Historic Chicago Union Station Power House

AVAILABLE for adaptive reuse as data center, chilling plant or other use.
Not formally listed for sale, so unique opportunity to add value.

The Benefits:
• 20% Federal Tax Credits
• Illinois Historic Tax Credits
• Adopt-a-Landmark Funds
• Class L Tax Designation
• Permit fee waivers

The Opportunity:
Available for adaptive reuse as a data center, chilling center or other use, the Union Station Power House by one of Chicago’s greatest architectural firms is in close proximity to central business district. Amtrak has plans to demolish the building at an estimated cost of $13 million and replace with surface parking lot. Not formally listed for sale, ANY purchase offer would save Amtrak millions of dollars. Opportunity for a variety of development funds.

Potential Eligibility:
• 20% Federal Tax Credits
• Illinois Historic Tax Credits
• Adopt-a-Landmark Funds
• Class L Tax Designation
• Permit fee waivers
Central Location - Close to Central Business District, Loop, South Loop, West Loop, ‘The 78’ tech development and the University of Illinois Chicago.
Overview:

Visible from Roosevelt Road Bridge, the iconic and austere Chicago Union Station Power House, with its streamlined Art Moderne facades and smokestacks, exemplifies the story of Chicago's growth as a railroad and transportation center beginning in the pioneering days of the 1850s. The Union Station Power House is part of a network of buildings, systems, and rail tracks constructed in the 1920s by the architectural firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, which included Chicago’s Union Station, its Great Hall and Grand Waiting Room, along with the separate Concourse Building.

The Chicago Union Station Power House has been out of service since 2011 and is currently mothballed and being considered for demolition.
History:

Chicago’s central role in the national rail network was unparalleled by any other city in the nation, with the highest amount of passenger and freight traffic. This allowed for early industries to flourish, ranging from coal and raw products for manufacturing, to agriculture, including wheat, corn, grains and even meat-packing. Chicago’s robust rail system also affected the city’s residential population. As industrial business expanded in Chicago its population also expanded, as laborers and their families came to the city to work and live. Chicago’s location at the hub of the railroad network established Chicago as the capital of the Midwest.

In contrast to the more Classical-Revival style Union Station complex, the Power House is in the Art Moderne and Art Deco styles, reflecting the streamlined style of the time and the “industrial might” associated with generating and supplying power to operate a system of trains and buildings.

The architects of the Union Station Power House were Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, a firm that descended from Daniel Burnham’s architectural firm. They designed many of Chicago’s most iconic buildings, including the Wrigley Building, The Field Building (both Chicago Landmarks), the Merchandise Mart, and other notable structures, both in Chicago and across the United States.

The strong verticality of the Power House, from its linear groupings of parallel window bands to the tall chimneys, emphasize the building’s strength. Its massive cream-colored brick walls, horizontal stone banding and austere ornament create additional visual impact. Unique in form, this is a rare example of power house industrial architecture by Graham, Anderson, Probst & White.
Threat:
Amtrak is the current owner of the building, and has determined that this structure, closed from service since 2011, may no longer be desired for this use or any other. Therefore, they are conducting federally mandated “Section 106 Hearings” to determine if it may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. However, these hearings will not necessarily rule out demolition of the structure in the future. Demolition would be an expensive option as well, costing millions of dollars of taxpayer funds, to create a paved asphalt parking lot adjoining the Chicago River.

Recommendations:
We at Preservation Chicago understand the limitations of the site, with railroad tracks to the west and the South Branch of the Chicago River on the east, but encourage a creative reuse of the building and site by either another service utility, like the nearby Com Ed facilities, or another user. This third-party idea could also be part of long-range plans for the Riverfront, with a potential future Riverwalk, which could link the commercial and residential areas that abound nearby.

We also believe that the Power House’s connection to Chicago’s incredible railroad and architectural history make it a prime candidate for Chicago Landmark designation. A positive preservation outcome would make this building a great asset for Chicago and for Amtrak Rail Systems for future generations.