

# D/DRC Case

**1501 Lady Street**  
**City Center Design/Development District**  
TMS: 11402-12-14

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**DESIGN/DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMISSION**  
**DESIGN REVIEW DISTRICT**  
**CONSENT AGENDA**  
**EVALUATION SHEET**  
**Case # 2**

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**ADDRESS:** 1501 Lady Street, Seibels Bruce Building

**APPLICANT:** Robert Lewis, agent

**TAX MAP REFERENCE:** TMS#11402-12-14(partial)

**USE OF PROPERTY:** Office

**REVIEW DISTRICT:** City Center Design Development Area

**NATURE OF REQUEST:** Request recommendation for Group II Landmark designation

**FINDINGS/COMMENTS:**

This is a 1950 four-story office building designed by local architectural firm Lafaye, Fair & Lafaye, for the Carolina Life Insurance company, featuring a smooth stone panel exterior and central entry on an angled façade, prominently displayed at the intersection of Bull and Lady Streets. This has long been the offices of the Seibels Bruce Company. A 1977 addition carries on many of the exterior details of the original building, but is not eligible for landmark designation due to its age and characteristics. The applicants are seeking landmark designation for the original 1950 building. This building retains a high degree of integrity inside and out; original wood walls, marble flooring in the lobby, Art Deco vent covers, light fixtures and original nameplates for offices numbers, etc. evoke the mid-century origins of the structure. The exterior's stone panels and metal windows, as well as an Art Deco motif in the transom above the main entry, in the door surround and in the steps to the entry are all intact.

**PERTINENT SECTIONS FROM GUIDELINES**

*Section 17-691(c)*

*Group II consists of structures or sites which constitute a delineation of Columbia's material visual history to a lesser degree than those of Group I; they evidence one or more of the following criteria for selection:*

- (1) The sites of events, homes of men, etc., having contributed to local history.*
- (2) Reasonably distinctive characteristics in architectural design, not necessarily unique.*
- (3) Somewhat rare type within Columbia.*
- (4) Belonging to a family or "genera" of buildings of which it is a good example.*
- (5) The work of an architect of local importance.*
- (6) A good example of a style or type of building which is becoming, or is in danger of becoming, extinct locally.*

*Where at all possible, these should be preserved on their original sites, possibly by "adaptive use." Where the interior is impossible to preserve, the exterior should be retained by conservation and/or restoration.*

The 1949 building at 1501 Lady Street meets several of the criteria for Group II designation.

(1) *The sites of events, homes of men, etc. having contributed to local history*

The Seibels Bruce Company was founded by Edwin W. Seibels and J.B. Ezell in 1869 and “evolved into one of the South’s largest insurance firms” according to Robert A. Pierce’s short article about the company in *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*. Edwin G. Seibels, son of the founding father, was part of the company during its incorporation in his name in 1908, and is credited with inventing the vertical filing system. As headquarters for this progressive and large company, the building at 1501 Lady Street is the site of a company of local importance, and integrated into the office walls of the building are the vertical filing systems associated with Seibels.

(4) *Belonging to a family or "genera" of buildings of which it is a good example.*

This building is within the early modern group of office buildings in Columbia. It shares some features of that group as seen in another late 1940s and early 1950s office building that became a landmark building last year, 1321 Lady Street, or the Owen Building. Both buildings achieve strong symmetry with a repetition of bays and a single material used for the exterior, with a severe lack of applied ornamentation. The Seibels Bruce Building has retained its office use for over 60 years and has been regularly maintained; resulting in an incredibly intact, original example of a modern era building. An addition in 1977 to the rear of the building along Bull Street was done in a very sympathetic manner, with the exterior stone cladding closely matching the original building and windows of the same size but with a single pane configuration. The 1950 building was noted in a 1970s survey by local architects as a good example, and the city’s only example, of Federal Modern architecture. Using clean lines, a simple exterior and an interesting U-shaped form, the building is thoroughly of its time and is indeed a good example of the early modern movement in the capital city.

