

# COMMUNITY STREETScape MARKERS: CONTEXT STATEMENT



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## CONTENTS

<b>Chapter One: Placemaking and the Street</b>	<b>1</b>
The Planning and Design Evolution of Retail Streetscapes	1
Streetscape Design in Chicago During the 1990s	8
<b>Chapter Two: Associated Streetscape Projects</b>	<b>9</b>
Little Village Arch ( <i>26th Street at Albany Avenue</i> )	9
Puerto Rican Flags ( <i>Division Street at Artesian Avenue and at Mozart Street</i> )	11
Rainbow Pylons and the Legacy Walk ( <i>Halsted Street from Melrose Street to Bradley Place</i> )	14
<b>Chapter Three: Designation Requirements</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>20</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

Chicago — often called the “City of Neighborhoods” — includes over 200 distinct areas spread throughout the city and along its major arterial streets. Its neighborhoods are defined by a diverse social, cultural, and multiethnic makeup that is visible in its many commercial corridors. Since the early 1990s, trends in urban planning and design have attempted to revitalize neighborhood commercial corridors through the installation of celebratory street beautification projects that identify and recognize social or ethno-cultural groups. These types of community-based placemaking infrastructure projects are significant in Chicago history because they reflect community history and civic pride.

Hundreds of street improvement projects have been completed in Chicago since the early 1990s. In the four years leading up to 2002, 134 retail corridors were enhanced or repaired. Typically, projects involved improvements to “streetscape” infrastructure, including signage, lighting, landscaping, and sidewalks that were designed to enhance the pedestrian experience by creating a sense of place. The concept of placemaking has its origins in the pioneering ideas about designing cities for people at the pedestrian scale that was promoted from the 1960s by writers and social observers including Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, and William H. Whyte as a process and policy for returning people and life to previously automobile-dominated spaces. The “places” created by neighborhood placemaking streetscape projects range from the simple recognition of a neighborhood using banners or other permanent markers highlighting its name to the identification and celebration of an aspect of a neighborhood, such as its social, cultural, or ethnic identity.

Of the many streetscape projects in Chicago, nearly one dozen have incorporated special social or ethno-cultural design themes as a means to differentiate and identify community retail corridors. During the 1990s, several of these placemaking projects were privately funded by local business districts with custom-designed and -built sculptural community markers as interpretive street art. These projects were especially creative and elaborate in their designs of sculptural objects and structures during the 1990s. However, the great variety and range of sculptural objects and materials used during the 1990s resulted in new City-initiated design guidelines in the early 2000s that were developed both to encourage future enhancement and revitalization and to standardize the nature and composition of city streetscapes.

Chicago has 13 existing objects and sites that are designated Chicago Landmarks. These include monuments, sculptures, fountains, and tombs designed by notable architects and sculptors that identify important people and events in Chicago's history. The majority of these objects and sites were added to the city's streetscape during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Only two sites feature sculpture from the post-World War II period: the site of the first self-sustained nuclear chain reaction from 1942 and the site of the origin of the Great Chicago Fire, installed in 1961.<sup>1</sup>

This context statement considers the relatively recent history of neighborhood placemaking streetscape projects as well as the unique sculptural objects and structures that were included as community markers. Three examples are discussed as representative of this type of civic infrastructure. These examples serve both to attract visitors to a community and as concrete reaffirmations of the community's collective identity in Chicago: the Little Village Arch on 26th Street in the Little Village neighborhood, which was built in 1990 to recognize Chicago's Mexican-American community; the twin steel gateway flags added in 1995 at either end of a section of Division Street called *Paseo Boricua*, which represents Chicago's Puerto Rican community; and the 20 rainbow pylons along North Halsted Street installed in 1998 celebrating Chicago's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community.

## **CHAPTER ONE: PLACEMAKING AND THE STREET**

### **The Planning and Design Evolution of Retail Streetscapes**

Community streetscape markers are elements designed to recognize and make visible the social, ethnic and/or cultural identities of a community. They are artistic expressions of abstracted symbols associated with a specific social, ethnic, or cultural identity. Community markers are not characterized by any single object, but they have taken the form of many common design elements and standard types of street furniture. Streetscape elements, such as benches, street trees, and lamp posts have existed as standard objects in the design and layout of streets in the United States and elsewhere for centuries. At the same time, the use of sculptural art in the form of monuments and statues has an even longer history in urban settings. The significance of the community marker as a sculptural street furnishing that embodies the collective identity of a community cannot be discussed without considering the history of the street — specifically, the commercial street or retail corridor.

The design of commercial streets and streets in general has changed over time as their hierarchies of use have evolved. Streets serve multiple purposes as constructed public spaces with social, economic, and political values and as connecting thoroughfares. Historically, they have served as a community's face and as the integral space in which day-to-day activities are performed. They are the commercial terrain of the retail merchant; the path for transportation of all levels; the democratic space for debate, protest, and celebration; and the social place for community interaction.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, rapidly urbanizing cities such as Chicago experienced increasingly congested and filthy streets. Social reformers during the late-nineteenth century advanced ideas for sanitation and public health, which promoted a range of engineering advances including sewer systems and more easily cleaned paving systems.<sup>2</sup> During the same period, sidewalks became common in cities and provided a cleaner and safer alternative to carriage ways and streets. Throughout the late-nineteenth century, cities in the United States



During the Late-19th century, social reformers pushed for cleaner conditions in cities, while city governments implemented new laws to reduce street congestion by regulating perceived nuisances and obstructions. The rise of the automobile prompted the laws and relegated pedestrians to the sidewalk. By the 1910s, most streets in Chicago had clearly separated the automobile and the pedestrian.

