Preservation Chicago Unveils the 2018 Chicago 7 Most Endangered...

Hotel Guyon

4000 W. Washington Boulevard

OVERVIEW:
Conceived in the 1920s as a magnificent hotel on a grand scale, the Hotel Guyon was part of a robust commercial, business and entertainment district, centered near Madison Street and Pulaski Road (originally known as Crawford Avenue), on Chicago’s West Side. The Hotel Guyon was a famous destination for many residents of and visitors to the West Garfield Park neighborhood and adjacent shopping district. The hotel is also located a short distance from one of the City’s largest West Side attractions, Garfield Park with the Garfield Park Conservatory, one of the largest plant conservatories in the United States, and located along Chicago’s famous tree-lined boulevard system.

Decades of disinvestment in the West Garfield Park Community has made more challenging the rehabilitation of this magnificent hotel and rare example of Moorish-Revival architecture in Chicago. Constructed of red and cream brick with deep red terra cotta detailing, the Hotel Guyon is a visual landmark in the community—towering over the nearby streets and neighborhood. It was also a radio broadcasting center in its early years and the site of the founding of the WFMT Radio station, which continues its classical music format and public broadcast programs to this day. The hotel structure has experienced multiple owners over time and was converted from a residential hotel to single-room-occupancy (SRO) apartments in the late 1980s.
Hotel Guyon was included in 2012 on Landmarks Illinois' Endangered List, and included in 2013, 2014, and again in 2018 on Preservation Chicago's 7 Most Endangered List. Hotel Guyon is the only building that has been included three times on the Chicago 7 Most Endangered List. The hotel's reuse has been part of many ongoing discussions over the past number of years, however, the Guyon's sheer magnitude makes it a formidable building to renovate and reuse.

HISTORY:
The Hotel Guyon was designed by architect Jens J. Jensen (no relation to the famed landscape architect, Jens Jensen) in 1927, and was commissioned by J. Louis Guyon, the local businessman and ballroom dancing impresario. Guyon was a dance instructor, a club owner, and the proprietor of the adjoining Guyon's Paradise Ballroom and Dance Hall, located to the north of the hotel. It's been said that, "his dream was to create and control the West Side's largest single concentration of entertainment venues." However, Louis Guyon found little success in the hotel business and was not able to complete construction of his various projects, beyond the ballroom and the hotel, which was sold to others in time.

Louis Guyon was one of the original investors and promoters of the lavish 3,500-seat Paradise Theater, a grand movie palace constructed down the street from the Hotel Guyon, at 231 N. Pulaski (Crawford) Road. The Paradise Theater, designed by architect John Eberson and operated by the Balaban & Katz chain, opened in 1928 and was billed as "the world's most beautiful theater" and "the most elaborately decorated theater ever built in Chicago."

The Paradise was designed to compete with the nearby Marbro Theater, which opened a year earlier in 1927. With almost 4,000 seats, the Marbro Theater was one of the largest theaters in the City at that time and was operated by the Marks Brothers from their offices at 4110 West Madison Street. The Paradise was demolished in 1956 and the Marbro was lost in 1964.

The centerpiece of this entertainment district, the Hotel Guyon was built for $1.65 million dollars ($22 million in today's dollars) and remained under the ownership of Guyon until 1934, at which time it was sold. The hotel transferred ownership again in 1964. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Chicago's West Side suffered from disinvestment and increased commercial vacancy which negatively impacted the viability of a large structure like the Hotel Guyon.
Over the past 30 years, the Hotel Guyon endured multiple attempts at upkeep and rehabilitation efforts. It was rehabilitated in the early 1980s by a non-profit affordable housing developer, but the failure of various systems, including the elevators, HVAC and others contributed to the building’s abandonment. Its most famous resident was likely former President Jimmy Carter, who stayed here for a week while working with Habitat for Humanity in Chicago. Today, the Hotel Guyon stands vacant, deteriorating, and in need of a redevelopment plan.

THREAT:
In recent years, the City of Chicago has attempted to allocate funds to demolish the building. Despite being landmark-quality, a court order is in place to demolish this once proud gateway building to the West Garfield Park community. Preservation Chicago continues to advocate for more time. We continue to encourage reuse in conversations with multiple developers, along with our sister preservation organization, Landmarks Illinois. Meanwhile, the Hotel Guyon remains vacant and in need of restoration, redevelopment, and investment. Though the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is not a Designated Chicago Landmark, and therefore has no legal protections against demolition.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
The award-winning recent renovation and restoration of the Rosenwald Apartments on Chicago's South Side, also known as the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments, is a successful model for affordable housing development in long-vacant historic buildings. Designated as a Chicago Landmark in 2017, the Rosenwald renovation was championed by 3rd Ward Alderman Pat Dowell. While discussions continue with numerous City agencies and developers regarding a plan to save and reuse the Hotel Guyon, there appears to be a $10 million-dollar funding gap preventing this project from moving forward.

Preservation Chicago encourages the City of Chicago and the Chicago Housing Authority, as well as elected officials to come together and find a way to encourage a reuse of the Hotel Guyon for affordable housing, perhaps for seniors and/or veterans. The Rosenwald was an expensive development, but well worth the effort and funding to make that development an outstanding success, and which has had a profound and positive impact on the Bronzeville community. The same level of support and funding, along with the support of elected representatives and 28th Ward Alderman Jason Irwin, would encourage a restoration of the exterior facades and a renovation of the interior of the Hotel Guyon for Chicago's West Side. The Hotel Guyon is currently listed for sale.