

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



PASEO BORICUA GATEWAY FLAGS **WEST DIVISION STREET AT ARTESIAN AVENUE [2400-WEST]** **AND MOZART STREET [2800-WEST]**

Final Landmark Recommendation Adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,
on May 5, 2022



CITY OF CHICAGO
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Maurice Cox, Commissioner

CONTENTS

Map	2
The Humboldt Park Neighborhood	3
Paseo Boricua, the Puerto Rican Cultural District in Chicago	5
Planning, Design and Construction of the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags	5
Criteria For Designation	11
Significant Historical and Architectural Features	13
Selected Bibliography	14

PASEO BORICUA GATEWAY FLAGS

WEST DIVISION STREET AT ARTESIAN AVENUE [2400-WEST] AND MOZART STREET [2800-WEST]

BUILT: 1995

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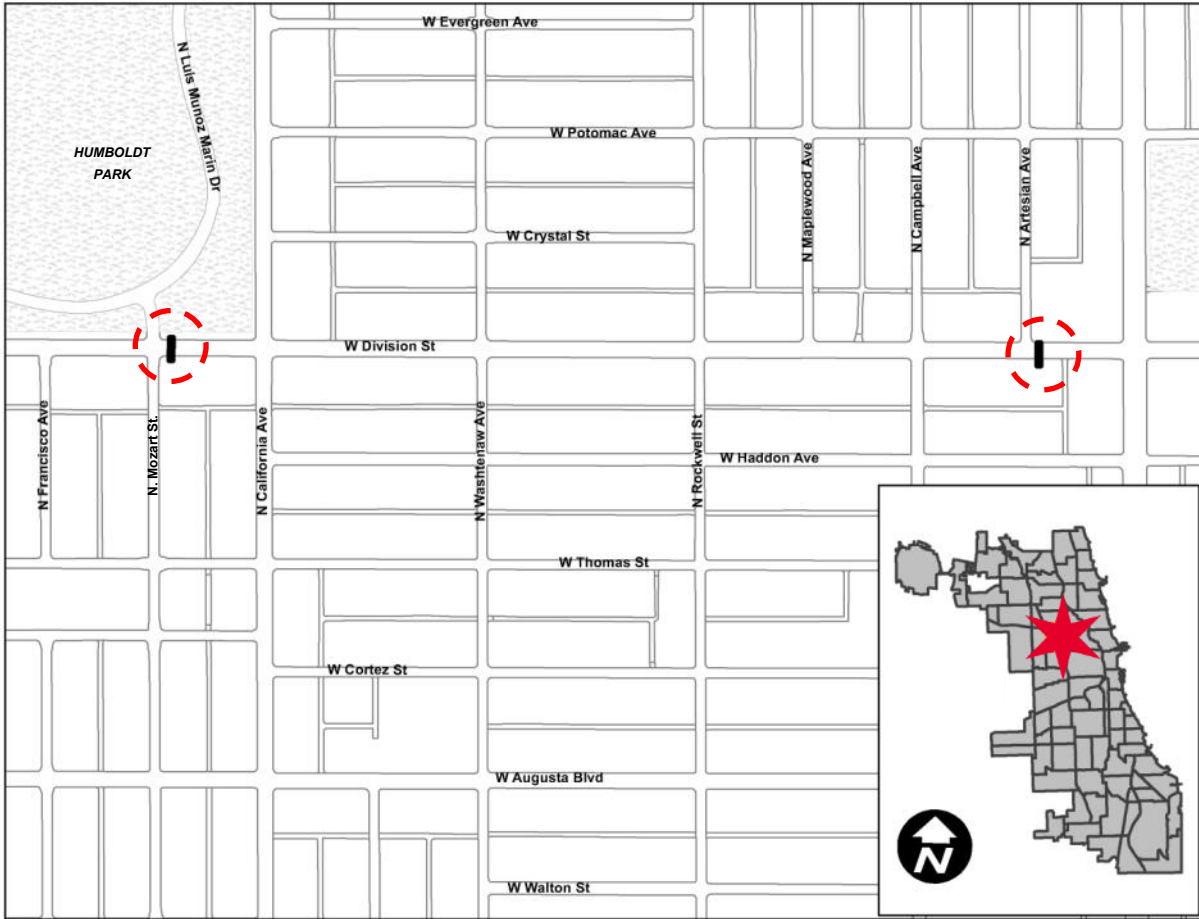
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McCLIER COMPANY

The Paseo Boricua is a section of Division Street in the Humboldt Park neighborhood that was formally recognized in 1995 as the economic, political, and cultural center of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community. At either end of the paseo stand twin steel gateway sculptures designed in the shape of fluttering Puerto Rican flags. Each gateway is a sinuous network of red and blue steel tube and plate that stand 55 feet tall and 56 feet wide. The innovative design transforms rigid structural steel into forms that appear to billow and ripple in the wind.

