



Island News

City will vote on Miami Marine Stadium site plan July 11

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The Miami Marine Stadium site plan will be presented for approval to the Miami City Commission July 11.

Previously, the site plan was put on the City Commission agenda as a discussion item. According to Friends of Miami Marine Stadium founder Donald Worth, the presentation was well received at that time. Final approval is necessary before Friends of Miami Marine Stadium can move ahead with their plans to restore the structure.

Support for the restoration has gained momentum over the past few months. The Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York, the largest freshwater maritime museum in the United States, has committed to help raise funds to operate a satellite maritime museum adjacent to the Marine Stadium.

A major art exhibit about the stadium, "Concrete Paradise," will open at the Coral Gables Museum October 17.

"This will not be your grandfather's exhibit," said Worth. "It will be exciting and fun and viewers will leave thinking, 'oh, we've got to get this thing restored.'"

This will be the first ever exhibit about the stadium's flashy past, edgy dilapidated present and spectacular proposed comeback as a world-class sports and performance venue, he said.

Miami Marine Stadium is featured as the cover story in the spring issue of *Preservation Magazine*, the National Trust for Historic Preservation publication.

"We are now the number one priority na-

tionwide," said Worth.

Other aid has come from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, which recently approved a resolution supporting stadium efforts.

"This is huge," said Worth. "The support of a key organization such as Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce signals a growth in awareness in the Miami community that a restored and operating Marine Stadium is possible."

Singer and performer Gloria Estefan has endorsed restoration efforts, and the *Miami Herald* wrote a strong and comprehensive editorial supporting the restoration, according to Worth.

"We think we have really strong support. This should not be controversial," he said of the pending commission approval "And as far as we know, there is not an organized opposition. It's time for a restored stadium."

The 6,500-seat stadium, located on Virginia Key, was built in 1963 after being designed by Cuban-born architect Hilario Candela. It was originally designed for boat racing, but from 1964 to 1992 the stadium hosted many noteworthy events: boxing, water shows, Easter sunrise services, campaign rallies, community events and concerts; and served as a backdrop for many film shoots and movie productions.

It was damaged by Hurricane Andrew and then suffered from years of neglect during which it was painted with graffiti and vandalized. The City of Miami commission claimed the stadium was irreparable and needed to be demolished, according to Worth.

"From 1992 to 2007, the stadium remained shuttered, desolate and vandalized," he said.

"Graffiti covers nearly every inch of the structure."

Various redevelopment plans – usually calling for the demolition of the stadium – have been proposed over the years.

In June of 2007, the City of Miami unveiled the first draft of its Virginia Key Master Plan, and Miami Marine Stadium was not in it.

"The 200 people in attendance at the unveiling unanimously and spontaneously asked that the stadium be adopted back into the plan," said Worth.

The all-volunteer Friends of Miami Marine Stadium was organized in early 2008 to seek the landmark's restoration. The group was organized under the administrative umbrella of Dade Heritage Trust, a Miami-Dade historic preservation organization.

"In a short period of time, a large and broad-based advocacy initiative has made much progress," said Worth. "The City of Miami designated the Marine Stadium and basin as historic in 2008."

Because of that designation, the stadium received national and international recognition through its inclusion on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11 Most Endangered Sites in 2009. In 2010, the World Monuments Fund put the stadium on its Watch List.



Photo courtesy Miami Marine Stadium

A rendering shows the proposed improvements at Miami Marine Stadium.

Last year, the Miami Marine Stadium Steering Committee, appointed by the Miami City Manager, unanimously approved the site plan proposed by Friends of Miami Marine Stadium.

"The process was rigorous," said Worth. "The Steering Committee met five times and requested a great deal of back up information."

Once the site plan is approved, vigorous fundraising will follow.

"The first step is the quiet campaign where we pursue major donors," said Worth.

A public campaign will follow.

"We've got the plan; we've got community support," said Worth. "We can create a world-class facility for the community of Miami."