

April 8, 2021

The Hon. Dan Gelber
Mayor of Miami Beach

Mr. Jack Finglass, Chair
Historic Preservation Board
City of Miami Beach

Dear Mayor Gelber and Chairman Finglass:

I write to urge the City of Miami Beach to preserve the South Shore Community Center. The Center is an extremely significant aspect of the work of the architect Morris Lapidus and is important nationally in understanding the evolution of Lapidus' career in the 1960s and 70s. While the Community Center is not as well-known as Lapidus' hotels, the building is an extraordinary example of how Lapidus adapted his designs to meet the demands of different clients and urban settings. The Center is extremely significant, indeed internationally important for its architect Morris Lapidus, its role in the major redevelopment of the City, and as example of public commitment to elderly individuals.

Your city's historic preservation regulations emphasize the importance of the evolution of design throughout the history of the city. For the work of Morris Lapidus, the city is in the unique position of having examples of his work across the decades that he practiced. If the Community Center is lost, the city's architectural landscape is diminished and how Lapidus designed buildings for one of the City's most significant constituencies -- its elderly population of the 1960s and 70s -- will be erased.



The building also relates to national history. Designed as part of a pioneering urban development program for older Americans, the Center became a proving ground for the provision of services that addressed the entire spectrum of human and social needs of the elderly. The South Shore Community Center housed these programs, served as a national model for advancements in aging, and was the site of a Senate hearing on the needs of the elderly chaired by Edward Kennedy with the participation of Congressman Claude Pepper.

Please reconsider the city staff's decision and preserve the South Shore Community Center. In so doing, you will be preserving both Miami Beach and a significant part of American architectural history.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Guy Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard Guy Wilson

Commonwealth Professor Emeritus in Architectural History

University of Virginia

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

10 June 2021

Amadeus Huff
Aide to Commissioner Steven Meiner
Office of the Mayor and Commission
1700 Convention Center Drive
Miami Beach, FL 33139
AmadeusHuff@miamibeachfl.gov

Re: Opposition to proposed demolition of the South Shore Community Center, Miami, Florida

Dear Mr. Huff:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) strongly opposes the destruction of the South Shore Community Center by the City of Miami Beach, Florida. The South Shore Community Center, designed by architect Morris Lapidus in 1969, is nationally significant for its role in the redevelopment of the City of Miami, and as an example of the City's public commitment to elderly individuals.

Morris Lapidus is an internationally -significant figure. While Lapidus is best known for his exuberant hotel designs, the South Shore Community Center represents an often-overlooked aspect his work and the evolution of his design philosophy. The Center is part of his personal struggle as an outsider in his profession, and stands as a physical example of his efforts to address social housing issues. The South Shore Community Center was a determined attempt by Lapidus to move beyond his reputation as the architect of the Edan Roc and Fontainebleau hotels, whose designs had brought him both popular acclaim and unwanted professional censure.

The South Shore Community Center is integral to an understanding of both Miami and national history in the 20th Century. It is both product and symbol of the rise of the elderly as a distinct and politically powerful social class in America. National issues related to aging were played out in microcosm in Miami Beach, and specifically at the Community Center, and were acted upon by the federal government because of local Congressman Claude Pepper. Pepper not only worked to transform the South Shore neighborhood of Miami Beach for his constituents, he employed it as a proving ground for the provision of services that addressed the whole range of human and social needs of the elderly. The South Shore Community Center housed these programs, serving as a national model for advancements in elder care, and was the site of a Congressional hearing on the persistent needs of the elderly chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy.

When the neighborhood demographics changed in the 1980s and 90s, the Community Center adapted with the times. The city enlisted the Little Havana Activities Center in merging the needs of the elderly community for social interaction with the needs of newer residents for childcare. The resulting program, the Rainbow Intergenerational Daycare Center, continues to operate in the Community Center to this day. Alterations to the building have not affected its architectural integrity, but rather illustrate how the neighborhood, its residents, and the city have evolved since 1969.

