

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Hart, Philip A., PlazaOther names/site number: Civic Center Plaza

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 1 Hart PlazaCity or town: Detroit State: MI County: WayneNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national   X   statewide      local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

  X   A      B   X   C      D

SHPO

July 17, 2024

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title :

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

*Lisa Deline*

8/30/2024

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☒

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Site	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Object	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	objects
<u>11</u>	<u>6</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

---

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

---

---

---

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

---

---

---



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

---

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE, GRANITE, METAL:  
Steel/Stainless, METAL: Aluminum

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

### Summary Paragraph

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit, Michigan, on the banks of the Detroit River. Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974 and dedicated in 1979, the park displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements to a planned spatial design. Its major contributing features include a surface level broken into three somewhat distinct plaza structures and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, the *Pylon* sculpture, a sunken oval amphitheater and a pyramidal amphitheater, the central Dodge Memorial Fountain, several smaller sculptural pieces, and a series of intentional views and vistas that lead to and from the individual elements toward the adjoining Detroit River and surrounding landmarks. The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as events such as concerts and festivals. Despite the introduction of a few additional sculptures, a recent pavement replacement project and other small changes, the property retains historic integrity to its original Noguchi design and the period of significance.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

---

## Narrative Description

### *Methodology*

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a complex collection of buildings, structures, and objects contained within a single surface and subsurface property. A cultural landscape methodology has been applied to documenting and evaluating the plaza property. This approach is based upon *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, and additional federal documentation that addresses the evaluation of historic landscapes, including: *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and other pertinent documents.<sup>1</sup> The process included building a foundation of historical information as a basis for understanding the evolution of the significant landscape, documenting existing conditions, and analyzing landscape integrity.

Within Hart Plaza, the pertinent landscape characteristics are assessed. Landscape characteristics include tangible and intangible aspects of a landscape from the historic periods; these aspects individually and collectively give a landscape its historic character and aid in the understanding of its cultural importance. Each characteristic is described and then its integrity is assessed. An overall assessment of the historic integrity of the Hart Plaza property concludes this section.

Because this nomination uses a cultural landscape approach, which considers the entire Hart Plaza landscape as a single property, landscape characteristics and small-scale features are described as important aspects of the contributing landscape but are not counted individually. Major buildings, structures, and objects are counted and identified within the relevant descriptions in the sections that follow.

### *Overview*

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit, Michigan, on the banks of the Detroit River. The park is situated at the southern terminus of Woodward Avenue in the commercial core of the city between the contemporary landmarks of the remodeled Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and Renaissance Center to the east and the Huntington Place (until recently

---

<sup>1</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, Robert Z. Melnick, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1989, revised 1999); Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), and Charles A. Birnbaum and Christine Capella Peters, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 3-5.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

known as Cobo Hall, and referred to with its historical name in this nomination) convention center to the west. The plaza's origins lie in early twentieth century plans to develop a civic center where Woodward Avenue meets the Detroit River. Principal components of the contemporary civic center include Hart Plaza, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (formerly the City-County Building), and Cobo Hall.

Hart Plaza lies between Jefferson Avenue to the north, an open lot formerly the site of the Henry and Edsel Ford Memorial Auditorium (demolished 2011) to the east, the Detroit River to the south, and the United Auto Workers-Ford National Programs Center building (commonly the UAW-Ford Center, formerly Veterans' Memorial Building) to the west. The park is oriented with the city grid from north-northwest to south-southeast, although this form simplifies descriptions and graphics to cardinal directions.

The park generally consists of a surface level plaza (made up of three contributing plaza structures) and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, all of which contain numerous, discreet spaces and prominent features. The upper plaza includes a street level promenade with the *Pylon* obelisk, Martin Luther King Jr. monument, and *Transcending* (the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark), a landscape installation featuring an arch sculpture; a large central plaza centered on the *Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain)*, a supported metal ring that drops water and its related features, and the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, surrounded by the plaza transitional area including the Lincoln Garden (a pre-existing green space associated with the Veterans' Memorial Building and incorporated into the plaza), vegetated slopes, seating nodes, and a pyramidal amphitheater; a sub plaza beneath with an open-air amphitheater, underground theater, loading dock, and interior rooms; and the riverbank area with wide steps, a spiral sculpture, vegetated slopes, *Gateway to Freedom* (the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad), and a riverside walk. Aside from the *Transcending* landscape installation, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, Lincoln Bust, *Gateway to Freedom*, and Martin Luther King Jr., the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, with construction generally completed in 1979, the plaza displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. The plaza is mostly open to the sky and slopes toward the river. Convex and concave shapes join across the ground plane. From the street level to the center, primary spatial relationships are reinforced by large artistic elements including the *Pylon* obelisk and the *Dodge Fountain*. From the central plaza to the south, primary views are directed at and across the river to the waterfront of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The multilevel plaza is primarily composed of raw and tinted concrete and remaining, original red and black flecked granite surfaces that are framed by lawn with deciduous trees, giving it a decidedly park-like feel.

The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. Most of these activities occur on the surface plaza level. The sub plaza spaces are currently used for performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance. With the construction of the Detroit RiverWalk over the past fifteen years, the Hart Plaza sidewalk directly fronting the river is now an active link in a larger series of parks and public spaces providing access to the Detroit River.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

### *Landscape Characteristics*

#### **Natural Systems and Features**

The natural systems that have influenced the development and physical form of Hart Plaza are strongly related to its urban setting. Natural factors include the riverbank location, urban soils, hydrology as it relates to local drainage toward the river, open exposure, orientation north to south, and prevailing winds from the west. While Hart Plaza aligns with the existing river edge on the south, the plaza does not reflect the historic, natural river boundary, which was modified as dictated by the commercial needs of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Limited overhead cover by trees and other features results in a plaza environment that reveals the day and night sky and weather conditions.

As designed, three terraces with transitional, constructed slopes define the topography of the park: the upper terrace is level with Jefferson Avenue; the central plaza makes up the middle terrace; and the riverbank area along the Detroit River makes up the lower terrace. The south-facing slope of the site is constructed on fill soils. The weight of park elements and live loads from event machinery and attendance occasionally result in areas of slope failure in the riverbank area.

#### *Natural Systems and Features Integrity Assessment*

The natural systems and features associated with this property remain pervasive and persistent, retaining integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association.

#### **Spatial Organization**

The organization of physical forms and visual associations that define and create spaces at Hart Plaza are predicated on the spatial relationships between the park, the Detroit River, and the sky. These intentional relationships are orchestrated through the design of Hart Plaza. The location of the park on the waterfront connects the city to the water. The largely open plane of the plaza provides exposure to the sky, while vertical elements direct further attention upward. General alignments within the park emphasize these relationships with major features. The trajectory of Woodward Avenue aligns to the *Pylon* obelisk on the Jefferson Promenade. The *Pylon*, located along Jefferson Avenue, is placed at the north entrance of the plaza and centered on the axis of Woodward Avenue, reinforcing the strength and significance of Detroit's main thoroughfare (Photo 0001). It serves as a fulcrum for the diagonal axis leading down a sloped walk to the *Dodge Fountain* in the center of the plaza. The alignment between the *Pylon* and the *Dodge Fountain* continues down wide steps to the waterfront (Photos 0018, 0039). The two primary elements, *Dodge Fountain* and the *Pylon*, are fundamental to determining relationships between other features and spaces in the plaza.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

The park consists of four divisions that contain individual areas and features. The main spatial divisions are given descriptive names and include upper plaza, central plaza with surrounding plaza transition, sub plaza, and riverbank (refer to the Resource Map diagram).

The upper plaza is a rectangular shaped area parallel to Jefferson Avenue. The main spatial components of this area include two original features and one recent introduction. Built between 1966 and 1973, the Jefferson Promenade is a wide walk south of and parallel to the Jefferson sidewalk with rectangular pavement panels with trees (Photos 0009, 0010, 0012). The *Pylon* obelisk rises from the east end of the Jefferson Promenade (Photos 0013). Added in 2003, *Transcending*, a landscape installation featuring a 63-foot, incomplete steel ring sculpture, rises from an elevated plaza with numerous elaborated boulders near the foot of Griswold Street.

The roughly circular central plaza forms the core of Hart Plaza and includes several features. The *Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain)* marks the center of the space, surrounded by a shallow bowl of granite pavers. A cubist water sculpture, a square-shaped resource made up of multiple stone cubes, is located directly north of the *Dodge Fountain*. The plaza surface itself consists of mostly level concrete paving. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, a life-size statue with two historical markers, is located in a raised planting bed east of the *Dodge Fountain*. The central plaza and the surrounding plaza transition are located at roughly the same elevation (Photo 0034).

The plaza transition consists of a wide and irregularly crescent-shaped slope between the upper plaza and central plaza areas. It contains the upper slopes, the pyramid amphitheater, and the Lincoln Garden. The upper slopes with paths include planters, lawn, and east and west seating nodes that are referred to as “interludes” on plans. The amphitheater, also known as “pyramid stage” and “ziggurat,” is a square-based pyramid with stepped seating that descends to a sunken stage in the southeast corner of park, perpendicular to the diagonal axis from *Pylon* to *Dodge Fountain*. The seating faces the park and city to the north while the stage faces south.

The Lincoln Garden is a small, formal courtyard adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center in the northwest corner of the park that was incorporated into the design of Hart Plaza. The current garden is approximately eighty-three feet from east to west and ninety-six feet from north to south (7,968 square feet). Constructed around 1950 in conjunction with the building, the green space originally formed a rectangle extending from the crook of the L-shaped building to the present edge of Jefferson Avenue. Prior to the expansion of Jefferson Avenue in the late 1950s, this space abutted a rectangular lawn panel that was parallel to the roadway. Through the 1960s, the approximately ninety-eight-foot by two-hundred-and-sixty-five-foot (25,970 square feet) garden area formed a sunken green space that was separated by retaining walls from the upper, entry level of the building to the west and a lower parking lot to the east in what became the core of Hart Plaza. The garden consisted of a rectangular lawn panel bordered by a walkway with a series of niches with benches facing the building along the eastern edge of the park. The garden was reduced to its current dimensions by 1973 during construction of the upper plaza. Identified on Noguchi’s plans as “existing garden,” the green space became referred to as the “Lincoln Garden” after placement of a bust of President Abraham Lincoln in the central lawn panel of the garden in 1986 (Photo 0013).

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

The sub plaza lies under the slopes of the plaza transition and connects to the main amphitheater, which is functionally, structurally, and visually incorporated into the underground spaces. The approximately two acres of subterranean spaces are either walled into rooms or unenclosed chambers and corridors. Ducts for ventilation and illumination were constructed as bulkheads in tall concrete or metal cylinders. Walls are primarily concrete slab with some outer rooms featuring glass walls and windows. The main spatial components include the plaza's main amphitheater, an underground kitchen, a loading dock and access drive, and several interior rooms. The open-air amphitheater is the main performance space oriented such that the audience faces northwest toward the city and the performance space faces southeast toward the *Dodge Fountain*. A variety of interior rooms within the sub plaza support performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance (Photos 0015, 0017).

The riverbank is a generally linear zone oriented toward the Detroit River. This area includes several main features including riverbank steps, a spiral seating sculpture, the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture, lower slopes, and a riverside walk. The riverbank steps are roughly on axis with the *Dodge Fountain* and the *Pylon*. Roughly eighty-five feet wide, the steps connect a sloped walking surface to the river's edge. The spiral seating sculpture is a concrete form wrapped around a ventilation shaft located on the steps slightly west of the axis between the *Dodge Fountain* and the *Pylon*. The *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture and plaques are located at the base of the steps. East and west of the steps are the lower slopes that consist of trees over turf descending toward the river. The riverside walk is a pedestrian corridor along the river within Hart Plaza. It is a segment of a longer route known as the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza and the three-and-one-half-mile RiverWalk are part of the Detroit International Riverfront, a zone of connected green spaces and attractions that is spurring development along the riverfront and facilitating community access to the water (Photo 0048).

### *Spatial Organization Integrity Assessment*

The historic spatial organization associated with Hart Plaza is largely intact. The four basic divisions of the park remain from design and construction. Aside from the *Transcending*, Cadillac, and *Gateway to Freedom* installations, the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Spatial relationships between major landscape features remain with only minor alterations in setting due to the removal of the Ford Auditorium east of the park and in materials and design due to the placement of *Transcending*, the largest non-Noguchi sculpture. In alignment with the *Dodge Fountain*, the tall steel ring on the Jefferson Avenue streetscape of the Upper Plaza introduces a non-historic, prominent feature that affects the integrity of the site. The feature contributes to the fragmentation of the green lawn with trees that was originally installed along Jefferson Avenue and once balanced the hard surfaces of the streetscape at the edge of the plaza. Despite these effects, the presence of all major historic features reduces the intrusive nature of the new feature. Overall, the spatial organization of the park demonstrates integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

## Land Use

The principal human uses of Hart Plaza include planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, seasonal office use, and informal habitation. The park exists to provide year-round and event-based outdoor recreational space in the city. Passive recreation includes pedestrian activities such as walking, sitting, reading, playing music, observing the riverfront, looking at and playing on sculptures and other park features. The amphitheater is designed for winter conversion into an ice rink but no longer provides this function.

Planned events held in the park include musical and ethnic festivals with a capacity of 40,000 participants. Events make use of the above ground park and the sub plaza. Heavy weight loads associated with event staging and use have damaged paving (evinced by cracked pavers) and exacerbate subsidence on the riverbank.

The park is also used as a through-route that channels pedestrian and bicycle movement from the city center to destinations along the river via the RiverWalk. The Hart Plaza surface functions as a bridge over Atwater Street, which connects between Bates Street and Civic Center Drive from east to west. An access drive on the west side of the park connects to loading docks of the sub plaza and the United Auto Workers-Ford Center receiving area.

The sub plaza interior spaces have transitional habitation. Interior rooms provide seasonal office space for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Detroit Police Department north of the amphitheater and south of the pyramid amphitheater. Partially enclosed spaces within the sub plaza provide informal shelter to a small number of people. Common social and sanitary issues associated with informal settlement in parks conflict with intended park uses.

### *Land Use Integrity Assessment*

Land uses of Hart Plaza reflect continuity and change. The plaza continues to be used for planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, and offices, but demonstrate aspects of change. Office occupation is now seasonal. Also, the removal of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) from the Ford Auditorium in 1989 (and demolition of the venue in 2011) reduced the use of the park amphitheater for concerts by the DSO. Similarly, the generally poor condition of the sub plaza spaces has reduced the use of this part of the park for planned events and eliminated the seasonal skating rink. The frequent non-historic use of the park for informal habitation by a transient population does not reflect the design intent. These alterations have reduced integrity for the aspect of feeling.

## Circulation and Paving

Hart Plaza is centrally located in relation to the city transportation grid and major circulation conduits including Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. Within the park, systems of movement include vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and riverine systems of movement.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Vehicular access within the park includes park frontage for drop off along Jefferson Avenue to the north and the Hart Plaza Access Drive to the sub plaza loading dock from the west. Parking is available to the north and east. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Garage (under Jefferson Avenue north of Hart Plaza) has an entrance/egress portal building on the surface at the northeast corner of Hart Plaza. Offsite parking occurs in a gravel lot east of Hart Plaza and south of Atwater Street and in a gravel lot north of Atwater Street on the site of the former Ford Auditorium. Atwater Street forms a through route beneath Hart Plaza via the Atwater Tunnel.

Pedestrian circulation consists of through routes and internal routes. The sidewalk along Jefferson Avenue, access walks to the UAW-Ford Center from the Lincoln Garden, and the RiverWalk provide connections to points outside of the plaza. Internal routes can be described by the primary spatial divisions. The upper plaza includes the Jefferson Promenade and walk east of *Pylon* aligned to the entrance to Mariners' Church. The central plaza has generally open paving, while the plaza transition area includes the main sloped walk, non-historic narrow curving walks, original straight walks between features and east and west interludes, and the pyramid amphitheater steps. The sub plaza contains amphitheater steps, steps between the Lincoln Garden and the lounge, steps north of the central plaza to the kitchen rooms, enclosed sub plaza walks and ramps, and a metal spiral staircase between the loading dock and fountain control room. The riverbank includes the RiverWalk and sloped transitional walks and steps.

Bicycle circulation is primarily associated with the segment of the RiverWalk, which has a connection to the Dequindre Cut Greenway, a popular bicycling route, to the east.

The riverine system of movement is located adjacent to the plaza. The *Detroit Princess* riverboat presently docks at the southwest edge of Hart Plaza, and commercial and recreational river traffic, including Great Lakes freighters and ocean-going "salties," pass by Hart Plaza on the Detroit River. The Detroit-Wayne County Port Authority Building sits along the river to the east of Hart Plaza and its dock welcomes passenger cruise vessels throughout the navigation season.

Paving surfaces form relatively level planes except for the shallow bowl-shaped depression surrounding the *Dodge Fountain*. Paved surfaces contain a wide variety of flush grates, drains, and utility covers.

Paving materials vary by purpose and location and consist of the following historic types:

- Historic, large carnelian granite pavers, four-foot square in size and finished with a parallel grooved surface texture (identified as "mellogroove" in construction documents) once delineated primary walkways in the central plaza and wrapped widely around the *Dodge Fountain* and highlighted the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the UAW-Ford Center. After a 2021 repaving project, these large pavers can now only be found only along the eastern and northern passageways along the pyramid amphitheater (Photo 0026);
- Historic, small carnelian granite paving setts six-inch square in size with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges once paved most walks of the plaza transition, provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater, and covered the sloped walks toward the



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

riverbank, and along the riverfront. In the 2021 repaving project, the pavers on the sloping primary passage from the upper plaza to the central plaza were removed, along with those that swept around the *Dodge Fountain* beyond the bowl and those sloping toward the river. They remain in the plaza transition side passageways and interludes (Photos 0023, 0024, 0025), on the southwest access ramp (Photo 0046), and in a trapezoidal shaped form at the extreme southeast corner of the property on the RiverWalk;

- Historic, variably sized carnelian granite pavers with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges decreasing from six inches in size under in a shallow bowl surrounding and beneath the *Dodge Fountain* (Photos 0036, 0037);
- Historic, variably sized granite pavers with dimensions greater than eight inches at the upper ring of the amphitheater;
- Historic, precast hexagonal concrete pavers throughout the sub plaza (Photos 0017, 0033);
- Historic six-inch low limestone curbs, forming edges of lawn panels of the upper plaza that predated the construction of Hart Plaza (Photo 0005).

Non-historic paving materials include poured concrete, concrete brick pavers, and stone tiles.

Non-historic concrete includes multiple types:

- Slab concrete poured to replace the large carnelian granite pavers along most primary walkways, including the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition, central plaza surrounding the shallow bowl of the *Dodge Fountain*, east-west axis, sloped surface toward *Gateway to Freedom* and the river, and the south and west passageways around the pyramid amphitheater (Photo 0039);
- Single surface concrete of platform of *Transcending* sculpture and for ice rink in center of amphitheater;
- Concrete with four-foot scoring between the central plaza and the riverbank, west of the pyramid amphitheater, at the performance level of the pyramid amphitheater, and surrounding the main amphitheater of the sub plaza;
- Concrete with square panels scored at a forty-five-degree angle, tinted light red that replaced non-historic concrete paving brick laid at in a herringbone pattern along the Jefferson Promenade to the west of *Pylon* (Photo 0010);
- Concrete sidewalk with six-foot scored panels of alternating dark and light gray surface treatment to create bands along the RiverWalk perpendicular to the river;
- Concrete paving and curbs, twelve inches wide and eight inches high, with red surface treatment at the upper ring of the amphitheater.

Non-historic concrete brick pavers occur in various locations throughout the plaza. Concrete brick in a basketweave pattern with gray colors occurs along the edges of the Jefferson Promenade and as bands in regular intervals between the red-tinted concrete sections. On the riverside walk below the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture, non-historic concrete brick pavers are laid in a stack bond pattern with light and dark gray colors and memorial donor names. Twelve-

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

foot square, non-historic stone tile is used as pavers at the base of *Transcending* north of the Jefferson Promenade.

A significant project in 2021 and 2202 replaced more than 50 percent of paving materials across the surface level of the plaza, removing both historic and non-historic pavements and replacing them with new material largely due to deteriorated conditions. Nearly all the historic large carnelian granite pavers were replaced with poured concrete, as were several sections of smaller carnelian granite pavers on primary walkways. The visual impression of Noguchi's original paving pattern ringing the shallow bowl beneath the *Dodge Fountain* is maintained with the use of red-tinted concrete outlining the same dimensions and form. All previously in-place pavement borders remain unchanged. As part of this effort, the Circular Depression, an original Noguchi-designed object to the west of the *Dodge Fountain*, was eliminated and replaced with level concrete and no longer exists.

### *Circulation and Paving Integrity Assessment*

Circulation and paving features associated with Hart Plaza demonstrate limited historic integrity. Historic routes persist with only one area of introduced pathways in the plaza transition north of the amphitheater. Due to deteriorated conditions, substantial areas of the central plaza and upper plaza and the rectilinear walks of the plaza transition were recently repaved with non-historic new materials that do not match the Noguchi-designed originals. Pavement routes and boundaries are generally unchanged from the Noguchi design. The condition of remaining historic paving on the paths of the plaza transition, in the bowl of the *Dodge Fountain* and on granite steps is fair to good. Generally good condition, non-historic paving is found throughout the upper plaza and riverbank and on the curving walks of the plaza transition. Some of the Noguchi-designed concrete features, particularly the pyramid amphitheater, show deteriorated conditions of original materials. Replacement materials in the central plaza reflect the historic design intent. Remaining Noguchi-specified pavement remains in fair to good condition. Overall, the integrity of circulation and paving is compromised. Specifically, circulation and paving features reflect integrity of location, design, and feeling.

### **Vegetation**

Vegetation of Hart Plaza consists of historic and non-historic deciduous and evergreen trees over turf, evergreen shrubs, and herbaceous flowering plants in the beds of the Lincoln Garden. Vegetation can be described by area:

Upper plaza vegetation includes two, asymmetrical rectangular lawn panels, separated by a concrete walkway, that Noguchi had designed to contain a grid of Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) trees. The smaller of the panels, to the northeast contained twenty-eight trees in rows of four and columns of seven. The large of the panels, to the southwest, contained sixty-four trees in rows of four and columns of sixteen. Since the opening of the plaza, however, the original arrangement was interrupted by the installation of the *Transcending* sculpture, and the historical trees suffered from decline and removal. By 2002 the original grids had become incomplete, and by 2022 less than 50 percent of the original trees remained from the block

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

planted between 1966 and 1973. Historically, the planter contained rows five trees wide from north to south and was stylistically incorporated by Noguchi into the design of Hart Plaza by the inclusion of a now-removed, single row of Norway maple along the south side of the Jefferson Promenade. These and all existing Norway maple are free-growing but design documents specify that they were intended to be topped and tightly pruned into the shape of an inverted glass. Between 2022 and 2023, these remaining Norway maples, many of which were in poor health, were removed and replaced with new deciduous trees planted in two rows of twelve. The turf was replaced with finely crushed gravel. Although not matching the original Noguchi-specified grid of trees for this space, the new installation calls to mind the orderly arrangement originally planned by the designer. The upper plaza also contains a recently installed, narrow planting bed of day lilies along the western portion of the south side of the Jefferson Promenade above the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation of the transition area of the central plaza includes several lawn panels with trees. The northeast sloping lawn panel contains older, historic Norway maple and more recently planted northern hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) in a scattered pattern. The east raised lawn panels around the east interlude contain Norway maple and one American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) (Photo 0020). The raised panels east and west of the pyramid amphitheater are planted with Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). The central sloping lawn panel contains Norway maple and flowering cherry (*Prunus* sp.) adjacent to the angular walk. The northwest sloping lawn panel includes Norway maple, flowering cherry adjacent to the angular walk, crab apple (*Malus* sp.) near west steps to sub plaza, and dwarf beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) southwest of the amphitheater (Photo 0014). The west lawn panel includes Norway maple by the amphitheater, Austrian pine at the western boundary and crab apple at the west interlude. The west raised lawn panels around the west interlude contain crab apple (Photo 0042). The west sloping lawn panel south of the UAW-Ford Center contains alternating red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and little-leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*) on the north side, crab apple on the west and south sides, and a thirty-two-inch wide bed of rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*). The Lincoln Garden has four outer lawn panels and a central square lawn panel with roses (*Rosa* sp.), grasses, and other herbaceous perennial flowers.

The central plaza core contains little vegetation. One crab apple (*Malus*) tree grows in a raised lawn panel south of the Cadillac statue.

Riverbank vegetation includes sloping lawn panels with trees. The southeast sloping lawn contains northern hackberry, red maple, honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* 'inermis'), and little-leaf linden. The southwest sloping lawn panel has little-leaf linden, honey locust, elm (*Ulmus* sp.), and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). One ginkgo is identified with a small stone and plaque as the "1984 Peace Tree." The plaque indicates that the tree was presented by the Detroit Westown and Downtown Windsor Lioness Clubs, but no further information on the circumstances of its dedication were found, and it is not believed to be related to Noguchi's design. Crab apple and river birch (*Betula nigra*) are planted close to the RiverWalk. The west sloping lawn panels north and west of the angled access walk contain Austrian pine, crab apple, and river birch (Photo 0044). The eastern lawn panels north of the riverside walk contain river birch and crab apple.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Vegetation is absent from the sub plaza. Stumps and stems in planters remain by the steps east of the amphitheater. Offsite, one older crab apple remains directly east of Hart Plaza by the courtyard of the Ford Auditorium.

### *Vegetation Integrity Assessment*

At the overall level, the vegetation of Hart Plaza reflects a general, historic pattern of large canopy trees surrounding a hardscaped plaza with flowering crabapples toward the center and east and west edges formed by evergreen trees. Within this larger vegetation plan, aspects of the designed plantings are diminished. Replanting in recent decades includes both exotic and native trees, but neither conform to the historic design. Specific designed aspects of vegetation are absent from the park. Missing elements include the original grid of trees along Jefferson Avenue and the turf beneath them, the entire shrub and ground cover (understory layer) of plantings, and the controlled pruning of trees. Some individual, historic trees remain, but, because the overall, modern style of design used large groups of uniform species to create Noguchi's desired effect, the survival of individual specimens is not highly significant.

Individual instances of historic, extant vegetation include partially intact patterns of canopy trees in informal clusters throughout the plaza transition and the riverbank areas of the park.

Noguchi's intent that the river should be visible beneath the tree canopy overhead is maintained in some areas. Also, groupings of Austrian pine remain along the east and west edges of the plaza transition. Remaining historic trees pertain to a primarily non-native mixture including Norway maple, Austrian pine, various types of crab apple, and honey locust. Remaining crab apple trees remain around the central plaza, near the west interlude, and flanking the steps to the riverside walk.

### **Views and Vistas**

Hart Plaza affords numerous expansive views and controlled vistas that are predicated on individual landscape features. The strength of the Noguchi design for Hart Plaza is reflected in the persistence of these characteristic views, which include views to and from the plaza. Views of Hart Plaza from Woodward Avenue and surrounding streets focus on the *Pylon*. Other outside views of Hart Plaza are afforded by the multistory buildings along Jefferson Avenue and in the general area.

Places within Hart Plaza offer relatively expansive views to locations outside of the plaza. The Jefferson Promenade provides views of surrounding downtown skyscrapers. The view from the *Dodge Fountain* and central plaza reveals the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. Open views from the riverbank provide a panorama of the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront, and across the central plaza toward the downtown Detroit skyline toward the north (Photo 0039). In the sub plaza, views through partially enclosed spaces to areas with natural light include a large circular light well in the northwest part of the sub plaza, open staircases, the opening at the amphitheater performance level, and north and south side exits east toward the former Ford Auditorium and courtyard.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Characteristic, controlled vistas to individual features abound at Hart Plaza. These linear visual relationships include:

- The vista between the walk west of *Pylon* and the Mariners' Church entrance (Photo 0010, far distance);
- The vista from Jefferson Promenade to the bust of Abraham Lincoln;
- The vista through Jefferson Promenade to *Pylon* (Photo 0012);
- The vista between *Pylon* and the *Dodge Fountain* (Photo 0018);
- The vista between the *Dodge Fountain* and sculptural features including the spiral seating sculpture, pyramid amphitheater, cubist water sculpture, *Pylon*, and the *Transcending* sculpture;
- The vista between the east and west interludes and the *Dodge Fountain*; and
- The east-to-west sub plaza vistas that reinforce a linear range of vision between structural columns.

External vistas also exist between the central plaza and individual skyscrapers in the general area. Specific buildings with a visual relationship to the central plaza include One Woodward to north, the central tower of the Renaissance Center to the east, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Building to the northeast, and Crowne Plaza to the northwest. All of these adjacent buildings existed at the time of Hart Plaza's completion.

### *Views and Vistas Integrity Assessment*

Views and vistas associated with Hart Plaza are reliant on the upright, individual landscape features such as sculptures and other unique park features like the pyramid amphitheater. These Noguchi-designed features remain intact and enable views and vistas to demonstrate integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

### **Buildings and Structures**

The Hart Plaza landscape contains both surface and subsurface structures as the core built elements of the plaza's design, and individual buildings that shelter human activities.