For over a century, the flag of Puerto Rico has been a symbol of identity and consciousness within the Puerto Rican community. The steel sculptures in the form of this symbol serve as a community icon and a point of pride for the Puerto Rican community in Chicago and the community’s decades-long ties to Division Street and the larger Humboldt Park neighborhood. The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags grew out of a community-based process and were completed in 1995.

In 2019, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks identified the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags as part of the *Community Streetscape Markers: Context Statement*. The Context Statement recognized the cultural significance of this type of public improvement and laid out the criteria necessary for these community resources to be designated Chicago landmarks.



The two gateway flags mark a 1/2 mile stretch of Division Street in the Humboldt Park neighborhood. This stretch of Division Street is known as Paseo Boricua and forms the economic, social and cultural heart of Chicago's Puerto Rican community.



Over 50 murals adorn the six blocks between the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags, many were painted since the flags were dedicated, and several include images of the flag sculpture itself, including 79th at left by John Vergara, from 2010.

THE HUMBOLDT PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags mark the entrances to a section of West Division Street known as Paseo Boricua, which is the heart of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. The Paseo Boricua runs east-to-west through the Humboldt Park neighborhood within the larger West Town Community Area.

The land that is now Humboldt Park is near historic Native American trails now traced by Milwaukee and Grand Avenues. Originally these thoroughfares were important trade routes in the Great Lakes region for indigenous peoples like the Council of the Three Fires (Ojibwa, Odawa, Potawatomi), among others who inhabited the area before European colonization.

The Humboldt Park neighborhood, as well as the 206-acre pastoral landscaped park in it, both take their name from the Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Like many Chicago neighborhoods, Humboldt Park has been home to a number of different ethnic communities over time. Germans and Scandinavian began to move in and develop the area in the late 1850s and 1860s. They were followed after the turn of the 20th century by Polish, Italians, Russians, and Eastern European Jews who built much of the housing stock as well as churches and synagogues that surround the area. These groups left landmarks in Humboldt Park accenting their cultural roots with statues of Alexander Von Humboldt, the German novelist and poet Fritz Reuter, as well as, Norse explorer Leif Erikson, which still stand in the park.

In 1904, the Polish community in Humboldt Park raised money to erect and dedicate a statue to Revolutionary War hero Thaddeus Kosciuszko, which attracted an estimated 50,000 people to the ceremony. The statue stood in Humboldt Park until 1978, when it was relocated near Northerly Island. European groups also left important institutions like the Norwegian American Hospital, which was founded in 1894 and continues to independently operate today as a community hospital (renamed Humboldt Park Health in 2021). As a result, the area of Division Street from Oakley to Francisco Street, has seen a concentration of health services including St. Mary's and St. Elizabeth hospitals on the east, and health clinics, private practice offices, small pharmacies, nonprofit healthcare providers like Vida SIDA/Puerto Rican Cultural Center, dentists, physical therapists and non-traditional health & healing providers are found along Division Street.

Humboldt Park was also home to Saul Bellow, one of Chicago's greatest literary figures and Nobel Laureate (1976). Two of his most-respected works were written in the neighborhood, including *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), which received the National Book Award for Fiction and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), which won the Pulitzer Prize in Literature in 1976. Another significant person associated with Humboldt Park is Jens Jensen, the prominent landscape architect who developed the Prairie Style of Landscape architecture in Chicago. He made the Humboldt Park neighborhood his home when he was appointed superintendent of its namesake park. His offices were in the Humboldt Park Receptory Building and Stable, which today serves as the home of the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts & Culture (the building is also a designated Chicago Landmark).



The Humboldt Park neighborhood takes its name from the large park in its midst. This park, was designed by William LeBaron Jenney's as part of the park and boulevard system that connected the South and West Sides. Shown here is the lagoon with its 1907 Prairie-style Boathouse/ Refectory designed by Schmidt, Garden & Martin.



Humboldt Park's named for Prussian naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, represented by a portrait sculpture in Humboldt Park cast in 1892 by sculptor Felix Gorling. It is shown here in a stereoscope. Credit: Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>.

