

16 July 2026

Department of Buildings  
Room 900, City Hall  
City of Chicago  
121 North LaSalle Street  
Chicago IL 60602

Attn: Marlene Hopkins, Commissioner

via email: [DOBcommissioner@cityofchicago.org](mailto:DOBcommissioner@cityofchicago.org)

Re: 1838 North Lincoln Park West, Chicago

Dear Commissioner Hopkins:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and membership of the Old Town Triangle Association (OTTA), we are contacting you to express our strong concerns regarding the ongoing modifications at 1838 North Lincoln Park West, Chicago.

The OTTA is a non-profit neighborhood organization that has worked continuously for over seventy-five years to improve the conditions of life, work, recreation, health and safety in the historic Old Town District. As stewards of the District, we have worked closely with the Historic Preservation Division of the Department of Planning and Development, as well as the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, to preserve the integrity of Chicago's historic buildings.

The building in question is one of the principal structures that contributed to the establishment of the Old Town Historic District. Started in 1871 and completed in 1874, it was one of the earliest buildings to follow the Great Chicago Fire. Its original owner was Frederick Wacker, and his son, Charles Wacker, lived in the home thereafter. Charles Wacker was the youngest director of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and chaired the Chicago Plan Commission for seventeen years. He also co-authored the Chicago Plan in 1909 with Daniel Burnham. Chicago's Wacker Drive is named for him.

Our concerns are quite simple:

- Protecting the health and safety of the community
- Ensuring compliance with laws/ordinances protecting designated historic structures

While the OTTA respects homeowners' rights to make changes to their property, those changes must comply with the City of Chicago's landmark ordinance requirements governing the Old Town Triangle Historic District, as well as any applicable guidelines under the National Register of Historic Places. Above all, OTTA is committed to mitigating any health impacts to our neighbors in the community that have resulted from the unlawful destruction of protected historic structures.

We request your review of the history of this situation and assistance in the enforcement of all relevant historic, landmark, and statutory regulations. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,  
Old Town Triangle Association



Raymond S. Clark  
President

Cc: Timothy Knudsen, Alderman, 43<sup>rd</sup> Ward      via email: [yourvoice@ward43.org](mailto:yourvoice@ward43.org)  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks      via email: [landmarks@cityofchicago.org](mailto:landmarks@cityofchicago.org)

Attachments:

- Significance of the Wacker House, prepared by the OTTA Historic District, Planning & Zoning Committee (HDPZ)
- 1838 North Lincoln Park West, Detailed Incident Timeline
- Letter from Neighbor, John Brannen, 1842 North Lincoln Park West

## **Significance of the Wacker House, 1838 N Lincoln Park West (HDPZ Statement)**

### **History**

An up and coming brewer in Chicago, German immigrant Frederick Wacker moved his family to 714 Franklin (today's 1838 Lincoln Park West) in about 1870. The next year their home burned during the Great Chicago Fire, but by 1874 the Wackers had rebuilt a fanciful, brick and frame Swiss-chalet style home that survives on the lot today. The family also built and owned the house to the south, 1836 Lincoln Park West.

Wacker died in July of 1884, three months after his beloved wife Katerina passed. Their son Charles became president of the family brewing company. Charles would go on to be one of the youngest directors of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and Chair of the Chicago Plan Commission for seventeen years. Chicago's Wacker Drive is named after him.

Charles sold the family home in 1897. Since then, the house has been carefully tended by subsequent owners, becoming a prominent historic icon of the Old Town Triangle Historic District. The City of Chicago gave the building protected landmark status in 1977, along with most other buildings in the Triangle, and it has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1984.

### **Status in the neighborhood**

There are several buildings within the Old Town Triangle District which could vie for the title of most important, but none are as visually arresting as 1838 N Lincoln Park West. More ornate than its sister building at 1836, the two bookend equally significant row houses designed by Louis Sullivan, providing a focal point of notable 19th Century architecture on one of the Old Town Triangle's most iconic streetscapes. The house at 1838 is well-known; it is cherished by residents and admired by passers by. It would be difficult to imagine the historic district without this building.