Above ground buildings include the fountain control building (**one contributing building**) located in the corner of a raised lawn bed west of the *Dodge Fountain* and south of the main amphitheater and a Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building located at the northeast corner of the plaza along the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk. The fountain control building has concrete walls, a curved metal roof, and a row of narrow glass windows that view the fountain and the amphitheater. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building along Jefferson Avenue (**one contributing building**) has black granite, glass, and metal walls and a terraced metal roof over the steps and escalators that descend to the parking structure (Photo 0007).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> A Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building was constructed at the same time as Ford Auditorium during the initial phase of

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Three individual structures constitute the surface of Hart Plaza. These are generally in alignment with the spatial divisions highlighted in the spatial organization section of this document:

The upper plaza (**one contributing structure**) occupies the northern quarter of Hart Plaza and consists of the Jefferson Promenade, the rectangular panels to the immediate north, and the entry plaza surrounding *Pylon*. Although the Jefferson Promenade actually predates the construction of the rest of Hart Plaza, it was incorporated with slight modifications into Noguchi's overall plan for Hart Plaza, anchored at the east end by Noguchi's *Pylon*.

The central plaza (**one contributing structure**) occupies the center half of Hart Plaza and consists of the central plaza area surrounding the *Dodge Fountain*, and the plaza transition area that forms a roughly crescent-shaped surround to the north, east, and west. These two spaces together constitute the nucleus of the site and provide direct access to and from this nucleus generally at the same elevation. Despite changes in paving, Noguchi's patterns of use and original design intent is largely present.

The riverbank (**one contributing structure**) consists of the surface areas of the plaza lowest in elevation, closest to the Detroit River. This structure incorporates the RiverWalk paved pathway along the seawall and related pathways and greenspace panels that are all oriented toward the water.

The sub plaza is a single underground structure (**one contributing structure**) with a series of spaces and rooms occupied on a seasonal or as-needed basis. Materials include concrete slab and block walls, exposed or dropped grid ceilings with acoustic tiles, and floors of synthetic tile, carpet, or concrete. Most interior spaces are in poor condition. The exterior sub plaza spaces create corridors of covered movement between rooms.

The sub plaza includes the concrete amphitheater and a concrete block beverage booth with a circular, concrete block wall located east of the amphitheater and north of the kitchen rooms. Clockwise from the northwest, the sub plaza rooms include a warming room, a cafeteria, and office and support rooms. The warming room, formerly used by skaters in the winter and presently as a backstage area in the summer, contains restrooms and three-foot-high rectangular glass windows that face south toward the amphitheater and glass walls that face east toward the cafeteria. The cafeteria contains a kitchen, bathrooms, and a long, rectangular glassed-in lounge that faces south to the center of the amphitheater and west toward the back stage rooms. East of the cafeteria and north of the amphitheater, a cluster of rooms includes an event operations

---

the Civic Center development (1956). As a lesser component of Hart Plaza and located at its extreme fringe, the entry and egress building can be seen in very few archival photographs from available collections. Aerial imagery shows a building with a generally square shaped footprint existing on this site before Hart Plaza; available 1981 aerial imagery shows a building matching the existing footprint present, leading to the belief that the present building dates from the development of the Plaza and therefore falls within the period of significance as a contributing resource.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

office, a seasonally occupied office of the Detroit Police Department, a park operations office with camera control area, a maintenance and boiler room, and a seasonally occupied group of offices for the Department of Parks and Recreation. South of these rooms and across an underground corridor, the sub plaza contains a gallery room and a concessions area with twenty-six kitchen stalls. South of the loading docks are utility, maintenance, and storage rooms. A cluster of rooms farther south near the pyramid amphitheater include storage and changing rooms and restrooms. South of the Atwater Tunnel are utility rooms and an office of Detroit Police Department with an entrance on the RiverWalk pathway.

The convex and concave pyramid amphitheater (**one contributing structure**) is located in the southeast corner of the park. Reminiscent of Mesoamerican pyramids, the square-based structure is composed of a series of shallow steps with a small, rectangular room at the top (Photos 0027, 0029, 0030, 0032). Exposed materials above the plaza surface level are concrete and materials below that level are granite. The south end of the structure is a convex pyramid with seating that is integrated into an open-air stage on the north. Concrete and stone seating is partially submerged below the plaza grade. The walls of the performance area are concrete with integrated light wells along the upper edge of the walls forming a sunken performance area. The shape of the pyramid amphitheater echoes the square, pyramidal roof of the Bob-Lo Island Boat Office Building that was formerly in this location prior to the construction of Hart Plaza. Boats historically transported people from this location to an amusement park that operated on Bois Blanc ("Bob-Lo") Island, Ontario, from 1910 to 1993.

Above ground utility evidence include vents and pipes, integrated into the structural design (Photo 0021). Seven cylindrical concrete vents are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and in the plaza transition area north, east, and west of the *Dodge Fountain*. The vents are six feet in diameter and variable in height with an average height of six feet at the bottom of the slanted top opening. Two tall metal vents, approximately eighteen feet high, are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and along the eastern edge of the plaza transition near the former Ford Auditorium. Low metal relief pipes with curved ends are located throughout the park.

Retaining walls of varying heights (from approximately two to twenty feet) are integrated throughout the plaza design. The walls are either eight inches or twenty-four inches wide. Most retaining walls are raw concrete and feature expansion and construction joints at four-foot intervals. Retaining walls under four feet typically form edges of variously sized vegetated panels or serve as independent planters. Walls of various heights and widths have integrated benches. Retaining walls that are bulkheads play an important role in defining and transitioning between upper and lower levels of the plaza. These walls also create stairwells and may form edges of planters or parapet walls at the surface level. Some of these walls include integrated railings such as at the north side of the auditorium. These walls are generally considered part of other named structures and features in the course of this nomination and are not classified individually (Photos 0014, 0022, 0024, 0042).

The materials vary across the retaining walls of Hart Plaza. Most concrete retaining walls are twelve inches thick with four-foot scoring. Other concrete retaining walls are two feet thick and may have integrated metal handrails and guardrails that are five inches in diameter and variably

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

silver or painted black. A concrete, double-stacked seat wall is located along the riverside walk. It is constructed in three-foot by six-foot sections with integral, square lights. Polished red granite-faced, concrete retaining walls, parapet walls, and cheek walls are located at the steps flanking the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture. These decorative walls feature a black granite base course and coping with integrated metal handrails. Marble faced concrete walls associated with the UAW-Ford Center form the three- to six-feet high south and west boundary walls of the Lincoln Garden.

Freestanding walls include low concrete landscape walls generally less than four feet high. In addition, a massive, largely free-standing concrete slab forms a sloped backdrop to the pyramid amphitheater's stage.

### *Buildings and Structures Integrity Assessment*

The buildings and structures of Hart Plaza retain integrity with some modifications to the buildings. Structures, which primarily consist of three distinct surface sections of Hart Plaza and the sub plaza below grade, have historic integrity to Noguchi's original design and is also reflected in location, setting, feeling, and association. Various types of walls support and border these primary structures and typically have integrity and remain in generally good condition. As an exception, there are low retaining walls on the west side of the plaza transition area that demonstrate failure at corners. The interior of the underground structure of the sub plaza has been modified with some addition of rooms, partitioning with walls, and interior modifications due to changing uses. Characteristic elements including the glass walls of the warming room and the cafeteria remain. Replacement of some features, such as the black railings integrated into the concrete wall forming the north parapet edge of the main Amphitheatre, have changed the character of the site. Historically, the railing in this location was a single metal tube with integrated lights.

The Fountain Control Building is in relatively poor condition while the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building is in generally good condition. In general, integrity is reflected in the design and materials of the buildings and structures.

### **Sculptures and Constructed Water Features**

Sculptures and constructed water features include four resources original to the historic design of Hart Plaza and five resources that are not part of the design. The most recent non-historic object was added in 2023. One historic sculpture was recently removed.

The *Pylon* (**one contributing object**) is located at the east end of the Jefferson Promenade and in line with Woodward Avenue. The 120-foot-tall, stainless-steel-frame pylon is seven feet square at its base and twists into a helix as it rises toward the sky. The pylon design required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. *Pylon* is faced in one-quarter-inch anodized aluminum plate (Photo 0019).



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

The *Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain* (**one contributing object**) is located above a bowl-shaped depression in the central plaza. In designing the *Dodge Fountain*, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. At the base of the stainless steel fountain sits a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The two-foot square convex brass features protrude from the paving north and south of the fountain. The fountain has three hundred water jets within the ring capable of offering thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour (Photos 0034, 0035, 0036, 0037).

The cubist water sculpture (**one contributing object**) is located north of the *Dodge Fountain*. The rectangle of projecting and recessed square granite slabs of varying heights forms a visual counterpart to the one-time circular depression to the southwest and the two together framed the path from the *Dodge Fountain* to the amphitheater. It was labeled as a play sculpture and fountain in the original drawings, with mechanicals for pumps, flow, and drainage. However, there is no evidence it was ever functional as a water feature (Photo 0041).

The spiral seating sculpture (**one contributing object**) is located southwest of the *Dodge Fountain* at the top of the sloped walk descent to the riverbank. It consists of three approximately eighteen-inch-high concrete steps in a spiral pattern that lead to a central concrete ramp and wrap around a cylindrical concrete air shaft that serves to ventilate the sub plaza near the Atwater Tunnel. Modern security camera equipment is mounted to the apex (Photo 0040).

Sculptures added to Hart Plaza after the design and initial construction include the Abraham Lincoln bust, *Transcending*, the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture, and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. monument.

The Abraham Lincoln bust (**one non-contributing object**) is a seventy-two-inch-high marble sculpture of the sixteenth U.S. president set on a black granite pedestal in the center of the Lincoln Garden adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center. Created by Gutzon Borglum, a one-time instructor of Noguchi in 1918, the bust was a gift of Ralph Herman Booth to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in 1924.<sup>3</sup> Following the redesign of the base by Marshall Fredericks in 1954, the composition was dedicated by American Citizens of German Ancestry through the German American Cultural Center in 1956. In 1986, the bust was restored and placed in Hart Plaza through the joint efforts of the DIA, Detroit Parks and Recreation, and the Civic Center (Photo 0013).

*Transcending*, the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark, by David Barr and Sergio de Guisti (**one non-contributing object**), was dedicated in 2003. The sixty-three-foot-tall, incomplete (or open) steel ring set on its edge has a low plaza-like plinth and outer circle of boulders. It divides two rectangular panels along Jefferson Avenue and is in line with the *Dodge Fountain* and Cubist Water Sculpture (Photo 0004).

<sup>3</sup> "Abraham Lincoln, sculpture," IAS 76000536. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue (**one non-contributing object**), installed in 2001, is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel east of the *Dodge Fountain*, approximately fifteen feet south of a Michigan Historical Marker commemorating Cadillac's founding of Detroit in 1701 and approximately fifteen feet north of the French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan interpretive sign.

*Gateway to Freedom, the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad*, by Edward J. Dwight Jr. (**one non-contributing object**), was installed in 2001 at the double steps by the riverside walk (Photo 0048). A central, multi-figural bronze sculpture features six people preparing to board a boat. The sculpture of a man with an outstretched finger represents George de Baptiste, a local business leader and Virginia-born free man who also transported fugitives aboard his steam ship, the *T. Whitney*. The other figures depict women and men of various ages, including an infant. Two marble pillars with brass flames flank the main sculpture. Donor names are engraved on bricks of the walk and on the polished granite-faced walls flanking the sculpture to the east and west. *Gateway to Freedom* is the United States' component of the memorial that is also commemorated by a Canadian sculpture located in Windsor, Ontario, almost directly across the Detroit River from Hart Plaza. Part of the same commission, the complementary sculpture by Dwight, *Tower of Freedom*, shares complementary design elements such as brass figures and a marble pillar with brass flames. The Canadian sculpture depicts a man raising his arms in celebration of emancipation, a Quaker woman assisting a woman and her child, and a young girl glancing back toward Detroit.

A monument depicting Civil Rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (**one non-contributing object**) was installed along the Jefferson Promenade near its west end in June 2023. The monument was completed in 2010 by artist Stan Watts but not immediately installed. Sculpted of bronze, Dr. King is presented standing behind a lectern with his right hand held aloft, giving a speech. The monument was installed on the fiftieth anniversary of the March to Freedom, led by Dr. King and other Civil Rights leaders, which culminated with a speech in nearby Cobo Arena (now Huntington Place).

The marquee (**one non-contributing object**) is located at the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk edge directly north of the *Pylon*. The current structure replaced an earlier marquee around 2005. It has a six-foot-square footprint and metal, T-shaped facades facing all four directions. This object functions as dynamic signage that can advertise upcoming events at the plaza (Photo 0003).

In 2021 a large-scale repaving effort at Hart Plaza eliminated the circular depression, a Noguchi-designed historic object. The depression was located approximately one hundred feet west of the *Dodge Fountain*. It was formed by granite setts that dipped into a shallow bowl-shaped depression that echoed the bowl under the fountain. The circular depression was replaced with level poured concrete.

*Sculptures and Constructed Water Features Integrity Assessment*

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Sculptures and constructed water features are mostly intact, retaining integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the original design intent of Isamu Noguchi. Four of Noguchi's five original sculptures remain. Sculptures that have been recently added to the park are distinct from the historic features; however, the large *Transcending* ring detracts from the designed spatial organization of the site due to its scale. Although the circular depression was a more minor object, its design was a part of the Noguchi vocabulary, that has now been lost. Security equipment, such as that mounted on the spiral seating sculpture, visually detracts from Noguchi's simple design but is not permanent.

### **Small-Scale Features**

Numerous small-scale features provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and interpretive or aesthetic concerns at Hart Plaza. Most small-scale features are recently added as utilitarian features and are not essential to the overall design and character of the plaza. Small-scale features include lights, upright poles, bollards, trash receptacles, benches, rails, and interpretive elements.

Lights consist of ground mounted light fixtures near the west interlude and in the Lincoln Garden, flood lights along the Jefferson Promenade, and approximately one hundred globe lights. These ubiquitous globe lights, installed throughout the park around 2000, have a glass globe lantern bracketed by aluminum bands on thirteen-foot-tall posts formed of four independent poles set on one aluminum base (Photos 0005, 0020, 0049). Globe lamps of this type were recently removed from the Jefferson Promenade and replaced with LED lighting mounted on adjoining flag poles.

Upright poles primarily include security poles with cameras and sensors over the Jefferson Promenade, and flagpoles. The security poles consist of a tubular metal upright with a cantilevered metal pole extending out over the Promenade (Photos 0010, 0012). Approximately twenty flagpoles generally flying U.S. flags employ the same stylistic details as the globe lights and are located along the Jefferson Promenade, above the stage area of the main amphitheater, and at the east and west edges of the park. Four taller flagpoles present in early photographs of the plaza behind the stage of the main amphitheater were later replaced with flagpoles matching the standard design. Shorter flagpoles with a variety of colored flags are set in moveable, concrete bases presently at the south edge of the central plaza (Photos 0039, 0049).

Other small-scale features are dispersed throughout the park. Planter bollards and circular concrete planters line the Jefferson Promenade. Various types of plastic and metal garbage and recycling receptacles are placed in the landscape depending on use and seasonality. Synthetic wood benches are located along the Jefferson Promenade and in the Lincoln Garden. Two wood benches are located in the sub plaza by the cafeteria and stairwell north of the amphitheater. Guardrails along a concrete sidewalk in the plaza transition directly north of the amphitheater consist of unpainted, round steel pipe that is four inches in diameter. Other tubular metal handrails and guardrails that are typical throughout the park are five-inch-diameter pipe variably painted either black or gray.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

Interpretive, small-scale elements include plaques and signs. A Veterans Memorial brass plaque on polished granite is located in the southwest corner of the Lincoln Garden. An aluminum Michigan Historical Marker entitled “The Landing of Cadillac” is located north of the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, installed in 2001. It is a standard metal plaque painted green with gold text and brown metal posts. South of the statue is an interpretive marker entitled “The Cadillac Convoy,” which was placed in December 2001 by the French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan. The black metal sign with gray metal posts commemorates Detroit’s tricentennial. A second Michigan Historical Marker entitled “Ford Motor Company” is placed opposite the Cadillac marker to the southwest of the *Dodge Fountain*. The marker discusses the incorporation of the Ford Motor Company in 1903 that took place near this site. The marker is dated 1978 and archival paperwork notes it was installed “at the corner of Jefferson and Griswold,” but it is unclear if it was ever located at the actual streetcorner and later moved, or has always occupied the current location since Hart Plaza opened. A Hart Plaza dedication marker, a replacement donated by Herman Miller Cares in 2016, is located by steps to the sub plaza on the east side of the park. A rededication marker for The *Dodge Fountain* is located at the edge of the plaza and south of the fountain. It is a small, granite and limestone monument on a concrete unit block base. The north face contains a plaque dated August 31, 2006, marking the refurbishment of the fountain, and revitalizing the waterfront through the support of Gretchen C. Valade. The south face contains a rectangular metal plaque that was part of the dedication of the fountain on July 24, 1976, prior to the dedication ceremonies for Hart Plaza in 1978 and 1979. The plaque describes the fountain as “‘An Engine of Water’ at the Gateway to a Great City.” Since the plaza was under construction at the time of the 1976 event, the original location of the plaque is not known. On the riverbank slope west of the fountain dedication monument, a metal plaque with the words “1984 Peace Tree” is embedded in a stone at the base of a ginkgo tree.

### *Small-Scale Features Integrity Assessment*

Small-scale features of Hart Plaza are largely non-historic and do not have integrity. As originally designed, the Noguchi’s design for the park contained very few furnishings or free-standing lights. Existing bollards, flagpoles, planters, and independent monuments were not part of the original design but are found throughout the park today. The few flagpoles present in the original design no longer exist. The security equipment, while a modern necessity, diminishes the views in certain areas of the property. These vertical elements detract from the open, uncluttered landscape as designed.

### *Overall Historic Integrity*

Despite the addition of several sculptural objects that postdate the period of significance, the replacement of paving materials, the selective loss of vegetation and incursion of small scale features not associated with the original design, Hart Plaza retains historic integrity and conveys its historic significance as a designed landscape created by sculptor and landscape designer Isamu Noguchi and functioning as the home of significant cultural and community activities, not just for Detroit, but for the wider southeast Michigan area. The basic form, design, and use of Noguchi’s key spaces remains intact and visible. The plaza continues to reflect Noguchi’s philosophy that sculpture and space are meant to be mobile and experienced. Circulation

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

patterns, envisioned when the plaza opened but initially unfounded due to activities beyond plaza borders, have increased passive recreation. Evident aspects of location, setting, design, feeling, and association reflect the intentional abstract style where large-scale sculptural forms function as integral elements to the overall planned spatial design.

A summary of extant contributing and non-contributing resources is presented here.

Hart Plaza Resource Type	Contributing (11)	Non-Contributing (6)
<i>Buildings</i>	Parking Access Building (1979)	(None)
	Fountain Control Building (1976)	
<i>Structures</i>	Upper Plaza (1974)	(None)
	Central Plaza (1979)	
	Riverbank (1979)	
	Pyramid Amphitheater (1979)	
	Sub Plaza (1979)	
<i>Objects</i>	Dodge Memorial Fountain (1976)	<i>Transcending</i> (2003)
	Cubist Water Sculpture (1979)	<i>Gateway to Freedom</i> (2001)
	<i>Pylon</i> (1974)	Cadillac Statue (2001)
	Spiral Seating Sculpture (1979)	Lincoln Bust (1986)
		Martin Luther King (2023)
		Hart Plaza Marquee (2005)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☒ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Landscape Architecture

---

---

---

**Period of Significance**

1979

---

---

**Significant Dates**

---

---

---

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

---

---

---

**Cultural Affiliation**

---

---

---

**Architect/Builder**

Noguchi, Isamu

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls

---

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Philip A. Hart Plaza is significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of Landscape Architecture, at the state level, as the only large-form sculptural landscape in Michigan designed by master landscape architect and designer Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a widely respected artist with significant works in the United States and abroad. Over Noguchi's career prior to Hart Plaza, he designed a series of conceptual landscapes while honing a unique vocabulary of

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

elements, inspired by his philosophy of play. Although prominent Detroit architectural firm Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls was the architect of record for Hart Plaza, the design is credited to Noguchi. At first commissioned only to create the centerpiece *Horace A. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain*, Noguchi ultimately designed the entire 10.8-acre plaza, creating an interplay of positive and negative spaces that blend monumental sculptures, diagonal axes, and playful forms that balance each other across wide expanses, all focused on the centerpiece of the *Dodge Fountain*. While subsequent additions and the depredations of time have slightly impacted Noguchi's original design, the fundamental character of Noguchi's Hart Plaza remains distinctive and intact. Hart Plaza, in turn, informed his later design vocabulary toward three other large public spaces that he designed prior to his death. Hart Plaza remains one of the only large-scale civic plazas constructed in a large Michigan city.

The period of significance is 1979, which is the year when key Noguchi-designed elements of the plaza were completed, and the plaza was formally dedicated. All contributing resources fall within this period of significance.

Although Hart Plaza has not yet surpassed the fifty-year threshold, the property meets Criteria Consideration G as it holds exceptional design significance. Hart Plaza is exceptionally significant under Criteria C as the embodiment of key design philosophies of Isamu Noguchi that he had begun to explore in his sculptural work as early as the 1930s. Hart Plaza is important as the initial practical, large-scale implementation of several of his concepts, meant to be experienced by the public at large. Expanding beyond his earlier work, which was composed of smaller, often private spaces and singular sculptural forms, Detroit's civic center plaza represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Several design philosophies that were employed at Hart Plaza were refined and seen again in Noguchi's later public plaza spaces in Florida and California. Hart Plaza's integrity of design is largely intact, maintaining these concepts for the next generation.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

*Note: Hart Plaza occupies the geographical center of the City of Detroit's long border along the Detroit River. To understand the circumstances in which Isamu Noguchi was able to see his mid-twentieth century vision for the plaza come to fruition, a discussion of the uses and plans for this property begins long before the start of the period of significance.*

### ***Detroit's Early Riverfront***

Detroit's present-day civic center (a series of buildings and open spaces arranged to accommodate the city government and other social and civic functions) is built at the narrowest point of the strait between present-day Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Anishinaabe or "Three Fires" people, which included the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, lived around the Great Lakes. Anishinaabe people shared a similar



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

culture and language, and the riverfront location at this narrow point was a natural gathering place to share news, hunt, fish, and trade. When the fur trade brought Europeans to the region, the Anishinaabeg traded beaver pelts for European goods such as tools, food, and weapons.

In 1701, French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac led an expedition to establish a fort, named Fort Pontchartrain for the French chancellor, at this location in order to control the fur trade on the lower Great Lakes. This became the first permanent European settlement in the region. The layout of farmland adjacent to Fort Pontchartrain was one of the first public efforts to impose form along Detroit's riverfront. These "ribbon farms" were often as narrow as two hundred feet wide, extending up to three miles inland, and were situated perpendicular to the riverfront to facilitate river access for farmers. The streets along Detroit's riverfront were often laid out along the property lines between these early ribbon farms, and many of them still bear the family names of Detroit's early French settlers.

Following the establishment of permanent Euroamerican settlements, the region's original inhabitants, the Anishinaabeg, were gradually displaced after losing their land through a series of treaties signed and enacted during the early to mid-1800s. The Treaty of Detroit, signed on November 17, 1807, transferred land in what is now southeast Michigan and northwest Ohio from the Anishinaabeg to the United States. The treaty was signed in Detroit by William Hull, governor of the Michigan Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>4</sup> The Treaty of 1836 transferred nearly half of Anishinaabe land in the Upper Peninsula to the United States, as well as the northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula. In 1837 the land acquired by the United States became part of Michigan, the twenty-sixth state.

In the summer of 1805, a fire destroyed all evidence of Detroit's riverfront settlement except for one house and a few outlying farms. The devastating fire had at least one positive outcome – it provided a blank slate upon which to rebuild. The new territorial governor and his three-justice judiciary were instructed by Congress to "lay out a new town including the site of the one destroyed and ten thousand acres of adjacent land."<sup>5</sup>

Augustus Woodward, Chief Justice of the Michigan Territory, was the first of the new administrative delegation to arrive following the fire. Woodward was a Columbia-educated lawyer who was personally acquainted with both Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him to the post of Chief Justice, and Charles Pierre L'Enfant, whose Baroque design had been implemented in planning the layout of the District of Columbia. Woodward had a personal interest in surveying and city planning, and he seized the opportunity given by the destruction of Detroit to plan his own American city. For Detroit, he proposed an ambitious plan that improved on L'Enfant's plan for the District of Columbia, which had merely imposed diagonal avenues and public circles on the existing gridiron, by creating a unified pattern of equilateral triangles four thousand feet in length on each side, converging on circular plazas or "circuses." Woodward

---

<sup>4</sup> "November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries.  
<https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Ellis Roberts, *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present* (Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855), 4.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Avenue, running from the riverfront to Grand Circus Park, the first of the envisioned public circuses, became the main axis of what came to be known as the Woodward Plan.

Woodward's plan was only partially implemented before local politics intervened and the remainder of the city was laid out on the more traditional rectilinear grid. However, portions of the plan are still visible on the landscape of downtown, as are traces of the city's earlier history in the narrow grid of streets perpendicular to the river along the borders of the old French ribbon farms, and the hub of Native American trails intersecting at the riverfront and Woodward Avenue that later became the city's major radial avenues.

During the early 1800s as the city continued to grow, farmland on the river side of Jefferson Avenue was divided into smaller lots for businesses. By the 1830s the riverfront had so many stores, taverns and boarding houses, it became known as the "dollar" side of Jefferson Avenue.<sup>6</sup> Advertisements in the *Detroit Free Press* during the 1830s and 1840s indicate that businesses along the riverfront sold dry goods, groceries, cutlery, hardware and stoves.

The shoreline of the Detroit River was continuously filled in and expanded to make more room for hotels, bringing in tourists and seamen. The Mansion House, built in 1836, became a gathering place for mariners and was later converted into a charity home for unemployed sailors. Although the building became somewhat rundown as a result, it was still viewed by Detroiters as a charitable and worthy institution and remained in use as late as 1920. Mariners were also welcomed at the Mariner's Church on the northwest corner of Woodward Avenue and Woodbridge Street, built in 1848 to serve traveling seamen and sailors.

Given its strategic location and proximity to Canada, Detroit became an early station on the Underground Railroad, with the height of this activity occurring between 1838 and 1865. The intricate network of safe houses and routes transferring enslaved people away from slave-holding states generally ended at one of at least seven points for entering Canada from Michigan. The United States Congress essentially ended slavery and involuntary servitude in Michigan by enacting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. Great Britain followed suit and in 1793 began a phased termination of slavery in Upper Canada (future Ontario). At various points in time, enslaved people would escape to either the United States or Canada depending on the location granting the most favorable legal status.<sup>7</sup>

The large and sympathetic network of individuals and churches in Detroit, such as the Second Baptist Church, sponsored relocation via the one-mile boat trip from the downtown docks. At the peak of the Underground Railroad, it is estimated that around one-thousand-five-hundred people left from Detroit each year.<sup>8</sup> Around 1859 for example, as many as ninety-four enslaved people

---

<sup>6</sup> Friend Palmer, "Earlier Days in Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.

<sup>7</sup> Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010).

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

were transferred in one week.<sup>9</sup> Docks along the city's entire riverfront including the future Hart Plaza site were vital to the Underground Railroad. Mariner's Church may have also been an important stop along the Underground Railroad. When the church was moved to a new location in 1955 to make way for the civic center, a brick tunnel was reportedly discovered that led to the river, suggesting it had been used to move enslaved people to the waterfront where they could board boats and be ferried across to Canada. This route is commemorated in the present-day *Gateway to Freedom* memorial in Hart Plaza and its counterpart directly across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario.

Beginning in the 1850s warehouses and steamboat docks began to displace the small retail stores. The new warehouses constructed along the riverfront housed the American Eagle Tobacco Company, which had several warehouses and offices near the river on Atwater between Woodward and Shelby (1884), Lawson, Howard & Co, a grain merchant at Griswold and Atwater (1843), and the Detroit Steam Supply Company (1884).<sup>10</sup>

As tourism began to develop in the city in the later nineteenth century, tension developed between the needs of these two contrary riverfront industries. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated 1884 mentioned with disapproval that business and warehouse owners stored extra freight on the sidewalks on Shelby Street between Jefferson and the river, forcing pedestrians to walk in the streets. The article went on to mention that this was (regrettably in its opinion) the first sight of vacationers coming to Detroit via steamboat liner.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Before Noguchi – Detroit's Civic Center Plans***

The idea of a park in the center of the city along the waterfront was widely discussed as early as 1891, when City of Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree gave his annual message to the Common Council. For the next sixty years, ideas were proposed, plans were drafted, architects and landscape designers were consulted, but no meaningful construction took place. This section will briefly summarize the legacy of these early efforts.

Pingree's vision for a downtown civic park was in line with the developing ideals of the City Beautiful movement. In 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, which featured a prominent display of monumental buildings arranged around a formal lagoon. The exhibition, with its emphasis on symmetry, beauty, and order, captured the public imagination and helped give rise to the City Beautiful movement. By the early 1900s American city planners were calling for monumental arrangements surrounding open plazas and malls, so elegantly displayed by the formal groupings of buildings at the World's Columbian Exposition, as an antidote to cities that were over crowded, poorly planned, and congested. The Common Council took no action to implement a new riverfront park for the burgeoning downtown.

---

<sup>9</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Katie Korth, "Hart Plaza: A History." Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. 23 April 2013, 4.

