

## Chapter 7: BEACH NORTH OF ATLANTIC AVENUE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AREA ANALYSIS

The Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area includes all properties at the beach between Atlantic Avenue and Kimberly Street, as illustrated on Figure 136. Included below is a summary of the Neighborhood Planning Area's predominant character defining features, and an entire list of character defining features is included later in this section of the report.

- *Height/stories* – The structures vary in height from one to three stories throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area. The earlier structures are typically lower in height and the later historic and non-historic are higher. It is a rare remaining portion of Florida's oceanfront development of such a low scale, which gives it a unique sense of place.
- *Porch enclosures* – The majority of the structures within the Neighborhood Planning Area have a porch which faces the ocean. These vary in size and form and range from one story to multi-level structures with open, covered, and screened enclosures.
- *Sidewalks and landscaping* – The Neighborhood Planning Area contains no sidewalks and has a low level of landscaping, contrasting with the majority of the historic development within the City. The landscaping which is present is natural and consists primarily of grasses which occupy both vacant and built lots, and palm trees on some of the built lots. It does not have the heavily wooded and greened lots found throughout the majority of the other Neighborhood Planning Areas.

### History and Development Patterns

The development patterns of the historic resources in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue area are illustrated in Table 6. The four historic development periods established during the survey reflect the developmental history of the area. These patterns of development also provide the contexts necessary for determining the significance of the various historic resources.

**Table 6: Development Patterns of Resources within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area**

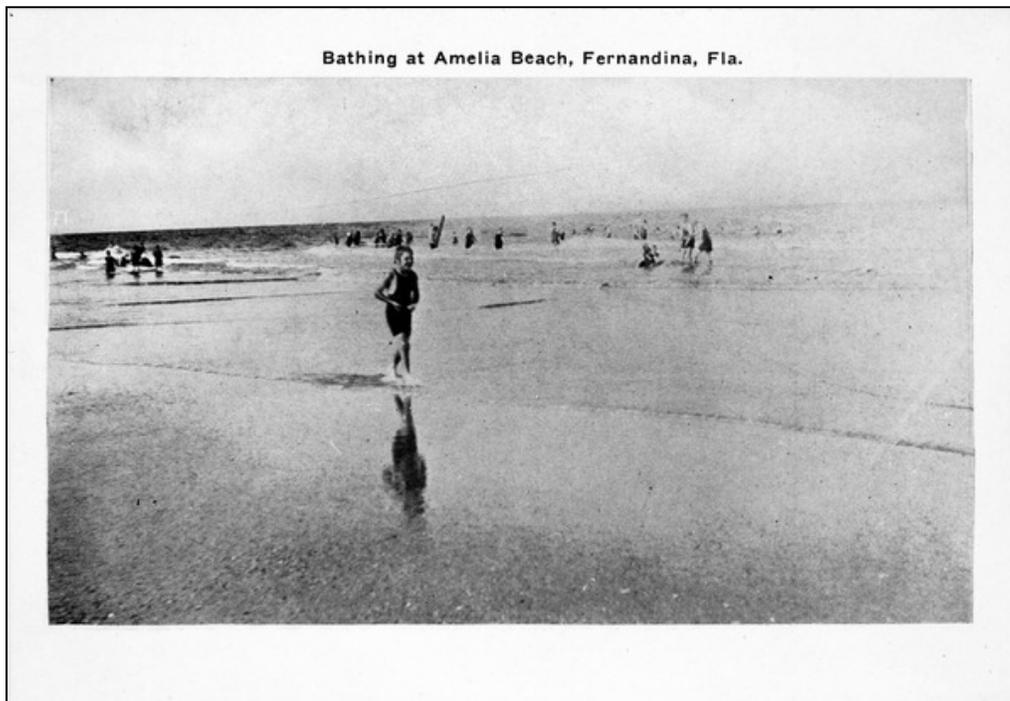
Periods of Development	Number of Parcels
Florida Land Boom Period (1920-1929)	1
Depression and New Deal Period (1930-1940)	37
World War II and Post-War Period (1941-1949)	17
Modern Period (1950-1961)	45
Non-Historic (Post 1961)	468



