# SNIFFEN & SPELLMAN, P.A.

Sender's Direct Line: (561) 721-4002 Sender's Email: jeubanks@sniffenlaw.com

September 9, 2021

#### Via E-mail

Mayor and Town Council c/o Maggie Zeidman, President Town Council of the Town of Palm Beach 360 South County Road Palm Beach, Florida 33480

#### Re: Lack of Hardship to Support Variance in Application No. Z-21-00383 146 Seaspray Avenue – Expansion of Non-conforming Structure

Dear Mayor and Town Council Members:

Our office represents John D. Firestone (as Trustee),<sup>1</sup> the owner of 151 Seaview Avenue which abuts the rear of 146 Seaspray Avenue ("Property") owned by Michael and Michelle Fries ("Applicants").<sup>2</sup> The Applicants are seeking a variance to construct an addition to a prior existing non-conforming garage to create a much larger cabana and home office located 5.6 feet in the rear setback in lieu of the 10 foot minimum required setback under the Town's Zoning Code ("Code"). Mr. Firestone objects to such an improper expansion.

The Application is another example of homeowners purchasing a property knowing the size and configuration of the lot, the location of the structures thereon, and the existing non-conformities, yet nevertheless seeking a variance based on convenience, not hardship. Such variances should be denied out of hand when the home and structures can continue to be used for their intended purposes as 146 Seaspray Avenue has been since 1921.<sup>3</sup>

#### I. Applicants' Desire to Create Larger Cabana and Home Office

The Applicants seek to expand the first floor of a rear yard garage and second floor guest house, which is already non-conforming, and expand it into a much larger non-conforming structure. Presently, the first floor contains a small laundry room and cabana bath with an outside shower and open space. The proposed revised plan will demolish portions of the prior first floor, eliminate open space, and add additional square footage to the east of the garage to create a much larger 128 square foot cabana and home office (along with potential additional living area), placing the expanded structure within four or five feet of Mr. Firestone's lot line and pool area and creating

#### **REPLY TO:**

605 NORTH OLIVE AVENUE, 2ND FLOOR WEST PALM BEACH, FL • 33401 PHONE: 561.721.4000 FAX: 561.721.4001

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Mr. Firestone owns and holds 151 Seaview Avenue under John D. Firestone, as Trustee under the JDF Florida QPRT dated December 26, 2011.

 $<sup>^{2}</sup>$  As such, Mr. Firestone is a neighboring property owner, received notice of the Application, has an interest in protecting the preservation of his property rights and the neighborhood and has a right to rely upon the existing zoning restrictions absent a demonstration that the Applicants have met the requisites for a variance under the Town Code, which they have not.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See, Property Appraiser Property Detail for 146 Seaspray Avenue attached as Exhibit "A" showing date of construction as 1921 along with the original footprint of the home and garage.

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the potential for a dangerous precedent in the neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, rather than designing the extension of the first floor to meet the present code 10 foot setback by making a smaller room, the Applicants are seeking a variance to expand the prior non-confirming structure to the east and yet leave it only 5.6 feet from the rear setback.

The Town Code allows for the continuation of nonconforming structures until they are removed, abandoned or demolished, but it does "not to encourage their survival." Town Code, Sec. 134-416(d). "A building or structure is ... nonconforming if the building or structure or any physical characteristics thereof is not in full compliance with all the regulation of the zoning district in which it is situated." Sec. 134-416(b)(emphasis added) Such nonconforming structures or buildings can only be enlarged or expanded if "said enlargement, expansion or extension meets all of the lot yard and bulk regulation for the zoning district in which the building or structure is located." Sec. 134-416(d); Sec. 134-417 (emphasis added). The proposed expansion in the Application admittedly does not meet the applicable 10 foot rear setback. Town Code, Sec. 134-893(9). As a result, the Applicant must (but can't) meet all of the requirements for a variance under Sec. 134-201(a) and its sub-parts under the Town Code (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

#### II. Lack of Unique and Undue "Hardship" to Support Variance

A variance is nothing more than an approved violation of the Town Code. As a result, approving unsupported variances undermines the very protections of the Code which are designed to maintain the character of the Town. Therefore, variances should not be granted except in the most extreme of circumstances, not to merely meet the desire of an owner to "upgrade" the home or make it more "modern" or "livable" or even "functional in today's world."

