzie, a classically trained architect, practiced architecture out of New York and found his way into planning by his mid-fifties in 1925 (Fig.26).\textsuperscript{102} During his career Mackenzie acted as the director of the National Planning Association and Tenement House Commissioner for New Jersey. In 1920 Mackenzie published a piece called Industrial Housing which focused on planning and design processes for industrial towns that sought to foster economic prosperity and more importantly, elevate the quality of life for its residents.\textsuperscript{103} One of Mackenzie’s most notable projects featured in his publication was his work with John Nolen, one of the nation’s most influential city planners of the twentieth century, at Kingsport, Tennessee. Kingsport, an industrial town, was celebrated in the 1920s as an exemplary model for planning and housing.\textsuperscript{104} The pair teamed again in 1923 in Mariemont, Ohio, a city plan heralded as the first fully executed Garden City plan in the nation.\textsuperscript{105}

Mackenzie’s amicable partnership with Nolen placed him at the forefront of innovative

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\textsuperscript{102} Lynn, 186.

\textsuperscript{103} Clinton Mackenzie, Industrial Housing, New York: The Knickbocker Press, 1920, 1.

\textsuperscript{104} Lynn, 187.

and progressive planning practices taking shape in the United States. When comparing the plan for Opa-locka to the city of Kingsport, Tennessee, similarities appear in the curvilinear and diagonal street arrangements stemming from a railroad line at the base of the plan (Fig.27). Based on Mackenzie’s close collaboration with Nolen on previous projects one can infer that his planning philosophies and predilection towards Garden City principles aligned with Nolen’s. The lack of scholarship on Mackenzie’s planning philosophies begs a closer look into those upheld by Nolen in areas such as Kingsport and Mariemont, Ohio to shed light onto ideas guiding the master plan concept that transpired in Opa-locka. This connection further links Opa-locka to the Garden City movement.

Nolen, a man who thought of himself more as a “missionary than a planner,” saw city

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106 Lynn, 187.
planning as a means for social reform. Following a period of rapid urbanization in the United States, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cities were infamous for epidemics and breeding the ills of society. By this period planners and architects sought to remedy these associations and reformers like Nolen looked to Europe for precedents and efficient planning practices. Nolen’s close relationship with Raymond Unwin, designer of Letchworth considered to be the first Garden City, catalyzed a cross-Atlantic transfer of ideas and spurred progressive planning practices in the United States. Nolen became the president of the International Federation of Housing and Town Planning in 1931, replacing Unwin who held the same title between 1928 and 1931. When Unwin took the position in 1928 he replaced Ebenezer Howard, Unwin’s close

107 Stephenson, 100; Cross, 61.

108 Stephenson, 100-101.
mentor and the theorist considered to be the father of the Garden City movement.\textsuperscript{109} Howard’s book Garden Cities of To-morrow (1902) is often referred to as the publication that started the Garden City movement.

*Garden Cities of To-morrow* details the makings of an ideal city and describes essential features such as parks, prominently sited public buildings, thoroughfares emanating from the center of the city to the periphery, and houses with ample garden space.\textsuperscript{110} Beyond the essential components noted in Howard’s publication, the general philosophy behind the Garden City movement was rooted in distilling the complexities of the urban environment, including nature, health, and economic resources, in a manner that responded to the inherent characteristics of the landscape (Fig.28). Designing these features around natural forms was intended to result

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Howard_Garden_City_Diagram}
\caption{Ebenzer Howard’s Garden City Diagram, c.1902 (Source: Howard, 22)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{109} Stephenson, 105-106.

in a “human scale” design.\footnote{Stephenson, 106.} Howard’s ideals related to this movement and style of planning greatly influenced Nolen’s work and he acknowledged this exchange of ideas towards modern city planning in his book \textit{New Ideals in the Planning of Cities Town and Villages}: \footnote{Stephenson, 106.}

Throughout the United States, civic, commercial and other organizations have undertaken to cope vigorously with the problem of improving cities…the United States is following the precedent of other nations. Continental European cities decades ago, and English and South American cities more recently, changed radically their municipal regulations and their methods of building cities.\footnote{John Nolen, \textit{New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages}, (New York City, NY: American City Bureau, 1919), 6.}

Following his success in Mariemont, Ohio Nolen went on to test his planning philosophies on a larger scale and began taking on new development projects in Florida. Between 1921 and 1925, in the midst of the real estate boom, Nolen and his firm worked on approximately fifty-four projects including Venice and St. Petersburg. Nolen saw Florida as a “great laboratory of town and city building,” and during a speech at the 1926 National City Planning Conference, suggested that Florida needed “a state plan” to regulate the location of new towns and cities, and discussed his vision for “interconnected garden cities.”\footnote{Stephenson, 107-11.}

In \textit{New Ideals} Nolen outlines the necessary elements for modern city planning and calls out three “fundamental parts of every comprehensive city plan:” (1) zones or building districts; (2) channels of transportation: railroads, streets, waterways; (3) public open spaces, parks, and playgrounds.\footnote{Nolen, \textit{New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages}, 96.}

When locating public buildings Nolen recommended placing these structures at points in the city where the most number of streets intersect. He goes on to detail the advantages related to the proper grouping of buildings and the importance of a civic core, stating that:
A civic group stimulates civic pride, and nourishes civic life without which a city cannot truly grow and flourish. It aids a city in competition with other cities; it gives form to community effort, and heartens, inspires, and guides the development of private property.¹¹⁵

The most prominent and public or semi-public structures sited as part of Opa-locka’s original master plan were located within or directly adjacent to the roughly semi-circular center of the city, defined by the curvilinear Sharazad Boulevard to the north and diagonally laid, Ali Baba Avenue to the south. As seen on the 1925 Status of City Improvements plat, these structures and spaces included the administrative building (#1), fire station (#6, bank building (#3), a zoo (#50), parks (#46), a hotel (#28), and a garage and apartment building (#29) (Fig.29). The residential section of Opa-locka radiated northward from the civic center. This area was bounded by Jann Avenue to the north and Sharazad Boulevard to the south. North of Jann Avenue was a series of horseshoe shaped street arrangements with the central horseshoe connected to the residential and civic sections by way of Periz and Bahman Avenue. This section of the plan was never realized

Fig.29: Plat of Opa-locka, Status of Improvements with numbered public and semi-public buildings and city center highlighted by author (Source: University of Miami, Special Collections, BMC)

¹¹⁵ Nolen, New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages, 81.
however two churches, a school, and a hotel were planned for this area (Fig.30).\(^{116}\)

In defining the importance of street configuration, Nolen establishes the need for two classes of streets; main thoroughfares and secondary streets, the incorporation of the latter, he suggests, will increase the efficiency of the former.\(^{117}\) He also recommends a radial configuration of these thoroughfares, noting that this is the “well-ordered and natural growth.” Nolen further stipulates that these roads should be laid out in direct lines however, that to avoid “sharp curves” and sudden jogs that subtle curves should be utilized.\(^{118}\) Traces of this distinct style of street configuration can be seen in Opa-locka’s plan where the streets stem from Ali Babsa Avenue, just north of the railroad line running northeast to southwest, and radiate outward laid out in linear

\(^{116}\) This horseshoe section resembles Ebenezer Howard’s three magnets diagram; See Appendix B: Plat of Opa-locka, Status of Improvements, 1925 with key.

