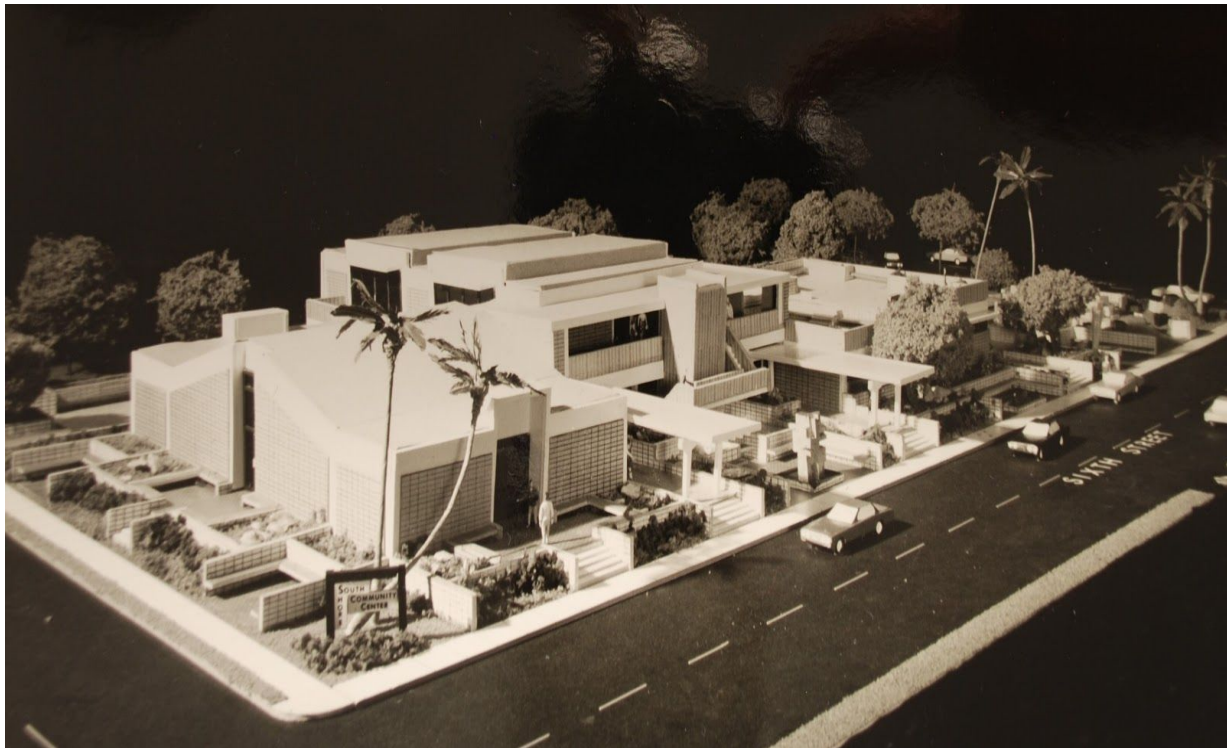


The South Shore Community Center



The Case for its Preservation



David D. McKinney, Ph.D.

Architectural Historian

davidmckinney@yahoo.com

August 17, 2020

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Historical Context	2
Changing City, Declining Reputation	2
Sending the “Red Pepper” Back to Congress	3
Architectural Understatement was not his Style	4
Diagnosing and Prescribing for the Most Fabulous Invalid	4
Morris Lapidus, A Modernist?	5
<i>Barocco Rococo: A Symbol of Bad Taste</i>	7
Radical Change in Future Designs	7
In Actuality an Evolution in Design	8
South Shore	9
Ripe for Renewal	9
Seniors Exercise their Political Power	9
The South Shore Community Center	10
A Centerpiece of Urban Renewal	10
Designed for Seniors and for the South Shore Neighborhood	12
An Illustration of Lapidus’ Evolution as an Architect	13
Relationship to Miami Beach Architecture and its Climate	14
From “form follows function” to “form follows purpose”	14
Reimagining a Miami Beach building type	14
Path and Place	16
Complexity of Program	19
South Shore Community Center: In the Life of the City and the Eye of the Nation	19
A Result of Senior Activism	19
A National Model	20
A Place to be Heard	21
A Harbinger of Demographic Change	22
Conclusion: The Case of Preservation	23
Miami Beach Heritage is Ongoing	23

The South Shore Community Center

A Case for Its Preservation

Introduction

To demolish the South Shore Community Center is to erase a chapter from Miami Beach's history, the legacy of Rep. Claude Pepper's national advocacy for the elderly, and the career of architect Morris Lapidus.

The South Shore Community Center is located at 833 Sixth Street in the Flamingo Park Historic District of Miami Beach, Florida. Designed in 1969 and completed in two phases by the architect Morris Lapidus, the Community Center is an example of a neglected aspect of Lapidus' work. Created in response to changing demographics and acute social issues, the Community Center is both part of and the witness to local and national history. Alterations to the building have not affected its architectural integrity, but rather are illustrations of how the neighborhood, its residents, and the city have evolved since 1969.

Architectural Significance: The South Shore Community Center was designed by Morris Lapidus, whom the City of Miami Beach has recognized for his contribution to its built environment by naming a historic district in his honor and inducting him into the city's hall of fame. While the Community Center does not share the reputation of Lapidus' hotels, the building complex is an extraordinary example of how Lapidus' designs were influenced by his personal struggle of being an outsider in his profession.

Historical Significance: The South Shore Community Center is integral to local and national history of 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 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, served as a national model for advancements in aging, and was the site of a Congressional hearing on the persistent needs of the elderly, which was 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.

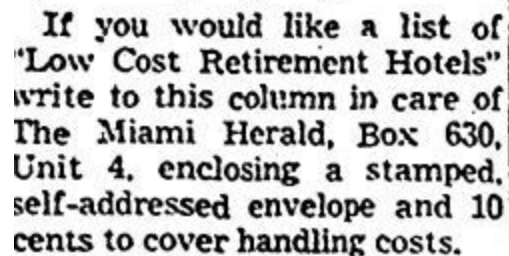
Historical Context

Changing City, Declining Reputation

In 1950, the City of Miami Beach named the 275 acres from Government Cut to Sixth Street as South Shore. Throughout the next three decades, the area garnered a reputation as derelict and contrary to what attracted tourists to the city. The hotels and housing in the area were older, and their residents more than matched them in age.

These residents were part of an emerging segment of Americans, known by the recently minted term retiree. They steadily grew in number after the federal government started paying Social Security benefits in 1940.¹ Following World War II, many retirees from the northern states made their way to Miami Beach. They were not coming for a visit or for the season; they were moving to the city to spend the rest of their lives in the warm climate.

