

# MIAMI BEACH

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Staff Report & Recommendation

Historic Preservation Board

TO: Chairperson and Members  
Historic Preservation Board

DATE: March 8, 2021

FROM: Thomas R. Mooney, AICP  
Planning Director



SUBJECT: HPB20-0446, **7275 Collins Avenue – North Beach Bandshell**.

A presentation by the City of Miami Beach Planning Department to the Historic Preservation Board of a Preliminary Evaluation and Recommendation Report relative to the possible historic designation of the North Beach Bandshell structure located at 7275 Collins Avenue, as an individual local historic site.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Direct the Planning Department to prepare a formal historic designation report for the proposed North Beach Bandshell Historic Site.

### **BACKGROUND**

On December 8, 2020, the Historic Preservation Board passed a motion (7-0), directing the Planning Department to prepare a Preliminary Evaluation and Recommendation Report relative to the possible historic designation of the North Beach Bandshell as an individual historic site.

### **DESIGNATION PROCESS**

The process of historic designation is delineated in Sections 118-591 through 118-593 in Subpart B of the Land Development Regulations of the City Code (Chapter 118, Article X, Division 4). An outline of this process is delineated below.

Step One: A request for designation is made either by the City Commission, the Historic Preservation Board, other agencies and organizations as listed in the Land Development Regulations of the City Code, or the property owners involved. Proposals for designation shall include a completed application form available from the Planning Department.

Step Two: The Planning Department prepares a preliminary evaluation report with recommendations for consideration by the Board.

Step Three: The Historic Preservation Board considers the preliminary evaluation to determine if proceeding with a designation report is warranted.

The designation report is an historical and architectural analysis of the proposed district or site. The report:

- 1) describes the historic, architectural, and/or archeological significance of the property or subject area proposed for Historical Site or District designation;
- 2) recommends Evaluation Guidelines to be used by the Board to evaluate the appropriateness and compatibility of the proposed Developments affecting the designated Site or District; and
- 3) will serve as an attachment to the Land Development Regulations of the City Code.

**Step Four:** The designation report is presented to the Historic Preservation Board at a public hearing. If the Historic Preservation Board determines that the proposed site or district satisfies the requirements for designation as set forth in the Land Development Regulations of the City Code, the Historic Preservation Board transmits a recommendation in favor of designation to the Planning Board and City Commission.

**Step Five:** The Planning Board will hold a public hearing on the proposed designation, and shall consider the proposed historic designation as an amendment to the Land Development Regulations of the City Code and, subsequently, transmit its recommendation to the City Commission.

**Step Six:** The City Commission may adopt an amendment to the Land Development Regulations of the City Code which thereby designates the Historic Preservation Site or Historic District after (1) public hearing for a parcel of land less than ten (10) contiguous acres or after (2) public hearings for a parcel of land which is more than ten (10) contiguous acres.

## **PRELIMINARY EVALUATION**

### **Historical Context**

Long before the incorporation of Miami Beach in 1915, even before this desolate barrier island became a coconut plantation, the Biscayne House of Refuge was built near present-day 72nd Street (just south of what would become the future site of the North Beach Bandshell). It was one of five stations constructed by the United States Lifesaving Service (a precursor to the Coast Guard) along Florida's southeast coast in 1876. These stations usually housed a keeper and his family, and they provided shelter and food for shipwrecked mariners.<sup>1</sup>

It is widely believed that the Biscayne House of Refuge was the first formal structure erected on the barrier island now known as Miami Beach.<sup>2</sup> It was also the birthplace of Richard Peacock, son of the keeper at that time. Born on November 4, 1886, he is reputedly the first person born in what would later become Miami Beach.