**Figure 136: Development Patterns in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area**



Although little development occurred during its earliest periods, the beach area has a rich history as a tourist attraction which dates to the late 1800s. Fernandina was Florida's first resort town which attracted union soldiers after the war (Sutton 1979). An 1880 account of the beach stated that, "the fishing here is unsurpassed and the opportunities for indulging in this always pleasant pastime are excellent...the beach is the finest in the world... the drive upon the beach is one that will be enjoyed by every visitor to Florida, for at no other place of resort in the state can anything half so grand be found" (Youngblood 1880). The beachfront was government owned, restricting development during its early history. However, during the 1920s people constructed cottages on the government land as squatters (Youngblood n.d. – handwritten roads history of Fernandina). Only one residence remains within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area from the 1920s: 633 Ocean Avenue, constructed in 1922. The government began to auction off beach land in the late 1920s (Youngblood n.d. – handwritten roads history of Fernandina). An early view of visitors to Fernandina's beach is included in Figure 137.



**Figure 137: Circa 1920s view of Beach Activity in Fernandina**

*Courtesy Florida Photographic Collection, State Archives and Library of Florida  
Photographic Collection, State Archives and Library of Florida*

The first private business venture on the beach was Moore's which opened in 1929 (Figure 138). At this time, the only other beach area enterprise was the publicly owned Casino which included a skating rink, bowling alley, restaurant, restrooms, and showers (Walsh 2005). The Moores moved their beach cottage to the rear of their property at the corner of Fletcher and Atlantic Avenues, and constructed a two-story building with a small restaurant and grocery store, as well as upstairs rental units. Their friends had advised against this due to the poor economy; however, the business was very successful and continued to grow (Walsh 2005).



**Figure 138: Undated Historic View of Moore's in Fernandina Beach**

*Courtesy Amelia Island Museum of History*

The 1930s was the first major boom of development along the beachfront. By this period, the resort industry in Fernandina Beach was down, as a result of the expansion of the railroad and the opening of Henry Flagler's hotel in St. Augustine drawing tourists further south. While no professions or additional information about the residents of the dwellings are available in City Directories from the period, secondary accounts and local informants indicate that the beach was primarily occupied by year-round residents and vacationers from nearby Georgia. The majority of the residences constructed in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area during the 1930s were simple one and two-story Frame Vernacular structures, as illustrated in the Character Defining Features section of the report.

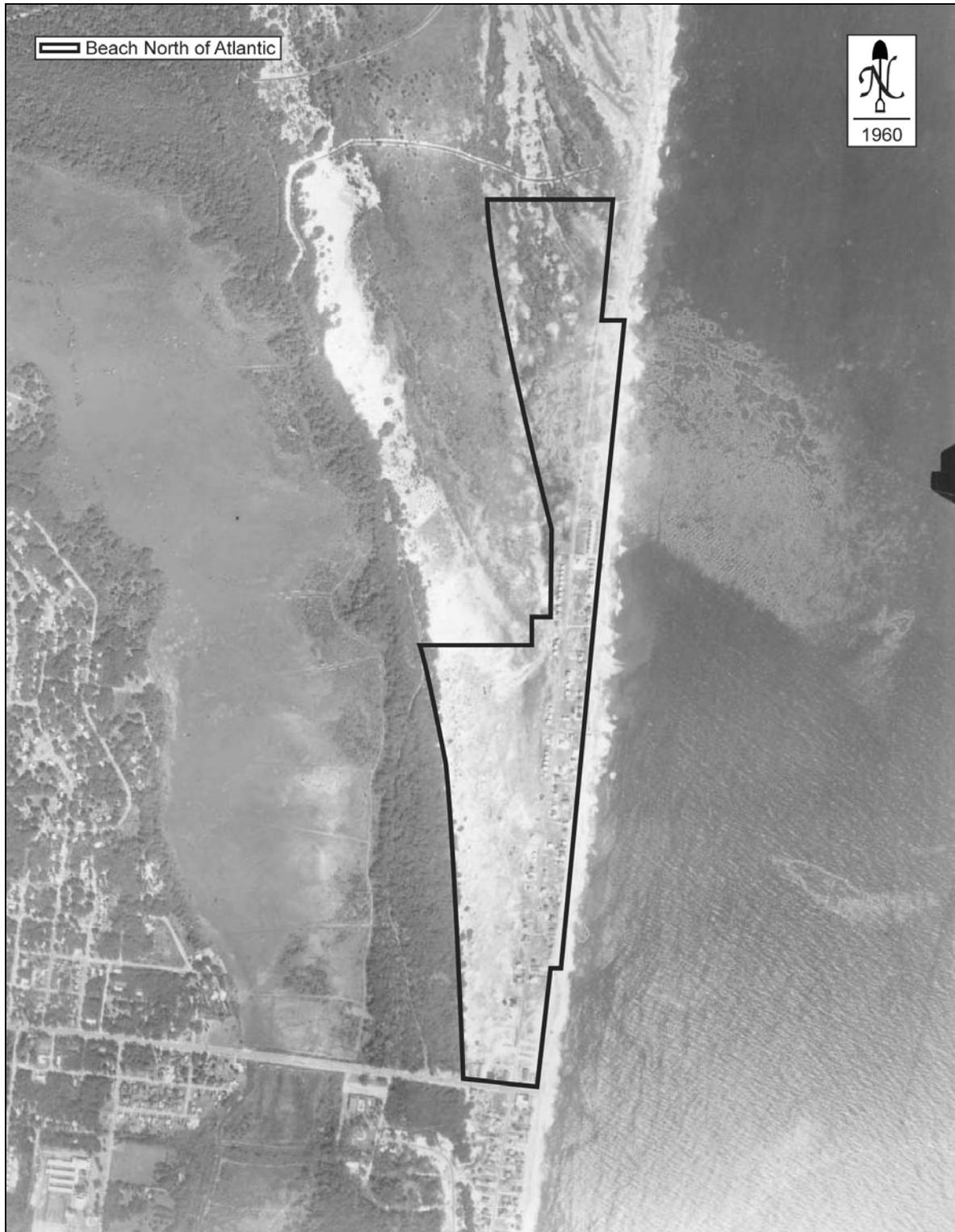
Moore's was destroyed by a fire in 1932, and rebuilt with the addition of a lounge and bar as well as a dance facility and snack bar for those under 21. The business continued to grow and the facilities were expanded, especially in the years following the construction of the mills (Walsh 2005). A Laundromat and ice house were later added to the Moore's facilities, allowing visitors to come and stay for weeks with everything they needed at the beach (Walsh 2005), and by the 1940s the beach was a popular ocean resort.

