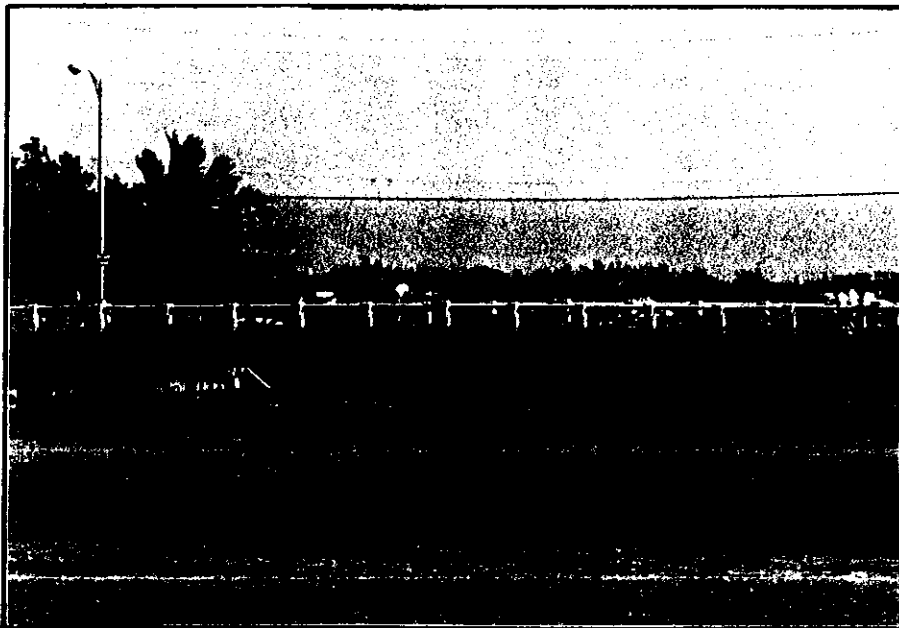

VENETIAN CAUSEWAY

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
THE VENETIAN CAUSEWAY
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Maria T. Temkin 10-1-89
Consultant Date

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton _____ Date
Historic Preservation Planner

Accepted by _____ Date
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. _____

Date _____

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Venetian Causeway

Current Name:

Venetian Causeway

Location:

The entire length of the Venetian Causeway right-of-way within the City of Miami from a point approximately 20 feet west of the Dade County Bulkhead Line eastward to the City Limits and including all bridges and the rights-of-way of North and South Venetian Way.

Present Owner:

Metropolitan Dade County

Present Use:

County Road

Present Zoning District:

RG-2/5, RS-2/2

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

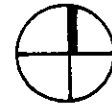
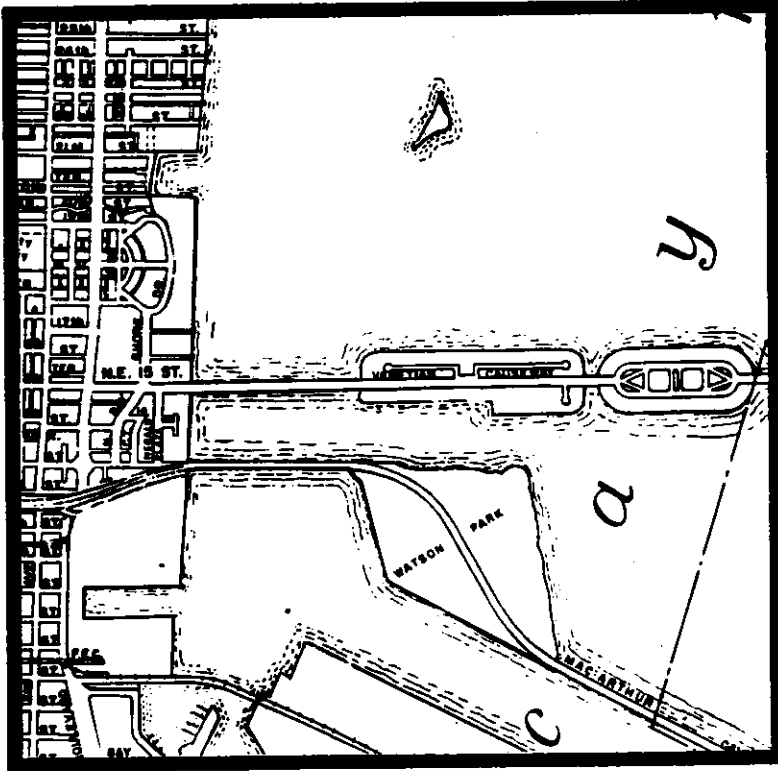
Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

