

TJS

<b>FROM</b>	NAME & TITLE	THOMAS J. STOSUR, DIRECTOR
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 <sup>TH</sup> FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #17-0026 / CHICK WEBB RECREATION CENTER HISTORIC LANDMARK

CITY of  
BALTIMORE  
**MEMO**



**TO**

DATE:

The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400  
100 North Holliday Street

August 2, 2017

At its regular meeting of July 27, 2017, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #17-0026, for the purpose of designating the Chick Webb Recreation Center located at 623 North Eden Street as a Commission for Historic Architectural Preservation (CHAP) Landmark.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report and accepted staff's recommendation. Thus, the Planning Commission recommended amendment and approval of City Council Bill #17-0026 and adopted the following resolution Eight members being present (Eight in favor).

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, and recommends that City Council Bill #17-0026 be amended and passed by the City Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Wolde Ararsa, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-4488.

TJS/WA

Attachment

- cc: Mr. Pete Hammen, Chief Operating Officer
- Mr. Jim Smith, Chief of Strategic Alliances
- Ms. Karen Stokes, Mayor's Office
- Mr. Colin Tarbert, Mayor's Office
- Mr. Kyron Banks, Mayor's Office
- The Honorable Edward Reisinger, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
- Mr. William H. Cole IV, BDC
- Mr. David Tanner, BMZA
- Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration
- Ms. Sharon Daboin, DHCD
- Mr. Patrick Fleming, DOT
- Ms. Elena DiPietro, Law Dept.
- Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
- Ms. Natawna Austin, Council Services
- The Honorable Robert Stokes, City Councilman



*Stephanie Rawlings-Blake*  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

*Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman*



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

### STAFF REPORT

**July 27, 2017**

**REQUEST:** City Council Bill 17-0026: Baltimore City Landmark List: Exteriors - Chick Webb Recreation Center, 623 North Eden Street

**RECOMMENDATION:** Amendment and Approval

Amendments are as follows:

- In lines 3, 4, 16 and 17 add the word "Memorial" after the word "Webb". (Final title should read Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center)
- Lines 4 and 17 add "1401 E. Monument Street, historically known as" after 'Center,'. (The final should read "... Center, 1401 E. Monument Street, historically known as 623...")

**STAFF:** Tamara Woods

**PETITIONER:** City Councilman Robert Stokes

**OWNER:** Mayor and City Council

### **SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**General Area:** The Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center is located in East Baltimore, in the same block as a few significant institutions that served African Americans in segregated Baltimore in the twentieth century, including the Old Dunbar High School, PS 103, a Baltimore City Landmark, the new Dunbar High School, the Health Center, and First Baptist Church, a Baltimore City Landmark. In the surrounding blocks, the Johns Hopkins Hospital Complex is located to the east, Douglass Homes to the south, property that was formerly Somerset Homes to the west, and the Lester Morton Court Apartments to the north.

**Site Conditions/Architectural Description:** The building is located on the corner of the 1400 block of East Monument Street and the 600 block of N. Eden Street. The building faces N. Eden Street, which was a city street when the recreation center opened, but today is a wide pedestrian boulevard. It was constructed in three stages, all designed by Baltimore architect Frederic A. Fletcher. The first portion of the main recreation center was completed in 1947. This was designed in the Art Moderne style, with clean lines, strong linear and geometric patterns created by minor projections and recesses on the facade. The swimming pool was constructed in 1949 inside a reused 1919 industrial building, and the multipurpose room was

constructed above the swimming pool in 1960. The swimming pool and multipurpose room were part of the original plan for the recreation center, but were later additions due to budget constrictions. These portions of the building are very utilitarian in nature. The parcel as a whole contains almost three quarters of an acre, and includes a playground and ball courts to the north of the recreation center adjacent to E. Monument Street.

## **ANALYSIS**

The proposed exterior landmark designation of the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center in East Baltimore is for the historical significance of the site, but is also included in an active master planning process and proposed new development area for the Oldtown area. City Council Bill #17-0026 was analyzed by CHAP, Land Use and Urban Design, and Comprehensive Planning Staff.

### **Eligibility for Landmark Designation**

This was the first recreation center and pool built for African Americans in segregated East Baltimore. The impetus and seed money for the construction of this recreation center came from members of the community, who fundraised and advocated for years for a recreation center, purchasing the property for the center with their own money.