<sup>11</sup> "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Aside from private and commercial development, Detroit had few major public works projects in the century following Woodward's plan – with the exception of Grand Boulevard, a twelve-mile ring encircling the city perimeter, Waterworks Park, a public leisure ground at the site of the city's water intake system upriver, and plans for Belle Isle, the city's largest park that marked the eastern terminus of the Boulevard. In the wake of the Columbian Exposition, there was no shortage of enthusiasm for much needed public improvements, and in the fall of 1904 the Detroit Board of Commerce invited Charles Mulford Robinson to Detroit, to make a study to recommend improvements for the city.

Robinson was a newspaper editor, author, and professor celebrated as one of the United States' first urban planners and an early proponent of the City Beautiful movement. Robinson's preliminary recommendations resulted in the creation of a Committee on Civic Improvement, which immediately invited Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. to undertake a more expansive study. As one of the nation's preeminent landscape architects and a pioneer in comprehensive city and regional planning, Olmsted was the obvious choice to guide the city in its necessary public improvements.

Although Olmsted's study offered more concrete recommendations, the separate studies by Robinson and Olmsted both provided valuable insights into Detroit's much needed public improvements. Olmsted and Robinson agreed on two key points: the importance of rectifying the improper disposition of monumental public buildings throughout the downtown core, and that linking this monumental grouping to the Detroit River was essential for the image of the future city. Robinson proposed that the commercial waterfront at the center of the city should be a "water-gate—the official entrance to the city" and reclaimed for aesthetic development.<sup>12</sup>

As cities continued to develop at a pace that left little time for thoughtful planning, turn-of-the-century city planners redirected their dreams of a comprehensive city-wide plan into a much more accessible goal: the design of a civic center, similar to what was so beautifully displayed in Chicago. It was further hoped that the typology of a civic center, an idealized city in miniature, with its well-thought out placement of streets, buildings, and plazas, would serve as a model for the city at large. In the early 1920s, the Detroit City Plan Commission and an architect and planner named Eliel Saarinen began to collaborate on a picturesque civic center plan near the Detroit riverfront.

Saarinen was hired by the city in 1921 to help design and select the most appropriate location for a locate a war memorial and civic auditorium to memorialize its fallen soldiers and serve the growing need for a convention hall and civic meeting place. He was the foremost architect of his generation in Finland before moving to the United States. By 1914 he had become widely known in Europe for his Helsinki railroad station and urban planning projects for Reval (now Tallinn),

---

<sup>12</sup> Detroit Board of Commerce, *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905). This includes Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43; and Charles Mulford Robinson, "Report of Charles Mulford Robinson," 45-67, hereafter cited as one work.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Estonia, and Canberra, Australia. In 1922 he placed second in the Chicago Tribune tower competition with a design that influenced an entire generation of skyscrapers. As a result, Saarinen was invited by Emil Lorch to teach design courses at the University of Michigan in 1923. In later years, Saarinen created a lasting influence through his architectural designs that included churches and a large part of the campus at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, at Bloomfield Hills near Detroit, where he also served as president of the academy before becoming head of the graduate department of architecture and city planning.

Saarinen proposed a civic center scheme at the foot of Woodward, which was the location he determined to be best suited for the proposed Memorial Hall to honor the city's war veterans. His 1924 plan was of a picturesque grouping of public buildings that included a city hall and municipal complex surrounding a wedge-shaped plaza – a sweeping vision for the site.

Saarinen's plan received wide acclaim from the Sub-Committee on Site, the City Plan Commission, engineers of the Rapid Transit Commission, and the local press. The proposed civic center project met its first obstacle with the price tag for the Memorial Hall. Originally budgeted at just over \$5,000,000, the Memorial Hall project ballooned into a massive twenty-year, \$100-million development, requiring an estimated \$30,000,000 for the acquisition of property alone, and taking up twelve blocks of what was still prime city real estate.<sup>13</sup> The Detroit Common Council was undeterred and agreed to place condemnation proceedings on the spring ballot. However, the election in 1924 of a new mayor, John W. Smith, halted the whole plan. Smith viewed the entire project as an extravagance and preferred to direct the city's resources toward more practical infrastructural improvements. Saarinen's plan remained just a vision.

During Mayor Smith's administration, which lasted from 1924 until 1928, there were no further plans for the civic center. From 1929 until the mid 1940s, the Great Depression and World War II halted most construction work in the city, and city resources were generally directed toward relieving the effects of the Depression and supporting the war effort.

In the fall of 1943 forty civic-minded architects formed the Architect's Civic Design Group to consider postwar "highways, residential developments, business and cultural centers, and suburban projects."<sup>14</sup> Foremost on their agenda was the study of waterfront development at the foot of Woodward Avenue, although they also looked into design solutions to other problems that had affected the city, such as so-called blighted districts and overcrowding. A 1943 *Detroit News* article entitled, "Can We Build a City That Will Give Us Health, Happiness?" noted that the group was working out a new comprehensive plan for Detroit that would transform the city into a better place to live.

---

<sup>13</sup> "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.

<sup>14</sup> Donald E. Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (University of Pittsburgh, 2013, 242. No listing of the architects in the group was found, but the group was chaired by Branson V. Gamber and included Suren Pilafian and Saarinen.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

In 1944, Mayor Edward Jefferies' office issued a brochure, entitled *Post-War Improvements To Make Your Detroit a Finer City in Which to Live and Work*, which prominently featured "a dignified, unified Civic Center, which will not only symbolize our pride in our city, but which, even more importantly, will bring together at one central and accessible point the now scattered municipal departments and offices." The civic center plan in the brochure was not the 1924 design by Saarinen, but a newly devised plan based on the preliminary studies undertaken for the City Plan Commission by Suren Pilafian, one of the architects working with the Architect's Civic Design Group.

Pilafian first came to public notice when the thirty-two-year old Turkish-born Detroit architect won a competition for a campus plan and Student's Center Building for Wayne University (later renamed Wayne State University). Pilafian later became the University's campus architect in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two years later, the City Plan Commission began to issue its Master Plan for the City of Detroit in a series of booklets that addressed recreation, the thoroughfare system, and general land use. The Civic Center Plan, number 3 in the Master Plan series, was published in October 1946. Although the Commission acknowledged that this site had been "for years recognized as appropriate for this development," it stated that they had surveyed the entire city to identify the best possible site and settled on the riverfront as providing the best location based on six factors, including proximity to the central business district, accessibility via both public and private transportation, relatively low land costs, historical significance, and inherent natural beauty.<sup>15</sup>

Although the booklet outlining the civic center plan credited it as "based in large part on preliminary studies undertaken for the Plan Commission by Mr. Suren Pilafian," the design had evolved considerably since the sketch in the Mayor's office brochure of two years earlier, with the City Plan Commission noting that "the final design exploits to the fullest the natural dignity of the site." To the west was a V-shaped Veteran's Service Building with a convention hall beyond, while to the east was a civic auditorium, recognizable as the shape of the future Ford Auditorium, but oriented east-west rather than north-south as it would eventually be executed. The brochure also noted that, "the natural slope of the land in the plaza area will make available large amounts of underground space, of which four acres will be utilized as exhibition halls. Underground accommodations for 800 automobiles have also been indicated."<sup>16</sup>

Although the city government had invested at least three years and two publications in Pilafian's plan, in February 1947 the Detroit Chapter of the AIA advised the Common Council and the City Plan Commission to retain Saarinen, Swanson, Saarinen Associates as consultants for the proposed civic center's plaza as well as the architectural treatment of the remaining buildings. This recommendation not only dismissed the significance of the initial contribution Pilafian had already made to the design of the civic center, but also paralleled the recommendation that had been made back in 1942, when Pilafian won the Wayne campus competition. In announcing the

<sup>15</sup> City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit - A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946), 9-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 13.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

award of the campus competition, the jury recommended that Pilafian “be invited to restudy his design, and he should feel free to invite the collaboration of other architects [...] to achieve a more expressive quality.” Furthermore, the jury hoped that Pilafian would agree to collaborate with the second-place winner – the firm of Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen.

More than twenty years had passed since Eliel Saarinen first presented his 1924 civic center design, and the architect was seventy-four years old. Now, Eliel’s thirty-seven-old son, Eero Saarinen, joined his father in developing the 1947 plan. The younger Saarinen was born in Finland, but attended public schools in Michigan after moving with his family to the United States in 1923. In 1929 he studied sculpture at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris but, as he recounted years later, “it never occurred to me to do anything but follow in my father’s footsteps.” He studied architecture at Yale University, and conducted research on housing and city planning with the Flint Institute of Research and Planning in Flint, Michigan, before joining his father’s practice in Bloomfield Hills in 1938.

Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen’s design for the civic center retained several elements of the earlier Pilafian plan, including the placement of key buildings - the county-city building, state and federal buildings, Veterans’ Memorial Building, convention hall (now a circular structure) and civic auditorium. The defining feature of the plaza was now an elongated tear-shaped reflecting pool along the axis of the civic auditorium with a less rectilinear and freer flowing park south of the pool including curved walks, extensive lawn areas, and trees. Saarinen provided several revised designs for the County-City building, and each rendition included new refinements to the surrounding civic center, especially the landscaping of the plaza below Woodward Avenue. The proposed cost was \$50,000,000.

### ***Detroit’s Civic Center takes shape***

In the early 1950s the city began to demolish waterfront structures in preparation for implementation of the civic center. At this time, the area was patchwork collection of parking lots, dock buildings, and industrial sites. As the transportation focus of the city had moved away from the riverfront and towards rail and road travel, many of the warehouses erected on the river side of Jefferson Avenue fell into disuse and the small storefront businesses were closed, razed, and replaced with parking lots. A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that the site included a multi-story parking lot and a store named Sam’s Drugs and Shoes. The one industry that did survive along the riverfront were the excursion steamboat companies, which used the dock area. Although the steamboats attracted tourists and locals to the riverfront during the summer months, the area that would later become Hart Plaza was mostly vacant during the remainder of the year.

The one exception to the general demolition of the waterfront area was Mariners’ Church, which was deemed too important to raze. In 1955 the church was relocated from the northwest corner of Woodward and Woodbridge, on a site that is now the lawn panel east of the labor union monument *Transcending*, to its current location nine hundred feet to the east to the corner of Jefferson and Randolph.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Veterans' Memorial Hall (currently known as the UAW-Ford Center), was the first civic center building to be completed, along the civic center's west boundary. This building was constructed in 1950 to plans by the Detroit-based architecture firm of Harley, Ellington and Day. In 1955 the same firm completed another important building anchoring the civic center – the City-County building, now known as the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, at the northeast corner of Jefferson and Woodward. A year later, in 1956, the design firm Odell, Hewlett and Luckenbach completed the Ford Auditorium along the eastern boundary. In 1960, Mayor Pingree's vision of a convention space on the riverfront was finally realized with the nearby completion of Cobo Hall (later Cobo Center, now Huntington Place), one of the nation's first large convention centers, designed by Gino Rossetti while he was with design firm Giffels and Vallet.

The civic center buildings completed during the 1950s and 1960s were very different from the Art Deco and Neoclassical monuments envisioned by the 1924 Saarinen plan or the realized buildings in the immediate neighborhood of the same era. All were International-style buildings sheathed in or featuring white marble. Along with Minoru Yamasaki's Michigan Consolidated Gas Building (1962) at the northwest corner of Jefferson and Woodward, with its vibrant white precast concrete panel exterior, the civic center buildings created a modern, uniform perimeter for the future plaza. They were accented by pools, such as the reflecting pool in front of the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Building, and sculptures including Marshall Fredericks' Spirit of Detroit (on the west end of the City-County Building) and Victory Eagle (on the north side of the Veterans' Memorial Building), and Giacomo Manzu's Passo di Danza in front of the Gas Company building.

However, the centerpiece of the civic center design – the plaza – was still not implemented, and aerial imagery from the period shows the shining white marble buildings surrounding acres of surface parking lots below. In the decades that followed the construction of the civic center buildings, the City deliberated on the best approach for developing the plaza. In order to further develop the design of the civic center plaza, Saarinen brought in a partner with whom he had worked on previous projects, Dan Kiley. Kiley was a nationally-known landscape architect with a long history of collaboration with prominent architects, including Louis Kahn and I. M. Pei. In 1946, Kiley was on the winning team with Eero Saarinen for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition, known colloquially as the Saint Louis Arch, and in 1955, again with Saarinen, he designed the garden for J. Irwin Miller's family in Columbus, Indiana, perhaps the most important post-World War II garden in the United States.

In 1955, perhaps as a result of the collaboration with Kiley, the City of Detroit's Committee on Civic Design "unanimously and enthusiastically" endorsed the new design and overall shape of Saarinen's civic center plaza design. A few days later, the Common Council approved Saarinen and Kiley's surface treatment for the plaza. It is unclear what refinements Kiley and Saarinen made to the plan since 1947, as no drawings or renderings have been found, and despite the approval of the Common Council, there was still no execution of the plan.

In 1962 thirty-three-year-old Jerome P. Cavanagh became Mayor of Detroit after winning a landslide victory over the incumbent Louis C. Miriani, becoming one of the country's youngest big-city mayors. During his eight-year administration, he became nationally recognized as an



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

outstanding leader who adopted Lyndon B. Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also known as the Model Cities Act), and obtained \$490,000,000 in federal funding that was invested into a nine square mile section of Detroit's inner city in the hopes of setting new standards in urbanization and quelling poverty.

In a letter to Mayor Cavanagh dated June 15, 1964, Charles Blessing, Director of Detroit's City Plan Commission, wrote that since the Saarinen and Kiley plan was approved in 1955, the need for an underground parking structure and roadway across the civic center plaza had been recognized (despite these being features of plans going back to the 1940s), and a new plan that retained the "essential features" of the Saarinen design, while incorporating the garage and roadway, had been reviewed and approved by all affected city departments. Blessing recommended that the plaza plan be presented to the Common Council with Kiley in attendance to explain the design (Eero Saarinen had died in 1961) and that Kiley should be engaged to complete the detailed design and surface treatment. Once cost estimates had been obtained, the city should proceed with construction.

Blessing was both an architect and city planner and served as Director of the City of Detroit's City Plan Commission from 1953 until 1977, so his recommendation should have carried considerable weight. Under Blessing's leadership, Detroit had carried out a series of ambitious attempts to reshape its urban landscape by sweeping aside small commercial buildings and single-family housing and replacing them with new modern buildings and parks such as the Mies van der Rohe-designed Lafayette Park residential development just east of downtown, and an industrial development in Corktown to the west, both clearance projects under the Federal Urban Renewal Act. That same year, in 1964, the Detroit City Plan Commission had received the prestigious American Institute of Planners (AIP) Honors Award in Comprehensive Planning for implementing many of the facilities plans for schools and recreational resources, which confirmed that Detroit had greatly improved the city's municipal services. Yet the realization of the civic center plaza still stymied city planners.

Despite Blessing's firm endorsement, there was another plan under review for the plaza, by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G). In February 1965, the Common Council authorized the City of Detroit to provide funds for architectural and engineering services to SH&G, who were commissioned to provide construction documents for the civic center plaza and underground garage. The project amount was listed as \$415,000 for the architectural and engineering services for SH&G to provide the construction documents.<sup>17</sup> It is unclear if at this time SH&G were merely expected to provide construction documents for the Saarinen and Kiley plan amended by the City Plan Commission, or to develop an entirely new plan. Since Kiley was initially retained as a consultant to SH&G, this may have been the original intention. However, it was clear by the following fall that SH&G were moving toward a very different design.

---

<sup>17</sup> No information was found on why the Common Council decided to award the contract for the plaza to Smith Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G), and there was no date found to indicate when Kiley was eventually retained as a consultant to SH&G. The contract may have been awarded to SH&G because they were based locally in Detroit, whereas Eero Saarinen had died and Kiley was based outside of Michigan.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

City Plan Commission staff voiced their alarm at the changes. In a letter dated October 8, 1965, Blessing relayed to Mayor Cavanagh the view of the City Plan Commission that the Saarinen plan was far superior to the proposal by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. In providing reasons for this recommendation, Blessing stated that the elements of Saarinen's design – the reflecting pool, architectural treatment of steps, pedestrian paved areas, and the “generously sloping lawn extending from the reflecting pool to the river's edge” - more effectively related to the adjacent buildings, the Ford Auditorium and the Veterans' building. He also noted that Saarinen's design has “greater utility functionally in terms of the large open surface adapted to use by maximum numbers of people...and represents the ideal expression of a great city park along a beautiful river.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite the push of city planners to retain the integrity of the Saarinen plan, their efforts were dealt another blow in the fall of 1965 when Kiley, who had worked so closely with Eero Saarinen, withdrew from the project. Kiley had openly expressed his concerns about the design direction of the SH&G proposal, such as their treatment of the fountain and the scheme that he labeled as “dramatic – the scale is much too big.” In an October 18, 1965, letter to Robert Hastings, president of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Kiley expressed his reasons for leaving but also indicated the importance of a new feature that would ultimately shape the future design of the plaza. Kiley observed that for the project to be successful there should only be “one strong designer.”<sup>19</sup> He also noted that the plaza program had changed considerably since he and Eero Saarinen had devised their plan in 1955.<sup>20</sup> Among the significant changes to the plaza, Kiley called attention to the fountain, which he called “a major focal point for the entire plaza development,” and the underground parking structure, which had become “a controlling feature to the design solution.”<sup>21</sup>

The fountain referenced in Kiley's letter to Robert Hastings was the first mention of what would become the central element of the plaza design. The City of Detroit had received notice of a bequest of \$2,000,000 from Anna Thompson Dodge, in honor of her late husband, the American automotive innovator Horace E. Dodge, Sr., and their son Horace E. Dodge. While the sources do not state when Dodge notified the city of her plans, it was most likely between December 1963, when her son died, and Kiley's letter in 1965 (Dodge passed away in 1970).

SH&G's design for the plaza was a major departure from the Saarinen/Kiley plan. While Saarinen's plan was free-flowing and curvilinear, the SH&G plan was rectilinear and regimented. It centered on a large square pool surrounded by a series of small square lawn panels set in paving. Geometric groupings of trees separated the pool from the adjoining buildings and

---

<sup>18</sup> Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Jerome Cavanagh. October 8, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

from Jefferson Avenue. A vertical sculpture element aligned along the axis of Woodward just south of Jefferson, in approximately the future location of the *Pylon*, but the north-south axis through the center of the pool did not align with the street grid. South of the pool was a triangular lawn panel, with a viewing platform extending out over the river at the southwest corner of the site, aligned with the main wing of the Veterans' Memorial Building. Atwater Street was carried under the plaza, and the underground parking garage was accessed by ramps in front of Cobo Hall and the Veterans' building.

While the SH&G model for the plaza included a conception of the fountain for the pool, they determined that the construction of the civic center plaza surface treatment should not begin without first having an approved pool and fountain design. In a memorandum from the civic center plaza and underground garage meeting dated May 1968, Sigmund Blum of SH&G noted, "...since the pool and fountain area is the central theme of the Plaza, it must be a vibrant and exciting element. New ideas, capturing the spirit of Detroit, must be reflected in its design."<sup>22</sup>

In order to accomplish this objective, Blum suggested either "an international competition to select a design, or that a group of prominent Detroiters be organized to select an artist."<sup>23</sup> It was a point on which Blum and Blessing could finally agree. Blessing suggested that a memo be prepared, in the interest of identifying a fountain designer and for general discussion on the topic with the Mayor, Common Council and various Commissions concerned with the development of the Plaza. An eleven-member Fountain Selection Committee was established in April 1971 to select a fountain designer. The Fountain Selection Committee was handpicked by Mayor Roman Gribbs and included Detroiters who were well known for their expertise and achievements in business, arts, and architecture.

### ***Isamu Noguchi and Detroit's Civic Center Plaza***

The committee chose for the fountain design Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi's artistic work spanned from sculptures to theater set designs, and included the design of public spaces in cities throughout the world. Noguchi was born in 1904, the son of a well-educated New Yorker, Leonie Gilmour, and a Japanese poet, Yonejiro Noguchi. The two had enjoyed a collaboration as editor and author, but Yonejiro returned to Japan before Isamu's birth. Leonie raised their son in a tent village of immigrants just outside of Los Angeles. In 1907, as anti-Japanese sentiment grew in the United States, Leonie moved to Japan so that young Isamu would not face the harsh discrimination against Asian Americans that resulted in their children attending segregated schools. He returned to the United States to attend high school at age thirteen, but the culture of Japan remained a constant influence on his work.

While still a teenager, Noguchi apprenticed briefly with Danish-American sculptor Gutzon Borglum in his Connecticut studio, with mixed results, as Borglum declared that Noguchi had no future in sculpture. Perhaps as a result of this indictment, Noguchi enrolled in Columbia

<sup>22</sup> Meeting Memorandum - Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 - May 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

University's pre-medical program, but continued to pursue his interest in sculpture through night classes at a local art school. Noguchi eventually dropped out of medical school to focus more completely on his artistic pursuits. In 1926, Noguchi received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study sculpture in Paris and travel throughout India and China. He returned to the United States and held his first solo exhibition, which firmly established him as a fixture of the New York artist community.

Noguchi's work was not widely recognized in the United States until he completed a large-scale sculpture in 1938 that symbolized the freedom of the press. The project was commissioned for the Associated Press building in Rockefeller Center, New York City. The commission became the first of his public works celebrated worldwide, and reflected his belief in the social significance of sculpture. Noguchi collaborated with artists working in a wide range of disciplines, including stage sets that he created for the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham in the 1930s, as well as dancers and choreographers Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, and George Balanchine. In 1937 he designed a Bakelite intercom for the Zenith Radio Corporation, and in 1947 his glass-topped table was produced by Herman Miller – a design that is still produced today. In the 1960s he began working with stone carver Masatoshi Izumi, a collaboration that continued until his death.<sup>24</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, anti-Japanese sentiment was high. While Japanese-Americans on the East Coast were not as liable to relocation to internment camps as those on the West Coast, Noguchi decided to work as the sole volunteer at an internment camp in Arizona where he hoped to use art and community activity to establish an "ideal cooperative community." Recognizing the need for improved morale among those forced to live in internment camps, Noguchi created a design for parks, recreational facilities, and a traditionally inspired Japanese cemetery that he hoped would bridge the cultural divide between the east and the west. The War Relocation Authority refused to implement his design, but his unrealized plans for a park in the internment camp was his first landscape design project. The notion of public spaces that inspire and provide a cultural bridge between two worlds remained a permanent feature in his emerging ethos.

Noguchi's exploration of playscapes and sculpture began in the early 1930s and led to his wider view of shaping landscapes. A plaster model produced in 1933 showed the three-dimensional landscape he proposed for a full city block park in New York, consisting of a low stepped pyramid, with sweeping semi-circular ramp leading around to the apex, and concave depression at the foot. Dubbed "Play Mountain," it provided a design for an equipment-less playground, where the sculpture of the land itself provided varied surfaces for creative play (Figure 1). Play Mountain was never constructed, but Noguchi's experimentation with playscapes continued. He designed several creative playground structures with a focus on unique geometry or materials in their construction, which achieved some acclaim. He later described Play Mountain as "the kernel out of which have grown all my ideas relating sculpture to the earth."<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> "Biography," The Noguchi Museum. "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza," <https://www.noguchi.org/noguchi/biography> (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 22.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

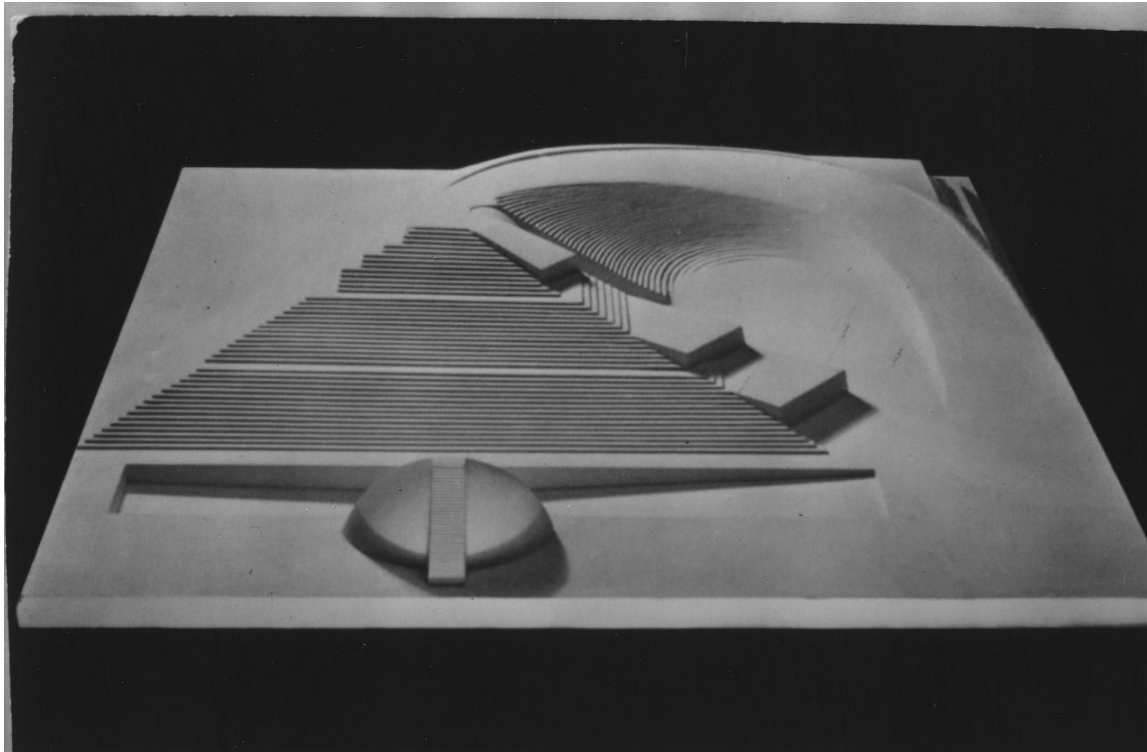


Figure 1: A model of Play Mountain (1933), Isamu Noguchi. This landscape plan, which lacked installed structures and relied simply on the design and grading of the land, was never constructed. Courtesy The Noguchi Museum Archives, 01646. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society [ARS]

Noguchi also collaborated from 1960 to 1966 with architect Louis Kahn on a playground design for Riverside Drive Park, on the upper west side of New York City. Numerous models were created by the duo as they sought to refine their design. Prominent in several versions are stepped pyramids, semi-circular terraced landforms, and structures formed of large square blocks of various heights stepped for sitting or jumping (Figure 2). Politics eventually terminated the Riverside Park project, leaving another Noguchi landscape design unbuilt. Though the designs exist only as models, the foundation of Noguchi's concepts of a sculptured land was already being honed.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

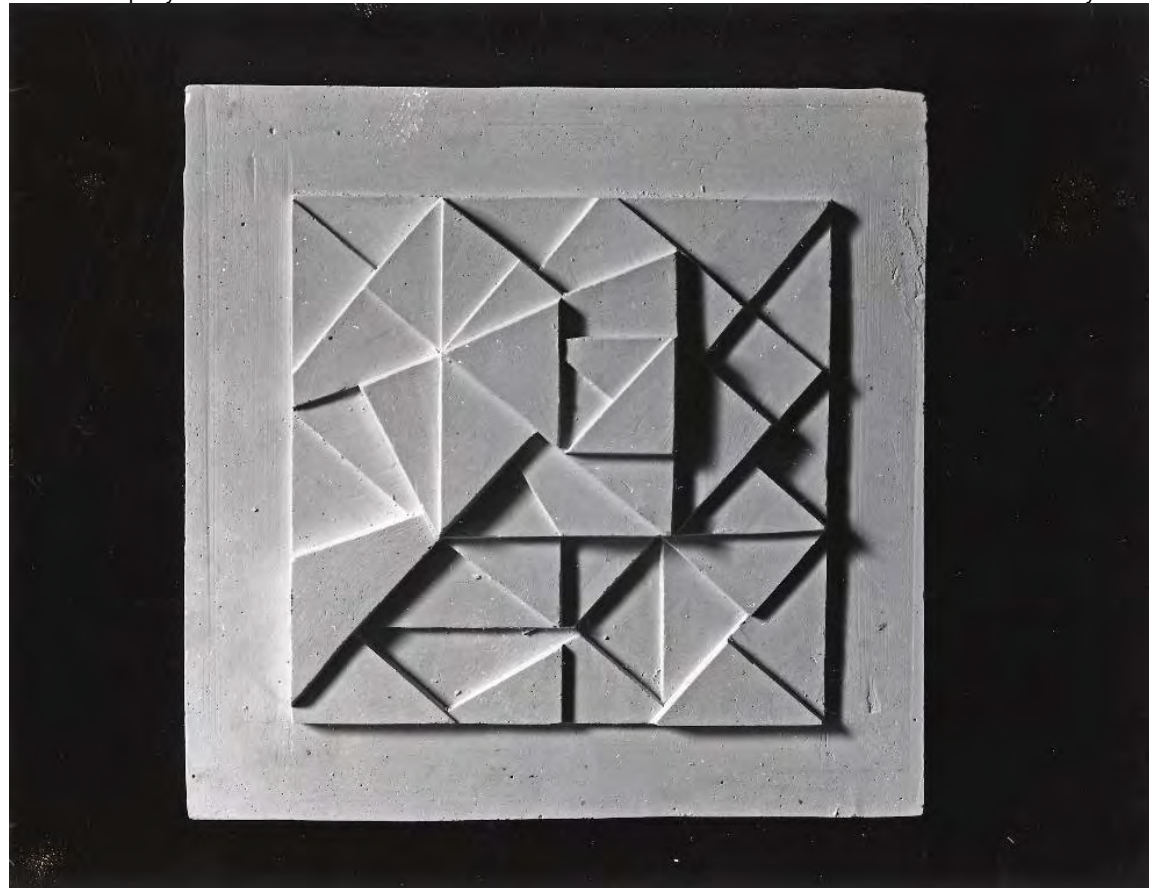


Figure 2: A model of a portion of the design for Riverside Drive Park featuring stepped blocks and triangles of varying heights and sizes. Noguchi and Kahn's design was never constructed, despite numerous models and revisions created. Hart Plaza's Cubist Water Sculpture, a contributing resource, is an interpretation of this theme. Courtesy The Noguchi Museum Archives, 01952. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society [ARS]

By the time Noguchi was approached by Detroit's Fountain Selection Committee, he had designed smaller-scale landscapes for corporations, museums, and institutions throughout the United States, and in Israel, France, and Japan. His invitation to design a patio in an area of the new UNESCO Headquarters site in Paris by architect Marcel Breuer provided his first application of larger landscape planning – from a sculptor's point of view. In what would become a recurring theme, Noguchi ultimately designed a space much larger than his initial patio, considering the design of the surrounding buildings as he sought to lay out and fill this undeveloped space. Inspired by the traditional design of Japanese gardens, his plan incorporated sculpted, terraced land surrounding a centered, lower-level lake, with interplay between pathways, a stream, topography, and intentional use of green space. Noguchi personally selected rocks from Japan and native Japanese plantings were imported and installed under the direction of Japanese gardener Toemon Sano. Defined as a garden and not as a plaza, Noguchi instructed that UNESCO is "...an ambulatory garden, the enjoyment of which is enhanced by walking in it whereby one perceives the relative value of all things."<sup>26</sup> The completed project in 1958

<sup>26</sup> "Garden of Peace," UNESCO. *Le Courier*, Special Edition. November 1958, 33.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

provided a haven of peace in the heart of Paris. Although small by later comparative standards, and typically only open to UNESCO employees and delegates instead of truly a public space, elements and textures of this design came to be seen again in the final design for Hart Plaza and Noguchi's later public spaces.

