



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

BUILDING | HISTORIC PRESERVATION | PLANNING & ZONING

PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD STAFF REPORT

109 SE 5th Avenue

Meeting	File No.	Application Type
April 21, 2025	2024-104	CBD Architectural Style
Applicant/Property Owner		Authorized Agent
109 5 th LLC		Neil Schiller, Esq.

Request

Provide a recommendation to the City Commission regarding the implementation of the Contemporary Functionalism architectural style within the Central Business District (CBD), pursuant to LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3)(c), Other Architectural Styles.

Site Data & Information

Location: 109 SE 5th Avenue

PCN: 12-43-46-16-F1-000-0010

Property Size: 0.89 Acres

Land Use Designation: Commercial Core (CC)

Zoning District: CBD, Central Core Sub-district

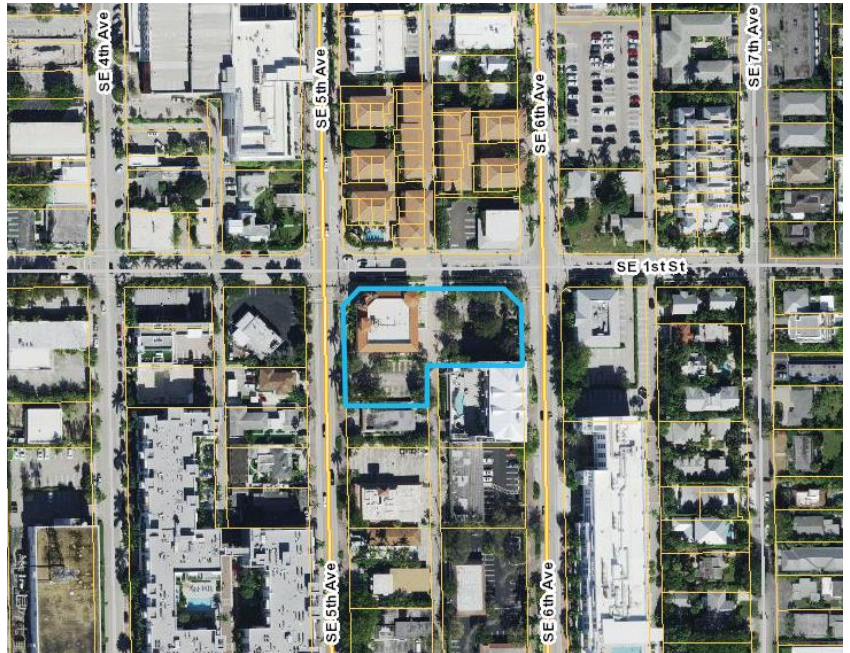
Adjacent Zoning:

- **All Directions:** CBD, Central Core Sub-district

Existing Use: Office

Proposed Use: Multi-family Residential

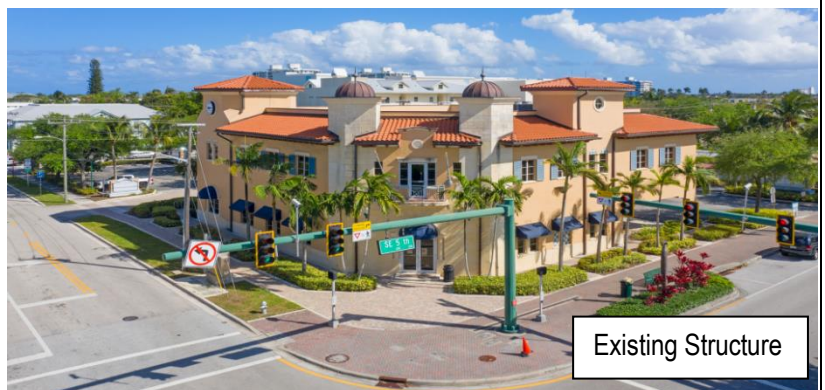
For Reference: LDR Section 4.4.13, CBD



Background

The site was developed in 2002 with a two-story commercial building. The building was originally occupied by a financial institution and has most recently functioned as an office building.

A Level 4 Site Plan application has been submitted to demolish the existing building and construct a four-story, 26-unit multi-family residential development. When evaluating the site plan application, it was determined that the proposed design does not conform to the requirements of any of the seven styles identified in the CBD Architectural Design Guidelines. Development in the downtown area is required to conform to one of the seven identified styles.