Soon after its construction, the Biscayne House of Refuge played a part in the coconut

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<sup>1</sup> Miami Library, Florida Room, "The Biscayne House of Refuge," Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida, June 1975, pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ruby Leach Carson, "Forty Years of Miami Beach," Tequesta, Historical Association of Southern Florida, volume XV, 1955, pp. 6-7.

plantation project of 1882 when New Jersey entrepreneurs Elnathan Field, Ezra Osborn, and Henry Lum purchased about 60 miles of oceanfront land extending from Key Biscayne to Jupiter, Florida. A mobile work crew planted this land with over 300,000 coconuts that were brought by boat from the Caribbean. The first camp site for the coconut planting operations was located in the area of today's Lummus Park; subsequent camp sites were positioned at the Biscayne House of Refuge in Miami Beach and then the Ft. Lauderdale House of Refuge (about nine miles south of the Hillsboro Inlet). Although the project did not succeed commercially, it was the first attempt at development of the City and it led to other, more successful endeavors aimed at tourism.



*Biscayne House of Refuge, ca. 1925*

The Biscayne House of Refuge was originally built on a 10-acre strip of oceanfront land claimed for the United States government by an executive order from President Ulysses S. Grant in 1875. The Department of the Interior increased the government's land holdings to extend from the Atlantic Ocean to Biscayne Bay in 1891. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding issued an executive order to restore part of this tract to the public domain (to become known as Harding Townsite), and a 500 foot-wide strip was retained for use by the United States Coast Guard (established in 1915).<sup>3</sup> The Coast Guard tract was 22 acres in size and spanned from the ocean to the bay between what is now 72nd Street and 73rd Street.

In 1922, a survey revealed that the Biscayne House of Refuge, which consisted of the main building, a boathouse, and an observation tower, had mistakenly been built a short distance

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<sup>3</sup> City of Miami Beach, Planning Department, "Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District Designation Report," 1996, pp. 12-16.

south of the parcel of land the United States government had claimed for its site.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Biscayne House of Refuge was moved the following year from its original location just south of 72nd Street northward about 200 feet onto the government-owned tract of land.<sup>5</sup> This area was located in unincorporated Dade County at that time. When Miami Beach was incorporated in 1915, the northern city limits were set along the midline of State-surveyed Sections 22 and 23 near present-day 46th Street.<sup>6</sup> The house of refuge and the future site of the North Beach Bandshell did not become a part of Miami Beach until July 1, 1924, when the northern city limit was extended to its present location at 87th Terrace.<sup>7</sup>

The Biscayne House of Refuge remained in use until September of 1926 when it was heavily damaged in the great hurricane and subsequently demolished. The only house of refuge that survives today is located at Gilbert's Bar near Stuart, Florida. As times changed, property values rose in North Beach, and the Coast Guard left the federal reservation idle and overgrown. Many appeals were made for the release of this land from government ownership, but the original 1875 decree prohibited its sale. Finally, in 1941, the Coast Guard exchanged this property for the site of its present station on Causeway Island, and the land between 72nd Street and 73rd Street came into the possession of the City of Miami Beach for use as a public park.<sup>8</sup> It appears that the former Coast Guard property was first named Surfside Park<sup>9</sup>; however, it was later renamed to North Shore Park by 1952.<sup>10</sup>

In 1942, the City of Miami Beach erected a lifesaving and comfort station on the beach in the new park (just southeast of what would become the future site of the bandshell). It was designed by August Geiger and built by Wilbert Harborn for a cost of \$18,000. The floor plan of the building was organized around a central hospital room with a squad room on the north end and a storage room on the south end. Bathroom facilities were located on the far north and south sides of the structure. The 1-story building was symmetrically designed with a central section and two side wings that were lower in height. It featured multiple hipped roofs with flat tile, double-hung sash windows, heavy wood-paneled doors, wooden shutters, side entrances with thick masonry sidewalls, and a large porch facing the ocean. In 1974, the structure was enlarged and significantly altered to adapt to a new use as a community center.<sup>11</sup>

In 2010, the 1942 building was demolished and replaced by a new 2-story community center designed by architect Rene Gonzalez. This new community center was approved by the Design Review Board in 2008 and completed in 2013.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Harding Tale Tragic," Miami Herald, 21 April 1940; "The Story of Miami Beach," Beach Beacon, 7 July 1927, p 4; and City of Miami Beach, Public Works Department, United States Department of Interior Survey, Plat of the Townsite of Harding, 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., United States Coast Guard Correspondence, box 640, 1910 to 1935.

