



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

**COMMISSION FOR
HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL
PRESERVATION**

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

July 11, 2017

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

RECOMMENDATION: Approval, with addition.

STAFF: Lauren Schiszik

PETITIONER: Councilman Robert Stokes

OWNER: Mayor and City Council

SUMMARY: Designate this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List.

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, that of the main recreation center, was completed in 1947. This was designed in the 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.

BACKGROUND

- This designation is being requested by Councilman Stokes, with the introduction of City Council Bill 17-0026.

PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES

Designate this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List.

ANALYSIS

CHAP staff has reviewed the landmark designation report and has determined that the property is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criteria 1, 2, and 3.

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. 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.

Staff has two recommendations: adding a word to the landmark name, and adding an address. Staff recommends adding “Memorial” to the name, so that it is the “Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center” so that this matches the name on the building. Staff also recommends 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.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS

The property is not located within a CHAP district; therefore, comments from an Architectural Review Committee are not applicable.

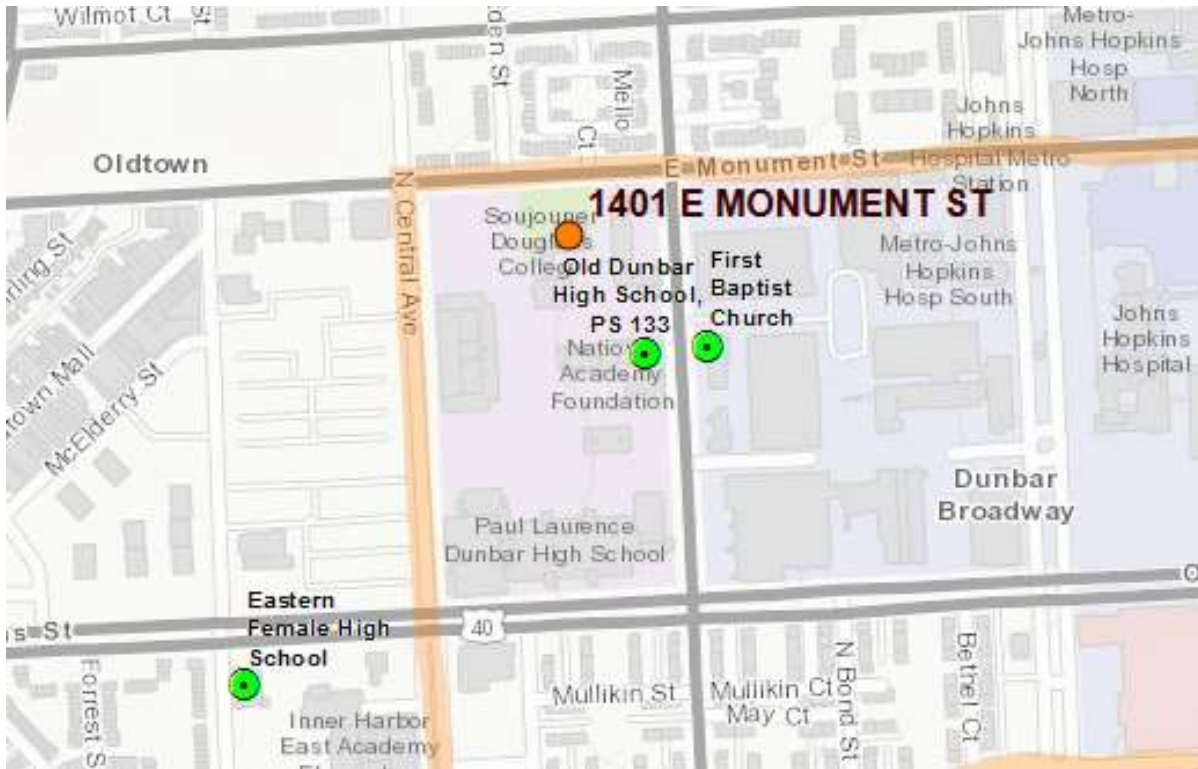
RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends a finding of approval for designation of this property on the Baltimore City Landmark List because it meets criteria 1, 2, and 3 of CHAP’s criteria for designation. Staff also recommends adding “Memorial” to the name, and the address of 1401 E. Monument Street to the designation.

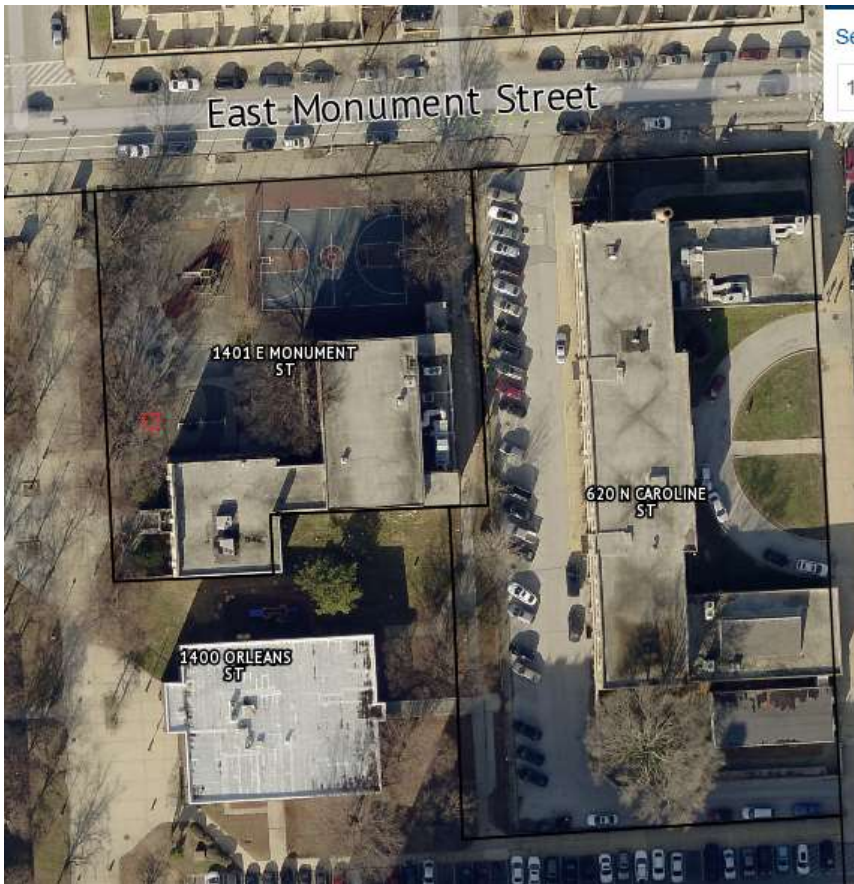
E. S. M. L.

Eric Holcomb
Director

MAP AND IMAGES



Map 1: Map of the property, also showing nearby landmarks.



Map 2: Property boundary.



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



Image 2 – The façade today.



DRUMMER'S MEMORIAL—City officials pay a visit to the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center, developed by the city to honor the memory of the late Negro musician. Located in Eden street, the center will be accepted officially by the city on Friday.

Image 3 – Image of the Rec Center just before it opened in 1947.

