
SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT
AS A HISTORIC DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton, Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on June 17, 1997

Resolution No. HEPB-97-24

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Spring Garden, Country Club Addition

Current Name:

Spring Garden Historic District

Location:

The area generally bounded by N.W. 11th Street on the north, the Miami River on the south, N.W. 12th Avenue and N.W. 11th Place on the west, and N.W. 8th Street Road and the Seybold Canal on the east.

Present Owner:

Multiple Owners - complete list of owners is available in the Department of Planning and Development

Present Use:

Residential, Office, Commercial

Zoning Districts:

R-1, R-3, O, C-1

Tax Folio Numbers:

Multiple Numbers - complete list of tax folio numbers is available in the Department of Planning and Development

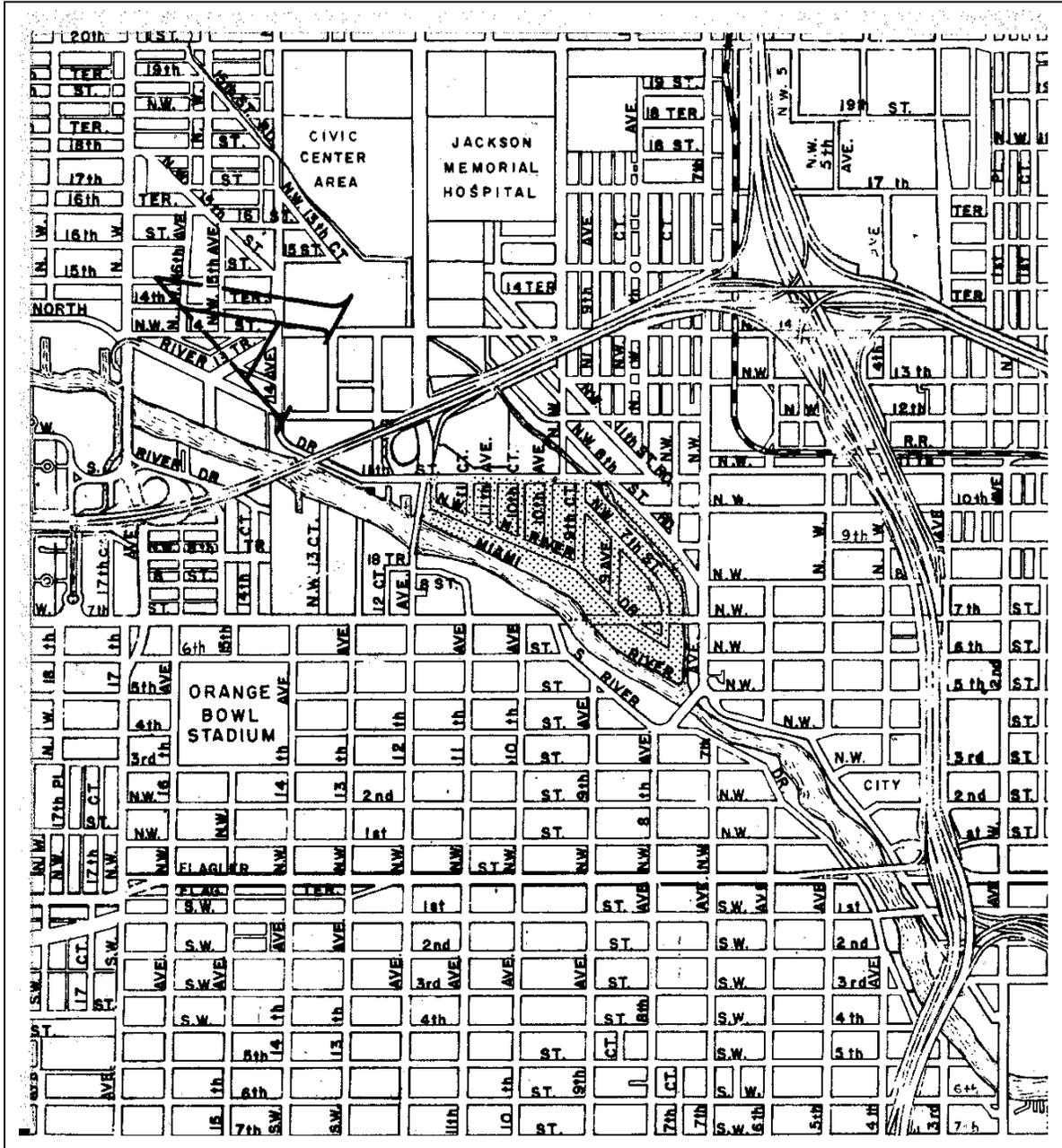
Boundary Description:

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

Classification:

Historic District

SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT



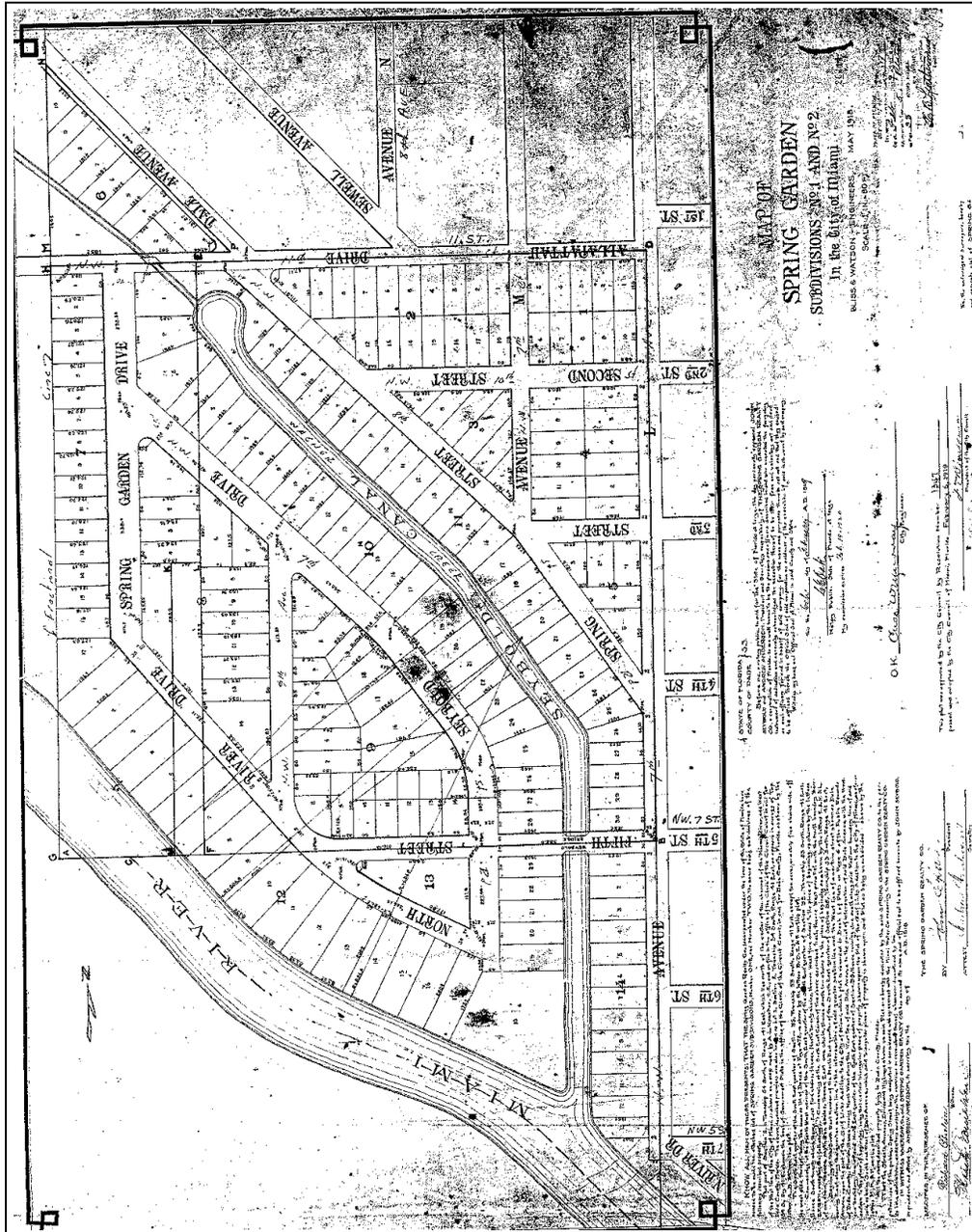
location

SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT



⊕
site plan

SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT



Spring Garden Subdivisions No. 1 and 2 - 1918

II, SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

Summary:

The Spring Garden Historic District is significant in the historical, archeological, and architectural heritage of the City of Miami. This neighborhood reflects the City's growth from the mid-1910's to the 1940's and demonstrates the importance of the Miami River in the City's history. Developed by an important pioneer businessman, Spring Garden is the oldest, intact, single family neighborhood still remaining along the Miami River.

The district also possesses archeological significance and has a high probability of containing important prehistoric and historic archeological sites, features, and artifacts.

The district is significant architecturally for its wealth of early Frame and Masonry Vernacular, Mission, Bungalow, and Moderne style houses that reflect the diversity and evolution of architectural design in South Florida during the early twentieth century.

Historical Significance:

Much of the history of Spring Garden predates its initial subdivision in 1918. Crucial in this history is the area's location between two bodies of water, the Miami River and Wagner Creek (now the Seybold Canal). Wagner Creek was one of the main natural tributaries of the Miami River and joined the river approximately one and one-half miles from Biscayne Bay.

It is likely that the first structure in today's Spring Garden was a coontie starch mill built on Wagner Creek by William English in the late 1840's. William Wagner and a Captain Sinclair also built a steam-powered coontie mill on Wagner Creek in the late 1850's, perhaps on the same site of English's earlier mill. The area's first known house was located at Penniman Spring, near Wagner Creek and today's N.W. 9th Street.

The area also contained a number of residences that predated the subdivision, including those belonging to Jesse H. Bratley, L. A. Moffett, and George Albert Freas. Other structures in the area included buildings for storage and boat building.

Today's Spring Garden was significant to the early population of Miami as one of its most reliable fresh water sources. The spring at Wagner Creek encouraged Henry Flagler to commission a well in 1899 as a source of water for the City of

Miami. The Miami Water Co. Plant was established immediately north of today's historic district.

Spring Garden became well known to the general public when Warren B. Frazee built the popular tourist attraction "Alligator Joe's" in the late 1890's. There is still evidence today of the alligator pits where the Seybold Canal meets the river. By 1911, however, the property around the mouth of Wagner Creek was advertised for sale, and Alligator Joe's was forced to move.

In 1913, the Spring Garden Realty Company, with John Seybold as president, acquired the land where Alligator Joe's attraction had been located, as well as additional land nearby, and began to develop what would become the Spring Garden subdivision. Seybold was born in 1872 in Stuttgart, Germany, and became one of Miami's pioneer merchants. He arrived in Miami in 1896 and soon developed one of the most modern bakeries in the country. In 1914, he built the Seybold Building and Seybold Arcade on Flagler Street in downtown Miami, now a Miami landmark. Soon, he expanded into real estate and banking.

Seybold dredged Wagner Creek, widened it into what would become known as Seybold Canal, and created a turning basin. In order to provide a means of convenient access to his proposed subdivision, Seybold paved N.W. North River Drive from N.W. 3rd Street, and then built a bridge across the canal. By 1918, when the Spring Garden subdivision was platted, the infrastructure was essentially complete, and the area was ready for development.

Seybold planned a permanent home for himself on the point where the Seybold Canal joins the Miami River. In 1917, he moved temporarily with his family into a large house that included his real estate sales office on the lot immediately to the north. That building has since been demolished, and the lot intended for his permanent home has remained vacant.

In 1923, Spring Garden was expanded when the property immediately to the west was subdivided as Country Club Addition. Seybold's Spring Garden Realty Co., which owned the majority of the property, joined with the other three property owners (Jesse H. Bratley, L. A. Moffett, and M. F. Comer and W. H. Ebsary) to develop the land.