<sup>6</sup> "Vote Tonight on Incorporating Miami Beach," Miami Metropolis, 26 March 1915, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Miami Beach News," Miami Daily News-Metropolis, 2 July 1924.

<sup>8</sup> City of Miami Beach, Planning Department, "Harding Townsite/South Altos Del Mar Historic District Designation Report," 1996, pp. 12-16.

<sup>9</sup> Atlas of Miami Beach to Golden Beach, Florida (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Frank B. Dolph, 1944), plate 15.

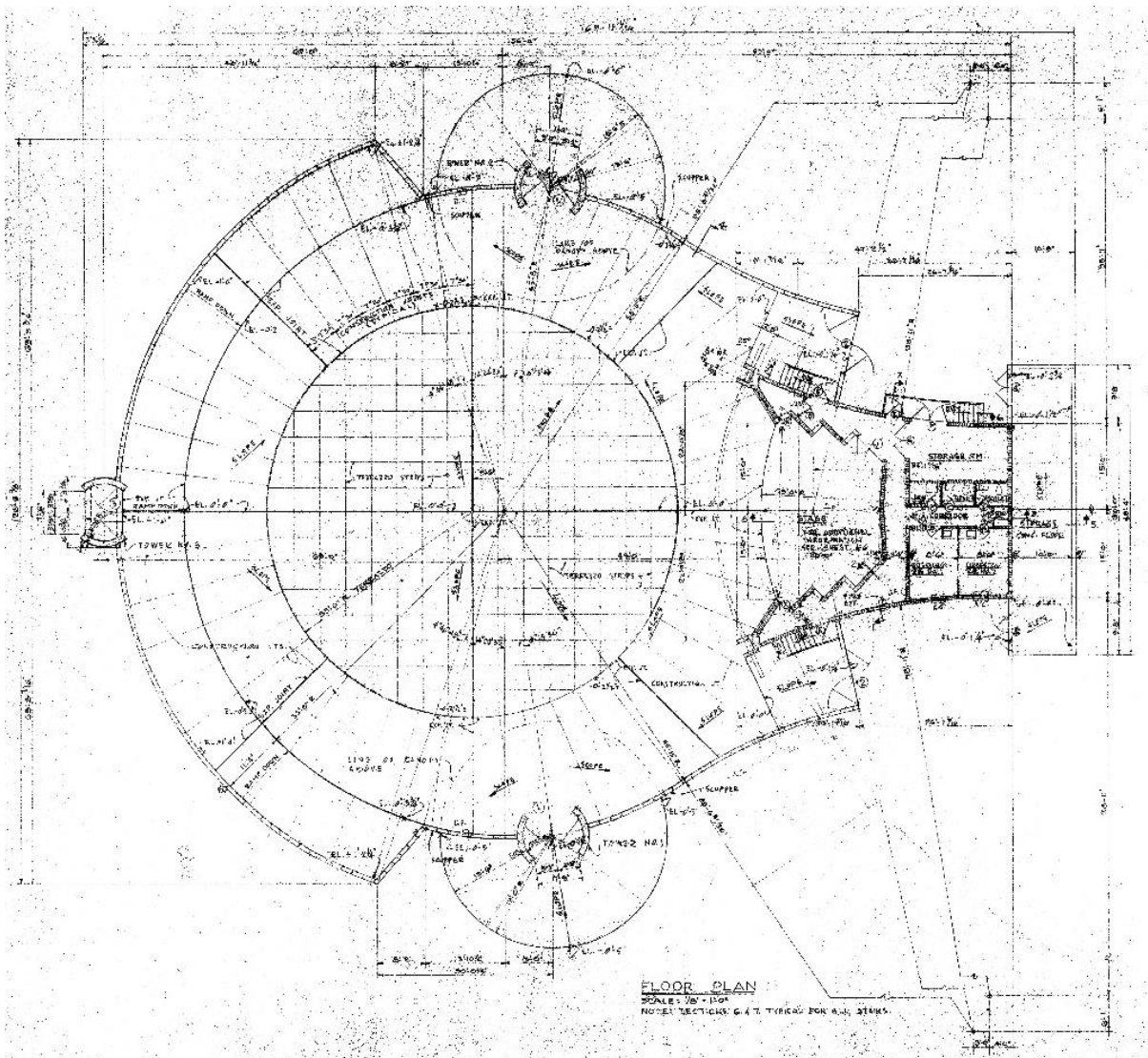
<sup>10</sup> Plat Book of Miami Beach to Golden Beach, Florida (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: G.M. Hopkins Company, 1952), plate 20.

