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COMMUNITY PUSHES FOR NORTH ASHLAND BRIDGE PROTECTION – URGENT - JUNE 5TH LANDMARK AGENDA

The North Ashland Avenue Bridge, which spans the North Branch of the Chicago River between Webster and Fullerton Avenues, is an important historic, artistic, design and engineering landmark that deserves protection, restoration and preservation. In April 2013, the non-profit *Chicago Art Deco Society* (“CADS”) filed a community recommendation with the Commission on Chicago Landmarks that the bridge be designated a Chicago Landmark, an important step to insuring the bridge’s rehabilitation and restoration. On April 30th, the non-profit *Landmarks Illinois* included the structure on their 10 Most Endangered Historic Places list, within a group of bascule bridges (sometimes known as drawbridges or moveable bridges).

Dedicated in 1937, the Ashland Bridge is a monumental example of stripped-down, classically-inspired deco, a style made popular in the 1920’s and 30’s, which is experiencing a resurgence in popularity in modern culture. The bridge features exquisite embellishment in the form of sculpted bas relief panels – each depicting a personification of Chicago. The panels showcase the river as a heroic figure, integrated with a unique iconography celebrating Chicago as a global center for industry, commerce and transportation. The bridge originally featured almost a mile of Bedford limestone balustrades and pylons. The deco theme continues with structural steel elements reflecting the advent of the “streamline moderne” style. According to photographs and documents in public archives, several thousand people attended the bridge’s dedication.



For at least 15 years, the bridge has been neglected. Orange plastic safety barriers have also deteriorated. In 2012, The Chicago Art Deco Society advocated for removal of graffiti and invasive plants but Bedford limestone panels are loosened from the structure and have fallen into the river. A plan which includes preservation, community support, and comprehensive rehabilitation is essential.

ABOUT THE ARCHITECT & ARTIST

Scippione Del Campo (1895 – 1957) immigrated from San Marco in Lamas, Italy to the Taylor Street neighborhood when he was a pre-teen. A bright student with a particular interest in art and architecture, Del Campo went on to apprentice as a draftsman. With little formal education, he worked his way through the ranks and engaged in independent study. Eventually, Del Campo took the license exams for architecture and engineering, passing both and receiving accreditation in Illinois and Wisconsin. Del Campo’s other major bridge on Ogden Avenue was demolished in 1995. Its decorative relief panels were distributed to public collections like the Art Institute of Chicago.



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CADS' Board Chair for Preservation Amy Keller reflects, "The Ashland Avenue Bridge is a magnificent piece of functional engineering with integrated art that celebrates a proud vision of Chicago. Further, with budgeting for public works becoming increasingly difficult, there is no better time to advocate for the responsible and feasible preservation of existing infrastructure. The bridge's value cannot be underestimated."

ABOUT THE CHICAGO ART DECO SOCIETY

Founded in 1982 as a non-profit corporation, the Chicago Art Deco Society advocates for preservation and celebration of the unique design culture of the 1920's and 1930's. CADS hosts lectures, tours and special events and has undertaken the first, comprehensive cultural survey of the period in the Chicago region.

ACTION ALERT

The public is asked to support CADS's efforts to insure the protection of the bridge via landmark designation by writing the Commission on Chicago Landmarks to encourage designation and protection of the North Ashland Avenue Bridge. **The Ashland Bridge recommendation is scheduled for presentation before the Commission on June 5th at 3:00 pm.**

Commission on Chicago Landmarks

33 N La Salle St # 1600

Chicago, IL 60602

RESOURCES:

Chicago Art Deco Society (CADS): www.chicagoartdecosociety.com

Landmarks Illinois: www.landmarks.org/ten_most_2013_chicago_bascule_bridges.htm

HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

