HAS CHICAGO’S LANDMARK ORDINANCE BECOME JUST A FACADE?
TIF – Are public funds being used to facilitate the demolition of historic buildings?

There has been much talk about TIF’s of late. TIF, or Tax Increment Financing, is a financing tool that was originally intended to revitalize “blighted” and other “underinvested” neighborhoods. Although they are used throughout Illinois, they have become a favored tool of the Daley Administration. However, in recent years, many communities have begun to call into question the necessity and effectiveness of some TIF’s. In turn, Preservation Chicago has itself begun to explore the impact that some TIF financed developments are having on historic preservation.

The issue that piqued Preservation Chicago’s interest in TIF involved the former Brach’s Candy Factory building located at 401 N. Kilpatrick Street in the Austin neighborhood. The city is providing $10.6 million dollars in tax money to redevelop the site, which includes the demolition of the Brach’s factory building. The site will become a distribution center.

Preservation Chicago listed the orange-rated Brach’s factory building as one of dozens of great factories and warehouses threatened with demolition (see our website: http://www.preservationchicago.org/chicago7/2005/warehouse.html) on our 2005 Chicago’s Seven Most Threatened Buildings list. The building was designed in 1924 by famed Chicago architect Alfred Alschuler and is the oldest building in the Brach’s complex. However, the TIF funds will be used to demolish the historic building and salvage the terra cotta ornament, which will be reused on the site and incorporated into the design of the new building.

As Chicago’s industrial might continues to wane, there is no question that finding viable uses for the hundreds of vacant and under-utilized historic factory and warehouse buildings has become an economic and logistic challenge. And there is certainly no question that new investment is needed and desired for that area. However, we do not believe that the city should be using tax dollars to subsidize the demolition of our historic architecture. A more creative solution should have been explored for the site and more efforts should have been made to preserve the entire original factory building.

At the very least, this type of redevelopment financing scheme should be discouraged by the planning department. However, if such abuses of the public trust continue, it may become necessary to consider forbidding it all together.

The true irony here is that after the city spends $10.6 million dollars of our tax money, only 75 permanent jobs are “expected” to be created.

Jonathan Fine
President, Preservation Chicago
For a street whose ample green spaces suggest urban serenity, Uptown’s Dover Street has been the scene of numerous precedent-setting development battles over the past 10 years. Dover Street (1400 West, between Montrose and Lawrence Avenues), is the westernmost block of the Sheridan Park National Register Historic District (est. 1985). It is filled with a dazzling array of unique single-family houses and smaller apartment buildings by some of the most prominent 19th and early 20th century architects.

Like the rest of the Sheridan Park Historic District, development on Dover Street has increased significantly over the past 15 years, spurred in part by the tax incentives created by the federal historic designation. But unlike the rest of the Sheridan Park District, Dover has much lower density and is filled with many single-family houses and two-flats on unusually large lots–making it a developer’s dream for teardowns.

THE SHOT ACROSS THE BOW

The preservation battles began in earnest in the spring of 1999, when–two days after the last aldermanic election–neighbors were shocked to see a single-family house torn down with no public notice. The house sat on an exceptionally large lot that was 200 feet deep. One of the main attractions for residents of Dover is the generous 40-foot building setbacks that allow for a wide swath of green space to prevail on the street.

Neighbors were horrified to learn the developer wanted to build a five-story concrete block condo structure within 10 feet of the sidewalk. “It would have looked like the Berlin Wall,” quipped one neighbor. Through numerous meetings and community pressure, the developer was forced to conform to the prevailing setback. Over the years, Dover residents employed numerous strategies to try to dissuade developers from plying their teardown brand of urban renewal – including a zoning overlay and down zoning. But every time residents thought they found a solution to a problem, developer’s found yet more loopholes to exploit and two more properties were torn down on the street.

However, it was the demolition in 2005 of the oldest home in the District—a beautiful, orange-rated Queen Anne-style house on adjacent Beacon Street—that convinced concerned Dover residents that a city landmark district was the only way to stop the out-of-control demolition.

