

Fons, Monique

From: HPB <HPB@miamibeachfl.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 21, 2021 4:27 PM
To: Fons, Monique; Bueno, Lizbeth
Subject: FW: South Shore Community Center
Attachments: RGW Miami Beach 1.JPG; RGW Miami Beach2.JPG

Please process.

From: David MCKINNEY <david.d.mckinney416@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, December 10, 2021 7:45 AM
To: HPB <HPB@miamibeachfl.gov>
Subject: South Shore Community Center

[THIS MESSAGE COMES FROM AN EXTERNAL EMAIL - USE CAUTION WHEN REPLYING AND OPENING LINKS OR ATTACHMENTS]

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:

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- *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.
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- *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.
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- *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.
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- *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.
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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.

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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