This retiree migration changed every aspect of Miami Beach from its image as a playground of the rich to the services that the city offered. In terms of the built environment, the migration had a profound effect on hotels and apartment complexes. Retirees found the small hotels, in particular, not only affordable, but also as a means to create enclaves of community within the larger city.



If you would like a list of
"Low Cost Retirement Hotels"
write to this column in care of
The Miami Herald, Box 630,
Unit 4, enclosing a stamped,
self-addressed envelope and 10
cents to cover handling costs.

Excerpt from a newspaper column on retiring to Miami Beach.

Their *takeover* of local hotels was accelerated by an act of nature. In the winter season of 1957-58, Miami Beach experienced an extended cold snap that curtailed tourism, and it was the older hotels that were left out in the cold. Four hotels declared bankruptcy, and 25 others reported severe financial distress.

To attract visitors and to compete with newer hotels with more amenities, hotels across South Beach adopted the "American Plan" that offered a room with meals for one price. Competition among the hotels created a price war resulting in a fifteen percent rate drop in 1959 and was instrumental in transforming seasonal hotels into year-round residences. The adoption

¹ Merriam Webster Dictionary classifies the word retiree as American in origin and traces its first usage to 1935, the same year that the Social Security Act was enacted. The term did not enter common usage until after World War II and was often used interchangeably with "senior citizen." Both terms generally referred to persons 65 years of age or older. Individuals in this category became to be considered a distinct segment of the American population in the 1950s with the founding of *Senior Citizen Magazine* in 1955 and the establishment of the American Association of Retired Persons in 1958. Throughout this narrative, the retirees in Miami Beach will be referred to as elderly or seniors because these terms were used in city and national documents related to South Shore from 1960 to 1980.

of the American plan also sent restaurants into decline since hotel guests had no incentive to dine out.

The migration of retirees and their concentration in one area of the city brought threats to their wellbeing. As early as the mid-1950s, targeted crime on retirees increased. A crime report in the *Miami Herald* titled “Penny Ante Holdup Men Strike Again” illustrates.² Chronicling six robberies over a weekend committed by the same two perpetrators, the report detailed how the robbers started anew on Monday morning beginning at the Wellington Hotel at 655 Euclid Avenue and moving northward. Within fifteen minutes, they had also held up the front desk at the Admiral Hotel at 11th and Meridian. In the 1960s, an increasing number of classified ads mirrored the growth of crime in the South Shore neighborhood. These ads appealed for the return of stolen items with “no questions asked.”

Increased crime was not the only issue brought about by the city’s changing demographics. With an aging population came the need to address healthcare and social concerns. By 1962, the change in the South Shore population had garnered the attention of the proponents of tourism represented by the hotels, advocates for the elderly represented by the city’s newly elected congressman, Claude Pepper, and the architect Morris Lapidus. Lapidus came to serve both factions.

Sending the “Red Pepper” Back to Congress

The State of Florida first sent Claude Pepper to Congress in 1936, and he served in the Senate until his branding as a Communist sympathizer cost him the Democratic primary in 1950. After an unsuccessful attempt to win back his Senate seat, Pepper was elected to the House of Representatives in 1962 from a newly created district that included Miami Beach.

At the time of his election, the first wave of the retiree migration into Miami Beach had advanced in age to the extent that their use of the healthcare system was a constant and their need for assistance in the rituals of daily life was a growing necessity.

Pepper believed that by addressing the needs of the elderly in Miami Beach he could develop programs and services that could be replicated nationally. His advocacy on behalf of older Americans led the House of Representatives to create a select committee on the elderly and appoint him as chair. Chief among the concerns of the committee was the provision of healthcare, but Pepper widened the scope to include nutritional programs, as well as facilities and programs that addressed unique sociological issues prevalent among the elderly.

Pepper and his colleagues wanted these programs and facilities to be placed in the same neighborhoods where their constituents lived. This made the provision of services more accessible and was seen as a means to reverse urban decline in major cities. Pepper outlined what was needed in Miami Beach and across the nation:

. . . our growing [elderly] population requires the adequate and timely provision of a wide variety of public works and community facilities. This includes not only hospitals, but also . . . facilities which serve community needs.³

At the time of this speech in 1969, Rep. Pepper was already working with the City of Miami Beach to create one such facility, and it already had a name -- the South Shore Community Center. A facility that he intended to be a national model for improving the daily lives of the elderly in the urban neighborhoods where they lived.

² Miami Herald (online), February 1, 1955.

³ Claude Pepper, Address, March 9, 1969. Claude Pepper Papers. FSU Library.

Architectural Understatement was not his Style⁴

The architect Morris Lapidus had changed the cityscape and reputation of Miami Beach with his design of the Fontainebleau Hotel in 1954. His second hotel, the Eden Roc, located beside the Fontainebleau was built in quick succession. Together, they established what was considered the “Miami Style” or “Miami Look” in architecture and interior design. This style was characterized by overscale ornament and lavish interiors that Lapidus’ critics dubbed as *Bourgeois Baroque*.

These hotels contained venues that brought internationally known entertainers like Frank Sinatra and also served as the backdrop for television programs like *I Love Lucy*. Their glamor and amenities drew tourists to mid beach and offered an extreme contrast to the city’s aging Art Deco hotels.

The appeal of Lapidus’ hotels was not enough to counter a growing perception that Miami Beach had seen better days.⁵ And by 1961, there were concerns that even the Eden Roc and Fontainebleau were losing their appeal when the comic Jack Benny could not draw an audience to cover his \$35,000 a week salary.

The Fabulous Invalid

Sunday, January 14, 1962 THE MIAMI HERALD 2-G

Miami Beach Needs Strong Medicine

Diagnosing and Prescribing for the Most Fabulous Invalid

The change in the city’s demographics and the deterioration of its reputation were of great concern to another constituent, Miami Beach tourism. In 1962, the *Miami Herald* announced that “the Hotel Industry of Miami Beach was the most fabulous invalid in the resort world.”⁶ The newspaper assembled hoteliers, architects, and designers to determine “what made it sick and what could restore it to good health.”

Among the panelists and one of the most vocal participants was the architect Morris Lapidus. Lapidus criticized Miami Beach on two levels. Firstly, he stated that “there is no culture or social status here.” Secondly, he said that most of the Miami Beach hotels were dated and obsolete. Implied, but not spoken by Lapidus, was that changing demographics (i.e., the city’s burgeoning elderly population) was at the root of both evils.

Lapidus sounded the alarm by proclaiming “Beware of Hot Plates!” He told the newspaper that “. . . more and more of the old hotels will become rooming houses and people will be cooking on hot plates in rooms created by a bygone era.”