Project Planner:

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The CBD Architectural Design Guidelines state, “These guidelines are intended to provide a framework for the successful execution of quality urban architecture in the downtown area of Delray Beach.” Pursuant to LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3), appropriate architectural styles for downtown Delray Beach are based on “historical precedent, climate, and building scale.” The seven approved styles are:

1. Florida Vernacular
2. Anglo-Caribbean
3. Mediterranean Revival
4. Classical Tradition
5. Art Deco
6. Masonry Modern
7. Mainstreet Vernacular.

It is important to note, the downtown design guidelines were adopted following a high degree of public input to determine the architecture that aligned with the community’s consensus vision for future development.

Due to community concerns regarding the appropriateness of the Art Deco style and the proliferation of Masonry Modern, the use of both styles currently requires City Commission approval. Furthermore, direction has been provided to evaluate their potential removal from the CBD Architectural Design Guidelines.

To provide flexibility for exceptional architectural proposals, LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3) allows for the use of a “documented and substantiated Florida vernacular style” not included among the seven approved CBD architectural styles, subject to City Commission approval.

As part of this request, the applicant proposes to implement a style referred to as “**Contemporary Functionalism**.” This is the only component under consideration at this time; the full site plan and building design will be reviewed separately, pending a determination on the proposed style.

Per LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3)(c), new architectural styles may be approved by the City Commission upon recommendation by SPRAB, provided the applicant submits:

1. *A description including images (similar to those in these guidelines) of a documented and substantiated Florida vernacular architecture;*
2. *A justification of the appropriateness of the style for downtown Delray Beach; and*
3. *An explanation of how the building design follows the proposed style.*

“The utmost intention is for architecture to be authentic and true to style.”

The CBD Architectural Design Guidelines note that departures from the approved styles are not encouraged but may be considered if supported by the documentation outlined above.

Executive Summary

Contemporary Functionalism is not a substantiated Florida vernacular style, as there is no coherently defined or widely accepted category of Architecture known as Contemporary Functionalism. Instead, “Contemporary” is an adjective that establishes time – contemporary works are products of current time - while “Functionalism” is an adjective that defines a characteristic of design that may be implemented across numerous styles of architecture. Namely, functionalist architecture is minimal, lacks decorative ornamentation, and allows the function of the building to dictate form.

Neither term, individually or combined, constitutes a distinct architectural style. Rather, they present characteristics that may be embodied within the umbrella of a more specific, established style. Staff have significant concerns over the introduction of a broadly generic and ill-defined style within the CBD. The lack of contextual clarity and stylistic specificity poses a risk to the integrity of the built environment, potentially encouraging future proposals that conflict with the intent and purpose of the CBD Architectural Design Guidelines. A detailed analysis of these concerns is provided in the following sections.

Description of Proposal

The subject request is specifically seeking approval to utilize architecture style the applicant terms, “**Contemporary Functionalism**.” The applicant’s description of the proposed style is provided as an attachment.

Contemporary Functionalism Style Proposed Design



1-Functionalist - functional and practical with minimal ornamentation, emphasizing use/function over decorative elements.

2-Expressiveness - form and function are one and will be expressed through articulated volumes, colors, and textures that accentuate its functionality.

A - Vertical Circulation
B - Living Areas
C - Public Areas
D - Connection with the street

3-Simplicity - simple dominant geometric shapes and forms.

4-Structure - recognizable elements in façades that follow a proportionate rhythm, framing a series of openings.

5-Use of modern materials – Concrete, stucco, and Glass

6-Tripartite Composition - Distinct Base, Middle, and Top.

7-Use of expansive glass - to integrate with the natural environment and pedestrian activities

8-Consideration of climate - overhangs and eaves to provide shaded areas.

A - Continuous balconies with eaves
B - Overhangs to emphasize entrances

Review Analysis: Architectural Style

Functionalism

Functionalism is less a specific style of architecture and is instead more so described as an ethos or characteristic of design that permeates many stylistic schools of thought. However, Functionalism as a core component of design philosophy was introduced to the mainstream during the mid-20th century modernist period and is evident as a characteristic of many modernist subcategories. At its essence, Functionalism is a movement away from extravagant embellishment and ornamentation for the sake of aesthetic, and instead a focus on the functional purpose that a building serves, allowing and embracing the interior function of the building to be visually apparent within the exterior form. Decorative elements and ornamentation that were a hallmark of many preceding traditional architectural styles were stripped away to allow only those architectural elements that were essential to the building function to remain.

