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Miami Marine Stadium renovation gets boost

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Graffiti covers the Miami Marine Stadium, which has been closed since Hurricane Andrew struck in 1992.

The cost of repairing the historic but deteriorated Miami Marine Stadium could be substantially lower than previous estimates, according to a new engineering study that appears to boost the prospects of renovation for the long-shuttered site.

The study, by the nationally recognized firm of Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, estimates the cost of basic repair work to the publicly owned, raw-concrete structure, widely regarded as a modern architectural and engineering landmark, at \$5.5 million to \$8.5 million, according to a statement by the World Monuments Fund, the study's main

sponsor.

A previous, less in-depth analysis commissioned by the city of Miami pegged the cost of basic repairs at \$15 million.

Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado, who has called restoration of the 1964 stadium a chief priority for his administration, quickly embraced the new study. Though the financially strapped city has not identified money for the work, Regalado said the study marks an encouraging start to a process he said "will restore one of the city's crown jewels."

"It is very good news," Regalado told The Miami Herald. "We feel we are on the right track, and we thank this group for the work they did."

Regalado said he hopes to have a proposal for the stadium's renovation completed before the end of his first 100 days in office in March, possibly with the use of state or federal grants and possibly in a partnership with a private entity.

The full engineering report will be made publicly available Tuesday, but the World Monuments Fund issued a brief summary of its conclusions in advance.

"The results of this engineering study are an important step forward for this modern icon," fund president Bonnie Burnham said in the statement. "Miami Marine Stadium is an important structure and deserves to be fully renovated and returned to use."

Burnham will be in Miami Tuesday to tour the stadium with Regalado.

The New York City-based fund, which supports preservation of world landmarks, has embraced the Marine Stadium cause, putting the site on its "watch list" of endangered places. It was the engineering study's main funder, with help from Friends of Marine Stadium, Miami-Dade Commissioner Carlos Gimenez and several preservation groups.

The cost of basic repairs would vary depending on what protective measures are included to prevent future deterioration, the fund statement said. There would be an additional cost to replace seats and bathrooms and meet handicapped accessibility requirements, but that has not yet been tabulated.

One big unknown: the condition of the pilings sunk into Biscayne Bay that support the stadium's grandstand. That awaits an additional study.

But the engineers -- who also analyzed the stadium's structural condition after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and found it basically sound -- said any further deterioration since then "is not alarming," according to the fund's release.

The stadium -- once the popular site of powerboat races and concerts and treasured by many longtime Miamians -- has been closed since Andrew. The city once planned to do away with it, but a grass-roots campaign to salvage the stadium resulted in its designation as a protected historic landmark by the city's historic preservation board and rising international recognition.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation put the stadium on its list of 11 most endangered sites last year and helped fund the engineering study.

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