PASEO BORICUA, THE PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL DISTRICT IN CHICAGO

The Puerto Rican community began arriving in Chicago in significant numbers during the early 1950s when Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States. Historians cite a push-pull dynamic in the movement of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland: a lack of economic opportunity on the island provided a push, while the hope of better jobs on the mainland served as the pull. In Chicago, many Puerto Ricans found employment in the area's steel industry, a legacy honored by the steel material used to construct the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags. Initially, the newcomers settled throughout the city, but especially on the Near West Side along Harrison Street and on the North Side in Lincoln Park and Lake View. Most Puerto Ricans left these areas during the 1960s in the face of the construction of the University of Illinois at Chicago campus on the Near West Side and gentrification in both Lincoln Park and Lake View. After this displacement, the Puerto Rican community in Chicago coalesced around the West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods with Division Street serving as the economic and cultural spine of the community.

The Puerto Rican corridor of Division Street was originally known to the community as *La Division*. In 1966, the first Puerto Rican parade was held on Division Street, a cultural tradition that continues today. More recently, the combined Spanish-English name of the street, *La Division*, has been replaced with the appellation *Paseo Boricua*. *Boricua* is derived from *Borikén*, the name used by the indigenous *Taino* population of the island prior to Spanish colonization.

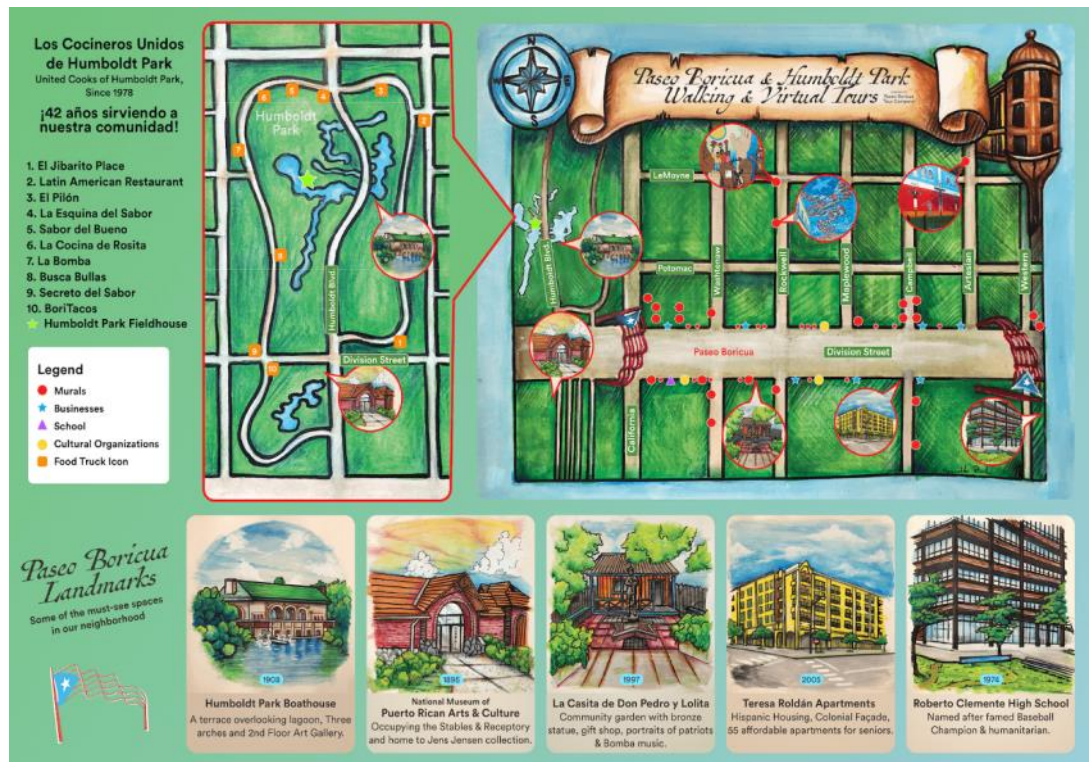
Paseo Boricua is now the most-densely commercialized Puerto Rican business district in the United States. This space serves as the epicenter of Puerto Rican Chicago and is often described as the Puerto Rican's "*pedacito de patria*" (a small piece of the homeland). The Paseo Boricua Flags mark the gateway for either side of the six-block corridor of Puerto Rican businesses, restaurants, affordable housing developments, non-profit organizations, and cultural institutions like the Urban Theater Company, Africaribe and La Casita de Don Pedro. The strip that composes Paseo Boricua is considered by those living inside and outside of the area, both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans alike, to be the "heart" of Chicago's Puerto Rican community.

PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE PASEO BORICUA GATEWAY FLAGS

During the 1970s and 1980s, Division Street suffered from disinvestment, high retail vacancies, crime, and deteriorated infrastructure. In the 1990s, continued gentrification at the community's eastern edges pushed the Puerto Rican population west past Western Avenue. Community leaders concerned by both the high levels of vacancy and perceived threat posed by gentrification began plans in the early 1990s for the revitalization of Division Street. Devised by community members as well as then-alderman Billy Ocasio, the idea for Paseo Boricua – the



Numerous annual festivals have longstanding traditions celebrating the Puerto Rican culture and pride on Division St. / Paseo Boricua since 1966. These include the Puerto Rican day Parade (established 1966), The Puerto Rican Festival in the Park (established 1977), The Puerto Rican Peoples Parade (established 1978), Fiesta Boricua (established 1994), Three Kings Day Parade (established 1995) and Haunted Paseo Boricua (established 2001). Credit: José E. López and Eduardo Arocho, M.S.



A current visitor's map of Paseo Boricua highlights the steel flags as well as the culture of the city's Puerto Rican corridor, including cuisine, murals, businesses, schools and cultural organizations. Credit: Paseo Boricua Tour Company.



The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags transform steel plate and tube into a towering representation of the flag of Puerto Rico, long a symbol of Puerto Rican consciousness and self determination. Credit: Paseo Boricua Tour Company.

Puerto Rican community's street – was inspired by other ethno-cultural districts in the city. Alderman Ocasio presented the district concept to mayor Richard M. Daley, who supported the project and approved its funding. The City hired the firm of DeStefano+Partners to design gateways that delineate the district and serve as entrances to the community. The firm's 1994 proposal featured the twin flag gateways in addition to a comprehensive streetscaping plan that included small plazas bordered in Spanish tiles with central shade trees. The plazas were designed to create inviting outdoor spaces for local interaction that had the atmosphere of an avenue in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In addition, a series of laser-cut metal lamp post banners featuring traditional *Taino* symbols and 78 painted planters representing towns of Puerto Rico were installed.

Planning for the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags began in 1994 and took nine months. Ocasio, with the support of Congressman Luis Gutierrez, then-Cook County Commissioner Roberto Maldonado, the Division Street Business Development Association and community leader José López responded to a call articulated in a 1993 community summit held at Roberto Clemente High school convened by the Puerto Rican Agenda of Chicago, a non-profit community organization. The summit started to formalize the idea of having some kind of marker in the community. Ocasio explained “I personally wanted some type of gateway. That was the task given to the architectural firm. We need something that's going to anchor all of that and let people know. That's when I said I wanted gateways.”

Ocasio goes on to discuss how the architects came back with ten different gateway designs. But he and José López knew the moment they saw the winning flag design: “At the meeting, José López and I just looked at each other and we said, ‘That one!’” The architects asked if they wanted to go through the other proposals, but Ocasio and José declined, expressing, “No, no, no, no, we just want this.”

Architects Edward Windhorst and James DeStefano came up with the design by walking in the community, observing, and talking to residents. The architects explained to Ocasio how they came up with the flag design, “everywhere you took us, people or somewhere, every store, every restaurant, everybody had the (Puerto Rican) flag somehow. So, we thought that it's not like any other flag because, people take pride in a lot of things, but in the Puerto Rican community, the flag, has always been the symbol.” The architects said, “Look, why don't we do this?” By observing and interacting with the community they concluded that the flag really captured the pride and sense of community among Puerto Rican people.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico adopted its flag in 1952, however the concept of a distinct flag for the Puerto Rican island and its people traces its origins to 1868 when the first Puerto Rican flag was designed by Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances and embroidered by Mariana Bracetti during *El Grito de Lares*, a revolt against Spanish colonial rule of the island that was itself an early manifestation of Puerto Rican national identity. The design of the current Puerto Rican flag originated in New York in 1895 from a group of Puerto Rican exiles who had led the *Grito de Lares*. When Puerto Rico was annexed by the United States six year later, the Puerto Rican flag was prohibited from being flown on the island until 1952 when the Commonwealth