<sup>11</sup> City of Miami Beach, Building Department, Building Permit Cards 68 and 94.

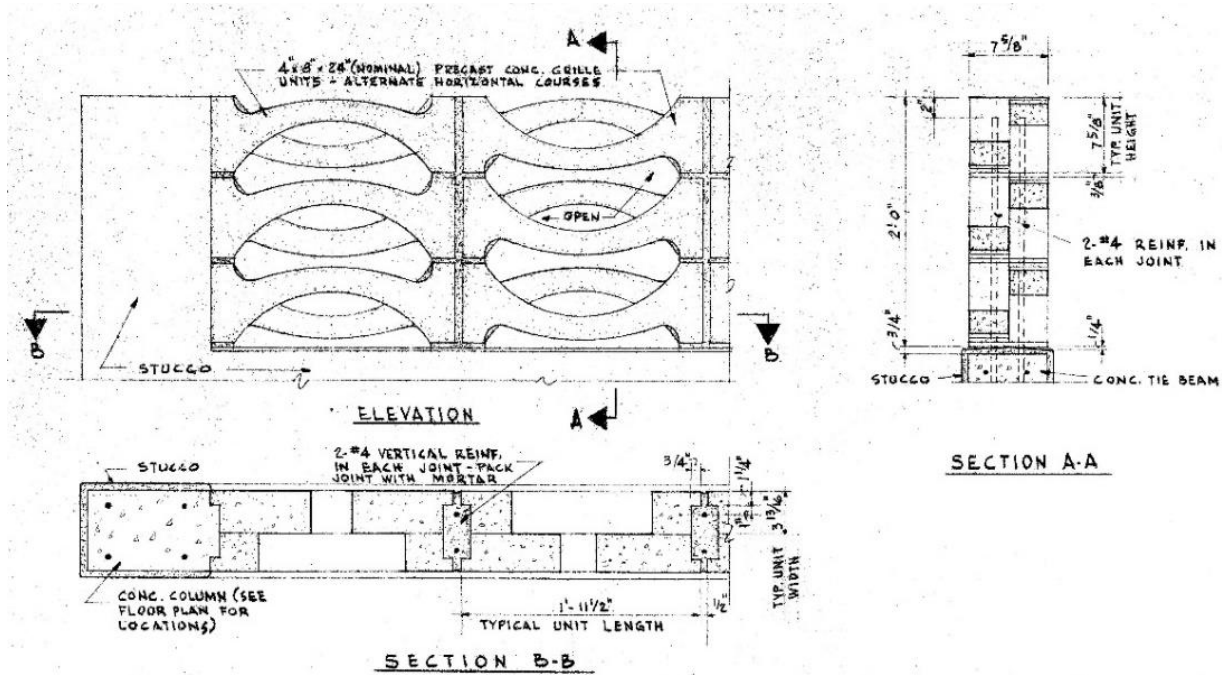
<sup>12</sup> City of Miami Beach, Planning Department, DRB File No. 21559