Water features interested Noguchi. He designed a fountain for Expo '70, a world's fair held in Suita, Osaka, Japan, where the designs astounded visitors with a display of water that "jetted down one hundred feet, rotated, sprayed, and swirled...disappeared and reappeared as a mist."<sup>27</sup> The fountains were a collaboration between Noguchi, Japanese-American architect Shoji Sadao, and Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, and set the stage for Noguchi's later work as a designer of exterior artistic installations and the complementary landscapes that surround them. Charles Blessing cited the Osaka fountain design in a personal letter to Noguchi in the summer of 1971 as he encouraged him to submit a proposal to Detroit.<sup>28</sup> Noguchi submitted his fountain proposal to the Fountain Selection Committee in late August 1971.

Noguchi's selection as artist for the fountain almost immediately sparked contention. Much of it came from David Elgin Dodge, a member of the selection committee who had also submitted his own design. In September 1971, Dodge complained that Noguchi had not submitted a sketch of his design, only a verbal description. He also pointed out a technicality: The location of Noguchi's fountain was to be at the center of the plaza, not the foot of Woodward Avenue as stipulated by Anna Thomson Dodge (her will used the phrase 'the fountain in the park at the foot of Woodward'). The fact that SH&G's 1960s design for the plaza also placed the fountain at the center of the plaza appears to reinforce the idea that this was sour grapes on the part of Dodge. A friend of the Dodge family defended him, saying that Dodge "is a registered architect who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, not just some little rich boy who says: 'I'm going to do this because grandma gave the money.'...David Dodge [living in Switzerland] is understandably unhappy because his plan, sweated out with William Wesley Peters, chief architect of the Wright Foundation's Taliesin Institute, didn't win."<sup>29</sup> The issue was finally resolved by the city agreeing to name the plaza "Dodge Brothers Plaza" in return for the family's agreement to drop the requirement that the fountain be on the plaza's street edge.<sup>30</sup>

While Noguchi may have had Dodge as an adversary, Charles Blessing appeared to be a supporter. The city planning director was familiar with Noguchi's work at least as early as April 1959, when he penned a letter to Noguchi while was staying at the Beaux Arts Hotel in New York City "I am very hopeful of meeting with you tomorrow – Thursday to talk about a wonderful program we are considering in Detroit, Michigan – a "master plan" of Recreational Hills, recalling your Jefferson National Memorial Competition Submittal. We will have

<sup>27</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), 174.

<sup>28</sup> Charles A. Blessing letter to Isamu Noguchi. July 15, 1971, Detroit, Michigan. MS\_PROJ\_156\_003, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>29</sup> Ladd Neuman, "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful," *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.

<sup>30</sup> Julie Morris, "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

60,000,000 cubic yards of expressway excavation and we propose using this for a new aspect of the urban scene.”<sup>31</sup> Although this particular project never came to fruition, Blessing was clearly aware of Noguchi’s concepts of space and materials much earlier than Noguchi’s initial Civic Center Fountain plan presentation in 1971.

Another development was that SH&G’s Hastings, with the support of the selection committee, recommended that Isamu Noguchi be awarded the commission not just for the fountain but the entire plaza. It was particularly remarkable as Hastings was the chairman of SH&G, which had just completed an entirely new design for the plaza. It also represented Noguchi’s official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and public civic space. While Noguchi was accustomed to considering urban spaces as relationships to a whole rather than as singular objects, Hart Plaza would be his first opportunity to execute a commission at this scale. His modernist public spaces consisted of plazas and parks with landscapes designed as sculptural experiences, setting him apart from traditional landscape architects. Noguchi and Shoji Sadao formalized a new partnership, Noguchi Fountain and Plaza, Inc., in 1971, working with Smith, Hinchman & Grylls as local on-site architects and engineers, to complete the project.<sup>32</sup>

Noguchi wrote of his design:

Emerging out of classical symmetry toward a controlled asymmetry and the river beyond, the mood is that of the primeval land we inhabit within America. The vista is defined by the primary forms which themselves invite participation as places of relaxation: to sit and listen to the sounds of the river, the sound of voices, or even music and theater at times...<sup>33</sup>

Noguchi’s plaza design for Detroit contained two primary elements inspired by recent events: the *Dodge Fountain* at the center of the plaza, and the *Pylon* at the Jefferson Avenue entrance. In refining the design of the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two, cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large twenty-six-foot diameter ring thirty feet above the ground. In describing the fountain, he noted that he wanted it to “represent our times and our relationship to outer space.”<sup>34</sup> His futuristic design motif was in keeping with the times. The 1960s was the decade of the first manned space flights, the development of the powerful Saturn V rocket, and the safe landing of Apollo 11 on the surface of the moon. Noguchi even referenced space travel as an inspiration for the fountain during a presentation to the Fountain Selection Committee in the spring of 1973.

---

<sup>31</sup> Charles A. Blessing letter to Isamu Noguchi. April 22, 1959. Beaux Arts Hotel, New York City. MS\_PROJ\_257\_007, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>32</sup> Jenny Dixon, “Musings on Isamu Noguchi’s Hart Plaza”, docomomo-us.org. <https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza>. (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to the Horace E. Dodge Fountain Selection Committee, August 25, 1971. NFP\_DET\_071\_001. Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Friedman, *Noguchi’s Imaginary Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum. 1978), 80.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

The great fountain, projected to be the most significant of modern times, will rise from the plateau of primal space. It will be an engine for water, plainly associating its spectacle to its source of energy, an engine so deeply a part of Detroit. It will recall and commemorate the dream that has produced the automobile, the airplane, and now the rocket, a machine become a poem.<sup>35</sup>

The base of the stainless steel fountain was set in a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The *Dodge Fountain* was a technological spectacle, with three hundred water jets within the ring capable of creating thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.<sup>36</sup> The fountain and nearby *Pylon* were both constructed of custom metal fabricated by the Allied Bronze Division of the Otis Elevator Company.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Isamu Noguchi, typescript of presentation to Fountain Selection Committee, March 1973. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975-79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>36</sup> For a technical discussion about the operation of the Dodge Fountain's mechanical systems, examine "Splashy fountain bejewels motor city plaza." *Engineering News Record*, October 6, 1977, 64, 67, and see also numerous memos and other technical correspondence in the archive of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>37</sup> Kerry O'Connor, "Elevating Architectural Art," *United Technologies Bee Hive*, Summer 1977, 6-9.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State



Figure 3: The *Dodge Fountain* in operation, with both upper and lower water features functioning. *Pylon* rises in the distance to the right. Circa 1980. Photographer: Balthazar Korab, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office collection.

Noguchi sited the *Pylon* at the north entrance of the plaza along the centerline of Woodward Avenue, where it served as the fulcrum for a dramatic diagonal axis leading to the *Dodge Fountain* at the center of the plaza, and the Detroit River beyond. The concept of the *Pylon* was first introduced in an early plan by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. The architecture firm had conceived of a tall tower placed at the entrance of the plaza, which Noguchi later transformed into a 120-foot stainless steel framed pylon, seven feet square at its base, that twisted into a helix as it rose toward the sky, clad in shining anodized aluminum plate. The form of the helix had recently captured the public imagination when it was discovered, in the 1950s, that the molecular structure of DNA had the smooth three-dimensional curve of a helix. To translate the form into a 120-foot-tall structure, the pylon required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. Noguchi later claimed that he had donated the *Pylon*, “a free gift to get things going”<sup>38</sup> to the city, although it is not clear from the context if he was referring to the design of the piece, or the fabrication itself. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated November 1977 reported that the *Pylon* cost around \$425,000 and was paid for entirely by private donations.<sup>39</sup> Due in part to the complexity of the fountain design, the *Pylon* was actually

<sup>38</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>39</sup> “Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza.” *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

the first element of the plaza to be completed, and a dedication ceremony was held on August 28, 1974.<sup>40</sup>

The remaining elements of Noguchi's plaza plan were designed and placed relative to the *Pylon* and *Dodge Fountain*: the stepped pyramid amphitheater reminiscent of Play Mountain at the southeast corner of the plaza, placed perpendicular to the diagonal axis, and the oval amphitheater at the northwest, the pyramid amphitheater's visual counterpart, which led into the underground promenade. Approximately one hundred feet west of the fountain, the granite tiles dipped into a shallow circular depression set into the surface. Noguchi provided a playful visual counterpart to this circular depression to the north, mirrored along the axis established by the amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater, with a fountain and play structure set in a rectangle of square granite slabs of varying heights.

The entire plaza was paved with carnelian granite – a red and black flecked stone from South Dakota. Large pavers, four feet square and finished with a horizontally raked surface specified as “mellogroove” in construction documents and clean cut on the edges, delineated the primary walkways through the plaza, wrapping widely around the fountain and highlighting the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the Veterans' Memorial Building above the Atwater Tunnel. Smaller six-inch square pavers with a rougher finish and an irregular “guillotine” edge encircled the fountain and provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater and along the waterfront. In writing of his design of the civic center plaza, Noguchi stated, “what is important above all is the sense of space that Hart Plaza supplies. An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people.”<sup>41</sup>

Atwater Street's continuation parallel to the river and beneath the plaza was incorporated into Noguchi's design. The roadway was realigned into a serpentine path, further away from the river where it passed closest to the *Dodge Fountain*. The roof of the road tunnel was paved in the same large, four-foot-square pavers found on other primary walkways. The tunnel roof therefore afforded direct sightlines to the river from the fountain, both to the east up the Detroit River to Belle Isle, and to the southwest, downriver toward the Ambassador Bridge. The height requirement for vehicle traffic beneath required the surface design to be largely level from Jefferson Street to the Atwater tunnel. Lawn panels then sloped down toward the river, embodying a more natural connection to the water.

Like UNESCO before it, Hart Plaza was meant to be moved through to be experienced. One could not find every plaza feature or experience every viewpoint by standing in a single location. The horizon of the water feels far away, until you move through the growing tree cover and suddenly the water spreads before you, and you can hear it. From the water, your eyes can't reach the skyline of downtown skyscrapers without first being interrupted by the *Dodge Fountain* and *Pylon* in the foreground.

---

<sup>40</sup> “Pylon Ceremonies in Civic Center.” City of Detroit News Release, August 28, 1974.

<sup>41</sup> *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space* (Exhibition catalogue, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 29.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

The project began with a great deal of optimism, buoyed by the vision of a public waterfront park that the citizens of Detroit could enjoy throughout the seasons. Noguchi's design of the plaza was generally well received and accepted "as the only way to have it harmonize with the fountain."<sup>42</sup> Blessing and Mayor Roman Gribbs offered Noguchi enthusiastic approval and city support. The Common Council approved Noguchi's design in the spring of 1973. A press release from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls dated March 30, 1973, announcing the presentation to the Detroit Common Council indicates Noguchi's intentions:

In addition to the fountain, the plaza now has the strong emphasis on a wide variety of uses by both large and small groups of people, many of which can occur simultaneously. ... The fountain itself, a 30 foot high ring floating above a walled circular pool, is a refinement of the original concept of an 'engine for water.' ... The plaza now makes provision for a number of public activities on different levels, including a large circular festival amphitheater that can be used for outdoor music, dance, theater, or can be converted to ice skating; a tourist center, a smaller gathering place for a variety of entertainment or educational uses; shopping facilities; a riverfront restaurant directly overlooking the water; a riverside promenade; and underground restrooms, dressing rooms, service areas, etc.<sup>43</sup>

By the fall of 1973 the civic center plan had passed through several mayoral administrations and was now in the hands of Mayor Coleman A. Young, Detroit's first African American mayor, who asked Noguchi how the plaza would accommodate the annual Ethnic Festivals which had been inaugurated under Young's predecessor Roman Gribbs and had grown from three festivals held in the summer to over twenty.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Sculpture of Space*, 178.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, Hinchman & Grylls press release, March 30, 1973.

<sup>44</sup> "Ethnic Festivals on Weekends," Detroit Free Press, June 24, 1979.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State



Figure 4: An early model of Hart Plaza by Isamu Noguchi, looking toward the Detroit River from above Jefferson Avenue. Key elements including *Pylon* and central fountain (depicting the initial 1971 design) are generally situated in their as-built locations. Other elements including a stepped pyramid/ziggurat, circular bowl depression, and cubist sculpture are also present. This model is also depicted in the December 1971 edition of *Progressive Architecture*, and the design was soon revised. Courtesy The Noguchi Museum Archives, 02118. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society [ARS]

Plans for the plaza already had it sitting well above grade, having been located on the site of a former parking lot and elevated, due to poor soil conditions, on piles sixteen feet above the riverbank. Noguchi quickly revised his design to include a lower level with space for a riverside service road, a restaurant, and an amphitheater large enough to accommodate the ethnic festivals. A working model of basswood and metal from ca. 1978 shows all key structures and features of the built Noguchi design in place, with only minor changes (including replacing the stepped lawn panels with a gentle slope) undertaken in the as-built final product (see Figure 5).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Model for Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit, Michigan, 1977-1978, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/artwork/6469>. (accessed: May 20, 2022)



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

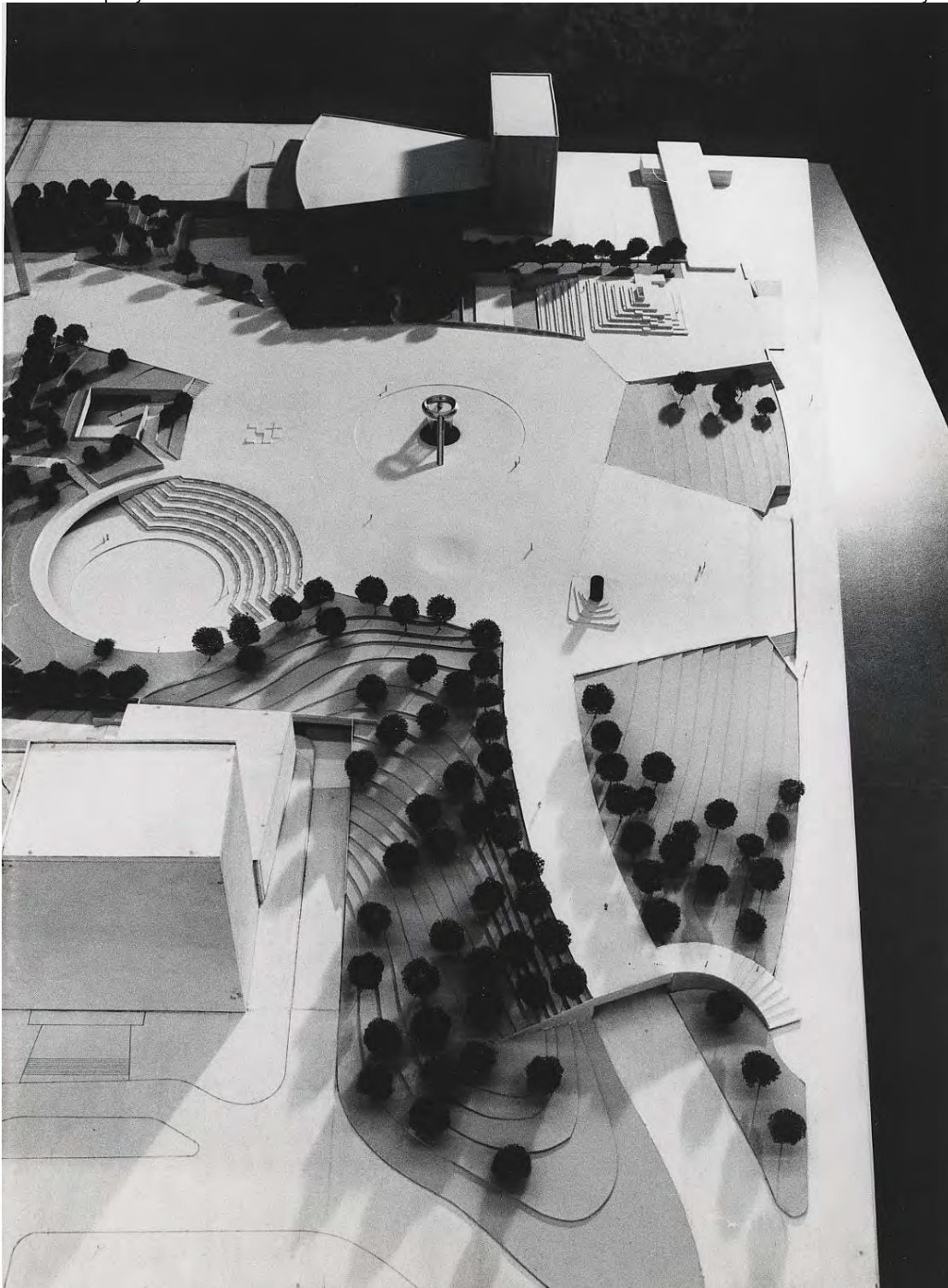


Figure 5: A 1978 model of Hart Plaza, looking from southwest to northeast with the Detroit River along the righthand border. All of the key design elements built into the completed plaza are present here. It is not clear if the stepped lawn panels toward the river depicted in the model were later revised into sloping panels or if the steps were done for simplicity in small-scale. Courtesy The Noguchi Museum Archives, 02118. Photographer: Evelyn Hofer. The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York / Artists Rights Society [ARS]

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

### ***Dedication of Philip A. Hart Plaza***

Construction of Hart Plaza took place over several years, and the City held a series of ceremonies to commemorate the completion of its major sculptural elements, its naming and its formal opening. In August 1974, Mayor Young presided at ceremonies marking the completion of the *Pylon*, the first component of the Plaza, where he noted, “this distinctive landmark is a big step in developing an outstanding, people-oriented, riverfront-downtown area.” The presentation of a plaque honoring the role of Robert Hastings, who had recently died, was also part of the ceremony.<sup>46</sup>

The plaza was projected for completion in 1976, in time for the 275th anniversary of Detroit and the bicentennial of the United States. By that summer, however, it was still under construction. With a backdrop of cranes and in the presence of Noguchi, Mayor Young, and other invited guests, dedicated the *Dodge Fountain* on the afternoon of July 24, 1976. The ceremony took place among the foundations of the sub plaza but open to the sky since the only completed portion of the plaza surface was the circular, granite-paved area directly below the fountain. The water was briefly turned on for the event, but final performance testing did not occur until the fall of 1977.

Although the city had agreed to name the plaza in honor of the Dodge brothers in 1972, by 1977 other considerations took precedence. In 1977 the plaza was officially named Philip A. Hart Plaza in honor of the United States Senator from Michigan, Philip Aloysius Hart, who had died in office on December 26, 1976. On May 18, 1978, Jane Hart, the wife of the plaza’s namesake, unveiled the Hart Plaza dedication plaque with Mayor Young and other attendees.

Philip A. Hart was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, in 1912. He studied at Georgetown University, graduating from there in 1934. Hart then studied law at the University of Michigan, and, after completing his legal education, was admitted to the Michigan bar and practiced law in the state until World War II. At the conclusion of the war Hart returned to Michigan, and served in various public posts, including lieutenant governor (1955-1958) until he was elected to the United States Senate in 1958. Hart served eighteen years in the Senate, during which time he was instrumental in passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, among other legislation. Hart was not only respected by his colleagues, his integrity, political courage, and humility resulted in Hart being recognized as “the Conscience of the Senate.” In addition to Hart Plaza, several public buildings have been named in Hart’s honor, including the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Philip A. Hart Visitor Center in Empire, Michigan; the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D. C., the only congressional office building to be named for a sitting senator;<sup>47</sup> and the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center (formerly the Battle Creek Sanitarium) in Battle Creek, Michigan, among others.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear if this plaque is still on the site. It was not observed during field investigations.

<sup>47</sup> “Philip A. Hart: A Featured Biography.” United States Senate.  
[www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured\\_Bio\\_Hart.htm](http://www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_Hart.htm)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Noguchi was back in Detroit in April 1979, for Hart Plaza's final, official dedication and opening. Concurrent with the dedication of the plaza, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) held an exhibit of Noguchi's work entitled "Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes." In the days leading up to the dedication ceremony, Noguchi attended a formal dinner at the DIA honoring his achievements, and conducted a forum connected with the exhibit opening, along with architect Walter Netsch, art critic Dore Ashton, and curator Jay Belloli, where he shared his thoughts on public projects in Detroit and the world. Noguchi's public speeches framed Hart Plaza in relation to other public projects around the world.

The formal opening of the plaza took place on the afternoon of Friday, April 20, 1979. The announcement for the 1979 dedication ceremony emphasized inclusivity: "come to Downtown's new Hart Plaza and enjoy... Hart Beat. The People's Dedication of the Philip A. Hart Plaza in the Civic Center, Foot of Woodward ... Bring your lunch, bring your camera, bring a friend."<sup>48</sup> Festivities included a mime troupe, a dance company, a church choir, and jazz bands. Mayor Young praised Noguchi to the crowd, who responded with a "long ovation" for the artist and crowded around him after the ceremony, expressing their appreciation for his work and requesting autographs. Noguchi responded modestly, "there's nothing I can add. I've spoken through the fountain."<sup>49</sup>

However, Noguchi did use the occasion to express his unhappiness at the condition of the fountain, and urged the Mayor to maintain it properly. As the *Detroit Free Press* observed nearly ten years later, "the fountain was supposed to have five primary designs and 30 different patterns, taking a half hour to complete its repertoire. It never did. It gurgled, fizzled, spit and just plain didn't work." Noguchi blamed it on lack of proper maintenance:

the problem doesn't seem to be with the design and construction as much as lack of know-how on how to maintain and run the fountain. Some of the pipes have been left on in winter.... It seems an elementary precaution to drain water lines in winter with something costing \$3 million, or \$300 for that matter... A five-gallon paint can [was] dropped into the fountain's filter.... Noguchi [noted] the fountain needs a permanent maintenance man.

Mayor Young was reportedly annoyed at the public criticism, and noted that the city's budget did not support a full-time maintenance person. Although Young and Noguchi both expressed regret at their words that day, the fountain's operation continued to be an issue. It had a highly sophisticated computerized system to control the light and water within the fountain that frequently clogged due to dirt and debris, a situation not helped when pipes were left on during the winter causing damage from freezing. The fountain continued to limp on, suffering from a

---

<sup>48</sup> Hart Plaza Dedication, August 20, 1979. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Heldman, "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

lack of maintenance and engineering knowledge, until 1988 when the city committed \$800,000 to rebuild the fountain, with all new valves and computers.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the contretemps over the fountain maintenance, reaction to Hart Plaza was generally favorable. *Detroit Free Press* art critic Marsha Miro summed up the appeal of the plaza as “a wonderful place to be, to lounge, to laze, to gaze in. It is comfortable, pleasant, harmonious. You don’t feel overwhelmed or oppressed by the urban hubbub, but somehow able to cope. It is a people place. Just what we needed.”<sup>51</sup> Director of Public Information for the City of Detroit Joyce Garrett praised Hart Plaza as “the new hub of Detroit,” and informed Noguchi that he would be “thrilled by the throngs of joyous people who are experiencing its facilities daily.”<sup>52</sup>



Figure 6: An aerial view of a well-attended event at Hart Plaza looking generally south, with the Detroit River at top and Jefferson Avenue just out of view at the bottom. The incomplete lawn beds near the river suggest a date around 1980. This is the same perspective as the early model in Figure 4. Photographer: Balthazar Korab, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office collection.

<sup>50</sup> “Dodge Fountain; It works - after 10 years,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988; “Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979; Louis Heldman, “Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

<sup>51</sup> Marsha Miro, “What Noguchi’s Genius Brought to Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.

<sup>52</sup> Joyce F. Garrett, letter to Isamu Noguchi, July 9, 1979, in the Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Noguchi continued his interest in the development of the plaza in the following years, writing letters to express his concerns with how the plaza was used and elements that were added. Noguchi renewed his criticisms to Mayor Young several months after the dedication. He complained that the plaza was not designed to accommodate 100,000 people for the city's large festivals, expressed his distress that kiosks were placed in the parkway to the west, and added, "this may have been a stop gap measure needed to cope with the sudden crowds. But the long-range solution would be to go back to the original idea of having the overload handled in a more suitable place that does not ruin the view."<sup>53</sup>

Although the plaza had been officially opened, several key landscape features remained incomplete. In 1979, the chairman of the J.L. Hudson Company, located in downtown Detroit, wrote Noguchi expressing his appreciation at having "left us the Plaza and Fountain" and stated, "I can assure you that many of us will keep a watchful eye on the completion of the landscaping and other details that are still left unattended."

Despite the praise for the plaza, by the early 1980s Noguchi was still frustrated at the lack of progress on the completion of his design. In February 1982, he sent \$2,000 to the City of Detroit's Department of Engineering and Planning with a letter that stated, "the purpose, as you know, is to purchase eight trees which are to be planted in the Hart Plaza in a location which I discussed with Mrs. Larson, in an arc starting near the flagpoles and going towards the river." Half of the donation was from an honorarium he received from a recent talk at the University of Michigan, and the other half was his own personal contribution. Noguchi concluded by stating that the intention of the eight trees is that, "...they will grow to a size which would permit the viewing of the plaza from beneath the branches."

In a letter to the director of the Central Business District Association, penned in 1988 a few months before his death, Noguchi was more exacting in his criticism and reflective of his misgivings:

As you must know I am the one who worked on what there is there [sic] starting in 1971, over a period of seven years. The design is mine to the smallest detail...the company I formed, together with Shoji Sadao to assist me, received hardly anything because the working drawings which accurately followed our specifications had to be done by Smith Hinchman & Grylls and they took 60%, I hope you will appreciate that I feel I deserve consideration in whatever transpires in Hart Plaza...

The flagpoles are a hodgepot [sic] of flags with light fixtures; the light stands entirely decorative...I suggested that tall poles for general lighting could be used at the perimeter...Imagine my shock on visiting Hart Plaza on July 3rd and finding a forest of bright aluminum poles crowding in on the fountain; in direct confrontation with the fountain. This type of fussy light fixtures [is] no doubt

---

<sup>53</sup> Isamu Noguchi Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, August 22, 1979. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

intended to bring interest to buildings where this is lacking. The globes of light are intended to light themselves, to draw attention, and are not an efficient source of lighting for the space. This is probably why there are so many.

It would be nice and appropriate if the designers work could be respected when changes or “improvements” are made by others. I was not informed. I hope you will understand my distress.<sup>54</sup>

It is not clear if Noguchi received a letter in reply or if his concerns were considered in later improvements.

### ***Later Additions to Hart Plaza***

Beginning shortly before Noguchi’s death in 1988 various additions have been made to Hart Plaza. In 1986 the works of Noguchi and his one-time instructor Gutzon Borglum were integrated when Borglum’s bust of Abraham Lincoln was incorporated into the formal green space adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center within Hart Plaza. The space has been referred to as the Lincoln Garden since erection of the sculpture.

Several pieces were added to Hart Plaza to commemorate Detroit’s tricentennial in 2001. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel east of the *Dodge Fountain*.

On the southern edge of the plaza, facing the river, sits *Gateway to Freedom*, which illustrates an African American family pointing across the river to Canada where freedom and prosperity wait, marking the Detroit terminus of the Underground Railroad’s safe passage for escaped enslaved people. The companion monument entitled *Tower of Freedom* is located directly across the river in Windsor, Ontario. The monument in Windsor depicts a formerly enslaved man raising his arms to celebrate his freedom while a Quaker woman offers assistance to a woman and her child.

