

MIAMI BEACH

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Staff Report & Recommendation

Historic Preservation Board

TO: Chairperson and Members
Historic Preservation Board

DATE: April 22, 2025

FROM: Thomas R. Mooney, AICP
Planning Director



SUBJECT: HPB24-0639, **833 6th Street, South Shore Community Center – Possible Designation of an Historic Site.**

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 designation of the South Shore Community Center located at 833 6th Street, as a local historic site.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the Planning Department to prepare a formal historic designation report for the proposed South Shore Community Center Historic Site.

BACKGROUND

On June 20, 1990, the Flamingo Park Local Historic district was designated. The South Shore Community Center, which is located within the boundaries of the Flamingo Park Historic District, was classified as Non-Historic in the Miami Beach Historic Properties Database.

On May 14, 1994, Section 19 of Miami Beach Zoning Ordinance No. 89-2665, entitled "HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD AND HISTORIC DISTRICT REGULATIONS", was amended to require that non-individually designated historic sites in historic districts be listed in the Miami Beach Historic Properties Database and classified as either Contributing or Non-Contributing. The definition of a "Contributing Building, Structure, Improvement, Site, or Landscape Feature" is as follows:

One which by location, scale, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association adds to a local historic district's sense of time and place and historical development. A Building, Structure, Improvement, Site or Landscape Feature may be Contributing even if it has been altered if the alterations are reversible and the most significant architectural elements are intact and repairable.

All buildings previously classified as Non-Historic were automatically reclassified as Non-Contributing, including the South Shore Community Center.

On June 15, 2021, the Historic Preservation Board requested that the Planning Department evaluate the current classification for the South Shore Community Center building for the purpose of possibly modifying its classification from Non-Contributing to Contributing in the City's Historic

Properties Database. On September 13, 2021, the Historic Preservation Board, reviewed the request and affirmed the Non-Contributing classification.

On September 11, 2024, the Mayor and City Commission adopted Resolution No. 2024-33274, directing the Planning Department to prepare a Preliminary Evaluation and Recommendation Report relative to the possible historic designation of the South Shore Community Center as an individual historic site.

On December 17, 2024, the Board reviewed and continued the subject application to a date certain of March 11, 2025.

DESIGNATION PROCESS

The process for historic designation is specified in Section 2.13.9 of the Land Development Regulations of the City Code. 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.
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

The development of Miami Beach as an urban environment began in July of 1912 with the first platting of land by the Ocean Beach Realty Company. Ocean Beach's first plat included the area south of 5th Street and subsequent plats in 1913 and 1914 included nearly all of current day South Beach, south of 14th Street. Between 1912 and 1918 the landform and infrastructure of Miami Beach was created. The first roads were constructed in 1913, the first land fill (over 6 million cubic yards) completed in 1914. Lots were given away as a promotion, chinaware was given as inducement to attend land auction sales as prospective buyers were brought to the island on boats departing from the Miami mainland every 30 minutes.

With the infrastructure completed, the jubilation created by the end of World War I, and the completion of the County Causeway brought the initial land boom of Miami Beach in 1919. The permanent population of Miami Beach (incorporated in 1915) grew from 644 people in 1920 to over 15,000 people by 1925 and the number of winter visitors increased to 30,000. In September of 1926, a hurricane hit the Miami area marking the end of this first land boom. Winds of 132 miles-per-hour were recorded at the Allison Hospital (now demolished, the Allison and later St. Francis Hospital was located on the south side of Allison Island). Following the bust of 1926 and the depression of 1929, Miami Beach entered what would become its most profitable building period. Between 1930 and 1940, the permanent population of Miami Beach nearly doubled to 28,000 residents, with 75,000 visitors annually. By 1940, there were 239 hotels and 706 apartment buildings in the city.

Miami Beach played a significant role as a training site and redistribution center for the U.S. Army-Air Forces during World War II. The immediate availability of the city as a training center in 1942 is credited with reducing the length of the war effort by six to eight months and saving the government \$6 million in building costs. After the war, many veterans who had trained as recruits in Miami Beach returned here to vacation or to make their home.