The entire length of the Venetian Causeway right-of-way within the City of Miami from a point approximately 20 feet west of the Dade County Bulkhead Line eastward to the City Limits and including all bridges and the rights-of-way of North and South Venetian Way.

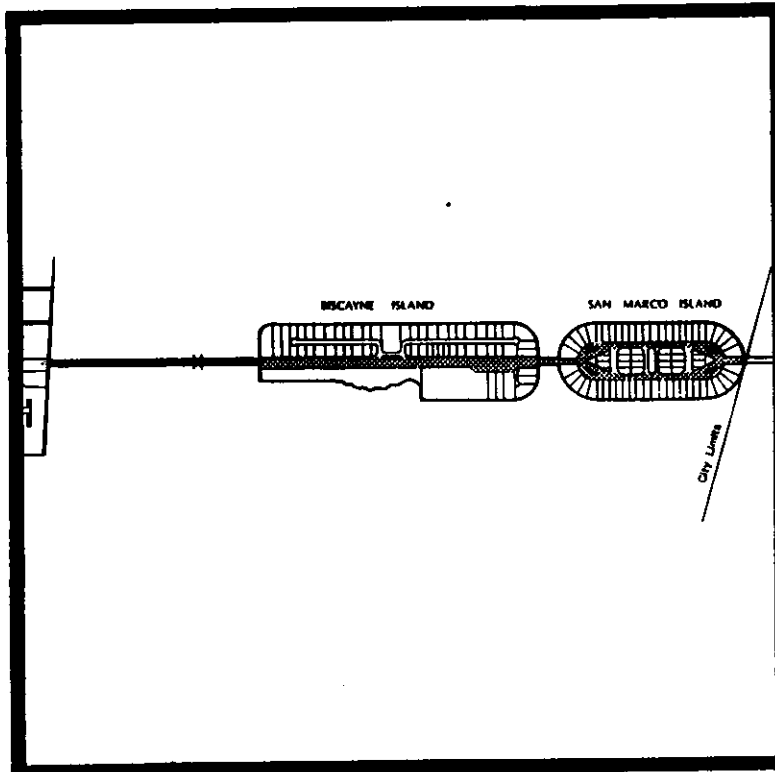
HC Zoning Classification:

Historic Site

VENETIAN CAUSEWAY



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Date:

1926

Builder/Architect:

Harvey Stanley, Engineer
Raymond Concrete Pile Company of New York, Contractor
James M. Thompson, Superintendent

Statement of Significance:

The Venetian Causeway, the oldest causeway in its original form in Dade County, is significant in the history of community planning and development in Miami. Designed and constructed as an essential element of the planned community of the Venetian Islands, the Venetian Causeway was the final phase of the development of these island communities. The causeway, which links Miami with the island of Miami Beach, includes a series of twelve spans, two of which are located in the City of Miami. The design of its railings and its prominent location in Biscayne Bay have made the Venetian Causeway an important visual feature in northeast Miami.

The Venetian Causeway came into existence as a result of the Florida Land Boom of the 1920's. During this period, a tremendous amount of building activity was taking place in the Miami area, and residential subdivisions were springing up at an unprecedented rate. The most desirable land on which to build was the waterfront. "Island building" became a popular way of increasing the amount of waterfront property. Through the dredging and filling of bay bottom, new and valuable real estate was created.