Moreover, Lapidus embraced urban renewal and the government program that would subsequently help to fund the construction of the South Shore Community Center. He noted that “. . . it is economically unfeasible to do anything with the worst of the stucco palaces except tear

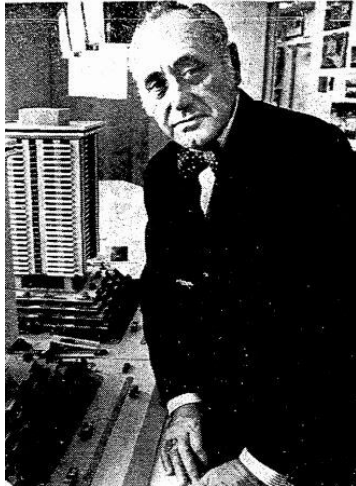
⁴ Quote from Morris Lapidus’ obituary. *New York Times* (online archive), January 19, 2001.

⁵ Gregory W. Bush, “Playground and the Promotion of Spectacle,” *Pacific Historical Review*, v.62, no.2, May 1999, p.169.

⁶ *Miami Herald* (online), January 14, 1962.

them down. We can do it with housing because there is a government program that makes it possible . . . There is no Title 1 program for the hotel business.”

In prescribing the “strong medicine” for replenishing the city’s hotel inventory, Lapidus did not look to his work at the Fontainebleau or Eden Roc as examples. Instead, he specifically referenced them as outliers and cautioned that there was “. . . no reason why the rest of the beach should ape them.” What he recommended was a simplified design for a new generation of Miami Beach hotels that would be characterized by light, air, and informality. These recommendations were aspects of a new approach to design he was developing.



“Oh, I don’t want always to be referred to as the architect of the Fontainebleau,” he implores.

Morris Lapidus in 1969 from a newspaper interview in which he discusses his work and the future of his profession. He lauds standardization, prefabrication, and synthetic materials (not ornamentation) in design. His plea to the reporter is not to link him to the Fontainebleau, but present him as a pacesetter in his profession. (Miami Herald (online) February 9, 1969)

Morris Lapidus, *A Modernist?*

As noted in Gabrielle Esperdy’s important study of his career, the decade of the 1960s was a period of soul searching for Lapidus as to what direction he should take his architectural practice.⁷ His designs for the Eden Roc and Fontainebleau hotels had brought him much notoriety and even more criticism (e.g., “grossest national product”). While he was credited for establishing the Miami style in architecture, this same style was continually ridiculed in the press and by Lapidus’ fellow architects. And by 1962, even Miami Beach’s hoteliers were worried that “the look” was dated.

Lapidus’ dilemma was reflected in his writings. In 1961, he wrote a defense of his work in an essay for the *AIA Journal* stating that ornament in architecture is what separated man from beast.⁸ A year later he penned an essay stating “I am a modernist.”

⁷ Gabrielle Esperdy, “I am a Modernist. Morris Lapidus and his Critics,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* v. 66 no.4, December 2007, pp. 494-516.

⁸ Morris Lapidus, “A Quest for Emotion in Architecture,” *AIA Journal* v. 36. No. 5, November 1961, pp.55-56.

As outlined by Alison Hotten in her Ph.D. dissertation, Lapidus' work shows a decided move toward modernism as early as 1960. The Crystal Apartments in Miami Beach were designed in that year, and Lapidus considered it his homage to modernist Mies van der Rohe.⁹

Just prior to the design of the Crystal Apartments, he created a city park on Kosciusko Street in Brooklyn, NYC. Consisting of a pool and playground, the park was intentionally “bare bones without ornament” and constructed totally in concrete. Lapidus proudly noted that the design was “without a single blade of grass or a single tree.”¹⁰

This design seemed out of character for Lapidus. Indeed, it is more reminiscent of the architect and modernist icon Louis Kahn's Trenton Bath House (also a playground and a pool) of 1955 than of Lapidus' other works from this period. Like Kahn who was known for reinterpreting elements of ancient monuments in modernist vocabulary, Lapidus even created a large pyramid to house the bathhouse for the park.

The importance of the Kosciusko Street park to Lapidus is indicated in his autobiography. The opening chapter is devoted to its design, and he noted that it proved that his architectural principles could be applied without lavish ornamentation and in any medium or style (e.g., modernism).¹¹



The pyramidal locker room for the pool at Kosciusko Street park in Brooklyn, NYC. Designed by Lapidus and his son Alan in 1959, Lapidus believed that this project proved his design tenets could be applied without lavish ornamentation. (Photograph circa 2018).

Lapidus' apparent move away from ornate to spare design may have been driven by his clients.¹² Robert Swedroe, a designer for Lapidus, noted that their clients were demanding cost-efficient designs during the 1960s. Their attention was not on “decorative detail, but on cost per square foot.”¹³ And it is during this period (1967) that Lapidus published his monograph,

⁹ Alison L. Hotten, *Building Bagel Beach: An Examination of Jewish Architects and Regional Design*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nevada Reno, pp. 228-231.

¹⁰ Morris Lapidus, *Too Much is Never Enough*, New York: Rizzoli, 1996, p. 9.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 9-14.

¹² Lapidus attributes his “homage to Mies van der Rohe” to the request of his client. See Lapidus, *Too Much* p.221.

¹³ Telephone interview with Robert Swedroe, June 12, 2020.

Architecture: A Business and a Profession. And an essential part of Lapidus' business acumen was understanding the client and the nature of his industry.

Barocco Rococo: A Symbol of Bad Taste

Lapidus had real cause for concern after the American Institute of Architects held its annual convention in Miami Beach in 1964. Floods of criticism from convention speakers and in the national press cited Lapidus as emblematic of what was wrong with the Miami style.

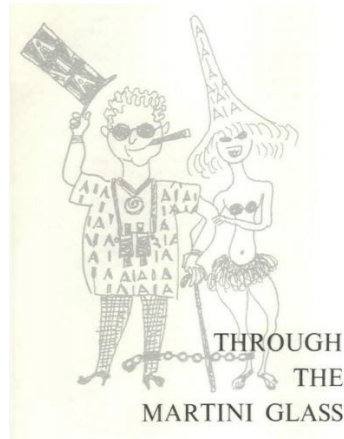


Illustration from an editorial in the AIA Journal that names Miami Beach as "a bad taste town" and offers a tongue-in-cheek apology for Lapidus' architecture.