\(^{117}\) Nolen, New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages, 50.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 47.
and subtle curvilinear routes. South of the Seaboard Railroad line was the designated area for much of the industrial section of Opa-locka. According to the plat, a manufacturing plant, the Southern Concrete Products Company plant, Opa-locka Lumber and Supply Company, and the Martin Cement Products Company were all planned near Commercial Street.119

Nolen’s final component, parks, parkways, and playgrounds, he referred to as “a necessity of city life...not only desirable, but increasingly necessary, in fact indispensable.”120 He goes on to state that it is necessary to acquire both large and small tracts of land for these purposes and they should be accessible. Faced with deep-seated segregation in Florida, Nolen took a strong stance against inequality of living conditions and utilized parkways as elements for “connecting African American neighborhoods to the larger community.”121 Nolen defined these areas loosely as any type of “public grounds” and listed examples such as commons, public gardens, and parkways.122 The publication also incorporated waterways and water features as part of the park system and included examples of ponds with landscaped grounds and a swimming pool in East Walpole, Massachusetts.123 Opa-locka’s plan followed this recommendation for the incorporation of several public parks areas including a large golf course and a public swimming pool west of the city center, a public zoo at the center of the city, and three triangular plots designated as “parkways and parks.”124 The zoo, public pool, and park land to the west were demolished during the Navy’s occupation starting in the 1940s and this tract of land is now the Opa-locka Airport.125

119 See Appendix B: Plat of Opa-locka, Status of Improvements, 1925 with key.

120 Nolen, New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns and Villages, New York City, 71.

121 Ibid.,110.

122 Ibid.,72.

123 Ibid.,72-73.

124 “Plat of Opa-locka, Florida: With Foot-notes Explaining Status of Improvements,” Bernhardt E. Muller Collection, University of Miami Archives, n.d. c. 1926; An article from 1926 touts the presence of community gardens, no records of these plots have been found, however they may have classified as “parkways and parks” noted in the plan, “Opa-locka will be Beautiful,” Miami Daily News and Metropolis, June 23, 1926, J-24.

125 See Appendix B: Plat of Opa-locka, Status of Improvements, 1925 with key.
Mackenzie’s original 1926 master plan of Opa-locka featured all three of the components outlined by Nolen as necessary for comprehensive city planning. The zones, streets arrangements, and public amenities together moved beyond the City Beautiful movement’s concentration on aesthetics and infused it with social theories of reform and components to foster economic prosperity. One author speculates that had Opa-locka developed according to Mackenzie’s plan after construction was put on hold in 1927, the plan was “so impressive that Opa-locka, like Coral Gables...might even have pulled out of the Great Depression.” Opa-locka’s Garden City planning elements are largely extant today with the exception of the public parks.

The combination of development pressures related to the Florida real estate boom, rising popularity of the tales associated with *Arabian Nights*, and Garden City philosophies held by Mackenzie and his mentor John Nolen, resulted in a self-sustaining planned community with a strong architectural theme that rivaled nearby developments and gained notable popularity during the mid to late-1920s. Though Opa-locka’s original visionaries and designers have since passed, there are many lessons to be learned from the city’s original concept and guiding philosophies. Much of the New Urbanist movement in its efforts to diffuse suburban sprawl builds off of the Garden City model aimed toward alleviating the densification of urban cities. Focused on designing communities that “rediscover civic life and restore the vitality...of the public realm,” these ideals echo the philosophy behind the Garden City movement outlined above. As designers and planners face challenges in the twentieth-century similar to those of their predecessors at the turn of the nineteenth century such as sprawl, a lack of a civic core, and environmental concerns, perhaps there are lessons to be learned and build upon.

126 Cross, 62.
127 Lynn, 187.
128 Stephenson, 100.
EXISTING LAND USE IN OPA-LOCKA

Since the halt of construction in 1927 and subsequent disinvestment in the realization of the original 1926 plan for Opa-locka, the city has faced reoccurring trends of economic decline. Increased illegal drug activity and gang related violence during the early 1980s, in the eastern section of the city infamously known as the “Triangle,” branded the Magnolia North neighborhood as “one of the most violent and crime affected communities in South Florida.”

Between 1981 and 1982 the crime rate dropped from 13% to 8.4% due to the restructuring of the Opa-locka Police Department with the appointment of Dr. Robert Ingram as Police Chief, a man formerly ranked as “one of Miami’s most-honored officers.” Ingram established facilities dedicated to mental health and spearheaded crime prevention programs that aimed to unite residents with the police department. Though crime rates improved throughout the city, the Triangle remained plagued with homicides and drug activity. By the late 1980s metal barriers closed in the “nine-block pocket” of the city which had become subject to blight and abandonment. These barriers and the notorious crime associated with the Triangle plagued the city throughout much of the 1990s. Removal of these barriers began in 2007 and these efforts were lauded by residents who saw this as “an important first step in restoring the area’s forgotten reputation as a working-class neighborhood.” Crime rates have continued to decrease, yet the lingering public perception of Opa-locka as an unsafe city remains and has resulted in stalled population and economic growth. With an estimated population of 15,219 in 2010, Opa-locka has seen a mere 1.8% increase in

129 Carras, A-3.
130 Carras, A-3.
131 Raymond Land, “Man of God and Gun: Dr. Robert Ingram is minister and police chief in Opa-locka, FL,” Ebony, September (1983), 102-104.
132 Land, 104.
population since 2000. Of that population, approximately 32% of Opa-locka’s residents were below the poverty level between 2006 and 2010. The 2008 recession and increasing unemployment rates, further weakened Opa-locka’s tax base resulting in a lack of funding for public amenities and infrastructure.

Current Initiatives

Recent recognition in the past few years, beginning in 2010, of the distressed conditions in Opa-locka has resulted in an influx in federal and state funding to aid in the revitalization of the city. Spearheaded by the city officials and the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC), outreach to these agencies has resulted in the designations and funding described below:

In 2010, Opa-locka was designated as a Community Redevelopment Area and Agency under Florida Legislature as part of the Community Redevelopment Act of 1969. As set forth in Chapter 163, Part III, municipalities in Florida may submit a “Finding of Necessity” study to seek authorization as a “community redevelopment area and agency” (CRA), defined as a “blighted area...or an area in which there is a shortage of housing that is affordable to residents of low or moderate income...” Following the creation and adoption of a redevelopment plan, CRA designation allows the redevelopment agency to acquire or demolish property within CRA boundaries through eminent domain. Additionally, the CRA is allowed taxing and other financing tools to aid in redevelopment such as tax increment financing (TIFs). The CRA Plan completed in 2011 encompasses four specific sections of Opa-locka: Magnolia North, Magnolia Gardens, City Center, and Opa-locka LeJeune commerce area (Fig.31). Also in 2010, as part of the Building


135 Carras, A-3


137 Section 163.340, 'Community Redevelopment Area,' “The 2006 Florida Statutes.”
Better Communities General Obligation Bond Program sponsored by Miami-Dade County, Opa-locka was awarded $2 million dollars for the interim stabilization of the City Hall Building (formerly the Administrative Building). This project is slated to begin during the summer of 2012.

A new citywide comprehensive plan is also in the works for Opa-locka following the receipt of a $624,479 award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under the Community Challenge Grant. Awarded in 2011, this funding will support the undertaking and implementation of the “Sustainable Opa-locka 20/30” plan. In the same year, Opa-locka was awarded over $22 million dollars in NSP2 funding to aid in the purchasing and renovation of foreclosed residential properties in the city. This funding was also through HUD under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and was the second round of Neighborhood


Stabilization Program funding (referred to as NSP2).\textsuperscript{140} Awarded to the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation, funding was allocated to the agency beginning in the summer of 2011. The OLCDC received an additional $300,000 dollars in grant funding from HUD, in January of 2012, as part of the Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant for the revitalization of the Niles Gardens neighborhood.\textsuperscript{141}

This recent influx in funding aimed towards revitalization is an incredible accomplishment for Opa-locka. As the city begins to strengthen communal ties, revitalize structures, increase revenues, and construct new infrastructure, the city must seek to build on its existing assets. Current land use and historic preservation ordinances must be taken into account and analyzed to ensure appropriate treatment and future protection of historic assets that have defined the character and cultural heritage of Opa-locka. The planning philosophies on which Opa-locka was planned were rooted in civic engagement and well-being. As such, harkening back and building upon this foundation can enrich the history of development in Opa-locka by starting a new chapter in development grounded in these ideals yet responsive to contemporary needs.