### North Beach Bandshell

The North Beach Bandshell, originally known as the North Shore Community Center, is located within Bandshell Park on Collins Avenue between 72nd and 73rd Streets, adjacent to the beach and the Atlantic Ocean. Designed by the renowned Miami Beach architect Norman Giller in 1961, the bandshell is an excellent example of the Post War Modern or Miami Modern (MiMo) style of architecture. The bandshell was designed as an open-air facility to host a variety of civic and community activities. Comprised of sculptured concrete forms, the bandshell complex is designed as an amphitheater with a central circular terrazzo dance floor surrounded by a semi-circular area for seating and a central stage. A perimeter wall capped with decorative cast concrete breeze block encircles the amphitheater complex. The large, curved concrete stage is flanked by two side entrances, each detailed with large cantilevered concrete canopies that appear to float, and a main gate that is on axis with the stage and enclosed in a tower of curved columns. This open-air performing arts facility was sensitively designed to respond to its unique tropical location in Miami Beach. The highly spirited open form of its architecture integrates artfully with its coconut palm setting by the sea.



*Bandshell floor plan, Norman Giller, 1961*

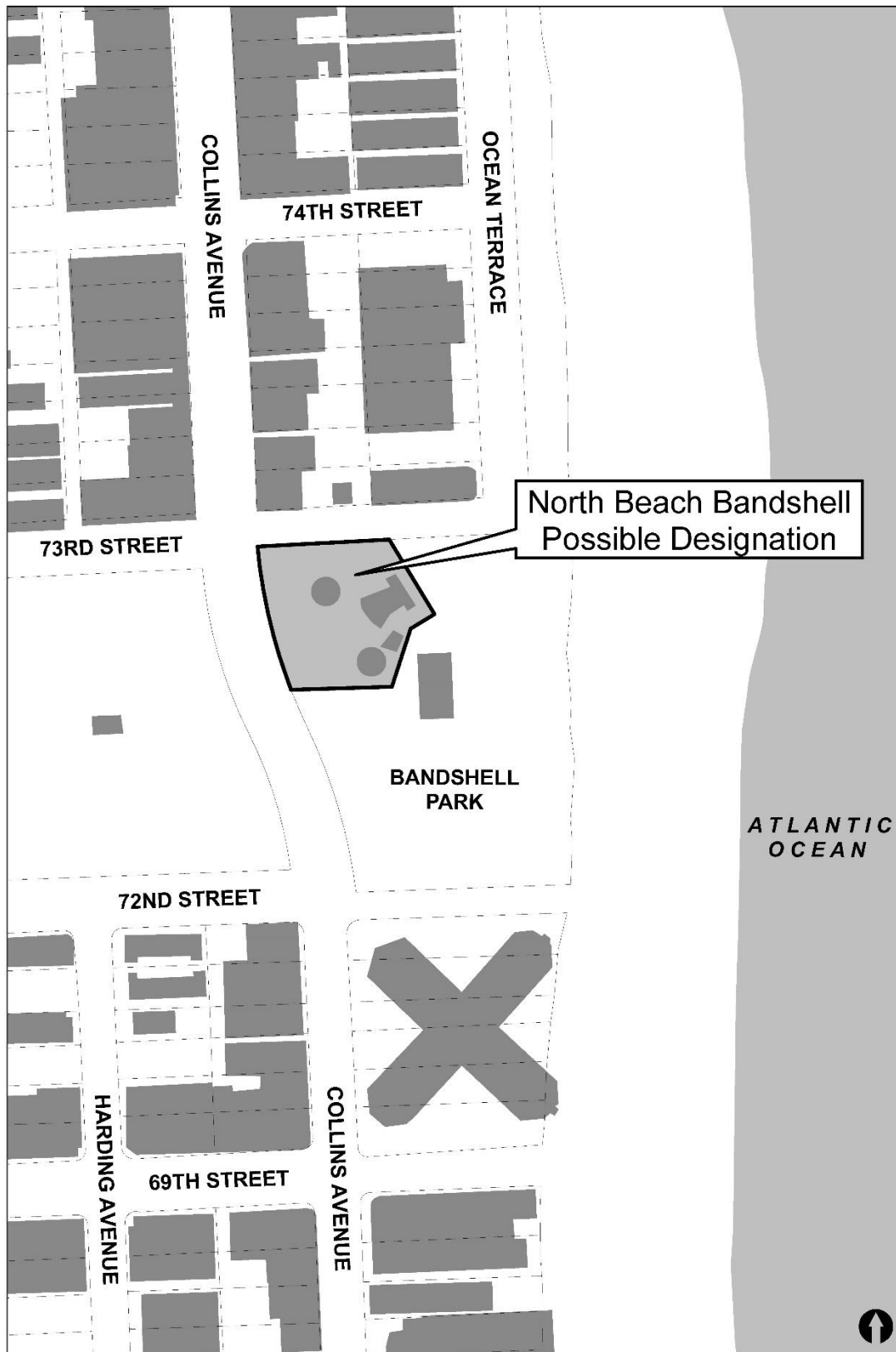


*Breeze block detail, Norman Giller, 1951*

Between 2009 and 2011, the Bandshell facility was restored and renovated by the City including the replacement of the eastern shed structure with a new 1-story back of house addition. In 2019, the Design Review Board reviewed and approved plans for the introduction of a new circular shade canopy structure designed by Ira Giller, Norman Giller's son.



*Current photograph of the bandshell complex showing recently installed canopy*



Map of the approximate boundaries of the possible North Beach Bandshell Historic Site

### **The Post War Modern Style of Architecture in Miami Beach (about 1945 to 1967)**

In order to better understand the Post War Modern or Miami Modern (MiMo) style of architecture, it is important to view this architectural movement in the context of the historical, political, social, economic, and technological changes that were taking place during this period worldwide, nationwide, and locally.