Spring Garden was advertised as "the most exclusive subdivision in Miami," when the first lots were offered for sale in 1919. Emphasis was placed on its deep water frontage, its broad streets and drives, the large lot sizes, and the beautiful palms and shade trees provided. The Spring Garden Realty Co. made similar claims when it promoted the Country Club Addition, but the focus was primarily on the prime location of the subdivision. The new subdivision took advantage of its location in the geographical center of Miami with no bridge to cross. Also appealing was its location between the Miami River and the Royal Palm Golf Course.

The general character of the Spring Garden Historic District is partly due to the deed restrictions that the developer attached to the sale of each lot. These restrictions specified the minimum price of each residence and a requirement for minimum front setbacks. Land use was also restricted. Those lots facing the Seybold Canal were never to be used for boat building, boat storage, warehouse, fish handling, or other mercantile business use. Similar uses were prohibited along the Miami River, although only for a period of 15 years, ending in 1938. Permanent houseboats were also prohibited along the Seybold Canal.

Spring Garden is also associated with the history of film production in Miami as the primary location for one of the first movies filmed in the city. A \$12,000 Hindu village was constructed on the Seybold Canal and featured as its centerpiece a large temple at the end of the canal. Completed in 1919, the movie captured the imagination of the citizens of Miami, and John Seybold built a less elaborate version of the temple on the same site. This was one of the earliest buildings constructed in Spring Garden.

From its inception, many prominent local residents have lived in the Spring Garden Historic District. In addition to John Seybold, the area has been home to Dr. Benjamin F. Hodsdson, an early Miami doctor, Gardner Mulloy, a tennis professional and Wimbledon champion in 1957, and W. C. Maynard, an early real estate developer. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, author of River of Grass and Florida's most well known environmentalist, lived with her father Judge Frank B. Stoneman, managing editor of the Miami Herald, for a few years before building her house in Coconut Grove. Other residents have included actor Charles O. Richardson, Redmund "Bunn" Gautier, Jr., Florida State Senator in the early 1940's, and businessman Truly Nolen.

Archeological Significance:

The Spring Garden Historic District encompasses an area adjacent to the Miami River and Wagner Creek (now the Seybold Canal) that has a high probability of containing significant archeological sites, features, and artifacts. These sites are largely unrecorded because of the paucity of archaeological testing conducted there to date, but similar confluences of the Miami River that have been tested, as well as historic documentation, indicate that the following types of archeological sites could occur within the district:

- Prehistoric Sites

Prehistoric areas of habitation, subsistence, and mortuary internment occur in the district, particularly within areas located within 400 feet of the historic banks of the Miami River and Wagner Creek.

- Historic Sites:

Historic sites that are anticipated and known to occur within the district include loci of Seminole habitation, pioneer homesteads, and mill sites dating to the mid-nineteenth century. Other historic sites include trash pits, features, etc. associated with early twentieth century homes. Known specific historic archeological sites that occur within the district are the English mill site, possibly the Wagner mill site, and features associated with Alligator Joe's tourist facility.

Architectural Significance:

Houses constructed in the Spring Garden Historic District reflect the architectural eclecticism popular in early twentieth century Miami. The earlier buildings in the district are predominantly Frame and Masonry Vernacular, although examples of Mission Revival and Bungalow can also be found. Later buildings continued the vernacular styling, but also introduced such nationally recognized styles as Streamlined Moderne.

Many of the buildings in the district display a variety of distinctive local materials, such as oolitic limestone. Decorative tropical motifs add to the vernacular expression.

The Spring Garden Historic District features the work of many local architects. Perhaps the most well-known is August Geiger, who designed the Hindu Temple.

Also significant is the Seybold Bridge, an unusual and early example of early concrete bridge design in South Florida. It is particularly noteworthy for its geometrically-shaped concrete design features.