Edward Dwight, the artist who sculpted both works, was a veteran of the United States Air Force and trained as the first Black astronaut. Although he occasionally “built things with scrap metal,” he harbored no artistic intent until George Brown, Colorado’s first Black lieutenant governor, asked him to create a statue for the state capitol building in 1974. The commission was a success and helped launch his second career as a sculptor memorializing the struggle for civil rights. Dwight’s body of work would eventually encompass more than one-hundred-twenty memorials, monuments, and public art installations as well as gallery sculptures including statues of Martin Luther King Jr., Hank Aaron, and Harriet Tubman.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane J. Edgewater. July 8, 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Interview of Edward Dwight by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed: July 20, 2018)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

In March 2001 the Michigan Labor History Society invited over 120 artists and sculptors from across the country to gather in Detroit and envision a monument to the history of the labor movement at Hart Plaza along Jefferson Avenue. The location held an important place in labor history as the site of Detroit's early industries including the fur and ship building trades, as well as more modern industries such as the auto industry which was founded just a few blocks east of Hart Plaza. The site was also in an area of many important events in Detroit's labor history, from the big organizing rallies of the 1930s to the Labor Day parades to the historic civil rights march of 1963 which all took place within a few blocks of the future site of Hart Plaza.

Two months after that initial gathering of artists, the Society received fifty-five proposals for the monument. A panel of five jurists reviewed the submissions and selected three finalists, before agreeing on a collaboration between David Barr and Sergio De Giusti. The monument was made possible by donations from more than 1,800 rank-and-file workers and individuals from dozens of unions, organizations and enterprises including the United Auto Workers, Detroit Federation of Teachers, Iron Workers and Roofers Union. In 2003 the monument was completed and installed in Hart Plaza. The artists entitled their collaboration *Transcending*. It rises sixty-three feet above street level in the form of two stainless-steel arcs. The arcs are geared on the inside to reflect Detroit's industrial might, and open at the apex to symbolize labor's unfinished work.<sup>56</sup>

In 2006 the *Dodge Fountain* was refurbished and rededicated by Gretchen Carhartt Valade, philanthropist, chair of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation, and chairwoman emeritus of Detroit-based Carhartt, Inc., sponsor of the free jazz festivals held annually at Hart Plaza. The fountain's computerized water designs were reprogrammed to reflect Noguchi's original intent. A small cast stone monument was installed on the southern edge of the plaza to mark Valade's contribution.

In 2011 the Ford Auditorium, which had sat virtually vacant since around 1990, was demolished, removing one of the major buildings of the original civic center and altering the spatial organization to the immediate east of Hart Plaza. In June 2023 a life-size metal statue of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., depicted standing at a lectern in the midst of speaking with his hand raised, was unveiled near the northwest corner of Hart Plaza. The monument commemorates the 1963 Walk to Freedom held in Detroit, led by Dr. King and others, who marched down Woodward Avenue to a rally held near the river at Cobo Arena. Crafted by artist Stan Watts, it was created between 2005 and 2010 but not installed until the sixtieth anniversary of the march.

Public access to Hart Plaza has also changed in more recent times. An important goal of the Noguchi design was to connect the city with its river. The original Noguchi-designed riverfront walk supplied this but was an isolated segment and never fully achieved this goal. In 2003 the non-profit Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was established to plan for and link together various unrelated public access points along the Detroit River into a continuous five-mile public pathway known as the Detroit RiverWalk. Work in the vicinity of Hart Plaza got underway in the mid-2000s, better linking to the former Cobo Hall to the west, and a connection behind the site of the

---

<sup>56</sup> "Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit." Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Ford Auditorium to the east in 2011. Hart Plaza is now a geographically central component of the RiverWalk, inviting users exploring the riverfront up into its public spaces, and as a welcoming point into the central business district of the city.

### ***Community Use of Hart Plaza***

From its inception, Hart Plaza was a hub of Detroit's cultural and social events. The plaza was active year-round, serving as a popular location for weekend festivals, concerts, and rallies in the warmer months and for ice-skating in the wintertime. Well before its completion, Hart Plaza was used for informal activities, such as picnics and sunbathing, as well as organized events like Detroit concert band performances in the summer of 1977. That same year, local radio station WDET and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra held an impromptu rally to protest a state legislative committee's recommendation to slash funds for the arts.

The most significant events held in Hart Plaza in its early years were the popular Ethnic Festivals, inaugurated under Mayor Gribbs. As Gribbs' wife wrote in 1974:

the summer Ethnic Festivals on the riverfront were the idea of Mayor Gribbs and as a result millions of metropolitan Detroiters have has a magnificent time enjoying the cultural, the art and the food of many Ethnic people who have contributed so much to make Detroit the great city that it is. We started with 3 Festivals in the summer of 1970. By 1973 the number have grown to 20. The Ethnic Festivals are the first of their kind in the U.S. to be done over every consecutive weekend throughout the summer.<sup>57</sup>

Festivals included Greek, Italian, Polish, Irish, and African American heritage, and later expanded to include the celebration of other many other cultures, including the Festival of India, Festival of Captured Nations, and a Slovenia Festival.

The festivals initially took place at Michigan Avenue and Third Street. Following his election as Mayor, Coleman Young requested that Noguchi alter his design for Hart Plaza to accommodate the festivals, and Noguchi created a lower level to house facilities for the festivals. Organizers had hoped to hold the festivals at Hart Plaza in the summer of 1978, but plans had to be deferred due to delays in construction. Finally, the festivals were first held in Hart Plaza in 1979. With only twenty-one weeks in the summer and shoulder seasons, each group was assigned its own weekend and sometimes different ethnic groups had to share Hart Plaza during the same weekend. The profile of the Ethnic Festivals was raised considerably by their location in such a prominent downtown space, and they dominated the program of the plaza in its early years, with millions of people attending the festivals every year.

---

<sup>57</sup> Katherine Gribbs, handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

During the week, Hart Plaza remained active with weekday programs specifically suited for nearby office workers. Local radio stations set up in the plaza and provided noontime concerts with live performances by artists who were promoting their new albums. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, which was headquartered at the adjoining Ford Auditorium during Hart Plaza's early years, held outdoor performances on the plaza.

During the winter, the city operated the amphitheater's lower surface as an ice rink. There were condensers under the sunken amphitheater that were used to create and maintain the ice. The lower level had spaces for skate rental and a warming room. It was a popular destination for winter recreation during the weekend, and equally as popular during the week where office workers often came by for a skating break during their lunch hour.

Given its central location and ability to accommodate large crowds, Hart Plaza was a natural setting for events featuring visiting dignitaries. One of the most significant of these was an address by Pope John Paul II in 1987. It was the first time that a pope had visited the state of Michigan, and an important moment in Michigan's religious history, especially for Catholics. In addition to appearances in heavily Polish Catholic Hamtramck and a Mass in the Pontiac Silverdome, the pope gave a speech on social justice at Hart Plaza on September 19, 1987. The city's annual Labor Day Parade always ended at Hart Plaza and, due to Detroit's importance in the labor movement, the current President or Vice-President of the United States usually came to Hart Plaza to speak during the parade, including Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore.

In the early 1980s, attendance at the Ethnic Festivals at Hart Plaza began to wane. There were several contributing factors: an increase in crime, cultural assimilation as young Detroiters expressed less an interest in attending ethnic events, and urban sprawl as many groups moved outside of the city and took their festivals with them. But with a decline in the Ethnic Festivals came a rise in "Themed Festivals" organized by promoters. These included the International Freedom Festival, a two-week celebration that ended with fireworks at Hart Plaza, the Hoe Down, which was initially sponsored by Budweiser, the Detroit Blues Festival, food-oriented festivals like the Chili Cook-off, Great American Rib Fest, and Ribs & Soul, and the Detroit Riverfront Festival.

Another major annual event held at Hart Plaza was the International Jazz Festival. Founded as the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival, it was the largest free jazz festival in North America, first held over Labor Day Weekend 1980. It was the idea of Robert E. McCabe, the founding president of Detroit Renaissance, an organization created to provide economic stimulus projects for the city in 1971 including housing developments and construction of the Renaissance Center, which was designed by architect John Portman. McCabe's inspiration for the jazz festival was "Detroit's history as a great jazz center back in the 1920s and the strong music heritage of the public schools. Music was a very important factor, and it was time to revive it." The festival was developed concurrently with the Detroit Grand Prix and the International Freedom Festival to complement the physical developments of Detroit Renaissance and provide a "more rapid economic impact on the downtown area." Originally called the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival to reflect its partnership with an international jazz festival in Montreux, Switzerland, the festival

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

merged with Detroit's Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in 1991 and is now managed and produced by the Detroit International Jazz Festival Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed in 2006.<sup>58</sup>

Beginning in the late 1980s there were significant changes to the programs and maintenance of Hart Plaza. In 1989 the Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved from the adjoining Ford Auditorium to the recently restored Orchestra Hall. The plaza also suffered from cutbacks in maintenance. Initially, the running of Hart Plaza was a three-office operation. The City of Detroit's Recreation Department was responsible for all operations and programming, the Civic Center Department oversaw maintenance, and the Department of Public Works kept the plaza clean, such as snow removal and cleaning up after the weekend festivals. Unfortunately, the city's best efforts to successfully manage Hart Plaza were impacted by larger forces taking shape throughout the city, which was facing an economic downturn, the loss of wealth to the outlying suburbs, and a struggling middle class. In 1992 the Recreation Department had to lay off many of its staff. Some were eventually hired back, but by then the use of Hart Plaza had changed. Vendors requested to use their own cooking equipment and booths "upstairs" at the plaza level to provide increased visibility from Jefferson Avenue, resulting in the downstairs kitchens and equipment falling into disuse. In the early 2000s the Civic Center Department pulled back from their involvement with Hart Plaza and an independent cleaning company had to be commissioned to clean up the plaza after events. With dwindling staff and financial resources, the maintenance and upkeep of Hart Plaza began to decline.

In 2004, Campus Martius Park in downtown Detroit was completed, with two performance stages and its own ice-skating rink, and the ice-skating rink at Hart Plaza was permanently closed. By that time, the city was trying to get out of the business of funding events at Hart Plaza. The last event that the city collaborated with was the Detroit Electronic Music Festival in 2002. Held every year over Memorial Day weekend, the festival, known by various names over the years but currently called Movement Detroit, celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of the international Techno movement. The festival continues to use Hart Plaza, but without direct city involvement.

Hart Plaza has also been the destination for a number of large-scale, singular events in recent memory. Starting with their 1996-1997 Stanley Cup winning season, the Detroit Red Wings hockey team celebrated their National Hockey League victory with a mile long parade ending down Woodward Avenue at Hart Plaza. Aerial imagery of the event shows a sea of people attending the event clad in the team's red and white colors, filling almost every available surface of the plaza. News coverage of the event estimated attendance of more than one million people, about one tenth of Michigan's total population.<sup>59</sup> Parades were repeated again for Stanley Cup

---

<sup>58</sup> Gary Graff, "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years," *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> "From the Vault: Coverage from 1997 Red Wings Stanley Cup victory parade in Detroit." WDIV Detroit Channel 4, [clickondetroit.com](https://www.clickondetroit.com/video/sports/2022/06/02/from-the-vault-coverage-from-1997-red-wings-stanley-cup-victory-parade-in-detroit/).  
<https://www.clickondetroit.com/video/sports/2022/06/02/from-the-vault-coverage-from-1997-red-wings-stanley-cup-victory-parade-in-detroit/> (accessed August 3, 2022.)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

victories in 1998, 2002, and 2008, and for a Detroit Pistons' National Basketball Association championship parade in 2004, each terminating with a celebratory community rally at Hart Plaza. In April 2024, the National Football League Draft event was held in downtown Detroit including several events at Hart Plaza. The plaza is likely the only outdoor facility large enough to accommodate gatherings of this scale in the downtown area.

### *The Noguchi Vocabulary*

Time and again, Isamu Noguchi emphasized in his correspondence that a single individual sculpture must take into account its surroundings. In a similar vein, a plaza, garden, or park must look to how it would interact with what surrounds it in order to function properly. In his own words:

I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space: a beginning, and a groping to another level of sculptural experience and use: a total sculpture space experience beyond individual sculptures. A man may enter such a space: it is in scale with him; it is real. An empty space has no visual dimension or significance. Scale and meaning enter when some thoughtful object or line is introduced. This is why sculptures, or rather sculptural objects, create space. Their function is illusionist. The size and shape of each element is entirely relative to all the others and the given space. What may be incomplete as sculptural entities are of significance to the whole.

...[i]ts viewing is polydirectional. Its awareness is in depth. With the participation of mobile man all points are central. Without a fixed point of perspective all views are equal, continuous motion with continuous change. The imagination transforms this into a dimension of the infinite.<sup>60</sup>

With this mindset, Noguchi tailored each commission to its particular landscape. While no two installations are identical, a common vocabulary of features and structures emphasize his interests and priorities.

### Experiential Sculpture

Noguchi landscapes were not simply a series of elements set in lines, they were meant to be experienced, and only when you experienced one might you be led to the next. A visitor to Detroit might be drawn from blocks down Woodward Avenue by the *Pylon*, and from there to the *Dodge Fountain*. It is only at this time that they discover smaller features such as the cubist water sculpture, which was not visible before. Turning around, the expanse of the Detroit River invites them downward to the water's edge, which had been partially hidden behind the foliage of intentionally planted shade trees. Turning back, they are suddenly greeted by the gleam of the civic center buildings in the distance, set off by the *Dodge Fountain* and *Pylon* at intervening distances, leading you back toward the hustle and bustle.

---

<sup>60</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968, 161.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

### Terraces and Platforms for Seating, Performances, and Play

Play Mountain, Noguchi's early design for an equipment-less playscape of the 1930s, provided his initial inspiration toward play, where the design of the landscape itself provided platforms, treatments and landforms for people of all ages to express themselves. No definitive structures were created in Play Mountain for this purpose, and this mindset is exhibited in Hart Plaza as well. Visitors young and old alike might make structural elements of Hart Plaza their own to enjoy – the uneven steps of the pyramid amphitheater, the circular path of the spiral seating sculpture, or the scattered blocks of the cubist water sculpture, where water was never implemented, all afford a visitor the chance to make the sculpture their own.

### Fountains and Water Features

Noguchi's landscape work regularly formed around a centralized water feature. These were not uniform in materials, design, or scale. Rather than consider how a water feature might form a draw in the space, it appears Noguchi's water features were designed based on how he wanted visitors to interact with the water. In Hart Plaza, the *Dodge Fountain* is a powerful, yet approachable, centerpiece. Visitors can walk down the gently sloping stone paver bowl right up to the fountain's charging water, reaching out to touch the cascading torrents as they overflow the pool, or feel the spray on their face when it catches the wind. The fountain seems to invite them in, and once they are there, they are welcomed in another direction, to experience something else new.

### ***Noguchi's Later Public Spaces***

Public spaces as defined in this section constitute those landscapes designed by Noguchi which were intentionally built for the public (either with public or private funding) and incorporate his design philosophy. Spaces meant to be private, such as corporate courtyards, may embody some of the same stylistic cues and values but were not meant to be accessible for all. Likewise, individual, large-format sculpture where the individual piece is not part of a wider Noguchi-designed landscape are also not considered for comparative analysis here.

Hart Plaza was the first of Noguchi's major civic space designs, and his experience in Detroit informed much of his later work prior to his death in 1988. His designs during these years included three public spaces associated with public redevelopment efforts in America: the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza in Los Angeles, California (1980-1983); *California Scenario* in Costa Mesa, California (1981-1982); and Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida (1986-1996). The *Dodge Fountain*, specifically, is largely akin to the Noguchi-designed structural sculpture known as *Sky Gate*, located in Honolulu, Hawaii (1977).

In 1980, the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC) received funds to develop a half-acre plaza along San Pedro Street in Los Angeles, California, as an entryway to the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center Building and the JACCC Theater. The purpose of the plaza was to facilitate the diverse cultural needs of the community and encourage

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

interaction among the residents of the surrounding neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. One of the funding criteria was a major sculptural element, which the Friends of Little Tokyo Arts (FOLTA) offered to fund.

FOLTA invited Noguchi to design a sculptural piece for a large passageway between the existing community center and a proposed theater, school and gym. Noguchi imagined the site becoming an active core for Little Tokyo. Just as he had done in Detroit, Noguchi parlayed his selection as sculptor into a larger role. Rather than accept the commission for a sculpture in a transitional space, he insisted that the planned orientation of the site be modified and the proposed gym be relocated to a new site so that the plaza could serve as a true gathering space for ceremonies and assemblies. In the end, he was offered the commission to design the enlarged one-acre plaza. The JACCC complex was designed by the architectural firm of Adachi, Sawano & Matsunaga in collaboration with landscape architects Uesgi-Tong, completed in 1980.

In his interviews and writings on the JACCC space, Noguchi noted that while his sculptural pieces secured his invitation as the plaza's designer, the entire plaza acted as a sculpture to draw people into the space, an approach he had pioneered in Detroit. His design for the plaza contained two primary elements: a central elevated sculpture and a fountain. The sculpture, *To the Issei*, situated in the heart of the plaza, consisted of two twelve-foot Japanese basalt monoliths on a fan-shaped platform and was designed as a tribute to the first generation of Japanese who immigrated to America.<sup>61</sup>

The JACCC Plaza is elevated from the surrounding landscape, and, as a large and mostly open space, has the feel of an intersection, providing an impression similar to areas of the much larger Hart Plaza and Bayfront Park. Unlike at his other public spaces paved with stone, JACCC is paved entirely in red brick, perhaps in a manner to set off the massive stones which comprise *To the Issei*. Set upon a raised quarter-circle foundation, the stepped base of *To the Issei* mirrors the stepped pyramids seen in at Hart Plaza and elsewhere, and provides a secondary purpose as a performance stage, opening out to the center of the plaza. Stepped geometric tiers line the perimeter, with a series of cubes placed at the outer edges for sitting.

Also seen at Hart Plaza, circular elements anchor the JACCC Plaza. A raised circular fountain anchors one corner, just inside the primary stairway up from San Pedro Street, set within a square foundation at an angle to the rest of the plaza. Consisting of a low convex disc, water projects from a central pipe over the rough stone surface. Less of a statement than the *Dodge Fountain* at Hart Plaza or the Pepper Fountain at Bayfront Park, it nevertheless is impossible to miss within the plaza landscape. The circular fountain in the southwest corner is countered in the opposite corner by a circular raised planter in the southeast corner. The center of the plaza is anchored by a large circular ring design of brick. Within the ring, paving bricks are hexagonal in shape, subtly emphasizing this space from the surrounding traditional rectangular pavers. Although not exactly the same as Hart Plaza's lost circular depression, the visual cue is similar.

---

<sup>61</sup> Alexandra Eve Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013, 71-6.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

California Scenario differed in scope somewhat from Hart Plaza, JACCC, and Bayfront, but its purposes were largely in alignment with the three other public spaces. Entrepreneur and philanthropist Henry T. Segerstrom commissioned Noguchi to design a garden for his expanding South Coast Plaza shopping center development in California's booming Orange County. At 1.6 acres in size, it is similar in scale to the JACCC Plaza. Segerstrom first became aware of Noguchi when the *Dodge Fountain* at what was to become Hart Plaza was featured on a magazine cover in the late 1970s. Segerstrom stated he "remember[ed] being impressed by the strength of the design, its uniqueness, the creative force that he was able to bring to bear, and its gracefulness, combined with the strength of function." C.J. Segerstrom & Sons development of the South Coast Plaza was underway at the time, and Segerstrom was determined to meet with Noguchi to discuss the design of a garden.<sup>62</sup>

Tailored to the new surrounding development, Noguchi's design was to occupy a roughly rectangular shape parcel between several office buildings and an elevated parking deck. Dubbed "California Scenario" but more formally known as the Noguchi Garden, the plan incorporated five sculptural elements "designed to create a tranquil setting in a dramatic abstract of California environment," according to Noguchi. These were titled *The Forest Walk*; *Energy Fountain*; *Land Use*; *Water Source and Water Use*; and *The Desert Land*.<sup>63</sup> A sixth element was crafted directly by Noguchi at Segerstrom's request, as he wanted "something in the garden that was done by his hand as well as by his mind." To honor the Segerstrom family's successful background in the lima bean industry, this sixth piece became *The Spirit of the Lima Bean*.<sup>64</sup>

While the California Scenario site does not have the same robust topography that the other three offer, the Noguchi signature vocabulary is still largely evident. The primary foundation is paving formed by large sandstone slabs, meant to weather with time. These are visually broken up by each of the six elements, most of which use a sculptured mound of earth to form a distinct presence. A water feature occupies the central space, although *Water Source and Water Use* is but a contemplative trickle compared to the possibilities of the *Dodge Fountain*. *Energy Fountain* offers a dynamic water feature set at the junction of two primary entry paths and viewsheds. Granite benches provide a place to rest. Distinctive plantings separate each element from the others, and all represent native flora to the state of California. Unlike the other public sites, there is less emphasis on multifunctionality, and is more akin to an actual garden. Surrounded by the hustle and bustle of busy Orange County, with reflective office buildings on one side and the concrete wall of the parking deck on the other, it is a fairly quiet place.

Noguchi's largest public space was also his last, Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida. Much like Hart Plaza fronting the Detroit River, Bayfront Park also seeks to connect the core of Miami with

<sup>62</sup> Interview of Henry T. Segerstrom by Cathy Curtis, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1989. MS\_PROJ\_200\_014, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>63</sup> "Background on the California Scenario," California Scenario: A Noguchi Celebration. Program pamphlet. March 24, 1982. MS\_PROJ\_199\_001, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>64</sup> Interview of Henry T. Segerstrom by Cathy Curtis, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1989. MS\_PROJ\_200\_014, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

its primary body of water, Biscayne Bay. Unlike at Hart Plaza, the Miami property was already a public park space, but one that was underused and suffered from poor design. Designed primarily for passive recreation, the park also suffered from the construction of a central library near its center. While the library brought a new audience to the area, it completely blocked the dramatic view of the bay from downtown and isolated the waterfront from the city. Other redevelopment projects along the borders of the park changed the surrounding landscape. In 1978, following the opening of the Walker Art Museum's exhibition on Noguchi's works, *Imaginary Landscapes*, Noguchi was contacted by Kitty Roedel, the Director of Marketing at the Miami Development Authority. Roedel requested that Noguchi look at the park and propose a solution.

In a letter to Roedel, Noguchi condemned developments surrounding Bayfront Park and reasoned, "Miami must have a totally new park because all the modern buildings have made the present facility incongruous."<sup>65</sup> In re-envisioning the space, he acknowledged the existing layout but sought to give it his own fingerprint. The realization of Noguchi's Bayfront Park design began in 1985 with the demolition of the library. This large twenty-eight-acre parcel became his largest landscape design.

Noguchi was intrigued by Bayfront's position on Biscayne Bay:

The bay there is a tremendous opening, like a huge window. That kind of space and opening interests me. On the one side you have the big buildings and the boulevard and the other side is ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, and off beyond is Europe. I think I am driven by the idea of the place and its possibilities.<sup>66</sup>

Noguchi had previously described Hart Plaza's relationship to the Detroit River as "An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people." Connecting people with the water, but also serving as the path between big buildings, a major thoroughfare and the horizon above water in the distance form a commonality first embodied at Hart Plaza.

Bayfront Park contains a number of elements that Noguchi first used in Detroit. Central to the Noguchi plan for Bayfront Park is a substantial water feature, the Mildred and Claude Pepper Fountain, surrounded by a circular plaza. Like the *Dodge Fountain* in Detroit, the Pepper Fountain is a visual focal point and employed cutting edge technology for its time. Noguchi designed the fountain to be able to mimic the actions of nearby Biscayne Bay through all types of weather events, using eleven distinct phased patterns. Dramatic effects for water jets, wave action, and even fog were carefully crafted into the design. It has also endured the same lament about infrequent use, and a complex computer system for control. The fountain was damaged during Hurricane Andrew in 1992, but even in its early years of operation the *South Florida Sun-Times* noted it was only operating three and a half hours each day on weekdays, and cost forty-

---

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Isamu Noguchi to Kitty Roedel. August 27, 1979. Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, 1981, Folder 1 of 24, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>66</sup> Interview of Isamu Noguchi by Kitty Roedel, *The City Slant*, Miami-Dade Community College. Spring 1986. MS\_PROJ\_253\_001, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

two dollars an hour for electricity.<sup>67</sup> An attempt to draw more tourists to the park in 2007 launched the Miami SkyLift, a large balloon which lifted passengers up to a height of five hundred feet above the park to admire the view. To properly anchor the balloon, large cylindrical concrete piers were spaced within the fountain's basin, substantially eroding the clean look of the conical volume.

Beyond the fountain, familiar Noguchi vocabulary include the play of geometric shapes, two amphitheaters, and circulation patterns such as the "interludes" alongside paths. Surface treatments and materials are similar as well, employing frequent use of concrete and large granite pavers. In addition to the Pepper Fountain, two Noguchi sculpture were later incorporated into the park's design: the *Challenger Memorial* (designed in 1986 but not installed until after his death in 1988), and white marble *Slide Mantra*, which was crafted and installed at the 1986 Venice Biennale, and then found a permanent home in Miami. The park was completed in 1996, nearly eight years after Noguchi's death, at a cost of approximately \$40,000,000.<sup>68</sup>

Noguchi's interest in structural sculpture went beyond fountains. In 1975, he entered a competition to design a new sculpture on the grounds of the park-like campus of Honolulu City Hall in Hawaii. The sculpture which emerged is remarkably similar to the design of the *Dodge Fountain*, employing tubular sections of steel, where a large undulating ring is supported by a tripod of tubular legs approximately twenty-four-feet above the ground. Again, Noguchi's interest in experienced views and vistas serves as an inspiration. Visitors are encouraged to step up onto a centered plinth and gaze heavenward, where the ring defines the unobstructed limits of the celestial sky above. Despite the irregular nature of the ring, twice each year, at a time known locally as Lāhainā Noon, when the sun is perfectly overhead, the shadow of the ring loses its irregular shape and becomes a perfect circle. Completed in 1977, *Sky Gate* is another executed example of Noguchi's interest in connecting humans with unique experiences and experimentation with unusual forms and materials.

### ***Modern Plazas in Michigan***

Plazas, as a designed public square or gathering space, are numerous in Michigan communities in general, though often of smaller size than Hart Plaza. Many, or most, blend park-like elements with hardscape and artistic elements. Few, however, possess the comprehensive design and scale of Hart Plaza. Some public plazas, like the Liberty Plaza in Ann Arbor, exhibit a vernacular Modern aesthetic in their use of materials, arrangement of spaces, and rectilinear layout. Dedicated in 1977, about the same time as Hart Plaza, Liberty Plaza is about one-tenth the size of Hart Plaza. It intended as a community space in the way that Hart Plaza was and does not possess the interplay of sculpture, design, landscaping, and vistas of Hart Plaza. It has, however, held festivals, fairs, and other community events like Hart Plaza, and has undergone some change since its construction.

---

<sup>67</sup> Joan Woods, "3.2 Million Coins in the Fountain," *South Florida Sun-Times*, July 26, 1990.

<sup>68</sup> Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, 46.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Other public spaces, such as Wenonah Park in Bay City, about 110 miles north of Detroit, are more park than plaza. Wenonah Park was established in the early 1900s and has remained a place for public recreation since that time. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the park was redeveloped and achieved the form and arrangement largely seen at present. Like Hart Plaza, Wenonah Park is located along a river and remains a prominent place for community events and festivals. A promenade runs north-south along the west side of the park, adjacent to the river. On the east side of the park, the primary entrance, or Gateway Terrace, leads to the twenty-eight-foot *Ring of Friendship* sculpture. A concrete walkway connects the terrace to the promenade. The terrace is flanked on the north and south by raised masonry planters containing mature deciduous trees. The arrangement of the planters creates walkways through these areas; their rectilinear form and materials conveying a vernacular Modern aesthetic. In the northwest corner, the original, 1981 World Friendship Arts Shell was razed in 2020 and a larger amphitheater was constructed in its place. Other redevelopments occurred in the mid-2000s, the mid-2010s, and in the early 2020s. At just over six acres, it is slightly smaller than Hart Plaza.

Michigan's only other large scale mid-twentieth-century public plaza is the Vandenberg Center Plaza in the state's second largest city of Grand Rapids. The vision for this plaza was much akin to that of the early designs for Detroit's Civic Center, where civic and commercial buildings played as much a part of a harmonious design as the space between them. But what developed in Grand Rapids was dramatically different in form and function from Noguchi's Hart Plaza.