\textit{Current Zoning}

Within the regulations set forward by the Miami-Dade County Planning and Zoning Department, there are a total of twenty-five zoning categories, of which the city of Opa-locka features fifteen (Fig.32).\textsuperscript{142} Predominately single-family residential, industrial, and commercial, there is currently no allowance of mixed-use zoning in the city. As stated in the 2010 Community Redevelopment Plan, a lack of mixed-use development in the city deters a walkable city in which residents can easily access basic amenities. Miami-Dade County’s Comprehensive Master Plan


\textsuperscript{142} Carras, A-11.
(CDMP) for 2015-2025 discusses the incorporation of both vertical and horizontal mixed-use
development in areas with a higher density and near public transit hubs in the coming years.\textsuperscript{143}
The document also details future development of the area next to the Opa-locka Executive Airport,
located west of the city center, and approved uses such as lodging, industrial use, and retail.\textsuperscript{144}

\textbf{Current Historic Preservation Ordinance}

Under Miami-Dade County’s Historic Preservation Ordinance, adopted in 1981,
municipalities incorporated prior to 1982 were provided with a choice of either adopting the
County’s ordinance or developing a separate historic preservation ordinance for the municipality.
Nine municipalities chose to enact a historic preservation ordinance of their own: Coral Gables,


\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., I-55.
Hialeah, Homestead, Miami, Miami Beach, Miami Shores, Miami Springs, Opa-locka, and South Miami. Accordingly, each municipality is obligated to meet minimum compliance standards for a historic preservation ordinance as set forth by the Florida State Historic Preservation Office. The minimum requirements include establishment of a preservation review board, adoption of procedures for designation, and establishment of economic incentives for preservation. In 1982 a total of twenty structures that were part of the original 1926 development of Opa-locka were listed on the National Register under a Multiple Property Submission (MPS). The survey, documentation, and nomination forms were completed by Michael Maxwell and Associates. Due to the designation of these properties in March 1982 by the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Board (HPRB) before the July 1, 1982 ordinance transition, according to the ordinance, all properties having undergone approval by the Miami-Dade HPRB “shall have the status and protections of properties designated under the municipality’s historic preservation ordinance unless and until such designation is removed by formal action of the municipality pursuant to its ordinance.”

Due to strained resources in Opa-locka, the city does not have an active preservation review board. After the renovation of the City Hall building (formerly the Opa-locka Company Administration building) in the late 1980s the city’s constituency dedicated to historic preservation diminished and has yet to come back. Under Section 6-14 City of Opa-locka Arabian Motif Architectural Regulations, an ordinance adopted in February of 1991, the city chose to implement a set of regulations and incentives aimed toward “encouraging and expand[ing] the creative use


of the Arabian Motif Architectural Style.” This document lists the structures within the Opa-locka Multiple Property Submission and cites these as examples from which to derive prominent motifs to be mimicked and applied. Employment of this style with new construction, adding these elements to an existing building not listed on the National Register MPD, or restoration of these elements with proper documentation on an existing building, were among the “creative uses” that would make a project eligible for development bonuses and special allowances. These incentives resulted in new constructions with applied domes, horseshoe arches, and crenellated parapets (Fig.33).

Fig.33: Example of new construction, New City Hall  (Source: Roadside Architecture.com, http://www.agilitynut.com/deco/fl.html)

148 Section 6-14: “City of Opa-locka Arabian Motif Architectural Regulation” document was provided to the author by the Opa-locka Planning Department during the summer of 2011 and presented as their “design guidelines” for new development.
CURRENT STATE OF HISTORIC RESOURCES IN OPA-LOCKA

By 1987 twenty-one buildings dispersed throughout the historic center of Opa-locka were listed on the National Register under a Thematic Resource Area nomination, referred to today as a Multiple Property Submission (MPS). Of the over one hundred buildings constructed under the original 1926 Arabian Nights theme in Opa-locka the twenty-one buildings listed showed the highest level of integrity and were in good to fair condition.149 The buildings listed under the MPS included eleven single-family homes (Baird House, Cavero House, Crouse House, Etherege House, Griffith House, Haislip House, Helms House, Long House, Tinsman House, Tooker House, and Wheeler House), two are multi-family dwellings (Higgins Duplex and Taber Duplex), two mixed-use buildings with apartment units on the top and retail at the bottom (Helms Store and Apartments and Hurt Harry Building), two were used for industrial or retail purposes (King Trunk Factory and Showroom and Root Building), and four were considered civic structures (Opa-locka Bank, Opa-locka Company Administration Building, Opa-locka Fire Station, and the Opa-locka Railroad Station) (Fig.34 and Fig.35).

Today, twenty of the original twenty-one listed buildings remain. The Helms Store and Apartments building is no longer extant. The listed single-family residential properties remain in good condition and, according to a survey conducted by the author in 2011, are currently occupied. In 1985, the Railroad Station underwent restoration though it remains vacant today and is currently next to the newly constructed Tri-Rail Commuter Train Platform and elevated walkway.150 Owners of the Administration Building (also known as Opa-locka City Hall) and the Hurt-Harry Building (now the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation offices) took advantage of the Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program and both buildings underwent

149 “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Area Nomination.”

restoration in the late 1980s. The Administration Building/City Hall was replaced with a new City Hall structure located just south of the building facing Opa-locka Boulevard in the 1990s rendering the historic structure vacant and in need of restoration due to deferred maintenance. The 2011 survey of residential properties revealed a total forty-two residential structures (one of which was a multi-family property) constructed between 1927-30 not listed as part of the MPS. Today, a total of sixty-two buildings (including those listed on the National Register) constructed between 1926 and 1930 under the original Arabian Nights theme remain extant in Opa-locka (Fig.36). Additionally, the original Seaboard Airline Railroad track, now operated by the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority, functions as the Tri-Rail Regional Commuter system and runs through the core of Opa-locka.

While the 1926 Moorish Revival structures are the most touted and well-associated theme

of Opa-locka, the city has transformed considerably over the course of nearly eighty-five years. According to recent census records, of the 5,511 structures in Opa-locka the highest percentage of these structures were constructed between 1940 and 1959. This period of development marks the Navy’s occupation in Opa-locka resulting in critical shifts in aesthetics and the city’s economic climate. According to the Florida Master Site File, Florida’s inventory of historic resources, 34 structures surveyed in the late 1980s, constructed between 1930 and 1950, were listed as “Potential contributor to NR district.” Noted as masonry vernacular buildings these structures have the potential to convey and exemplify Opa-locka’s period of development following the Great Depression. Other areas of the city are comprised of light industries and also tell the story of Opa-locka and its origins as a Garden City economically supported by light industry. These areas are located to the south and southeast of the railroad.


153 “Florida Master Site File for City of Opa-locka”, obtained through office June 2011; See Appendix: Potential Contributor to NR District List.
Legend:
- City Municipal Boundaries
- Historic Downtown
- Tri-Rail Commuter Line (Former Seaboard Airline Railroad)
- Original (1926-1930) Commercial
- Original (1926-1930) Civic
- Original (1926-1930) Residential
- Site Listed on the National Register (see full NR list)

Historic Resources (1926-1930)
Opa-locka, FL

Created: 04-20-2012, L.Allen
Base Map: City of Opa-locka Zoning Map, 11-05-2010

Fig.36: Map of Extant Historic Resources 1926-1930 (Source: Author, 2012)
COMMUNITY + HISTORIC PRESERVATION

As the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC) continues with its unyielding efforts to rebuild and revitalize the community and economic prosperity in Opa-locka, its infrastructure and public buildings must keep up with these demands to provide public gathering spaces necessary for community-building. In a conversation with Willie Logan, the CEO of the OLCDC, when asked how he saw historic preservation playing a role in the revitalization of Opa-locka, he mentioned utilizing the Moorish Revival architectural style to promote the area and to attract visitors. In an effort to enhance and solidify the architectural character created by these historic resources, the OLCDC is interested in utilizing tax credits to rehabilitate these structures.