### **Threats**

Unfortunately, this unique and priceless house is being threatened from within. The current owner has chosen to flagrantly disregard Chicago's Landmark Guidelines and recklessly altered the building. (See photos) While there has been non-permitted work done in the rear of the building and its coach house, the most egregious alterations have been clearly visible in the front. The owner has sloppily replaced historic portions of the entry staircase with irregular tree sections. These changes obviously are wildly inappropriate, but some people have assumed them to be a whimsical, legitimate artistic statement. Most gallingly, visitors to this year's Old

Town Art Fair stopped to view and photograph the building as if it was on display, being treated to see the owner “working” on the stairs that Sunday.

The greatest threat to the building, however, is the fact that the owner stripped all the paint from the exterior wood three years ago, and shows no intent to repaint. The wood is very likely midwestern-sourced pine, which is prone both to rot and deterioration from UV radiation. Many of the decorative carvings adorning the building will soon be destroyed due to exposure to the elements. There will be significant expense and difficulty of recreating such features.

It is difficult to assess what future work may be accomplished by the owner, but his ambition clearly shows no limit. The fence at the front of the property is historic, and was already repaired by a previous owner. We must assume that is at risk, as well as any of the woodwork still on the building. The owner has been observed to throw historic items in the trash once he’s replaced them, which once again adds to the difficulty of restoration.

1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline  
As of June 17, 2026

## Executive Summary

The dispute between the Case family (1836 N. Lincoln Park West) and Michael/Amelia Gancarz (1838 N. Lincoln Park West) spans approximately four years and centers on repeated construction and renovation activities that the Cases contend have caused property damage, environmental contamination, safety hazards, trespass incidents, and violations of City of Chicago building requirements.

The matter began in 2022 with exterior renovation work and escalated significantly in 2023 during the removal of lead-based paint from the Gancarz residence. According to complaints made to the City of Chicago and later reflected in a 2024 attorney demand letter, the lead-paint removal allegedly contaminated the Case property and resulted in elevated blood-lead levels in the Cases' young daughter. The dispute led to involvement by the Chicago Department of Public Health, a City stop-work order in December 2023, attorney involvement, and an alleged EPA investigation.

In 2025, the dispute expanded beyond lead contamination and focused on extensive modifications to the carriage house/garage roof, including the creation of a roof-deck-like structure, installation of large trees and containers, construction of a rooftop brick wall, multiple complaints to the Department of Buildings (DOB), alleged trespassing incidents, police reports, and two stop-work orders issued in June 2025.

Construction activity allegedly continued into 2026, including excavation work in the front yard, additional City warnings, and ongoing modifications to the exterior of the historic property.

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## COMPREHENSIVE TIMELINE

### Summer 2022

#### Exterior Renovation Begins

- Gancarz family removes aluminum siding and insulation from exterior of historic home.
- No barrier erected between properties.
- Construction debris and nails accumulate in shared gangway.

## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

### **Paint Overspray Incident**

- Michael Gancarz spray-paints portions of house.
  - Paint blows onto Case residence and porch.
  - Cases hire contractor to repair damage.
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### **Winter 2022–2023**

#### **Construction Largely Pauses**

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### **Spring 2023**

#### **Lead Paint Removal Begins**

- Workers begin removing lead paint from exterior.
- Dry sanding allegedly performed without proper containment.
- Lead dust reportedly migrates onto:
  - Front porch
  - Yard
  - Gangway
  - Patio
  - Window AC unit serving infant daughter's bedroom

#### **Public Health Complaint**

- Cases contact Chicago Department of Public Health.
  - Inspector confirms lead paint.
  - Workers instructed regarding lead-abatement requirements.
  - Dry sanding reportedly ceases.
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## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

### Summer 2023

#### Chemical Paint Removal

- Workers switch to chemical stripping paste.
- Cases report:
  - Unauthorized use of water spigots.
  - Paste splatter on home and porch.
  - Landscaping damage.
  - Lead-paint debris on property.

### June 2023

- Cases begin repeatedly warning Gancarz family regarding contamination concerns.
  - Written and verbal objections documented.
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### August 2023

#### Cherry Picker Introduced

- 85-foot cherry picker arrives.
- Contractor later leaves project.
- Michael reportedly begins operating equipment himself.