Between 1942 and 1945 Miami Beach played a significant role WWII. Nearly half a million men took over more than 300 hotels and apartment buildings for housing and training headquarters by the Army Air Forces Technical Training Command. By the time the war ended, one-fourth of all Army Air Force officers and one-fifth of the military's enlisted men had been trained in Miami Beach. Hotel rooms became barracks, hotel dining rooms became mess halls, a movie theater became a testing center, hotels became administrative offices, hotel pools and the ocean were used to teach life saving techniques, golf courses became parade grounds, and the beach was used for rifle ranges and physical training. Another group of hotels and buildings served as an Army Redistribution Station for infantrymen returning from battle. Many of the buildings are still in operation today and are visited by thousands of tourists each year.

Many of these young servicemen and women returned after the war. The influx of new residents and visitors resulted in a housing construction boom during the 1950s, when hundreds of Post War Modern style buildings were erected throughout the City.

### **Architectural Description**

After a hiatus in construction due to World War II, the Post-War Modern style picked up where Art Deco left off with the added influences of a booming post-war economy, new technologies such as air conditioning, the prevalence of the sophisticated, affordable, and reliable new automobiles, and a feeling of national optimism. The local expression of this style was dubbed Miami Modern or MiMo by the Greater Metropolitan Miami area's Urban Arts Committee in about 2004 (much as the term Art Deco was first applied about 1965 when the style actually first appeared in the 1920s).

From about 1948 to 1966, the widely popular Post-War Modern style was frequently applied to hotels, commercial buildings, apartment houses, and single family homes throughout Miami Beach. Post War Modern style buildings generally made an extensive use of glass and poured concrete. They often mixed two or more textured surfaces together (i.e. stucco with stone, brick, or mosaic tile as well as contrasting smooth and patterned stucco surfaces). The style featured such dramatic elements as accordion-like folded plate roofs and walls, acute as well as subtle angles, dynamic parabolas, delta wing shapes, sweeping curved walls, and soaring pylons. Other commonly occurring design elements and materials that were added to the architectural vocabulary of the Post War Modern style structures included: brise soleil, architectural accents with exotic themes and often wall sculptures in relief, brick or stone faced feature areas, cast concrete decorative panels with geometric patterns, and a remarkable use of architectural 'breeze block' in a wide variety of design patterns lending itself so well to natural air flow in this tropical environment . Architect Morris Lapidus further expanded the architectural language of this style when he made popular "cheese holes", "woggles", and "beanpoles".