Some consistent features of Functionalist architecture include noticeable and exposed structural elements, uniform material palettes, fenestration patterns and styles that correspond to the purpose and intended use of the building, design compositions grounded in order and rationality, and lack of decorative embellishment. The philosophical ethos of Functionalism is that orderly and functional design is aesthetically valuable in itself, and unnecessary decoration and embellishment detracts from the pure form of the building. The maxim from 19th-century architect Louis Sullivan, “form follows function”, is perhaps the most succinct way to emphasize the philosophy of Functionalism.

Subcategories of modernist architecture that implement Functionalism as a principle are Organic Architecture, Bauhaus, International Style, Minimalism, and Brutalism, amongst others (examples below).



Bauhaus Building, Walter Gropius, (1925)



Paimio Sanatorium, Alvar Aalto (1933)



S.R. Crown Hall, Mies van der Rohe, (1956)

Historical Precedent in Florida

In conducting the analysis for this request, Staff referenced *Florida's Mid-Century Modern Architecture* (2018), published by the University of Florida, to ascertain the degree to which various Functionalist architectural styles may have permeated Florida's built environment during the mid-century period. The survey identifies various modern styles that were prevalent in the State, some of which include Functionalist principles, but none that define a specific "Contemporary Functional" style as a clear and distinct Florida style.

Examples of specific works identified include Paul Rudolph's Sarasota School architecture (referenced for the Tropical Modernism style approved for the Ray Hotel, including the local example of the Sewell Biggs house), The Goldman house by Nils M. Schweizer, the University of South Florida Life Sciences Building by Mark Hampton, and the University of Miami School of Architecture Building. These examples vary in style but exhibit certain trademarks of modern architecture, Functionalism being one of them, although applied in varying degrees across the different works.



U. Miami School of Architecture Building, Marion Manley, 1947



PHOTO CREDIT | MARK G. HAMPTON PAPERS, SPECIAL AND AREA STUDIES COLLECTIONS
GEORGE A. SMATHERS LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

USF LIFE SCIENCES BUILDING, MARK HAMPTON



UMBRELLA HOUSE, PAUL RUDOLPH

Local Examples of Functionalism

Ultimately, the foremost criteria to allow an alternative architectural style is determining whether the style is contextually appropriate for downtown Delray Beach. The historic Sewell C. Biggs House at 212 Seabreeze Avenue is the only Paul Rudolph designed building in Delray Beach and is representative of 20th-century regional modernism tailored for the Florida environment. This is not a contemporary example but is a relevant historical reference.

Contemporary Examples

Functionalist design principles are found in many iterations of contemporary architecture. It is important to note, however, that *contemporary* in of itself is not a style, but rather encapsulates work of current time, which may include a wide and diverse mix of varying architectural styles, some of which may implement Functionalism as a core component. In an effort to consolidate into a coherent focus, Staff is interpreting Contemporary Functionalist works as those that adhere to a focus on simplicity and minimal ornamentation, while striving for open and flexible interior and outdoor space, use of sustainable and technologically advanced materials, and compositions and configurations that are well integrated with the natural environment and take advantage of exposure to natural light. Likewise, Contemporary Functionalist designs shall adhere to historical Functionalism principles that the function of the building guides form, ornamentation and embellishments are minimal, and the structure and purpose of the space is evident in the exterior design.



BIGGS HOUSE, PAUL RUDOLPH



University of Miami Architecture Studio, Arquitectonica (2018)



Perez Art Museum Miami, Herzog & de Meuron (2013)

Using the term “contemporary” as a defining characteristic of a particular architectural style is problematic, however, in that the term is extremely vague and encapsulates a wide spectrum of differing design philosophies and points of view. This is exacerbated by the fact that Functionalism in of itself is also an attribute that is assigned to many architectural styles, rather than a style identity. This creates a lack of



any cohesive and clear foundation for which a design may be analyzed and evaluated, given that there is no clear and consistent set of criteria for both contemporary architecture and functionalist architecture.

A local example of Contemporary Functionalist architecture in downtown Delray Beach is the Urban Outfitters façade on Atlantic Avenue.