Section 134-201(a) of the Town Code is clear that only variances that "will result in **unnecessary and undue hardship**" can be granted (emphasis added). The Courts are also clear that an applicant for a variance must demonstrate a unique hardship to qualify for a variance. *Bernard v. Town of Palm Beach*, 569 So. 2d 853 (Fla. 4th DCA 1990) (citing, *Nance v. Town of Indialantic*, 419 So. 2d 1041 (Fla. 1982)). By definition, a "hardship" may not be found unless no reasonable use can be made of the property without the variance; or, stated otherwise, "the hardship must be such that it renders it virtually impossible to use the land for the purpose for which it is zoned." *Bernard* at 854 (citing, *Town of Indialantic v. Nance*, 485 So. 2d 1318, 1320 (Fla. 5th DCA); *see also, Thompson v. Planning Comm'n*, 464 So. 2d 1231, 1237 (Fla. 1st DCA 1985)(emphasis added).

In the case of *Bernard v. Town of Palm Beach*, 569 So. 2d 853 (Fla. 4th DCA 1990) the desire to construct a 35 to 40 foot master bedroom, bath and den above an existing southern portion

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The aerial attached as Exhibit "B" from the Property Appraiser website, as well as the ones in the Applicants' presentation on pages 13 and 15 of 24, shows numerous garages, apartments and guest houses within the "Sea Streets" which clearly do not meet the current Code rear (and in some cases side) setbacks. As such, permitting the Applicants to receive a variance without meeting the requisite hardship standard in the Code would establish a dangerous precedent for many other homes in the area to likewise seek unwarranted variances.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Notably, under Section 134-201the Applicants must meet both section (a) and all the sub-sections thereunder. They have not. The burden of meeting the requirements for a variance is on the Applicants, not the Town or the neighbors.

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of the house resulting in a rear setback of 5 feet instead of 15 feet was not a "hardship."<sup>6</sup> The house could continue to be used for its purpose, albeit with a smaller bedroom and bathroom.

So too here, the desire of the Applicants to have a larger cabana and create a new home office and living area does not constitute a showing that no reasonable use can be made of the Property without the requested variance. To the contrary, the house and garage can continue to be used as they have been for over 100 years since they were constructed. While the Applicants, may "like," "want" or "desire" to create a larger area to work from home, they are not entitled to violate the Code to do so. The Applicants, like many other homeowners, may just need to use a portion of the guest suite over the garage, the sunroom, the living room, the kitchen or some other room in their home as their office. In the alternative, they can design a first floor office that does not encroach into the current rear setback or purchase a larger home. Either way, the Applicant cannot presently meet the requisite unnecessary and undue hardship needed for a variance as the home is clearly usable for its intended purpose. Therefore, the Application should be denied.

#### III. Any "Hardship" Would be Self-Imposed

Even if the lack of a legally recognized hardship could be overlooked (which it cannot) any "hardship" alleged by the Owner would clearly be self-imposed. The courts have consistently found that a hardship must arise from circumstances **peculiar to the realty alone, unrelated to** the conduct or to **the self-originated expectations of any of its owners or buyers**. *See, Maturo v. Coral Gables*, 619 So. 2d 455 (Fla. 3d DCA 1993); *City of Coral Gables v. Geary*, 383 So. 2d 1127 (Fla. 3d DCA 1980).

As a result, situations in which purchasers **are fully aware of the shape and size of a lot**, **but still design a building which is too large for the lot**, **constitutes a self-created hardship**. *Thompson v. Planning Com. of Jacksonville*, 464 So. 2d 1231, 1237 (Fla. 1st DCA 1985); *see also*, *Namon v. State Dept. of Environ. Reg.*, 558 So. 2d 504 (Fla. 3d DCA 1990).

