

## Architecture

# Handling A Hot Potato

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IT WILL be a matter of record by tomorrow whether Adler and Sullivan's 1893 Chicago Stock Exchange has been given official landmark status or not. That is the deadline for decision by the Chicago Commission on Historical and Architectural Landmarks after public hearings 15 days ago. What is at stake with the designation is whether there is any possibility of landmark survival in terms of the economics of today's city, anywhere, and by extension, the quality of the city itself.

The Chicago Stock Exchange has become a test case because its owners, Edward W. Ross and Jerrold Wexler, have announced their intention to tear it down for a new building, and that has forced the city into action. Of 17 buildings proposed some time ago as landmarks by the Chicago Landmarks Commission, only one accepted the designation.

Most of the proposed buildings, like the Stock Exchange, are commercial structures of the internationally famous Chicago School which pioneered the skyscraper in the 1880's and 90's and set technical and artistic standards to which the world still pays homage. They are in the city's commercial heart, and that is the crux of the matter. For everything that goes up, something goes down. The Loop is in the throes of brilliant private redevelopment, not unlike the late 19th-century explosion that produced the Chicago School. Moreover, it is being developed with new commercial construction of such superiority that it is being called the Second Chicago School.

The combination of the new and what is left of the old is distinctly, magnificently and uniquely Chicago. In the shadow of the new skyscrapers sit the dark, distinguished landmark buildings, with names like Monadnock, Rookery, Reliance and Leiter, that have become talismans to artists and historians here and abroad.

The shadow is real. As

things stand now, these buildings are doomed. It is simply a matter of time. (Among losses already suffered is Adler and Sullivan's superb Garrick Theater.) Unless something is done to turn the tide, a very natural combination of financial forces makes eventual demolition inevitable.

Having offered landmark designation and been rejected by property owners who obviously want no obstacles in the way of profitable development, the Commission voted, by a close 5 to 4, to try to make the Stock Exchange designation stick. This required the public hearings just held. If the Commission pushes designation, it must still be approved or rejected by the City Council. Then the real trouble begins.

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If the city accepts the designation recommended by the Commission, the owners must be compensated. This means that the city must buy the landmark and maintain it, or give the owners some kind of subsidy to make up the difference between the present income and what would have been gotten from the new construction.

This is necessary because the avoidance of "economic hardship" is the essence of any constitutional landmarks law, which must guard against anything resembling an "unjust taking of property." Cities with landmarks laws are frequently sued on this basis, but the laws have been quite consistently upheld by the courts. At present, Penn Central has a suit against New York City on the Landmark Commission's refusal to permit the construction of a tower over Grand Central Station.

Until now, these lawsuits and the danger of having a landmarks law overturned as unconstitutional have been the major fear of cities in making designations. But that is really no longer the heart of the matter. The problem is economic. It is so serious that some commissions drag their feet rather than throw the financial hot potato to the city with its designation.



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Chicago Stock Exchange, Adler and Sullivan, 1893

A city would sell its mother for revenue today

Again, the Chicago Stock Exchange offers a classic illustration. If the Chicago City Council designates this or any of the proposed landmark buildings it commits itself to purchase or subsidy. Today, no city has that kind of money to spare. With crises in the services that hold the city together, and with no funds to begin to fill the bottomless well of social needs, the city's heritage is in close to last place as a financial and political priority.

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And that is not the only financial problem. In the case of the Stock Exchange, which pays \$150,000 a year in taxes, the new development would yield \$1.5-million. This is an awesome increase in funds for that bottomless well. Any city would sell its mother today for revenue.

Is there any answer? Rarely within existing machinery or processes. There are two attitudes prevalent today. One is that it is a simple, hopeless, open and shut

the defenders of landmarks are licked. That, of course, is the real estate gospel, but these gentlemen are not given to creative thought based on the attainment of urban objectives and public purposes that they appear not to understand.

The other is that something can be done that is both economically practical and politically palatable and that will let everyone have his cake and eat it too. The Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects came up with such a solution at the hearings, based on zoning.

Zoning, today, is becoming a significant frontier of urban design, or a way of shaping the city to more desirable ends. Chicago, like New York, has a relatively new incentive zoning ordinance which gives builders bonuses of extra height and space for the inclusion of public amenities such as plazas or arcades.

The A.I.A. proposal says case as it stands now and

that a landmark is also a public amenity, and that bonuses should be given to the builder who preserves one, just as they are given now to those who preserve open space. The owners of the Stock Exchange would actually tear down the landmark to create the open space that is necessary to get the bonuses.

The suggestion is to amend the existing zoning law to recognize landmark sites as similar in public purposes to open land, with the bonus privileges of the present law. The owner could have total "air rights" to the landmark site exactly as if it were empty. These newly created "air rights" could be used for construction on the rest of the lot, if it were big enough (as with the Stock Exchange), or transferred to adjacent property, if held by the same owner, or transferred by sale or lease to other owners of adjacent property. This kind of zoning solution would allow maximum new development and maximum increase in the tax base — and the landmark would continue to exist. It could even increase owner income.

Chicago is going to have to deal with the problem increasingly, and, it is to be hoped, toughly and creatively. Amending a zoning law is not uncommon, although it could come too late now for the Stock Exchange. In New York, the city has already broached negotiations in terms of air rights transfer.

The feeling in Chicago seems to be that the Landmarks Commission is terribly conscious of walking on eggs and doesn't want to scramble any. Well, there is an old saying that you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, and if decisions were made by simply bowing to the difficulties, constructive solutions would never be found and landmarks commissions would never have been created in the first place. In its clear and cogent zoning proposal the A.I.A. states, "We believe a mix of new and old buildings enriches urban life as significant elements of the past remain to touch our lives in a direct and tangible way." The commission and the city have at least 15 more significant and irreplaceable structures to deal with, and a lot of people hope Chicago has the courage and the vision to get on with it.