

Guyon Hotel, 4000 W. Washington Street



Hotel Guyon, Photo Credit: David Schalliol

Overview:

Originally part of an architecturally and culturally booming West Garfield Park community, the long and steady decline of the neighborhood has only further made the rehabilitation of this rare and magnificent Moorish Revival hotel more challenging. Beautifully constructed of red and cream brick with deep red terra cotta detailing, the Guyon Hotel's interior is in various states of decay, in contrast to the richness of its once-magnificent grand ballrooms and other interior spaces. Vacant until recently, the site has had multiple owners over the years. It was finally converted from a residential hotel to a single-room-occupancy apartment in the late 1980s. Listed last year on Landmarks Illinois' 10 Most Endangered list, the Guyon faces a disappointing lack of interested developers willing to take on the project as well as series of on-going code violations that may force the city to condemn and ultimately demolish the property.

History:

The Guyon Hotel (also known as the Hotel Guyon) was designed by Jensen J. Jensen in 1927 after being commissioned by local businessman and ballroom dancing impresario J. Louis Guyon, of French-Canadian descent. There is the common misconception that this architect was the same as the

Guyon Hotel

Architect: Jens J. Jensen

Date: 1927

Style: Moorish Revival

Neighborhood: West Garfield Park

National Register: Yes

Chicago 7: Guyon Hotel Continued:



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famous landscape architect, Jensen Jensen, however the two are completely unrelated. A club owner and dance instructor, Guyon found little success in the hotel business, mostly due to the nasty reputation of mob ties to Al Capone. The hotel, built for \$1.65 million dollars (\$22 million in today's dollars) remained under the ownership of Guyon until 1934, at which time it was sold. It was sold again in 1964, but after the upheaval from the 1968 riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, the area began a steep decline leading to the transition of Guyon into a single-room-occupancy dwelling. Never a profitable hotel, even at its inception, the Guyon suffered through numerous attempts to rehabilitate it over the next 30 years. Its most famous resident, however, may have been former President Jimmy Carter, who stayed there for a week in a dingy room while in the city working for Habitat for Humanity. Today, The Guyon stands vacant, deteriorating and in need of a sympathetic redevelopment plan.

Threat:

Located in West Garfield Park, the community has attempted to place Guyon Hotel as the lynch-pin to redevelopment for decades to no avail. In the last fifteen years the building has changed ownership a total of seven times, with no owner ever completing significant repairs to the structure. While the building is on the National Register of Historic Places, due mostly to Jimmy Carter's stay, the structure itself has no legal protection as a local landmark, although it is listed on the National Register of historic places, making it fair game for demolition and development.

Recommendation:

The Guyon, as well as its surrounding neighborhood, clearly need help. Although Landmarks Illinois tried valiantly over the last year to interest a developer to rehabilitate the property, in the end those efforts did not end in success. To that end, perhaps it is time for the city itself to become involved before it is too late. At this writing, Illinois legislators are working to pass a state historic tax credit. If that occurs, perhaps the Guyon can be used as the demonstration project with a positive result.