As noted in Stephanie Ryberg’s dissertation, *Neighborhood Stabilization through Historic Preservation: An Analysis of Historic Preservation and Community Development in Cleveland, Providence, Houston and Seattle*, community development corporations (CDCs) are spearheading revitalization efforts in many of today’s communities and many have turned to historic preservation tools to catalyze revitalization. Tools often utilized include the Main Street program, federal rehabilitation tax credits, and designation through the local or national register.  

Ryberg states that although CDCs utilize historic preservation tools, these connections and are not outwardly connected or touted. She goes on to claim that the effectiveness and sophistication of CDCs are enhanced by preservation tools as a means for neighborhood stabilization as “historic resources...contribute to socioeconomic improvement...and reinforce[s] cultural identity of neighborhood.”

Other advocates for preservation as a positive tool in community growth in urban areas, such as Dolores Hayden, call for the expansion of preservation to a wider audience. To this end Hayden in her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* urges that:

A politically conscious approach to urban preservation must go beyond the techniques

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154 Ryberg, 11

155 Ryberg, vi.
of traditional architectural preservation (making preserved structures into museums or attractive commercial real estate) to reach broader audiences. It must emphasize public processes and public memory.156

Historic preservation seeks to promote and foster cultural capital, reframed by Ned Kauffman as “cultural diversity,” he states that while “cultural capital is located in people, it is expressed and nurtured in places.”157 Historic preservation is often viewed as antiquated and irrelevant to contemporary needs of society. Many advocates of preservation stress the power of place, and in the context of community revitalization historic preservation initiatives can play a pivotal role in regenerating and fostering a community’s sense of place. Defining community-building goals and linking these with possible historic preservation goals and tools can create a more dynamic and supportive combined set of goals.

Community-Generating Goals + Historic Preservation Tools

According to a study outlining the essential elements in constructing community, eleven “community-generating” properties were found necessary, in some form, to render a strong communal setting. These eleven “community-generating” properties included:

...Attracting “people predisposed to getting along with one another”; having “community organizations that serve as vehicles for collective action”; have “facilities that bring people together”; arranged housing and other spaces that “create reasons and opportunities for social contact”; build in conditions where “individual residents stand to benefit from the success and loose from the failure of the collective”; promote organization of a “suitable size for area-wide” collaboration; foster collective memory through traditions and reoccurring events; encourage long-term residency; feature areas where community gathers during leisure-time; denote clear physical boundaries of a given area, and a unified composition.158

While all eleven factors were defined as necessary, in some capacity, to foster community


in a given area, three of these properties are well-suited by historic preservation tools aimed toward the preservation and restoration of portions of Opa-locka’s historic resources. The most relevant of these community-generating properties is that of a “unified composition.” Opa-locka and Mariemont, Ohio were among the fifteen planned communities studied in the United States as part of this research to determine the community benefits of a unified architectural style and aesthetic in a particular area. The study determined that areas with a unified appearance “can validate residents’ sense of we-ness, define who they are as a group, and help outsiders see them as a community.”

It was noted, however, that design alone could not foster this sense of community and that each of the communities studied were part of a larger planning initiative that incorporated programs and public spaces. Historic preservation tools such as design guidelines and design review boards can bring together city officials and residents to work together in maintaining a unified composition.

The next characteristic outlined that could potentially be bolstered by historic preservation tools is the creation of “conditions under which individual residents stand to benefit from the success and lose from the failure of the collective.” Suggestions for implementing this community-generating characteristic included regulations such as land use and design controls that provide community members with an equally vested interest in some element of the urban environment. Aside from design controls listed above, other historic preservation tools can provide a communal network for decision making such as neighborhood conservation districts or designating the municipality as a certified local government.

Collective memory as a community-generating tool can be closely linked to preservation
initiatives. Oral histories, festivals and events of commemoration, and other interpretive devices can be utilized to promote a collective memory amongst residents. A strong and active preservation alliance or a historical society in the city could allow for a central location for memorabilia and other relics to keep both new and old traditions of Opa-locka around for other generations.
CASE STUDIES OF RELEVANT PRESERVATION PLANS + APPROACHES

The following case studies represent a range of issues related to the preservation of historic resources in Opa-locka and adequate preservation planning recommendations to this end. These issues include preservation program management (Coral Gables), future development as a Garden City (Mariemont), design guidelines for new construction (Santa Fe), and strategic fusion of preservation and community-building related goals (Washington State). The final case study, Venice, California, showcases an example of a city turned suburb with an eroded early twentieth century thematic foundation. These case studies help to frame preservation goals and strategies for the basis of Opa-locka’s preservation plan.

Coral Gables, Florida: Certified Local Government Approach

Designed and developed beginning in 1921, the city of Coral Gables is located approximately twenty miles south of Opa-locka. Coral Gables set the precedent for a thematic architectural style paired with comprehensive town planning in South Florida under the guidance of developer George Merrick. Merrick chose to model the city’s architectural style on Mediterranean examples found in Washington Irving’s Legends of the Alhambra163 (Fig.37). In addition to the promotion of an exotic Mediterranean style, Merrick also envisioned a city that would “offer every amenity to its residents…and become a center for international business.”164 Today the city of Coral Gables is lauded for its strong historic preservation program and was designated as a Certified Local Government in 1986. With several historic resources, districts, and one of the three National Landmarks in Miami-Dade County, Coral Gables can serve as a model for its strong program exemplified by its certification as a CLG.165

163 Lynn, 166-67.


165 Ibid.
In speaking with Donna Spain, the Historic Preservation Officer and Certified Local Government contact for Coral Gables, she noted the numerous benefits of being a CLG. These benefits range from the network of preservation professionals to access to competitive matching funds.\textsuperscript{166} Though the Preservation guide for the city of Coral Gables does not call out a community component, Coral Gable’s early CLG model has proven to be a strong piece in keeping this community viable. Similar to Opa-locka, Coral Gables opted out of being under Miami-Dade County’s historic preservation jurisdiction. As of 2003, the city’s Historic Preservation ordinance moved under its Zoning Code. Revisions in 2007 strengthened the Historic Preservation ordinance with the inclusion of an \textit{ad valorem} tax relief for historic commercial properties.\textsuperscript{167}

The preservation guide for Coral Gables also features a series of “Standards” for

\textsuperscript{166} Donna Spain, CLG Contact, City of Coral Gables Historical Resource Department, Phone Interview by Author, Philadelphia, PA, March 14, 2012.

rehabilitation, restoration, and new construction in relation to historic structures. The “Standards” for new construction detail character-defining features and illustrate examples of appropriate scale, massing, and architectural vocabulary (Fig.38). A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for any “work on the local historic landmark or property located within a historic district.”

Coral Gables is known as an exemplary model for preservation in Miami-Dade County. Lessons related to a CLG designation and design standards can be readily translated to Opa-locka, considering their similarities as 1920s developments and current independent preservation programs in Florida.

*Mariemont, Ohio: Garden City Plan and English Village Theme*

Incorporated in 1941, Mariemont is a municipality in Ohio located ten miles northeast of Cincinnati with approximately 3,000 residents. Mariemont originally developed as a Garden City in the 1920s, planned by John Nolen with architecture designed by Clinton Mackenzie along with a team of other notable architects including Grosvenor Atterbury. Touted as the “National

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Fig.39: Plan of Mariemont, Ohio, 1922 (Source:“Mariemont, America’s Demonstration Town,” 309)

Fig.40: Mariemont Theater (Mariemont Vision 2021, cover)
Exemplar” of town planning, Mariemont is considered to be an example of the English Garden City (Fig.39).\footnote{171 National Register of Historic Places, “Village of Mariemont,” 62.} Designed to emulate an English Village, the city features a historic core of buildings designed in the Tudor and Georgian Revival style (Fig.40).\footnote{172 Ibid., 56.} As a “National Exemplar” of town planning mixed with a strong “Village” core, Mariemont has capitalized on both its innovative plan and distinctive architecture.