Vandenberg Center, named for Senator Arthur Vandenberg, was part of a substantial urban renewal project which reshaped much of the downtown core between 1962 and 1969. More than 120 buildings on seventy parcels were acquired over a multi-block area for demolition. The resulting plaza designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill created a raised plaza atop a subterranean parking garage. A central, generally flat and paved plaza was surrounded on two sides by contrasting International-style office buildings for the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County: the ten-story city hall slender and rectangular, the three-story county building low and broad. To the immediate south, a larger corporate campus provided similarly styled offices for west Michigan's largest financial institution, the Old Kent Bank and Trust Company, along with the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, both designed by Grand Rapids-based Daverman Associates architects. These were paired with new buildings to the east and north constructed in the immediate years which followed, including new Federal and State office buildings, a new main post office, and new headquarters for the Union Trust Company and Grand Rapids Press newspaper. In ten short years, an intact urban neighborhood was replaced with large-scale, generally rectangular forms newly dominating the skyline.<sup>69</sup>

As the steel was being hoisted and concrete poured, discussions were underway about what type of visual feature might anchor the new plaza space. A fountain was suggested, or a reflecting pool. In April 1967, local leaders became aware of a program available from the newly created National Endowment for the Arts where federal money could be paired with local or corporate donations to create new works of art in public places. By the autumn, a local selection committee

---

<sup>69</sup> Garret Ellison, "Awash in Concrete: How Calder Plaza came to be," *Grand Rapids Press*, October 20, 2016.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

had invited Alexander Calder (1898–1976) to create a large stabile (for “stationary mobile”) sculpture for the site. Measuring forty-three feet high by fifty-four feet long by thirty feet wide and weighing forty-two tons, *La Grande Vitesse* (“The Great Swiftess”) was dedicated on June 14, 1969. Its swooping, irregular shape and bright red paint offer a stark contrast to the orderly facades of steel and concrete which surround it.<sup>70</sup> The stabile has come to define the plaza to the extent that it is commonly referred to as “Calder Plaza” instead of the more formal Vandenberg name.

Hart Plaza and Vandenberg Center began with similar origins, but they differ in function and design. In Grand Rapids, Calder was invited to design his piece for the plaza, not by a competition. While the irregular stabile looks different from every angle and sightline, the Vandenberg Center plaza was not designed with specific sightlines toward the stabile in mind. Rather, the plaza was designed by an engineering firm around concepts of function and the stabile later added to the form. In Hart Plaza, Noguchi was selected from a competitive environment to design the fountain, but once he had the authority to design the entirety of Hart Plaza, his design vocabulary touched every aspect of the plaza form. The plaza served the sightlines and paths of discovery leading to the sculptural fountain, and the fountain served to anchor the plaza which surrounded it. Visitors could catch a glimpse of the sparkling Detroit River, be drawn in by a towering aluminum helix, or enjoy the shade of a tree, all by Noguchi’s design. Noguchi’s comprehensive plan for Hart Plaza, creating topography, greenspace, plantings, performance venues, large sculptural works, and smaller sculptural support pieces, are in a class substantially different from the scale and scope of Calder’s work within Vandenberg Center.

### ***Changes to Hart Plaza Since 2021***

Starting in 2021, the Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation began a comprehensive study of parks and other public properties along the Detroit River, culminating in the East Riverfront Assets Study Report. The study involved obtaining public feedback and developing a series of recommendations which informed the creation of a new ten-year strategic plan.<sup>71</sup> Hart Plaza figured prominently in this study.

The study notes that while the public enjoys how the plaza is used for large festivals, it offers few opportunities when no major events are going on, and the poor condition of many of the features within the plaza make it unwelcoming for visitors. A reported 72 percent of participating individuals, when asked about their general opinion had a combined “fair” or “poor” opinion. The non-working fountain was acknowledged as an important feature of the plaza and respondents wished it would function. A key recommendation from the study called for the preservation of elements of Hart Plaza that are essential to Noguchi’s original design, although

---

<sup>70</sup> Garret Ellison, “Inherently Controversial: How Grand Rapids got a Calder sculpture in the first place,” *Grand Rapids Press*, October 6, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> East Riverfront Assets Study webpage. City of Detroit Department of Parks and Recreation. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/detroit-parks-recreation/parks-and-recreation-strategic-plan/east-riverfront-assets-study> (Accessed June 21, 2024.)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

this was offered alongside other recommendations to increase green space and repair or replace hardscape surfaces.<sup>72</sup>

A detailed Conditions Assessment document was created as part of the study in 2021, which informed some of the proposed physical changes needed at the plaza.<sup>73</sup> Most notable among these was the recommendation for large scale pavement replacement of some areas due to highly deteriorated conditions. This led to the 2021-2022 project that largely replaced the large carnelian pavers and some areas of small pavers and original concrete. Detroit's ability to use American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds as a result of a federal infusion of cash during and after the Coronavirus pandemic allowed additional investment to begin. In 2023 the City of Detroit issued a Request for Proposals for rehabilitate the Dodge Memorial Fountain and make other repairs to physical and mechanical features of the site including repairs to the amphitheater seating and stairs, and investments in fire safety, security, and plumbing systems.<sup>74</sup> All documents reference returning the fountain to its original capabilities with up-to-date wiring, plumbing, and computer controls. The Dodge Memorial Fountain rehabilitation project was completed in June 2024.<sup>75</sup> The City has also issued a separate Request for Proposals to renovate the grand stairs connecting the fountain plaza with the Detroit River. This project appears to be geared toward making the non-contributing *Gateway to Freedom* monument accessible to individuals with mobility disabilities. Construction has not yet begun as of the writing of this nomination.

### ***Archaeological Resources***

Not easily apparent from land, the perspective of Hart Plaza from the Detroit River shows a landscape that dramatically rises from the seawall up nearly twenty feet to the elevation of the downtown some three blocks inland. The shoreline of the Detroit River has been altered several times since Cadillac and his French landing party arrived in 1701. Seeking to increase useable land for farming and later for docks and the shipment of cargo, the shoreline was moved

---

<sup>72</sup> Hart Plaza was studied along with two other geographically adjacent public gathering places, the "Spirit Plaza" and "Monument to Joe Louis," in an East Riverfront Assets Study document titled "Civic Center." Each area was studied individually, and individual recommendations were provided for each. The Civic Center study document can be viewed online at [https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2022-08/01\\_ERAS\\_Civic%20Center.pdf](https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2022-08/01_ERAS_Civic%20Center.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> "Appendix A: Comprehensive Conditions Assessment," East Riverfront Assets Study. Mannik & Smith Group. [https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2022-08/1\\_Appendix%20A\\_Condition%20Assessment%20Report\\_210913.pdf](https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2022-08/1_Appendix%20A_Condition%20Assessment%20Report_210913.pdf) (Accessed online June 21, 2024.)

<sup>74</sup> "Request for Proposals: Hart Plaza Design-Build Services," City of Detroit. <https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2023-06/ARPA%20GSD%20RFP%20HART%20PLAZA%20DESIGN-BUILD%20183600%206-20-23.pdf> (Accessed June 21, 2024.)

<sup>75</sup> "Mayor joins in celebration of the \$6.7M ARPA-funded restoration of historic Dodge Fountain in Hart Plaza," City of Detroit. <https://detroitmi.gov/news/mayor-joins-celebration-67m-arpa-funded-restoration-historic-dodge-fountain-hart-plaza> (Accessed June 21, 2024.)



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

southward and straightened on at least two occasions in the nineteenth century. Later the site of shops and businesses, and parking lots, successive layers of history covered over what lay beneath.

As Hart Plaza was being planned, it was determined that all of the fill needed to bring the plaza up to the elevation of the downtown blocks inland of Jefferson Avenue would cause the existing shoreline to become unstable. The solution was to elevate the plaza atop five hundred concrete columns to an elevation of fifteen to eighteen feet. Envisioned as a uniform grid of columns, engineers were forced to make numerous adjustments to work around existing submerged foundations and other obstacles discovered during construction.<sup>76</sup> This work enabled Hart Plaza to be built as envisioned at the surface level, but certainly compromised surface and subsurface deposits below.

During the excavation of the riverfront site that would become Hart Plaza (20WN327) in 1975 and 1976, Charles Martinez, of the Michigan Archaeological Society, led archaeological investigations at the site. While it should be noted that Martinez's work was conducted in "an emergency situation in which neither funds nor sufficient manpower" could be utilized, the investigators nonetheless identified thirteen features within the site (Section 3 of the Governor and Judges' Plan of Detroit, 1806-1807) dating between 1830 and 1905. Among the artifacts recovered were nearly two thousand ceramic sherds, wooden brush handles, square cut nails, and glass vessels.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, the investigation team identified a privy and two mortared limestone foundations that appeared to date to the mid-nineteenth century. Both foundations were located in the southwest section of the site. The foundation identified as Feature 3 was thirty inches long and rested on four-inch-thick timber supported by an eight-inch-diameter log. The second foundation, identified as Feature 4, was ninety-three inches long, twenty-five inches high, and approximately eighteen inches thick. The foundation appeared to correspond to the south wall of a warehouse identified on an 1853 map of the city drawn by Henry Hart.<sup>78</sup>

Martinez found no features or artifacts dating to the French occupation of the site, and while not excavated, Martinez observed "two upright wooden posts or pilings... east of the Veteran's Memorial Terrace. These posts were about ten feet below the Terrace level and might have been part of an old wharf or foundation support." The site was in proximity to the Merchant's Wharf, formerly located south of Woodbridge Street between Shelby Street and Griswold Street, roughly in the west end of the current Promenade.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> "Splashy fountain bejewels motor city plaza." *Engineering News Record*, October 6, 1977, 64, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Artifacts collected from Martinez's Hart Plaza recovery effort are in the collection of the Gordon L. Grosscup Museum of Anthropology at Wayne State University, Detroit. A selection may be viewed online at <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/anthromuseum/Hart-Plaza-Artifacts>.

<sup>78</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.

<sup>79</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

No known burial sites were noted in Martinez's work. A historic cemetery survey of Wayne County undertaken by Karen Krepps suggests the British Garden Cemetery was located to the south of Jefferson Avenue near the foot of Griswold Street, in the general proximity of the *Transcending* sculpture. This would date to the British occupation of Detroit in the 1760-1787 time period, before what later become Michigan was given to the fledgling United States in the Treaty of Paris. Although the sinking of columns to bedrock and modern construction overtopped the Hart Plaza site, the potential remains that subsurface archaeological deposits may yet be uncovered on the Hart Plaza site.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

### ***Books, Reports, Dissertation & Thesis:***

- City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit – A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946).
- Detroit Board of Commerce. *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmstead, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905).
- Friedman, Martin. *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes*. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Museum, 1978.
- Frost, Karolyn Smardz. *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Galster, George. *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- Gara, Larry. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996.
- Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980.
- Kirby, Alexandra Eve. *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013.
- Korth, Katie. *Hart Plaza: A History*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. Wayne State University, 23 April 2013.
- Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit*. Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006.
- Martinez, Charles. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.
- Mull, Carol E. *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *A Sculptor's World*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1968.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987.
- Play Mountain: Isamu Noguchi + Louis I. Kahn. Tokyo: Marumo Publishing
- Post-War Improvement Committee [Detroit], *Post-War Improvements to Make Your Detroit a Finer City in which to Live and Work* (Detroit: 1944).
- Roberts, Ellis Robert. *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present*. Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855s.
- Saarinen, Eliel. *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future*. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1943.
- Simpson, Donald E. *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Pittsburgh, 2013.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Torres, Ana Maria. *Isamu Noguchi: A Study of Space*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2000.

### ***Articles and Online Sources:***

- "Architect Gives Critics Answer," *The Detroit Times*, August 10, 1947. Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Eero Saarinen Papers, Series IV, Project Records, Box 88, folder 172, Job 4627: Detroit Civic Center, Detroit, MI, clippings.
- "Biography of Eliel Saarinen," Britannica.com. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eliel-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Biography of Eero Saarinen," Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eero-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Civic Center Plans Leave Council Quiet." *Detroit Free Press*, 12 July 1947.
- Dixon, Jenny. "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza", [docomomo-us.org](http://docomomo-us.org). <https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza>. (Accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Dodge Fountain; It works – after 10 years." *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988.
- Dwight, Edward, Interview by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed: July 20, 2018).
- "Ethnic Festivals on Weekends." *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1979.
- "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.
- Graff, Gary. "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years." *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.
- Heldman, Louis. "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.
- Larivee, Shaina D. "Playscapes: Isamu Noguchi's Designs for Play," *Public Art Dialogue*, April 8, 2011. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21502552.2011.536711> (accessed March 28, 2022).
- "Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza." *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.
- Miro, Marsha. "What Noguchi's Genius Brought to Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.
- Morris, Julie. "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan." *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.
- Neuman, Ladd. "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful?" *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.
- "Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City." *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979.
- "November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries. <https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).
- Palmer, Friend. "Earlier Days in Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.
- "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.
- "Statuary and Memorial Commemorating Detroit's Role in the Underground Railroad at the Detroit River in Hart Plaza in downtown Detroit," Detroit 1701. <http://detroit1701.org/UndergroundRailroad.htm>. (Accessed online: June 14, 2018).

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

“Underground Railroad.” Detroit Historical Society.

<https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/underground-railroad>.

(Accessed online: June 14, 2018).

### ***Archival Collections:***

City of Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection. City Planning Commission Civic Center Plaza, Folder 1 and 2. Referenced files include:

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, undated.*

*Committee on Civic Design, Oct. 14, 1955.*

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, Oct 18, 1955.*

*Minutes of Departmental Committee, Detroit City Plan Commission, on the Civic Center Plaza, March 15, 1963.*

*Memorandum of Conference from Dept of Public Works, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, May 15, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, June 15 1964.*

*William Finnin Director of Municipal Parking Authority, letter to Common Council, July 27, 1964.*

*City of Detroit Resolution dated Feb 2 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. August 27, 1965.*

*McCafferty, Senior City Planner, letter to Charles Blessing, Sept 1, 1965.*

*Undated Cumulative Lists of Observations – Design Division.*

*Charles Blessing letter to City of Detroit City Plan Commission, October 8, 1965.*

*Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968.*

Gribbs, Katherine. Handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum Archives. References files include:

*1973 04 to ca1980 PH plan notes and aerial photos MS\_PROJ\_157\_041*

*1973 03 Typescript of Noguchi Presentation to Fountain Selection Committee*

*1975 07 14 Letter Noguchi to Turkin MS\_PROJ\_157\_001.pdf*

*1975 08 04 Letter Turkin to Sadao MS\_PROJ\_157\_002.pdf*

*1979 04 20 Manuscript plaza dedication notice MS\_PROJ\_157\_025*

*1979 04 24 Letter Hudson to Noguchi*

*1979 04 25 Letter Noguchi to Hustable (NYT)*

*1979 07 03 Letter Noguchi to Hudson*

*1979 08 14 Letter Denison to Meathe*

*1979 08 22 Letter Noguchi to Young*

*1979 08 27 Letter Noguchi to Roedel*

*1982 02 11 Letter Noguchi to Viall*

*1988 07 08 Letter Noguchi to Edgewater*

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.

University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Charles Mulford Robinson Papers Manuscript Collection 1010.

[http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date\\_facet%3A%221900-1950%22%20AND%20subject\\_topic\\_facet%3A%22United%20States%22&id=PACSC\\_L\\_UPENN\\_RBML\\_PUSpMsColl1010&](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date_facet%3A%221900-1950%22%20AND%20subject_topic_facet%3A%22United%20States%22&id=PACSC_L_UPENN_RBML_PUSpMsColl1010&). (Accessed online on June 10, 2018)

Wayne State University Walter Reuther Library. Cavanagh Collection, Abstract and boxes 135 and 472.

***Interviews:***

Telephone interview of Phillip A. Talbert. June 13, 2018.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other

Name of repository: Noguchi Museum, Long Island City, New York  
Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit  
City of Detroit  
Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 10.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.327662 | Longitude: -83.046069 |
| 2. Latitude: 42.328654 | Longitude: -83.043812 |
| 3. Latitude: 42.326698 | Longitude: -83.042725 |
| 4. Latitude: 42.325745 | Longitude: -83.046003 |

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927    or    ☐ NAD 1983

- |          |          |           |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of Noguchi's design, extending roughly from Jefferson Avenue on the north to the Detroit River on the south, and between the former site of Ford Auditorium on the east and the Veterans' Memorial Building on the west. See attached map for exact boundaries.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of the area designed by Isamu Noguchi, which fit within adjacent, preexisting features.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Nathaniel Nietering/Ruth E. Mills and Gregory W. DeVries  
organization: Michigan State Historic Preservation Office/Quinn Evans Architects  
street & number: 300 N. Washington Sq./4219 Woodward Ave., Ste. 301  
city or town: Lansing/Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48913/48201  
e-mail: nieteringn1@michigan.gov/rmills@quinnevans.com  
telephone: 517-331-6024/313-462-2550  
date: June 29, 2024

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Philip A. Hart Plaza

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne State: Michigan

Photographer: Rebecca Savage, City of Detroit

Date Photographed: May 2022 unless otherwise noted

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0001

View looking southeast from Joe Louis Fist center median in the intersection of Jefferson and Woodward Avenues showing *Pylon* set behind the Hart Plaza marquee.

2 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0002

View looking south-southeast across the expanse of Hart Plaza from foot of Woodward Avenue, with *Pylon*, *Dodge Fountain*, and Detroit River in the far background.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

3 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0003

View looking west-southwest of Woodward entry at Hart Plaza marquee.

4 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0004

View looking southwest from Woodward entry of grassy lawn space separating Jefferson Avenue from the Jefferson Promenade. *Transcending* is visible at center.

5 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0005

View looking northeast from Woodward entry of promenade leading out of Hart Plaza across Bates Street toward Mariners' Church.

6 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0006

View looking southeast from Woodward entry of sidewalks and lawn panels toward the Detroit River.

7 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0007

View looking east of the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building in foreground with Renaissance Center in the background.

8 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0008

View looking northwest from Woodward entry across Jefferson Avenue and up Woodward Avenue, Detroit's "Main Street."

9 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0009

View looking southwest of the Jefferson Promenade toward Cobo Hall (now Huntington Place). The Veteran's Memorial Building (now UAW-Ford Programs Center) is at left.

10 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0010

View looking northeast from about the halfway point of the Jefferson Promenade looking toward the rectangular lawn panel showing overgrown and incomplete trees and east toward the base of *Pylon*.

11 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0011

View looking southeast from Jefferson Avenue sidewalk across lawn panels, Jefferson Promenade, and *Dodge Fountain* toward Detroit River.

12 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0012

View looking northeast from the west end of the Jefferson Promenade, with *Pylon* at center.

13 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0013

View looking south of Abraham Lincoln bust.

14 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0014

View looking north along west side sidewalk surrounding the sunken amphitheater.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

15 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0015

View looking north of sunken main amphitheater performance area, also used historically as an ice-skating rink, toward the sub plaza structure. *Transcending*, nearly circular, rises in the background along the Jefferson Promenade.

16 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0016

View looking northeast of main amphitheater stepped seating with the sloping walkway from the Woodward entry beyond.

17 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0017

View looking northwest from sloping walkway of sub plaza office space with original hexagonal concrete blocks.

18 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0018

View looking south down the sloping walkway from *Pylon* to the *Dodge Fountain* and central plaza, with Detroit River behind.

19 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0019

View looking north up sloping walkway from *Dodge Fountain* area showing *Pylon* as a clear visual node against the Detroit skyline.

20 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0020

View looking north from top of sloping walkway near *Pylon* with original stone curbing, toward Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building with Detroit City-County Building (now Coleman A. Young Municipal Center) behind.

21 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0021

View looking northwest from east interlude on surface of sub plaza ventilation and illumination cylinders.

22 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0023

View looking northwest along east side pedestrian walk toward the east interlude, showing integrated concrete seating and elevated lawn panels. August 2022

23 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0023

Detail view looking northwest of the east interlude showing original carnelian granite pavers extant, and integrated concrete seating. August 2022

24 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0024

View looking southeast of the east side pedestrian walk toward the east interlude, showing detail of the smaller carnelian granite pavers. August 2022

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Name of Property

25 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0025

Detail view of smaller carnelian granite pavers showing cut, surface finish, texture, and color. August 2022

26 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0026

Detail view looking southeast of large carnelian granite pavers showing cut, surface finish, texture, and color in the vicinity of the pyramid amphitheater. August 2022

27 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0027

View looking north of the above-surface pyramid amphitheater showing stepped and irregular stepped sides.

28 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0028

View looking northwest of southeast corner of pyramid amphitheater.

29 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0029

View looking west from eastern edge of pyramid amphitheater toward sunken performance space at bottom.

30 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0030

View looking south from north corner of pyramid amphitheater showing detail of irregular stepped pyramid design.

31 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0031

View looking northeast of top of unique concrete "bandshell" along the northwest wall of the sunken portion of the pyramid amphitheater.

32 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0032

View looking southeast from performance floor of the pyramid amphitheater toward the above-surface structure pinnacle.

33 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0033

View looking northeast of sub plaza and access stairway with landing to the immediate north of the pyramid amphitheater performance space.

34 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0034

View looking north from the spiral seating sculpture of the central plaza surrounding the *Dodge Fountain* situated within its shallow bowl, with the sloping walkway leading up to *Pylon* in the distance.

35 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0035

View looking northeast of *Dodge Fountain* with Renaissance Center in the distance.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Name of Property

36 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0036

View looking west-southwest showing detail of carnelian granite pavers comprising the *Dodge Fountain* bowl, and base of fountain structure.

37 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0037

Detail view looking northwest of *Dodge Fountain* base (non-functioning in photo).

38 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0038

View looking south-southeast from east-west axis down showing concrete sidewalk toward the Detroit River and Windsor, Ontario beyond. The individuals silhouetted against the water are the figures comprising the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture.

39 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0039

View looking north from behind *Gateway to Freedom* looking up the sloping sidewalk toward *Dodge Fountain* showing elevation changes extending away from the river.

40 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0040

View looking east of the spiral seating sculpture.

41 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0041

View looking south of the cubist water sculpture.

42 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0042

View looking northeast from east-west axis showing west sidewalk and interlude at left and lawn panels beneath crabapple trees.

43 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0043

View looking east-northeast along east-west axis showing new concrete, looking toward pyramid amphitheater in the distance.

44 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0044

View looking east-northeast near the southwest corner of Hart Plaza showing sloped lawn panels and trees separating the east-west axis at left and the Detroit RiverWalk route along the seawall and railing at right.

45 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0045

View looking east-northeast near the top of the southwest access passage showing sloping lawn panels and the spiral seating sculpture in the distance.

46 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0046

View looking south from the west end of the east-west axis down the southwest access passage toward the Detroit River.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Name of Property

47 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0047

View looking west-southwest down the east-west axis toward the end of the axis with a view toward the Ambassador Bridge connecting to Canada over the Detroit River far beyond.

48 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0048

View looking west-southwest down the Detroit RiverWalk sidewalk along the Detroit River, with *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture at center right and the docked Detroit Princess boat in the distance.

49 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0049

View looking north-northwest from the back of the *Gateway to Freedom* sculpture of the downtown Detroit skyline rising above elements of Hart Plaza in the foreground.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.





Philip A. Hart Plaza	
1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan	
Latitude	Longitude
1. 42.327662	-83.046069
2. 42.328654	-83.043812
3. 42.326698	-83.042725
4. 42.325745	-83.046003

Solid Black Line: Property Boundary  
Dotted White Line: Polygon Boundary







## Philip A. Hart Plaza

1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

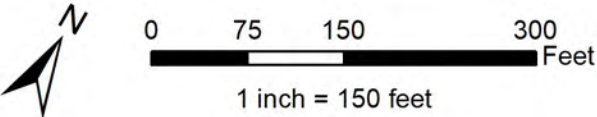
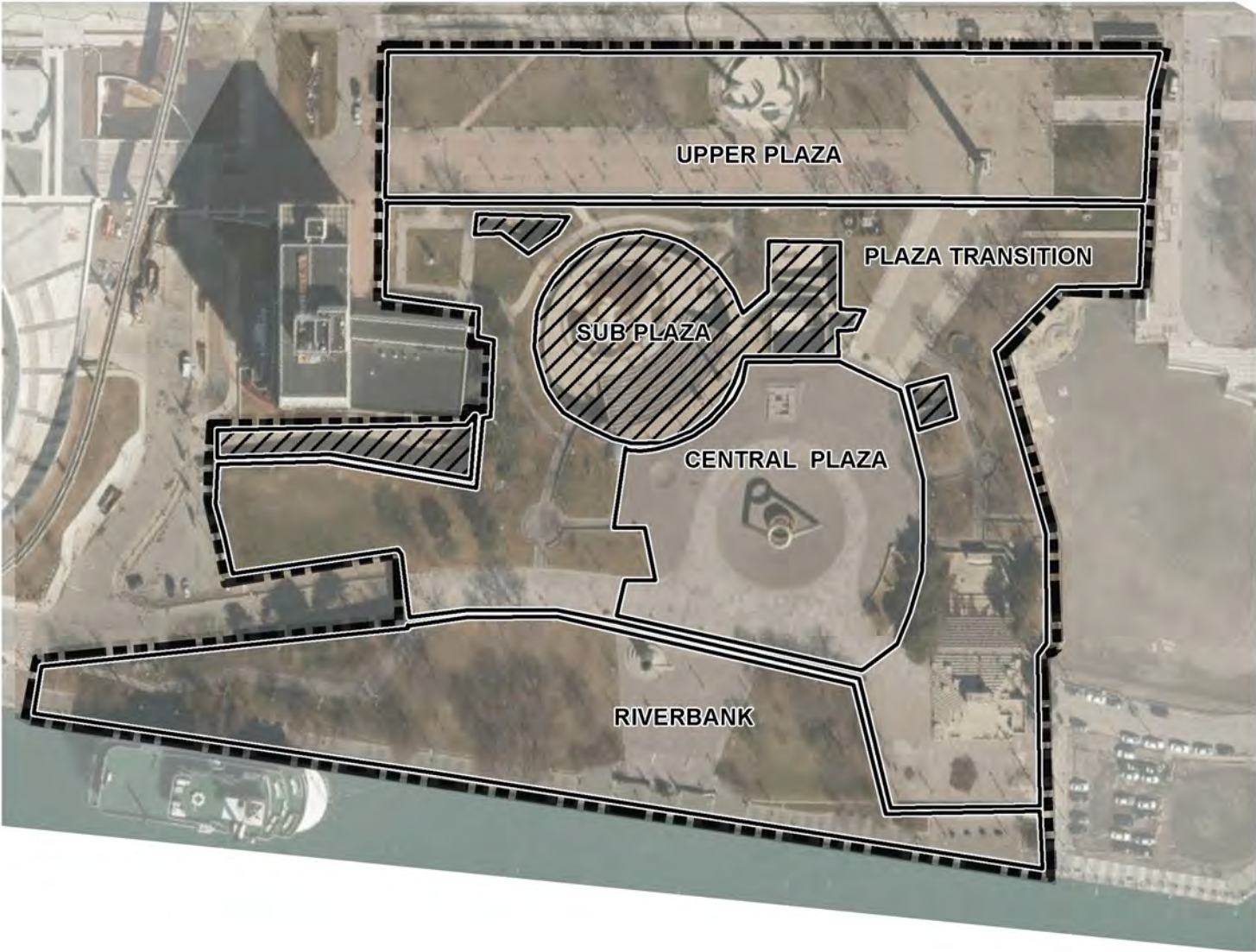
	Latitude	Longitude
1.	42.327662	-83.046069
2.	42.328654	-83.043812
3.	42.326698	-83.042725
4.	42.325745	-83.046003

Solid Black Line: Property Boundary  
Dotted White Line: Polygon Boundary



**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Spatial Organization Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



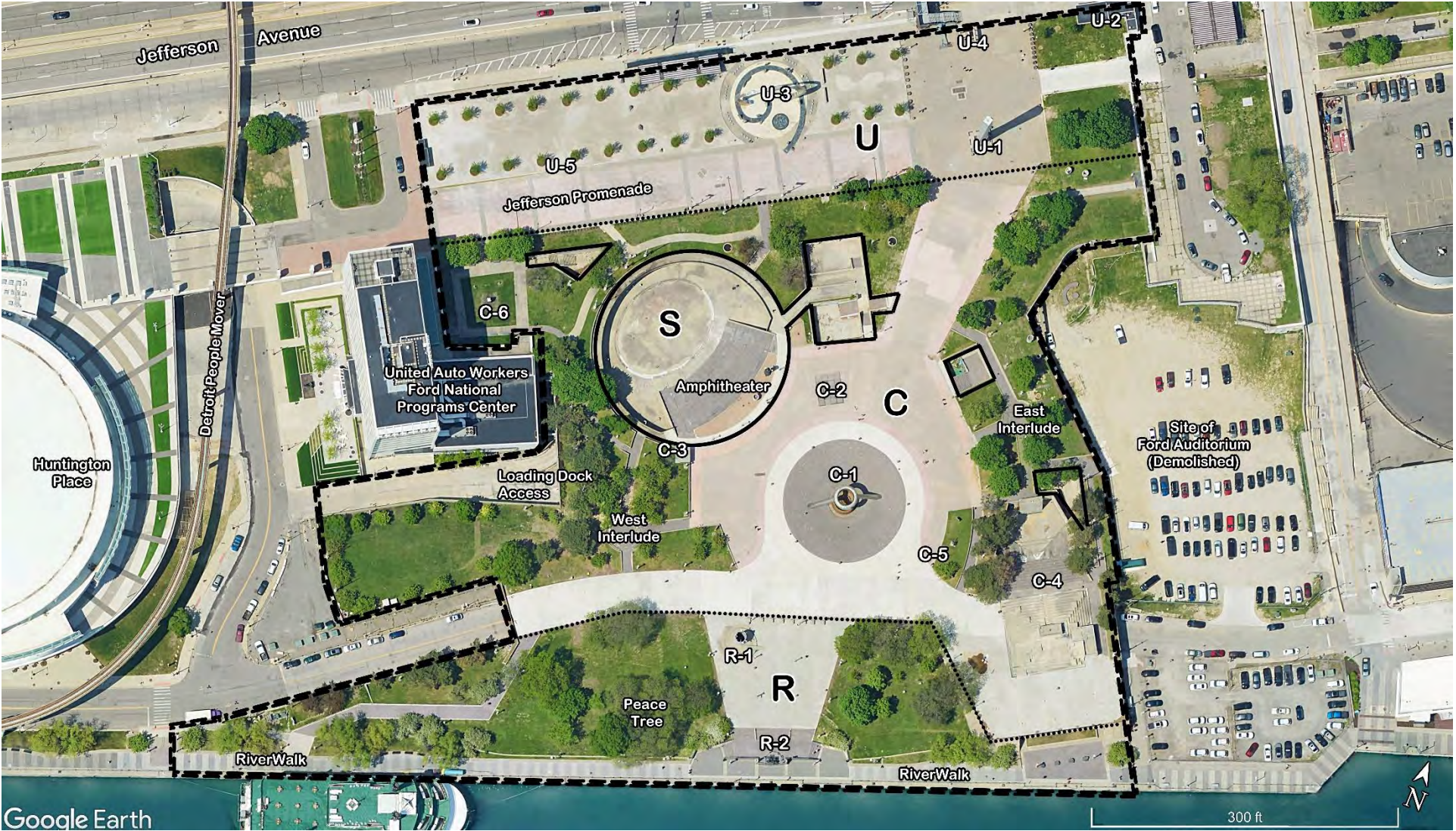
- Spatial Divisions
- Sub Plaza Open at Surface
- National Register District Boundary



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

## Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

### Resource Map



Identifier	Resource	Resource Type	Classification
	Resource boundary (for reference purposes only)	n/a	n/a
	NRHP property boundary	n/a	n/a
	Plaza section dividing line (for reference purposes only)	n/a	n/a
U	Upper Plaza	Structure	Contributing
U-1	Pylon	Object	Contributing
U-2	Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Structure Access Building	Building	Contributing
U-3	Transcending: Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark	Object	Noncontributing
U-4	Hart Plaza Marquee	Object	Noncontributing
U-5	Martin Luther King Jr. Monument	Object	Noncontributing
	Jefferson Promenade	Incorporated Feature	
C	Central Plaza	Structure	Contributing
C-1	Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain	Object	Contributing
C-2	Cubist water sculpture	Object	Contributing
C-3	Fountain Control Building	Building	Contributing
C-4	Pyramid Amphitheater	Structure	Contributing
C-5	Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue	Object	Noncontributing
C-6	Abraham Lincoln Bust and Lincoln Garden	Object	Noncontributing
	East Interlude	Incorporated Feature	
	West Interlude	Incorporated Feature	
R	Riverbank	Structure	Contributing
R-1	Spiral seating sculpture	Object	Contributing
R-2	Gateway to Freedom, International Memorial to the Underground Railroad	Object	Noncontributing
	Peace Tree	Incorporated Feature	
S	Sub Plaza (indicated by Exposed Sub Plaza Line)	Structure	Contributing
	Amphitheater	Incorporated Feature	
	Loading Dock Access	Incorporated Feature	



**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
1 Hart Plaza, Detroit  
Wayne County, Michigan  
**Photo Key**







**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 1: Aerial view of Hart Plaza and environs shortly after completion of the plaza, 1981.