Many factors influenced the growth of the beach from the 1930s through the 1960s. As was seen throughout Fernandina Beach, the late 1930s construction of the mills resulted in a dramatic rise in development and population boom which fueled development from the time of their construction through the early 1960s. In addition, the conclusion of World War II resulted in increased tourist traffic throughout Florida, including providing a rise in Fernandina Beach's tourist industry. Still, the majority of the vacationers to Fernandina Beach were nearby



The greatest amount of historic residences which remain within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area are from the Modern period (1950-1961). An aerial photograph showing the development within the Neighborhood Planning Area in 1960 is included as Figure 140. This illustrates that the area's historic development is concentrated at the southeastern section of the Neighborhood Planning Area. A review of available City Directories from the late 1950s shows a wide range of professions for those that lived within the Neighborhood Planning Area. These include ranger at Ft. Clinch State Park, Rayonier Corporation, Container Corporation, trainman, teacher, state police officer, pilot, salesman, clerk, cook, and attorney.

Today, much non-historic development has occurred within the Neighborhood Planning Area, and it includes almost five times as much non-historic development to historic. Demolition and natural disaster have resulted in only a small number of historic structures remaining, and those which do remain have been altered as illustrated in the Character Defining Features section of the report. A fire destroyed Moore's in 1963. All accounts reported that significant destruction was caused along the beachfront from Hurricane Dora in 1964.



**Figure 140: 1960 Aerial Photograph showing the layout and level of development of the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area**

*Aerial Photograph Courtesy of Aerial Photography: Florida, State University System of Florida  
<http://www.digital.uflib.ufl.edu/collections/FLAP/Index.htm>*



Figure 141: Current Aerial Photograph for Comparison with Figure 140

## Character Defining Features

### Land use

Land use is single-family residential, and there are some vacant lots (Figure 142-Figure 145).



**Figure 142: Typical Street of Single Family Residences in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, facing north from Dolphin Street**



**Figure 143: Typical Street of Single Family Residences in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, facing northwest from north of Dolphin Street**



**Figure 144: Typical Street of Single Family Residences in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, N Fletcher Avenue, facing south from W 9<sup>th</sup> Street**



**Figure 145: Typical Street of Single Family Residences in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, N Fletcher Avenue, facing west at 1431 N Fletcher Avenue**

Height/stories

The structures vary from one to three stories throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area. The earlier structures are typically lower in height and the later historic and non-historic are higher.