Left: State Street south from Madison Street, 1910. *Library of Congress*

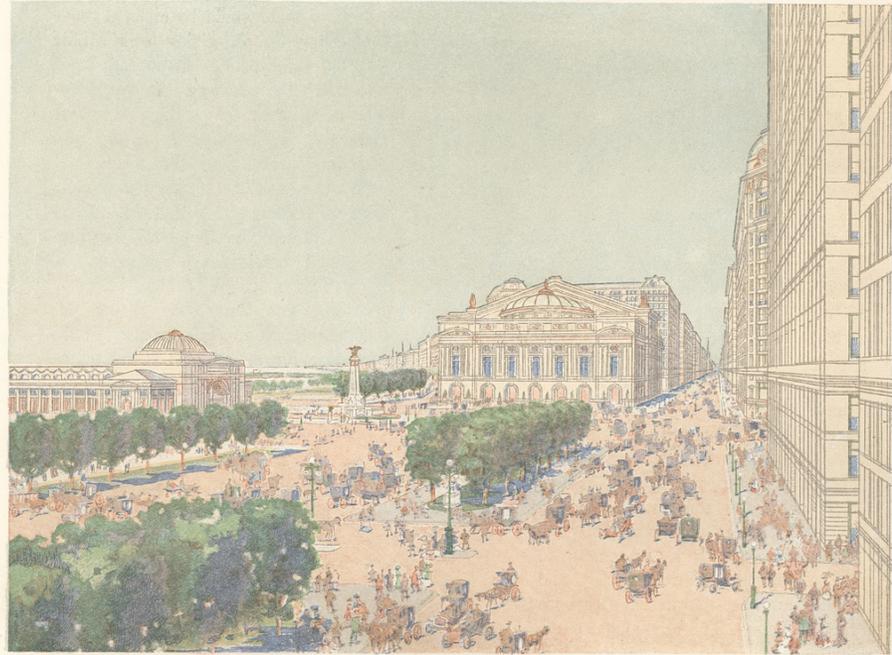
Right: Erie Street east from Pine Street (Michigan Avenue), 1915. New street lamps are visible. These were installed in parks and along many of Chicago's boulevards.

*Chicago History Museum*



Right: Lincoln Avenue west of Seminary Avenue, 1910s. Example of a neighborhood retail street. *Calumet 412.com*

**Daniel Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago* guided national interest in the beautification of public streets. The plan called for broad tree-lined arterial boulevards that emphasized the monumental scale of the proposed urban transformation. This view, one of many composed by Jules Guérin, shows Michigan Avenue, looking south toward Roosevelt Road. *Plan of Chicago***



enacted laws to control the congestion of streets and sidewalks by regulating perceived obstructions and nuisances such as signage and street vending. These regulations increased during the early-twentieth century with the rise of the automobile, which prompted the development of numerous traffic systems including streetlights and a litany of new signage.<sup>3</sup> As early as the 1910s, pedestrians were relegated to ever narrowing sidewalks as streets were redesigned and regulated for efficient motorized transportation. In Chicago, this process began during the 1910s along downtown's famously congested streets and spread to neighborhood commercial corridors across the city. Most projects were municipally-initiated, with design and execution completed by the Chicago Department of Public Works, which was established in 1861.

The design of streets during the twentieth century was influenced by Progressive Era movements that promoted civic improvement through "beautified" streets and municipal art, the planting of trees, establishment of park spaces, social equity, and the continued concern for sanitation. The City Beautiful movement, with its roots in the influential decorative arts and planning scale presented by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, made the installation of public art more popular. Civic improvement societies proliferated across the country and sought to counterbalance the often-industrial nature of cities such as Chicago with public art and cleaner, more beautiful tree-lined streets. Streetscaping during this period included a range of standard features, such as lighting, benches, sewer covers, and other objects that were sometimes cast with sculptural designs featuring flora and fauna or important figures from a particular locale.

Daniel Burnham is frequently credited with encouraging the City Beautiful movement. His monumental 1909 *Plan of Chicago* emphasized aesthetics and efficiency while promoting a cleaner and more verdant city from a regional scale. At the pedestrian scale, Burnham's 1909 plan led to civic projects such as the expansion of Lincoln Park and the construction of new arterial roadways such as Ogden Avenue and the Congress Street Expressway. By the 1930s,

streets were carefully delineated with distinct public spaces for the pedestrian and automobile. Street vendors and other uses that were viewed as non-conforming were disallowed.

Although street design during the inter war period focused on efficiency for the automobile, a few were projects designed to revive urban historical and ethno-cultural streetscapes for the benefit of the pedestrian. The historical significance of colonial America led to re-creations of the colonial U.S. in Germantown, Pennsylvania and most significantly in Williamsburg, Virginia. In Los Angeles, historic ethnic identities were highlighted and fictionalized through caricatures after several early adobe structures were refashioned into a “Mexican street of yesterday” known as Olvera Street.<sup>4</sup> Through these themed streetscapes were not common, they represented an early interest in the commodification of historical themes and ethno-cultural diversity.

Decentralization during the post-World War II period led urban planners and landscape architects to gradually prioritize the pedestrian over the automobile in the following decades. Although during the 1950s Chicago planned for future growth, the development of highways and new suburban areas contributed to decades of population decline as residents moved to the suburbs. During the 1960s, in an attempt to attract residents and revitalize its urban neighborhoods and commercial corridors, Chicago initiated several major projects to rebuild or rehabilitate entire communities. Within these projects, streets were primarily modernized and widened for traffic, but increasingly many were closed and converted into public spaces and pedestrian malls. Many of Chicago’s grand urban renewal and conservation district plans featured pedestrian-oriented open space. Examples include the widening of Michigan Avenue on the Near South Side, the construction of a retail shopping plaza at 63rd and Halsted Streets in 1967, the partial replacement of Ogden Avenue in Lincoln Park with small parks and housing developments during the 1960s, and the creation of dozens of small cul-de-sac parks throughout the city.