Image Source: Wayne State University DTE Aerial Photo Collection





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 2: Aerial view of Hart Plaza and environs showing changes in trees of Upper Plaza lawn panels, prior to installation of *Transcending* monument, April 2002.

Image Source: Google Earth





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 3: Aerial view of Hart Plaza and environs showing changes in trees of Upper Plaza lawn panels, after installation of *Transcending* monument, July 2005.

Image Source: Google Earth





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 4: Aerial view of Hart Plaza and environs showing changes in trees of Upper Plaza lawn panels, July 2022.

Image Source: Google Earth





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 5: Aerial view of Hart Plaza and environs after renovations to Upper Plaza lawn panels, May 2023.

Image Source: Google Earth





## **Philip A. Hart Plaza**

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 6: View of Hart Plaza from Detroit River looking north-northwest, downtown Detroit skyline in background, c. 2013. Photograph courtesy of Nathan Nietering.





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 7: Birdseye view of Hart Plaza under construction, likely taken from the Renaissance Center, looking southwest. "City of Detroit; 1976." In the digital collection Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu>. University of Michigan Digital Collections.





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 8: View of Hart Plaza under construction, looking northeast. “Renaissance Center; 1974-1977; John Portman Associates.” In the digital collection Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu>. University of Michigan Digital Collections.





## **Philip A. Hart Plaza**

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Figure 9: Aerial view of Hart Plaza during event. "Hart Plaza." In the digital collection Art, Architecture and Engineering Library, University of Michigan  
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu>. University of Michigan Digital Collections.





Hart Plaza

Welcome to  
Detroit









Hart Plaza

Hart Plaza

Welcomes You To  
Detroit

Welcome to  
Detroit



STATE  
BARRICADES  
500-756-8282









































ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
1809 1865  
BY CAROL BOGARD  
SCULPTOR 1964-1965  
GIFT OF  
RALPH HARMAN BOOTH  
1964  
THE UNIVERSITY OF  
CHICAGO  
THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION  
CHICAGO, ILL.

















→ Restrooms  
→ Ethnic Gallery  
→ Food Booths  
→ Police Substation









ally

Hart Plaza  
Welcomes You To  
Detroit





































♥ We All Require and want RESPECT  
MAN OR WOMAN  
**BLACK OR WHITE**  
It's our basic human right

NS1























































































National Register of Historic Places  
Memo to File

# Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.



**Certified Local Government  
National Register Nomination Review Report**

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office  
Michigan State Housing Development Authority



- \* **Complete and return to:** National Register Coordinator, Michigan State Historic Preservation \*
- \* Office, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, 735 East Michigan Avenue, PO Box \*
- \* 30044, Lansing, Michigan 48909 \*

**Name of Property:** ~~Grande Ballroom~~ HART PLAZA  
**Address:** ~~8952-8970 Grande River Avenue~~ 1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan  
**Owner:** Chapel Hill Missionary Baptist Church  
**Date Complete Nomination Approved by the SHPO:** August 10, 2018

\*\*\*\*\*

The Certified Local Government (CLG) agrees with the SHPO to expedite the review period for this nomination.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ (date of agreement) \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of CLG Commission Chairperson

9/13/18  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Elected Chief Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*\*\*\*\*

Date(s) of commission meeting(s) when the nomination was reviewed: 9/13/18

Date of written notice to property owner of commission meeting: 8/10/18

The CLG provided the following opportunities for public participation in the review of this nomination:

Were any written comments received by the CLG? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Attached  
Was the nomination form distributed to CLG commission members? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Was a site visit made to the property by CLG commission members? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X  
If yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_



Did the CLG seek assistance of the SHPO in evaluating the eligibility of this property for the National Register? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X

VERIFICATION of Professional Qualifications of Commission in accordance with 36 CFR 61, Appendix 1, of Michigan's Certified Local Government Program.

List those commission members who meet the 36 CFR 61 qualifications required to review this type of resource.

**Commission Member**

**Professional Qualifications**

1. Keith Dye, Historian
2. Louis Fisher, Architect
3. Melanie Bazil, Historian
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Was an outside consultant used? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, provide the name and list the 36 CFR 61 qualifications the person meets:

Ruth Mills, QEA

The CLG Commission finds that the property meets the following National Register criteria of significance: A+C

The CLG Commission finds that the property meets the National Register standards of integrity.

YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation of CLG Commission:

APPROVAL X

DENIAL \_\_\_\_\_ (specify reasons on a separate sheet of paper)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Chief Elected Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Date of transmittal of this report to the SHPO 9/14/18

Date of receipt of this report by the SHPO \_\_\_\_\_





CITY OF DETROIT  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

COLEMAN A. YOUNG MUNICIPAL CENTER  
2 WOODWARD AVENUE SUITE 808  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226  
(313) 224-1339 • TTY: 711  
(313) 224-1310  
WWW.DETROITMI.GOV

September 12, 2018

Mr. Todd A. Walsh  
National Register Coordinator  
State Historic Preservation Office  
735 East Michigan Ave., PO Box 30044  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Mr. Todd Walsh,

The City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department received the invitation to comment on the Philip A. Hart Plaza nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. We would very much like to begin a conversation with your office as we will be launching a Comprehensive Feasibility Study to assess existing conditions of the structural components and other features of the Plaza. This will serve as the basis to begin a community engagement process and a design competition. We look forward to a productive collaboration on this important public asset.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Cox  
Director of Planning & Development Department  
City of Detroit





**Board of Directors**

Theodore Prudon  
PRESIDENT

Robert Meckfessel  
VICE-PRESIDENT

Flora Chen  
TREASURER

Jack Pyburn  
SECRETARY

Meredith Arms Bzdak

Todd Grover

T. Gummy Harboe

Anna Mod

Robert Nauman

Robert Pullum

Michelangelo Sabatino

Monica Schaffer

Barry Solar

Bradford J. White

John Wieland Jr.

Barbara Yanni

Liz Waytkus

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Docomomo US Chapters**

Chicago/Midwest

DC

Florida

Georgia

Hawaii

Michigan

Mid Tex Mod

Minnesota

New England

New Orleans/Louisiana

New York/Tri-State

Northern California

North Texas

Oregon

Philadelphia

Southern California

Western Washington

**Friend Organizations**

Houston Mod

Indiana Modern

Landmark Columbus

Modern STL

North Carolina

Modernist Houses

Palm Springs Modernism

Week

September 13, 2018

State Historic Preservation Office

735 East Michigan Avenue

PO Box 30044

Lansing, MI 48909

walsht@michigan.gov

Re: Philip A. Hart Plaza National Register Nomination

Dear Colleagues,

Docomomo US is pleased to support the nomination of the Philip A. Hart Plaza located at 1 Hart Plaza in Detroit, Michigan and designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi to the National Register of Historic Places. As the nation's only non-profit historic preservation organization dedicated to preserving modern architecture and design, we applaud the efforts of the City of Detroit, Historic Designation Advisory Board in their efforts to designate the first of only four public spaces designed by Isamu Noguchi, one of the most well-known and respected artists of the mid-twentieth century.

Hart Plaza is of exceptional national, if not international, significance by a renowned designer and features an abstract composition of form, sculpture and public space. Hart Plaza is by far Noguchi's most impressive and comprehensive landscape that masterfully connects a series of positive and negative spaces that was built for and continues to be utilized for a variety of public events, cultural festivals and general recreational activities.

Designed to be the heart of Detroit's civic activity, Hart Plaza is an important example of post-World War II modern civic space. While it has been plagued with deferred maintenance and vandalism over the years, Hart Plaza remains unchanged in its design since its opening forty years ago. While the landscape is significant for its architectural merits, it continues to contribute successfully to the development of Detroit as a city of international commerce and design.

Docomomo US is the United States chapter of Docomomo International, a non-profit organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement. Through advocacy, education and documentation, Docomomo US provides leadership and knowledge by demonstrating the importance of modern



design principles including the social context, technical merits, aesthetics and settings of these important pieces of American history.

Docomomo US enthusiastically supports the nomination of Hart Plaza to the National Register of Historic Places and encourages the State Historic Preservation Office to designate this exceptional landscape for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz Waytkus", with a stylized, flowing script.

Liz Waytkus  
Executive Director



Historic Designation Advisory Board  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 218  
Detroit, MI. 48226

State Historic Preservation Office  
735 East Michigan Avenue  
P.O. Box 30044  
Lansing, MI. 48909



September 12, 2018

Dear Advisory Board and Preservation Office Members,

This letter is written in support of designating Hart Plaza on the National Historic Register. For the last fourteen years our company, Paxahau, has been fortunate to produce the Movement Electronic Music Festival each Memorial Day weekend and the Detroit Jazz Festival each Labor Day weekend in Hart Plaza. Movement celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of Techno and its impact globally over the last 35 years, while Jazz Festival celebrates being the largest free Jazz Festival in the world and will embrace its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019.

To say that Hart Plaza has become a symbolic beacon or nucleus for the hundreds of thousands of attendees over the last fourteen years we have produced festivals there would be a profound understatement. The landmarks and monuments at the park have become icons in the minds of these youth from the next generation who associate these symbols with the city and the memories they forge each year at the festival. This mirrors our memories as children during the 1980's while attending the various ethnic and civic festivals at Hart Plaza. Running around the vast expanse of granite and concrete, fountains and ramps - a seemingly alien environment designed by Mr. Noguchi, not seen anywhere else in the world - has created a lasting impression on us that lasts to this day.

The significance of Hart Plaza being the largest project of this kind that Mr. Noguchi executed is something that should be cherished and maintained, now and into the future. The protection of his original design concept for this space, in our minds, should be protected from attempts in the future for sweeping change. It's too often that the importance of such spaces is swept aside in the name of progress while not valuing the significance of the accomplishment itself. We sincerely hope that the historic designation will at the very least create pause in the minds of those who may need reminding of the relevance this park has had in the historic timeline of Mr. Noguchi and the beautiful City of Detroit.

Sincerely,

Jason Huvaere and Sam Fotias  
Paxahau





GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
LANSING

EARL J. POLESKI  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

February 6, 2018

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240



Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed discs contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan**. This property is being submitted for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Disc one contains the nomination file, signed cover page, and any correspondence. Disc two contains photographs of the nominated site.

All owners and appropriate elected public officials were notified and provided at least thirty (30) days to comment on the above proposed nomination in accordance with National Register regulations. The Certified Local Government Report from the City of Detroit is included in hard copy and as a digital file on disc one. All written comments concerning this nomination, submitted to us prior to our forwarding this nomination to you, are included in hard copy and in the correspondence file on disc one.

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator, at (517) 373-1979 or walsht@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Martha MacFarlane-Faes  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

MMF/taw



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

3554

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

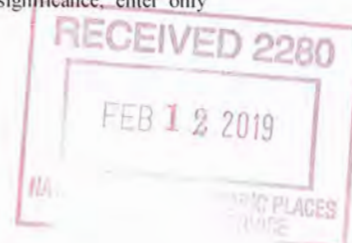
Historic name: Philip A. Hart Plaza

Other names/site number: Civic Center Plaza

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)



## 2. Location

Street & number: 1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, MI 48226

City or town: Detroit State: MI County: Wayne

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination X request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

X national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Returned

March J. M... 2/6/19

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Deputy SHP

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

---

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

---

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: ☐

Public – Local ☒

Public – State ☐

Public – Federal ☐

Returned

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☐

District ☒

Site ☐

Structure ☐

Object ☐



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	objects
<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE:

Work of Art - Sculpture

Theater- Amphitheater

Outdoor Recreation - Park

---

---

---

---

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE:

Work of Art - Sculpture

Theater- Amphitheater

Outdoor Recreation – Park

---

---

---

---

Returned



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

---

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

---

---

---

---

---

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

CONCRETE

GRANITE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

#### Summary Paragraph

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit on the banks of the Detroit River. Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, the park displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. Its major elements include a surface level plaza and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, the Pylon and Transcending sculpture, Gateway to Freedom sculpture, a sunken oval amphitheater and a pyramidal amphitheater, and the Dodge Fountain. The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. The property retains historic integrity to the period of significance.

—



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

## Narrative Description

### Methodology

The cultural landscape of Philip A. Hart Plaza is a complex collection of buildings, structures, and objects contained within one historic district. A cultural landscape methodology has been applied to documenting and evaluating the landscape. This approach is based upon federal standards guiding the evaluation of historic resources including *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and other pertinent documents.<sup>1</sup> The process includes building a foundation of historical information as a basis for understanding the evolution of the significant landscape, documenting existing conditions, and analyzing landscape integrity.

Within Hart Plaza's cultural landscape, the pertinent landscape characteristics are assessed. Landscape characteristics include tangible and intangible aspects of a landscape from the historic periods; these aspects individually and collectively give a landscape its historic character and aid in the understanding of its cultural importance. Each characteristic is described and then its integrity is assessed.

Because this nomination uses a cultural landscape approach, which considers the entire Hart Plaza landscape as one contributing site, landscape characteristics and small-scale features are described as important aspects of the contributing landscape but are not counted individually. Major site buildings, structures, and objects are counted and identified within the description. A summary of contributing and non-contributing resources is included here.

Resource Type	Contributing	Non-Contributing
Sites	Hart Plaza	(None)
Buildings	Parking Access Building Fountain Control Building	(None)
Structures	Pyramid Amphitheater Sub Plaza	Hart Plaza Marquee
Objects	Dodge Fountain	Transcending

<sup>1</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, Robert Z. Melnick, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1989, revised 1999); Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), and Charles A. Birnbaum and Christine Capella Peters, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 3-5.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

Cubist Water Sculpture  
Pylon  
Spiral Seating Sculpture

Gateway to Freedom  
Cadillac Statue  
Lincoln Bust

### **Overview**

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit on the banks of the Detroit River. The park is situated at the southern terminus of Woodward Avenue in the commercial core of the city between the contemporary landmarks of the remodeled Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and Renaissance Center to the east and the Cobo Center to the west. The plaza's origins lie in early twentieth century plans to develop a civic center where Woodward Avenue meets the Detroit River. Principal components of the contemporary civic center include Hart Plaza, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (City-County Building), and the Cobo Center.

Hart Plaza lies between Jefferson Avenue to the north, an open lot formerly the site of the Henry and Edsel Ford Memorial Auditorium (demolished 2011) to the east, the Detroit River to the south, and the United Auto Workers-Ford National Programs Center building (UAW-Ford Center, formerly Veterans Memorial Building) to the west. The park is oriented with the city grid from north-northwest to south-southeast. (This form simplifies descriptions and graphics to cardinal directions).

The park generally consists of a surface level plaza and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, both of which contain numerous, discreet spaces and prominent features. The upper plaza includes a street level promenade with the Pylon obelisk and Transcending (the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark), a landscape installation featuring an arch sculpture; a plaza transitional area with the Lincoln Garden (a pre-existing green space associated with the UAW-Ford Center and incorporated into the plaza), vegetated slopes, seating nodes, and a pyramidal amphitheater; a large central plaza with the Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain), a supported metal ring that drops water and its related features, and the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue; a sub plaza with an open-air amphitheater, underground theater, loading dock, and interior rooms; and the riverbank area with wide steps, a spiral sculpture, vegetated slopes, Gateway to Freedom, (the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad), and a riverside walk. Aside from the Transcending landscape installation, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, Lincoln Bust, and Gateway to Freedom, the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, the plaza displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. The plaza is mostly open to the sky and slopes toward the river. Convex and concave shapes join across the ground plane. From the street level to the center, primary spatial relationships are reinforced by large artistic elements including the Pylon obelisk and the Dodge Fountain. From the central plaza to the south, primary views are directed across the river to the waterfront of Windsor, Canada. The multilevel park is primarily composed of raw concrete and red and black flecked granite surfaces that are partially framed by lawn with deciduous trees.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. Most of these activities occur on the upper plaza level. The sub plaza spaces are currently used for performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance.

### ***Landscape Characteristics***

#### **Natural Systems and Features**

The natural systems that have influenced the development and physical form of Hart Plaza are strongly related to its urban setting. Natural factors include the riverbank location, urban soils, hydrology as it relates to local drainage toward the river, open exposure, orientation north to south, and prevailing winds from the west. While Hart Plaza aligns with the existing river edge on the south, the plaza does not reflect the historic, natural river boundary, which was modified as dictated by the commercial needs of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Limited overhead cover by trees and other features results in a plaza environment that reveals the day and night sky and weather conditions.

As designed, three terraces with transitional, constructed slopes define the topography of the park: the upper terrace is level with Jefferson Avenue; the central plaza makes up the middle terrace; and the riverbank area along the Detroit River makes up the lower terrace. The south-facing slope of the site is constructed on fill soils. The weight of park elements and live loads from event machinery and attendance occasionally result in areas of slope failure in the riverbank area.

#### ***Natural Systems and Features Integrity Assessment***

The natural systems and features associated with this property remain pervasive and persistent, retaining integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association.

#### **Spatial Organization**

The organization of physical forms and visual associations that define and create spaces at Hart Plaza are predicated on the spatial relationships between the park, the Detroit River, and the sky. These intentional relationships are orchestrated through the design of Hart Plaza. The location of the park on the waterfront connects the city to the water. The largely open plane of the plaza provides exposure to the sky, while vertical elements direct further attention upward. General alignments within the park emphasize these relationships with major features. The trajectory of Woodward Avenue aligns to the Pylon obelisk on the Jefferson Promenade. The Pylon, located along Jefferson Avenue, is placed at the north entrance of the plaza and centered on the axis of Woodward Avenue, reinforcing the strength and significance of Detroit's main thoroughfare. It serves as a fulcrum for the diagonal axis leading down a sloped walk to the Dodge Fountain in the center of the plaza. The alignment between the Pylon and the Dodge Fountain continues down wide steps to the waterfront. The two primary elements, Dodge Fountain and the Pylon, are fundamental to determining relationships between other features and spaces in the plaza.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

The park consists of five divisions that contain individual areas and features. The main spatial divisions are given descriptive names and include upper plaza, plaza transition, central plaza, sub plaza, and riverbank (refer to the spatial organization diagram).

The upper plaza is a rectangular shaped area parallel to Jefferson Avenue. The main spatial components of this area include two original features and one recent introduction. Built between 1966 and 1973, the Jefferson Promenade is a wide walk south of the Jefferson sidewalk and historic raised lawn panels with trees. The Pylon obelisk rises from the east end of the Jefferson Promenade. Added in 2003, Transcending, a landscape installation featuring a 63-foot, incomplete steel ring sculpture, rises from an elevated plaza with numerous elaborated boulders.

The plaza transition consists of the irregularly crescent-shaped slope between the upper plaza and central plaza areas. It contains the upper slopes, the pyramid amphitheater, and the Lincoln Garden. The upper slopes with paths include planters, lawn, and east and west seating nodes that are referred to as "interludes" on plans. The amphitheater, also known as "pyramid stage" and "ziggurat," is a square-based pyramid with seating that descends to a sunken stage in the southeast corner of park, perpendicular to the diagonal axis from Pylon to Dodge. The seating faces the park and city to the north while the stage faces south.

The Lincoln Garden is a small, formal courtyard adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center in the northwest corner of the park that was incorporated into the design of Hart Plaza. The current garden is approximately eighty-three feet from east to west and ninety-six feet from north to south (7,968 square feet). Constructed around 1950 in conjunction with the building, the green space originally formed a rectangle extending from the crook of the L-shaped building to the present edge of Jefferson Avenue. Prior to the expansion of Jefferson Avenue in the late 1950s, this space abutted a rectangular lawn panel that was parallel to the roadway. Through the 1960s, the approximately ninety-eight-foot by two-hundred-and-sixty-five-foot (25,970 square feet) garden area formed a sunken green space that was separated by retaining walls from the upper, entry level of the building to the west and a lower parking lot to the east in what became the core of Hart Plaza. The garden consisted of a rectangular lawn panel bordered by a walkway with a series of niches with benches facing the building along the eastern edge of the park. The garden was reduced to its current dimensions by 1973 during construction of the upper plaza. Identified on Noguchi's plans as "existing garden," the green space became referred to as the "Lincoln Garden" after placement of a bust of President Abraham Lincoln in the central lawn panel of the garden in 1986.

The roughly circular central plaza forms the core of Hart Plaza and includes several features. The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain) marks the center of the space. A cubist water sculpture, a square-shaped water feature made up of multiple stone cubes, is located directly north of the Dodge Fountain. The plaza surface itself is the granite ground plane with a twenty-five-foot diameter concave circular depression west of the Dodge Fountain. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, a life-size statue with two historical markers, is located in a raised planting bed west of the Dodge Fountain.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

The sub plaza lies under the slopes of the plaza transition and connects to the main amphitheater, which is functionally and visually connected to the underground spaces. The approximately two acres of subterranean spaces are either walled into rooms or unenclosed chambers and corridors. Ducts for ventilation were constructed as bulkheads in tall cylinders. Walls are primarily concrete slab with limited rooms with glass walls and windows. The main spatial components include the plaza's main amphitheater, an underground theater, a loading dock and access drive, and several interior rooms. The open-air amphitheater is the main performance space oriented such that the audience faces northwest toward the city and the performance space faces southeast toward the Dodge Fountain. North of the amphitheater, the underground theater is a small, sunken venue that is enclosed on three sides. A variety of interior rooms within the sub plaza support performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance.

The riverbank is a linear zone along the Detroit River. This area includes several main features including riverbank steps, a spiral seating sculpture, the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, lower slopes, and a riverside walk. The riverbank steps are roughly on axis with the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. Roughly eighty-five feet wide, the steps connect a sloped walking surface to the river's edge. The spiral seating sculpture is a concrete form wrapped around a ventilation shaft located on the steps slightly north of the axis between the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. The Gateway to Freedom sculpture and plaques are located at the base of the steps. East and west of the steps are the lower slopes that consist of trees over turf. The riverside walk is a pedestrian corridor along the river within Hart Plaza. It is a segment of a longer route known as the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza and the three-and-one-half-mile RiverWalk are part of the Detroit International Riverfront, a zone of connected green spaces and attractions that is spurring development along the riverfront and facilitating community access to the water.

#### *Spatial Organization Integrity Assessment*

The spatial organization associated with Hart Plaza is largely intact. The five basic divisions of the park remain from design and construction. Aside from the Transcending, Cadillac, and Gateway to Freedom installations, the main spaces and features are original to the park design. Spatial relationships between major landscape features remain with only minor alterations in setting due to the removal of the Ford Auditorium east of the park and in materials and design due to the placement of Transcending. In alignment with the Dodge Fountain, the tall steel ring on the Jefferson Avenue streetscape of the Upper Plaza introduces a non-historic, prominent feature that affects the integrity of the site. The feature contributes to the fragmentation of the green lawn with trees that was originally installed along Jefferson Avenue and once balanced the hard surfaces of the streetscape at the edge of the plaza. Despite these effects, the presence of all major historic features reduces the intrusive nature of the new feature. Overall, the spatial organization of the park demonstrates integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Land Use**

The principal human uses of Hart Plaza include planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, seasonal office use, and informal habitation. The park exists to



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

provide year-round and event-based outdoor recreational space in the city. Passive recreation includes pedestrian activities such as walking, sitting, reading, playing music, observing the riverfront, looking at and playing on sculptures and other park features. The amphitheater is designed for winter conversion into an ice rink but no longer provides this function.

Planned events held in the park include musical and ethnic festivals with a capacity of 40,000 participants. Events make use of the above ground park and the sub plaza. Heavy weight loads associated with event staging and use have damaged paving (evinced by cracked pavers) and exacerbate subsidence on the riverbank.

The park is also used as a through-route that channels pedestrian and bicycle movement from the city center to destinations along the river via the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza also functions as a bridge over Atwater Street which connects Bates Street and Civic Center Drive from east to west. An access drive on the west side of the park connects to loading docks of the sub plaza and the UAW-Ford Center receiving area.

The sub plaza interior spaces have transitional habitation. Interior rooms provide seasonal office space for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Detroit Police Department north of the amphitheater and south of the pyramid amphitheater. Partially enclosed spaces within the sub plaza provide informal shelter to a small number of people. Common social and sanitary issues associated with informal settlement in parks conflict with intended park uses.

#### *Land Use Integrity Assessment*

Land uses of Hart Plaza reflect continuity and change. The plaza continues to be used for planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, and offices, but demonstrate aspects of change. Office occupation is now seasonal. Also, the removal of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) from the Ford Auditorium in 1989 (and demolition of the venue in 2011) reduced the use of the park amphitheater for concerts by the DSO. Similarly, the generally poor condition of the sub plaza spaces has reduced the use of this part of the park for planned events and eliminated the seasonal skating rink. The non-historic use of the park for informal habitation does not reflect the design intent. These alterations have reduced integrity for the aspect of feeling.

#### **Circulation**

Hart Plaza is located in relation to the city transportation grid and major circulation conduits including Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. Within the park, systems of movement include vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and riverine systems of movement.

Vehicular access within the park includes park frontage for drop off along Jefferson Avenue to the north and the Hart Plaza Access Drive to the sub plaza from the west. Parking is available to the north and east. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Garage (under Jefferson Avenue north of Hart Plaza) has an entrance/egress portal at the northeast corner of Hart Plaza. Offsite parking occurs in a gravel lot east of Hart Plaza and south of Atwater Street and in a gravel lot



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

north of Atwater Street on the site of the former Ford Auditorium. Atwater Street forms a through route beneath Hart Plaza via the Atwater Tunnel.

Pedestrian circulation consists of through routes and internal routes. The sidewalk along Jefferson Avenue, access walks to the UAW-Ford Center from the Lincoln Garden, and the RiverWalk provide connections to points outside of the plaza. Internal routes can be described by the primary spatial divisions. The upper plaza includes the Jefferson Promenade and walk west of Pylon aligned to the entrance to Mariners' Church. The central plaza has generally open paving. The sub plaza contains amphitheater steps, steps between the Lincoln Garden and the lounge, steps north of the central plaza to the kitchen rooms, enclosed sub plaza walks and ramps, and a metal spiral staircase between the loading dock and fountain control room. The plaza transition area includes the main sloped walk, non-historic narrow curving walks, original straight walks between features and east and west interludes, and the pyramid amphitheater steps. The riverfront includes the riverside walk and sloped transitional walks and steps.

Bicycle circulation is primarily associated with the segment of the RiverWalk, which has a connection to the Dequindre Cut Greenway to the east.