In the present case, the Applicants were admittedly fully aware of the Property's size, location and set-backs, yet designed an expansion for a large cabana and office which was too large and encroached into the required rear yard setbacks. The Council need look no farther than the SKA Letter of Intent to demonstrate that any purported "hardship" is self-created. Within its Letter, SKA indicates in pertinent part that:

- 1. The special condition is that the current residence and guest house in encroaching into the setback and the property is non-conforming to today's code.
- 2. ... The layout of the residence is an existing condition.
- 3. ...A request for a variance for a small one story addition in the rear of the property is a reasonable request.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See also, Herrera v. Miami, 600 So. 2d 561, 562 (Fla. 3d DCA 1992) (reversing approval of a variance where there is no finding that "it is virtually impossible to use the land as it is presently zoned."); Auerbach v. City of Miami, 929 So. 2d 693, 694 (Fla. 3d DCA 2006) ("Florida courts have held that a legal hardship will be found to exist only in those cases where the property is **virtually unusable**...,")(citing to Mauro v. City of Coral Gables, 619 So. 2d 455,456 (Fla. 3d DCA 1993))(emphasis added).

- 4. The hardship. ... is that there is no other feasible location to add an office/cabana and the proposed location is the most feasible location to work with the existing configuration of the house. ...
- 5. ...the proposed office/cabana is the minimum size needed and the proposed location is the most feasible and acceptable location on the site.
- 6. Since the proposed office/cabana is not visible from the street ... there should be minimal impact to the neighborhood.

In each case, the "justification" for the variance demonstrates that it cannot be legally granted as they are no more than self-originated expectations. The Applicants knew that the structures are encroaching into the setbacks and that the layout of the house and garage are an existing condition, yet still designed an office/cabana which did not meet the Town Code because *they believed* their request was "reasonable" and there "was no other location for the design" for a project *of the size they desired* which *they assert* is the "minimum necessary" and can't be seen from the street.<sup>7</sup> The proper size and minimum necessary is no expansion of a non-conforming structure under the Code. Such "justifications" therefore, represent nothing more than a self-created "hardship" which simply cannot support the variance sought. As such, the Application must be denied.

#### IV. <u>Property Restrictions Are Not Unique</u>

In addition to the above, there can be no "hardship" in the present case in light of the fact that many of the nearby homes share the same difficulties as the Property. Under Section 134-201(a)(1) of the Code an applicant must demonstrate that "special conditions and circumstances exist which are **peculiar to the land**, structure or building involved **which are not applicable to other land lands**, **structure or buildings in the same zoning**." (emphasis added)

As a result, "a prerequisite to the granting of a hardship zoning variance is the presence of an exceptional and unique hardship to the individual landowner; **unique to that parcel and not shared by other property owners in the area**." *Indialantic v. Nance*, 400 So. 2d 37, 40 (Fla. 5th DCA 1981)(emphasis added). Therefore, where an applicant's lot has a similar size, shape and topography and is subject to the same zoning requirements in the neighborhood, including the height, set-back, and landscaping, restrictions, the restrictions are common difficulties and cannot establish the unique hardship required to support the proposed variances.

Here, there is no peculiarity at all as to the size or shape of the Property. Instead, the Applicants' Deed and the underlying Plat of the Sea Streets along with the survey in the Application demonstrate the Property is rectangular and not peculiar in any way.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, there are many other homes on the Sea Streets with garages, pools and other structures in today's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nowhere in the Code is there a provision that if an improper variance can't be seen it should be granted.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> As identified in the Applicants' Warranty Deed, the legal description of their property is merely "Lots 489, 491 and 493 of Poinciana Park, 2d Addition, according to the Plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 6, Page 86, Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida." A copy of the Applicants' Deed is attached as Exhibit "C" while a copy of the Plat is attached as Exhibit "D." Both the Plat and the Survey included in the Applicants' presentation also show the Property to be rectangular, not peculiar.

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setbacks because they were built well before the present Code and zoning restrictions were in place. In each case, the lots in the area are the same general shape and size as defined by the underlying plat. As such, the limitations on the Property are the same as those shared by other lands, structures and buildings in the same zoning district and cannot be the basis for a hardship. The Present Application therefore must be denied.