The development of pedestrian malls in U.S. cities emerged during the 1960s with the first planned mall constructed in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1959 and designed by pioneer shopping mall architect Victor Gruen. Gruen encouraged the development of urban street malls as a means to create viable public space that would attract shoppers back to urban retail cores. Street malls incorporated design elements that were then common to parks or plazas. Fountains, landscaping, sculpture, clocks, seating, and play areas all became the language of the new urban mall space, a space reclaimed from the arterial street and returned to the pedestrian. The initial positive influence of early malls on revitalizing urban retail areas and halting deterioration prompted other cities to build their own malls and helped initiate new beautification programs. In Chicago, several secondary streets adjacent to commercial districts were converted to pedestrian malls, including a portion of Wisconsin Street at Halsted Street in 1977 (extant) and the Lincoln Square shopping district along Lincoln Avenue at Lawrence in 1978 (extant). That same year, Chicago’s most well-known pedestrian mall, the State Street Mall, was completed. The State Street Mall converted the city’s most visible commercial street into a pedestrian space bisected by bus lanes. Although sculpture was included in many local malls it was largely absent from the open State Street Mall.

The State Street Mall was the first street improvement project in Chicago to be funded through an assessment-based Business Improvement District (BID), which is referred to in Chicago as a Special Service Area (SSA). The State Street Mall was ultimately unsuccessful and returned to traffic following a streetscaping project in 1995. During the 1980s, the City established nearly a dozen SSAs to help communities and business associations fund everything from local street

In the post-WWII era urban planners and architects gradually began to prioritize the pedestrian over the automobile. In Chicago, several Urban Renewal projects were completed that converted streets into landscaped pedestrian malls.

Right: During the 1960s, several malls and parks like this one south of Armitage Avenue replaced Ogden Avenue in the Lincoln Park neighborhood.

*Urban Renewal Journal, June 1968: 3.*



Left: Mayor Michael Bilandic dedicates the Willow Street Mall at Halsted Street on June 17, 1977. The Drum and Bugle Corps of the Jesse White sponsored boy scout troop are in the background.

*Author's collection*

Right: Chicago's largest pedestrian mall was the conversion of State Street into a mall with a central bus corridor in 1978. This project was also the first in the city to fund a project through special local assessments. State Street was converted back into a street in 1996.

*Brubaker Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago*



In the early 1990s, a series of new street beautification projects were completed across Chicago as part of the *Neighborhoods Alive!* Program. Most projects involved placemaking street markers and/or general improvements, including sidewalk widening, new lighting, and landscaping.



Above: Howard Street was improved in 2002 and was decorated with special metal banners that identify the street.



Above: In 1999, a section of Wells Street south of North Avenue was improved. These large metal gateways that identify the neighborhood were at the northern and southern ends of the district.



57th Street in the Hyde Park community is an example of typical streetscape projects completed between 1990 and 2002. It featured new landscaping, lighting, and crosswalks.

improvement projects to festivals and community events. Many SSAs, such as the Lake View East SSA, which was established in 1988, modernized streetscapes with general design elements such as new lighting and wider sidewalks featuring specially designed paving with matching planters, trash cans, and benches.<sup>5</sup> These types of street improvements – like the pedestrian mall – were simply designed to attract people into the retail street. Streetscaping projects were completed throughout Chicago during the 1980s; however, some observers complained that municipal improvements were not addressed equally in all neighborhoods.

### **Streetscape Design in Chicago During the 1990s**

Following the election of Richard M. Daley as mayor in 1989, the City government reorganized its management of streetscape improvement in Chicago. In 1991, the City budget called for the establishment of a new Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) to replace the long-established Department of Public Works, which previously had been responsible for all major infrastructure improvement projects. Several street and infrastructure improvements were completed using a variety of funding sources, including Tax-Increment Financing districts and bonds.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of these street beautification projects featured standard improvements, including wider sidewalks, street resurfacing with some special crosswalk treatments, newly planted trees, benches, planters, and early twentieth century style ornamental light poles with banner supports. In the mid-1990s, projects were pursued not only by the City but also by community organizations that felt a need to present their best face for the Democratic Party Convention held in Chicago in August 1996. By the end of 1996, the newly beautified streets included sections of Madison Street, Halsted Street, Chicago Avenue, Washington Avenue, La Salle Street, Balbo Drive, and also the reopened State Street in 1995.<sup>7</sup> These improvements were isolated treatments but were part of a wider range of planning goals set during the new administration to improve infrastructure and beautify a city whose official motto is *urbs in horto*, or “city in a garden.”

In addition to general street beautification, during the 1990s the City embarked on a series of themed placemaking projects in community retail districts as part of the City-initiated *Neighborhoods Alive!* program. These districts commonly featured geography-based community markers, such as banners or sculptural objects that highlighted the name of a neighborhood or a street; examples include the markers in Old Town along Wells Street between Division Street and North Avenue (1999) and the lamp post banners along Howard Street (2002). Less common were the City’s celebratory streetscapes that prominently featured social or ethno-cultural branding in the form of banners and substantial sculptural objects and monuments. These elements were designed to draw people into Chicago’s unique neighborhoods and instill neighborhood pride, as well as encourage economic development. Artistic representations of social or ethno-cultural groups are not essential to distinguish established communities. Places naturally develop a series of multi-sensory cues, such as sounds of music and language, scents of foods, and most clearly signage, which are imbued with meaning and identify the character of a community. These areas of the city have a uniquely defined sense of place that is most frequently appreciated by those who are part of the community. However, having a presence does not guarantee visibility from a broader perspective. The use of community markers in streetscaping not only served to attract visitors to established communities but in many cases also was intended to provide communities with a sense of pride by making the intangible visible.

