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## Miami Marine Stadium may become a landmark

BY ANDRES VIGLUCCI

A campaign to save the storied Miami Marine Stadium will get its first test on Tuesday, when the city's historic preservation board will consider a proposal to designate the long-neglected but architecturally dazzling structure as a historic landmark.

The effort has received a boost from the city's preservation officer, Ellen Uguccioni, who in a report to the board called the 1964 stadium "a *tour de force* of modern design" and concluded it is eligible for designation.

But the save-the-stadium effort must still overcome a significant hurdle, Uguccioni said: Generally, buildings must be 50 years old before they are eligible for historic status. Because the stadium is only 44 years old, proponents of designation must demonstrate it is "of exceptional importance," she wrote.

The proponents say they are confident they can do so.

"We will be offering some very strong evidence on that," said Don Worth, spokesman for Friends of Miami Marine Stadium, the group spearheading the preservation effort along with Dade Heritage Trust. "This is a really significant structure. Fifty years is kind of an arbitrary number. The important things are that, as a piece of architecture, this building is revered around the world, and it has a very strong hold on people's memories in Miami."

If the board agrees the stadium merits consideration, it would likely schedule a full debate and a final vote on historic status for the fall. Historic designation would bar demolition or significant alteration of the building, owned by the city of Miami.

But proponents recognize that designation is only half the battle. Saving it, they say, will also require finding viable uses for the stadium, once the memorable site of powerboat races and rollicking waterfront concerts by Jimmy Buffett and other popular performers.

City planning consultants have been asked to examine possibilities as part of a larger master plan for Virginia Key, where the stadium is located. The Friends group is also working on proposals, Worth said.

### 'FIRST STEP'

"Assuming we pass this first step, we will then launch a campaign that's not just local, but national and international, to draw attention to what we're doing here," he said. "We will flesh out some more opportunities to show this building can be made viable."

The city closed the stadium after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, in part because of storm damage but also because the facility was underused and a drain on public coffers at a time of fiscal problems.

Since then, the stadium has deteriorated. Nearly every square foot is covered by graffiti. The city

earlier this year commissioned an engineering evaluation to determine the stadium's structural soundness, but a city spokeswoman said it's not complete.

Backers, including the stadium's architect, Hilario Candela, have said they're confident the structure is fundamentally sound.

City officials have been reluctant to salvage the stadium. A draft Virginia Key master plan designated the site, adjacent to a pair of city-owned marinas in need of upgrading, as the center of marine-oriented commercial development that would help finance development of parks on the island.

Designation by the preservation board would force the city to revamp that strategy. The city commission has the power to overturn board decisions, but has rarely done so.

Interest in the stadium, long considered an architectural and engineering marvel by *connoisseurs*, has increased with the popular rediscovery of mid-20th Century modern architecture. Cities from London to New York and Chicago have begun recognizing modern structures as historic landmarks. Two years ago the city of Miami designated a nearly 40-block stretch of northern Biscayne Boulevard as a historic district, which features a collection of 1950s Miami Modern motels and apartment buildings.

The president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Richard Moe, sent the city a letter urging historic designation of the stadium "as an important mid-century civic structure -- a building type that has only recently been recognized as an important part of America's heritage."

The stadium has been featured in books and exhibitions the world over -- including an architectural forum this week in Turin, Italy.

### **V-SHAPED COLUMNS**

In her report, Uguccioni highlighted the stadium's architectural distinction and ingenuity -- "the bold contemporary expression of its design" -- as key to its importance. She cited the bare-concrete structure's vast Origami-like roof, anchored only at the rear by massive V-shaped columns, which seems to float over a grandstand seating nearly 7,000.

To overcome the 50-year hurdle, she suggested that proponents broaden their report on the stadium's significance, written by architect and University of Miami professor Jorge Hernandez, to consider how it stands out from other contemporary structures.