

City of Jacksonville Landmark Designation Report

231 Laura Street North

LM-25-06
May 28, 2025



Property Owner:
Carmen Godwin
Historic Urban Core, LLC
4834 Malpas Lane
Jacksonville, Florida 32210

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

LM-25-06

Historic Name: National Shirt Shops Building

Other Names: 231 North Laura Street (FMSF)

Address: 231 Laura Street North, RE# 073696-0000

Location: Southeast corner of Laura Street North and Monroe Street West

Owner: Carmen Godwin
Historic Urban Core, LLC
4834 Malpas Lane
Jacksonville, Florida 32210

Applicant: Same as owner

Year Built: 1957 (Permit Records)

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

LM-25-06 seeks to designate the subject property located at 231 Laura Street North (RE# 073696-0000) as a local landmark. The property consists of a two-story masonry vernacular commercial structure. Constructed in 1957, the building is characterized by its rectangular form, its flat roof with a large billboard, its brick exterior, its recessed doorway, its plate glass storefront windows, its terrazzo decorative knee wall, its overall restraint in architectural detailing, and its corner signage feature on the second floor. The building has been altered slightly from its original form including changes to the storefront, the installation of a covered awning on the secondary entrance, and the painting of a mural on the secondary facade.



FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- (A) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning Department determined that the application for designation of the subject property was complete.
- (B) As required, the Planning Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed landmark. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the subject property was published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication is attached to this report.

- (C) Once designated, any activity affecting the exterior of the building and site of the subject property will require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). All proposed work will be reviewed for consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The review of most routine work scopes including repairs, maintenance, alterations of previously altered features, small additions and size-limited new construction that would not impact significant historic elements or would not be readily street visible can be processed by the Historic Preservation Section (HPS) of the Jacksonville Planning Department, but certain activities like alterations, additions, new construction, relocation and demolition that would be visible from the public right-of way, as well as any work the HPS determines to be potentially in conflict with the *Secretary of the Interior Standards*, will require review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

The purpose of the historic designation of this site is to provide protection, not to discourage or prohibit the future development of the site. The review of work through the COA process is to preserve the historic character, architectural features, and materials of this significant structure, as well as, to ensure any future development of the site is compatible with and sensitive to this primary historic resource.

- (D) In preparing the application, the Planning Department has found the application to meet **three of the seven** criteria. The **three** criteria include the following.

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

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property meets this landmark criterion.

231 Laura Street North is listed as a contributing property within the Downtown Jacksonville National Historic District. By 1900, Jacksonville was the largest city in Florida in terms of population, which had reached 28,430. The signature event in the history of Downtown Jacksonville that defined the character of the city during the first half of the twentieth century was the “Great Fire of 1901”. Starting in the LaVilla area west of Downtown at noon on May 3, 1901, the fire destroyed within an eight-hour period over 2,300 buildings located on 148 city blocks causing an estimated 15 million in property damage. Although only seven people lost their lives because of the fire, 8,677 people were left homeless. Destroying the oldest and most densely populated area of the city, the fire consumed twenty-three churches, ten hotels including the grand St James and Windsor, as well as almost all public buildings such as the courthouse and city hall.¹

¹ For more on the 1901 fire see: Bill Foley and Wayne W. Wood, *The Great Fire of 1901* (Jacksonville Historical Society, 2001).

T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida, and Vicinity, 1513-1924* (St. Augustine: Florida Historical Society, 1925, 1990 Reprint), 219-228.

Historic Property Associates, *Historic Buildings Survey of Downtown Jacksonville* (Jacksonville Downtown Development Authority, November 1991), 11-13

James Robertson Ward, *Old Hickory's Town, An Illustrated History of Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, Florida: Old Hickory's Town, Inc., 1985), 175-186.

The destruction caused by the 1901 fire ushered in a new era of growth in Downtown Jacksonville. The business opportunities caused by the fire had attracted numerous architects, builders, and investors from different parts of the country. New construction in the Downtown area began to reflect a variety of architectural styles popular during the first quarter of the twentieth century such as the traditional Colonial, Neoclassical, and Gothic Revivals interspersed with the more modernistic designs of the Prairie School and the Chicago school of commercial architecture. These latter styles were particularly evident in the work of noted architect, Henry John Klutho (1873 – 1964) who came to Jacksonville after reading about the 1901 fire in the *New York Times*.² 29 East Adams Street was one of the many buildings that was constructed downtown in the years following the fire. Henry John Klutho designed the building in 1913 with many prairie school commercial style elements from its horizontal bands of brick and windows to its pier and pilaster capitals. The building was constructed during 1914 and completed in 1915 with the Home Telephone Company occupying the structure shortly thereafter.³ The first floor was divided into three commercial spaces, two of which were rented out and the farthest right space was used by the Home Telephone Company. The structure continued to function as commercial space in this capacity until the mid-1960s when it was redesigned.