One of the first streetscape elements used to identify a community in the city was the Chinatown gateway arch, which was designed by Peter Fung & Associates and completed in 1973.<sup>8</sup> It was designed to represent a town gate, a theme that was also selected for the predominantly Mexican-American Little Village neighborhood in 1990. A gateway arch modeled after the gateways of traditional Mexican villages was built across 26th Street, at the eastern end of the community's retail district.<sup>9</sup>

In 1994, the City planned a new streetscaping project to celebrate the largely Puerto Rican community along Division Street between Western and California Avenues. The design concept, which featured twin gateway arches in the shape of the Puerto Rican flag, was modeled on both Chinatown and Little Village as unique ethnic centers and neighborhoods within the city. In 1997, one of the City's most visible and notable streetscape improvement projects was proposed for the north Halsted Street area. Although the streetscape design and designation were controversial, the official public recognition of Chicago's LGBTQ community served as a significant step in strengthening the community's visibility and acceptance. Twenty pylons symbolizing victory columns, "freedom rings," and beacons of hope lined and illuminated the Halsted streetscape, which was unveiled by Mayor Richard M. Daley in 1998.

Beginning in 2003, the city's Streetscape and Urban Design Program initiated design standards for streetscape improvements. Most projects completed between the 2000s and 2017 have focused on general streetscape improvements. Themed district designs with social or ethno-cultural sculptural forms were the least common type of streetscaping due primarily to the high cost associated with artist-designed objects and monuments, which are funded separately from other streetscape improvements. One example of ethno-culturally themed streetscaping in 2017 including specially designed screens and metal banners with "South Asian motifs" along Devon Avenue.

## **CHAPTER TWO: ASSOCIATED STREETScape PROJECTS**

### **Little Village Arch (26th Street at Albany Avenue)**

*Date: 1990*

*Architect: Adrián Lozano*

Standing proudly above 26th Street is the Little Village Arch, which serves as the eastern gateway to what has been referred to as the "Mexican capital of the Midwest." The two-story tall archway spans 26th Street and features dome-capped and stucco towers at either end, with sidewalk passageways below. The arch is inset with a wrought-iron grille with a metal banner that reads "Bienvenidos a Little Village." Above, the arch is faced on both sides with orange mosaic tile set in a diamond pattern and is capped by a clay tile roof. At the arch's center is a grand mechanical clock.

Little Village, or La Villita as many residents call it, has been an important area for Chicago's Mexican-American and immigrant community since the late 1960s. The neighborhood name was derived in 1964 by its Eastern European residents coined the neighborhood name to distinguish the area that was formerly known as South Lawndale from the adjacent North Lawndale neighborhood. The newly formed Little Village 26th Street Chamber of Commerce proposed a rejuvenation and remodeling of its commercial streets in the "old world" tradition by drawing on the neighborhood's Czech and Polish roots. At the same time, the construction



The Little Village Arch. View looking east along 26th Street. The clock was presented by then president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and installed in 1991.



The arch across 26th Street in the Little Village neighborhood was built in 1990. Traffic was maintained during construction. *Mortenson Roofing Company*

of the University of Illinois at Chicago Campus pushed many established Mexican-American families were being pushed out of part of the West Side; many arrived in Little Village, followed later by larger waves of Mexican-American and immigrant families. By 1980, Latinos represented 47 percent of the community's population.

In 1990, the idea of a celebratory community marker to highlight the growing Latino population of the neighborhood was proposed. The initial idea consisted of twin iron gates at the eastern and western ends of Little Village's vibrant 26th Street retail corridor; however, then-alderman Jesus "Chuy" Garcia proposed a design that represented traditional Mexican architecture and themes. The idea of a community gateway resembling the arched town entrances found in many Mexican villages and towns was selected. It was intended by the City to build community pride and recognize the significance of the Mexican-American community to Chicago.

The City chose architect Adrián Lozano (1921-2014) to design the arch. Lozano was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico and came to Chicago at age four with his parents. Early in his career he learned various trades at Hull House and became a Works Progress Administration architect during the 1930s. In 1941, he painted the non-extant Progress of Mexico mural inside the Benito Juarez Club room at Hull House (the room was demolished). He later formed the firm Adrián Lozano and Associates Architects, which specialized in designing newspaper plants. He served as the architect for the remodeling of a former Chicago Park District natatorium into the Mexican Fine Arts Center in 1978, and designed its addition in 2001.

Construction of the arch was begun in late 1990 and was built over a period of six months by Balti Contracting Company, which used scaffolding to prevent interruption to traffic. In 1991, then President of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, visited Chicago to promote a free-trade agreement and stopped to speak to a rally of around two thousand Little Village residents near the newly completed arch. Salinas reassured the crowd that the Mexican government had not forgotten them and they were not alone. "As president of Mexico, it's very emotional for me to be here with you in Little Village, in the barrio with the Mexican people surrounded by Mexican flags and proud, honest hard-working people," he said. As a gift to the community and the City, Salinas presented a bronze clock manufactured by Relojes Centenario, the oldest clockmaker in Mexico. It was installed in the crown of the arch, with faces on both the east and west sides. Today the arch and clock stand as proud symbols of the community.