The minimalist exterior is comprised of finished concrete and the stark façade is devoid of any ornamentation or embellishment allowing the form to speak for itself. Fenestration is configured to expose the interior to natural light and maximize display area, and the structural columns are a prominent element of the composition. However, this façade alteration sparked the community sentiment for the need for Architectural Design Guidelines to help guide development in a direction that maintained a contextually appropriate character for the “Village by the Sea”.

Another regional example that meets the criteria of Contemporary Functionalism as described is the brightline station in downtown West Palm Beach. The uniform, unembellished stucco material palette, emphasized structural elements, and wide expanse of windows to facilitate natural light are all characteristics of Functionalism. The Board should be aware that this iteration of Contemporary Functionalism, which abides by the generally broad standards as ascribed to the vaguely defined stylistic category, would be deemed compatible within the CBD should this request be approved. Staff encourages serious consideration over the implications of establishing a generic and vaguely defined style category that departs so drastically from the established character and intent of the CBD Design Guidelines.

The board may also recall the recent approval of the MiMo style, which proposed following established architectural style guidelines from Miami Beach. MiMo references architecture from the 1950s and 60s that utilized modernist concrete architecture with dramatic elements, brise soleil, and sculptural relief. MiMo was accepted as a documented, substantiated South Florida architecture and found to be appropriate for use in Delray Beach. The criteria that establishes the MiMo architectural category is much more focused and precise than generalized terms such as “Contemporary” and “Functionalism”.



Caspian Predates CBD Architectural Design Guidelines



Hotel approved under Masonry Modern.

Structures referenced by the applicant to support the contemporary style, such as the IPIC Building, the Caspian, The SOFA building, and the Aloft Hotel, pre-date the adoption of the CBD Design Guidelines and thus were not subject to the CBD Design Guidelines during review. The CBD Design Guidelines were specifically adopted in response to the rapid proliferation of these types of ill-defined contemporary designs

to ensure that future development was focused through the lens of **regionally appropriate and established architectural styles deemed compatible with the historic character of the downtown**. As such, these specific examples are not useful or relevant for the purpose of establishing architectural precedent. Although a path is provided to request approval of an alternate style that could serve as a unique, architectural statement, the Design Guidelines are specifically in place to prevent architectural experimentation that is not consistent and compatible with historic character and scale of the greater downtown area.

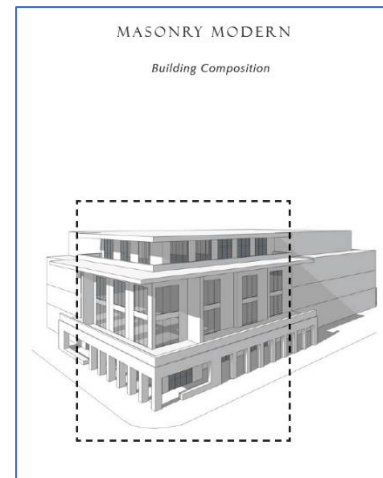
It is important to note that the seven styles are based on vernacular architecture that responds to Delray Beach's history and climate. Comparing the description of the proposed style to the current Masonry Modern category, the proposal appears to be consistent with some of the Masonry Modern characteristics, with a few critical differences: the use of expansive glass walls, rather than punched openings is a key departure from the masonry modern style, as well as the material and color palate which implements various non stucco treatments and colors that are darker than would be expected for the style. In comparison, Masonry Modern "Emphasizes the solidity of the structure" while the proposal has "use of expansive glass", which is inherently not an emphasis on the solidity of the structure.

The solidity of Masonry Modern is related to thicker walls historically utilized in warm climates to have cooler interior temperatures and references current concrete construction techniques. Aspects of design are derived from environmental context, which is why it is imperative that design styles introduced into the CBD have an established vernacular relevant to the geographic location and local context.

The applicant has provided four examples on pages 5 and 6 of their style narrative. However, it is important to note, three of the four examples, 2005 Calais Drive in Miami Beach, 4098 NE 167th Street in North Miami Beach and the building in Aventura appear fairly consistent with the Masonry Modern style in the CBD Guidelines, raising the question of whether the proposal meets the criteria of providing a "documented and substantiated Florida vernacular architecture" that is indeed separate and distinct from Masonry Modern and if the design should instead be adjusted to better conform to the established criteria for Masonry Modern.



