



CITY OF VENICE

FLORIDA

401 W. Venice Avenue • Venice, Florida 34285

Office: (941) 882-7398 • Fax: (941) 480-3031

elavallee@venicegov.com
www.venicegov.com

Edward F. Lavallee
City Manager

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

November 6, 2019

Mr. Jonathan R. Lewis, County Administrator
Sarasota County
1660 Ringling Boulevard, 2nd Floor
Sarasota, FL 34236

Dear Mr. Lewis

The City of Venice Historic Preservation Board has identified a local historic site worthy of preservation. The site is the former home of Walter Farley, a noted author. His writing studio is located in Venice and is part of an estate available for acquisition.

Please see the attached letter that describes a proposal to recreate a portion of the writer's studio in the Venice Library. In that regard, I have been asked if the County would entertain a discussion about the possibility of using a small section of the library for that purpose.

Would you please advise if you consider this request worthy of discussion and, if so, please indicate how the Historic Preservation Board might proceed to discuss this idea with appropriate County officials. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Edward F. Lavallee, City Manager
City of Venice

EFL/jg

Attachment

MEMORANDUM

To: Ed Lavallee, City Manager

From: Harry Klinkhamer, Historical Resources Manager

Date: November 5, 2019

Re: Recreation of Farley Studio in Library

At the September 20, 2019 Historic Preservation Board meeting, the board requested the city manager to contact the county manager regarding the possibility of recreating the studio of Walter Farley at the William H. Jervy, Jr. Venice Public Library.

The Farley home is currently on the market and the Historic Preservation Board is researching what options might be available to save the history of Walter Farley in Venice. One such option is recreating the interior space of the studio at the library and filling it with its contents. They are intact from when he last used it. The current studio is approximately 216 square feet.

What a recreation would entail would be negotiating with the owners for the transfer of the contents in the studio from their ownership to the county's ownership—most likely to Sarasota County Historical Resources. Then it would be up to the county to recreate what the interior of the studio looked like within the library and stage the contents within that space.

MEMORANDUM

To: Ed Lavallee, City Manager

From: Harry Klinkhamer, Historical Resources Manager

Date: August 20, 2019

Re: Walter Farley Property

BACKGROUND:

Walter Farley was a prolific and successful writer. His series of books based upon *The Black Stallion* included 21 titles published between the years 1941-1989. More than 12 million copies of his books have sold in 14 different countries. He and his wife Rosemary were one of the founders of the Friends of the Venice Library. He was a strong supporter of children's literacy and children's writing.

The Farley's had their home built between 1953-1956. They hired architect Ralph Twitchell to design the home. Twitchell is considered the father of the "Sarasota School of Architecture" that created a unique style between the 1940s and 1960s. He incorporated many elements of that style in the house, with Ocala Bricks, Terrazzo Floors, floor-to-ceiling windows, exposed beams, and access to nature. The project included a separate studio attached to a carport that Farley used to write many of the *Black Stallion* books. Jack West would later be hired to design an expansion of the house. This would add more bedrooms and living space to the house. West was also a founding member of the Sarasota School of Architecture.

This property is eligible to be placed on the local register of historic places based upon the following criteria in Chapter 86-28:

- (c)(2)a.1 Are associated with distinctive elements of cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, the city, the state or the nation;
- (c)(2)a.2 Are associated with the lives of persons significant in past history; and
- (c)(2)a.3 Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style or method of construction or work of a master; or possess high artistic value; or represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

This property is eligible to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places based upon the following criteria:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or

appropriate place to put the studio. The Cultural Campus has been deemed a logical destination—especially with the library on the campus. In trying to find a suitable location on the campus, it will be important to factor in the impact on parking, green space, and stormwater. In addition, there is also discussion of a museum/storage facility for Old Betsy possibly going on the campus that needs to be considered. And finally, returning back to James Clinch’s concerns about upkeep and operation, there is the challenge of sustainability once it is here. Who is going to take care of it? Operate it? And how?

OPTION 2

Option 2 proposes recreating the studio inside the William H. Jervey, Jr. Venice Public Library.

Value -- There is no doubt that the connection of Walter Farley to the City of Venice is one worth preserving and telling. Farley has had an international impact with his writing. The ability to recreate the interior of the studio within the library would enhance the value of the literary landmark there while not suggesting any false depiction of the real studio that a relocation would do. However, the value of the work of Twitchell and West would be lost. Even if the interior walls were recreated, it would be done more so to set the feel for where Farley worked rather than the accomplishments of these architects. But the recreated studio could be a place to collect, preserve, and display original items from Farley that are currently in the studio.

Cost -- Recreating the studio in the library would mean that the responsibility for costs to build the replica studio, acquire and preserve any artifacts, and long-term upkeep and maintenance would fall to the Sarasota County Department of Libraries and Historical Resources.

Practicality -- Acquiring the items in the Farley studio will be much less difficult than trying to move the whole building onto the campus. There would need to be enough space at the library to recreate the studio and then decide how to utilize it in programming. These responsibilities would fall to the Sarasota County Department of Libraries and Historical Resources.

OPTION 3

Option 3 proposes repurposing the Walter Farley property as a writer’s retreat/literary center.

Value -- There is no doubt that the connection of Walter Farley, Ralph Twitchell, and Jack West to the City of Venice is one worth preserving and telling. Farley has had an international impact with his writing and Twitchell and West are both known nationally for their architectural accomplishments. Although there was no option 3 proposed at the historic preservation board meeting, this is a rough idea that I have been thinking about for the site. The National Trust for Historic Preservation strongly recommends that saving a place is just the beginning; a building needs to have a purpose. One way to save the Farley home would be to have an entity acquire, restore, and repurpose the property. Walter Farley was an ardent proponent of children and individuals reaching their dreams through writing and having the proper skills to learn from reading. Having a small, secluded facility that supports that vision could be another way that the City of Venice can tout itself as a unique place. There would be the added value of showing and knowing how a community came together to save an historic place and put it to good use.

Cost -- The cost to the city would come from primarily two areas. First would be staff time involved to help organize several groups to meet and brainstorm a more detailed solution for repurposing the