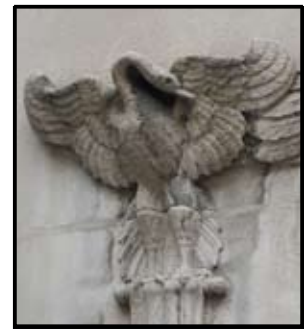


## The Farwell Building



**Address:** 660-664 North Michigan Ave.  
**Date:** 1927  
**Architect:** Philip B. Maher  
**Style:** Art Deco / Classical Revival  
**CHRS Rating:** Not Rated  
**Landmarked:** 2004  
**National Register:** No



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### Overview:

A line in the sand has been drawn between preservationists and developers. That line is represented by the historic Farwell Building, located in the heart of the Magnificent Mile, where the Prism Development Company plans to skin the building's historic façade, demolish the entire building, and then reapply it to a parking garage.

### History:

The 11-story Farwell Building represents one of the few remaining buildings left on Michigan Avenue from the 1920's, the period that transformed sleepy residential Pine Street into "The Magnificent Mile." This French inspired design, highlighted with both Art Deco and Classical Revival details, exemplified the work of architect Philip Maher. Clad in limestone, the building features ornamental cast stone panels and a slate mansard roof. Its delicate scale elegantly anchors the prominent corner of Erie Street and Michigan Avenue. In addition, Maher designed 5 other buildings on the boulevard including the Women's Athletic Club, which is also a city landmark. These remaining buildings reflect the aesthetic of the 1909 Burnham Plan, which was an attempt to turn our gritty industrial town into the "Paris by the Lake".

Originally built as a speculative office building, the building was purchased in 1987 by the Terra Foundation to house its art museum. The Farwell Building was granted city landmark status in early 2004 with the owner's consent. The museum closed its doors that same year. At that time, the fate of the Terra Museum remained in doubt. However, it was assumed that the landmark designation would at least guarantee that the building that once housed its famous art collection would remain for generations to come.

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**Threat:**

Unfortunately, the future of this building is in more jeopardy now than at any time since before its landmark designation. Last year, ads began to appear in newspapers and magazines advertising a new project on the site depicting The Farwell Building, surmounted by a 40-story condominium tower. Prism Development's plan called for the complete demolition of the Farwell Building. However, the limestone façade was to be removed, stored, and then reapplied to a new structure. Although the lower two floors were to remain as retail, the remainder of the building was to become the parking garage for the condominium tower to the north. Although the top two floors would also be occupied, no windows would be provided, offering a deadened streetwall above the second floor on the most important street in Chicago.

When Prism Development presented their dubious proposal to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks for their approval, they rejected it. But, the developers may actually succeed in destroying the entire building by invoking a little-known clause in the Landmarks Ordinance and plead "economic hardship". However, they would still have to argue their case before the same landmark commissioners who voted not to approve the project in the first place. Although Prism Development may ultimately win their case based on "economic hardship", they will surely lose it in the court of public opinion if they succeed in demolishing the Farwell Building. All eyes are now on Prism Development to see what their next move will be.

**Recommendation:**

This project can be built, but not in its current incarnation. The project needs to be drastically scaled back so that the new tower no longer encroaches onto the footprint of the Farwell Building. A taller, more slender building should be seriously considered with only one or two units per floor, rather than the 4 units originally proposed. The tower should incorporate all of the required parking, either in its base or underground.

The Farwell Building should then be preserved in its entirety, incorporated into the project as additional full-floor living units, or it could be sold as a separate office building once the tower project is completed. Additionally, the developers could restore the façade, do minimal repairs to the interior and then donate the entire building to a not-for-profit or other civic institution in exchange for a large tax deduction. The faithful restoration of the exterior would also trigger all of the tax benefits that could be used to offset the overall project costs.