

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.