The hotels in the Post-War Modern style often incorporated an expansive use of glass curtain walls, cantilevered asymmetrical roofs, leaping arches, dramatic fin walls, floating planes, architectural bridges, and grand entrance porte cocheres. Primary facades were sometimes graced with bold neon signs or logos in order to catch the eye of passing motorists. Sometimes,



“sky signs” were mounted on rooftop features or on parapet walls. Color was an essential ingredient of signage. The fenestration was often highlighted with boxed or corner windows, as well as continuous ribbon windows and eyebrows. The hotels often took on exotic or futuristic forms, using architecture as advertising in an effort to outdo one another in competing for business.

**Norman M. Giller** (d. 2008), was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1918. Giller earned a degree in architecture from the University of Florida in 1945. He apprenticed with Henry Hohausser and Albert Anis during the early 1940's in Miami Beach. After World War II, Giller became one of South Florida's most influential and inventive architects of the Post-War Modern style.<sup>13</sup>

Some of his best-known works include:

Bombay Hotel – 6901 Collins Avenue, 1951

Giller Building – 975 41<sup>st</sup> Street, 1957

Carillon Hotel – 6801 Collins Avenue, 1957

Diplomat Hotel (now demolished) – 3555 South Ocean Drive, Hollywood, 1957

## **RELATION TO ORDINANCE CRITERIA – Preliminary Evaluation**

Sec. 118-592. - Criteria for designation.

(a) The historic preservation board shall have the authority to recommend that properties be designated as historic buildings, historic structures, historic improvements, historic landscape features, historic interiors (architecturally significant public portions only), historic sites, or historic districts if they are significant in the historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic or archeological heritage of the city, the county, state or nation. Such properties shall possess an integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association and meet at least one of the following criteria:

(1) Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of the city, the county, state or nation.

(2) Association with the lives of persons significant in the city's past history.

(3) Embody the distinctive characteristics of a historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction.

(4) Possess high artistic values.

(5) Represent the work of a master, serve as an outstanding or representative work of a master designer, architect or builder who contributed to our historical, aesthetic or architectural heritage.

(6) Have yielded, or are likely to yield information important in pre-history or history.

(7) Be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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<sup>13</sup> Eric P. Nash and Randall C. Robinson, Jr., MiMo: Miami Modern Revealed (San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books, 2004), pp. 92-93.

- (8) Consist of a geographically definable area that possesses a significant concentration of sites, buildings or structures united by historically significant past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development, whose components may lack individual distinction.
- (b) A building, structure (including the public portions of the interior), improvement or landscape feature may be designated historic even if it has been altered if the alteration is reversible and the most significant architectural elements are intact and repairable.
- (c) The historic preservation board shall consider if the historic buildings, historic structures, historic improvements, historic landscape features, historic interiors (architecturally significant public portions only), historic sites, or historic districts comply with the sea level rise and resiliency review criteria in Chapter 133, Article II, as applicable, pursuant to Section 118-592.

