



**Robbins Design Studio, P.A.**  
**AA26003378**  
40 East Adams Street, Ste. 04  
Jacksonville, FL 32202  
Ph: 904-662-9994

August 13, 2020

Bureau of Historic Preservation, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
Attn: Architectural Preservation Section  
500 South Bronough Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250  
Ph: 850-245-6333

**Re: Accessibility Waiver for the Porter Mansion, Jacksonville, FL**

To Whom It May Concern,

We are seeking a vertical accessibility waiver for the Porter Mansion, located at 510 N. Julia Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202. The Porter Mansion was constructed in 1902 and was designed by Henry John Klutho, and was added to the National Register for Historic Places on May 13, 1976. (See Exhibit A.) *"The building is still the finest of the few remaining residences built in downtown after the Great Fire of 1901, and is one of Klutho's best Classical designs...Initially the house featured an ornate one-story veranda on three sides of the house. This colonnaded veranda was removed when the house was purchased in 1925 by the first Christian Church, which moved Porter's home around the corner to its present location."*<sup>1</sup> The building was renovated in 1981 per NPS Guidelines by the previous owner, who retained ownership and occupancy until 2017. The renovation completed in 1981 predated the American with Disabilities Act and Florida Accessibility Codes.

The Building has the following accessibility deficiencies:

1. Neither the primary entry on the east façade or the secondary entry on the south façade are ada compliant. There is an approximately 5'-0" height differential between the grade plane and the entry doors. (See Photos 1 through 4)
2. The building does not have an elevator.
3. Interior stairs from levels 1 to the attic are historically decorative and do not provide appropriate clearances for a chair lift. (see Photos 5-8)
4. While there are restrooms on all 4 floors, none of the restrooms are ada compliant (see Photos 9-16)

Each of the items outlined above were evaluated and analyzed for bringing the building up to current accessibility requirements:

1. Access to the Main Floor/Level 1: Two different alternatives were designed in order to achieve accessibility for entry in to the building in consideration of the 5'-0" height differential from grade to entry level.

Option 1 was to provide an accessible ramp on the north façade (see Photos 17 & 18) to reopen

1. Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage, Landmarks for the Future, Wayne W. Wood, 1989.



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existing double doors. This also required a new porch and canopy covering for water intrusion and visual integration with the façade. This was undesirable due to detracting from the front primary entry of the building and too large and excessive, in addition to being cost prohibitive. (See Drawing Exhibit C - Porter Concept Design Option 01). The Owner received multiple bids for the scope of work and the estimated cost of construction for option 01 was approximately \$1,000,000.00. This cost included the addition of an interior elevator to access the basement, level 1, and level 2, as described in item 2 below.

Option 2 – is the scope of work being proposed for the renovation. This option is to provide an ada lift at the existing exterior stair on the South Façade. (See Photo 3 for location and Exhibit D Porter Concept Design Option 2). By reworking the existing exterior stair access, we can provide lift access to both the first floor and the basement level, providing accessibility to two levels. Proposed occupancy for the building is a single tenant in the lower level, and a single tenant to occupy levels 1, 2, and 3/attic. Therefore, this would provide accessibility to at least one floor for each separate tenant. Door hardware on the south entry will also be replaced with ada compliant hardware, allowing the primary front entrance to remain the historic hardware. (See Photo 19.) Also, the existing stair handrail is not code compliant and this will also be replaced as part of the rework of the south entry to comply with current code standards. Estimated cost for Option 2 Scope of work is approximately \$340,000.00. This is the least intrusive option to the aesthetic of the original building, in addition to providing cost savings.

2. The addition of an elevator to the building to provide access to all floors was evaluated and determined that it would be detrimental to the layout of the building and cost prohibitive. In addition, the attic floor plate is a smaller footprint than the floors below, so this greatly impacted the available locations for a proposed new elevator. (See Drawing Exhibit B - Porter Concept Design Option 01). With the smaller footprint of the attic floor, the only location that would be structurally available, would only allow the elevator to access the basement, level 1, and level 2. It would not be able to extend up to level 3, and additionally, if the elevator was extended to level 2, the elevator overrun would extend into the floor area of the attic space, creating a raised platform, which is undesirable from a future tenant occupancy standpoint. The addition of an exterior elevator was discussed; however, this option was not pursued for aesthetic reasons. With the attic footprint being smaller than the floors below, the exterior walls do not align, therefore there would be an addition to the attic level in order to accommodate elevator access. This would be a significant change to the roofline and exterior elevations that would be detrimental to the character of the building, therefore this option was not pursued.
3. There are two interior decorative stairways – the primary grand staircase that connects levels 1 and 2, and the servant’s stairwell that connects levels 1, 2, and the attic. (See photos 5-8.) There also is an existing staircase that was added in the 1981 renovation that connected level 1 to the basement internally of the building. The addition of a wall mounted stairwell lift to the grand staircase would be detrimental to the historic character of the stair. In addition, the stairwell has 3 separate landings, where the stairs change direction, therefore this impedes the ability to add a wall lift. Additionally, the addition of wall lifts to the secondary internal stair would impede usage of the stair for egress, as it is already a minimal width. The stair also has multiple switch backs and the landings are not of a size to accommodate a wall lift. The stair that was added



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internally in 1981 to connect the first floor with the basement is proposed to be removed as part of this renovation. (See photo 20.) With the two separate tenant occupancies proposed for the basement vs. Levels 1, 2, and attic, this allows for separation of usages, and alleviates security concerns between tenants. A new entry to the basement is proposed on the south façade which will accommodate the need for a secondary entry/exit for the basement floor.

4. As previously discussed, while the building has restrooms on every floor, none of these restrooms are currently code compliant. Existing restrooms are currently small and contain steps within the floor plan to access toilet stalls. The renovation proposed (Concept Design Option 2) will provide accessible restrooms and water coolers on the first floor. Accessible restrooms on the basement level will be added as part of a future tenant build-out. Restrooms on level 2 will be renovated to provide accommodations for both male and female occupants as currently there is only a male restroom on this floor. The existing male and female restrooms on the attic floor will be updated with new finishes.

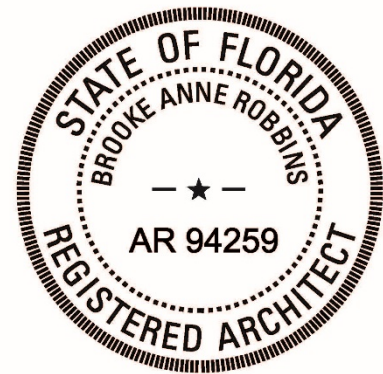
In summary, we are seeking a vertical accessibility waiver for level 2 and the attic level. We are providing vertical accessibility via an exterior lift to the basement and levels 1. Additional restrooms on the first floor are being upgraded to comply with accessibility standards and the basement level restrooms will also be ada compliant when added in a future tenant improvement package. Providing accessibility to level 2 and the attic floor would be detrimental to the historic character of the building as outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration and please let me know if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,  
Robbins Design Studio, P.A.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brooke Robbins", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brooke A. Robbins, AIA  
Principal Architect & Interior Designer  
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Note:  
Attached Exhibits:

- Exhibit A – National Register for Historic Places Documentation
- Exhibit B – Photo Documentation
- Exhibit C – Concept Design Drawings – Option 1
- Exhibit D – Concept Design Drawings – Option 2