The Village of Mariemont is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in 2007 was designated as a National Historic Landmark.\footnote{173 “The Village of Mariemont,” Mariemont Website.} 180 buildings are listed as contributing resources to the Village and the “General Plan and Street” arrangement are also listed as contributing.\footnote{174 “Appendix A: List of Contributing and Non-Contributing Resources,” In National Register of Historic Places Nomination, “Village of Mariemont.”} In speaking with Frank Raeon, the President of the Mariemont Preservation Foundation, when asked about the successes related to adaptive use projects of historic resources and new construction adjacent to resources within the Village he referred to a notion of “legacy planning and design” upheld by the city officials and developers as the key to success.\footnote{175 Frank Raeon, Phone Interview by Author, Philadelphia, PA, March 15, 2012.} He added that this notion of legacy planning guided much of the success in Mariemont due to input and actions by designers and planners invested in the image and livelihood of the village.

In an effort to bolster this legacy, in 2011, Mariemont contacted Hampstead Garden Suburb, just outside of London, to establish a “Sister City” relationship with the area. Mariemont sought this connection “to start an international relationship that could boost cultural and educational ties between the two communities.”\footnote{176 Lisa Wakeland, “Sister City Closer to Reality for Mariemont,” Cincinnati.com, June 22, 2011, http://cincinnati.com/blogs/eyeontheeastside/2011/06/22/sister-city-closer-to-reality-for-mariemont/, (accessed March 28, 2012).} In creating a dialogue around the importance and evolution of Garden Cities, advocates in Mariemont hope that it will spur heritage tourism
and highlight the importance of Mariemont’s original master plan.

Additional efforts to promote and preserve the master plan designed by John Nolen can be seen throughout Mariemont’s plan, Vision 2021: A Blueprint for the Future of Mariemont. The plan lays out a total of twenty-one priorities based on feedback from public meetings and surveys. “Nolen Town Plan” is listed as one of the identified priorities and calls for the preservation and further development of the original master plan. The plan goes on to suggest that “By adhering to the principles of town planning, future projects should be envisioned with the same or a similar high-quality architectural character and integrity as Nolen’s plan set forth in 1921.”

The document also notes a lack of planning initiatives in the city and suggests that the city build upon the strong planning campaign of the 1920s in an effort to encourage sustainable future development. To further highlight the importance of quality town planning and architecture, Frank Raeon also suggested that a coalition or organization should be formed to keep other garden cities informed about best-practices for development and preservation.

Mariemont has preserved much of its original character through historic nominations of both the architecture and original master plan as a whole. Additionally, efforts such as creating links to international communities with the “Sister City” initiative have helped to promote heritage tourism. This notion of “legacy planning” seeks to generate a dialogue and connection between the architectural character and plan to foster a sense of continuity in forethought and integrity in design. Mariemont’s response to the original master plan that provided a foundation for the character that the city enjoys today can serve as a model for Opa-locka’s future plans related to heritage tourism and international relationships to heighten the city’s profile.

Santa Fe, New Mexico: Dominant Style

Founded circa 1610, the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico is often referred to as “The City

Different,” today for reasons related to its mix of cultures, remarkable collection of historic structures, and its rich natural setting. The term “The City Different” was originally coined as a play on the “City Beautiful” movement during the creation of the Plan of 1912 for Santa Fe. The Plan of 1912 was the first official endorsement of the “Santa Fe Style” for all structures in the city (Fig.41). In 1957 the city established a preservation ordinance and ten years later, in 1967, the city created a historic district overlay that further indoctrinated the Santa Fe Style. Today, the preservation ordinance for Santa Fe shows a continued predilection towards this style in the city’s historic districts. Under the “General Purpose” section of the city’s ordinance it is stated that “qualities relating to the history of Santa Fe, and a harmonious outward appearance, and

Fig.41: Santa Fe, NM, 1938, Example of Adobe Style (Source: Photographed by, Charles Kelly, content.lib.utah.edu)


180 Ibid., 89.
which preserve property values and attract tourists and residents alike, be preserved....”\textsuperscript{181} This continued use and promotion of the Spanish-Pueblo style with brown stucco walls, flat roofs, and \textit{vigas} projecting wood beams) has caused some critics to call the city an “adobe theme park” that dismissed its modern architecture in the downtown region.\textsuperscript{182} Tourism is a staple industry in Santa Fe and the Spanish-Pueblo style is a large driver of visitation.

Currently, Santa Fe's design standards and provisions for historic districts are under Article 14-5 of its zoning code: \textit{Overlay Zoning Districts}. Zoning overlays add an additional layer of regulations to already existing zoning procedures for a given area. Overlays trigger a design review process under the zoning ordinance, as opposed to the independent design review process typically used in local historic districts.\textsuperscript{183} For new construction within the Downtown and Eastside historic district overlays, design standards set forth as part of the zoning ordinance require one of two styles to be used: the “Old Santa Fe Style” or the “Recent Santa Fe Style.”\textsuperscript{184} The Old Santa Fe Style is described as follows: “…characterized by construction with \textit{adobe}, is defined as including the so-called “pueblo” or “pueblo-Spanish” or “Spanish-Indian” and “territorial” styles…”\textsuperscript{185} The “Recent Santa Fe Style” is described as intending to “…achieve harmony with historic buildings by \textit{retention} of a similarity of materials, color, portion, and general detail. The dominating effect is to be that of adobe construction.”\textsuperscript{186} While there is some differentiation in style, the ordinance goes on to detail specific design standards related to elements such as wall configuration and paint colors. This control over the finer details is what has gained the city’s design control a


\textsuperscript{182} Berke, “Is There Such a Thing as Too Much Vitality?”


\textsuperscript{184} Article 14-5: Overlay Zoning Districts, Section 14-5.2, Section E

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
notorious reputation for creating a “Hispanicized version of Main Street USA” by ignoring other historic styles and “destroying the ability of the historic architecture to convey the actual story of the community.”

The design standards set by the preservation ordinance and the historic district overlay in Santa Fe can serve as general touchstones for Opa-locka when considering future development and a unified aesthetic. If Opa-locka is to avoid some of the criticisms Santa Fe has faced, there must be a concerted effort to balance the implementation of design guidelines with the protection of other historic resources in the city designed with styles outside of the Moorish-Revival or Arabian Nights architectural vocabulary.

**Washington State: Community Preservation Plan**

In 2009 Washington State developed a State Historic Preservation Plan titled *Sustaining Communities through Historic Preservation 2009-2013*, a follow-up to their 2004-2008 *Strengthening Communities through Historic Preservation* plan. A critical component of these preservation plans, and what distinguishes itself from more traditional plans, are the planning goals, related objectives, and strategies outlined in the document that are directly connected to community-building strategies. These goals promote an overall vision for historic preservation as a strategic response to the needs of the state and its communities in an explicit rather an implied manner. As stated in the “Executive Summary” of the 2004 plan, this document was intended to highlight “preservation’s potential for economic development and community revitalization” and states that “preservation brings an added dimension to a community’s quality of life.”

Adaptive reuse and heritage tourism are identified in the plan as the overarching historic preservation tools

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187 McWatters, 90.

that would work to strength communities in Washington State. These two tools were highlighted as avenues for job creation, sustainable development, downtown revitalization, economic activity, and promoting continuity in a community’s past, present, and future. The following six goals were presented in the plan:

... (1) Increase use of historic preservation as an economic development and community revitalization tool; (2) advocate to protect our heritage; (3) strengthen connections inside and outside the preservation community; (4) integrate preservation principles into local land use decisions, regulations, and development processes, (5) expand efforts to identify and preserve cultural and historic resources; (6) effectively increase knowledge of historic preservation and its importance to Washington.  