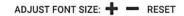
#### V. <u>Conclusion</u>

The circumstances in the Present Application simply do not factually or legally support the requisite "hardship" for a variance under the Town Code or the case law. The home and garage can reasonably continue to be used as it has been since 1921 without a bigger cabana and a home office. In the alternative, the plans can be modified to construct the desired cabana and office respecting the current 10 foot required setback. The size and configuration of the lot, the location of the structures, and the existing non-conformities of the Property were all known to the Applicants at the time of purchase, making any "desire" for a larger cabana and home office a self-imposed hardship. Finally, the Applicants' Property is not peculiar or unique, but common in the Sea Streets. As a result, the Application should be denied.

Very truly yours,

John R. Eubanks, Jr.

cc: Wayne Bergman, Director Planning, Zoning & Building Paul Castro, Zoning Manager John C. Randolph, Esq., Town Attorney Kelly Churney, Administrative Specialist Town Clerk, Town of Palm Beach



Website Search

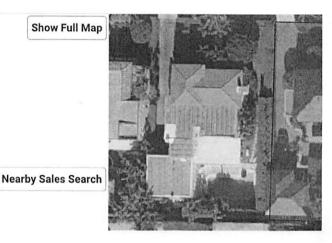




#### **Property Detail**

Location Address Municipality Parcel Control Number Subdivision Official Records Book/Page Sale Date Legal Description

146 SEASPRAY AVE PALM BEACH 50-43-43-22-07-000-4890 POINCIANA PARK 2ND ADD IN 30799 / 588 JUL-2019 POINCIANA PARK 2ND ADD LTS 489, 491 & 493



#### **Owner Information**

**Change of Address** 

Owner(s) FRIES MICHAEL T & MALONE MICHELLE R

#### Sales Information

**Sales Date** Price **OR Book/Page** Sale Type 🔍 Owner JUL-2019 \$6,200,000 30799 / 00588 WARRANTY DEED FRIES MICHAEL T & JUL-1999 \$1,150,000 11230 / 01722 WARRANTY DEED **KLING JARRETT B &** AUG-1992 \$100 07352 / 01329 🔍 QUIT CLAIM JUN-1992 \$430,000 07317 / 01678 WARRANTY DEED 07317 / 01675 JUN-1992 \$100 QUIT CLAIM

NOTE: Sales do not generally appear in the PAPA database until approximately 1 to 3 weeks after the closing date. If a recent sale does not show up in this list, please allow more time for the sale record to be processed.

Mailing Address

146 SEASPRAY AVE

PALM BEACH FL 33480 4227

#### **Exemption Information**



**Portability Calculator** 

No Exemption Information Available.

#### **Property Information**

Subarea and Sq. Footage for Building 1	Structu	Iral Element for Building 1	Sketch for Building 1	
Code Description     I       FUS Finished Upper Story     I       UOP Unfinished Open Porch     I       BAS Base Area     I       SFB Semi Finished Base Area     I       FUS Finished Upper Story     I       FUS Finished Upper Story     I       FOP Finished Open Porch     I       FGR Finished Garage     I	12. Interior Wall 2	WSF: STUCCO 1921 esc. HTG & AC FORCED AIR DUCT ELECTRIC 3 2 0 GABLE/HIP WOOD SHAKES PLASTER N/A FINE OR SOFT WOOD 2		
Number of Units       2       View Building Det         Total Square Feet*       4048         Acres       0.2109         Property Use Code ()       0100 - SINGLE FAMILY         Zoning ()       R-B - Low Density Resider         PALM BEACH )       *         May indicate living area in residential properties.       Request Structural Details Change	ntial ( 50-			

#### Appraisals ्

P = Preliminary		All values are as of	All values are as of January 1st each year		
Total Market Value	\$3,838,947	\$4,165,591	\$3,617,340	\$3,793,572	\$3,075,385
Land Value	\$2,416,181	\$2,218,661	\$2,375,000	\$2,532,842	\$2,302,584
Improvement Value	\$1,422,766	\$1,946,930	\$1,242,340	\$1,260,730	\$772,801
Tax Year	2021 P	2020	2019	2018	2017
				Show 5	year   Show 10 year

