

RE: AMBASSADOR VARIANCE APPLICATION  
July 16, 2020

My name is Michael Blanc and I am from the Regency. I would like to speak in opposition of this application. As an architect with considerable experience with variances, I believe the relief being sought is excessive. The nonconforming extra building height and land coverage being sought would be detrimental to our neighborhood because the amount of building on the site would be much denser than others in this area. From Sloans Curve to the Lake Avenue Bridge the existing physical character exudes calm. This is due to the generous separation between buildings, which are all filled with homes. It is a residential neighborhood.. The new Ambassador, when seen from the air, reveals a site packed with much more building coverage than its neighbors. The building itself, architecturally, looks like towers with very flashy glass lined balconies. The project gives the appearance of a resort not homes.

A change in use is also being sought. This too would be Detrimental to the neighborhood. With the new uses this project would become more a resort destination, Acapulco style, totally out of character in the middle of a low rise, low density, predominantly residential area.

There is much description of a valet parking system to be used to great advantage for saving space. But it is well known valet parking is a slow process. From the Breakers to the Old Key Lime House we all have experienced the delays associated with valet parking. I fear when there is a large gathering at the new ball room, the queue of cars arriving, from both directions for that function, will be forced to back up on A1A. A1A is a narrow, two lane road without shoulders and such a queue would totally block local traffic,

as well as, access by emergency vehicles. All this is without mention of any traffic generated by staff arrivals and departures. The Town of Palm Beach should request a full traffic study of this development's impact on A1A before considering the application..

Actually, the most dangerous aspect of this application, if approved, is it would set a legal precedent for other such developments. In my experience, once such a precedent is set, any other application seeking the same relief has been granted. Because a Zoning Board cannot approve something for one applicant and then deny it to another, three lots away, without facing serious litigation. So imagine this sort of resort development pepering A1A. It would transform the neighborhood for the worst.

The final, and perhaps most important, question I have has to do with what is called in zoning language, "hardship." Again in my experience, an applicant needs to demonstrate a viable hardship as the reason for seeking a particular type of relief from the regulations. I do not know if I missed it, but I found nothing in the material provided about the hardships being claimed by the applicant. If there are no hardships then design of new additions to the existing structures should conform to the regulations.

*Michael Blum*

July, 21, 2020

Dear Members of ARCOM,

My name is Ivar Goldart. I have the privilege to reside in The Regency of Palm Beach which is located on S. Ocean Blvd diagonally across from The Ambassador Hotel. I grew up in New York City and until 9 years ago was not the slightest bit aware of the beauty of this location. My wife Nancy and I were taking a brief vacation on Singer Island and she suggested that we visit Palm Beach. I was stunned with views that were reminiscent of the coast in the south of France. Two years later we purchased our apartment. Since then, each December when we arrive and take in the view, we exclaim "do we really live here?" I will do anything I can to help keep this serene, restrained unbelievable place just what it is. With this in mind, below is my view of harm the redevelopment plan for The Ambassador will do to this precious community.

**The Claimed Hardship Should Denied as it is Both Without Merit and Disingenuous**

The heart of a variance request is hardship. The sponsor's claimed hardship should not be recognized as sufficient to support the drastic and extensive variances that they seek.

The hardship claimed appears to boil down to this:

The Ambassador Hotel premises is a fully built out seven story building. The seven stories are permissible because the structure was built pre-code limiting to 5 stories. The sponsors are very sophisticated developers and were fully aware of the limitations of property development in Palm Beach when they purchased one of the smallest lots in the area. Consequently, protests about restrictions interfering with their expansive development goals ring hollow. If they wanted to create a high density, mixed commercial and residential condo hotel premises they should have looked down the road so as not to violate the peaceful, quiet and spectacular beauty and unique norms of Palm Beach.

Beyond this, whatever little appeal the "hardship" claim may, is completely undermined by the sponsor's admission in the variance application that their business plans could be met without the requested variances although this would be "challenging" (their words), not impossible.

**New Structures Are Not In Harmony With The General Area As They Are Oversized, Create Density Issues, Disturb Sight Lines to the Ocean, Create Noise, Glare and Light Pollution**

The Ambassador is located on the East Side of S. Ocean Blvd. The buildings from Sloan's Curve to the Lake Worth Casino are quite consistent in materials with which they are built, the presentation of understated terraces and in generally keeping activity areas out of public view and east of the housing structures. In the main they are beautiful classic mid-century structures. None of these attributes are respected in the redevelopment of the Ambassador Hotel with the possible exception of painting the building white.

To be sure the architects of the new Ambassador had their work cut out for them as the current hotel is a long way from elegant. The new building as designed, standing alone, is an impressive

conversion. But the building does not stand in a vacant part of town; it is within a community of buildings. The redevelopment plan overdevelops the area extending west towards S. Ocean Blvd.

The serenity of the drive along S. Ocean Blvd. will be shattered by a hulking ballroom, described below, a main building bedecked by gawky and glistening terraces and outdoor drinking and dining areas that will undoubtedly be noisy.

### **Ballroom**

Variances requested would allow for the construction of a 3,100 Sq. Ft. ballroom. At a zoom meeting presented to The Regency on July 8, 2020, the sponsors were constrained under questioning to acknowledge that the largely glass exterior will be at least 35 feet high and the ballroom will push well north of the footprint of the main building. As a result of the width of this facility, site lines to the ocean will be blocked and the view from S. Ocean Blvd. disturbed by creating a large commercial look inconsistent with surrounding properties. These facts clearly call into question the sponsor's response (Application Ex.A.10) that the proposed new structures were in keeping with the height restraints on commercial buildings. As the proposed ballroom juts out beyond the north side of main building, the response that new structures will not create visible size and bulk issues (Application Ex.A.11) is not credible.