As World War II came to an end and mid-century approached, development in the south beach area began to grow at a slower rate than in the more northerly areas of the city. This is especially true in the period following World War II through the 1960's, when newer hotels were being developed on former Millionaire's Row north of 16th Street and upward on Collins Avenue. It was the beginning of the modern resort hotel concept, complete with numerous restaurants, nightclubs, shops and private beaches--all of which drew many tourists away from southern Miami Beach. The nightclubs and restaurants in and around South Beach closed or were converted to other uses, and the small hotels and seasonal apartments came to depend upon a more modest,

increasing elderly, clientele.

Excerpts from a Miami Herald article published on June 10, 1956, entitled “On the gold coast – RUST”, gives an overview of the state of South Beach:

“A 15-block stretch of Miami Beach is floundering in a pocket-sized depression while the rest of South Florida enjoys a tourist boom. The area, known as the South Shore section, has been a subject of concern to city officials, businessmen and planners for years. While summertime vacationers pour into the city on the heels of capacity winter crowds, the South Shore shutter many of its hotel and closes its restaurants. ... The area was known as “South Beach” until civic groups, concerned with its declining economy, promoted the more elegant “South Shore.” But its economy, businessmen admit, remains stagnant.”

“Many of the buildings in the South Shore, extending from the southern tip of the city north the 15th Street, are pre-war vintage hotels, apartments and business blocks. Today most of them show the need of repainting and remodeling. They contrast strongly with post-war structures of white and pastel concrete, modernistic design, skyscraper heights and multi-colored neon, located north of Lincoln Road.”

As tourists and residents moved north to the modern resort hotels and apartment buildings, South Beach shifted to a secondary market, that of elderly, poorer, and more transient group that occupied apartment buildings and hotels. The continued use of these building through the 1970s however, largely helped to preserve them until their architectural recognition in 1976 by the newly formed Miami Design Preservation League (MDPL). MDPL’s tireless efforts led to the designation of the nation’s first 20th Century National Register Historic District in 1979. Although nationally designated, there was no protection against demolition until the city began to locally designate historic districts in 1986.