The collapse of the Florida Land Boom in the 1920s followed by the onset of the Great Depression during the 1930's did slow the growth and development of Jacksonville. For example, during the height of the Florida Land Boom in 1926, building permits were valued at \$13,051,074. By 1931, building permit value had fallen to a low in Jacksonville of \$1,728,200, with most of it attributed to alterations and expansion, or from residential construction in the newer suburbs outside Downtown and adjacent urban neighborhoods. Building permit activity did significantly increase following the annexation of growing South Jacksonville to the city in 1932. During the 1930's, only a few significant new buildings were added to the downtown area. The two most significant being the United States Post Office and Courthouse at 310 West Duval Street (1932 – 1933), and the Western Union Company Building at 333 North Laura Street (1930 – 1931). The Great Depression followed by World War II resulted in the built environment of Downtown Jacksonville remaining much as it was at the end of the Florida Land Boom in 1929.⁴

Following World War II, Downtown continued to serve as the financial, commercial, and social heart of the city. Although residential uses had become less a component of Downtown, a variety of offices and businesses continued to thrive. At the same time, the core city also began having more competition from suburban shopping centers and commercial strips. However, between 1955 and 1965, Jacksonville's Downtown entered its greatest period of growth and redevelopment

² For more on Jacksonville during the two decades after the 1901 fire see: James B. Crooks. *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City* (Jacksonville, Florida: University of North Florida Presses, 1991).

For more on the life and works of Henry John Klutho see: Robert C. Broward, *The Architecture of Henry John Klutho: The Prairie School in Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, Florida: University of North Florida Presses, 1983). Historic Property Associates, 13-17

Bill Foley and Wayne W. Wood, *The Great Fire of 1901* (Jacksonville Historical Society, 2001), 212-219.

³ Broward, Robert C., *The Architecture of Henry John Klutho: The Prairie School in Jacksonville* (Jacksonville: University of North Florida Press, 1983), 208.

⁴ Wood, 28, 71, & 81.

Historic Property Associates, 20-21.

since the building renaissance following the Great Fire of 1901.⁵ Under the leadership of Haydon Burns, a five-term mayor and later Governor of Florida, the City launched perhaps its most extensive civic improvement program. This initiative to improve downtown started in 1955 when Mayor Burns used four million dollars in Parking Lot Certified Bonds to clean-up the north bank by acquiring and removing old docks and warehouses to accommodate a new bulkhead. During that same year, the Jacksonville Expressway Authority was organized for the purpose of designing and funding a new highway system that would enhance traffic flow between downtown and the growing suburbs. During this period, the building at 231 Laura Street North was constructed. The building exhibits many of the characteristics of commercial architecture of the period, most notably its restraint in architectural detailing and its built-in billboard on the front corner of the primary façade.

B. Its location is the site of a significant local, state or national event.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property does not meet this landmark criterion.

C. It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the city, state or nation.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property does not meet this landmark criterion.

D. It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, state or nation.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property does not meet this landmark criterion.

E. Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property meets this landmark criterion.

There are about 35 contributing Masonry Vernacular buildings in the Downtown Jacksonville Historic District, including 231 Laura Street North. Such buildings are normally designed and constructed by local craftsmen from readily available masonry products. Masonry Vernacular buildings tend to be mostly unornamented and simple in design. Windows and doors are symmetrically spaced on an elevation to form a regular rhythm of functional and negative space referred to as bays. Decoration is simple and usually limited to string courses, window or door lintels, and cornices. Most of the Masonry Vernacular buildings in the Downtown Jacksonville Historic District were constructed throughout the period of significance (1901-1965) and were constructed for commercial purposes. These structures were typically characterized by a horizontal

⁵ James B. Crooks, Jacksonville, *The Consolidation Story, From Civil Rights to the Jaguars* (Gainesville, University Presses of Florida, 2004), 1-2.

division into two distinct zones. The two zones are separated by the use of the interior space of the building. The lower zone is usually reserved for retail space and often contains large plate glass display windows, while the upper part contains space for offices or apartments. The exterior design of such buildings are usually homogeneous, but in some cases different building materials and exterior fabrics are used visually to divide the two zones.

231 Laura Street North is typical of a commercial Masonry Vernacular structure in the Downtown Jacksonville Historic District. The first floor of the primary façade features a storefront with large plate glass display windows. The corner signage on the second floor and the billboard on the roof are evidence of the structure's blend of commercial use and architectural elements. The use of terrazzo for the front knee wall and flooring is typical for commercial architecture during the period as well.

F. It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property does not meet this landmark criterion.

G. Its suitability for preservation or restoration.

It is the determination of the Jacksonville Planning Department that the subject property meets this landmark criterion.

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

231 Laura Street North has not been altered in a manner that has destroyed its original architectural significance and any alterations that have been made to the structure are reversible. Furthermore, the structure does not show evidence of any significant deterioration that threatens the stability or integrity of the building. The structure is currently vacant and the owner has proposed to renovate the structure to allow for commercial use on the first floor and basement and residential use on the second floor.

RECOMMENDATION

Since the property owner is in favor of the designation, at least **two of the seven** criteria must be met, pursuant to Section 307.107(j) of the Ordinance Code. In reviewing the application, the Planning Department has found the application to meet **three of the seven** criteria.

Based on the findings of this report and consideration of the Ordinance Code, the Jacksonville Planning Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of 231 Laura Street North (**LM-25-06**) as a City of Jacksonville Landmark.