Each of these goals included subset tasks, with recommendations such as creating new partnerships, developing a unified voice for preservation issues, and promoting preservation as a growth management tool.

The 2009 Preservation Plan followed upon on the status and implementation of the goals presented above in 2004. This section, titled “A Look Back,” detailed the progress to date and identified completed reports, outreach materials produced, invigorated web outreach, updated growth management literature related to historic preservation, and the creation of forums and conferences related to historic resources.

Another helpful section in the 2004 and 2009 plans is the “Cultural Resources Overview.” This section of the plan detailed narratives and themes related to the development and areas of significance in Washington State. In lieu of identifying individual sites, this section discussed both archaeological resources and historic resources as themes covering varying sections of the state. These themes included resources related to the “recent past” such as transportation infrastructure, recreational areas, and industrial complexes. This is a helpful tool in increasing awareness and promoting further exploration related to specific types of resources that cater to


190 Ibid., 9.
diverse audiences.

Under *Goal I* in the 2004 plan, “Increase use of historic preservation as an economic development and community revitalization tool,” a note was made that during the public participation process as part of the plan, participants had little to no knowledge of the economic benefits of preservation that have been touted in the field for several years. In “forging the link” between economic benefits and preservation and making them more mainstream, Washington’s plan responded with the following objectives:

... (1a) Promote historic preservation as an economic development tool; (1b) facilitate heritage tourism across the state; (1c) expand existing and create new incentives for preservation; (2) develop a unified voice for historic preservation.¹⁹¹

The action plans under these objectives outlined strategies for implementation and included target dates, entities responsible for implementation, and legislative agendas.

Overall the preservation plans put forth by Washington State merge historic preservation goals and community development agendas in a proactive and actionable manner. While these goals and actions are presented for a state-wide program, Opa-locka as a municipality can benefit from implementing many of these same goals. Goals related to the revitalization and development of Opa-locka need to be grounded in historic preservation goals to encourage sustainable communities and development.

*Venice, California: A Themed City Abandoned*

Designed between 1892 and 1904, Venice, California predates Opa-locka by over two decades and was originally inspired by the distinctive style and infrastructure of Venice, Italy. Complete with over fifteen miles of canal systems and Venetian inspired architecture, this area of

Southern California was referred to in the early twentieth century as the “Venice of America.”\textsuperscript{192} Abbot Kinney, the visionary behind the development, transformed sand dunes, tide flats, and lagoons into a “high class” residential area and entertainment venue (Fig.42).\textsuperscript{193} After opening the development in 1905, Kinney recognized that the city’s success would be reliant upon tourism and amusement attractions.\textsuperscript{194} To this end, construction of several entertainment buildings commenced along the city’s piers in 1906, including a skating rink, dance pavilion, bowling alley, and bathhouse. These new constructions inevitably transformed the city into what some later referred to as “Coney Island West.”\textsuperscript{195}


\textsuperscript{193} Gunn, 410.

\textsuperscript{194} David Gebhard and Robert Winter, An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2003), 69.

By 1911 Venice officially became an independent city and its future seemed promising. The city's future took a turn for the worse following Kinney's death in 1920, ending the impetus for continued development with a Venetian inspired theme and a cultural center focus. Subsequently, many of the structures and canals fell into disrepair and the city center became "shabby and rundown." In 1925 Venice consolidated with Los Angeles and within two years many of the canals were paved over as streets. The paving over of the canals was due to unsanitary conditions as a result of inadequate drainage and increased automobile usage.

Discovery of oil in 1930 along the Venice peninsula resulted in the erection of approximately 148 oil wells and the destruction of buildings and the environmental quality of surrounding neighborhoods and beaches. Though Venice suffered further during the Great Depression, there were some signs of recovery during World War II. However this prosperity did not last beyond the war. By the 1950s Venice witnessed a considerable economic downturn and was overrun with low-income housing and abandoned properties. At this time several artists flocked to the area as a result of the area's "low rent, mild climate, and toleration of their lifestyle." The artist population in Venice continued to grow throughout the early 1960s until 1965 when the Earthquake Code Enforcement Act resulted in the demolition of over 550 buildings considered to be uninhabitable according to seismic regulations. Despite efforts by the Shoreline Landmarks Society to obtain landmark status and preserve several of the remaining original Venetian-style buildings, nearly one-third of Venice's original architecture was demolished.

196 Gebhard, 69.
197 Ibid.
198 Starr, 80.
199 "Windward Circle Neighborhood Profile," 3.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
The 1960s and 70s brought a resurgence of tourist attraction to Venice as a result of boardwalk development and the spectacle created by roller skaters, vendors, and artists along near the beach.\textsuperscript{202} An influx of new construction beginning in the 1980s and lasting to the present, has resulted in an eclectic mix of contemporary houses and lofts juxtaposed with historic buildings from the mid-twentieth century. Today, a handful of historic buildings associated with the original development of Venice remain, many of which are located along Windward Avenue. Four buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Venice Library, the Venice-of-America House, and the Warren Wilson Beach House. Additionally, the Venice Canal National Register Historic District was designated in the 1980s and the Venice Canals Rehabilitation project resulted in the restoration of a select number of canals in 1993. Including the canal system, four resources are locally designated by the city as Historic-Cultural Monuments.\textsuperscript{203}

According to the \textit{Venice Community Plan}, adopted in 2000, one of the community’s eighteen goals is related to the “preservation and restoration of cultural resources, neighborhoods and landmarks which have historical and/or cultural significance.”\textsuperscript{204} Although the city developed outside of the original Venetian theme, the community recognizes the importance of subsequent development and is working to foster “a diverse community that is socially and economically vibrant with unique architectural and historical characteristics.”\textsuperscript{205} Kinney’s original vision to set Venice apart from other nearby beach development laid the foundation for individuality in the community, a notion that the community still embraces today.

The extravagant Venetian-styled buildings were only part of the original scheme in Venice.

\textsuperscript{202} “Windward Circle Neighborhood Profile,” 3.


\textsuperscript{204} “Venice Community Plan,” III-32

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.,I-3.
These ornate buildings were strategically located and supported by equally stylized and themed infrastructure. Canal systems coupled with distinctive architecture created a holistic vision for what was to be the “Venice of America.” Following the loss of nearly one-third of Venice’s original resources in the 1960s, several community groups have worked together to preserve what little survived of both the canals and structures concentrated in the Windward Circle neighborhood. As a result, the area is now well known and sought after for its distinctive style and tangible history. The National Register Historic District designation of the remaining canals in the 1980s, followed by a Historic American Engineering Record survey completed in 1992, helped to heighten the importance of the canals and subsequently ensure their protection and incorporation into larger planning and community initiatives (Fig. 43). For example, under the Venice Community Plan, the restoration and protection of the canals and their associated banks and bridge falls under listed opportunities for “recreation, parks, and open space” in the area.206

Though much of the original Venetian architecture was demolished, the larger landmarks that have been protected and the canal systems work together to bring these seemingly disparate elements together to reflect what history remains of the area’s distinctive foundation. Many of the houses along the canals were constructed following World War II and the neighborhoods have an eclectic mix of 1920s Craftsman style homes and beach bungalows. While the structures constructed following the Abbot’s Kinney Venetian vision did not fit within the original theme, the city is working to ensure that subsequent areas of development with significant historical character are also preserved.

