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Car wash design fits Upper Eastside area, historic board says

BY LAURA MORALES

Miami's Historic and Environmental Preservation Board says the design for a planned car wash in the Upper Eastside harmonizes with its surroundings.

And in a bid to win over neighbors who don't want a fifth car wash in the area, its proponents said they'd like to throw in some concessions, including restoration of downtown's famous Coppertone sign, to help calm residents' concerns.

With a recent 5-2 vote, the board granted the owners of Green Carwash LLC the certificate of appropriateness they'll need to build in the historic Miami Modern, or MiMo, district.

Most board members decided the proposed building's ship-like design and porthole windows conform with the surrounding MiMo district, which runs along Biscayne Boulevard from Northeast 50th to 77th streets. It's identifiable by kitschy motels, clashing colors and angular post-World War II architecture.

And not everyone in the neighborhood opposes the wash plan. Dipak Patel, owner of the Royal Motel, said Monday he wants to see fewer empty lots in the area. "More businesses and more people could help reduce crime," he said.

The board added some conditions to the approved certificate, including:

- The structure must be built parallel to the boulevard.
- Some asphalt must be replaced with decorative pavers.
- A wall on the property's east side must be eight feet high to help block noise.
- On weekends, nine employees must wipe down cars to move them along faster.

"If it's subject to these conditions, it meets the intent of Chapter 23," said board member Gerald Marston, referring to the city's historic preservation ordinance.

Mickey Marrero, attorney for the car wash owners, said the certificate was the last permit the group needs from a city board. "Every other permit we need can be obtained administratively."

But many in the surrounding area don't want another car wash in a district where they're trying to promote walking. "If they agreed to put retail along the front it could help bring in pedestrian traffic," MiMo group leader Fran Rollason said.

The company's offering concessions. It plans to include a small coffee shop in the wash's waiting room and repair of the Coppertone sign, recently removed from a downtown building. The MiMo Biscayne Association owns the 49-year-old Miami relic.

Marrero also said the project's wiring and plumbing will, with a few tweaks, allow the building to be used as a restaurant should the car wash fail.

Denise Galicic, one of the venture's co-owners, said in an e-mail that she and her partners are discussing how to incorporate the concessions.

Both Marrero and Rollason said the two groups would meet this week to discuss the fate of the Coppertone Girl.

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