#### Reported Incidents

- Damage to parkway bricks.
  - Dislodged sewer cover.
  - Equipment operated over neighboring property.
  - Traffic obstruction.
  - Collision with porch.
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## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

**August 26, 2023**

### **Police Incident #3G398754**

- Power washing operation spreads debris onto neighboring property.
  - Verbal confrontation occurs.
  - Police respond.
  - Matter classified as civil.
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**September 2, 2023**

### **Tarp / Trespass Incident**

Despite prior written objections:

- Tarp attached to Case home.
- Gutter and siding allegedly damaged.
- Police respond.

Police Report:

- RD No. JG408248
  - IUCR 5091
- 

**November 2023**

### **Child Blood Lead Test Results**

- Cases learn daughter's blood-lead level is 7.9 µg/dL.
- Level exceeds CDC intervention threshold.

### **Environmental Testing**

Testing reportedly finds:

- Soil lead concentration of approximately 34,000 mg/kg adjacent to Gancarz property.
- Elevated lead levels inside Case residence.
- Contamination detected near daughter's bedroom air-conditioning unit.

## **December 7, 2023**

### **City Stop-Work Order**

- City of Chicago issues stop-work order related to lead-paint project.
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## **Early 2024**

### **Remediation Planning**

- Cases retain environmental professionals.
- Remediation costs estimated at approximately \$275,000.

### **EPA Investigation**

- Attorneys later state EPA is investigating project.
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## **April 22, 2024**

### **Alleged Continued Work**

- Attorneys later allege construction continued despite stop-work order.
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## **May 2024**

### **Attorney Demand Letter Issued**

- Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP issues formal demand.
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## **2025 COACH HOUSE / ROOF DECK DISPUTE**

### **Approximately June 2, 2025**

### **Front Yard Demolition**

- Historic brick reportedly removed.
- Concrete broken apart using sledgehammer.
- Approximately eight large trees installed.

## **June 8, 2025**

### **Warning to Amelia Gancarz**

- Liz Case sends photographs showing:
    - Containers on roof.
    - Young daughter on roof area.
  - Concerns raised regarding:
    - Lack of guardrails.
    - Lack of sidewalls.
    - Ladder-only access.
- 

## **June 11, 2025**

### **Complaint Filed with DOB**

- Email sent to Commissioner Hopkins and DOB leadership.
- Requests inspection and intervention.

### **Warning to Michael**

- Cases demand removal of rooftop containers.
  - Warn containers could fall onto neighboring patio and injure family members.
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## **June 14–15, 2025**

### **Rooftop Brick Wall Construction**

- Day laborers construct brick wall around perimeter of carriage house roof.
  - Work documented by photographs.
  - Cases unable to locate permit authorizing work.
-

## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

**June 16–17, 2025**

### **Continued Roof Construction**

- Brick wall covered with plywood and artificial turf.
  - Additional complaints submitted to DOB.
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**June 18, 2025**

### **Turf Blown Onto Neighboring Property**

- Artificial turf reportedly blows from roof.
- Lands on:
  - Case vehicle.
  - Case patio.

### **Alleged Trespass**

- Michael allegedly enters Case property without permission to retrieve materials.
- Ring camera footage reportedly captures incident.
- Neighboring video reportedly captures fence crossing.

### **Additional DOB Complaint**

- Cases request stop-work order covering entire property.
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**June 19, 2025**

### **Alleged Criminal Trespass**

- Michael allegedly again enters neighboring property.
- Incident documented through Ring/Nest footage.

Police Report:

- JJ 305151
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## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

### June 20, 2025

#### Second Stop-Work Order Issued

- Carl Byrd issues stop-work orders on:
  - Front gate.
  - Garage / coach house.

#### Removal of Notices

- Cases report notices removed shortly thereafter.
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### June 21–22, 2025

#### Continued Construction Despite Orders

- Crew of approximately 8–10 laborers reportedly continues work.
- Brick wall construction continues.

#### Police Response

Incident Number:

- CPD 2517205972
- 

### June 23, 2025

#### Third Stop-Work Order Issued

- Replacement notices posted on gate and garage.