Setbacks

Setbacks are generally uniform along each street, but vary throughout the entire area. Houses are typically set closer to the street in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood and have slightly larger setbacks to the north and west (Figure 146 and Figure 147).



**Figure 146: View of Typical Smaller Setbacks in the Southeastern portion of the North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, facing northwest towards E 2<sup>nd</sup> Street**



**Figure 147: View of Typical Larger Setbacks in the North and Western portions of the North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, N Fletcher Avenue, facing southwest from W 8<sup>th</sup> Street**

Density

The overall density throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area is low as the area consists primarily of low rise single family development, and vacant lots are present throughout the neighborhood (Figure 148).



**Figure 148: View of Vacant Lots North of 429 Ocean Avenue, facing northwest**

Building materials

Residences in the neighborhood are of concrete block and wood frame construction. The exterior fabric of the structures includes primarily stucco, weatherboard, and metal or vinyl siding.

Garage entrances

The majority of the structures throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area do not have garages. Of those that do, they typically consist of a detached garage, or garages or carports integrated into the first floor of the structure (Figure 149 and Figure 150).



**Figure 149: Typical Residence with Detached Garage, 1033 Ocean Avenue, facing southwest**



**Figure 150: Typical Residence with Integral 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Garage, 933 N Fletcher Avenue, facing west**

Porch enclosures

The majority of the porches within the Neighborhood Planning Areas are non-historic open wooden porches with simple rails; however, there are also some screened porches (Figure 151- Figure 154). Many of the structures have porches on the second story, or multi-level porches.



**Figure 151: Representative View of Simple Wooden Porch in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 529 Ocean Avenue, facing northwest**



**Figure 152: Representative View of Simple Wooden Porch in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 533 Ocean Avenue, facing northwest**



**Figure 153: Representative View of Screened and Simple Wooden Porches in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, facing northwest from 1023 Ocean Avenue**



**Figure 154: Representative View of Screened Porch in the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, 525 N Fletcher Avenue, facing west**

Fences and walls

The majority of the structures do not have fences or walls, but there are a few chain link and wooden fences throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area.

Scale

Residences throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area greatly vary in scale from modest one-story structures to larger multi-story structures. A random sampling of 20 structures was selected to determine an approximate average square footage for the Neighborhood Planning Area. The approximate average is 1558 square feet.

Floor area ratio

The floor area ratio of the structures is varied, but is typically low as they are primarily low rise structures which do not cover the entire lot.

Lot coverage

Lot coverage in the neighborhood is varied. It appears to range from approximately 25% to 75% with the majority of the houses having a small yard/green space.

Street patterns and widths

The street pattern is primarily a grid with varying widths. The northern portion of the Neighborhood Planning Area has some curvilinear and cul-de-sac streets. Some of the streets are paved and others are sand. The pattern of the streets is evident on Figure 136 on page 134, and typical views of the streetscape are included in Figure 155-Figure 157.



**Figure 155: Representative View of Street within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, E 4<sup>th</sup> Street, facing west from Ocean Avenue**



**Figure 156: Representative View of Street within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, facing north from 931 Ocean Avenue**



**Figure 157: Representative View of Street within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, N Fletcher Avenue, facing south just south of W 9<sup>th</sup> Street**

Accessory structures

There are few accessory structures within the Neighborhood Planning Area. A few of the residences have a detached garage as illustrated on Figure 149 on page 145.

Architectural styles

Architectural styles include primarily Frame Vernacular (Figure 158 and Figure 159) and Masonry Vernacular (Figure 160 and Figure 161) residences.



**Figure 158: Representative Photo of Frame Vernacular Residence within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 635 Ocean Avenue, facing west**



**Figure 159: Representative Photo of Frame Vernacular Residence within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 1033 Ocean Avenue, facing southeast**



**Figure 160: Representative Photo of Masonry Vernacular Residence within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 423 Ocean Avenue, facing southwest**



**Figure 161: Representative Photo of Masonry Vernacular Residence within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, 435 Ocean Avenue, facing west**

Spatial relationships

The structures are typically oriented to the ocean and their designs allow for views and access to the beach. N Fletcher Avenue is the major thoroughfare through the Neighborhood Planning Area.