THE COMMUNITY UNITES

Residents identified the district to include the three northernmost blocks of Dover, as well as a collection of four single-family houses on the adjacent Beacon Street. They worked vigorously over the next six months to enlist the support of property owners and renters.

By the time they approached Aldermen Eugene Schulter (47th) and Helen Shiller (46th) in the summer of 2006, they already had petitions bearing hundreds of residents’ names who supported creation of the district. The aldermen –especially Ald. Schulter – enthusiastically embraced landmarking and pushed it with the Chicago Landmarks Commission.

When the proposal was put to the Commission for a vote, over 50 of the district’s 88 property owners had signed consent forms supporting landmarking.

Now with the Chicago City Council’s designation of Dover as a Chicago Landmark District on December 12, 2007, proponents of saving Dover Street’s unique architectural treasures can finally rest assured that developers will not be able to knock down any more of the street’s distinctive properties.

– John Holden
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.

Chicago Athletic Association

Currently at issue is the proposal for the redevelopment of the Chicago Athletic Association (CAA) 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 CAA 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 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.

However, a developer plans 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 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 could also 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 few inches of the historic façade while everything else behind it is disposable. This 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 façades, pasted on to new structures that have no relation to the original intent of the architect or the architecture. This type of façadism is not historic preservation and no world-class city should be subjected to the continued “Disneyfication” of its premiere boulevard.
The 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. Approving to build a new, larger super-structure on the site, and then reapply the salvaged facade back onto a portion of the new building. Located at 660 N. Michigan Ave. and designed by Philip Maher in 1927, The Farwell was designated a city landmark in 2004. However, the protected 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 many protestations of preservation organizations, neighbors and the general public. Information about this project can be found at www.preservationchicago.org.

The Palmer House

Another controversial issue involved the historic 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 façade 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 historic features was a clear violation of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Rehabilitation, as well as the Landmarks Commission’s own 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.

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 innovative 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 proposed 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 Landmarks Ordinance intent.

The Landmarks Commission gave approval to demolish a significant portion of the historic building and to 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.”
Jeweler's Row Historic District

A disturbing trend is beginning to emerge in development circles and has been derisively named “façadism.” Façadism 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, façade preservation may sometimes be an acceptable alternative to complete demolition. However, the Legacy at Millennium Park, at 21-37 S. Wabash, a project approved by the Landmarks Commission in 2004, is another example of the disregard for the integrity and importance of an entire building.

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 strict and enforceable design guidelines for the Historic Michigan Boulevard District.

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 S. Wabash, and the CAA could have been avoided had unimpeachable rules existed at the time.

4. The Landmarks Commission and its paid staff need to be able to do their noble work as free from political pressure as possible. 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.
Grant Park (Children's Museum Proposal)
Date: 1835

Overview:
Leon Despres, former alderman and original sponsor of the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance, recently observed that parkland is always a temptation because it is free. Grant Park is a rare and magnificent urban open space in the very heart of downtown. Once again, it is proving to be too tempting to resist: the city is now considering it as the favored site for the Chicago Children’s Museum. 

History:
In 1890, A. Montgomery Ward sued to have all structures removed and prevent new ones from being built in Grant Park, with the exception of the Art Institute of Chicago. His defense: an 1836 mandate that Chicago’s lakefront remain “forever open, clear and free.” An 1897 Supreme Court decision upheld the mandate, which they reaffirmed in 1906 when Ward opposed building the Field Museum of Natural History in the park. The Children’s Museum proposal renews this long-standing dispute over public parkland use.

Threat:
The Children’s Museum’s proposal would impose more than 100,000 square feet of new construction on parkland intended as “forever open, clear and free,” further diminishing our city’s irreplaceable green heritage.

Recommendation:
Grant Park is too valuable a part of our civic fabric to parcel out to individual institutions. Therefore, Preservation Chicago stands with Alderman Brendan Reilly (42nd Ward) in his opposition to building the Chicago Children’s Museum in Grant Park. We urge that the City explore renovating one of the many vacant or deteriorating historic buildings scattered throughout the city for the Museum. This solution would save an historic piece of Chicago, as well as better serve the public trust.