Spring Garden stands today as one of Miami's most intact historic neighborhoods. Despite the presence of post-1949 buildings in the area, Spring Garden retains a high degree of historic and architectural integrity. This is due, in part, to the fact that most later buildings are not intrusive, but emulate the earlier structures in scale, setback, and materials.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Spring Garden Historic District has significance in the historical, archeological, and architectural heritage of the City; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

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

The Spring Garden Historic District is associated with the life of John Seybold, one of Miami's pioneer citizens and the developer of this neighborhood. Many prominent and influential citizens of early Miami also resided in the historic district. These individuals have been important in such fields as commerce, law, politics, and sports.

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

The Spring Garden Historic District exemplifies the historical development of Miami's residential neighborhoods from the second decade of the twentieth century until the late-1940's.

4. Portray the environment in an era of history characterized by one(1) or more distinctive architectural styles.

The Spring Garden Historic District reflects the evolution of architectural styles that have served to characterize Miami's residential neighborhoods from the 1910's to the 1940's. The neighborhood contains fine examples of Frame and Masonry Vernacular, Mission, Bungalow, and Moderne style buildings.

8. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The Spring Garden Historic District has a high probability of containing significant prehistoric and historic archeological sites, features, and artifacts.

III. DESCRIPTION

Summary:

The Spring Garden Historic District is a well-defined residential neighborhood on the north side of the Miami River in the heart of Miami. The district generally encompasses the boundaries of the Spring Garden and Country Club Addition subdivisions, which were platted between 1918 and 1923, and contains most of the neighborhood known today as Spring Garden.

The Spring Garden Historic District includes 147 primary buildings, the majority of which were built as detached, single-family houses. Also within the district are multifamily residential buildings, located primarily along the Miami River and N.W. 11th Street. The buildings in the district represent a wide variety of early twentieth century architectural styles, including Frame and Masonry Vernacular, Mission, Bungalow, and Moderne. The buildings are constructed of both frame and masonry and are primarily one or two stories in height.

The Spring Garden Historic District is a unique neighborhood that derives much of its character from its isolated location along two bodies of water, the Miami River and the Seybold Canal, its early architecture, and its extensive tree canopy.

Plan and Setting:

The plan and setting of the Spring Garden Historic District have remained virtually unchanged since the 1920's and are important factors in distinguishing this area from adjacent neighborhoods. The district's subdivisions (Spring Garden No. 1 and 2 and Country Club Addition) were laid out with irregular lot lines and a combination of a grid and diagonal street pattern that relates to both the Miami River and the Seybold Canal. The majority of streets are 50 feet in width, with the exception of N.W. 9th Court (75 feet), N.W. North River Drive (65 feet), and N.W. 11th Court (40 feet). Original street names, including Spring Garden Drive, Seybold Drive, and Spring Drive, reflected the area's early development history. The district was platted around early homesteads and still retains one unplatted parcel, which contained an early homestead that predated the area's subdivision.

Vehicular access to the neighborhood has always been limited and is provided only from six points along N.W. 11th Street on the north and from N.W. 7th Street on the east. These entries were formally marked with manmade features. On the north, oolitic limestone (coral rock) columns and street furniture marked the entrances. Many of these columns and one stone bench still remain. The Seybold Bridge, built c. 1915 to provide access from the east, is one of the most distinctive features of the district and is characterized by an unusual geometrically-shaped concrete design. Pedestrian access is also provided from N.W. 12th Avenue via

masonry steps that were added when the 12th Avenue Bridge was constructed in 1927-29.

The Spring Garden Historic District is characterized by large shade trees, which provide a tremendous amount of canopy. The trees, a majority of which are live oaks, can be found along the rights-of-way, as well as within the properties. Much of N.W. North River Drive and N.W. 8th Street Road also features rows of royal palms.

Present and Original Appearance:

The majority of the buildings in the Spring Garden Historic District were constructed between 1918 and 1949. Like many Miami residential neighborhoods, the majority of buildings were not constructed during the district's initial development, but in the years just prior to World War II. In the period from 1918 through the "Boom" era ending in 1926, approximately 28 houses were built. A second spurt occurred during the "Bust" and Depression (1927-1936), when approximately 12 houses were added. The greatest period of activity occurred between 1936 and 1941, with 44 structures built. An additional 20 were erected between 1942 and 1949. The 43 buildings constructed since 1949 have generally respected the architectural character of the district.