We write in opposition of efforts to demolish the nationally significant South Shore Community center, and in support of efforts to retain and preserve this landmark of American architecture. The South Shore Community Center is an important example of Morris Lapidus' architectural work, above and beyond the hotels for which he is best known, and represents a nationally significant and successful effort to provide dignified housing for aging Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B C G' followed by a horizontal line.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Florian Boiteux; Steven Meiner; Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.

Jefferson South Shore Condominium
Board of Directors
631 Jefferson Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 3319

June 15, 2021

The Hon. Dan Gelber
Mayor of Miami Beach

The Hon. Commissioners,
City of Miami Beach

Dear Mayor Gelber and Commissioners:

Our Community of owners and residents have been informed that the fire station project is at a point of re-evaluation, and we ask you to take this opportunity to look not only at the need for a new station, but also the adverse impact that tearing down the South Shore Community Center will have on our neighborhood.

We have been working with the Flamingo Park Neighborhood Association to ensure that the area from Alton Road to Washington Avenue along Sixth Street retains its pedestrian and residential focus by developing a plan for a zoning overlay. This will maintain the quality of life for residents while making the area attractive to small businesses that are compatible with a residential community. The fire station is incompatible with this vision.

We also believe that the South Shore Community Center could be the centerpiece of this vision for Sixth Street. The building with its auditorium and unoccupied second floor provides the opportunity to host programming and services that would be nothing short of transformative of the neighborhood. If the city is serious about making Miami Beach a place to live, work, and play, why not fill the building with enrichment activities that benefit the local residents? Now, it is an underused asset suffering from benign neglect by the city.

The city administration has acknowledged that siting the fire station on Sixth Street site has its challenges, including but not limited non conformance with

Jefferson South Shore Condominium
Board of Directors
631 Jefferson Avenue, Miami Beach, FL 3319

existing zoning. If you are willing to look for additional funds to build an aquatic center, are you not willing to look for funds that would allow you to place the fire station in a non residential area? The Fifth Street and Alton Road corridors have sites that could be acquired. These streets also are designed to handle emergency vehicles.

Finally, we must ask if our neighborhood was not selected for the fire station because of the presence of subsidized housing and smaller apartments. The Public records showed how the city abandoned several site locations without detailed figures and/or data. Implicit bias does exist and it is not always recognizable by decision makers. With a revitalized South Shore Community Center, we believe that the neighborhood could be a model of how a diverse community can thrive and become part of the city's economic growth.

Please direct the city administration to find a more appropriate site for the fire station.

Sincerely,

The Jefferson South Shore community

DocuSigned by:
Alan Stan
1B5E81722DF548E...

Alan STANG
President

DocuSigned by:
Diego Quinteros
B2D7679872924EC...

Diego QUINTEROS
Vice President

DocuSigned by:
Florian BOITEUX
E66A50362ED74AA...

Florian BOITEUX
Treasurer

FLORIDA TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION



July 14, 2021

Dr. David McKinney
daviddmckinney@yahoo.com

Dear Dr. McKinney:

On behalf of the Florida Trust I want to thank you for your commitment to Florida's historic resources, and for taking the time to nominate a property that is important to you for the 2021 Florida's 11 to Save. We are grateful for people like you working to protect the special places that make Florida extraordinary.

As you know, the Florida's 11 to Save is an annual listing of the most endangered historic places in the state, as nominated by the people of Florida. The list serves as a guide for the Florida Trust's advocacy and education initiatives for the year. This year we received a very high volume of nominations, and we are happy to share with you that the location you nominated made the list!

The 2021 Florida's 11 to Save will be announced at the Preservation on Main Street Conference in New Port Richey at the opening session on July 21, at 9 a.m. and available on Facebook.

On July 21 we will issue a state-wide press release announcing the 11 to Save locations. We ask that you do not share publically that your location has been placed on the list until after that time. Once the press release has gone out, please feel free to share the news of the listing with your local media – and let us know if we can help!