The Bay Biscayne Improvement Company was responsible for the construction of the Venetian Islands and the Venetian Causeway. The company's officers were Josiah F. Chaille, President; F.C.B. Le Gro, Vice President; and Hugh M. Anderson, Secretary-Treasurer. Chaille and Anderson had previously been associated, in 1917, in the development of the Wynwood Park subdivision. Le Gro was responsible for the opening of the Highland Park subdivision in 1910. In addition, in 1916 Le Gro had been affiliated with John S. Collins in the development of Belle Isle, the easternmost island on the Venetian Causeway. Marshall Price and Colonel Frank B. Shutts, Directors of the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company, were both well-known attorneys. Shutts was also the publisher of The Miami Herald.

Through the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company, these five prominent Miamians planned to create a residential development out of bay bottom.

They envisioned the creation of a chain of islands across Biscayne Bay. The chosen location for their island-building venture was alongside the Collins Bridge. The company's principals chose the name "Venetian Islands" for their planned island community. Their wish was that the project be associated with the City of Venice, Italy, a community of "villas" of Italian-inspired architecture within a landscape of water.

The company resolved to approach its development project in phases. Four islands were planned and were to be constructed one at a time, beginning west of the existing island of Belle Isle. Preparations for the purchase of the desired property were undertaken. John S. Collins, Miami Beach pioneer and owner of the Collins Bridge, was approached regarding the sale of the bridge. The Collins Bridge, a wooden structure thought to be the longest wooden bridge in the world, had been completed in 1913 and was an essential part of the development plans of the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company. The company realized that it would be necessary to replace the deteriorating bridge upon completion of the islands. However, access to the islands during the initial development period would be achieved via the old bridge.

Plans proceeded smoothly. The Bay Biscayne Improvement Company obtained all necessary permits and completed the purchase of the Collins Bridge. Island building began immediately. The Venetian Islands, bearing Italian names, were platted as follows: Rivo Alto in February 1922; Di Lido in January 1923; and San Marino and San Marco in June 1923. Whitney C. Bliss, the engineer of record, was responsible for preparing the layout of the islands.

The Venetian Islands would contain over 450 residential lots. Two sales offices were opened to market the development. One office was located in the heart of downtown Miami, while the second was placed at the Miami side of the Collins Bridge. Lots, still underwater, were sold from the plats. Sales contracts specified that a purchaser would receive a lot on an island that had been dredged, filled, and bulkheaded by a sea wall of one to three feet thickness. The contract also stipulated that the island would be equipped with roadways, sidewalks, utilities, and other amenities. Furthermore, the purchase agreement guaranteed that the Collins Bridge would be replaced. A toll would be charged for usage of the new access road; however, the toll would be waived for Venetian Island residents.

The construction of the Venetian Islands and the sale of the lots progressed swiftly. In 1924, the Bay Biscayne Improvement Company began drawing up plans for the replacement of the Collins Bridge. The engineer in charge of submitting plans for a new access road was Harvey Stanley. Several designs for the roadway were presented. The one that was chosen was estimated to cost two million dollars. Work began on the construction of the Venetian Causeway, which was to be made of concrete, in February 1925. The contractor was the Raymond Concrete Pile Company of New York. James M. Thompson served as superintendent.

The completion of the Venetian Causeway was scheduled to take place near the end of 1925. However, an embargo on the shipment of building supplies delayed this date. On February 28, 1926, a formal dedication

took place. The islands and causeway were considered engineering feats of both beauty and practicality.

Biscayne Island, the westernmost island on the Venetian Causeway, was not part of the original Venetian Islands development. Biscayne Island was platted in December 1936. The island was developed by the Biscayne Island Corporation whose president was Lucy C.T. Magraw and whose secretary was Albert R. Smith. The engineer in charge of the layout of the island was William B. Garris, a principal in the firm of Watson and Garris Civil Engineers, Inc.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Venetian Causeway is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

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

The Venetian Causeway came into existence as a result of the Florida Land Boom of 1920's. The causeway was an essential element in the planning and development of the community of the Venetian Islands.