The general character of the district and the quality of its architecture are partly due to the deed restrictions imposed by the developer. The minimum price of each residence was specified, and front setbacks of 20 or 25 feet were required. Land use was also restricted. Those lots facing the Seybold Canal were never to be used for boat building, boat storage, warehouse, fish handling, or other mercantile business use. Similar uses were prohibited along the Miami River, although only for a period of 15 years, ending in 1938. Permanent houseboats were also prohibited along the Seybold Canal.

Architecturally, the Spring Garden Historic District reflects the diverse stylistic trends of early twentieth century residential design and the adaptation of these styles to the South Florida environment. Especially prevalent are examples of early Frame and Masonry Vernacular architecture, as well as excellent examples of Mission, Bungalow (Craftsman), and Moderne style buildings. Two unique buildings are present and show influences of Middle Eastern style architecture with domed towers.

Many houses were built with detached garages, a majority of which contained servants' quarters. These outbuildings are consistent with the architectural character of the main house.

The majority of houses in the district have received only minor alterations throughout the years and are generally in good condition. Typical alterations have included the installation of contemporary windows, doors, security bars, roofing, and awnings. Chain link and other fences have also been added.

Despite these alterations, the original character, massing, and setback of most houses have not changed, and their original design intent is readily perceived.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

Contributing structures are indicated on the attached map. Also included as contributing structures are the Seybold (N.W. 7th Street) Bridge crossing the Seybold Canal, as well as the oolitic limestone (coral rock) columns and street furniture in the rights-of-way of N.W. 9th Court, N.W. 10th Avenue, and N.W. 10th Court immediately south of N.W. 11th Street, and the masonry steps leading from the N.W. 12th Avenue Bridge to N.W. 11th Place.

Contributing landscape features include all specimen trees and those trees subject to the provisions of Chapter 17 of the Miami City Code, as well as all trees within the rights-of-way. Also included as contributing landscape features are the Seybold Canal and that portion of the Miami River abutting the historic district.

Because of the archeological significance of the district, any ground disturbing activity or dredging of the Seybold Canal (Wagner Creek) shall also require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

SPRING GARDEN HISTORIC DISTRICT



■ Contributing Structure

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Spring Garden Historic District is a stable residential neighborhood located between the Miami River and the Civic Center complex. The original single family zoning of the neighborhood has been modified over the years to permit R-3 Multi-Family Medium-Density Residential along the Miami River and N.W. 8th Street Road, and O Office along N.W. 11th Street. These new zoning designations have encouraged the development of multifamily uses along the Miami River and N.W. 11th Street. The majority of new construction, however, has been low in scale. A multistory hotel, however, which has been excluded from the district, is located at the northwestern corner of the neighborhood.

The Spring Garden Civic Association is an active neighborhood group that monitors neighborhood activities and lobbies for improvements. The association is particularly concerned with inappropriate development and other threats to the integrity of the neighborhood.

In 1994, the Civic Association initiated the process to have Spring Garden designated as a historic district. Neighborhood residents have been particularly active in the process and have conducted virtually all of the research required to document the history and significance of the area.

The neighborhood has received increased attention in the last several years as interest in Miami's historic neighborhoods has grown. Many individuals who care about older buildings have recently moved to Spring Garden, and rehabilitation activity has increased.

Preservation Incentives:

The development of preservation incentives for neighborhoods like Spring Garden is one of the most difficult to address. Although Dade County does offer property tax abatements for rehabilitation projects, the City of Miami has not yet adopted a similar ordinance. Spring Garden, however, is eligible for the City's single-family and multifamily housing rehabilitation programs and, when available, the paint program.

The City will provide technical assistance to property owners as they develop rehabilitation plans. In addition, the City will continue to support the Spring Garden Civic Association's efforts to further revitalize the neighborhood through the Overtown Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET).

The City will also continue to recognize and include Spring Garden as a component in any future plans for the Miami River.

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