

**CITY OF CHICAGO
COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

April 3, 2025

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

THE MORNING STAR BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHICAGO

3993 S. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING DRIVE

Docket No. 2025-03

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 The Morning Star Baptist Church of Chicago (the “Building”), is worthy of designation as a Chicago Landmark. On the basis of careful consideration of the history and architecture of the Building, the Commission has found that it satisfies the following four (4) 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.*
5. *Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

I. BACKGROUND

The formal landmark designation process for the Building began on January 9, 2025, 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 four 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 following major historic interior spaces of the Building:
 - the first-floor entrance vestibule, including its internal stairways and elevated walkways,
 - the main worship space of the sanctuary.

The interior spaces include, but are not limited to, the overall historic spatial volume; historic decorative wall, floor, and ceiling materials, finishes and ornamentation; historic light fixtures; and other historic decorative features.

Specifically excluded as significant features of the interior are furnishing used for worship, including but not limited to, the baptistry, pulpit, pews and organ.

Also, as part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission adopted a Designation Report, dated January 2025 the most current iteration of which is dated April 2023, incorporated herein and attached hereto as **Exhibit A** (the "Designation Report").

At its regular meeting of February 6, 2025, the Commission received a report incorporated herein and attached hereto as **Exhibit B** (the "Department of Planning and Development Report") from Ciere Boatright Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development, stating that the proposed landmark designation of the Building supports the City's overall planning goals and is consistent with the City's governing policies and plans.

On March 10, 2025, the Commission received written consent to landmark designation of the Building in a form dated March 5, 2025, and signed by Reverend Doctor Henry A. Barlow, representing the congregation of the Morning Star Baptist Church of Chicago, the owner of the Building.

II. 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 and all of the information on the proposed landmark designation of the Building; and

WHEREAS, Morning Star Baptist Church embodies the social history of Bronzeville's development as a "Black Metropolis," serving as a spiritual and community anchor for African Americans who settled in Chicago during a period of significant demographic change.

WHEREAS, the church's founding is a representation of the cultural heritage of African Americans who arrived in Chicago as part of the Great Migration, and the influence that the movement had on the city, particularly Bronzeville and the South Side.

WHEREAS, Morning Star Baptist Church exemplifies the critical role that religious institutions played in the history and development of Chicago's neighborhoods in the early to mid-20th century, particularly in supporting and sustaining African American communities.

WHEREAS, despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression, in 1936 the congregation purchased the building and commissioned pioneering Black architect Walter Thomas Bailey to transform the utilitarian structure into to a place of worship reflecting the collective economic strength of the congregation.

WHEREAS, the Morning Star Baptist Church of Chicago has been led by significant pastors, including Rev. Edmund D. Hubbard who founded the church with a mere 25 members in 1917, Rev. Ira Monroe Hendon who served as pastor at Morning Star from 1932 to 1958 during the congregations purchase and renovation of the church in 1937, and Rev. Dr. Luke W. Mingo who led the congregation through the modernization of the building to its current architectural quality in the 1960s.

WHEREAS, Morning Star Baptist is also significant for its association with DeLois Barrett Campbell, Billie Mae Barrett Greenbey, and Rodessa Barrett Porter who formed the nationally significant gospel music trio known as the Barrett Sisters. They were nurtured in the choir at Morning Star Baptist Church and throughout their career returned to perform at the church.

WHEREAS, Morning Star Baptist Church is a unique example of adaptive reuse in ecclesiastical architecture from the 1930s, transforming from an early 20th-century auto garage into a house of worship.

WHEREAS, the church's renovation from 1963 to 1968 transformed the building's front facade into a modernist design featuring piers that clearly express the structure, smooth wall surfaces, an absence of historic ornament and distinctive dalle de verre stained glass windows.

WHEREAS, the 1963 to 1968 renovation also completely redesigned the double-height interior vestibule which is richly illuminated by the cobalt blue stained-glass windows.

WHEREAS, the vestibule features steel-railed stairways and a second-floor walkway leading to the church's Fellowship Hall. Modern and durable finishes are employed within the vestibule, including pale-blue glazed brick, blue and white mosaic tile and hardwood veneer paneling with a varnished finish.