Over time, the Little Village Arch has weathered well. In 2012, the arch was repaired and painted. Missing roof tiles were replaced, and the reddish granite base was replaced with limestone. In addition, the curbs were extended into the street to form garden areas and to help protect the arch's base from traffic. The clock was repaired by a technician from the Relojes Centenario factory in 2013.<sup>25</sup>

### **Puerto Rican Flags (Division Street at Artesian Avenue and Mozart Street)**

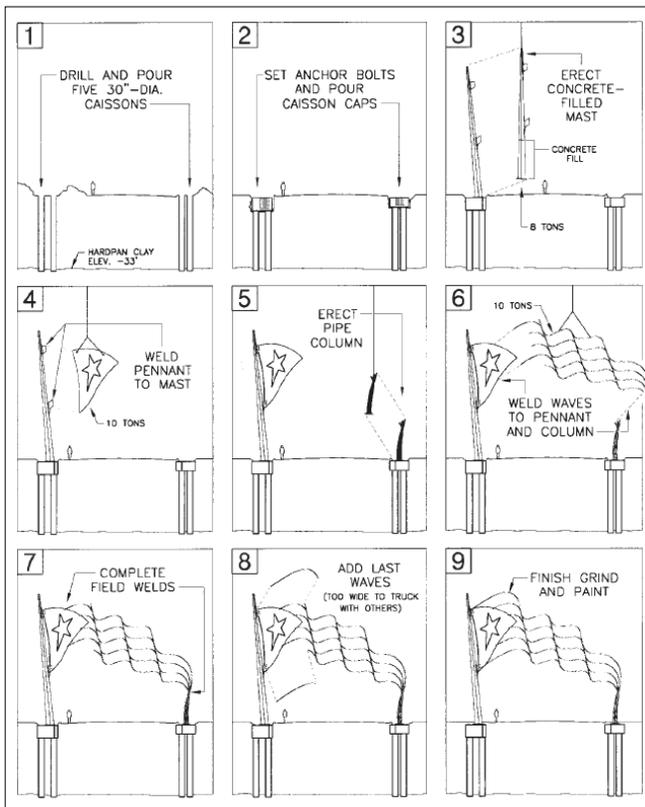
*Date: 1995*

*Architect: DeStefano+Partners*

The *Paseo Boricua* is a section of Division Street that was formally recognized in 1995 as the economic, political, and cultural center of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. At either end of the section stand twin steel gateways designed in the shape of fluttering Puerto Rican flags. Architect John Edward Windhorst of DeStefano+Partners as well as architects McClier



**Division Street features twin gateways modelled after the Puerto Rican flag at Artesian and Mozart Streets. These were installed in 1995.**



The flag gateways were designed by DeStefano+Partners and earned several awards for their design and construction.

Left: This diagram shows the process for installing each of the flags. Each flag was designed to withstand substantial wind strain while also having a light and airy appearance.

*Welding Innovation, 1998: 24.*

Company and Ozzie Rodriguez of Rodriguez Associates designed the gateways, which were installed in 1996 under the supervision of the Department of Transportation. Each gateway is a sinuous network of red steel tubes that stand 55 feet tall and 56 feet wide. Although they weigh 50 tons each, the intricately welded tubes form flags that appear to billow and ripple in the wind. In the community they are monuments of civic and cultural pride.

The Puerto Rican community began arriving in Chicago in significant numbers during the early 1950s when Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States. Many found employment in the area's steel industry. Initially, Puerto Ricans settled throughout the city, but especially on the Near West Side along Harrison Street and in the Lincoln Park area. However, many gradually left these areas during the 1960s in the face of the construction of the University of Illinois at Chicago campus and gentrification in both Lincoln Park and Lake View. Puerto Ricans were drawn to Division Street in the West Town and Humboldt Park areas for employment opportunities and quickly developed a strong community. The first Puerto Rican parade was held in 1966.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Division Street suffered from high retail vacancies, crime, and deteriorated infrastructure. In the 1990s, continued gentrification at the community's eastern edges pushed the Puerto Rican population west past Western Avenue. Community leaders concerned by both the high levels of vacancy and perceived threat posed by gentrification began plans in the early 1990s for the revitalization of Division Street, or *La Division* as it was known by many residents. Devised by community members as well as then-alderman Billy Ocasio, the idea for Paseo Boricua – the Puerto Rican community's street – was inspired by other ethno-cultural districts in the city. Alderman Ocasio presented the district concept to mayor Richard M. Daley, who supported the project and approved its funding. The City hired the firm of DeStefano+Partners to design gateways that delineate the district and serve as entrances to the community. The firm's 1994 proposal featured the twin flag gateways in addition to a comprehensive streetscaping plan that included 16 small plazas bordered in Spanish tiles with central shade trees. The plazas were designed to create inviting outdoor spaces for local interaction that had the atmosphere of an avenue in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In addition, a series of laser-cut metal lamp post banners featuring traditional Taino Indian symbols and 78 painted planters representing towns of Puerto Rico were installed.

The flag gateways were fabricated by one of Chicago's oldest ironworks, the Chicago Ornamental Iron Company. Installation began in December 1994 and lasted six weeks. The fabrication and installation of the flags were an engineering challenge. Each had more than 200 individual welds, several of which had to be completed on site. Steel was used not only because it could render a visually weightless design, but also because the material is significant as it recognizes the hard work of generations of Puerto Ricans in the steel industry. The City dedicated the flags as a gift to the Puerto Rican community on January 6, 1995, or Día de Los Reyes Magos (Three Kings' Day).

Within a year of the completion of the streetscaping project and installation of the flag gateways, the stretch of Division Street locally known as *Paseo Boricua* had quickly transformed. Sixteen new businesses opened in the first year, with a total of more than 90 businesses and organizations by the year 2000. The long history of Puerto Ricans in the Humboldt Park area was solidified and stabilized through several efforts, but benefited especially from the streetscape initiative and community flag gateways, which have won seven awards, including one from the American Institute of Architects. The gateways were restored and rededicated in 2013.