South Shore Community Center

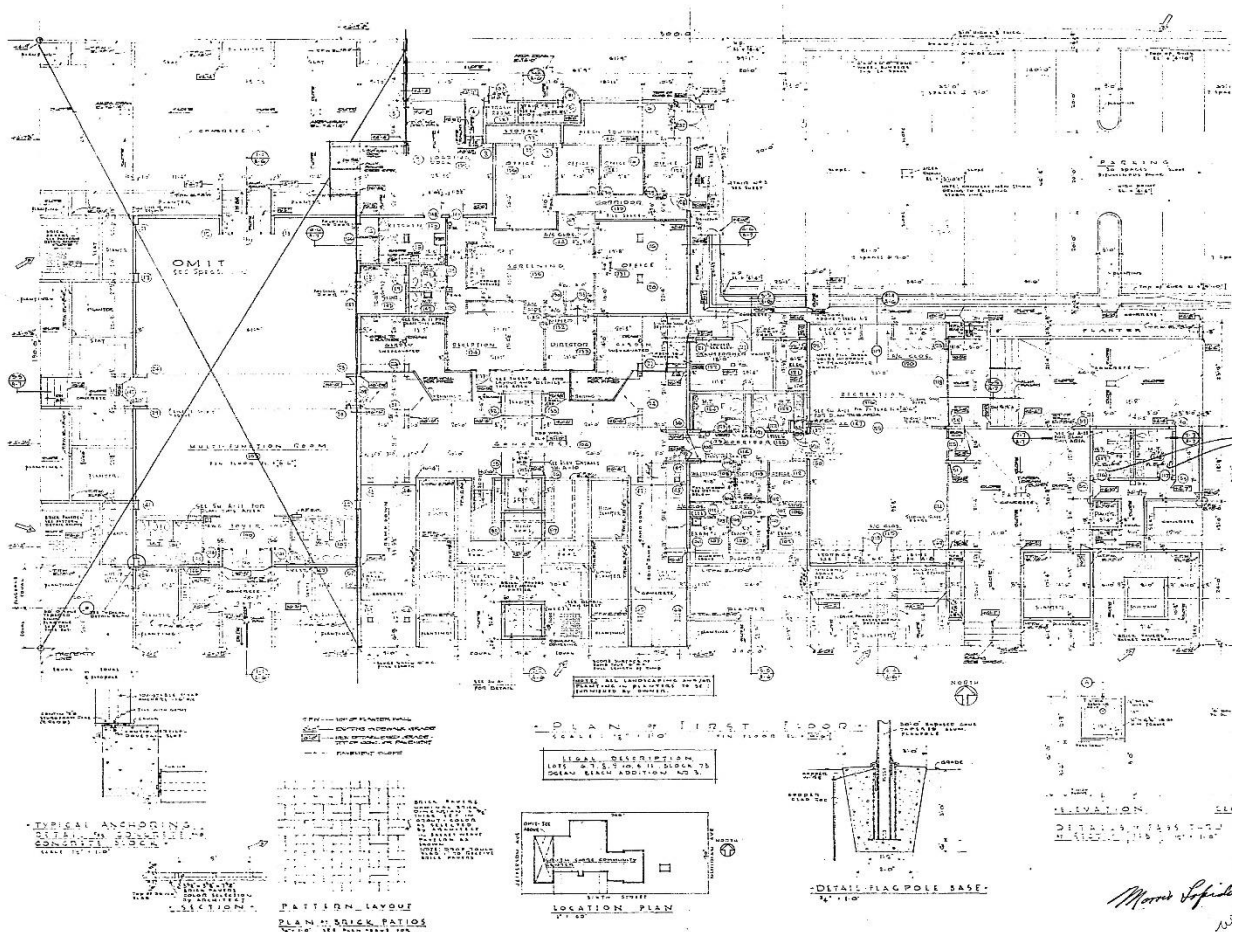
In order to serve an ever-growing elderly population in South Beach (referred to at the time as South Shore) the city, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), began the process of developing a community center. In 1968, the City Commission selected a city owned parking lot located at the northwest corner of 6th Street & Meridian Avenue and purchased four adjacent lots for the project. In 1969, Morris Lapidus & Associates was selected as the project architect and in September of that year a groundbreaking ceremony was held. In 1970, construction bids were received that exceeded the funds available for the project. Consequently, the western wing of the building was omitted, and construction commenced for the remainder of the project. This portion of the project was completed in 1971 and in the same year, the City Commission budgeted additional funds to construct the west auditorium wing. In 1974, Morris Lapidus & Associates was selected as the architect for the construction of the west auditorium wing, which was completed ca.1975.

The South Shore Community Center is highly characteristic of the Brutalist style of architecture. and the original building plan had three parts:

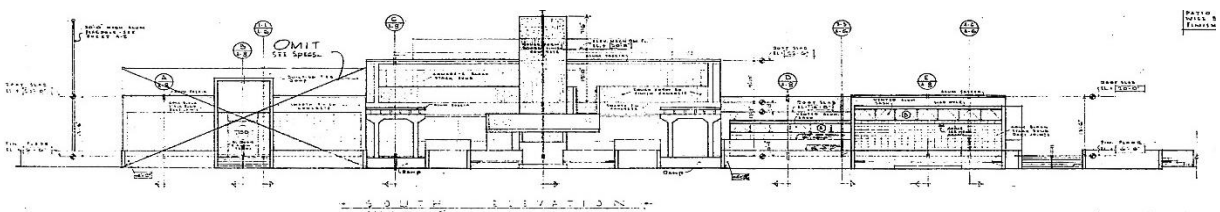
- A symmetrical 2-story central volume containing offices at the ground level and activity rooms at the second level;
- A 1-story auditorium wing to the west; and

- A 1-story recreation wing to the east.

Covered walkways from 6th Street lead to a concourse through which all areas of the building can be accessed. An exterior monumental stair that wraps the central elevator tower provides access to the second level. Below the stair is a multi-level water feature surrounded by built-in planters. The original building design incorporated distinctive architectural features and finishes including rough board form concrete finish, smooth concrete finish, exposed concrete blocks in a stacked bond with raked joints and exposed precast concrete beams, all characteristic of the Brutalist style of architecture.