Sidewalks and landscaping

There are no sidewalks in this Neighborhood Planning Area. The landscaping is natural rather than manicured. It generally contains a lower level of landscaping than in the western portion of the City, as illustrated by the photos throughout this section of the report. The natural landscaping consists primarily of grasses which occupy both vacant and built lots, and palm trees on some of the built lots.

Massing

The residences are most commonly rectangular in form; however, there are some t-shaped and irregular forms present.

Roof line and pitch

The majority of the residences feature gable roofs; however, there are some hip and flat roof structures (Figure 162 and Figure 163). The pitch varies but is typically moderate.



**Figure 162: Representative View of Residence with a Gable Roof, 532 N Fletcher Avenue, facing east**



**Figure 163: Representative View of Residence with a Hip Roof, 633 Ocean Avenue, facing west**

Lot size and width

The lot size and width varies throughout the neighborhood as illustrated on Figure 136 on page 134. The average lot size within the Neighborhood Planning Area is 2.067 acres, according to the records of the Nassau County Property Appraiser.

Elevation features

The elevation features vary, but the majority of the residences feature large expanses of windows facing the ocean. Many feature porches of various sizes and stories on the main elevation. They have both asymmetrical and symmetrical façade arrangements.

Parking and driveways

The majority of the residences feature unpaved off-street parking and some have parking pads accessed by unpaved sections (Figure 164 and Figure 165). Some of the newer residences have paved driveways. Multiple structures are elevated and feature covered parking on the first story.



**Figure 164: Representative View of Parking, 1029 N Fletcher Avenue, facing west**



**Figure 165: View of Variety of Paved and Unpaved Parking and Driveways, N Fletcher Avenue, facing south from W 8<sup>th</sup> Street**

Doors and windows

The doors and windows vary throughout the neighborhood and many structures feature replacement windows and doors. The primary window type is metal single hung sash with a variety of light configurations.

Building orientation

Residences are typically set parallel to the roadway.

Trees and shrubbery

The streets within the Neighborhood Planning Area are not lined with trees and the trees which exist throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area typically do not provide a large amount of shade or cover.

Topography

The Neighborhood Planning Area's topography is primarily flat and even with sand dunes and more built up land at the east, providing a buffer form the beach and ocean.

## Recommendations

It is the evaluation of Janus Research that the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area is not eligible for designation as a local or National Register historic district. The historic resources throughout the Neighborhood Planning Area have undergone a high level of alterations and there are many non-historic structures and vacant lots throughout, as illustrated on Figure 136 on page 134. Throughout the entirety of the planning area, only approximately 18% of the structures are historic. When eliminating the northern and western portions of the Neighborhood Planning Area, which contain primarily non-historic structures, and only evaluating the area bounded by Dolphin Street, Tarpon Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and the ocean, there are still only approximately 44% potentially contributing historic structures, and as previously indicated, many of these structures have undergone substantial alterations. Some of the new construction throughout the area is also out of scale with the historic development (Figure 166). A 1960 aerial photograph shows the sparse development in this area historically (Figure 140, page 139).



**Figure 166: Representative View of Out of Scale Construction within the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area, Ocean Avenue, Facing Northwest towards E 2<sup>nd</sup> Street**

The most striking aspect of the Beach North of Atlantic Avenue Neighborhood Planning Area's development is its small scale. One of the issues threatening development along the beach is current building codes for waterfront development. These prohibit one-story or ground floor development, and require that if a certain percentage of the structure's value is being invested into improvements the structure be brought up to modern codes. The City already has a height limit to development in the beach area. However, even low scale development is incompatible

with the historic one-story structures (Figure 166). Based on these circumstances, the only developmental and zoning regulations which could protect the one and two-story historic structures would be a moratorium on all new development, which is not practical.

It is recommended that future work in this area focus on documentation and recognition of the area's history. The area with the highest concentration of historic resources, roughly bounded by Dolphin Street, Tarpon Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and the ocean is considered of high priority for future survey efforts in Fernandina Beach as discussed further in the Conclusions section of the report. Survey efforts will identify those structures which do retain adequate historic integrity for local historic designation or listing in the National Register. The table within Appendix C notes any historic structures within the Neighborhood Planning Area which have not been previously recorded, and should be the focus of future survey work. Due to the large amount of alteration which has occurred, a documentation project should also focus on raising public awareness of the history of the beach and its significance. This could be done through creation of an exhibit, a brochure and tour highlighting the remaining significant structures, and an oral history project to document recollections of the beach throughout history.