## **Rainbow Pylons and the Legacy Walk (Halsted Street from Melrose Street to Bradley Place)**

*Date: 1997 (Rainbow Pylons), 2012 (The Legacy Walk)*

*Architect: DeStefano+Partners (1997)*

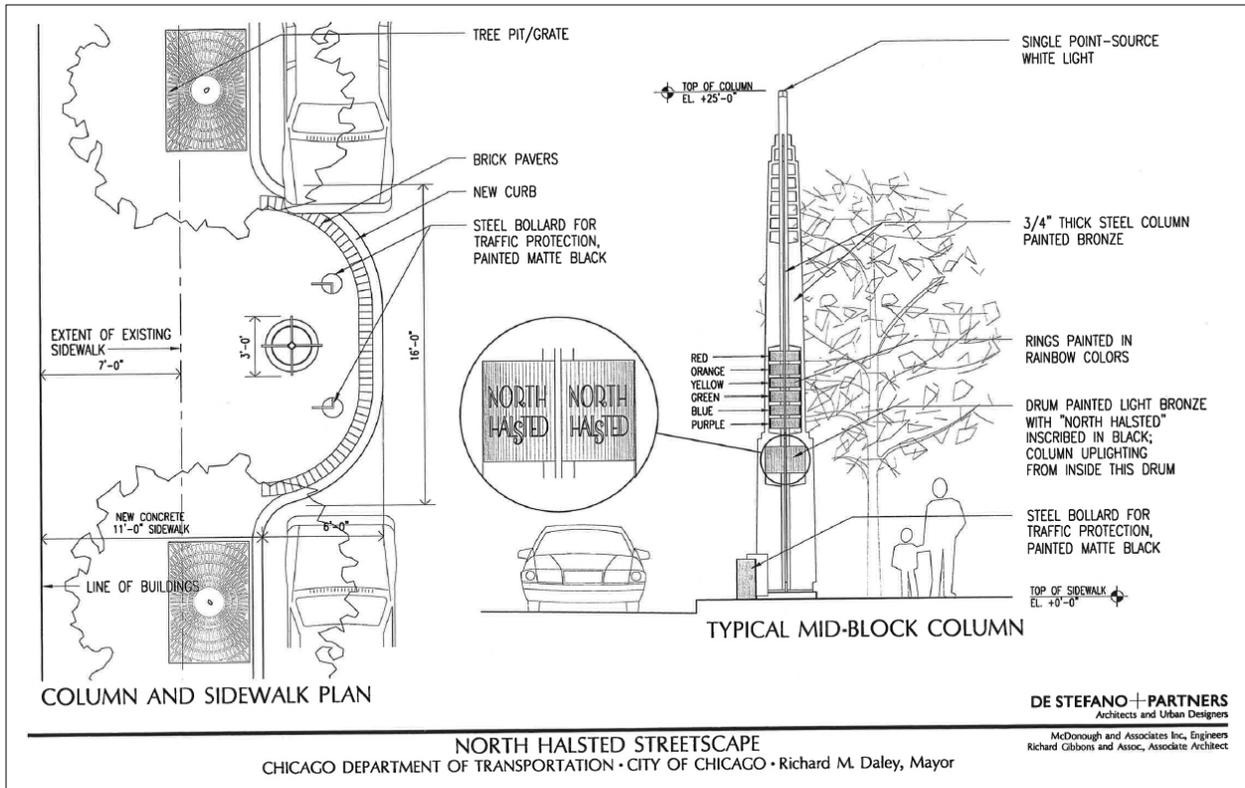
Since 1997, a series of 20 pylons along Halsted Street between Melrose Street and Bradley Place have officially delineated Chicago's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. This area is unique in its development as the perceived or visual cultural, economic, entainment, and political center of the LGBTQ community. Although Chicago's LGBTQ community was historically dispersed throughout the city, the Halsted Street area became the country's first LGBTQ commercial, entertainment, and cultural center officially recognized by a city government. The design of the markers and the designation of Halsted Street as a unique community district at first received criticism. However, over time the streetscape and its lines of markers have become a significant cultural monument that represent a major shift in the perception of Chicago's LGBTQ community.

In 2012, the nonprofit organization the Legacy Project selected the pylons as the location for the first outdoor museum recognizing the significant world achievements and contributions of LGBTQ people. As of 2018, the 20 pylons feature 40 illuminated bronze plaques dedicated to LGBTQ figures.

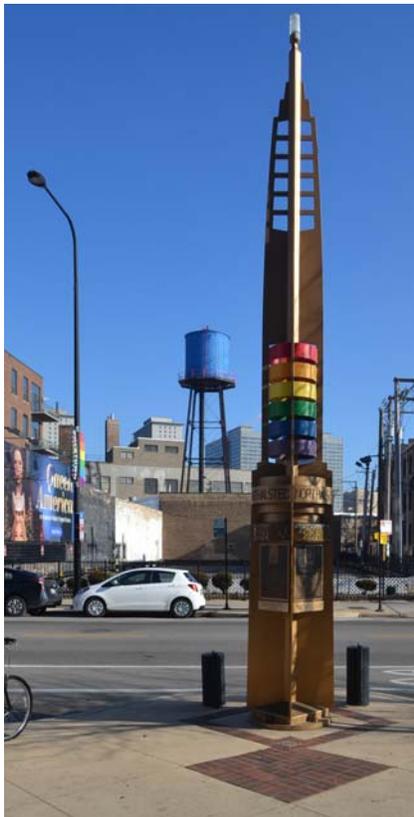
Chicago's LGBTQ community has long been a part of the city yet until recently it remained largely invisible. Early entertainment locations that were popular with gay and lesbian patrons existed in various areas during the nineteenth century, with rich entertainment and social districts emerging in Bronzeville and the Near North Side by the 1920s and 1930s. In the post-World War II era, Chicago's gay and lesbian population grew as increasing numbers of people who had been living lives of anonymity in small towns, rural areas, and suburbs left to find inclusion and strength in Chicago's urban gay and lesbian society. As more people became part of the community during the 1960 and 1970s, a significant LGBTQ rights movement developed that demanded fair treatment of gays and lesbians by the government and police. The rising LGBTQ rights movement began to model itself on the African-American civil rights movement and demanded equality and a stop to harassment and persecution.