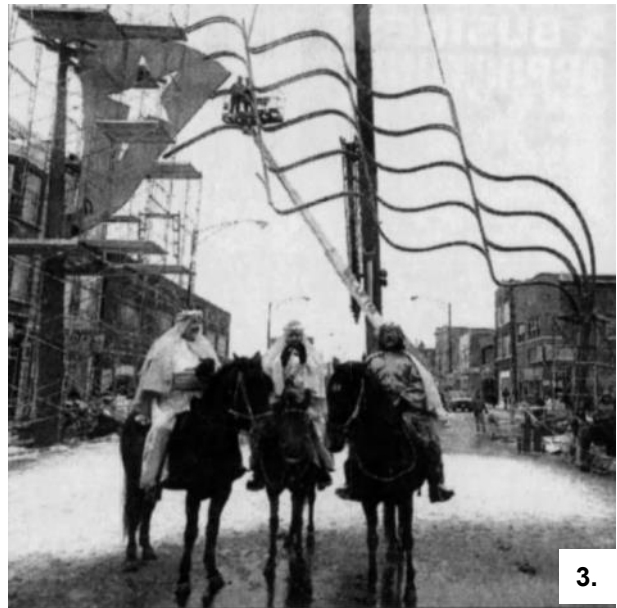


1.



2.

1. The flags are a double-lattice structure built up from steel tubes.
2. Flowing “pipe waves” were welded end-to-end with a high level of technical expertise. . (Credit: Chicago Tribune)
3. The Paseo Boricua Flags were dedicated on January 6, 1995, the occasion of *Día de Los Reyes Magos*, or the Feast of Three Kings when Christmas is traditionally celebrated in Puerto Rico with the exchange of gifts. . (Credit: Chicago Tribune)



3.

was declared. The design of the flag consists of horizontal stripes, with red symbolizing blood and white peace. A blue triangle at the left side symbolizes water and the island's three branches of government. The white star represents the island itself.

The two flags span Division Street at Artesian Avenue to the east and Mozart Street to the west. The easternmost is near Roberto Clemente High School, an important educational institution in the community; the westernmost flag stands at edge of Humboldt Park, the historic landscaped park where Puerto Rican festivals are held. The distance from flag-to-flag is the ½ mile section of Division Street known as Paseo Boricua.

The design and construction of the flags successfully transforms tons of welded steel plate and tubing into a visually dynamic and flowing form much like a cloth flag, indeed the Paseo Boricua Flags are the largest flags in the world that are not made of cloth. Architect John Edward Windhorst of DeStefano+Partners as well as architects McClier Company and Ozzie Rodriguez of Rodriguez Associates designed the gateways, which were installed in 1996 under the auspices of the Chicago Department of Transportation. The flags have been recognized with numerous awards, most notably the “Building of the Year Award” presented by the American Institute of Architects in 1995. They have been highly acknowledged for their streetscape projects in the City of Chicago. In addition to the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags, DeStefano+Partners also designed the Rainbow Pylons and Legacy Walk on North Halsted Street, a designated Chicago Landmark which commemorate the LGBTQ community in Chicago. They also designed the Madison St Bridge over the Kennedy Expressway (1996). This bridge was a prototype for the other bridges over the Kennedy—the red handrail sports motifs drawn from the Chicago Flag

Each gateway flag weighs about 45 tons and rises up 56 feet into the air, while spanning the 59 feet across the width of Division Street. Foundations of 70 tons of concrete carry each flag with a gravity load to hold much more weight than the above structure. The flags are constructed of structural steel joined with welds, respectively honoring an industry and skilled trade that hard-working Puerto Ricans found employment in when they arrived in Chicago.

The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags were fabricated by one of Chicago area's oldest ironworks, the Chicago Ornamental Iron Company. Installation began in December 1994 and lasted six weeks. The fabrication and installation of the flags were an engineering challenge. Each flag is a double-lattice structure to resist wind loading up to 77 miles per hour. Then-new digital technologies, including computer-aided design and manufacturing were used to make the sculptural elements as thin and light as possible. Each flag is built up with hundreds of steel tubes joined with full-penetration welds ground smooth, several of which had to be completed *in situ*. The steel surfaces were shot peened and finished with bright blue and red epoxy coatings.

According to Horst Peppas of the Chicago Ornamental Iron Company, construction and installation took five months. The structure was transported from the shop to the site in four pieces: the vertical “mast” or flagpole, the “wave” of steel pipes representing the horizontal-

banded portion of the flag, the triangular “pendant” portion of the flag, and the “tangle” representing the twisting fabric.

