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# CITY NATIONAL BANK BUILDING

121 S.E. 1<sup>st</sup> STREET

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## Designation Report



City of Miami



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**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

Historic Name:

City National Bank Building

Current Name:

Langford Building

Location:

121 S.E. 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Miami, Florida 33131

Present Owner:

Norman S. Braslow  
121 S.E. 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Suite 802  
Miami, Florida 33131

Present Use:

Commercial

Present Zoning District:

CBD-1/9

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0112-010-1160

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

The easterly 40 feet of Lot 13 and the westerly 20 feet of Lot 14 of Block 121 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH (PB B-41)

HC Zoning Classification:

Historic Site

# CITY NATIONAL BANK BUILDING

121 S.E. 1 STREET



  
location



  
site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Specific Dates:

1925

### Architects:

Hampton and Ehmann

### Statement of Significance:

The City National Bank Building is significant because its exterior represents an excellent example of the Commercial style of architecture in downtown Miami. The appearance of the building's exterior also contains elements of the Neo-Classical mode and characterizes a popular architectural trend of the 1920s in South Florida. The City National Bank Building is architecturally noteworthy as a unique record of early twentieth century commercial design in Miami as evidenced through the building's façade composition, the open loggia, and the classically-inspired decorative ornamentation. The building is historically significant for its associations with the commercial development of Miami at the height of the Boom.

The appearance of the City National Bank Building represents an effort by its designers to provide a distinctive commercial image. The façade of the building serves as a visual reminder of Miami's Boom years, when architects in the recently established metropolis were seeking a design identity through the utilization of easily recognizable architectural styles.

The visual composition of the City National Bank Building is also significant because it exemplifies the work of Hampton and Ehmann in Miami. The building's scale and articulation of the façade make it one of the most imposing examples of the firm's designs in Miami. Martin Luther Hampton and E.A. Ehmann executed a number of designs in downtown Miami throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Most of the firm's work was executed in a "Spanish style" such as the Mediterranean Revival or the Masonry Vernacular. The architecture of the City National Bank Building represents the diversity of styles and building types that the architectural firm was capable of handling.

The original owner of the building was the Miami Bank and Trust Company which seems to have collapsed with the Bust of 1926. As the building was nearing completion, it was taken over by the J.C. Penney City National Bank and Trust Company and named the "City National Bank Building." In 1930, after the failure of the J.C. Penney City National Bank and Trust Company, the building was acquired by the Florida National Bank and was known by that name until that

institution moved into the Alfred I. duPont Building. The building's name was then changed to the Langford Building after the man who built it.

The construction of the building marks one of the earliest instances when the financing of a major building was undertaken by out-of-state capital. In this case, the Mississippi Valley Trust Company of St. Louis made a loan of \$600,000 on the property in 1925.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

The City National Bank Building is historically significant for its associations with the commercial growth that characterized Miami during the Boom years of the early 1920s.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The City National Bank Building is an excellent example of the Commercial style of architecture in downtown Miami.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

The City National Bank Building exemplifies the work of Hampton and Ehmann, a prominent architectural firm in Miami.

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The building is particularly noteworthy for its façade composition, open loggia, and classically-inspired decorative ornamentation.

### III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### Description of the Building:

The City National Bank Building is a rectangular 11-story structure executed in the Commercial style of architecture and embellished with features derived from the Neo-Classical architectural mode. Construction of the building began in 1925 according to plans supplied by the architectural firm of Hampton and Ehmann. The building's structural system is comprised of a reinforced concrete frame sitting atop a concrete foundation. The exterior walls of the building are clad in stucco, while applied decorative ornament appears to be made of cast stone. The roofline of the building is characterized by a raised parapet wall, embellished with massive brackets and a tall cornice, spanning the principal elevation of the building. The parapet wall serves to conceal a flat roof.

Fronting to the south, the building's façade follows the standard pattern for high-rise construction: a massive base, an unadorned shaft, and an articulated roofline. The base of the building is comprised of flat pilasters, which rise three stories in height and are capped with stylized capitals. These pilasters sit atop flat pedestals which rise to about half the height of the first story. The building's principal elevation spans five bays across the front, and the pilasters serve to flank the middle three bays. The pilasters delineate arched openings, accented with keystones, that lead into an open loggia before providing access to the building. An entablature rising the entire height of the third story encompasses the windows of the third story as well as a shallow projecting cornice found between the third and fourth stories.

The shaft of the building is characterized by a simple fenestration pattern. Slightly paired windows are found within the middle three bays and single window openings are found within the end bays. A variety of windows are found on the building's exterior walls, although it appears that the original windows were of the casement type with metal frames. A number of these windows are still found within certain openings on the building's elevations. Fixed glass and awning-type windows comprise the most prevalent window types found on the building today.

The roofline of the building is characterized by an entablature that rises the full height of the top story and is capped by a massive projecting cornice running parallel to the street. The fenestration pattern remains the same through the top story, but between the window openings are found stylized ornamental cartouches.

The main entrance to the building is found at the center of the loggia directly behind the central arched opening. The entrance opening is characterized by decorative bands of masonry containing stylized classical ornamentation. The original entrance doors have been replaced with the present aluminum frame and glass doors.

Description of Site:

The City National Bank Building is located on the north side of S.E. 1<sup>st</sup> Street between S.E. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenues. The building occupies the entire site.



City National Bank Building  
121 S.E. 1 Street



City National Bank Building  
121 S.E. 1 Street

#### IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

##### Present Trends and Conditions:

The City National Bank Building has recently been sold, and the new owner is in the process of rehabilitating the structure. The owner is sympathetic to the historic character of the building.

The City National Bank Building was identified in the Downtown Miami Development of Regional Impact (DRI) as a historic site. The building has also been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

##### Conservation Objectives:

The continued preservation of this building should remain a high priority for the new owner. Any future changes should respect the building's architectural character.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

V. **HC ZONING ELEMENTS**

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include the entire tract of land on which the building is located.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

None