

Landmark Status FAQs from RMIA

*Ravenswood Manor Improvement Association
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Q. If a property is determined “non-contributing” and be torn down, are there any design restrictions on what can replace it due to neighborhood Landmark status?

A. If a non-contributing property is torn down, the new structure must comply with the guidelines provided for in Article III.G5 of the "Rules and Regulations" of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (CCL). These pertain to the characteristic building sizes, shape, scale, site characteristics, materials, etc. of the district. A new building would not have to look like it's 100 years old. It simply would need to fit in with the size, scale, materials, setbacks, etc. of the neighborhood. In fact, according to the Commission's "Rules and Regulations," the Commission "encourages contemporary designs" (provided they fit in with neighborhood character). But many architects seem to choose more traditional-looking designs.

Q. Will the RMIA be sharing the Commission on Chicago Landmark’s “specific design review guidelines for building dormers in these districts”

A. The recommendation in the Preliminary Summary of Information (which was drafted by the consultant Terry Tatum) is that the CCL would work with the RMIA to develop specific design guidelines for visible additions in the district, including dormers. Due to the high demand for design guidelines, the RMIA Board sent a letter along with the proposal to the Staff of the CCL asking to begin the working with them, with the express understanding that the proposal would not go before the Commissioners until design guidelines were created and reviewed. The design guidelines will be developed with the Zoning Committee, made up of Board members, neighborhood architects and other interested neighbors, along with the staff of the CCL

Q. What are the restrictions of Landmark status overall? Perhaps the RMIA could acquire other Chicago Landmark district’s restrictions as examples of what could be put in place for Ravenswood Manor.

A. The restrictions of Landmark status are explained in the Commission on Chicago Landmarks' "Rules and Regulations," as well as in the City of Chicago's Landmarks Ordinance. The only four landmark districts that have district-specific guidelines (as far as I know) are: Fulton-Randolph Market, Old Town Triangle, Ukrainian Village, and the Villa. RMIA is attempting to get copies of all of those district guidelines.

Q. In the report it states: “Based upon its preliminary evaluation of the Ravenswood Manor District, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as: All exterior elevations, including

rooflines, of buildings as seen from public rights-of-way." Who is the "Commission staff" referred to here that has already evaluated Ravenswood Manor?

A. I think the use of "Commission staff" is boilerplate language that the consultant has borrowed from other designation reports. As far as I know, no member of the Commission staff has yet "evaluated" Ravenswood Manor and will not likely do so until a preliminary research report is submitted.

Q. In the April presentation, I believe it was said "façades" would be held to these Landmark design specifications. This wording above does not state facade. What portions of the property will be held to these design standards specifically?

A. I think "facades" is not an appropriate term; the more accurate term is the one in the report: "all exterior elevations, including rooflines, of buildings as seen from the public rights of way" (which refers to streets not alleys).

Q. Does Riverside Drive qualify as a street?

A. The alley that is locally referred to as Riverside Drive runs parallel to the Chicago River. Despite the name, it does not qualify as a street.

Q. What are the requirements/restrictions for replacing windows in a local landmark district?

A. Landmarks staff only reviews alterations that require a city of Chicago building permit. Whether—and when—window replacements require a building permit is unclear. The RMIA will request clarification on this with the landmarks staff.

Q. What is the breakdown of the types (style) of houses in The Manor?

A. There are 518 residential structures in Ravenswood Manor.

Those built pre-1933

- 154 Chicago Bungalows
- 52 Craftsman Bungalows
- 16 Italian Renaissance Bungalows
- 2 Tudor Revival Bungalows
- 1 French Eclectic Bungalow
- 1 Prairie Bungalow
- 108 American Four Squares
- 27 Craftsmen
- 8 Italian Renaissance
- 7 Prairie Style
- 6 Gable Front
- 6 Tudor Revival
- 5 Colonial Revival
- 3 Queen Anne

- 2 Dutch Colonial
- 1 Spanish Colonial
- 1 French Eclectic
- 76 2 or 3 flats
- 11 Apartment/Commercial

Those built post-1933

- 3 2 or 3 flats
- 15 Ranch
- 5 Split level Contemporary
- 2 Neo Traditional
- 2 No Style
- 1 Modern
- 1 Mansard
- 1 Neo Craftsman
- 1 Apartment/Commercial
- 1 Vacant lot

Non residential

- Francisco “L” station (built 1907)

Q. Can the District be expanded to include the west side of Sacramento?

- A. Because the boundaries of the National Register District adhere to the limits of Wm. E. Harmon & Company’s 1909 subdivision, the local landmark report only discussed the buildings on the east side of Sacramento. However, it is expected that the City’s Landmarks staff will also research the west side of the street as part of its review of the report—and make a subsequent decision whether it would qualify for inclusion in a potential local landmark district.

Q. What additional costs would be incurred as a result of becoming a Landmark District?

- A. It depends on the scope of the alterations and extent of the architectural details of your home. Some alterations would not cost any more; others might.