After the conference, we will reach back out with you and share a Florida Trust ambassador that will work with you to learn more about the location. The goal of that communication is to gain a deeper understanding of the unique history and challenges surrounding the property. We hope to work with you to identify ways the Florida Trust could help the property.

As a reminder, being listed on the 11 to Save is a good thing – it means people in your community care about a historic place, and are seeking support to save it. Our goal is to work with property owners and the community to save these historic resources and share those unique stories only your community can tell.

Thank you again for taking the time to nominate a property for the 11 to Save.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Melissa Wyllie'.

Melissa Wyllie
CEO & President





MIAMI DESIGN PRESERVATION LEAGUE
1001 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, FL 33139
P.O. Box 190180, Miami Beach, FL 33119-0180
Phone 305-672-2014 www.mdpl.org

June 9, 2021

Chair and Members
Historic Preservation Board
City of Miami Beach
Via email

Dear Chair Finglass and members:

As instructed by a vote of the Board of Directors of the Miami Design Preservation League, I request that the Historic Preservation Board seek the reclassification of two structures as contributing. (HPB members Jack Finglass and Nancy Liebman, who are also MDPL Board members, recused themselves from the discussion and vote on this item before the MDPL Board.) The buildings (listed below) are located within the Flamingo Park Historic District and owned by the City of Miami Beach. Their significance lies in their architectural merit, contextual relationship with the neighborhood and city, and association with an important era in Miami Beach history.

Both buildings were designed by Morris Lapidus and Associates and are owned by the City of Miami Beach, which has recognized Lapidus for his contribution to its built environment by naming a historic district in his honor and inducting him into its Hall of Fame. While these buildings do not share the reputation of Lapidus' hotels, they are examples of how Lapidus' designs were influenced by Miami Beach environs and his personal struggle of being an outsider in his profession. As noted in Gabrielle Esperdy's important study, the decade of the 1960s was a period of soul searching for Lapidus as to what direction he should take his architectural practice. In 1969, the *Miami Herald* quoted Lapidus as saying "I don't always want to be referred to as the architect of the Fontainebleau." Alison Hotten in her Ph.D. dissertation outlined how Lapidus' work shows a decided move toward modernism in the 1960s. Moreover, Lapidus, in his autobiography, stated that his architectural principles could be expressed in unadorned concrete.

1. Fire Station Number 1, 1051 Jefferson Avenue, designed by Morris Lapidus Associates in 1966.

Historical Significance: Coming after significant criticism of the "Miami Beach style" at the American Institute of Architects Convention in 1964, the city seeks a new image for civic architecture. The fire station was one in a series of buildings (including the South Shore Community Center) that followed prevailing architectural trends and culminated in Miami Beach's embrace of the brutalist style for the new city hall by Bouterse, Perez, and Fabregas.

Architectural Significance: The fire station was the first of this building type designed by the firm. While Lapidus is celebrated for his exuberant designs, the firm did “all styles of buildings.” The building also demonstrates the influence of Robert Swedroe on Lapidus’ practice who was chief designer for the firm and principal for the fire station. Swedroe experimented with a stylized gable roof on the station which is further developed in the design of 930 Washington Avenue in 1967. (The outlining of Swedroe’s contribution to the Lapidus firm also provides a foundation for understanding his substantial contribution to the architectural landscape of southern Florida.)

2. South Shore Community Center, 833 Sixth Street. Designed in 1969 and completed in two phases by Morris Lapidus Associates.

Historical Significance: The South Shore Community Center is integral to local and national history of the 20th Century. It is both product and symbol of the rise of the elderly as a distinct and politically powerful social class in America. National issues related to aging were played out in microcosm in Miami Beach at the Community Center and were acted upon by the federal government because of local Congressman Claude Pepper. Pepper not only worked to transform the South Shore neighborhood of Miami Beach for his constituents, he employed it as a proving ground for the provision of services that addressed the whole range of human and social needs of the elderly. The South Shore Community Center housed these programs, served as a national model for advancements in aging, and was the site of a Congressional hearing on the persistent needs of the elderly, which was chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy. When the neighborhood demographics changed in the 1980s and 90s, the Community Center adapted with the times. The city enlisted the Little Havana Activities Center in merging the needs of the elderly community for social interaction with the needs of newer residents for childcare. The resulting program, the Rainbow Intergenerational Daycare Center, continues to operate in the Community Center to this day.