An editorial in the *AIA Journal* titled "Through the Martini Glass" called Miami Beach "a bad taste town" and suggested that "maybe we should go back there . . . and have a bad taste convention." Then in a *defense* of Lapidus that was more damning than exculpatory, the editorial concluded that "He is the Barocco Rococo architect lost in a world of concrete-refined Ictinuses . . . "

Radical Change in Future Designs

The next year, no doubt to counter this wide-spread criticism, Lapidus partnered with the designer Henry End to create a vision of the living spaces of tomorrow. The underlying principle for these spaces is that good design and modern synthetic materials could make any room both functional and inviting at virtually every price point.¹⁵

Lapidus reconfigured the shape of rooms to make smaller spaces appear to have greater dimension and banished ornamentation from the design. Instead of ornamentation, he employed manufactured ceiling tiles which provided texture for visual effect and laminate coverings which were both functional (i.e., easy care) and decorative. Carpets of modern polyester fibers were decorative and served as sound barriers. **In short, he made architecture affordable, utilitarian, and mass producible.**

¹⁴ *AIA Journal* v. 41, no. 2, February 1964, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ *Miami Herald* (online) November 7, 1965.

The adaptability of these designs to various uses from hotel and home to office was demonstrated in models displayed at the 1965 National Hotel and Motel Exposition and at the Association of Homebuilders Exposition, also in the same year.

Lapidus' belief in the universal applicability of these concepts for the future led him to predict that they would lead to standardization of design. In a 1969 interview with the *Miami Herald*, he stated that "future construction must look to prefabrication, construction . . . by factory methods." Even in making this prediction, Lapidus was seeking to rehabilitate his reputation. He told the reporter that he did not want to be "always referred to as the architect of the Fontainebleau." More importantly, he wanted to demonstrate that he "set the pace" for his profession and the clients he served.¹⁶

In Actuality an Evolution in Design

Lapidus' work during the 1960s represents more of a progression than a sea change in design principles. Even in his previous retail store and hotel work of the 1940s and 50s, there had been a distinct delineation between ornament and structure. As noted in Duttman and Schneider's monograph on his work, Lapidus ". . . distinguish[ed] between the transient and the permanent components of architecture -- between decoration and what will eventually remain as the substance of structure."¹⁷

In the early 1960s, he focused more on the articulation of the structural elements. He experimented by melding the structuralism of Mies van der Rohe and the sculptural forms of Erich Mendelsohn into designs that engaged the public as his highly ornate signature works had done in the previous decade.

Throughout the 1960s, he continued to experiment with the use of materials. Not just in interiors as demonstrated in his rooms of the future, but also in the construction of larger buildings. For the concert hall at the University of Miami, he employed crushed quartz and anodized aluminum on the exterior to replicate the texture and play of light on cut stone. In other words, he wanted the building materials to create a distinct sheen on the facade that replaced the monumentality of stone.

Most importantly, by employing these methods, Lapidus hoped to establish his work in the canon of modernism. But, ever the contrarian, he also wanted to chip away at what he considered to be the clay feet of the modern movement, especially its analogy of architecture as a machine. His works were more than the cold efficiency of design. They were meant to engage and captivate their visitors.

In his own defense, he often cited the *architect's architect* who was known for his elaborately ornamented buildings and was universally accepted as a forerunner of modernism, Louis Sullivan. Lapidus noted that in his own designs "form follows function," borrowing Sullivan's famous maxim.¹⁸ But Lapidus thought his designs went further. They also were in sync with their location and conformed to the needs and mindset of the people who visited them. The architectural historian Gabrielle Esperdy noted that "Lapidus fused the functionalist

¹⁶ *Miami Herald* (online), February 9, 1969.

¹⁷ Martina Duttman and Friederike Schneider, eds., *Morris Lapidus: Architect of the American Dream*, Boston, Verlag, 1992, p. 11.

¹⁸ His first analogy appears to date from 1957 (See *New York Times* online archive January 6, 1957). Esperdy describes how Lapidus related this dictum to his work in the 1960s. See Esperdy, p. 497.

tenets of modernism with a romantic responsiveness to human emotions, modulating the response according to his analysis of program and building type.”¹⁹

From his early retail designs, he had learned how to entice and manipulate shoppers. From his living spaces of tomorrow, he demonstrated how materials could be employed for the same effect as ornament. From his design of Kosciuszko Street park, he understood the unique demands of designing for urban settings and how to set his design principles “in concrete.” All these elements were incorporated in the design of the South Shore Community Center, which was to be placed in the middle of *an area ripe for a new face*.

South Shore

Ripe for Renewal

On February 22, 1969, the City of Miami Beach released to the press an urban renewal feasibility study on the area from Eighth Street to Government Cut. The *Miami Herald* relayed the study’s terse assessment to the public:

Miami Beach’s South Shore -- where aged Jews have come for many years to die in the sun, where Cuban immigrants are now settling and where governments park their garbage trucks and buses along the bay -- is ripe for a \$20 million dollar urban renewal.

This renewal project extended beyond housing to the provision of social services tailored to the elderly population. The city was beginning to recognize and address neighborhood problems, but not at the pace that its elderly residents demanded.

Seniors Exercise their Political Power

Miami Beach’s elderly residents grew impatient with what they perceived as the city’s unwarranted delay in the rehabilitation of South Shore. With the backing of the National Council for Senior Citizens, a group of 300 to 400 elderly protestors staged a march on October 1, 1969, beginning at the construction site of the South Shore Community Center at Sixth and Meridian and ending at city hall.²⁰ Holding placards stating “South Shore Community Center and more facilities for seniors” and “housing for seniors,” they chanted their demands outside city hall until the city commission members left their meeting and came down to address them.

The protestors had cause for impatience. It had taken almost a decade for the promised South Shore Hospital to open. First planned in 1962 for a scheduled opening two years later, the hospital did not admit its first patient until May 27, 1968.²¹ The city’s inertia had also threatened the federal funding for the South Shore Community Center, and many of the protestors believed that the city commission’s political wrangling was endangering the renewal project.²² They were also vocal in their disappointment that the city had scaled back the Community Center because of funding.

¹⁹ Esperdy, p. 497.

²⁰ *Miami Herald* (online), October 1, 1969.

²¹ South Shore Hospital, History *Miami News* (online) April 2019.

²² *Miami Herald* (online) May 8, 1969.

The local newspapers and the international wire service, Associated Press, carried stories and pictures of the protest. When a reporter asked about the number of marchers, a woman responded, “We would have had more here, but the rain last night kept the crowd small because it kicked up a lot of people’s arthritis.”²³ However, the almost 400 people who showed up to protest made their voice heard at city hall.