Venice, California and Opa-locka are similar in their original development under a specific architectural and planning theme and contemporary handling of a disjointed theme. Venice serves as a cautionary example of the devastating effects that loss of cultural resources can have on a community, while simultaneously serving as a noteworthy example of what preserving the larger planning infrastructure can do to help weave historic narratives together and fill in the gaps of an eroded theme. Fortunately, Opa-locka contains more resources associated with the original theme and has the opportunity to restore portions of the downtown to create a unified and cohesive visual identity. The roadways and blocks laid out as part of Opa-locka’s original master plan remain largely intact and provide an opportunity for Opa-locka to connect contrasting layers of history back to its original foundation and community-oriented ideals.
MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSIONS (THEMATIC RESOURCES)

The 20 resources listed on the National Register in Opa-locka were nominated in 1982 under a Multiple Property submission titled “Opa-locka Thematic Resource Nomination” under Criteria A, B, and C.\(^{207}\) Established in 1977 as a form of designation under the National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property submissions (MPS)\(^{208}\) were originally intended to encourage the use of these documents as tools for planning. Focused on general surveys of sources with common themes such as “the work of an architectural firm or a method of bridge construction,” this spur in survey and documentation efforts was prompted by the Housing and Community Act of 1976. This act sponsored grants that funded survey efforts and the preparation of nominations.\(^{209}\)

Lawrence Aten is credited with the general notion behind the MPS format as a response to the concepts behind Resource Projection Planning Process (referred to as RP3) taking hold in the National Park Service during the 1970s and 1980s.\(^{210}\) MPS submissions were seen as a fusion between two of the guiding principles of RP3: “rationalizing planning for historic resources and creating more effective mechanisms for management.”\(^{211}\) While the concept of the designation stayed the same, by 1984, in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, the form changed from a “multiple resource and thematic” form to a “multiple property documentation form.”\(^{212}\) This change strengthened the nomination’s requirement to feature “the development of historic contexts and the grouping of properties by common physical and associative


\(^{208}\) Based on the older forms these resources are also referred to as “Thematic Resources”


characteristics.” 213 In developing this historic context emphasis, Multiple Property submissions were seen as tools that could help other initiatives in areas such as tourism, public education programs, and interpretive projects through themes.

By 1980 MP submissions were in the thousands and as popularity grew over the course of the decade, by 1996 they accounted for nearly “one third of the 66,300 National Register listings.”215 In 1991 National Register Bulletin #16B: How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form and a video titled The Multiple Property Approach, were produced and distributed, further promoting MPSs. This designation type was intended to be a flexible nomination in that it anticipated the expansion of context and that additional surveys following the initial designation would result in new resources added under the umbrella of an established theme.216

Today MP submissions range from geographically dispersed structures crossing multiple city boundaries, such as the Historic U.S. Post Offices of Wyoming, to designations concentrated within one city, as seen in Opa-locka. One author states the importance of these listings as:

“...tangible link[s] between historic events of the past and places that today can be recognized, preserved, and interpreted. By connecting history and historic places, these listings are forming a rich and ever-growing compendium of local, state, and national history that can be used as we preserve historic properties in meaningful lasting ways.”217

This form of designation allows for the same benefits as being listed on the National Register as individual resources or as contributing properties within historic districts, including encouraging the utilization of tax credits and other incentives.

213 McClelland, 1.


215 Ibid.

216 McClelland, 1.

217 Ibid., 2.
FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION-BASED PRESERVATION PLAN

Conclusion

If the city of Opa-locka had developed the way Glenn Curtiss, Clinton Mackenzie, and Bernhardt Muller had intended it to during the 1920s, this four square mile city would be a near complete representation of styles inspired by the *Arabian Night* tales. Even with only one-fifth of the original structures remaining and scattered throughout the city, this *Arabian Nights* theme has a strong presence in the city given its distinctive architectural character. The Multiple Property designation under which these resources are tied together acknowledges themes related to its development as part of the Florida real estate boom, its Moorish Revival architecture, and its master plan as part of the Garden City movement in the United States. While these themes ground the historic context of its development, they do not reflect the narrative and associated resources related to the development of Opa-locka after the Great Depression and beyond.

The overarching question of this thesis is how preservation planning tools can be utilized to go a step further beyond the themes set forth in Multiple Property designations to connect geographically dispersed historic resources in a proactive way. As a flexible framework for designation that encourages amendments for new contexts and resources, Opa-locka’s Multiple Property Submission is in need of an update. The city also needs to acknowledge the original intentions of Multiple Property designations as part of a larger planning process. These nominations were intended to develop a context related to the development of the city, and in so doing spur larger community initiatives in the city such as tourism, educational programming, local oral histories, and other forms of local interpretation. Current initiatives aimed toward community revitalization provide a potential avenue for the city to merge planning and development plans with preservation plans that seek to protect Opa-locka’s diverse cultural heritage. A community-revitalization based preservation plan will give Opa-locka the opportunity to move towards a better future in a sustainable manner while promoting its community’s heritage in a way that will
enrich the lives of its residents and invigorate the city for years to come.

Towards this end, this thesis concludes with a recommended framework for Opa-locka's Community Revitalization-Based Preservation Plan that seeks to merge goals related to community revitalization and historic preservation. This framework is presented in the form of an annotated table of contents that details necessary sections for the plan supplemented by recommendations. Prior to and as part of the development of a final preservation plan, the author recommends an extensive public participation process. This process will enable a meaningful dialogue that connects the community back to its historic resources and assesses the public perception of historic preservation in the community.

Community Revitalization-Based Preservation Plan - Proposed Framework

Annotated Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Summarize the vision and goals outlined in the document. A clear Executive Summary provides residents and potential investors with a clear summary of the process, findings, and recommendations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This section details the process and impetus behind the creation of the preservation plan. The Introduction also provides an opportunity to detail the community engagement process and stakeholder interviews grounding the document in relevancy and community interest.

Chapter 2: Vision

The Vision statement establishes a guiding preservation and planning philosophy as well as a narrative for the current importance of preservation initiatives related to the overall vision for the city’s future.
**Recommended Vision Statement:**

The historic and cultural resources of a city create a narrative for the past, a narrative that makes it distinct from surrounding areas and fosters a sense of place. Resources related to Opa-locka’s progressive Garden City master plan, *Arabian Nights* theme, naval and aviation history, and its industrial history provide the city’s residents and visitors with tangible links to persons and events that have shaped the city and its community.

Currently the only resources with historic designation in the city are the 20 Moorish Revival buildings constructed in the 1920s under the city’s original *Arabian Nights* theme. Expanding the city’s rich history to incorporate the original Garden City master plan and its infrastructure in addition to listing resources from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s will promote a history that makes Opa-locka truly distinct from adjacent municipalities. Physical reminders for the past create a sense of place that in turn generates a sense of pride in the community.

Preservation often acquires the reputation of being low on the list of priorities for community development due to assumed costs and dismissal as a frivolous and regressive undertaking. However, recent studies related to the economic benefits of historic preservation have shown that initiatives to safeguard cultural heritage can be powerful economic tools: Historic Tax Credit projects encourage job training and creation in efforts related to restoring historic structures; heritage tourism initiatives can increase visitation to the community and increase tax revenues; and designations of and reinvestment in existing infrastructure can increase property values.

In addition to the economic benefits, the preservation of Opa-locka’s cultural heritage and resources today will allow future generations to learn from and embrace past accomplishments in the city and grow beyond its mistakes. Ignoring or making
the preservation of Opa-locka’s resources a lower priority undermines sustainable development of the city and the vitality of Opa-locka’s future. Strengthening the city of Opa-locka and its historic resources will promote community stewardship and foster a sense of pride for what the city once was and the prospect of what it can become.

Chapter 3: History of City

A comprehensive history of the city can serve to familiarize residents and visitors with the rich heritage found in Opa-locka. The history of the city should aim to balance the emphasis placed on the Arabian Nights theme and the Garden City planning concepts utilized to design the master plan of the city. While to some the Moorish Revival architecture seems out of place and foreign, the original city planning strategies focused on community development and prosperity provide an equally compelling narrative. Incorporating details of the city’s development beyond the 1930s will also be extremely important in setting the groundwork for promoting and protecting the city’s diverse history.

Chapter 4: Opa-locka Today

This section should detail current municipal regulations promoting and/or limiting preservation initiatives, and recommend appropriate supplemental regulations. The remainder of the section is devoted to the current conditions in the city relating to current revitalization initiatives and their relation to historic resources and current public perception of historic resources. Finally, it should include a list of resources the city has lost as well as the resources and history that could be lost if actions are not taken (group these by neighborhoods in the city).