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 bridges which make up the Venetian Causeway feature low, open railings in a geometric design which provide a constant and continuous view of Biscayne Bay. The bridges were considered engineering feats of both beauty and practicability.

9. Because of its prominence or spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, is an easily identifiable visual feature of a neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.

The Venetian Causeway's prominent location in Biscayne Bay has made it an important visual feature in northeast Miami.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Structure:

The Venetian Causeway, transversing Biscayne Bay, links the cities of Miami and Miami Beach through a series of man-made islands known as the Venetian Islands. Located just north of downtown Miami at N.E. 15th Street, the two-and-one-half mile causeway consists of twelve reinforced concrete bridges, including two bascule spans, connected by a two lane road. The main entrance to the causeway is located at the western end on the Miami side and is graced by simple octagonal towers. All of the bridges along the causeway feature low, open, geometrically designed railings. The Venetian Causeway cuts across six islands, and the bridges occur intermittently between the islands. The islands, from west to east, are named Biscayne, San Marco, San Marino, Di Lido, Rivo Alto, and Belle Isle. The Venetian Causeway was completed in 1926, shortly after the four central islands were created from material dredged from the bay bottom for a residential development. The area from the eastern edge of San Marco Island to the causeway's entrance at N.E. 15th Street lies within the City of Miami. The eastern portion of the causeway beyond San Marco Island is under City of Miami Beach jurisdiction.

The following contemporary description of the Venetian Causeway is found in the Spears/Harris Papers Manuscript, c. 1927:

The causeway consisted of a combination of viaducts and fill. There were eighteen viaduct units, running a total of 4,200 linear feet, which were arranged to take account of tidal flow. The longest, on the Miami side, ran 1,340 linear feet. The project featured two modern bascule-type draw bridges, one at each side of the bay, which allowed for twelve-foot clearances when closed. Fills ran an additional 4,005 linear feet, fills and viaducts totalling 8,205 linear feet. Fill for both causeway and islands came to 3,000,000 cubic yards.

The roadway was eighty feet wide, curb-to-curb, with four-foot sidewalks on both sides. The road surface on the fill was laid over two feet of boulders which, in turn, lay over a mat built from planks from the old wooden bridge. 278 white way street lights illuminated the roadway.

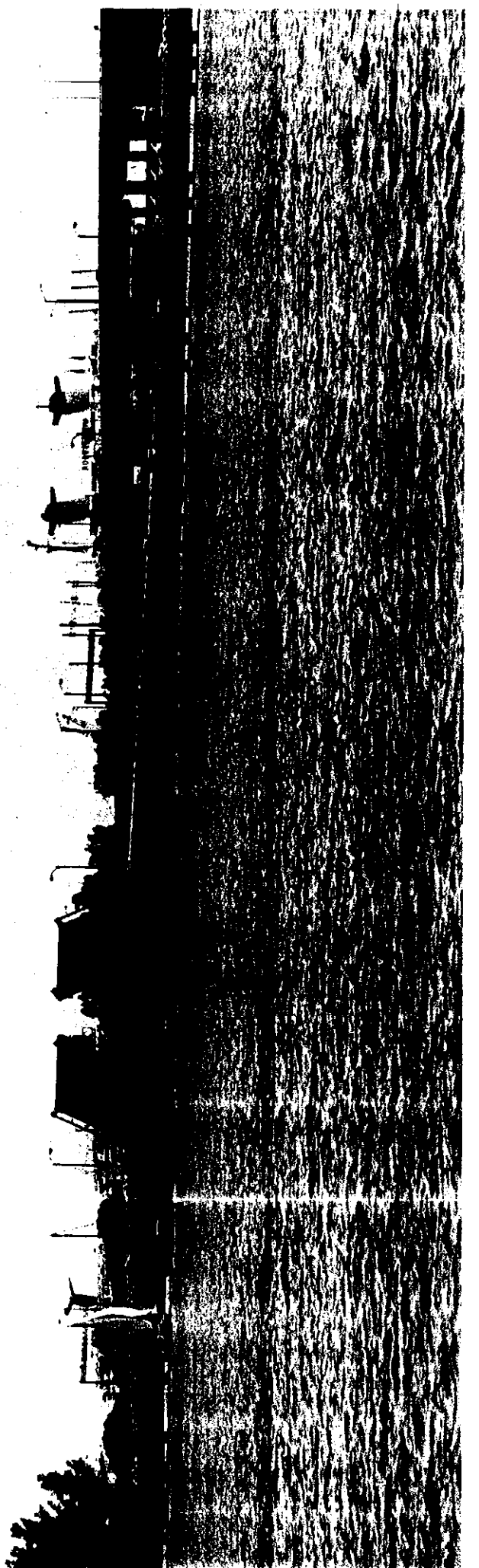
84,000 linear feet of concrete piling were featured in the project. 25,000 barrels of cement and 30,000 pounds of steel were required for the piers and abutments. The abutments were of the arch-girder type.