Below are staff's preliminary findings:

- (a) The historic preservation board shall have the authority to recommend that properties be designated as historic buildings, historic structures, historic improvements, historic landscape features, historic interiors (architecturally significant public portions only), historic sites, or historic districts if they are significant in the historical, architectural, cultural, aesthetic or archeological heritage of the city, the county, state or nation. Such properties shall possess an integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association and meet at least one of the following criteria:**

- (1) Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of the city, the county, state or nation;**

*Satisfied; the construction of the North Beach Bandshell directly reflects the turn of events in America following World War II (WWII). The advent of reliable and affordable mass-produced automobiles and air transportation and the introduction of air-conditioning during the early mid-century period, made year-round resort living in South Florida highly desirable and practical, as well as within the reach of America's middle class. The booming post war economy gave the growing middle class more leisure time leading to increased tourism and the construction of modern entertainment venues.*

*Financial prosperity combined with a strong sense of optimism led to a nationwide focus on the arts and entertainment in the two decades following the end of the war. Miami Beach, particularly along Collins Avenue north of 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, became a magnet for live entertainment in the 1950s and 1960s. The construction of the North Beach Bandshell in 1961, is directly associated with events that followed WWII.*

- (3) Embody the distinctive characteristics of an historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction;**

*Satisfied; the North Beach Bandshell embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Post War Modern style of architecture, the style of choice used by successful developers in the period that followed World War II in Miami Beach as well as other areas of South Florida. The design of the Bandshell incorporates*

*sculptured concrete forms, decorative cast concrete breeze block large, curved concrete stage, floating cantilevered concrete canopies This open-air performing arts facility was sensitively designed to respond to its unique tropical location in Miami Beach.*

**(4) Possesses high artistic values;**

**Satisfied;** *North Beach Bandshell, with its dramatic use of soaring concrete columns, acute angles and sweeping roof line, exemplifies high artistic values. A 2002 exhibit launched by the Municipal Art Society at the Urban Center Galleries on Madison Avenue entitled, “Beyond the Box – Mid-Century Modern Architecture in Miami and New York,” which featured the North Beach Bandshell, underscores the high artistic value of the architecture.*

**(5) Represent the work of a master, serve as an outstanding or representative work of a master designer, architect or builder who contributed to our historical, aesthetic or architectural heritage;**

**Satisfied;** *the North Beach Bandshell was designed by Norman Giller, a prominent local architect who also designed among others, the Carillon Hotel, Bombay Hotel and original Diplomat Hotel in Ft. Lauderdale (now demolished). Deauville and Doral Beach hotels along Collins Avenue.*

**(b) A building, structure (including the public portions of the interior), improvement or landscape feature may be designated historic even if it has been altered if the alteration is reversible and the most significant architectural elements are intact and repairable.**

**Satisfied;** the structure retains a high degree of architectural integrity with very limited modifications.

**(c) The historic preservation board shall consider if the historic buildings, historic structures, historic improvements, historic landscape features, historic interiors (architecturally significant public portions only), historic sites, or historic districts comply with the sea level rise and resiliency review criteria in Chapter 133, Article II, as applicable, pursuant to Section 118-592.**

(b) Criteria for ordinances, resolutions, or recommendations:

**(1) Whether the proposal affects an area that is vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise, pursuant to adopted projections.**

[ESTIMATED from LIDAR and 1995 Partial Building Records] The structure is located on a site that is at an elevation of approximately 7' NGVD. The ground floor elevation has not been determined.

At Mean High Water, Sea Level Rise is projected to be (NGVD Elevations):

- 2.31 to 2.64 by 2030 (near-term)
- 2.98 to 3.98 by 2060 (mid-term)
- 4.39 to 6.89 by 2100 (long-term)

**(2) Whether the proposal will increase the resiliency of the City with respect to sea level rise.**

The proposal complements near and mid-term efforts to increase the resiliency of the City with respect to sea-level rise. Reevaluation may be necessary in the future for long-term effects (year 2100 and beyond).

**(3) Whether the proposal is compatible with the City’s sea level rise mitigation and resiliency efforts.**

The proposal is compatible with the City’s near and mid-term efforts to increase the resiliency of the City with respect to sea-level rise.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Therefore, based upon the evidence presented and the historical and architectural significance of the proposed historic site, and in accordance with Chapter 118, Article X, Division 4, of the Land Development Regulations of the City Code, the staff of the City of Miami Beach Planning Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Board direct staff to prepare a formal historic designation report for the proposed North Beach Bandshell Historic Site.