Devon Avenue Commercial District
Location: 6400 North from Bell (2234W) to California (2800W)
Architects: Various

Overview:
With its populace made up of Indians, Pakistani, South Asians, Russians and Orthodox Jews, Devon Avenue is Chicago’s North Side “United Nations,” attracting thousands of locals and tourists to its colorful shops and restaurants every year. While the vibrant cultural melting pot of Devon Avenue flourishes, current plans for new development could irreparably harm the character and quality of this important street and its surrounding neighborhood.

History:
First developed in the years following World War I, Devon Avenue exhibits a fine variety of modest early-1920s brick buildings, elaborate late-’20s era terra cotta commercial flats, and art deco-influenced structures from the early-1930s. Among the best are half a dozen two-story terra cotta commercial buildings spread across the length of Devon Avenue, designed by Oldefest & Williams. Adolf Woerner’s North Town Post Office and Apartments at 2626 W. Devon is just one of Devon’s many jewels, with its yellow brick, red Spanish tile and recessed balconies.

Threat:
The significance of Devon Avenue’s architectural heritage has yet to be acknowledged and in fact, is threatened by neglect, indifference and the city’s lack of enforcement of zoning and building codes. Those intent on reinventing Devon are creating development plans entirely out of character with this richly textured pedestrian retail street.

Recommendation:
We encourage the City of Chicago to assist in the preservation and rehabilitation of Devon Avenue’s historic architecture through landmarking individual buildings, providing small business improvement loans to encourage rehabilitation, investment in infrastructure and streetscape programs, and enforcement of zoning and building regulations. If Devon is to be a street for the future, it must embrace its exquisite past.
**American Book Company Building**

Location: Cermak Road and Calumet Avenue intersection  
Architect: N. Max Dunning  
Date: 1912

**Overview:**  
In an area ripe for additional hotel space to complement the expanding McCormick Place convention center, the stately American Book Company building stands as an integral component in a trio of historic warehouse buildings. If a recently proposed hotel project goes forward, this unique slice of Chicago’s history will be destroyed.

**History:**  
In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the American Book Company was the world’s leading publisher of textbooks. For several decades, this handsome brick and stone structure provided a home worthy of the publisher’s stature. With its Romanesque arched windows, un-commercial-like 3-bay windows and ornamented tower, the building was the essence of what architect N. Max Dunning strived for in his designs: a perfect balance between meeting industrial needs and people-pleasing, human-scale aesthetics. After American, R.R. Donnelly & Sons occupied the site. It is now vacant.

**Threat:**  
The threat of demolition is real: A local development company recently announced its intention to construct a new hotel complex on a 3.7 acre site, which includes the American Book Company building. A 1998-1999 planned development (PD) zoning ordinance that called for the rehabilitation of the building has expired and the site will be subject to re-zoning to accommodate any redevelopment.

**Recommendation:**  
Preservation Chicago urges City Hall to seek rehabilitation of the American Book Company building as part of any site redevelopment plans. A convention-hotel would be a perfect fit, strengthening Chicago’s ability to attract conventioneers while breathing new life into the historical trio of publishing and printing buildings – something the surrounding neighbors and visitors alike will appreciate and enjoy for years to come.

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**Norwood Park**

Location: Bounded by Harlem, Bryn Mawr, Nagle and Avondale

**Overview:**  
The residential neighborhood of Old Norwood Park surrounds several large parks. But in fact, Old Norwood Park itself was designed to be park-like, with large lots, wide streets and elegant single-family homes ranging in styles from Victorian and Tudor to bungalow and ranch – many designed by some of the city’s most noted architects.

Unfortunately, the very features that have attracted residents for decades, are now attracting developers bent on eradicating them.

**History:**  
Named a National Register District in 2002, Old Norwood Park boasts 81 Orange-rated homes, including what some consider Chicago’s oldest house — the 1833 Noble-Seymour-Crippen House. Since 1980, the Norwood Park Historical Society has been seeking landmark designation for a district and individual buildings. In 1986, the City of Chicago identified a large historic district, but despite ongoing work by neighborhood activists, movement has stalled.