Architectural Significance: The South Shore Community Center is the embodiment of Lapidus’ architectural principles stripped of ornamentation. Lapidus noted that his designs “form follows function,” borrowing a famous architectural maxim. But Lapidus thought his designs went further. They were in sync with their location and conformed to the needs and mindset of the people who visited them. The architectural historian Gabrielle Esperdy noted that “Lapidus fused the functionalist tenets of modernism with a romantic responsiveness to human emotions, modulating the response according to his analysis of program and building type.” In the design of the South Shore Community Center, Lapidus creates a subtle interplay with the surrounding structures by his use of massing and through a reinterpretation of a prevalent Miami Beach building type (*i.e.*, garden court apartment building). Instead of restricting his design on the Community Center’s specified activities (*e.g.*, provision of programs and services), Lapidus looked beyond function to concentrate on the visitor experience. This also supported a goal stipulated in the HUD guidance for the building.

[N.B.: An in depth analysis of the South Shore Community Center is found on the MDPL website: <https://mdpl.org/blog/2020/09/south-shore-community-center-the-case-for-its-preservation/>]

These buildings are equally important to the city's overall architectural landscape. As noted in a letter to you from architectural history professor Richard Guy Wilson, "the city is in the unique position of having examples of [Lapidus'] work across the decades that he practiced," and the architect Denise Scott Brown has noted that Miami Beach is "a progression through recent American architectural history from the 1930s to the 1970s."

The preservation of the fire station and the community center will ensure that this progression remains intact. Just as the city had the forethought to recognize Art Deco and MiMo for their merit, MDPL believes that it is important that the city identifies the important structures of the 1960s and 70s as part of the city's historic fabric.

We urge you to seek the reclassification of these buildings and offer our assistance to document and preserve these important architectural landmarks.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Jack D. Johnson, Chair
Miami Design Preservation League

----- Forwarded message -----

From: David MCKINNEY <david.d.mckinney416@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Dec 10, 2021 at 7:45 AM

Subject: South Shore Community Center

To: <hpb@miamibeachfl.gov>

Honorable Chair and Members
Historic Preservation Board
City of Miami Beach
Via hpb@miamibeachfl.gov

Dear Chair and Members:

I ask that you move to preserve the South Shore Community Center in the Flamingo Park Historic District that was designed by the architect Morris Lapidus and that the city broke ground for its construction in 1969, according to an article from the *Miami Herald*. The loss of the South Shore Community Center will erase a chapter from Miami Beach's history, the legacy of Rep. Claude Pepper's national advocacy for the elderly, and a neglected aspect of the career of architect Morris Lapidus.

The preservation of the South Shore Community Center is consistent with the spirit and letter of the City's historic preservation code. More importantly, it preserves an important landmark of American history and the nation's architectural landscape. Section 118-501 states that "It is hereby declared by the city commission that the preservation and conservation of properties of historical, architectural and archeological merit in the city is a public policy of the city and is in the interest of the city's future prosperity." The city code also extends protections to all buildings (not just contributing) within a historic district.