Chapter 5: Benefits and Economic Impact Related to Historic Preservation

In an effort to dispel the negative connotations commonly associated with preservation initiatives, this section seeks to identify the benefits of historic preservation related specifically to Opa-locka’s
current needs. Related to both bettering the city’s economy and quality of life for residents, these could include such benefits as strengthening community identity through design review, establishing a walkable historic corridor, job creation (rehabilitation projects), and heritage tourism.

Chapter 6: Preservation Initiatives + Goals

The Preservation Initiatives and Goals section is the portion of the document that details the overarching goals related to promoting and safeguarding historic resources in the city. Detailing these goals establishes the groundwork for actions that respond to the current needs of the city. This grouping of initiatives and goals also provides a reference point and barometer for success following implementation, and could include:

Recommended Preservation Initiatives and Goals

#1 New Paths for Preservation - Leverage Historic Preservation as an Economic Tool

Explanation: As the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation and city officials move forward with revitalizing this economically depressed area, increasing tax revenues and the tax base will become critical. Considering that many of the already nominated historic structures are located in the historic core of Opa-locka, developing a strong downtown core along with the revitalization of these structures will allow new opportunities for commercial development.

#2 Diversity of Place – Promote + Raise the Profile of Opa-locka

Explanation: The original Garden City master plan and architecture associated with Opa-locka makes the city distinct from adjacent municipalities and other areas in the U.S. overall. Capitalizing on this with programs related to heritage tourism can increase visitation to the city. Forging partnership with other communities nearby and abroad with Garden City
plans can promote Opa-locka on a national and international scale and actively tie it to the Garden City context. The notions behind the Garden City movement echo much of the rhetoric behind Opa-locka’s current revitalization by promoting viable communities with accessible public resources to promote a better quality of life. The Moorish-Revival architecture can also be leveraged to create a tourist destination and should be promoted in tandem.

#3 Preservation Education - Community Engagement with Historic Resources

**Explanation:** Community stewardship is critical for both the revitalization of the city and the protection of Opa-locka’s historic resources; without support and pride behind initiatives in Opa-locka these efforts are not sustainable for multiple generations. Preservation related activities ranging from design review processes to annual festivals require community input for all residents to benefit from these actions. Opa-locka will establish an active historic preservation program that will both complete and implement a 5-year historic preservation plan.

**Chapter 7: Rehabilitation + New Construction (Design Guidelines)**

Pending the creation of a design review board, design guidelines, and prioritization of local designations, this section should be laid out in a user friendly format that provides owners of historic properties with a clear understanding of applicable regulations and guidelines. Providing a step-by-step approach and clearly indicating resources that should be consulted before commencing construction or rehabilitation will enable an encouraging process.

**Chapter 8: Current Status of National Register Listings**

Identifying the current condition and use of buildings in the city listed on or eligible for the National Register. Documenting these resources helps to identify buildings in danger of demolition and
also provides a comprehensive list for buildings eligible for rehabilitation through tax credits. This section should also identify and list potential new National Register listings.

Chapter 9: Inventory of Historic Resources

As one of the most important steps and indicators of an active preservation program, this inventory identifies properties that are eligible for local and/or national designation. This inventory will aid in future planning processes.

Chapter 10: Action Plan

This section addresses the goals previously listed in the document and details steps needed (typically within a 5 year period) to meet those goals. These actions should also be linked to an organizations that will be responsible for executing the task, and might include:

**Recommended Actions**

**Goal #1: Leverage Historic Preservation as an Economic Tool**

Recommended Actions:

- Locally designate and/or nominate for listing on the National Register other buildings in the historic core, part of the 1930s military history in the city, to encourage additional tax credit projects.
- Promote renovation through incentives
- Create job training programs related to restoring historic buildings
- Investigate downtown revitalization programs – such as the Main Street Program
- Seek zoning variance to allow for mixed-use development in downtown area

**Goal #2: Promote + Raise the Profile of Opa-locka**

Recommended Actions:

- Nominate the 1926 master plan and street arrangements
- Develop a connection with a “Sister City” – related to architecture or master plan
- Develop a Heritage Tourism and marketing plan

**Goal #3: Community Engagement with Historic Resources**

Recommended Actions:
• Allocate staff to the city’s preservation program and create a strong voice for preservation
• Seek designation as a Certified Local Government
• Revise and expand historic preservation incentives for owners
• Create a historic district overlay for historic downtown
• Encourage Conservation Districts following the nomination of other resources
• Create a neighborhood review board for local and national designations
• Themed annual festival on the same day as the 1926 Arabian Nights Festival

Conclusion

The city of Opa-locka holds a variety of resources worthy of safeguarding. Today, the lack of a preservation program in the city reveals that without active linkage to planning and community initiatives these resources will never reach their full and sustained potential. If the city of Opa-locka is to become a city that meets the needs of its residents and become a destination, historic preservation will be a critical tool and needs to become a prioritized strategy to maintain and bolster the area’s unique sense of place.

Though the current resources listed under a Multiple Property designation are geographically dispersed, the original Garden City master plan and the narratives related to the structures in between have the opportunity to weave these narratives together. This weaving of narratives will help foster a unified sense of place and requires active planning and connectivity with community decision making. Connecting these resources back to the community will ensure that a diverse set of resources are identified, protected, utilized, and enjoyed. A diverse set of resources will take Opa-locka a step beyond the Arabian Nights theme of the past and expand its scope to reflect the rich history and accomplishments that have shaped the city and will strengthen its future.
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INTERVIEWS

Spain, Donna. CLG Contact, City of Coral Gables Historical Resource Department. Phone Interview by Author. Philadelphia, PA, March 14, 2012.


Logan, Willie. CEO, Opa-locka Community Development Corporation. Phone Interview by Author. Philadelphia, PA, March 5, 2012.

NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATIONS


NEWSPAPERS


for-mariemont/

ORDINANCES


UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS


APPENDIX

Opa-locka, FL Potential Listings (post-1930)
Source: Florida Master File Site, Opa-locka - Properties labeled “Potential Contributor to National Register Historic District” by 1980 surveyor.

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Plat of Opa-locka, Florida, Explaining Status of City Improvements
Source: University of Miami, Special Collections, Bernhardt Muller Collection

See Transcribed Key - Next Page
Transcribed Key - Plat of Opa-locka, Florida, Explaining Status of City Improvements

1. Administration Building
2. Archery Club House
3. Bank Building
4. Observation Tower
5. Swimming Pool
6. Fire Station
7. Residences completed and occupied
8. Residences completed and occupied
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16. Residence of Mrs. Margaret Hurt
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23. Residence in course of construction
24. Residence in course of construction
25. Residence in course of construction
26. Sites reserved for churches
27. Site reserved for school
28. Site reserved for hotel
29. Garage and Apartment House
30. Store Building
31. Site of Healy’s Hardwood Floor Plant
33. Plant of Southern Concrete Products Company
34. Yards of Opa-locka Lumber & Supply Company
35. Site of plant of Martin Cement Products Company
36. 42,300 gallon tank – temporary water supply
37. Seaboard Air Line Passenger Station
38. Seaboard Air Line Freight Station and Warehouse
39. Seaboard Air Line Yards
40. Aviation Field and Hangar
Map of Extant Historic Resources (1926-1930)

Source: Author, 2012

Historic Resources (1926-1930)
Opa-locka, FL
Created: 04-20-2012, L. Allen
Base Map: City of Opa-locka Zoning Map, 11-05-2010
List of Historic Resources in Opa-locka (1926-1930)

Source: Survey by author 2011 and National Register Nomination Listings

List of Historic Resources in Opa-locka (1926-1930)

(NR) = Listed on National Register

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<td>Tinsman House (NR)</td>
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<td>1215 York St. (original building covered by new construction)</td>
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