

**CITY OF CHICAGO
COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

June 9, 2025

**RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF CHICAGO THAT
CHICAGO LANDMARK DESIGNATION BE ADOPTED FOR THE**

**ERIE STREET ROW
161 E. Erie St.**

Docket No. 2025-05

To the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago:

Pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code of the City of Chicago (the “Municipal Code”), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the “Commission”) has determined that Erie Street Row (the “Building”) is worthy of Chicago Landmark designation. On the basis of careful consideration of the history and architecture of the Building, the Commission has found that it satisfies the following three criteria set forth in Section 2-120-620 of the Municipal Code:

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.*
3. *Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*
4. *Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

I. BACKGROUND

On July 30, 2024, the Bureau of Citywide Systems and Historic Preservation received an application to demolish the Building. The Building was ranked “orange” in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey* and was therefore subject to the 90-day Demolition Delay Ordinance. As is standard practice, staff evaluated the Building for possible designation and determined that it met criteria for landmark designation. Subsequent to the evaluation, on September 27, 2024, the

owner requested that the demolition application be voided, and the Department of Buildings voided the application on the same day.

The formal landmark designation process for the Building began on October 3, 2024, when the Commission approved a preliminary landmark recommendation (the "Preliminary Recommendation") for the Building as a Chicago Landmark. The Commission found that the Building meets three of the seven criteria for designation, as well as the integrity criterion, identified in the *Chicago Landmarks Ordinance* (Municipal Code, Section 2-120-580 *et seq.*). As part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission preliminarily identified the "significant historical and architectural features" of the Building as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the Building.

The three-story common brick boiler house addition and one-story common brick garage at the rear (south) elevation of the Building are devoid of architectural treatment. The Commission may approve demolition of these additions to support new uses of the Building. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

For the purposes of Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the following additional guidelines shall also apply:

In recognition of the Building's location in the urban core with some of the city's highest building density including high-rises adjacent and within close proximity of the Building, the Commission may approve visible additions to the Building. The Commission's review of proposed work should ensure that the historic features of the Building are preserved long-term while allowing reasonable change and flexibility to meet continuing and new needs, whether related to the continued current uses of the Building or in accommodating future uses.

Visible additions may be approved that are set back from the front property line to a depth of approximately one half of the Building lot, so that the historic Building continues to read as an independent structure. Any visible addition should read as a separate volume rather than an extension of the historic structure and the overall height and mass of the addition shall be evaluated based on the specific circumstances of the subject property and its immediate context.

Also, as part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission adopted a Designation Report, dated October 3, 2024, the most current iteration of which is dated June 5, 2025, incorporated herein and attached hereto as **Exhibit A** (the “Designation Report”).

At its regular meeting of November 7, 2024, the Commission received a statement from Ciere Boatright, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development recommending approval of the designation of the Building as a Landmark.

On November 8, 2024, the Commission officially requested consent to the proposed landmark designation from the owners of the Building. On November 16, 2024, the owner requested a 120-day extension of the request-for-consent period, an extension provided for in the Municipal Code. The extension was granted, and the owner was notified that the expiration of the request-for-consent period was extended until April 22, 2025. As of the end of the request-for-consent period, the property owner has not responded to the Commission’s request-for-consent.

Without consent from the owner of the property, the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance requires the Commission to hold a public hearing on the Preliminary Recommendation with respect to the designation of the Building as a Chicago landmark. In a letter dated April 23, 2025, the Commission notified the owner of the Building of the public hearing on the proposed designation scheduled for May 15, 2025. Notices of the time and date of the hearing were also (a) posted on a sign in the right-of-way in front of the Building, and (b) published as a legal notice in the *Chicago Tribune*, as required by the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance. A notice was also posted on the Department of Planning and Development’s web site.

II. PUBLIC HEARING

The hearing was convened, as scheduled and noticed, on May 15, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. Commission member Jonathan Fair served as Hearing Officer, assisted by Suzanne Hilal, Assistant Corporation Counsel Supervisor of the Real Estate and Land Use Division of the City’s Law Department, as legal counsel to the Commission, and Dijana Cuvalo, Assistant Commissioner, Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Planning and Development. The hearing was conducted in accordance with the Commission’s Rules and Regulations, specifically Article II regarding the conduct of public hearings for landmark designation.

The Commission staff’s presentation recommending the proposed landmark designation was given by Matt Crawford, Coordinating Planner and author of the preliminary summary.