Associated Press photograph (left) of the seniors march from the construction site of the South Shore Community Center to Miami Beach City Hall. (Right) Detail of the photograph showing the South Shore Community Center sign. (AP Wirephoto October 2, 1969)

The South Shore Community Center

A Centerpiece of Urban Renewal

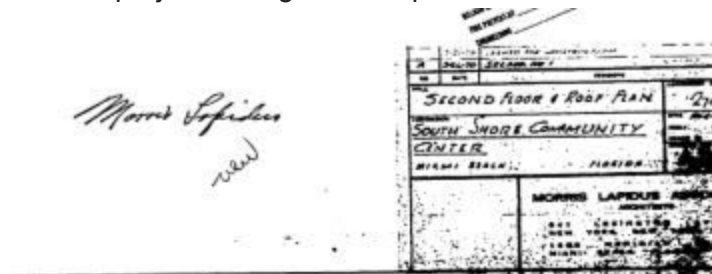
The South Shore Community Center was designed to be a model program for the nation in providing older Americans with a facility that addressed all aspects of their lives, including their spiritual wellbeing. The Community Center was created to serve a population of 16,000, 60% of whom earned less than \$3,000 per year. It had been put before Miami Beach voters in May 1968 and approved as part of a bond referendum. The city commission then okayed the issuance of bonds, \$165,000 of which would serve as Miami Beach’s match for the federal grant of \$254,700 for the project. On January 15, 1969, the commission approved Morris Lapidus as the architect. His fee was eight percent of the project (the AIA standard) and not to exceed \$23,000.

²³ *Miami Herald* (online) October 2, 1969.

Lapidus had undertaken numerous and varied projects for the city ranging from the transformation of Lincoln Road into a pedestrian mall in 1959 to the design of a fire station in 1966. What is unusual about the South Shore Community Center was Lapidus' continued first-hand involvement through its initial design, the construction of the scaled-back version, and the 1974 completion of the original concept. This was not his normal way of working. A designer in his office described Lapidus' usual process:

[Lapidus] does not design all his buildings . . . he could be the leader, director, he can critique it, but he doesn't sit down and design everything. It's the workers like I was that physically did the work.²⁴

With the Community Center, it appears that he remained involved by interacting with political leaders and city officials, and then working with his staff to realize these stakeholders' changing wishes. Documentation (e.g., his signature on revised plans) indicates that Lapidus stayed personally engaged with the project through its completion in 1974.



A detail from plans for the South Shore Community Center showing Lapidus' signature on a page with revisions. (Miami Beach Building Department).

The extent of Lapidus' involvement was probably driven by the national profile of the project, the involvement of Rep. Pepper, and the Community Center's status as a proposed model for HUD's projects in other cities. Another reason may be the confidence that the city commission placed in Lapidus. When the construction bid for the Community Center came in substantially over estimate, the city commission asked the architect to accompany city staff and Rep. Pepper to lobby HUD officials for more money.²⁵

The city's attempts to influence HUD were naive and did not consider that both the president and the governor were Republicans while Pepper was a Democrat. Indeed, not involving state officials may have thwarted their efforts. Gov. Claude Kirk told the *Miami Herald* that the city and Rep. Pepper had "just wasted their time." He added "They should have brought the matter to Tallahassee and we could arrange things for the city in Washington."²⁶ Since the lobbying efforts were unsuccessful, the commission directed Lapidus to revise the plans for a scaled back project.

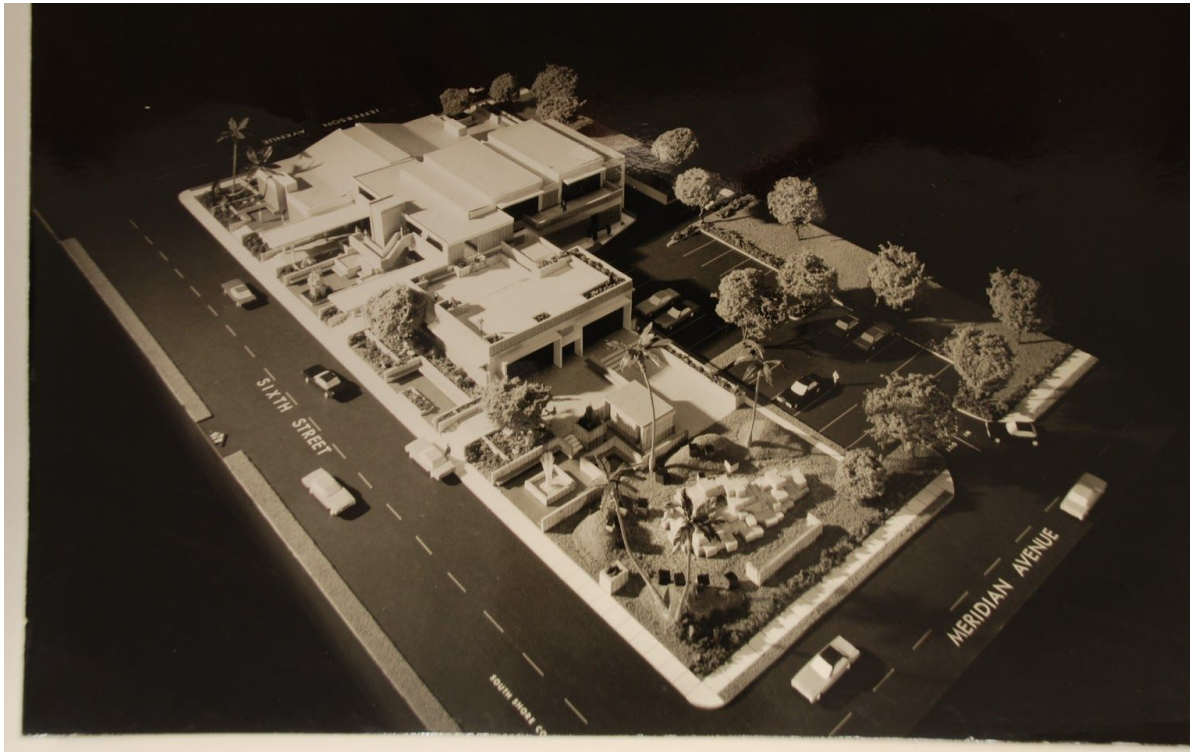
The city held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Community Center on September 23, 1969. The commission's invitation to the event brought the city further political embarrassment. In its press release and on the invitation to Sen. Gurney, he was misidentified as William and not as Ed Gurney. Unfortunately, the mistake overshadowed the groundbreaking ceremony in press coverage.

²⁴ MDPL/FIU oral history. Interview with architect Robert Swedroe by Kathy Hersch, May 12, 2015, p.4.