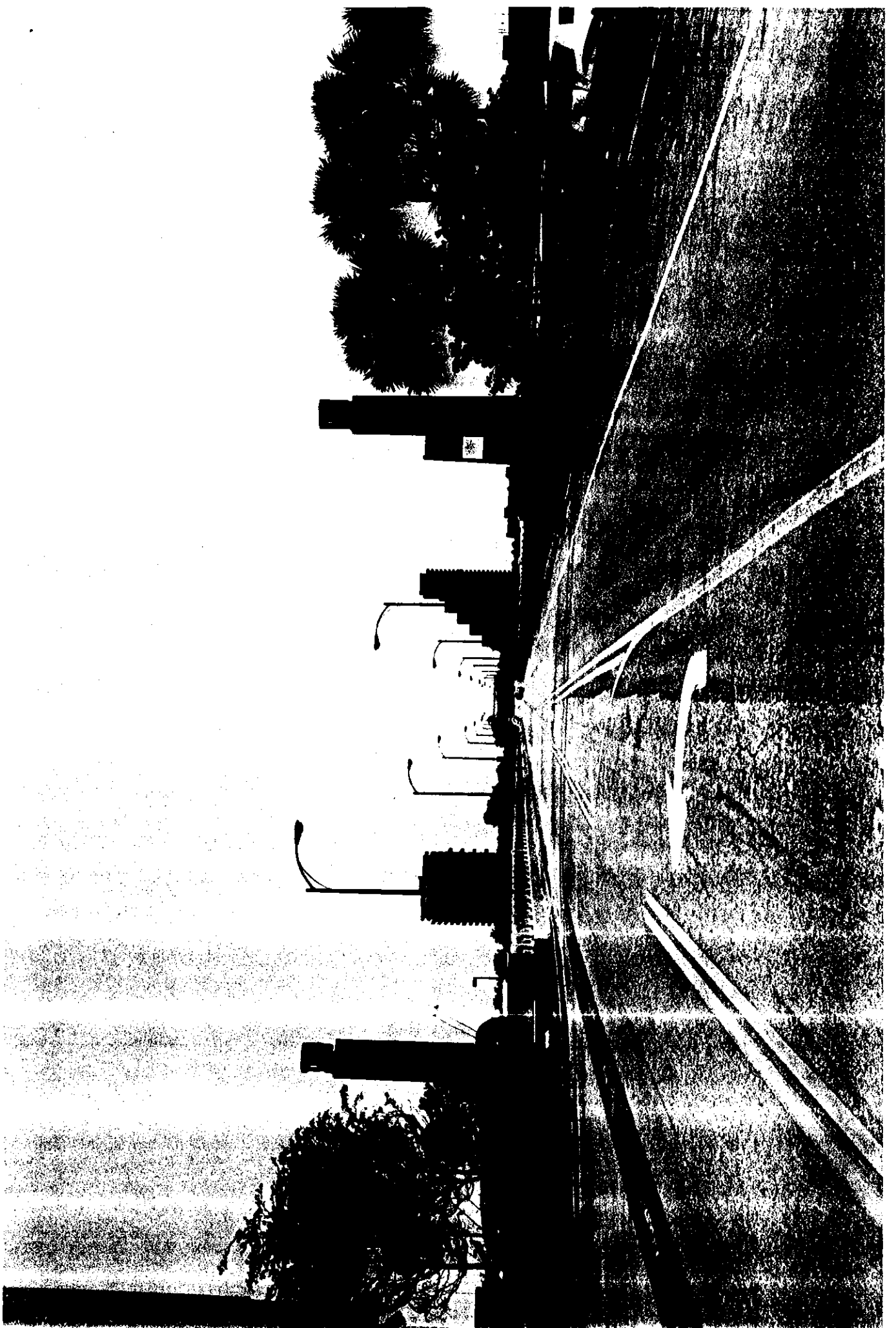
Perhaps the most striking feature of the bridges is the guardrail design. The pierced, ornamental design features central square units with radiating diagonals that form an "X" pattern, thus allowing a view of the bay from all bridges. Other than the two masonry light towers