WHEREAS, the main worship space of the sanctuary is a modern and dignified design from 1963 to 1968. A central aisle leads to a raised platform for the pulpit, baptistry and choir. The ceiling above the aisle is recessed with cove lighting.

WHEREAS, columns in the sanctuary are slender to maximize views. Their emphatically modern flared capitals reveal a high degree of design and craftsmanship.

WHEREAS, Morning Star Baptist Church of Chicago was originally built in 1912 as an auto and truck livery, however that building underwent a significant renovation from 1937 to 1939 that was designed by Walter T. Bailey, the first African American architect registered in Illinois.

WHEREAS, from 1905 to 1916 Bailey was recruited by Booker T. Washington to lead the Mechanical Industries Department and supervised planning and architectural projects at the Tuskegee Institute.

WHEREAS, in 1916, Bailey left Tuskegee to open his own architectural practice in Memphis, Tennessee where he made important contacts in the business community through the Knights of Pythias, an African American fraternal organization. In 1925 the organization commissioned Bailey to design the National Pythian Temple in the heart of Bronzeville at 3735-45 S. State Street (1925-30; demolished 1980), an impressive eight-story building which housed the organization's offices, meeting halls, and rental storefronts and offices.

WHEREAS, in addition to Morning Star Baptist Church, Bailey was also the architect for the substantial redesign of the First Church of Deliverance in 1939, a former hat factory that he transformed into a striking Streamline Moderne church building. The building is a designated Chicago Landmark.

WHEREAS, in 1963 the congregation began another major renovation that transformed Morning Star Baptist Church of Chicago into its present form as a manifestation of the Modern Movement in architecture. The renovation was designed by the African American architectural firm of Hunter, Konn, & Duster and Associates.

WHEREAS, architect Radcliffe Walton Hunter (1931-1998) earned a dual degree in architecture and interior design from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He established own architectural firm on the South Side known as Hunter & Konn which later became known as Hunter & Associates where he practiced until his death in 1998.

WHEREAS, Hunter was a well-regarded member of the St. Thomas Episcopal Church, the first Black Episcopal congregation in Chicago, at 3801 S. Wabash Avenue in the Douglas community. In 1977, Hunter designed the present church for that congregation after their first church burned. In 1962. That design bears some similarities with Morning Star Baptist Church in its modernity and use of dalle de verre glass.

WHEREAS, architect Charles E. Duster (1929-1991) was employed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) during the 1960s renovation of Morning Star Baptist Church, yet he clearly joined Radcliffe Hunter on the Morning Star project.

WHEREAS, Duster was the grandson of journalist-civil rights activist Ida Bell Wells and her lawyer, journalist husband, Ferdinand Lee Barnett.

WHEREAS, in 1956 Duster joined SOM as Architect and Engineer at SOM and would remain at SOM throughout his career working his way up the firm's corporate structure to become Associate and Technical Director.

WHEREAS, in his career at SOM, Duster contributed to numerous large projects for national corporations, including corporate headquarters, training centers, and research and development laboratories.

WHEREAS, at SOM, Duster was part of Walter Netsch's studio that focused on smaller scale projects with social emphasis, including university commissions, museums, public housing and religious work.

WHEREAS, the Building meets four criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4) and (5) 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. Adopts the recitals, findings and statements of fact set forth in the preamble and Sections I and II hereof as the findings of the Commission; and
2. Adopts the Designation Report, as revised, and dated this April 3, 2025; and
3. Finds, based on the Designation Report and the entire record before the Commission, that the Building meets four criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), (4) and (5) 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 following major historic interior spaces of the Building:
 - the first-floor entrance vestibule, including its internal stairways and elevated walkways,
 - the main worship space of the sanctuary.

The interior spaces include, but are not limited to, the overall historic spatial volume; historic decorative wall, floor, and ceiling materials, finishes and ornamentation; historic light fixtures; and other historic decorative features.

Specifically excluded as significant features of the interior are furnishing used for worship, including but not limited to, the baptistry, pulpit, pews and organ.

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: April 3, 2025