²⁵ City Clerk records (online) May 13, 1970.

²⁶ Interview of the governor about the project prior to the groundbreaking of the South Shore Community Center, *Miami Herald* (online) September 1, 1970. Miami Beach seniors were vocal in their disappointment that the Community Center project was scaled back.

The unanticipated overage in the construction bid meant that the Community Center was essentially constructed in two phases. The central and eastern modules were built in 1971, and the auditorium was added in 1974. A set of plans submitted to the city on August 13, 1970, show the original design with the scaled-back version drawn in. Since the Center as completed in 1974 is consistent with the original design, the following discussion is based on the original concept, model, and plans.



Photograph of the model for the South Shore Community Center. Occupying one third of a city block, the Center is intended to give seniors a place to go and somewhere to belong. Open air walkways link the three modules together and blend the garden with interiors. (Syracuse University Special Collections Library, Morris Lapidus Papers)

Designed for Seniors and for the South Shore Neighborhood

The concept of the Community Center design is to create an environment where seniors want to spend their days. The Center is comprised of three distinct building modules placed in a park setting. Capitalizing on the Miami Beach climate, Lapidus creates an open air walkway system that links the modules together as one structure and integrates the greenery of the park throughout the complex. The resulting design creates a series of paths and places where seniors may spend their time in structured activities, visit the garden area to the east of the complex, walk along the open air corridors, congregate in the “loggias,” or gather on the rooftop deck.

An Illustration of Lapidus' Evolution as an Architect

The South Shore Community Center encapsulates the design tenets that Lapidus had been experimenting with and developing through the 1960s. Indeed, this building is an amalgamation of what Lapidus had learned from designing retail stores, hotels, urban parks, and “living spaces for the future.” These tenets may be summarized as:

- *Design should relate to its environs and the climate of the city.* Lapidus used the analogy if you wouldn't wear a bikini to walk down NYC's Fifth Avenue, then you wouldn't design the same buildings for NYC and Miami Beach.
- *Path and place invite visitors to spend unprogrammed time in a building.* From his work with stores and hotels, Lapidus was aware that individuals need inviting spaces where they can gather in between activities. Indeed, his retail spaces were designed to entice shoppers from the street and then give them an environment where they would actively or passively spend their time shopping.
- *Materials used in structures in marginal urban areas should be durable and maintenance-free.* His design of Kosciusko Street park in Brooklyn had taught him that structures in urban centers are threatened by their environment and vandalism, but durable materials (e.g., concrete) may be employed in design to appeal to visitors.
- *Form should be based on analysis of program and building type, as well as function.* Designs should express structural elements, advance the purpose of the building, and evoke an emotional response.



Photograph of the South Shore Community Center circa 1971. Its outdoor spaces are of equal importance to the building modules, and the system of open air walkways continues the garden paths throughout the building complex. The massing of the building is meant to give visual variety and create distinct vistas at different points along the walkways and central staircase. (Syracuse University Special Collections Library, Morris Lapidus Collection)



Detail showing Lapidus' use of concrete. While concrete was principally employed for its durability, Lapidus also used concrete in his designs for its texture which he believed created visual excitement.

Relationship to Miami Beach Architecture and its Climate

In the design of the South Shore Community Center, Lapidus creates a subtle interplay with the surrounding structures by his use of massing and through a reinterpretation of a prevalent building type (*i.e.*, garden court apartment building).²⁷ The Community Center maintains the scale of its environs. It is only two stories in height. Its footprint correlates to the surrounding buildings by dividing the Center into three distinct modules. The separation of the modules allows air and light to flow into the central area and along the walkways.

From “*form follows function*” to “*form follows purpose*”

The design of the South Shore Community Center fused the structural elements of the building with the emotional comfort of a garden. Instead of focusing his design on the Community Center's specified activities (*e.g.*, provision of programs and services), Lapidus looked beyond function to concentrate on the visitor experience. This supported a goal stipulated in the HUD guidance for the building. The provision of programs and services was the Center's secondary purpose. The primary purpose of the Center was to provide Miami Beach's elderly with somewhere to go and, more importantly, a place to belong.

Reimagining a Miami Beach building type

Lapidus reimagined the layout of local garden apartment complexes because he was aware that many seniors spent their days in the garden area of their buildings. These buildings had a U shape footprint with a shared social space in the center. The garden also marked a transition from the street to apartments (from public to semi private to private space).

²⁷ Lapidus selected the garden apartment building type over Art Deco hotels because he thought these “stucco palaces” were out of date and obsolete.



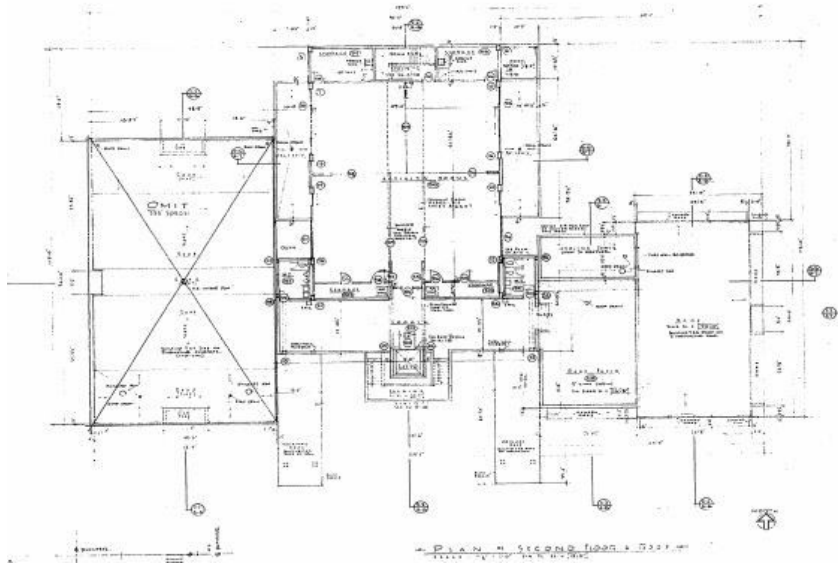
Garden apartment building with its U shape footprint (left) and central garden (right) at 756 Meridian Avenue provides for shared space and encourages informal gatherings. This building type is reinterpreted by Lapidus in the South Shore Community Center.

He reinterprets this transition in the Community Center. The layering of space ranges from an open area with seating adjacent to the street, a transitional space that links the building modules, and then the modules themselves which house activities and services.



The South Shore Community Center circa 1971. The central core reinterprets U shape apartment complexes in the neighborhood. The central core is unprogrammed space where seniors may congregate, similar to spaces in neighboring apartment complexes. Large planters carry greenery into the building and reinforce the Center as an oasis in an urban setting, similar to his concept for the Lincoln Road Mall. (Syracuse University Special Collections Library, Morris Lapidus Papers.)