After its construction, the community stayed involved, advocating and even paying for programming and upgrades to the facility. The recreation center was built to honor William Henry “Chick” Webb, internationally renowned drummer and bandleader from East Baltimore, who, before his untimely death in 1939, had promised to raise money for a community center in his neighborhood so that children would have opportunities that he lacked as a child. After his death, Webb’s doctor, Dr. Ralph J. Young, and others determined to complete his dream, beginning a decades-long fundraising and advocacy campaign to build the recreation center, which for almost 70 years has served a critical role in East Baltimore’s large African American community as a center for recreation, education, and community.

In addition, Ella Fitzgerald, Chick’s protegee who was the “First Lady of Swing” and the leader of his band following his death, paid tribute to Chick every year after his death. In 1948, she did so by entertaining children at a Christmas party at the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center. In order to ensure that an unexpected engagement would not prevent her from attending, she booked Baltimore’s Club Astoria for the ten days spanning Christmas and New Year’s Eve so that she would definitely be in town for the party at the Recreation Center.<sup>i</sup>

The building itself is designed in the Art Moderne style by Baltimore architect Frederic A. Fletcher, and is an excellent example of the style. This building is significant for its association with Chick Webb, its architecture, and the role that it has played in the history of Baltimore City.

CHAP staff reviewed the landmark designation report and determined that the property is eligible for designation as a landmark under CHAP Criteria 1, 2, and 3. A Baltimore City Landmark may be a site, structure, landscape, building (or portion thereof), place, work of art, or other object:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Baltimore history;
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in Baltimore's past; or
3. That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

### **Master Plan**

On October 6, 2016, the Planning Commission adopted an update addendum to the 2010 Oldtown Redevelopment Plan. The primary reason for this update was to reflect the new direction in implementation. On April 17, 2014, the Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC), on behalf of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore (The City), and the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), issued a Joint Request for Proposals (RFP) for a mixed-use development to be located on approximately 16 acres in the Oldtown community. The site included 7.5 acres of City-owned land, as well as 8.7 acres from the former Somerset Homes public housing site owned by HABC.

The selected joint-venture team including The Beatty Development Group, The Commercial Development Group, Mission First Housing Development Corporation, and The Henson Development Co. (The Development Team) was selected to pursue the redevelopment of the lower portion of the Oldtown Mall and the former Somerset Homes site.

As part of the developers' proposed redevelopment, they have expanded the area in which they would like to work. This area is to the east of Central Avenue and south of Orleans Street. Though the proposal is outside of the scope of the RFP, it was reviewed as part of the discussion with UDARP. This is a much later phase of proposed redevelopment and will have many more discussions with the communities and property owners as to the particular redevelopment scenario that would move forward, including any future demolition and street alignments.

The proposed phase east of Central Avenue shows the current location of the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center incorporated into a site for new construction. In response to this conceptual plan, members of the Dunbar Alumni Association began discussions about protecting buildings that they felt were of historical significance to the community. In their discussions with the City Councilman, it was decided to move forward with a proposal to landmark the recreation center.

On May 30, 2017 Planning Staff hosted a charrette with stakeholders to explain the City Council Bill and what becoming a landmark means. In addition, staff did an exercise with stakeholders to hear from them regarding support or opposition for the landmark designation of the Chick Webb Memorial Recreational Center, as well as what they would like to see for future recreation and the impact on the proposed redevelopment plan of the developers.

In evaluating the historical significance and the impact on the Oldtown Redevelopment Plan,

staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve the bill with two recommended amendments: 1.) Adding "Memorial" to the name of the landmark designation, so that it is the "Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center" so that this matches the name on the building, and 2.) That the address of 1401 E. Monument Street be added to the designation. While 623 N. Eden Street is the original and historic address of the recreation center, this portion of N. Eden Street is closed and thus the current valid address for the property is 1401 E. Monument Street. For practical purposes, such as future permitting of improvements, the legal address, not just the historical address, should be contained in the legislation.

### **Community Notification**

Baltimore City Recreation & Parks, Dunbar Alumni Association, Housing Authority of Baltimore City Residents Advisory Board, Baltimore Housing, Baltimore Development Corporation, Baltimore Heritage Inc., Baltimore AIA, Preservation Maryland, Beatty Development, Henson Development Company and City Councilman Robert Stokes have been notified of this action.



**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**

## IMAGES



Map 2: Property boundary.



Image 1- Aerial view of site, view from west.