**Threat:**  
They’re falling like a house of cards: The community lost three major houses in 2007, including the orange-rated James A. Low House that at one time was being supported for landmarking. An historic Eastlake Stick Style house and the 1909 Norwegian Old Peoples Home are slated for demolition by owner Norwood Crossing, who plans to make way for a new center called Park View, advertising it as “Building a ‘New’ Campus – Replacing an ‘Old’ One.”

**Recommendation:**  
Preservation Chicago recommends reviewing the district identified by the City of Chicago in 1986 and proceeding with its landmarking before more historic buildings are lost. A relatively easy geographic grouping of buildings roughly bounded by Harlem, Talcott, Interstate 90, Newark and Avondale would capture 223 of the 271 sites listed in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey. Expansion to include all of 271 buildings would be most desirable.
The Booker Building
Location: 4700 S. Cottage Grove Ave.
Architect: Horatio Wilson
Date: 1914

Overview:
The Booker Building is part of that vanishing breed – the vintage corner commercial building. Because of their prominent position on the street, developers often blessed them with their finest architectural efforts. They offered retail on their first floors with office and residential above, the very formula now being rediscovered as “mixed use.” Just when these buildings could contribute most to the commercial revitalization of Chicago’s neighborhoods, they are being demolished at an alarming rate.

History:
Designed by one of Chicago’s most popular and prolific turn-of-the-century architects, the Booker Building displays fine “arts and crafts” brick work, excellent terra cotta detailing and a low-hipped “prairie school” style roof. It was a cornerstone of the thriving 47th Street/Cottage Grove commercial district until the mid-’60’s and is one of the street’s last surviving vintage buildings.

Threat:
Although Wilson’s nearby Harper Theater Building will receive a full preservation rehab as part of a mixed-use redevelopment project sponsored by the University of Chicago, the Booker Building is scheduled for demolition as part of a TIF-financed project.

Recommendation:
The preservation of vintage commercial buildings is crucial to the re-establishment of a viable, lively commercial atmosphere in Chicago’s neighborhoods. Therefore, Preservation Chicago recommends that the Booker Building be preserved, adaptively reused and integrated into the larger redevelopment project planned for this site.

Daily News Building
Location: 2 N. Riverside Plaza
Architects: Holabird and Root
Date:1929

Overview:
The former home of the Chicago Daily News is an art deco gem that, in tandem with its impressive pedestrian plaza, has formed one of the iconic structures that define Chicago’s Loop. Without any local protections, this historic site is vulnerable to alterations that could deface its elegance, destroy its human scale, and erode the quality of life for downtown workers and visitors.

History:
Carl Sandburg, Mike Royko. 8-time Pulitzer Prize recipient. The Chicago Daily News certainly had a venerable history of its own. This was the building where much of it took place. While notable for its art deco design and pioneering use of air rights above an active railroad right-of-way, this was the first significant commercial building to embrace its riverfront location with a lively pedestrian plaza that remains actively used today.

Threat:
Currently, the Daley News Building is only 70% occupied. To create more leasable space, the owner proposed that the plaza be replaced with a high-rise condominium tower. This proposal was not well-received by the City of Chicago in 2000. Recently, the owner has re-initiated studies for ways to build upon the plaza to improve the site’s financial performance.

Recommendation:
We recommend that the City proceed with declaring the structure and its plaza an historic landmark. In the densely populated western Loop, the need for open space where people can meet friends and colleagues for lunch, dinner, or a cup of coffee is vast. We challenge the owner to find creative ways of improving the building while retaining the character of the original structure and the integrity of the pedestrian plaza.
LOST

Lake Meadows Tennis Club
3211 S. Ellis
Date: 1959, Architect: Gertrude Kerbis
Style: Modern
Lost: Senseless Demolition

Metro Theatre
3308 W. Lawrence
Date: 1915
Architect: Henry L. Newhouse
Lost: Senseless Demolition

Dunham Building
450 E. Ohio
Date: 1926
Architect: Burnham Brothers
Lost: Northwestern Memorial expansion project.

UNCERTAIN

1418 W. Addison
Date: 1890's
Style: Queen Anne
Uncertain: change of zoning has been applied for to build a six unit condo on the site, Alderman Tunney has yet to approve the rezoning of the property.

