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Is Coppertone billboard part of Miami history?

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Campaigns to save two long-neglected icons of Miami's golden age of the '50s and '60s -- the Marine Stadium and the giant Coppertone Girl sign that hung downtown for nearly 50 years -- could receive a significant official boost Tuesday.

The city of Miami's preservation board will consider both for historic designation during an afternoon hearing.

For the stadium, a 1964 modernist architectural landmark shuttered by the city 16 years ago, designation would mark a watershed moment in a grass-roots effort that has drawn international interest.

Designation as a historic sign would allow the Coppertone Girl, now awaiting restoration in a Hialeah warehouse, to be hung on the side of an office building in the city's new MiMo/Biscayne Boulevard Historic District.

By legally protecting the publicly owned stadium from demolition, designation would signal a city commitment to seek ways to renovate the deteriorated stadium and come up with feasible uses.

Until a group of preservationists, architects, rowers and boaters began lobbying to save the 1964 stadium earlier this year, the city was moving ahead with a new master plan for Virginia Key that likely would have done away with it.

Since then, however, members of Friends of Miami Marine Stadium have garnered support from several producers and concert and boat-race promoters, as well as the World Monuments Fund, a major private group that promotes preservation of architectural and cultural sites.

Still, renovation could cost millions of dollars, according to a city-commissioned engineering study, and there is no guarantee feasible uses can be identified, officials say.

Supporters, including its architect, Hilario Candela, say a renovated stadium could become a symbol of a revitalized Miami.

The Coppertone Girl's neon lights dazzled Biscayne Boulevard for decades, until its home was demolished 13 years and it was moved -- *sans* neon guts -- to a far less visible building on Flagler Street.

The badly weather-worn sign was removed in May for restoration and donated by its owner -- Dade Heritage Trust -- to the MiMo Biscayne Association. The nonprofit group promotes revitalization of the historic district that highlights the 1950s Miami Modern architecture of Upper Biscayne Boulevard.

Owners of an office building in the district, 7300 Biscayne, have agreed to hang the sign once it's restored. Historic designation will give the sign an exemption from signage laws, said MiMo association president Fran Rollason.

Coppertone will cover restoration costs. Plans are to replaced the sign's vanished neon with LED lights, Rollason said. Solar panels could power the sign.

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