

ORDINANCE

Shop Building at Altgeld Gardens

13100 S. Ellis Ave.

WHEREAS, pursuant to the procedures set forth in the Municipal Code of Chicago (the “Municipal Code”), Sections 2-120-620 through -690, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the “Commission”) has determined that the Shop Building at Altgeld Gardens (the “Building”), located at 13100 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, Illinois, as more fully described in **Exhibit A**, attached hereto and incorporated herein, satisfies five criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4), (5) and (7) of the Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, the Building served as the commercial center and community hub for Altgeld Gardens, one of the largest and most self-contained public housing developments built in Chicago during the first half of the twentieth century. Constructed in a largely industrial area with few commercial businesses to serve Altgeld residents, the Shop Building provided easy access to critical community assets, including a grocery store, drug store, tailor shop, doctor’s office, and beauty parlor; and

WHEREAS, between 1945 and 1951, the Building was home to the Altgeld Gardens Consumer Co-operative, a non-profit co-operative grocery store jointly owned and operated by Altgeld residents. Black-owned co-operatives, part of the larger co-operative movement that surged in Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s, were an important means of economic independence for African American communities. As a self-contained community of approximately 7,000 people, Altgeld Gardens was an ideal setting for a co-operative, and by 1947 the Altgeld Gardens Consumer Co-operative was the largest store of its kind in the country; and

WHEREAS, later known as the “Up Top” by Altgeld residents, the Building has also served since the late 1960s as a place of commemoration for community members who lived and died at Altgeld Gardens. After 17-year-old Sterling “Pinky” Jones—an active member of the Black Panther Party—was shot and killed at Altgeld in December 1969, his name was painted on the north wall of the Shop Building’s breezeway along with a mural of Malcolm X. In subsequent decades, residents have added hundreds of names and messages to lost loved ones to the wall, making it an important memorial connecting the thousands of people that have called Altgeld Gardens home; and

WHEREAS, during the last decades of the twentieth century, the Building housed the offices of the People for Community Recovery (PCR), a grassroots environmental justice organization founded in 1979 by Altgeld resident and community activist Hazel Johnson (1935-2011). Under Johnson’s tireless and determined leadership, PCR worked with residents and numerous stakeholders to document and address serious environmental issues at Altgeld Gardens, fight against the expansion of landfills and hazardous waste facilities on Chicago’s Southeast Side, and bring training and workforce opportunities for the Altgeld community; and

WHEREAS, Hazel Johnson emerged as a nationally recognized leader in the environmental justice movement in the 1990s. Her activism helped lead to important federal changes in environmental policy, including the formation of the EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice and the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council; and

WHEREAS, Johnson was awarded the President's Environmental and Conservation Challenge Award in 1992 by President George H.W. Bush. In 1994, she was one of a small number of stakeholders invited to witness President William J. Clinton sign Executive Order 12898, the first major federal action on environmental justice. Two years later, President Clinton honored 100 environmental groups, including PCR, at a White House ceremony. Johnson also served as an advisor for Vice President Al Gore's climate and environmental platform during his 2000 presidential campaign, and was one of eleven women of color honored at the 2002 People of Color Summit for her contributions to the environmental justice movement; and

WHEREAS, the Building is an early and unique example of modernist commercial architecture in Chicago, exemplifying Keck and Keck's affinity for contemporary, functional, and site-specific designs; and

WHEREAS, the Building, with its low-slung, curved form, its flat, unadorned wall surfaces, large expanses of glass, and swooping concrete canopy, reflects the influence of European modernism, which did not fully take hold in Chicago until after World War II; and

WHEREAS, the Building is important as an early example of a commercial building designed around the principles of passive solar heating. The Building's south-facing orientation, window placement, and canopies are all elements of solar design that Keck and Keck first developed for single family homes; and

WHEREAS, the Building is significant as one of the few commercial buildings designed by the architecture firm commonly known as Keck and Keck. The 50-year partnership of brothers George Fred Keck and William Keck produced many of best examples of early modernist residential design in Midwest and influenced a generation of Chicago architects; and

WHEREAS, George Fred Keck's avant-garde designs for the House of Tomorrow and the Crystal House at the 1933 A Century of Progress Exposition were a radical departure from any architecture built in Chicago at that time and helped open the public's eyes to modernism. Keck and Keck's subsequent commissions reflected the firm's commitment to creating functional, contemporary, and technologically advanced designs that met the specific needs of each client; and

WHEREAS, Keck and Keck were considered the foremost architects of high-quality solar homes, leading many advances in solar design and construction. The firm was among the first architects in the country to consistently incorporate energy efficient technologies in their designs; and

WHEREAS, the modern design of the Building stands in sharp contrast to the more traditional residential and community buildings at Altgeld Gardens. The Building, located in a prominent location within the commercial and administrative core of the project, is an established visual feature in Altgeld Gardens; and

WHEREAS, the memorial wall at the Building, created by residents to commemorate lost loved ones and former residents, is also a unique and important visual feature within Altgeld Gardens; and

WHEREAS, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has a significant historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value; and

WHEREAS, on July 9, 2026, the Commission adopted a resolution recommending to the City Council of the City of Chicago (the "City Council") that the Building be designated a Chicago Landmark; now, therefore,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO:

SECTION 1. The above recitals are hereby adopted as the findings of the City Council.

SECTION 2. The Building is hereby designated a Chicago Landmark in accordance with Section 2-120-700 of the Municipal Code.

SECTION 3. For purposes of Sections 2-120-740 and 2-120-770 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the Building.
- The memorial wall on the north wall of the covered breezeway.

Additional Guidelines—General

Pursuant to Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code, on April 2, 2026, the Permit Review Committee (P.R.C.) of the Commission approved, with conditions, a pre-permit submission, including drawings, renderings and photographs, for the exterior and interior rehabilitation of an existing one-story masonry building and construction of a new visible side addition (the "P.R.C. Project"). Notwithstanding the foregoing significant historical and architectural features listed above, the proposed scope of work contained in the P.R.C. Project shall be permitted.

SECTION 4. The Commission is hereby directed to create a suitable plaque appropriately identifying the Building as a Chicago Landmark.

SECTION 5. If any provision of this ordinance shall be held to be invalid or unenforceable for any reason, the invalidity or unenforceability of such provision shall not affect any of the other provisions of this ordinance.

SECTION 6. All ordinances, resolutions, motions or orders in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such conflict.

SECTION 7. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and approval.