

December 8, 2022

Commission on Chicago Landmarks

Chicago City Hall

121 N. LaSalle Street

Chicago, Illinois 60606

c/o Chairman Ernest Wong

Re: Greater Union Baptist Church, 1956 W. Warren Boulevard, Chicago

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,

We at Preservation Chicago unequivocally support the Preliminary Landmark Recommendation for the Greater Union Baptist Church, originally constructed as The Church of the Redeemer, and located at 1956 W. Warren Boulevard, on Chicago's Near West Side.

The Greater Union Baptist Church building has been a cornerstone of Chicago's Near West Side for generations and has endured many changes to the community over the past 136 years, including vast nearby Urban Renewal projects, social unrest and riots following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., along with the expansion of multiple institutions surrounding this magnificent church. It's a testament to the long-term commitment of its leadership and congregation, that Greater Union continues its service to the community, over the past nine decades, in which it has been located within this historic structure.

The church building itself is a beautiful sight to behold, constructed in the Richardson Romanesque Style, with its high gables of richly-colored red brick, ornamental terra cotta and sandstone. The organization of its principal facades, along both Warren Boulevard and Damen Avenue, is highly disciplined and further embellished with a variety of arched openings, often filled with highly decorative art glass windows. Its beautiful volumes are a commanding presence. This is especially noteworthy, as the building's design captures one's eye from a far distance, despite not having a tall tower or belfry, which is a more typical anchor and component of such an important edifice.

Greater Union Baptist Church is truly a remarkable structure, modern for its time, and with a remarkable column-free interior sanctuary, located on the second floor, with its wood-beamed ceiling, original brass chandeliers, converted to electricity, organ, curvilinear pews and richly-colored art glass by the Chicago firm of McCully & Miles. This designation may also further elevate the work of McCully & Miles, to join that of such firms as Tiffany, LaFarge, and Healy & Millet, all working in about the same time period, as the art glass windows at Greater Union are of such excellent quality.

Of great importance is the architect of Greater Union Baptist Church, William LeBaron Jenney (1832-1907). Jenney, an architect and structural engineer, who experimented with metal framing, noting his experience in the American Civil War as a bridge engineer for the Union Army, and is recognized on the world stage as the "Father of the Skyscraper," or first steel/metal-framed building. That first early skyscraper, "The Home Insurance Building," of 1884-1885, located on Chicago's LaSalle Street (demolished in 1931), was designed a year prior to Greater Union Baptist Church building.

PRESERVATION CHICAGO

CITIZENS ADVOCATING FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CHICAGO'S HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

In the years following the construction of the church, originally known as “Church of the Redeemer,” William LeBaron Jenney went on to design some of the Chicago’s tallest structures and recognized Chicago Landmarks, including the Manhattan Building, the Ludington Building, Second Leiter Building, the New York Life Building, among others, while also influencing a generation of architects and the design of their buildings around the world. Jenney’s work and achievements are recognized as the beginnings of the Chicago Commercial Style and Chicago School of Architecture.

Preservation Chicago has worked with the Greater Union Baptist Congregation, Board of Directors, and both Pastor Dr. McCray and former pastor Willie Morris of Church, for over seven years towards a designation of the church as a Chicago Landmark.

We were grateful to assist the City of Chicago’s Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Planning and Development to capture oral histories of the Pastor and many of the longtime members of the Congregation. We are extremely grateful for this opportunity to assist with this Preliminary Landmark Recommendation and bring this great honor to this amazing West Side institution.

Special thanks to the DPD-Historic Preservation Staff, Pastor Dr. McCray and the many members of Great Union Baptist Church for their help, commitment, dedication and stewardship towards this important moment in our collective history.

With that said, Preservation Chicago fully supports the Preliminary Landmark Recommendation and Chicago Landmark Designation for Greater Union Baptist Church.

Sincerely,

Ward Miller

Ward Miller, Executive Director



To: Commission on Chicago Landmarks
ccl@cityofchicago.org.

Re: Greater Union Baptist Church

December 7th, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

We write in support of the Preliminary Landmark Recommendation for Greater Union Baptist Church.

As the commission reviews the building's architectural significance; its distinctive design by William LeBaron Jenney, its artful masonry, and its detailed leaded glass windows, we hope that the commission and staff recognize that the preservation and care of this landmark is not a coincidence.

Since 1928, Greater Union Baptist Church, a historic African American faith community, has stewarded this landmark. This effort is not unlike the efforts of many other African American faith communities in Chicago that have inherited and cared for the historic architecture of our city, and have done so for decades on their own, without the recognition or incentives of municipal landmarking. Many of these efforts, like this one, predate the creation of the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance.

This effort, as well as the recent renaming of the Henry B. Clarke House to recognize the stewardship of Bishop Louis Henry Ford and the St. Paul Church of God in Christ, encourages the City of Chicago and preservation broadly to look deeply into how the field can commemorate and incentivize the preservation efforts of African American faith communities.

Yours Sincerely,

Elizabeth Blasius

Jonathan Solomon

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December 8, 2022

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121 N. LaSalle Street

Chicago, Illinois 60606

c/o Chairman Ernest Wong

Re: The Pioneer Arcade Building, 1535-1545 N. Pulaski Road, Chicago

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,

We at Preservation Chicago fully support the Chicago Landmark Designation and the Final Landmark Recommendation for the Pioneer Arcade Building, located at 1535-1545 N. Pulaski Road, Chicago.

The Pioneer Arcade Building, along with the New Apollo Theater, located directly across the street, were both recognized as part of our Preservation Chicago annual "Chicago 7 Most Endangered Buildings" program in 2015. These two structures, along with the Pioneer Bank, also a designated Chicago Landmark, were anchor buildings to this important commercial intersection and shopping district in the West Humboldt Park Community of Chicago. Unfortunately, over time, this area has suffered from severe disinvestment.

The Pioneer Arcade Building is a highly decorative cream-colored terra-cotta building, in a Spanish-Revival style and designed by noted architect Jens J. Jensen. It's also a fine example of a recreational hall building type, featuring bowling alleys and billiards and dating to 1925.

Over many years we have worked with the current owner, Hispanic Housing and its director, Paul Roldon, the North-Pulaski Historical Society and its members, towards a good preservation outcome and use for this special building. We are hopeful that this designation and new use for the Pioneer Arcade Building will engage many of its significant features, including a full restoration of the building's elaborate terra cotta façade.

We are of the opinion that the proposed reuse of the historic Pioneer Arcade Building and a Chicago Landmark Designation of the building is an excellent outcome. We look forward to the owner, developer, and City of Chicago, working together towards a beautiful and architecturally compatible addition to the rear sections of the building, while also integrating significant historic features of the interior of the building into the reuse plans. We therefore, at Preservation Chicago fully support the Final Landmark Recommendation and Chicago Landmark Designation for the Pioneer Arcade Building.

Sincerely,

Ward Miller

Ward Miller, Executive Director