At the conclusion of the staff presentation, the Commission's Rules and Regulations allow property owners to become parties to the hearing and/or question the staff's presentation. The owner of the Building, the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation, was represented at the hearing by their consultant. The owners did not request party status and did not question the staff. In lieu of party status, the owner's consultant made a statement in opposition of the significant historical and architectural features of the Building which the Commission identified in its preliminary recommendation of October 2024.

No other statements in opposition were received.

Six members of the general public made statements in support of the landmark designation.

Seven members of the general public attended the hearing.

The transcript (the "Hearing Transcript") and related exhibits from the public hearing are incorporated herein and attached hereto.

III. FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code, the Commission has reviewed the entire record of proceedings on the proposed Chicago Landmark designation, including the Designation Report, the Hearing Transcript and all of the information on the proposed landmark designation of the Building; and

WHEREAS, the Building was built around 1877 when the Near North Side was being rebuilt as a desirable residential neighborhood after it was devastated by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871; and

WHEREAS, from the 1870s to the 1910s, the families of successful merchants and professionals lived in the Building, reflecting the social fabric of the Near North Side; and

WHEREAS, the development of North Michigan Avenue as a commercial boulevard in the 1920s transformed the Near North Side from a residential to commercial district. During this time the Building was converted to offices for small creative businesses like advertising, publishing, architecture and commercial and fine arts.; and

WHEREAS, the Building is significant for its association with Johnson O'Connor and Eleanor Manning O'Connor, husband and wife, who in 1952 opened the Chicago branch of the

Human Engineering Laboratory of the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation, a nonprofit educational and scientific organization; and

WHEREAS, trained as an engineer, Johnson O'Connor developed a testing program for the General Electric Company in 1922 that proved successful in placing employees in the positions that matched their inherent aptitudes; and

WHEREAS, in 1938, O'Connor expanded his testing program to the general public, opening branches across the country to help young people and adults make informed decisions about their education and career; and

WHEREAS, Eleanor Manning O'Connor was a pioneering woman architect who specialized in historic preservation, public housing and urban planning; and

WHEREAS, beginning in the 1930s, Eleanor Manning O'Connor influenced Johnson O'Connor to publish his research on women's aptitude that encouraged women to pursue careers in architecture, engineering and the sciences; and

WHEREAS, the Building is a visually distinctive group of row houses, a building type of importance to Chicago architectural history. Built around 1877, this set of row houses is a particularly early, surviving group; and

WHEREAS, the Building is a fine example of the Italianate architectural style, a style of importance to Chicago architecture in the 1850s through early 1880s; and

WHEREAS, the Building exhibits fine detailing and craftsmanship in Joliet limestone, a historically significant building material in the context of Chicago architecture and the most popular building stone used for Chicago buildings from the 1830s until the 1880s; and

WHEREAS, alterations to the Building, including added bay windows and the consolidated entrance at grade reflect its transition from residential to commercial use in 1920 and these changes are significant in their own right; and

WHEREAS, the Building meets three criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3) and (4) of the Municipal Code; and

WHEREAS, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has 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; now, therefore,

THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS HEREBY:

1. Incorporates the preamble and Sections I, II and III into its findings; and
2. Adopts the Final Designation Report, as revised, and dated this 9th day of June 2025; and
3. Finds, based on the Designation Report, the Hearing Transcript and the entire record before the Commission, that the Building meets the three criteria for landmark designation set forth in Sections 2-120-620 (1), (3) and (4) of the Municipal Code; and
4. Finds that the Building satisfies the "integrity" requirement set forth in Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code; and
5. Finds that the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as follows:
 - All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the Building.

The three-story common brick boiler house addition and one-story common brick garage at the rear (south) elevation of the Building are devoid of architectural treatment. The Commission may approve demolition of these additions to support new uses of the Building. The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

For the purposes of Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the following additional guidelines shall also apply:

In recognition of the Building's location in the urban core with some of the city's highest building density including high-rises adjacent and within close proximity of the Building, the Commission may approve visible additions to the Building. The Commission's review of proposed work should ensure that the historic features and form of the Building are preserved long-term while allowing reasonable change and flexibility to meet continuing and new needs, whether related to the continued current uses of the Building or accommodating future uses.

Visible additions may be approved that are substantially set back from the front facade so that the historic Building retains sufficient depth to read as a whole structure. Any visible addition should appear distinct from the historic building when viewed from a pedestrian perspective along the public way. The overall setback, height and mass of any proposed addition shall be evaluated based on its visibility and resulting impact on the historic structure.

6. Recommends the designation of the Building a Chicago Landmark.

This recommendation was adopted unanimously (6-0).


Ernest C. Wong, Chair
Commission on Chicago Landmarks

Dated: June 9, 2025