

Chicago Landmarks Ordinance



Historic Michigan Avenue Streetwall

Overview:

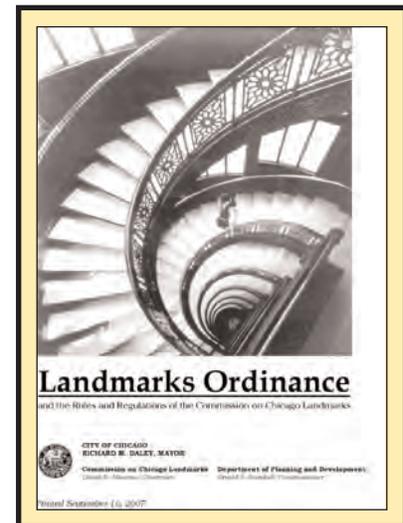
It has been 47 years since the destruction of Louis Sullivan's Garrick Theater, an act of civic vandalism that gave rise to Chicago's historic preservation movement and, ultimately, led to the passage of the Chicago Landmark Ordinance in 1968. Since that time the city has landmarked 255 individual buildings and created 49 historic landmark districts. Despite this progress, several recent redevelopment projects endorsed by the city's planning department and approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks call into question whether the integrity of the ordinance itself is in danger of being destroyed.

Threats:

Chicago Athletic Association

Currently at issue is the proposal for the redevelopment of the Chicago Athletic Association building, located at 12 S. Michigan Avenue. The building, built in 1893, was designed by architect Henry Ives Cobb, designer of the University of Chicago. Additions located at 71-79 E. Madison Street were added to the structure in 1906 and 1926 respectively by architects Schmidt, Garden, and Martin. The Venetian Gothic style is rare in Chicago, and the Chicago Athletic Association exemplifies it to the fullest in its use of patterned brick and intricately carved limestone.

This building is an integral part of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District which extends from Randolph Street south to 11th Street. This landmark district was created in 2002 with the intention of



Architect: Chicago City Council

Date: 1968

Chicago 7: Chicago Landmarks Ordinance Continued:

preserving the architecture and scale of the 1885 to 1930 era buildings. The historic district frames the western edge of Millennium Park and Grant Park and is one of the most heavily visited streets in the city. It defines the “face” of Chicago when viewed from these parks and Lake Shore Drive.

A developer proposes to demolish the rear two-thirds of the landmark building and construct a new addition for Omni Hotels. This steel and glass addition will rise at least 10 stories above the cornice height of the original building. An addition of this size will certainly be visible from Millennium and Grant Park, forever



Entrance to saloon

changing the nature of the protected landmark district. The demolition will also result in the loss of several historic interior spaces, including a marble swimming pool, a mahogany-paneled banquet room, and a medieval-inspired saloon. These irreplaceable

spaces should be preserved and incorporated into a more sensitive redevelopment plan.

The precedent that could be set by allowing this unnecessary and ill-conceived redevelopment scheme to move forward will shatter the integrity of the Michigan Boulevard Historic District. Approval of this type of proposal would lead to the similar destruction of other protected buildings. It will also send a signal that any developer who wishes to purchase other buildings in the Historic Michigan Boulevard District, or any historic district for that matter, need only preserve the first



Marble staircase to pool

few inches of the historic façade while everything else behind it is disposable. This message defies the intent of the Chicago Landmark Ordinance and shows disrespect for the buildings themselves. It also disregards the economic potential that the buildings, in their current configuration, could realize if redeveloped by the proper developer with the proper program. Finally, it ignores the success of other similar historic rehabilitations on the same block or in other parts of the Loop.

Allowing this proposal to move forward would render Chicago’s Landmark Ordinance meaningless. It could lead to the day when Michigan Avenue will become nothing more than a street full of soulless facades, pasted on to new structures that have no relation to the original intent of the architect or the architecture. This type of facadism not historic preservation and no world-class city should be subjected to the continued “Disneyfication” of its premiere boulevard.



Architect: Henry Ives Cobb
Address: 12 S. Michigan Ave.
Date: 1893
Status: important part of Historic Michigan Boulevard District (February 2002)

Chicago 7: Chicago Landmarks Ordinance Continued:

Case Studies:

The erosion of the Landmarks Ordinance

Farwell Building

The battle over the Farwell Building erupted early in 2007 when the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and the Chicago City Council granted permission to Prism Development, in association with the Ritz Carlton Residences, to completely dismantle and demolish the designated landmark, build a new, larger superstructure on the site, and then reapply the salvaged facade back onto a portion of the new building. Located at 660 N. Michigan Avenue and designed by Philip Maher in 1927, The Farwell was designated a city landmark in 2004. However, the protected landmark status was rendered meaningless only three years later when the Department of Planning and Development supported, and the Landmarks Commission approved, the dismantlement scheme, despite the protestations of preservation organizations, neighbors, and the general public. Additional information about this project can be found at www.preservationchicago.org.



Architect: Philip Maher

Address: 664 N. Michigan Avenue

Date: 1928-1934

Status: Local landmark

March 2004

The Palmer House

Architect: Holabird & Roche

Address: 1-25 E. Monroe St.