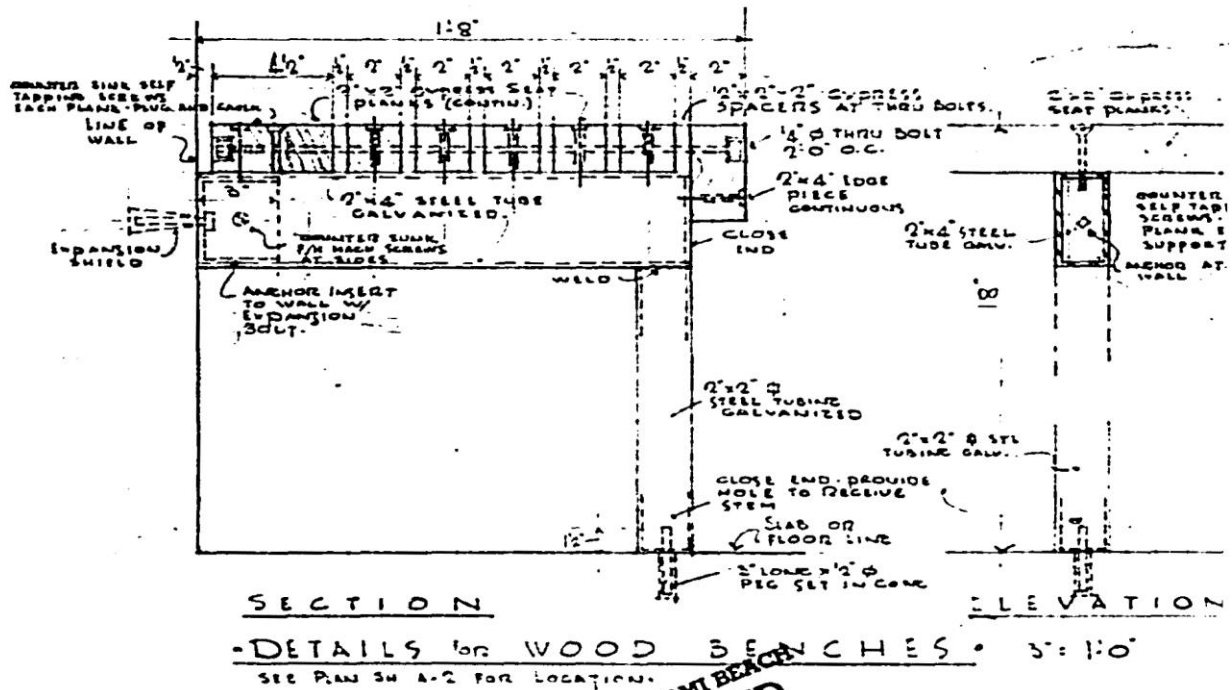
First Floor Plan, South Shore Community Center, Permit 84996, 1969



South Elevation Plan, South Shore Community Center, Permit 84996, 1969



Photograph, Ca. 1971



Detail drawings of wood benches, South Shore Community Center, Permit 84996, 1969

The auditorium wing constructed c.1975 features a symmetrical west facade and entrance terraces on the south and east sides of the building. The east wing features ribbon windows with projecting eyebrows and an expansive symmetrical glass façade that opens onto the eastern terrace. In 1977, the second level loggia facing 6th Street was enclosed.

RELATION TO ORDINANCE CRITERIA – Preliminary Evaluation

Sec. 2.13.9 Historic Designation

b. Criteria for designation

1. 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:
 - A. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of the city, the county, state or nation.
 - B. Association with the lives of persons significant in the city's past history.
 - C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction.
 - D. Possess high artistic values.
 - E. 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.
 - F. Have yielded or are likely to yield information important in pre-history or history.
 - G. Be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
 - H. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 7, article I, as applicable.

Below are staff's preliminary findings:

1. 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:
 - A. Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of the city, the county, state or nation.
***Satisfied;** the development and construction of the South Shore Community Center is related to urban renewal policies resulting from the Housing Act of 1949, in which the federal government provided grants to municipalities to clear slum and blight.*
 - C. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a historical period, architectural or design style or method of construction.
***Satisfied;** the South Shore Community Center embodies distinctive characteristics of the Brutalist style of architecture.*
 - D. Possess high artistic values.
***Partially Satisfied;** the original design of the South Shore Community Center was composed as unique pedestrian scaled design utilizing two primary materials, exposed concrete and glass. However, significant and distinct features of the Brutalist design of this building, including the exposed concrete and related finishes, have been compromised and may be beyond repair and restoration.*
 - E. 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 South Shore Community Center was designed by internationally acclaimed architect Morris Lapidus (1902-2001). Emigrating from Russia to New York as a child, Lapidus graduated from Columbia University and started his career in New York in retail design. Masterpieces of consumer psychology, his storefronts featured inventive shapes, curvilinear forms, and receding show windows to draw in shoppers. He first came to Miami Beach in 1929 on his honeymoon. After World War II, he returned here to pursue his ambition to design hotels, trading salesmanship for showmanship. His first major project was the interior of the Sans Souci hotel for fellow New Yorker Ben Novack and his partners, Harry Mufson and Harry Toffel. More interior work followed on the Algiers, Nautilus, DiLido, and Biltmore Terrace hotels. In 1954, as rezoning was underway, Novack again hired Lapidus to design an entire hotel project on the site of the soon-to-be razed Firestone estate: the Fontainebleau, which according to author Howard Kleinberg became "Miami Beach's most favored, most adored, most panned, most reviled hotel."*

In the following year, Novack's partner Harry Mufson hired Lapidus to design the Eden Roc Hotel next door to the Fontainebleau, resulting in legendary turmoil but also another landmark hotel design. Even before the Eden Roc opened, Lapidus won a commission to design the Americana hotel in Bal Harbour for the Tisch brothers. This magnificent structure was severely altered over the years and demolished in 2008. Lapidus' next major project was the conversion of Lincoln Road to a pedestrian mall in 1960. Shortly after that he began the Seacoast Towers buildings for Alexander Muss. Elsewhere, Lapidus designed the Americana (now Summit) Hotel in New York City, resort hotels throughout the Caribbean, and finally the Daniel Tower Hotel in Israel.

Lapidus eventually became one of Miami Beach's most beloved architects. His approach to design can best be summed up in the titles of two of his books: The Architecture of Joy and Too Much Is Never Enough.

2. 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.

Partially Satisfied; *the South Shore Community Center retains some degree of architectural integrity. However, significant and distinct features of the Brutalist design of this building, including the exposed concrete and related finishes, have been compromised and may be beyond repair and restoration. The alterations that have occurred overtime including the enclosure of open-air areas, introduction of security apparatus and as well as the extremely low finish floor elevation indicate that the subject structure may be able to be effectively adapted without severely compromising the original design.*

3. 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 7, article I, as applicable.

Criteria for ordinances, resolutions, or recommendations:

- A. Whether the proposal affects an area that is vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise, pursuant to adopted projections.

This possible historic site affects a property that is vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise. Based upon a property survey from 2021, the grade elevations (at the sidewalk) for this property are as follows:

- Jefferson Avenue 3.08' NGVD
- 6th Street 2.81' NGVD
- Meridian Avenue 3.12' NGVD

Additionally, based on the survey, the first finished floor elevation is 5.66' NGVD.

The unified sea level rise projection for Southeast Florida updated in 2019 projects the anticipated range of sea level rise from 2000 to 2120. The projection highlights three planning horizons:

- Short term: by 2040, sea level is projected to rise 10 to 17 inches above 2000 mean sea level.
- Medium term: by 2070, sea level is projected to rise 21 to 54 inches above 2000 mean sea level.
- Long term: by 2120, sea level is projected to rise 40 to 136 inches above 2000 mean sea level.

B. Whether the proposal will increase the resiliency of the city with respect to sea level rise.

The proposal may be in conflict with near, mid-term and long-term efforts to increase the resiliency of the city with respect to sea-level rise. Modifications to the building, including building elevation will be likely necessary to further the City's resiliency initiatives.

C. Whether the proposal is compatible with the city's sea level rise mitigation and resiliency efforts.

The proposal may be in conflict with near, mid-term and long-term efforts to increase the resiliency of the city with respect to sea-level rise. Modifications to the building, including building elevation will be likely necessary to further the City's resiliency initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the research and evidence presented herein, the historical and architectural significance of the proposed historic structure based upon the applicable designation criteria noted herein, and in accordance with Section 2.13.9 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 South Shore Community Center Historic Site.

CURRENT SITE PHOTOGRAPHS