Lesbian and gay organizations and establishments moved northward to an area around Dearborn and Division streets in the 1950s, remaining the dominant center of gay nightlife through the 1960s. However, frequent and organized police raids significantly impacted the community even after Illinois became the first state to repeal its anti-sodomy laws on July 28, 1961. During the 1970s, gay and lesbian bars and clubs grew in number following the infamous police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village in 1969. The ensuing support for LGBTQ people and condemnation of police oppression is widely recognized as a pivotal moment in the modern LGBTQ rights movement. However, police surveillance and raids of known clubs continued in Chicago through the 1970s and 1980s.

Chicago, like many other cities, held its first lesbian and gay pride parade downtown in 1970 on the anniversary of the Stonewall raid. The following year, the parade was held on the city's North Side in the neighborhoods of Lincoln Park and Lake View where many lesbian and gay clubs and bars had started to migrate. Despite continued police raids, prejudice, harassment, and persecution, the annual pride parade helped build the community by encouraging others to come out and celebrate their identity. The widening visibility of the community aided in the



**In 1997, the streetscape improvements along Halsted Street were completed. These included community markers in the form of illuminated pylons that celebrate the area's LGBTQ community. *North Halsted Streetscape: Project Description and Concept Design, 1997.***



**The Rainbow Pylons are set in ten pairs along Halsted Street. At right is an example of The Legacy Walk, which was added to the pylons between 2012 and 2018. Each pylon features two plaques dedicated to significant LGBTQ people of world history.**



development of what would become the identity-based Halsted Street and Lakeview LGBTQ community. Establishments opened along Broadway, Clark, and Halsted Streets, but they continued to maintain a low profile as they had elsewhere in the city; they mostly remained anonymous places without street-facing windows or prominent signage.

One important aspect of the Halsted Street community was that new residents and business owners bought property and permanently settled in the surrounding residential area. By the 1980s, several business owners organized the Northalsted Merchants Association (now known as the Northalsted Business Alliance). The organization grew from several shops and establishments to over 100 businesses. In addition, new gay and lesbian cultural organizations opened in the community, including musical groups, choral groups, theaters, festivals, and writers' groups. Although the AIDS epidemic of the mid-1980s had cost the community the lives of members and leaders, by the 1990s, the community emerged from the wake of the epidemic as a significant political power.

The Halsted Street beautification project was proposed by then-mayor Richard M. Daley as a gesture of recognition of Chicago's North Side LGBTQ community. The City of Chicago hired the architectural firm of DeStefano+Partners, which worked with the Northalsted Merchants Association to create a design; the design was unveiled in August 1997 at the annual Northalsted Market Days street festival. The \$3.2 million project was the first streetscape in the United States to represent the LGBTQ community, and it marked the first time that a city government had officially recognized and thereby legitimized a LGBTQ community. The proposal made international news, with coverage in the *Economist* and other publications.

The initial bold design called for twin 25-foot gateway structures in the middle of the street at the northern and southern ends of the district. Each would have featured neon-lit colored bands representing the gay pride rainbow flag. In addition, the plan called for nearly 200 steel pylons topped with neon-lit rainbow rings. However, both the design and the LGBTQ theme of the proposed streetscape were met with some opposition, which in retrospect reveal the great progress the LGBTQ rights movement has made since that time. People outside the LGBTQ community raised concerns about property values and inclusivity, while those in the LGBTQ community expressed discomfort with the attention the streetscape symbolism would bring and feared violence. Others simply objected to the generally bold design of the pylons. By November 1997, a new plan was announced that replaced the gateways with smaller "community identifiers" and reduced the number of pylons to 20. In addition, the pylons were redesigned with painted rainbow rings with internal lighting in place of neon. Each pylon was designed to recall a stepped Art Deco style skyscraper with a beacon at the pinnacle. The rainbow rings reference pride "freedom rings" introduced in San Francisco in 1991, and the lighted pinnacle symbolizes a beacon of hope. Other street improvements included extended curbs at the connecting side streets, where wishing-well shaped planters were located. Overall, the pylons stand to illuminate Halsted Street and shine a literal light into the darkness of ignorance and hate.

The Halsted Street renovation was officially dedicated in November 1998, when more than 300 people attended a ceremony in which Mayor Richard M. Daley thanked the community for its efforts to renovate the area. Within a few years, the Halsted streetscape had become as familiar and accepted as any part of the city.

The pylons represent a major shift in politics and the treatment of LGBTQ people in Chicago. Beginning in 2012, the pylons adopted additional significance as the home of the Legacy Walk,

the country's first outdoor museum honoring the significant contributions of LGBTQ people around the world and throughout history. Victor Salvo, community activist and founder of the nonprofit Legacy Walk Organization conceived the idea for the walk following his experience of several historic events that took place at the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which he co-chaired, on October 11, 1987. Salvo was energized by the incredible sense of community that he witnessed at the march and inspired by the advocacy group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), which was organized at the march to advocate for legislation and medical research in response to the AIDS epidemic. A central piece of the march was the first showing of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, which draped the National Mall with thousands of quilt panels in memory of the great diversity of people who had died of AIDS-related complications. For Salvo, witnessing living history as well as the extent of the destruction caused by the AIDS epidemic made him realize that an entire world-wide community of people was at risk of being lost.