The South Shore Community Center more than satisfies the criteria to warrant its preservation intact for its architectural significance and its importance in the history of Miami Beach and the nation. (The complete case for its preservation may be found in the attached paper, *South Shore Community Center: The Case for its Preservation*)

Architectural Significance:

The South Shore Community Center encapsulates the design tenets that Lapidus had been experimenting with and developing through the 1960s. Indeed, this building is an amalgamation of what Lapidus had learned from designing retail stores, hotels, urban parks, and “living spaces for the future.” These tenets may be summarized as:

- *Design should relate to its environs and the climate of the city.* Lapidus used the analogy if you wouldn't wear a bikini to walk down NYC's Fifth Avenue, then you wouldn't design the same buildings for NYC and Miami Beach. At the Community Center, open spaces and walkways are open to the warm climate of South Florida.
- *Path and place invite visitors to spend unprogrammed time in a building.* From his work with stores and hotels, Lapidus was aware that individuals need inviting spaces where they can gather in between activities. Indeed, his retail spaces were designed to entice shoppers from the street and then give them an environment where they would actively or passively spend their time shopping. Walkways in the Community Center link inside and outside space to give visual excitement and formal and informal areas to gather.
- *Materials used in structures in marginal urban areas should be durable and maintenance-free.* His design of Kosciusko Street park in Brooklyn had taught him that structures in urban centers are threatened by their environment and vandalism, but durable materials (e.g., concrete) may be employed in design to appeal to visitors. At the Community Center, concrete provides texture.
- *Form should be based on analysis of program and building type, as well as function.* Designs should express structural elements, advance the purpose of the building, and evoke an emotional response.

The significance of the South Shore Community Center was recognized before the design left the drawing board. The selection of the South Shore Community Center as a national model by the federal government demonstrates Miami Beach's role in both elder care and the urban renewal efforts of the 1960s and 70s. Most recently, architectural historians and preservation groups have recognized its importance to the American cultural landscape.

Prof. Richard Guy Wilson, noted architectural historian and member of the National Landmarks Committee, has written to you earlier stating that the Community Center “is an extraordinary example of how Lapidus adapted his designs to meet the demands of different clients and urban settings. (See attached.)

The Conservation Committee of the Society of Architectural Historians (an international professional organization founded at Harvard University in 1940) opposes “the destruction of the South Shore Community Center by the City of Miami Beach, Florida [because of] its nationally significant . . . role in the redevelopment of the City of Miami, and as an example of the City's public commitment to elderly individuals. (See its website: <https://www.sah.org/about-sah/news/sah-news/news-detail/2021/06/10/sah-letter-opposing-the-proposed-demolition-of-the-south-shore-community-center-in-miami>)

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation has recognized the “historical significance which is matched by its architectural merit. The Trust has named the South Shore Community Center to its Eleven Buildings to Save in 2021. (See website: <https://www.floridatrust.org/2021-11-to-save>)

Historical Significance:

The South Shore Community Center is integral to local and national history of the 20th Century. It is both product and symbol of the rise of the elderly as a distinct and politically powerful social class in America. National issues related to aging were played out in microcosm in Miami Beach at the Community Center and were acted upon by the federal government because of local Congressman Claude Pepper. Pepper not only worked to transform the South Shore neighborhood of Miami Beach for his constituents, he employed it as a proving ground for the provision of services that addressed the whole range of human and social needs of the elderly. The South Shore Community Center housed these programs, served as a national model for advancements in aging, and was the site of a Congressional hearing on the persistent needs of the elderly, which was chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy.

When the neighborhood demographics changed in the 1980s and 90s, the Community Center adapted with the times. The city enlisted the Little Havana Activities Center in merging the needs of the elderly community for social interaction with the needs of newer residents for childcare. The resulting program, the Rainbow Intergenerational Daycare Center, continues to operate in the Community Center to this day.

Miami Beach’s architectural heritage does not end with Art Deco or Miami Modern (MiMo). Nor is its history confined to tourism and the rich and famous. The citizens of Miami Beach should be represented in the history of their city and its architectural landscape. Elderly residents and Cuban immigrants profoundly changed the city’s culture. And the South Shore Community Center played a significant role in this transformation. The loss of the Community Center is as much of a loss to the Flamingo Park Historic District as the razing of an Art Deco building. Indeed, its potential loss is more impactful since it erases an entire chapter of the neighborhood’s architectural development.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

David D. McKinney, Ph.D.