at the Miami entrance to the causeway, no original street light fixtures remain.

Two of the bridges along the Venetian Causeway are in the City of Miami. Bridge 1, which spans the Intracoastal Waterway and connects the Miami mainland with Biscayne Island, is the longest bridge at approximately 0.4 miles. The western end of the bridge has two tapering, octagonal entrance towers topped by lights. These concrete towers are reminiscent of miniature lighthouses. In relief on the towers are the words "Short Way" on the north tower, and "Venetian Way" on the south tower. At the center of the bridge is a pair of steel bascule drawbridges. This bridge has a clearance above the mean high water of ten to twelve feet. Inscribed in bas relief on the north tower, and on the south tower, is a small, hipped roof, wood frame maintenance shed in a rectangular plan. Off to the east of the viaduct is a modern toll booth stretching the full width of the road. At the southeast end of the viaduct is a modest, utilitarian design and materials, it is a considerably shorter bridge. To the east is a modern toll booth stretching the full width of the road. At the southeast end of the viaduct is a modest, utilitarian design and materials, it is a considerably shorter bridge. To the east is a modern toll booth stretching the full width of the road.

Island. Of the same span as Bridge 1,







IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Venetian Causeway is a County-owned right-of-way and is one of four causeways connecting the cities of Miami and Miami Beach. Unlike the other three, the Venetian Causeway is only two lanes in width, has a lower speed limit, and is controlled by a toll booth. The causeway is also more susceptible to bridge openings because of the low rise of the bridge, which spans the Intracoastal Waterway. The load carrying capacity of the bridges is not adequate to carry standard Metro buses.

While the MacArthur and Julia Tuttle Causeways are the primary access highways to the southern half of Miami Beach, the Venetian Causeway's main function is a residential collector street serving the Venetian Islands.

Conservation Objectives:

Although roadway and bridge improvements are desirable for safety reasons, any changes should respect both the historic and residential character of the Venetian Causeway. Because the MacArthur and Julia Tuttle Causeways provide sufficient access and capacity to Miami Beach, it is not necessary to expand the Venetian Causeway. It should continue to perform its primary function as a distributor to the Islands, not a through road.

Any proposed safety improvements to the bridges should be carefully evaluated for the effect on their historic and aesthetic character. The present design of the guardrails should be maintained.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by applying an HC-1 zoning overlay district, which would require 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 east-west right-of-way of the Venetian Causeway within the City of Miami, specifically the two bridges and the roadway (North and South Venetian Way) connecting these spans.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All features of the causeway shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

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