#### **Assessed and Taxable Values**

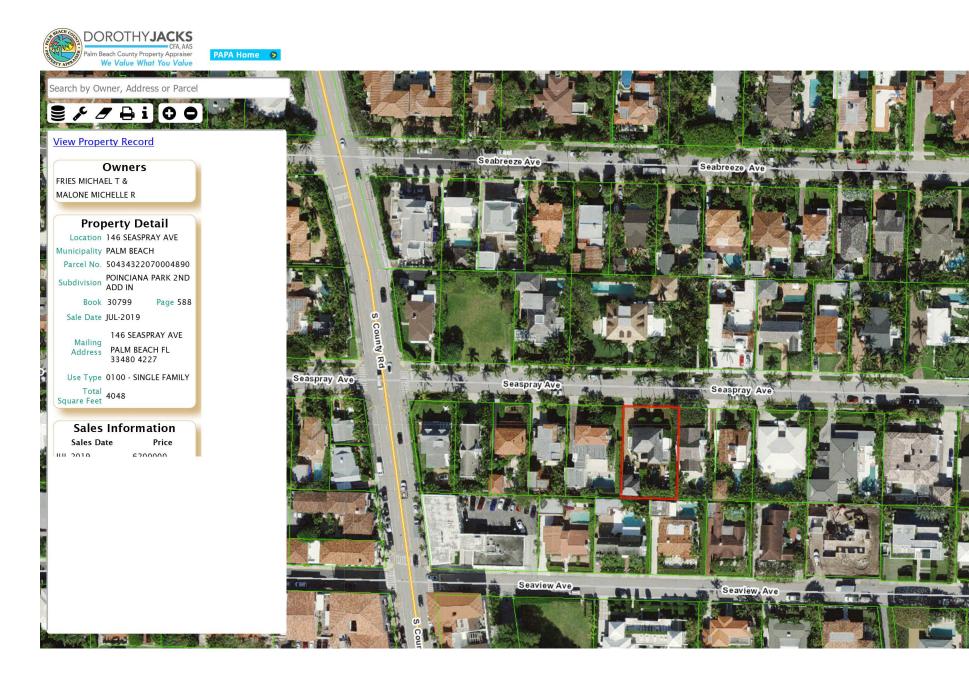
				:	Show 5 year   Show 10 year
Tax Year	2021 P	2020	2019	2018	2017
Assessed Value	\$3,838,947	\$4,165,591	\$2,290,775	\$2,248,062	\$2,201,824
Exemption Amount	\$0	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Taxable Value	\$3,838,947	\$4,165,591	\$2,240,775	\$2,198,062	\$2,151,824

#### Taxes

				Show 5 year   Show 10 ye	
Tax Year	2021 P	2020	2019	2018	2017
Ad Valorem	\$62,709	\$68,707	\$37,773	\$35,986	\$36,012
Non Ad Valorem	\$178	\$842	\$845	\$849	\$833
Total tax	\$62,887	\$69,549	\$38,618	\$36,835	\$36,845

\*Buyers take note: Taxes will change and often increase substantially when a property sells. The seller's exemption benefits will GO AWAY the year after they sell and this may result in higher taxes for a buyer. Please use the Property Tax Calculator to get a better annual tax estimate if you are purchasing this property.