In the Community Center design, he adds a layer of complexity to this U shape form by clearly delineating the walkways from the social areas. Unlike the sidewalks which were part of the garden areas in the apartment buildings, he distinguishes between courtyard and walkways at the Community Center by lining the walkways with planters. He also covers the walkways from the street approach to the building as a means to identify entrances to the Community Center and guide visitors to the doors of the three modules.



Detail of the plans shows how the Community Center reinterprets the U shape plan of garden apartment buildings. The resulting courtyard gives a variety of unprogrammed space for sitting or for informal gatherings. The central area is labeled loggia and is intended for a shaded alternative to the rooftop deck. (Miami Beach Building Department.)

Path and Place

The Community Center's open air walkways were designed to provide a park-like setting within the building precinct. These walkways and the "loggias" at the center of the complex link the building's three modules in the same way that a garden path links pavilions. The stair from first floor to second floor (another reinterpretation of a U shape form) gives visitors different perspectives of both the building and streetscape as they ascend or descend.

In this aspect of the Community Center's design, Lapidus reworked parts of his concept of Lincoln Road mall as "... parklike ... with beautiful landscaping throughout ..."²⁸ The planters that line the pathways in the Community Center give a sense of an oasis and soften the harsh elements of the structure. Whereas Lapidus employed "exotic concrete shelters" similar to garden follies to create visual excitement on Lincoln Road, the space constraints of the Community Center required a different treatment.

²⁸ Lapidus, *Too Much*, p. 205.



Elements of the Lincoln Road Mall (left) are reinterpreted in the South Shore Community Center (right).

For the Community Center, he employed *chiaroscuro*. He created this play of light and shadow through the massing of the structure. His inventive treatment of the corners of the building modules created lightwells at pivot points in the walkways that not only provided contrasts, but also reconfigured shadows throughout the day. The separation of the structure into three distinct blocks also varied the air flow so that portions of the walkways are subject to breezes while others sections are protected from the wind. This too varied the visitor experience.



Lapidus employs light to vary the experience as the visitor traverses the building. From the approach to the building (left), the visitor is drawn inward to the light. The quality of this light and shadow changes throughout the day. Areas between building modules (right) flood the loggia and walkways with light and air. The configuration of the junctures diffuse the light and create a constant change in shadow throughout the day.



The planters (left) blend the interior and exterior spaces. They are constructed in a manner that resists wear from heavy use or damage from vandalism. Their walls (right) provide textures, rhythms, and patterns that make them aesthetically pleasing.



Twin fountains (right) in the central courtyard also entice visitors into the Community Center and reinforce the atmosphere of an urban oasis. (Left) Detail of one of the fountains.

The design for and the materials used in the open-air walkways and the planters incorporate lessons that Lapidus learned in the Kosciusko Street Park Project. The walkways are concrete, and the planters are created with thicker sides that are more durable. As in the Kosciusko Street park project, Lapidus was acutely aware that the Community Center was in a setting where vandalism was likely, and materials were chosen in part to prevent chipping or breaking. But the use of concrete and its treatment in the design also served an aesthetic purpose. Lapidus created textures and rhythms through its rough cast that make surfaces more interesting.

Complexity of Program

The complexity of the building program is masked by its use of commercial materials and by its ease of use by visitors. As in Lapidus' retail and hotel designs, visitors are unaware that they are being manipulated. In this case, they are drawn to light or where the flow of air cools a hot Miami Beach day. Nor is the building intimidating since it is built on the scale of the neighborhood.

Most importantly, Lapidus has successfully created a public building that does not give the impression that it houses the machinery of healthcare and the bureaucracy of social services.

South Shore Community Center: In the Life of the City and the Eye of the Nation

A Result of Senior Activism

The creation of the South Shore Community Center was the direct result of the elderly of Miami Beach finding their voice and exercising their political clout. Beginning in 1962 when plans were developed for the South Shore Hospital, and growing through the decade, seniors demanded the attention of city officials while Rep. Pepper ensured that their voices were heard in the halls of Congress and at the White House. In 1969, the seniors showed that they were willing to march on the Miami Beach City Hall for the Community Center and for better housing. In 1977, members of Congress came to the South South Community Center to listen to them.



Miami Herald photograph of the senior march on city hall with a protestor (top left) holding a South Shore Community Center placard (Miami Herald (online) October 2, 1969)

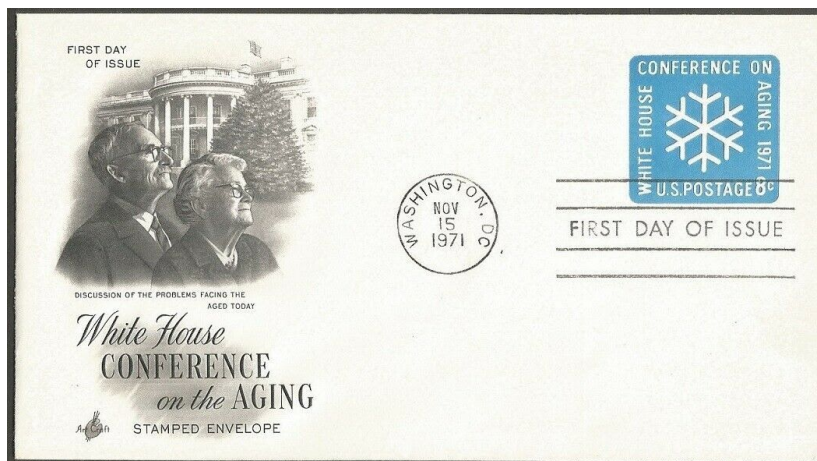
A National Model

The South Shore Community Center garnered national attention before it left the drawing board. Years of urban decline in cities across the country, along with the 1968 demonstrations after the assassination of Martin Luther King, drew worldwide attention to what was described as America's urban wastelands. Both the federal government and city leaders were looking for ways to mitigate the social issues of the inner cities and stem the flight to the suburbs.

HUD led this effort because of its ability to provide large sums of money to transform acres and acres within the nation's most troubled neighborhoods. Rep. Claude Pepper ensured that HUD programs included facilities for the elderly.

In addition to wholesale redevelopment, HUD wanted to create model programs that could be replicated in other cities. In cooperation with the City of Miami Beach, the concept for the South Shore Community Center was developed. The Community Center's focus was to improve the environment in which the elderly lived and foster their "physical and spiritual wellbeing."

