



To: Commission on Chicago Landmarks  
ccl@cityofchicago.org.

**Re: 600 N State Street (Medinah Temple)**

8/2/2022

Dear Commissioners,

We write regarding Permit Review Committee Draft Agenda Item 1, the requested permit for “Proposed adaptive reuse of historic building for temporary casino including in-kind signage replacement, installation of new interior and exterior security cameras, new interior partitions, and new rooftop mechanical equipment” at 600 N. Wabash (Medinah Temple). Our position is that the requested permit should be denied.

Completed in 1912 by architects Huehl & Schmid and recognized as a Chicago Landmark in 2001, the Medinah Temple is a uniquely American work of architecture. Combining local building techniques and materials with an over-the-top appropriation of Arabic architectural elements, ornament, and language, the Temple is a resplendent reminder of the role of Shriners in shaping turn-of-the-20th-century entertainment and culture in Chicago and the nation.

Preservation has long been recognized in both law and culture as providing public benefit. The Commission relies on this understanding of preservation for its mandate to protect and support Chicago Landmarks. While we recognize that adaptive reuse is necessary to preserve the Medinah Temple, we assert that such a use must be harmonious with the public benefit *of* preservation to warrant occupying a building that has benefitted *from* preservation.

Casinos have been repeatedly shown to have adverse effects on the communities in which they are located, with particular impacts on the most vulnerable. A 2019 study in the peer-reviewed journal *BMC Public Health*, “the Public Health Effects of Gambling” describes the financial harms of gambling—including extreme debt, bankruptcy, and



homelessness—as having been observed to be more common in “deprived areas and lower socioeconomic groups.” The study specifically identifies negative impacts on employment and interpersonal relationships caused by gambling, and observes increased criminality and policing costs within communities where casinos are located. A use with such negative impacts on the public cannot be understood as a “public benefit” and is therefore inappropriate as an adaptive reuse for a historic building.

We recognize that the decision to allow a casino in Chicago, and even the decision to place a “temporary casino” in a Chicago Landmark, are beyond the remit of the Commission. We ask, however, that you consider a ruling in this matter that asserts the principle of public benefit in preservation and deny the requested permit.

Yours Sincerely,

Elizabeth Blasius

Jonathan Solomon

Preservation Futures  
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1673  
Chicago, IL 60604  
[www.preservationfutures.com](http://www.preservationfutures.com)