The desire to celebrate the legacy and heritage of LGBTQ people drove Salvo to create an accessible outdoor memorial that would serve to teach future generations about the historical and cultural contributions of LGBTQ people.

The installation of the pylons in 1998 provided a location for the memorial plaques. Following the completion of the LGBTQ Center on Halsted in 2007, Salvo garnered support to establish the Legacy Walk. The walk was inaugurated by mayor Rahm Emanuel with the first set of plaques on October 11, 2012, the 25th anniversary of the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The date was also chosen by the Legacy Walk organization for its significance as national Coming Out Day.

Every year between 2012 and 2018, several new plaques were privately funded by individuals and/or institutions and installed on the Halsted Street pylons; all 40 spaces were occupied by 2017. The plaques are cast in bronze and feature the image and detailed biography of a significant nominated historical figure. Lights on the pylons illuminate each plaque, which are topped by backlit panels that read "Legacy Walk."

The Legacy Walk builds on the significance of the Halsted streetscaping and presents a monumental memorial space dedicated to teaching the history of LGBTQ people in the world. It recognizes the wealth of diversity within the LGBTQ community and offers the public accessible history to better know and fully appreciate the degree to which LGBTQ people have shaped the world.



**View looking north along the 3800-block of North Halsted Street. This pair of Rainbow Pylons is the northernmost set.**

## **CHAPTER THREE: DESIGNATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community streetscape markers are elements designed to recognize and make visible the social, ethnic and/or cultural identities of a community. They are artistic expressions that employ symbols associated with a specific social, ethnic, or cultural identity. Community markers are not characterized by any single object, but take the form of many common design elements used in streetscape improvements. The community markers installed on public rights-of-way throughout the city may be considered for landmark designation if they meet two or more of the following criteria as well as the separate integrity criterion in the Landmarks Ordinance.

### **CRITERIA 1**

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

### **CRITERIA 4**

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

### **CRITERIA 6**

Its representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other theme expressed through distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, or other objects that may or may not be contiguous.

In addition, the following requirements must be met:

- The design of the marker(s) must employ the use of symbolism or imagery that is significant and/or reflects a certain social, ethnic, or cultural group. The work does not only recognize a geographic place within the city (street, neighborhood, or community area).
- The community marker(s) must be visible from the public-right-of-way.
- The marker(s) is a work of original art and/or architectural designed by an artist or architect. It is not a stock piece, or an element comprised of prefabricated components.

## ENDNOTES

1. The site of the 1st self-sustained continuous nuclear chain reaction was memorialized with landscaping and the Henry Moore sculpture “Nuclear Energy” in 1942 (designated 1971). The site of the origin of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was memorialized with the “Pillar of Fire” sculpture, designed by Egon Weiner in 1961 (designated 1971). The most recent landmark designation of an object was in 2004 for sculptor Richard Henry Park’s Drake Fountain (1892).
2. Jon A. Peterson, “The Impact of Sanitary Reform upon American Urban Planning, 1840-1890,” *Journal of Social History* 13(1) Autumn, 1979: 90-91. *See also:* Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, “To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 65(2) September 1978.
3. One notable researcher and developer of traffic-related policies was Miller McClintock, who wrote several reports and books on the subject of the street and the place of the pedestrian. *See:* Miller McClintock, *Street Traffic Control* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1925) 159-166.
4. Hadley Mears, “Looking Back at Christine Sterling, the Maternalistic, Problematic ‘Mother of Olvera Street,’” *LA Weekly*, July 11, 2017; William M. Pizor, “Street of Memory,” [film] Los Angeles, CA, 1937, Prelinger Archives, <https://archive.org/details/Streetof1937>. In addition to Olvera Street, Sterling also guided the development of the Chinese-themed “China City,” which was created as a type of entertainment district in contrast to actual Chinese-American enclaves; it ultimately burned down.
5. Betty Lonngren, “Paying More Isn’t Taxing to These Businesses,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1992. Illinois passed enabling legislation for Special Service Areas (SSAs) in 1970. The legislation allows cities to tax or assess local retail property owners for street improvements and programming that are beneficial for local businesses. The first BID district was created in downtown New Orleans in 1974.
6. Between 1993 and 1996 over \$1.7 billion was spent on a range of neighborhood improvement projects, which were financed through the sale of general obligation bonds. Scott Spielman, “Un-Conventional Face-lift – City Says Spruce-up Not Just for Dems,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 27, 1996: 6.
7. Following the closure of five department stores on the great shopping street, the firm of Coffey & Associates was hired by the City to renovate the street, which was reopened to traffic in 1995.
8. The Chinatown gate was substantially revised from its original plan, which called for the use of granite and wood in its construction. The materials were to be donated by the Government of Taiwan. *See:* Chicago Department of Public Works, *Chinatown Gateway Project*, 1973, Chicago Public Library Harold Washington Library.
9. Jacqueline Serrato, “The Landmark That Welcomes Mexicans in the Midwest,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 2018. In 1998, streetscaping was installed on 18th Street between Racine and Wood streets, with a plaza park and sculpture at Blue Island Avenue. Although a sculpture of the Mexican coat of arms was installed in the plaza, streetscaping was limited to matching cut-metal banners. Earnest Tucker, “Groups Seek to Give 18th Street a Face-lift – Beautification Plan,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 2, 1997: 28.

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