In 1971, the U.S. Senate, recognizing that one out of ten Americans was classified as elderly, undertook hearings to outline the plight of this segment of the population and create solutions. Its report in *Developments in Aging* called for "Bold, imaginative, and far-reaching action . . . on several fronts." When reviewing and identifying best practices and model programs, the nascent South Shore Community Center was cited. It would also be included in the discussion at the Second White House Conference on Aging.



To mark the opening of the White House Conference on Aging, the U.S. Post Office issues a commemorative stamp. As noted in the stamped envelope, the Conference was a "discussion of the problems facing the aged today."

The Second White House Conference on Aging was held in November 1971. The conference drew 3,400 participants who represented Americans 65 years of age or older. The conference was organized around 14 subject areas: nine of which dealt with human needs and five dealt with the mechanisms to address those needs. The South Shore Community Center was cited as an example of how cities could address the human needs of the elderly in their own neighborhoods.

A Place to be Heard

While the Community Center was addressing the immediate needs of the elderly, its presence could not stem the decline of the neighborhood. In 1976, the city was looking at a drastic plan to revitalize South Shore.²⁹ Once again the elderly felt threatened. They believed that the city's promises of the previous decade had gone unfulfilled, and now the city was threatening to end rent control and demolish substandard housing stock -- leaving them nowhere to go.

Rep. Pepper grew more concerned about the circumstances of the elderly in his district and across the nation. To bring the problems of the elderly before both houses of Congress, Pepper prevailed on Sen. Edward Kennedy to hold a hearing in Miami Beach on November 9, 1977. The venue for this meeting was the South Shore Community Center. Pepper and Kennedy selected the site so the committee could hear from older Americans where they lived, and the residents of Miami Beach could speak in detail about the problems they faced as they aged.



— JOHN PINEDA/Miami Herald Staff

A Time to Listen

Hundreds of the South Beach elderly Wednesday re-

lated their health-care hardships to Sen. Richard Schweiker (R., Pa.), Sen. Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.) and Rep. Claude Pepper, Miami Democrat, and to plead for Congress to enact a national health-insurance program. The hearing by Kennedy's subcommit-

tee on health care was held in the South Shore Community Center on Miami Beach. "Any doubters about the need (for such a program) should read the record of what happened here today," Kennedy said. (See story, Page 2A.)

The Miami Herald printed two stories and an editorial on the hearing. While the senators focused on healthcare, residents recounted the multitude of issues that they encountered including substandard housing and poverty. The hearing was preceded with a tour of the South Shore Community Center and was held in the Community Center's auditorium. (Miami Herald (online) November 10, 1977)

The hearing also provided the City of Miami Beach with the opportunity to showcase its programs for the elderly. Members of the Senate were given tours and offered the opportunity to watch Community Center activities. Both the City of Miami Beach and Rep. Pepper received

²⁹ See "War over South Shore," in Howard Kleinberg, *Miami Beach: A History*, Miami: Centennial Press, 1994, pp.197-205.

praise from the ranking member of the committee, Sen. Richard Schweiker, for the contribution of the South Shore Community Center to the lives of the elderly.³⁰

A Harbinger of Demographic Change

Beginning in the 1980s, the neighborhood around the South Shore Community Center changed again. The Mariel Boatlift brought an influx of new immigrants into the area. But in terms of the Community Center and its constituency, a more profound change was occurring.

As the elderly residents died, they were not being replaced by a new wave of retirees. This situation and its impact across Miami Beach was outlined by Jeffrey Schmalz in his Miami Beach Journal which he published in the *New York Times*. He attributed this change to a new generation of retirees.

Unlike their predecessors, who were mostly from New York itself, the new retirees are from its suburbs and prefer the suburban feel of Broward and Palm Beach.³¹

Within the South Shore neighborhood, young families were moving in and speaking a different language. They brought a new set of needs, and the city worked with a non-governmental organization to create a solution that blended the disparate segments of the neighborhood.

On August 15, 1991, the city provided two block grants to the Little Havana Activities Center to renovate a portion of the Community Center for an early childhood daycare program. The model anticipated the concept that it takes a village to raise a child, and the program employed elderly residents as part of its staff. The program, called the Rainbow Intergenerational Daycare Center, also received \$30,000 from the city that year to subsidize daycare. The program remains in the Community Center to this day.



The Community Center changes with the neighborhood. To accommodate the childcare program, a playground (left) replaces the park setting (right) of the original concept. In renovating the Community Center for its new use, its architectural integrity is maintained.

³⁰ Subcommittee Hearing, p.9.

³¹ New York Times, online archive, November 27, 1989.

Conclusion: The Case of Preservation

Demolishing the South Shore Community Center will erase a chapter from Miami Beach's history, the legacy of Rep. Claude Pepper's national advocacy for the elderly, and a neglected aspect of the career of architect Morris Lapidus.

The South Shore Community Center more than satisfies the criteria to warrant its preservation intact. Created in response to changing demographics and acute social issues, the Community Center is both part of and the witness to local and national history. Moreover, its association with prominent historical figures (Rep. Claude Pepper and Sen. Edward Kennedy) and an emerging social movement gives the Community Center local and national import. This historical significance is matched by its architectural merit. It is an extraordinary example of the evolution of the work of Morris Lapidus, who did not want to be “always referred to as the architect of the Fontainebleau.”

- The South Shore Community Center not only represents a significant and neglected aspect of Morris Lapidus' career, it also illustrates how elements of Miami Beach's built environment and history influenced his designs and philosophy of architecture.
- The South Shore Community Center is the result of older Americans developing as a distinct social and political movement in the 1960s.
- The selection of the South Shore Community Center as a national model by the federal government demonstrates Miami Beach's role in both elder care and the urban renewal efforts of the 1960s and 70s.
- The South Shore Community Center is an architectural artifact of the work of Congressman Claude Pepper to develop national programs for older Americans by first addressing the needs of Miami Beach's elderly.
- The South Shore Community Center was the site of a Congressional hearing chaired by Sen. Edward Kennedy on healthcare and the plight of older Americans that brought national attention to Miami Beach's elderly.

Miami Beach Heritage is Ongoing

Miami Beach's architectural heritage does not end with Art Deco or Miami Modern (MiMo). Nor is its history confined to tourism and the rich and famous. The citizens of Miami Beach should be represented in the history of their city and its architectural landscape. Elderly residents and Cuban immigrants profoundly changed the city's culture. And the South Shore Community Center played a significant role in this transformation. The loss of the Community Center is as much of a loss to the Flamingo Park Historic District as the razing of an Art Deco building. Indeed, its potential loss is more impactful since it erases an entire chapter of the neighborhood's architectural development.