In addition, the sponsor's assurance that the redevelopment will not pose glare and light pollution issues is questionable given the predominate use of glass on the 35 ft. high Ballroom. (Application Ex.B.7)

### **Highly Glazed Terraces and Balconies**

Variances requests have been made to allow numerous balconies to be created, expanded and to expand and enclose several others. Great reliance is placed on glass building materials to be involved in the creation of these new amenities that is out of character for buildings in this area. In addition, the extensive use of glass gives reasons to question the sponsor's assurance that the redevelopment will not pose glare and light pollution issues. (Application Ex. B.7)

### **Inadequate Parking**

Double stacked parking will be burdensome to residents and guests. Gridlock created by difficulties created by the requirement to use valet parking could spill out of the property and result in traffic delay on S. Ocean Blvd. Car retrieval delays are going to be extensive. Even at the revered Breakers Hotel, valet parking does not eliminate significant delays and that is without the use of delay multiplying double stacking devices.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the sponsor, in responding to Zoning Application Ex.D (Parking Statement) chose to ignore the substantial commercial nature of the redevelopment plan. Instead the form was completed as if it was for a purely residential property. Whether such a choice is permissible or not is not important. What is important is you cannot hide the fact that employees must have the ability to park. The sponsor should be required to disclose the number of employees they intend to have on site and how their parking needs are to be met.

In the absence of a specific staffing number and plan for this supposed five star hotel to be, it is fair to look to an industry standard of staffing recommended for five star hotels. The World Tourist Organization suggests the ratio of people to staff is optimal in a five star facility at 20 staff per 10 rooms or 200 staff per day for a 100 room establishment. Obviously, the bulk of the staff would be working during the day and evening hours. On a greatly less than optimal staffing level it is fair to estimate that the most demanding shifts will require a shift change consisting of a total of 100 employees at a time. This means that at one point of the day as much as 30-40% of the valet spaces will be moving in and out at one time even if no guest needs to enter or exit from the garage. In short, the parking "plan" is a recipe for daily chaos.

Separate and apart from this fatal deficiency in the parking scheme presented is the planned above ground stacking of vehicles under the existing 5 story building. At a July 8, 2020 zoom meeting this issue was disclosed. The Sponsor suggested that landscaping would mask the problem. This overlooks the fact vehicles cannot be stacked or unloaded without considerable space to move them in and out. It should be clear that the parking system is not workable as currently drawn.


### **Height Variance**

In the zoning application (I.A.8) a request is made to "allow a height of 68.96 feet in lieu of the 62.5 maximum allowed for the Penthouse additions (7th floor). At the zoom meeting it was contended that this does not raise the height of the building. It is hard to accept this statement at face value. If the height will not be increased why is a variance necessary? If the height will be increased the request should be summarily denied as the building is already too high and no justification has been provided to grant this request.

### **Conclusion**

Without question, an appropriately updated Ambassador Hotel complete with a fine restaurant and modern Spa would be welcomed by the community. However, the project should be required to be harmonious with the special area that it joins and consistent with the values and lifestyle of the community in which it is to be built. This plan falls short.

Note: While I am sure that the committees receiving correspondence will evaluate them on their merits, a point of clarification might be helpful in that evaluation. I have seen numerous letters from owners in the Edgewater. This property is directly across S. Ocean Blvd. from The Ambassador. The overwhelming support of the redevelopment plan of a neighbor would normally carry considerable great weight. However, it should be made clear that apparently each and every one of these writers effusively welcoming the project to their neighborhood has signed an agreement to sell their units to an entity controlled by the Ambassador's sponsor. Aggressive advocacy is part of any petition process. However, the letters should be read in the context of the reality that these folks are set to not be around when the project is complete.

  
Ivar Goldart



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## OPPOSITION TO THE AMBASSADOR'S RENOVATION PROJECT

Dear Commissioners,

It is the first time I write to the town and I take today the liberty to express why I do not see this project as contributing to the calmness, enjoyment and quality of life nor harmonious to our neighborhood. The Ambassador has not been a vital "piece of the fabric of South Ocean Blvd". The vital fabric of the Blvd. is the condominiums surrounded by green open spaces with reasonable height and open skies, which has made this boulevard a most attractive, and inviting venue for residential living.

The proposal has 3 major issues at hand:

- Lot coverage
- Increase in height
- Increase in parking spaces

- 1) The current lot coverage is 23.7%. The proposal is almost double, 44.9%.
- 2) The maximum existing height permitted by the zoning is 62.5ft, the proposal is to increase this to 75.46ft.
- 3) If the site cannot be redeveloped profitably for a condo-hotel with the same coverage and height as the existing, why not re designate to allow a conventional condominium project that fits within the parameters.
- 4) The redevelopment is in no way a "tremendous asset" to neighbouring properties. This will create problematic impacts on traffic, both pedestrians and drivers. In addition, it will block the views and affect property values.

The added noise, traffic from cars, truck deliveries, and garbage trucks have never added value to the pursuit of happiness.

5) Under V (hardship) says it would be "challenging" but apparently not impossible to redevelop the condo hotel within the existing coverage ratio and height.

6) The redevelopment wants to increase parking for 124 existing spaces to a total of 232 with stacked (tandem) and lift parking with 24hr valet service. There is no guarantee there will always be 24hr valet service.

7) The redevelopment is not compatible with the multi-family nature of the neighbourhood. .

8) Exhibit 3 - the new Ambassador building will not be "beautiful" to neighbours due to the requested variances especially the lot coverage, the height and the increase used of the property.

Respectfully,

Monique Ogilvie