(5) *The work of an architect of local importance.*

The local architectural firm Lafaye, Fair & Lafaye designed this building in 1949. This firm is of local importance due to the quantity and quality of work they produced during the mid-twentieth century in Columbia. They did a large number of buildings at the State’s mental health campus (Bull Street), the Tapp Department store, the Owen Building, several dorms at USC, Benedict and Columbia College, a number of churches, banks and a number of homes. They were prolific, and their buildings helped influence the architectural direction of a number of campuses as well as downtown Columbia. The firm is noted in *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*, with an endorsement from architectural historian Andrew Chandler as “one of the state’s most respected and successful architectural practices from the 1910s to the 1970s.”

**STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Staff finds that the original c. 1950 building at 1501 Lady Street meets three of the criteria for Group II Landmark designation as outlined in Section 17-691(c) of the city ordinance and encourages a recommendation for landmark designation.

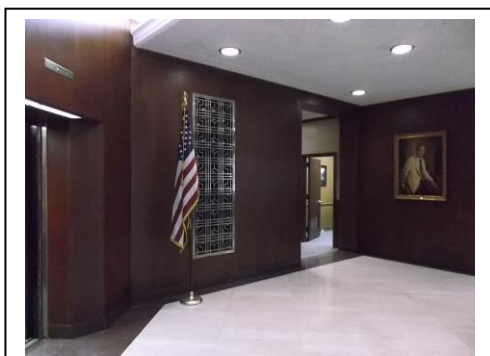
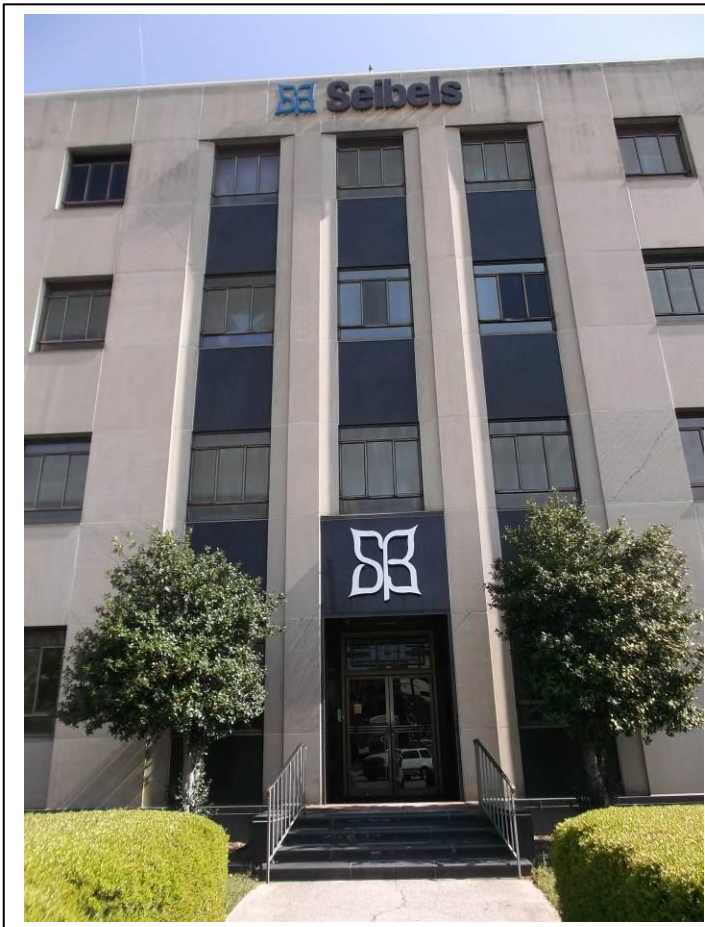
*New Home of Carolina Life to Rise at Bull and Lady*



The State, Feb. 6, 1949, architect rendering



Google view of 1501 Lady Street, 1970s addition is seen at left



Right:  
vertical  
filing system

Left:  
entrance  
lobby