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Rehabilitation of Miami Marine Stadium gets boost

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

aviglucci@MiamiHerald.com



PATRICK FARRELL / MIAMI HERALD FILE

The Miami Marine Stadium has been closed since Hurricane Andrew struck in 1992. In a big leap forward for preservationists trying to salvage the historic but dilapidated Miami Marine Stadium, the Miami-Dade Commission has unanimously agreed to provide \$3 million toward the city-owned facility's restoration.

It's the first chunk of money secured for the renovation, a priority of Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado, who said the grant will make it easier for the city and preservationists to attract additional funding. The cash-strapped city is unlikely to provide substantial funding directly, Regalado has said.

``This is important because now we can go to other government entities and private donors and use this \$3 million as leverage," said Regalado Wednesday, a day after the county commission approved the measure by a 12-0 vote.

The county money, which will come out of a voter-approved bond issue, has lots of conditions, however. To collect, the city must present a full plan for the shuttered stadium's rehabilitation and a plan for its use and management. It also must demonstrate that it has sufficient money to finish the renovation.

``I was looking for a way to jump start this thing," said the resolution sponsor, Miami-Dade Commissioner Carlos Gimenez, whose district includes the stadium site. ``Now it's going to be up to the city to do the rest."

Regalado said he is confident the city will have the plans done within 18 months, although the county commission gave the city five years.

``It's something that we are committed to," Regalado said.

The city has not yet determined the cost of rehabilitation of the 1964 stadium, a dramatic, raw-concrete structure widely regarded as a masterpiece of architecture and engineering. It has been closed since Hurricane Andrew struck in 1992.

A privately funded engineering analysis earlier this year found the concrete-and-steel skeleton of the stadium is pocked with moderate to severe corrosion and would cost from \$5.6 million to \$8.5 million to repair. That doesn't include the cost of new bathrooms, seating or lighting, sound and electrical systems, nor repairs to stadium grandstand support pilings sunk into the bay bottom, which have not been analyzed.

But the \$3 million represents a major boon to preservationists, organized as Friends of Miami Marine Stadium, who launched what struck many as a quixotic battle to salvage the stadium at a time when the city intended to do away with it.

Since then, the preservationists have managed to persuade the city's preservation board to declare the stadium a protected historic site, and have garnered worldwide publicity and funding for their campaign.

The county money will come from \$10 million that was earmarked for historic preservation under a general obligation bond fund.

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