#### Enforcement Questions Raised

- Cases request clarification regarding:
    - Enforcement authority.
    - Penalties for removing notices.
    - Building-code accountability.
-

## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

**September 5, 2025**

### **Public Social Media Tour**

- Michael provides tour of property to Chicago historian/TikTok creator (@YouShouldEat ((Jennifer))).
  - Renovation and construction work discussed publicly.
  - Video may document condition of property at that time.
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## **2026 EVENTS**

**May 25, 2026**

### **Continued Excavation**

- Excavation reportedly continues in front yard.
  - Additional brick and foundation-related work observed.
  - Concerns raised regarding disposal of construction materials.
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**May 26, 2026**

### **City Warning Issued**

- City reportedly issues warning related to construction activity.
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**Early June 2026**

### **New Exterior Modifications**

- Michael begins installing:
  - Large tree-ring sections.
  - Large wood slabs.
  - Additional decorative/structural elements around porch and balcony.

### **Nighttime Construction**

- Work reportedly performed personally by Michael during evening hours.
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**June 16, 2026**

**Evening Construction Activity Observed**

- Michael observed working from approximately:
    - 6:00 PM until 10:00 PM.
  - Work involved ongoing modifications to porch and balcony areas.
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## Major Themes Across the Timeline

**Environmental / Health Issues**

- Lead-paint removal.
- Soil contamination.
- Indoor contamination.
- Elevated blood-lead levels in child.
- Public Health and EPA involvement.

**Property Damage**

- Paint overspray.
- Landscaping damage.
- Paste contamination.
- Gutter, siding, and masonry damage.
- Debris migration onto neighboring property.

**Safety Concerns**

- Cherry picker operation.
- Roof-deck construction.
- Lack of guardrails.
- Ladder-only access.
- Rooftop trees and containers.
- Falling materials.

## 1838 North Lincoln Park West – Detailed Incident Timeline

As of June 17, 2026

### **Trespass Allegations**

- Repeated access to neighboring property.
- Tarp installation.
- Retrieval of rooftop materials.
- June 2025 fence-crossing incidents.

### **Government Enforcement**

- CDPH inspection (2023).
- Stop-work order (December 2023).
- DOB complaints (June 2025).
- Stop-work orders (June 20 and June 23, 2025).
- City warning (May 2026).

## Evidence Inventory

The chronology references:

- Text messages.
- Emails.
- Photographs.
- Ring/Nest video footage.
- Witness testimony.
- Police reports.
- DOB correspondence.
- Attorney demand letter.
- Public social-media videos.
- Environmental testing reports.

After my dear sister Debbie passed away in 2020, I decided to move into her row house at 1842 N Lincoln Park West in 2022. We grew up in La Grange and I was tired of the big house and very much looking forward to scaling down into a manageable city home.

I have known Michael Warnick and Ann Holmberg since 1995 so it already felt like home to me and not a complete stranger to the neighborhood.

Upon moving into the home, there was constant "power washing" starting very early in the morning lasting until dark. Michael and I would laugh about it, it was a constant annoying drone that became "white noise" that we eventually became used to it.

I didn't realize what was happening, but I remember seeing a white coating on my windows and plants in the front and back yard. This slurry came from the day workers power washing the lead paint off the house at 1838 N LPW. The white slurry was so bad that in the Fall of 2023 I was actually kneeling in my yard wiping off the lead coating from the leaves of the plants in my yard. My rose bush stopped blooming and this Spring I was pleasantly surprised to see rose blossoms appear for the first time in 4 years.

I also had my windows professionally washed because I couldn't see through the glass, it was so full of the white slurry and had dried to a haze.

Mike Gancarz saw that the back yard was full of the white slurry and offered to have his day workers clean the pavers and bricks. After they left for the day, I noticed they accidentally broke my Sigwirth Glass Garden Orb that I purchased at the Old Town Art Fair. I mentioned that to him and he said he would reimburse me, I have yet to be recompensed for the broken garden globe.

I try to be a good neighbor and definitely live by the "Golden Rule" to "love your neighbor as you love yourself." Mike eventually agreed to pay for the broken garden globe last year and I was so happy to hear that, I promised I would bring him a cherry pie from Michigan. Around Thanksgiving I brought him the pie, and I am still waiting for the reimbursement check.

This is basically all the firsthand information I have. If Mike Gancarz is having a problem, I would be willing to help him out.

It really is disturbing to the neighborhood to see such a grand iconic building deteriorate.

Sincerely,

John Brannen  
1842 N Lincoln Park West