4098 NE 167th Street, North Miami Beach, FL



Design Analysis

The characteristics of Contemporary Functionalism, as Staff has interpreted through a combination of research, reference examples, and the Applicant's justification statement, include the following aspects of design:

- Adheres to a focus on simplicity and minimalism
- Little to no ornamentation or embellishment
- Incorporates open and flexible interior and outdoor space with strong utilization of natural light
- Allows the function of the building to dictate the exterior form with visually apparent structural elements
- Utilizes technologically advanced and sustainable materials that are responsive to environmental context



Simplicity, Minimalism, and Ornamentation: The overall geometric language, emphasizing rectangular form, is generally simple in its application; however, recurrent shifts in massing and points of articulation do not reinforce a consistent sense of order within the composition. Additionally, frequent shifts in decorative material and texture elevate the overall composition beyond simplicity and minimalism in its execution. Non-functional decorative elements are employed across the façade in a way that is aesthetically interesting but functionally unnecessary and in conflict with the purported style. The varied geometry and emphasis on asymmetry convey a sense of activity and movement across the façade which is distinctly not minimal. A Contemporary Functionalist design would exercise restraint in the use of material and contemporary decorative elements (wood cladding, decorative columns, multiple colors) and instead favor a uniform material palette.

Function Dictates Form: The proposed multi-family residential use is apparent in the areas of the design where residential balconies are provided. However, most of the design language is not successful in conveying a residential language. The form of the structure is stark and substantial in scale, with design choices that could easily lend themselves to an institutional or commercial purpose. Without knowing the function of the building, the design is indicative of an office building, library, museum, or some other institutional facility. The tower element appears exclusively driven by aesthetic preference and the desire to have a focal statement of the design, regardless of whether it is compatible with the use type. This result is also in direct conflict with the purported style.





Conclusion

It is difficult to establish a defined criteria for what constitutes “Contemporary Functionalism” as a specific and distinct style. Both terms “Contemporary” and “Functionalism” are more appropriately used as adjectives to describe elements of a more specific style rather than a style in of itself. The first term establishes a time period, and the second term establishes an ethos of composition, but neither is specific enough to stylistically differentiate itself from other applications of design within the same time period and using the same ethos that produce significantly different visual outcomes. This is made evident by the diversity of style within the historic examples provided for Functionalism.

As such, the applicant has not provided sufficient documentation that Contemporary Functionalism is a substantiated style appropriate for downtown Delray Beach.

Board Considerations

The Board should consider the following when evaluating the proposed style:

- Whether the Contemporary Functionalist style is an established Florida vernacular architecture
- If the style has been demonstrated to be appropriate for the specific integration into the local context of downtown Delray Beach.
- Potential problems with future application of the Contemporary Functionalism style, given that it is a fundamentally broad and vaguely defined category.
- Whether the proposed design is a well-executed example of Contemporary Functionalism as defined in the report.
- Given Commission direction for the consideration of the removal of the Masonry Modern style from the CBD Design Guidelines and community perception that the style is too prolific, which negatively impacts the historical architectural context of Delray Beach, it may not be appropriate to deem Contemporary Functionalism as a contextually appropriate style. The specific concern is that, by determining that a much more broadly defined and vague category of architecture than Masonry Modern is contextually appropriate, it may result in future generic iterations of Contemporary Functionalism that are starkly incompatible with the urban context of Delray Beach, regardless of whether this particular version is deemed well-executed. Future applications utilizing Contemporary Functionalism may look substantially different from this proposal, given the lack of specific defining characteristics of the style category. Whereas generic and trend-based architecture was previously categorized, though incorrectly, as Masonry Modern, they may instead be incorrectly categorized as Contemporary Functionalism if Masonry Modern is removed from the design guidelines. Would this achieve the desired progress towards a more focused and contextually appropriate architectural tapestry in the CBD?

Options for Board Action

- A. Recommendation of **approval** to allow the use of the Contemporary Functionalism architectural style, pursuant to **LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3)(c), Other Architectural Styles**, for the property located at 109 SE 5th Avenue, by finding that the request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and meets criteria set forth in the Land Development Regulations.
- B. Recommendation of **denial** to allow the use of the Contemporary Functionalism architectural style, pursuant to **LDR Section 4.4.13(F)(3)(c), Other Architectural Styles**, for the property located at 109 SE 5th Avenue, by finding that the request is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and does not meet criteria set forth in the Land Development Regulations.
- C. Move to **continue with direction**.