Q. Shouldn’t the buildings built after World War II be included in a potential landmark district as well?

- A. They were not identified as significant in the research report that was written by architectural historian Terry Tatum, who identified the neighborhood’s “period of architectural and historical significance” as between 1907 and 1933.

Q. Is there any data on how the Landmark District impacts time on the market for real estate sales?

- A. None that we could find.

Q. Will this impact new fences?

- A. Building permits are not required for fences five-feet tall or less, unless they are built of masonry materials. Thus, those fences would not be reviewed by Landmarks

staff. However, a building permit for a taller fence—or a brick wall—would be reviewed by the Landmarks staff.

Q. Will the city be able to restrict what paint colors I use?

A. The Landmarks staff only reviews alterations that require a building permit. Painting does not require a permit.

Q. Will the Landmark District designation prohibit me from putting in new more energy efficient windows?

A. The CCL only reviews changes that require a City of Chicago building permit. This would only occur if the homeowner needed to install new lintels to support a larger opening, which would require a permit.

Q. Does Landmark District status affect property values?

A. Most studies indicate that designation is neutral or a benefit to property values.

Q. What if I want to expand? Will this designation put a halt to the changes I want to make to my house?

A. The district proposal calls out the need for rooftop additions to buildings in Ravenswood Manor. To that end, the RMIA Zoning Committee and the city's Landmarks staff will develop district-specific design guidelines to allow visible, yet historically sensitive, dormers and rooftop additions. All other zoning and building codes would still apply.

Q. Isn't this just a tax imposed on the neighborhood?

A. Landmark District designation provides an extra layer of review. Depending on the extent of the alterations, there may be additional costs for professional fees or additional time in the building permit process. This is not a tax.

Q. Can owners of buildings in Landmark Districts still use the city's "Easy Permit Process" for smaller projects that do not need an architect or architectural drawings?

A. According to the City, you can qualify for an "easy permit" for tuck pointing repairs. The RMIA will confirm with the CCL staff whether it can be used for landmark districts.

Q. Can the idea of a local landmark district be a referendum on the ballot of the upcoming city elections?

A. As part of the landmark designation process, each property owner receives a certified letter notifying them of the reasons for and effects of the proposed designation and requests that the owner consent, decline or abstain in writing. For condominiums, the condo association is the designate.

A ballot referendum, in contrast, would go out to any registered voter in the precincts, which could include multiple voters per household, renters, and people who reside outside the boundaries of the potential landmark district. It also would give multiple votes to condominiums.

Having a referendum also would penalize any property owners who are not registered or unable to vote or those property owners who live outside the precinct.

Q. What changes can be made to non-contributing buildings?

A. This would depend on the scale of the exterior alterations, but the city's Landmarks staff would review any changes to ensure that the alterations would not negatively impact the District. The RMIA Zoning Committee will work with the Staff to address this in the design guidelines.

Q. What if I want to install skylights, solar panels or a wind turbine?

A. Skylights and solar panels that are visible from the street—and which require a city building permit—would be reviewed by Landmarks staff. Normally, skylights or solar panels are permitted when they are aligned with the general shape of the roofline. Wind turbines would be allowed as long as they are not visible from the street.

Q. Is there a way to stop demolition of buildings without landmark designation?

A. The only way a demolition permit can be prevented is if the building is an individual Chicago Landmark or a contributing structure in a Chicago Landmark District. If an individual homeowner wants to prevent the future demolition of their house, they could consider donating a "preservation easement" to a nonprofit organization, such as Landmarks Illinois. However, this would require that the owner have the building listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places and contribute a fee to the nonprofit organization for the future monitoring—and legal enforcement—of the easement.

Q. Can a property owner get preliminary approval for their plans before they develop final drawings or apply for a city building permit?

A. Yes. A property owner/architect may schedule a meeting with the CCL staff prior to permit submittal.

Q. Would landmark district designation prevent the construction of a ramp to accommodate someone with disabilities?

A. Since the ramp would require a city building permit, the Landmarks staff would review the design of the ramp. However, staff traditionally has approved alterations that accommodate ADA needs.

Q. My house has a clay tile roof. When making major repairs, would I need to replace the tiles or could I substitute a less-expensive material, such as asphalt shingles.

A. In the case of an individually-designed Chicago Landmark, the staff normally requires replacement of clay tile roofs with a similar material. However, in the case of Landmark Districts, staff has provided more flexibility in certain instances. Given the number of clay tile roofs in the Manor, this is one of the topics that the RMIA Zoning Committee will investigate with Landmarks staff, prior to any decision on a district.

Q. If I already have a picture window on the front of my bungalow, would I be required to restore the look of the original windows if I needed to replace it?

A. Replacement windows do not require a permit unless you were looking to expand size of the window opening.

Q. I own a two-flat. What if someone wants to convert this to a single family? Would being in a local landmark district affect my ability to sell my two-flat?

A. The landmark designation is only concerned with alterations made to what is visible from the street. This does not affect any alterations done to the interiors or the use of the building.

Q. What if the property has been neglected? Would this bar any contributing structure from being demolished?

A. The structural safety of any property would still apply and this would be reviewed by the City if a demolition permit were requested.