January 10, 2019

Report to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks
On the
Pilsen Historic District

The boundaries of the Pilsen Historic District are: 18th Street between Leavitt and Sangamon Streets, and 13 blocks bounded by 18th Street to the north, Ashland Avenue to the west, 21st Street to the south, and Racine Avenue to the east.

The Department of Planning and Development finds that the proposed designation of the Pilsen Historic District supports the City’s overall planning goals for the surrounding Lower West Side Community Area (which includes Pilsen) and is consistent with the City’s governing policies and plans.

The Department supports the Commission’s preliminary landmark recommendation for the Pilsen Historic District. The district is part of a comprehensive, community-based strategy to preserve the culture, character and affordability of the Midwest’s largest Mexican community. While the landmark district is limited to a portion of the Pilsen neighborhood, the Department’s larger planning and housing strategy includes the entire Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods.

Pilsen received its first official historical recognition in 2006 when a large portion of the neighborhood was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service. This designation is primarily honorary, however, and does not protect buildings from demolition or alteration. The district’s historic architecture was built between 1872 and World War II. The historic buildings are characterized by a vibrant mix of Baroque and Italianate architectural styles that reflect the area’s settlement by Czech and Bohemian immigrants that built and largely occupied the neighborhood between the 1870s and the mid-20th century. The community’s diverse array of mixed-use buildings, meeting halls, cottages, two-flats, schools, churches and banks subsequently evolved as the center for Mexican life in Chicago, with more than three-quarters of local residents today identifying themselves as Latino, according to the U.S. Census. The Mexican community has preserved the historic architecture of Pilsen and has enhanced the neighborhood’s buildings with murals reflecting the community’s history and culture. This landmark designation would be one of the first designations to recognize the multi-cultural importance of a Chicago neighborhood, with the intent to preserve not a single point in time but the cultural heritage of both the early Bohemian and later Mexican residents.

In addition to the landmark district designation, the Department’s planning strategy includes enhanced affordability requirements for market-rate housing developments; new housing resources
to help existing residents avoid displacement caused by gentrification; an industrial modernization strategy to increase sustainable, head-of-household jobs; and open-space improvements that enhance neighborhood character and livability. Several of the strategies, including the landmark district in Pilsen, are identified in the *Pilsen and Little Village Action Plan*, completed last year by DPD through extensive community participation. These strategies are now underway in coordination with the City’s Department of Housing. In summary, the Department’s other strategies underway in the Pilsen neighborhood include the following:

**Affordable Requirement Ordinance (ARO) Pilot:** The ARO pilot will increase the City of Chicago’s required affordability component for any large residential projects located within a 7.2-square mile area in Pilsen and Little Village. The affordability requirement will increase from 10 to 20 percent of total units, with new provisions to increase the number of family-sized units in each project. Developer in-lieu fees will increase by $50,000 per unit. At least half of the required affordable units, or 10 percent of the total unit count, would have to be built on site.

**Affordable Housing Resources on Behalf of Existing Residents:** In conjunction with the ARO pilot, the City is investing resources from the Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund, which receives the fees paid by developers under the ARO, in Pilsen and Little Village to preserve affordable housing for existing residents. The City will make financial assistance available for developers that purchase or refinance multi-family residential buildings in the ARO pilot area in exchange for long-term affordable rental covenants. Additional resources will be made available in the ARO pilot area as forgivable loans to help income-qualified owner-occupants of one- to four-unit properties upgrade their properties and remain in their homes. The strategy will also prioritize outreach to area homeowners by the Chicago Community Land Trust, which provides reduced property taxes in exchange for long-term affordability, and to low-income tenants by the Chicago Low-Income Housing Trust Fund, which provides rental subsidies on their behalf.

**Industrial Corridor Modernization:** The Industrial Corridor Modernization effort will create strategies to enhance employment, transportation and other amenities within the neighborhoods’ two industrial corridors to foster job-intensive uses that support families and the regional economy. The process was initiated in the Little Village Industrial Corridor in April 2018, with a framework plan for regulatory land use improvements anticipated in early 2019. The planning process for the Pilsen Industrial Corridor is expected to start in 2019.

**Open Space Enhancements:** Area open space enhancements include the completion of the Paseo’s planned route along an underutilized rail line from 16th Street in Pilsen to 31st Street in Little Village while connecting new and existing parks through community-based designs that embrace local culture through art and programming. A recently introduced ordinance will authorize the City to acquire four-miles of the route from the BNSF Railway.

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Department of Planning and Development