Along with the giant flags, other renovations were added to Division Street as part of the recognition of the Puerto Rican community. According to August Chidichimo, Project Manager of the Chicago Department of Transportation, the entire cost of the project was \$1,250,000 which also included: the fabrication and installation of the black metal banners on the lampposts, acorn lights on the lampposts; 16 cement *placitas* (table and seats); provision for diagonal parking on two side streets, Campbell Ave. and Washtenaw Ave.; some concrete work on the pavement and the refurbishing of trees.

The Paseo Boricua Flags were dedicated on January 6, 1995, the occasion of *Día de Los Reyes Magos*, or the Feast of Three Kings when Christmas is traditionally celebrated in Puerto Rico with the exchange of gifts. The installation represented a new chapter for the community—a “marker” that slowed down gentrification, brought hope and much needed economic and community development into these inner-city blocks. The choice of the Puerto Rican flag as the symbol design grew from listening to community leaders and residents, reflecting the importance of community-driven design.

Within a year of the completion flag gateways, the stretch of Division Street locally known as Paseo Boricua had quickly transformed. Sixteen new businesses opened in the first year, with a total of more than 90 businesses and organizations by the year 2000. The long history of Puerto Ricans in the Humboldt Park area was solidified and stabilized through several efforts but benefited especially from the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Section 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of Landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated “Criteria for Designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of historic design integrity. The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage

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.

- The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags represent the Puerto Rican presence and persistence in the City of Chicago, the state of Illinois and the United States—given that the Puerto Rican

flag is the most significant representation of the Puerto Rican identity and given that the original Puerto Rican flag was adopted by Puerto Ricans living in the United States in 1895.

- The steel structure of the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags represents three major aspects of Chicago's industrial production which Puerto Ricans participated in including steel, steel pipelines and welding.
- The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags were dedicated on January 6, 1995, marking the centennial of the Puerto Rican flag and celebrating the most important day of the Puerto Rican ritual calendar, Three Kings Day.
- The flags of Paseo Boricua make the area the only officially recognized Puerto Rican community in the United States and the welded-steel sculptures in the form of Puerto Rican flags serve as a community icon and a point of pride for the Puerto Rican community.
- Community-based placemaking infrastructure projects like the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags are significant in Chicago history because they reflect community history and civic pride.

Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The design of the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags successfully transforms rigid steel tubing and plate into a dynamic visual representation of flowing cloth; indeed, the Paseo Boricua Flags are the largest flags in the world that are not made of cloth.
- The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags exhibit exceptional craftsmanship in structural steel, including design, installation and fabrication with a high-level of execution in welding technique.

Criterion 7: Unique or Distinctive Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

- As towering symbols of the flag of Puerto Rico, long a symbol of Puerto Rican consciousness and self determination, the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags are a distinctive visual feature of the Humboldt Park neighborhood and a unique sculpture in Chicago.

The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags also meet the additional requirements for designation outlined in the *Community Streetscape Markers Context Statement* adopted by the Commission on March 7, 2019, which states the following:

- The design of the marker(s) must employ the use of symbolism or imagery that is significant and/or reflects a certain social, ethnic, or cultural group. The work does not only recognize a geographic place within the city (street, neighborhood, or community area).
- The community marker(s) must be visible from the public-right-of-way.

- The marker(s) is a work of original art and/or architectural designed by an artist or architect. It is not a stock piece, or an element comprised of prefabricated components.

Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.

The Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags possess a high degree of integrity. They remain in their original location and the setting of commercial buildings on Division Street which remains the heart of Chicago's Puerto Rican community as it was when the flags were dedicated. The exceptional design which renders steel into flowing cloth remains unchanged with the passage of time. Although nearly three decades have passed since their dedication, the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags remain an important symbol and point of pride for the Puerto Rican community and the City of Chicago as a whole.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered the most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All elevations of the two Paseo Boricua Gateway Flags.



The "Sea of Flags" mural is by Gamaliel Ramirez with help from Star Padilla, Luis Ortiz, Moncho, Melissa Cintron in Paseo Boricua shows the important symbolism of the Puerto Rican flag and its sculptural representation on Division Street. Credit: Chicago Tribune.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual building, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street, Room 905, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; web site: www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the final landmark designation ordinance as approved by City Council should be regarded as final.

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS

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