Date: 1925

Status: Local Landmark

December 2006

Another controversial issue involved the historic renaissance-style Palmer House Hotel, located on the corner of Monroe and State Street, which came to a head in April 2006. Thor Equities' proposal to remove the entire first and second floor facade of the State Street elevation and replace it with a suburban-style aluminum storefront, and to shorten the ornate sidewalk canopy on the Monroe Street side, met with disapproval from the preservation community, who argued that removal of these intact historic features was a clear violation of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior standards for historic rehabilitation, as well as the Landmark Commission's own written rules and regulations. The project was approved by the commission despite these violations. However, the sustained public outcry created an opportunity for the Department of Planning and Development to re-approach the developer in an effort to retain more of the historic materials of the building. An agreement was finally reached between the city and the developer and, today, the Palmer House has never looked better.

Chicago 7: Chicago Landmarks Ordinance Continued:



The New York Life Building

Efforts to preserve the New York Life Building, a steel-framed 1894 skyscraper by pioneering engineer and architect William LeBaron Jenny, stretch back decades. This is the last remaining example of Jenny's inventive steel-frame construction that led to the creation of the modern skyscraper.

Located at 39 S. LaSalle Street in the heart of the financial district, preservationists sighed in relief when it finally was granted preliminary landmark status in 2002. However, the glee was short lived.

A redevelopment plan put forth by Hamilton Partners in 2005 and approved by the Landmarks Commission and City Council later that year spelled doom for the integrity of the building, and further eroded the spirit and intent of the Landmarks Ordinance.

The Landmarks Commission granted approval to demolish a significant portion of the historic building and construct a modernist 50 story skyscraper directly on top of the historic landmark. Although portions of the lobby would be retained and the long lost cornice rebuilt, the integrity of the original steel frame, the reason for the landmark designation in the first place, would be lost. Sun Times business writer David Roeder described the project as "pinning a medal on a corpse."

Architect: William LeBaron Jenny
Address: 37-43 S. LaSalle Street
Date: 1893-94 with 1903 addition
Status: Local landmark, July 2006

Jeweler's Row Historic District

A disturbing trend is beginning to emerge in development circles and has been derisively named "facadism." Facadism is the process of demolishing all but the front facade of a building, stabilizing it in place and then building a completely new building behind it. In cases where the front elevation of an historic building is the only architecturally important element, facade preservation may sometimes be an acceptable alternative to complete demolition. However, the Legacy at Millennium Park, a project approved by the Landmarks Commission in 2004, is another example of the disregard for the integrity and importance of an entire building.



Address: Wabash Avenue
between Washington & Monroe
Date: 1872 to 1941
Status: Local landmark district,
July 2003



Advertisement for The Legacy

The Jeweler's Row Historic District was created in 2003 to protect the last remaining and most important works of 1870s era architecture

remaining in the Loop. However, when a grouping of landmark buildings located at 21-37 S. Wabash, owned by the Art Institute of Chicago, were proposed for re-development, the Landmarks Commission allowed the protected buildings to be demolished and replaced with a 70-story modernist condominium tower. Only the facades of the 1870s buildings were preserved. When it is completed these historic facades will mask the tower's parking garage. The Landmarks Commission's oft-quoted mantra is that rooftop additions to historic buildings in landmark districts cannot be "visible from the public right of way." However, from any vantage point on Wabash Street or the "L" platform above the street, a 70-story building will be hard to miss.

Chicago 7: Chicago Landmarks Ordinance Continued:

Conclusion:

It is difficult to deny that a landmarked building is a three-dimensional object. When the public value of an historic building begins and ends at its facade, we begin to allow the soul of our city to be stolen from us. A world-class city's architecture should never be allowed to become merely a drapery to disguise another, often incompatible use. All too frequently, new development occurs in spite of existing architecture, not because of it. This loss of respect for the human scale and nature of our existing historic building stock must be reversed. But true change can only come from the top. Therefore, it is up to our elected officials and commissioners to stop putting the development cart before the preservation horse. Development

programs must suit the existing building. And if they do not, then obviously the wrong property has been chosen to redevelop. As the Chicago Landmark Ordinance celebrates its 40th birthday, perhaps a redefinition of historic preservation is in order. But a redefinition cannot be unilaterally mandated by the city. It must include all stakeholders who have an interest in seeing Chicago live up to its obligation to preserve its past, and thus ensure the viability of its future.



Recommendations

1. The development community needs a clear understanding of what type of construction is permitted in historic districts and what is prohibited. Preservation Chicago encourages the enactment of the long-stalled Design Guidelines that were promised for the Michigan Boulevard Historic District. Those guidelines should prohibit rooftop additions or additional floors unless such additions are absolutely necessary for logistical or life, safety, and welfare reasons. Facadism or the demolition of significant historic interior spaces should be disallowed.
2. Important buildings within the Historic Michigan Boulevard District, including the Chicago Athletic Association, should be considered for individual Landmark Status. Those ordinances should include the preservation of significant interior spaces.
3. All future landmark ordinances need to be written to explicitly recognize historic buildings as three-dimensional objects, rather than merely historic facades. Contentious debate over the Farwell Building, the low-rise buildings at 21-37 South Wabash, and the Chicago Athletic Association could have been avoided had unimpeachable rules existed at the time.
4. The Landmarks Commission and its paid staff do noble work. The Commission itself is a body of professionals who volunteer their time to monitor and protect the treasure that is our built environment. In exchange for their service, they need to be able to do their work in a manner that is as free from political pressure as possible. To that end, Preservation Chicago challenges the Commission to aggressively vet and then reject any development proposal that may compromise the historic integrity of a landmark building or district.

Chicago Athletic Association Photos: Debbie Dodge
Jeweler's Row and Michigan Avenue Streetwall Photos: Scot Nordstrom