830 N. State Street
Date: 1890
Architect: Unknown
Style: Queen Anne
Uncertain: Loyola University just acquired.

Joyce United Methodist Church
3904 N. Seeley
Date: 1899
Architect: Edgar D. Blake
Style: Shingle Style
Uncertain: as of 1/29/08 on 90-day demolition hold list.

SAFE

Vassar Swiss Underwear Company
2543-35 W. Diversey Ave.
Safe: In the process of receiving final landmark designation status.

Humboldt Park Reperatory & Stable
3015 W. Division
Date: 1896, Architect: Fromman & Jabson
Safe: has achieved City of Chicago landmark status.

IBM Building
330 N. Wabash
Date: 1971, Architect: Mies Van Der Rohe
Safe: has achieved City of Chicago landmark status.
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**PROFILES IN PRESERVATION:**

John Holden, Dover Street Preservation Group

PC: What motivated you to move to Chicago – and specifically, Dover Street?
One of my Lane Tech High schoolmates introduced me to Dover Street in the late ‘70’s. Uptown was a pretty dangerous area then, but I was always wowed by the wonderful architecture and knew its potential. I have seen a lot of positive change in the 20 years I have lived there.

PC: What inspired you to advocate for the Dover Street Landmark District?
Dover has been part of the Sheridan Park National Register district for over 20 years, but sadly, that did not offer protection from teardowns. As they became more numerous, we knew that only City landmark designation would save the best properties.

PC: What have you learned from this experience?
We had remarkably widespread support for the district and dozens of local residents immediately became part of the advocacy committee. Roughly two-thirds of the district’s property owners voted for the district, which impressed City officials. It was also a great community building exercise and many new friends were made in the process.

PC: What surprised you the most?
A lot of people appreciate and care for great older buildings. Before we launched our effort, some in the community callously suggested that only a few fringe types really cared about historic buildings.

PC: If you could express to the City, the Mayor or Alderman Schulter/ Shiller one thing regarding preservation, what would that be?
These older buildings are what drew a lot of people back into what had once been an economically depressed area. Good architecture and the solid construction that made Chicago great in the first place is a precious resource and should not be squandered.

PC: What advice would you give to others who want to take action in their neighborhoods?
Talk to your neighbors and consider the possibility of a district before too many structures are lost.
WE’LL ALWAYS HAVE MILWAUKEE…

Close your eyes and – better yet, keep your eyes wide open as you walk along Milwaukee Avenue from Division to North, and it won’t be very hard to imagine yourself back at the turn of the 20th century. You wind your way through the crowd, past storefronts housed in structures reflecting architectural motifs as varied as the cultures of those who built them: Italianate. Queen Anne. Arts and Crafts. Art Deco. Classical Revival. You could almost hear the symphony of foreign languages filling the air as vendors and customers engaged in shop talk or local gossip. From the mid 1800’s to the early 20th century, this is how it was. Today, the Avenue arguably represents Chicago’s oldest intact commercial district.

THE PATH TO PROSPERITY

Once a diagonal dirt trail that guided Native Americans into the heart of the city, Milwaukee Avenue gradually became the immigrant’s “path to prosperity.” German, Norwegian, Jewish and Polish settlers poured into the area, setting up businesses that served the community and fueled the nascent economy of the boom town known as Chicago. Having morphed from cloak tailors and feed stores to boutiques and bistros, Milwaukee Avenue’s businesses still serve as an absolute vital adjunct to the landmarked residential Wicker Park District.

But at the turn of the 21st century – and despite part of the strip’s listing on the National Register for Historic Places, the specter of the wrecking ball loomed. Demolitions had begun. And the results were not pretty.

LANDMARKED AT LAST

Last year, the 17-year long efforts of the community to preserve this storied street finally paid off. With the support of Alderman Manuel Flores (1st Ward), Milwaukee Avenue was designated a Preliminary Landmark District on May 3rd, 2007. As this commercial stretch marches towards becoming an official Chicago Landmark District early this Spring, we can all take heart that the street will continue to prosper while maintaining its rich, historical character. Now and always.

– Laura Stigler-Marier