Property Tax Calculator
Property Tax Detail
Tax Collector



## **EXHIBIT B**

CFN 20190286948 OR BK 30799 PG 588 RECORDED 08/05/2019 09:08:49 Palm Beach County, Florida AMT 6,200,000.00 DEED DOC 43,400.00 Sharon R. Bock CLERK & COMPTROLLER Pgs 0588-0589; (2Pgs)

Prepared by and return to: John F Flanigan, Esquire Haile, Shaw & Pfaffenberger, P.A. 660 V.S. Highway One Third Floor North Path Beach, FL 33408 561-627 (SHO) File Number: K609.001 Will Call No.:

[Space Above This Line For Recording Data]

# Warranty Deed

This Warranty Deed made this 31st day of July, 2019 between Jarrett B. Kling and Judith K. Kling, husband and wife whose post office address is 200 Laurel Lane, Haverford, PA 19041, grantor, and Michael T. Fries and Michelle R. Malone, husband and wife whose post office address is 146 Seaspray Avenue, Palm Beach, FL 33480, grantee:

(Whenever used herein the terms 'granter' and "grantee" include all the parties to this instrument and the heirs, legal representatives, and assigns of individuals, and the successors and assign of corporations, trusts and trustees)

Witnesseth, that said grantor, for and in consideration of the sum of TEN AND NO/100 DOLLARS (\$10.00) and other good and valuable considerations to said grantor in hand paid by said grantee, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, has granted, bargained, and sold to the said grantee, and grantee's heirs and assigns forever, the following described land, situate, lying and being in Palm Beach County, Florida to-wit:

Lots 489, 491 and 493, of Poinciana Park 2nd. Addition, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 6, Page 86, Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida.

**#**3∋22-07-000-4890 Parcel Identification Number: 50-43

Together with all the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining.

To Have and to Hold, the same in fee simple forever.

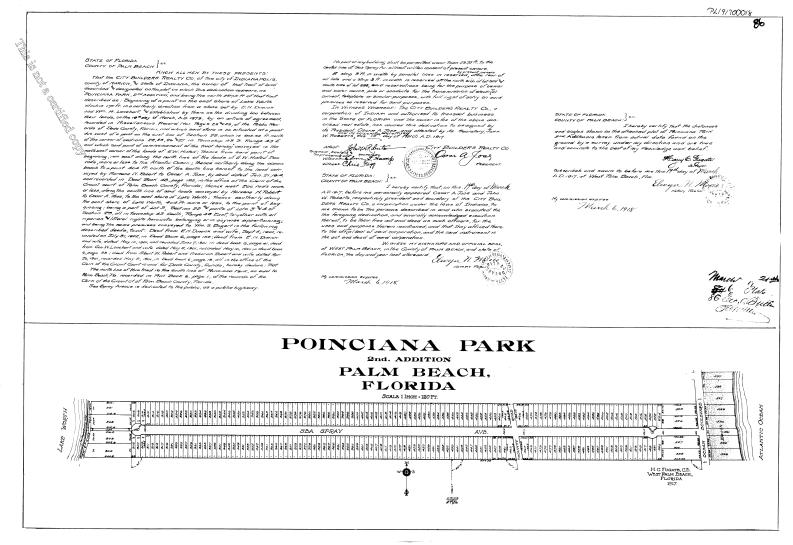
And the grantor hereby covenants with said grantee that the grantor is lawfully seized of said land in fee simple; that the grantor has good right and lawful authority to sell and convey said land; that the grantor hereby fully warrants the title to said land and will defend the same against the lawful claims of all persons whomsoever; and that said land is free of all encumbrances, except taxes accruing subsequent to December 31, 2018.

In Witness Whereof, grantor has hereunto set grantor's hand and seal the day and year first above written.

### EXHIBIT C

CFN 20190286948 BOOK 30799 PAGE 589 2 OF 2

:	Signed, sealed and delivered in our presence:	1 10
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	Witness Olame: <u>Reiserra Secur</u>	
	WA NO NO NO	Tuli (QC)
1	Witness Name	Judith K. Kling (Seal)
(		
	Witness Name: 2008 (Ca Sed D	
	(P)	
	State of Florida County of Palm Beach	
	The foregoing instrument was prepowledged before t	me this <u>He</u> day of July, 2019 by Jarrett B. Kling and Judith K.
	Kling, who [] are personally known or [X] have produ	luced a driver's license as identification.
		- May 10
	[N ptars and a star and a star	Notary Putolic
	EXPIRES: April 24, 2022 Bonded Thru Notary Public Undownillers	Printed Name: 1/40/00/00
		My Commission Expires:



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# EXHIBIT D