The riverine system of movement is located adjacent to the plaza. The Detroit Princess Riverboat docks at the southwest edge of Hart Plaza, and commercial and recreational river traffic, including Great Lakes freighters, pass by Hart Plaza.

Paving surfaces form relatively level planes except for the bowl-shaped depression under the Dodge Fountain and the smaller bowl-shaped depression northwest of the fountain. Paved surfaces contain a wide variety of flush grates, drains, and utility covers.

Paving materials vary by purpose and location and consist of the following historic types:

- Historic, large carnelian granite pavers, four-foot square in size and finished with a parallel grooved surface texture (identified as "mellogroove" in construction documents) delineate primary walkways in the central plaza and wrap widely around the fountain and highlight the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the UAW-Ford Center;
- Historic, small carnelian granite paving setts six-inch square in size with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges that pave most walks of the plaza transition, provide a sweeping form around the amphitheater, cover the sloped walks on the riverbank, and along the water front;
- Historic, variably sized carnelian granite pavers with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges decreasing from six inches in size under and around the Dodge Fountain and northwest plaza depression;
- Historic, variably sized granite pavers with dimensions greater than eight inches at the upper ring of the amphitheater;
- Historic, precast hexagonal concrete pavers throughout the sub plaza;
- Historic six-inch low limestone curbs, forming edges of lawn panels of the upper plaza that predated the construction of Hart Plaza.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Non-historic paving materials include poured concrete, concrete brick pavers, and stone tiles. Non-historic concrete includes multiple types:

- Rectangular slabs at edges of the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition;
- Concrete ring as footing for bollards around the Dodge Fountain;
- Single surface concrete of platform of Transcending sculpture and for ice rink in center of amphitheater;
- Concrete with four-foot scoring between the central plaza and the riverbank, west of the pyramid amphitheater, at the performance level of the pyramid amphitheater, and surrounding the main amphitheater of the sub plaza;
- Concrete sidewalk with six-foot scored panels of alternating dark and light gray surface treatment to create bands along the riverside walk;
- Concrete paving and curbs, twelve inches wide and eight inches high, with red surface treatment at the upper ring of the amphitheater.

Non-historic concrete brick pavers occur in various locations throughout the plaza. There are large areas of non-historic concrete brick pavers in herringbone pattern with red colors in the center of the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete brick in a basketweave pattern with gray colors occurs along the edges of the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete brick in herringbone pattern with beige color also occurs on the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition. On the riverside walk below the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, non-historic concrete brick pavers are laid in a stack bond pattern with light and dark gray colors and memorial donor names. Twelve-foot square, non-historic stone tile is used as pavers at the base of Transcending north of the Jefferson Promenade.

#### *Circulation Integrity Assessment*

Circulation features associated with Hart Plaza demonstrate historic integrity despite poor condition of materials. Historic routes persist with only one area of introduced pathways in the plaza transition north of the amphitheater. While substantial areas of the central plaza and sub plaza and the rectilinear walks of the plaza transition retain original paving materials, the majority of historic paving is in poor condition. Most granite pavers of the central plaza are highly fractured; however, the condition of historic paving on the paths of the plaza transition is fair to good. Generally good condition, non-historic paving is found throughout the upper plaza and riverbank and on the curving walks of the plaza transition. Original materials in the central plaza reflect the historic design intent. Circulation features reflect integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Vegetation**

Vegetation of Hart Plaza consists of historic and non-historic deciduous and evergreen trees over turf, evergreen shrubs, and herbaceous flowering plants in the beds of the Lincoln Garden. Vegetation can be described by area.

Upper plaza vegetation includes two rectangular lawn panels with an incomplete grid of historic Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) planted four trees wide from north to south and separated by



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

the Transcending sculpture. Less than fifty percent of the original trees remain from the block planted between 1966 and 1973. Historically, the planter contained rows five trees wide from north to south and was stylistically incorporated by Noguchi into the design of Hart Plaza by the inclusion of a now-removed, single row of Norway maple along the south side of the Jefferson Promenade. These and all existing Norway maple are free-growing but design documents specify that they were intended to be topped and tightly pruned into the shape of an inverted glass. The upper plaza also contains a recently installed, narrow planting bed of day lilies along the western portion of the south side of the Jefferson Promenade above the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation of the plaza transition area includes several lawn panels with trees. The northeast sloping lawn panel contains older, historic Norway maple and more recently planted northern hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) in a scattered pattern. The east raised lawn panels around the east interlude contain Norway maple and one American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*). The raised panels east and west of the pyramid amphitheater are planted with Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). The central sloping lawn panel contains Norway maple and flowing cherry (*Prunus* sp.) adjacent to the angular walk. The northwest sloping lawn panel includes Norway maple, flowing cherry adjacent to the angular walk, crab apple (*Malus* sp.) near west steps to sub plaza, and dwarf beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) southwest of the amphitheater. The west lawn panel includes Norway maple by the amphitheater, Austrian pine at the western boundary and crab apple at the west interlude. The west raised lawn panels around the west interlude contain crab apple. The west sloping lawn panel south of the UAW-Ford Center contains alternating red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and little-leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*) on the north side, crab apple on the west and south sides, and a thirty-two-inch wide bed of rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*). The Lincoln Garden has four outer lawn panels and a central square lawn panel with roses (*Rosa* sp.), grasses, and other herbaceous perennial flowers.

The central plaza contains little vegetation. One crab apple (*Malus*) tree grows in a raised lawn panel south of the Cadillac statue.

Riverbank vegetation includes sloping lawn panels with trees. The southeast sloping lawn contains northern hackberry, red maple, honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* 'inermis'), and little-leaf linden. The southwest sloping lawn panel has little-leaf linden, honey locust, elm (*Ulmus* sp.), and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). One ginkgo is identified with a small stone and plaque as the "1984 Peace Tree." The plaque indicates that the tree was presented by the Detroit Westtown and Downtown Windsor Lioness Clubs, but no further information on the circumstances of its dedication were found. Crab apple and river birch (*Betula nigra*) are planted close to the RiverWalk. The west sloping lawn panels north and west of the angled access walk contain Austrian pine, crab apple, and river birch. The eastern lawn panels north of the riverside walk contain river birch and crab apple.

Vegetation is absent from the sub plaza. Stumps in planters remain by the steps east of the auditorium. Offsite, one older crab apple remains directly east of Hart Plaza by the courtyard of the Ford Auditorium.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

### *Vegetation Integrity Assessment*

At the overall level, the vegetation of Hart Plaza reflects a general, historic pattern of large canopy trees surrounding a hardscaped plaza with flowering crabapples toward the center and east and west edges formed by evergreen trees. Within this larger structure, aspects of the designed plantings are diminished. Replanting in recent decades includes both exotic and native trees, but neither conform to the historic design. Specific designed aspects of vegetation are absent from the park. Missing elements include the uniform grid of trees along Jefferson Avenue, the entire shrub and ground cover (understory layer) of plantings, and the controlled pruning of trees. Some individual, historic trees remain; however, because the overall, modern style of design used large groups of uniform species to create effects, the survival of individual plants is not highly significant.

Individual instances of historic, extant vegetation include partially intact patterns of canopy trees in informal clusters throughout the plaza transition and the riverbank areas of the park. Also, groupings of Austrian pine remain along the east and west edges of the plaza transition. Remaining historic trees pertain to a primarily non-native mixture including Norway maple, Austrian pine, various types of crabapple, and honey locust. Remaining crabapple trees remain around the central plaza, near the west interlude, and flanking the steps to the riverside walk. The vegetation of Hart Plaza carries integrity to a high level order of design. All other aspects of integrity are significantly impacted.

### **Views and Vistas**

Hart Plaza affords numerous expansive views and controlled vistas that are predicated on individual landscape features. The strength of the Noguchi design for Hart Plaza is reflected in the persistence of these characteristic views, which include views to and from the plaza. Views of Hart Plaza from Woodward Avenue and surrounding streets focus on the Pylon. Other outside views of Hart Plaza are afforded by the multistory buildings along Jefferson Avenue and in the general area.

Places within Hart Plaza offer relatively expansive views to locations outside of the plaza. The Jefferson Promenade provides views to the central plaza and Detroit River. The view from the Dodge Fountain and central plaza reveals the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. Open views from the riverbank provide a panorama of the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. In the sub plaza, views through partially enclosed spaces to areas with natural light include a large circular light well in the northwest part of the sub plaza, open staircases, the opening at the amphitheater performance level, and north and south side exits east toward the former Ford Auditorium and courtyard.

Characteristic, controlled vistas to individual features abound at Hart Plaza. These linear visual relationships include:

- The vista between the walk west of Pylon and the Mariners' Church entrance;
- The vista from Jefferson Promenade to the bust of Abraham Lincoln;
- The vista through Jefferson Promenade to Pylon;
- The vista between Pylon and the Dodge Fountain;



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

- The vista between the Dodge Fountain and sculptural features including the spiral seating sculpture, pyramid amphitheater, cubist water sculpture, Pylon, and the Transcending sculpture;
- The vista between the east and west interludes and the Dodge Fountain; and
- The east-to-west sub plaza vistas that reinforce a linear range of vision between structural columns.

External vistas also exist between the central plaza and individual skyscrapers in the general area. Specific buildings with a visual relationship to the central plaza include One Woodward to north, the central tower of the Renaissance Center to the east, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Building to the northeast, and Crowne Plaza to the northwest.

#### *Views and Vistas Integrity Assessment*

Views and vistas associated with Hart Plaza are reliant on the upright, individual landscape features such as sculptures and other unique park features like the pyramid amphitheater. These original designed features remain intact and enable views and vistas to demonstrate integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Buildings and Structures**

At both surface and subsurface levels, the Hart Plaza landscape contains buildings that shelter human activities and structures, which are the functional elements constructed for purposes other than sheltering human activity.

Above ground buildings include the fountain control building (**contributing building**) located in the corner of a raised lawn bed west of the Dodge Fountain and south of the main amphitheater and a Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building located at the northeast corner of the park along the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk. The fountain control building has concrete walls, a curved metal roof, and a row of narrow glass windows that view the fountain and the amphitheater. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building (**contributing building**) has black granite, glass, and metal walls and a terraced metal roof over the steps and escalators that descend to the parking structure.

The sub plaza is one underground structure (**contributing structure**) with a series of spaces and rooms that are named for present or past uses (see sub-surface features diagram). Materials include concrete slab and block walls, exposed or dropped grid ceilings with acoustic tiles, and floors of synthetic tile, carpet, or concrete. Most interior spaces are in poor condition. The exterior sub plaza spaces create corridors of covered movement between rooms.

The sub plaza includes the concrete amphitheater and a concrete block beverage booth with a circular, concrete block wall located east of the amphitheater and north of the kitchen rooms. Clockwise from the northwest, the sub plaza rooms include a warming room, a cafeteria, and office and support rooms. The warming room, formerly used by skaters in the winter and presently as a backstage area in the summer, contains restrooms and three-foot-high rectangular



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

glass windows that face south toward the amphitheater and glass walls that face east toward the cafeteria. The cafeteria contains a kitchen, bathrooms, and a long, rectangular glassed-in lounge that faces south to the center of the amphitheater and west toward the back stage rooms. East of the cafeteria and north of the amphitheater, a cluster of rooms includes an event operations office, a seasonally occupied office of the Detroit Police Department, a park operations office with camera control area, a maintenance and boiler room, and a seasonally occupied group of offices for the Department of Parks and Recreation. South of these rooms and across an underground corridor, the sub plaza contains a gallery room and a concessions area with twenty-six kitchen stalls. South of the loading docks are utility, maintenance, and storage rooms. A cluster of rooms farther south near the pyramid amphitheater include storage and changing rooms and restrooms. South of the Atwater Tunnel are utility rooms and the Office of Detroit Police Department with an entrance on the riverside walk.

Above ground structures include the pyramid amphitheater, a marquee, utility features, and a variety of retaining and free standing walls. The convex and concave pyramid amphitheater (**contributing structure**) is located in the southeast corner of the park. Reminiscent of Mesoamerican pyramids, the square-based structure is composed of a series of shallow steps with a small, rectangular room at the top. Exposed materials above the plaza surface level are concrete and materials below that level are granite. The south end of the structure is a convex pyramid with seating that is integrated into an open-air stage on the north. Concrete and stone seating is partially submerged below the plaza grade. The walls of the performance area are concrete with integrated light wells along the upper edge of the walls forming a sunken performance area. The shape of the pyramid amphitheater echoes the square, pyramidal roof of the Bob-Lo Boat Office Building that was formerly in this location prior to the construction of Hart Plaza. Boats historically transported people from this location to an amusement park that operated on Bois Blanc ("Bob-Lo") Island, Ontario, from 1910 to 1993.

The marquee (**non-contributing structure**) is located at the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk edge directly north of the Pylon. The current structure replaced an earlier marquee around 2005. It has a six-foot-square footprint and metal, T-shaped facades. Above ground utility structures include vents and pipes. Seven cylindrical concrete vents are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and in the plaza transition area north, east, and west of the Dodge Fountain. The vents are six feet in diameter and variable in height with an average height of six feet at the bottom of the slanted top opening. Two tall metal vents, approximately eighteen feet high, are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and along the eastern edge of the plaza transition near the former Ford Auditorium. Low metal relief pipes with curved ends are located throughout the park.

Retaining walls of varying heights (from approximately two to twenty feet) are integrated throughout the plaza design. The walls are either eight inches or twenty-four inches wide. Most retaining walls are raw concrete and feature expansion and construction joints at 4-foot intervals. Retaining walls under four feet typically form edges of variously sized vegetated panels or serve as independent planters. Walls of various heights and widths have integrated benches. Retaining walls that are bulkheads play an important role in defining and transitioning between upper and



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

lower levels of the plaza. These walls also create stairwells and may form edges of planters or parapet walls at the surface level. Some of these walls include integrated railings such as at the north side of the auditorium.

The materials vary across the retaining walls of Hart Plaza. Most concrete retaining walls are twelve inches thick with four-foot scoring. Other concrete retaining walls are two feet thick and may have integrated metal hand rails and guardrails that are five inches in diameter and variably silver or painted black. A concrete, double-stacked seat wall is located along the riverside walk. It is constructed in three-foot by six-foot sections with integral, square lights. Polished red granite-faced, concrete retaining walls, parapet walls, and cheek walls are located at the steps flanking the Gateway to Freedom sculpture. These decorative walls feature a black granite base course and coping with integrated metal hand rails. Marble faced concrete walls associated with the UAW-Ford Center form the three- to six-feet high south and west boundary walls of the Lincoln Garden.

Freestanding walls include low concrete landscape walls generally less than four feet high. In addition, a massive, largely free-standing concrete slab forms a sloped backdrop to the pyramid amphitheater's stage.

#### *Buildings and Structures Integrity Assessment*

The buildings and structures of Hart Plaza retain integrity with some modifications to the buildings. Structures, which primarily consist of various types of walls, typically demonstrate integrity and remain in generally good condition. As an exception, there are low retaining walls on the west side of the plaza transition area that demonstrate failure at corners. Replacement of some features, such as the black railings integrated into the concrete wall forming the north edge off the auditorium, have changed the character of the site. Historically, the railing in this location was a single metal tube with integrated lights.

Buildings are in relatively poor condition with the exception of the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building. The underground structure of the sub plaza has been modified with some addition of rooms, partitioning with walls, and interior modifications due to changing uses. Characteristic elements including the glass walls of the warming room and the cafeteria remain. In general, integrity is reflected in the design and materials of the buildings and structures, but is moderated by poor conditions.

#### **Small-Scale Features**

Numerous small-scale features provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and interpretive or aesthetic concerns at Hart Plaza. Most small-scale features are recently added as utilitarian features and are not essential to the overall design and character of the plaza. Small-scale features include lights, upright poles, bollards, trash receptacles, benches, rails, and interpretive elements.

Lights consist of ground mounted light fixtures near the west interlude and in the Lincoln Garden, flood lights along the Jefferson Promenade, and approximately one hundred globe



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

lights. The ubiquitous globe lights, installed throughout the park around 2000, have a glass globe lantern bracketed by aluminum bands on thirteen-foot-tall posts formed of four independent poles set on one aluminum base.

Upright poles include security poles with cameras and sensors over the Jefferson Promenade and flagpoles. Approximately twenty flagpoles with U.S. flags employ the same stylistic details as the globe lights and are located along the Jefferson Promenade and at the east and west edges of the park. Shorter flagpoles with a variety of colored flags are set in mobile, concrete bases at the south edge of the central plaza.

Other small-scale features are dispersed throughout the park. Planter bollards and circular concrete planters line the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete and steel bollards surround the Dodge Fountain and cubist water sculpture. They also run down the center of the Jefferson Promenade and the wide, sloped walk of the plaza transition. Various types of plastic and metal garbage and recycling receptacles are placed in the landscape depending on use and seasonality. Synthetic wood benches are located along the Jefferson Promenade and in the Lincoln Garden. Two wood benches are located in the sub plaza by the cafeteria and stairwell north of the amphitheater. Guardrails along a concrete sidewalk in the plaza transition directly north of the amphitheater consist of unpainted, round steel pipe that is four inches in diameter. Other tubular metal handrails and guardrails that are typical throughout the park are five-inch-diameter pipe variably painted either black or gray.

Interpretive, small-scale elements include plaques and signs. A Veterans Memorial brass plaque on polished granite is located in the southwest corner of the Lincoln Garden. A Michigan Historic Site interpretive sign entitled "The Landing of Cadillac" is located north of the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue. It is a standard metal plaque painted green with brown metal posts. South of the statue is an interpretive marker entitled "The Cadillac Convoy," which was placed in December 2001 by the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan. The black metal sign with gray metal posts commemorates Detroit's tercentennial. A Hart Plaza dedication marker, a replacement donated by Herman Miller Cares in 2016, is located by steps to the sub plaza on the east side of the park. A rededication marker for The Dodge Fountain is located at the edge of the plaza and south of the fountain. It is a small, granite and limestone monument on a concrete unit block base. The north face contains a plaque dated August 31, 2006, marking the refurbishment of the fountain and revitalizing the waterfront through the support of Gretchen C. Valade. The south face contains a rectangular metal plaque that was part of the dedication of the fountain on July 24, 1976, prior to the dedication ceremonies for Hart Plaza in 1978 and 1979. The plaque describes the fountain as "'An Engine of Water' at the Gateway to a Great City." Since the plaza was under construction at the time of the 1976 event, the original location of the plaque is not known. On the riverbank slope west of the fountain dedication monument, a metal plaque with the words "1984 Peace Tree" is embedded in a stone at the base of a ginkgo tree.

#### *Small-Scale Features Integrity Assessment*

Small-scale features of Hart Plaza are largely non-historic and do not have integrity. As originally designed, the park contained very few furnishings or free standing lights. Bollards,



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

flagpoles, and independent monuments were not part of the original design but are found throughout the park today. These vertical elements detract from the open, uncluttered landscape as designed.

## Sculptures and Constructed Water Features

Sculptures and constructed water features include five elements original to the historic design of Hart Plaza and four elements that are not part of the design.

The Pylon (**contributing object**) is located at the east end of the Jefferson Promenade and in line with Woodward Avenue. The 120-foot-tall stainless steel pylon is seven feet square at its base and twists into a helix as it rises toward the sky. The pylon design required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers.

The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (**contributing object**) is located above a bowl-shaped depression in the central plaza. In designing the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. At the base of the stainless steel fountain sits a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The two-foot square convex brass features protrude from the paving north and south of the fountain. The fountain has three hundred water jets within the ring capable of offering thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.

The circular depression (**part of the contributing site**) is located two hundred feet west of the Dodge Fountain. It is formed by granite setts that dip into a shallow bowl-shaped depression that echoes the depression under the fountain.

The cubist water sculpture (**contributing object**) is located north of the Dodge Fountain. The rectangle of protruding square granite slabs of varying heights forms a visual counterpart to the depression. It is mirrored along the axis established by the main amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater. It was labeled as a play sculpture and fountain in the original drawings, with mechanicals for pumps, flow, and drainage. However, there is no evidence if it was ever functional.

The spiral seating sculpture (**contributing object**) is located southeast of the Dodge Fountain at the top of the sloped walk descending to the riverbank. It consists of three approximately eighteen-inch-high concrete steps in a spiral pattern that lead to a central concrete ramp and wrap around a cylindrical concrete air shaft that serves to ventilate the sub plaza near the Atwater Tunnel.

Sculptures added to Hart Plaza after the design and initial construction include the Abraham Lincoln bust, Transcending, the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, and the Gateway to Freedom sculpture.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

The Abraham Lincoln bust (**non-contributing object**) is a seventy-two-inch-high marble sculpture of the sixteenth U.S. president set on a black granite pedestal in the center of the Lincoln Garden adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center. Created by Gutzon Borglum, a one-time instructor of Noguchi in 1918, the bust was a gift of Ralph Herman Booth to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in 1924.<sup>2</sup> Following the redesign of the base by Marshall Fredericks in 1954, the composition was dedicated by American Citizens of German Ancestry through the German American Cultural Center in 1956. In 1986, the bust was restored and placed in Hart Plaza through the joint efforts of the DIA, Detroit Parks and Recreation, and the Civic Center.

Transcending, the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark, by David Barr and Sergio de Guisti (**non-contributing object**), was dedicated in 2003. The sixty-three-foot-tall, incomplete (or open) steel ring set on its edge has a low plaza-like plinth and outer circle of boulders. It is located in a panel of lawn and trees along Jefferson Avenue and in line with the Dodge Fountain.

The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue (**non-contributing object**), installed in 2001, is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel west of the Dodge Fountain, approximately fifteen feet south of the Michigan Historic Site sign and approximately fifteen feet north of the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan interpretive sign.

Gateway to Freedom, the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad, by Edward J. Dwight Jr. (**non-contributing object**), was installed in 2001 at the double steps by the riverside walk. A central, multi-figural bronze sculpture features six people preparing to board a boat. The sculpture of a man with an outstretched finger represents George de Baptiste, a local business leader and Virginia-born free man who also transported fugitives aboard his steam ship, the T. Whitney. Two marble pillars with brass flames flank the main sculpture. Donor names are engraved on bricks of the walk and on the polished granite-faced walls flanking the sculpture to the east and west. Gateway to Freedom is the U.S. component of the memorial that is also commemorated by a Canadian sculpture located in Windsor, Ontario almost directly across the Detroit River from Hart Plaza. Part of the same commission, the complementary sculpture by Dwight entitled "Tower of Freedom" shares complementary design elements such as brass figures and a marble pillar with brass flames. The Canadian sculpture depicts a man raising his arms in celebration of emancipation, a Quaker woman assisting a woman and her child, and a young girl glancing back toward Detroit.

#### *Sculptures and Constructed Water Features Integrity Assessment*

Sculptures and constructed water features are mostly intact, retaining integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the original design intent of Isamu Noguchi. All original features remain. Sculptures that have been recently added to the park are distinct from the historic features; however, the large Transcending ring detracts from the designed spatial organization of the site.

<sup>2</sup> "Abraham Lincoln, sculpture," IAS 76000536. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

Returned



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Returned

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☒ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Landscape Architecture

Art

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1974 to 1979

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1924

1955

1979

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls

Isamu Noguchi

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Returned



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Philip A. Hart Plaza is significant under National Register Criterion A, at the local level, as the culmination of a decades-long effort to establish a civic center at the foot of Woodward Avenue where it meets the Detroit River. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the Detroit city government initiated a series of planning efforts in an attempt to create a grouping of buildings and open spaces to accommodate the city government and other civic and social functions. Although city planning beautification efforts began in the later years of the nineteenth century, it was internationally significant architect Eliel Saarinen who provided the first plan for a civic center in the 1920s, an unrealized effort that was later taken up by his son Eero Saarinen in the 1950s. It was not until the 1970s, however, that the plan for a civic center plaza was executed by another internationally recognized designer and sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. Since its completion in 1979, Hart Plaza has served as the social heart of Detroit's civic center, a publically accessible space that hosts music and cultural festivals and provides year-round passive recreation activities.

Hart Plaza is also significant under National Register Criterion C, at the national level, as the first of only four public spaces designed by Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a widely respected artist with significant works in the United States and abroad. Although the local architectural firm Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls was the architect of record for the plaza, the design is credited to Noguchi. At first commissioned only to create the centerpiece Horace A. Dodge and Son Fountain, Noguchi ultimately designed the entire plaza, creating an interplay of positive and negative spaces that blend monumental sculptures, diagonal axes, and playful forms that balance each other across wide expanses, all focused on the centerpiece of the Dodge Fountain. While subsequent additions and the depredations of time have somewhat impacted Noguchi's original design, the fundamental character of Noguchi's Hart Plaza remains distinctive and largely intact.

The period of significance, 1974 to 1979, reflects the period during which Hart Plaza was constructed. Its place as one of the few public spaces created by an internationally recognized master of Modern design, and the integrity of its design within Noguchi's body of work, meets the criteria of exceptional significance (Criteria Consideration G) for properties less than fifty years old.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### ***Detroit's Early Riverfront***

Detroit's present-day civic center (a series of buildings and open spaces arranged to accommodate the city government and other social and civic functions) is built at the narrowest point of the strait between present-day Detroit and Windsor, Canada. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Anishinaabe or "Three Fires" people, which included the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, lived around the Great Lakes. Anishinaabe people shared a similar culture and language, and the riverfront location at this narrow point was a natural gathering place to share news, hunt, fish, and trade. When the fur trade brought Europeans to the region, the Anishinaabeg traded beaver pelts for European goods such as tools, food, and weapons.

In 1701, French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac led an expedition to establish a fort, named Fort Pontchartrain for the French chancellor, at this location in order to control the fur trade on the lower Great Lakes. This became the first permanent European settlement in the region. The layout of farmland adjacent to Fort Pontchartrain was one of the first public efforts to impose form along Detroit's riverfront. These "ribbon farms" were often as narrow as two hundred feet wide, extending up to three miles inland, and were situated perpendicular to the riverfront to facilitate river access for farmers. The streets along Detroit's riverfront were often laid out along the property lines between these early ribbon farms, and many of them still bear the family names of Detroit's early French settlers.

Following the establishment of permanent Euroamerican settlements, the region's original inhabitants, the Anishinaabeg, were gradually displaced after losing their land through a series of treaties signed and enacted during the early to mid-1800s. The Treaty of Detroit, signed on November 17, 1807, transferred land in what is now southeast Michigan and northwest Ohio from the Anishinaabeg to the United States. The treaty was signed in Detroit by William Hull, governor of the Michigan Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of 1836 transferred nearly half of Anishinaabe land in the Upper Peninsula to the United States, as well as the northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula. In 1837 the land acquired by the United States became part of Michigan, the twenty-sixth state.

In the summer of 1805 a fire destroyed all evidence of Detroit's riverfront settlement except for one house and a few outlying farms. The devastating fire had at least one positive outcome – it provided a blank slate upon which to rebuild. The new territorial governor and his three-justice judiciary were instructed by Congress to "lay out a new town including the site of the one destroyed and ten thousand acres of adjacent land."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries. <https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Ellis Roberts, *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present* (Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855), 4.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

Augustus Woodward, Chief Justice of the Michigan Territory, was the first of the new administrative delegation to arrive following the fire. Woodward was a Columbia-educated lawyer who was personally acquainted with both Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him to the post of Chief Justice, and Charles Pierre L'Enfant, whose Baroque design had been implemented in planning the layout of the District of Columbia. Woodward had a personal interest in surveying and city planning, and he seized the opportunity given by the destruction of Detroit to plan his own American city. For Detroit, he proposed an ambitious plan that improved on L'Enfant's plan for the District of Columbia, which had merely imposed diagonal avenues and public circles on the existing gridiron, by creating a unified pattern of equilateral triangles four thousand feet in length on each side, converging on circular plazas or "circuses". Woodward Avenue, running from the riverfront to Grand Circus Park, the first of the envisioned public circuses, became the main axis of what came to be known as the Woodward Plan.

Woodward's plan was only partially implemented before local politics intervened and the remainder of the city was laid out on the more traditional rectilinear grid. However, portions of the plan are still visible on the landscape of downtown, as are traces of the city's earlier history in the narrow grid of streets perpendicular to the river along the borders of the old French ribbon farms, and the hub of American Indian trails intersecting at the riverfront and Woodward Avenue that later became the city's major radial streets.

During the early 1800s as the city continued to grow, farmland on the river side of Jefferson Avenue was divided into smaller lots for businesses. By the 1830s the riverfront had so many stores, taverns and boarding houses, it became known as the "dollar" side of Jefferson Avenue.<sup>5</sup> Advertisements in the *Detroit Free Press* during the 1830s and 1840s indicate that businesses along the riverfront sold dry goods, groceries, cutlery, hardware and stoves.

The shoreline of the Detroit River was continuously filled in and expanded to make more room for hotels, bringing in tourists and seamen. The Mansion House, built in 1836, became a gathering place for mariners and was later converted into a charity home for unemployed sailors. Although the building became somewhat rundown as a result, it was still viewed by Detroiters as a charitable and worthy institution and remained in use as late as 1920. Mariners were also welcomed at the Mariner's Church on the northwest corner of Woodward Avenue and Woodbridge Street, built in 1848 to serve traveling seamen and sailors.

Given its strategic location and proximity to Canada, Detroit became an early station on the Underground Railroad, with the height of this activity occurring between 1838 and 1865. The intricate network of safe houses and routes transferring enslaved people away from slave-holding states generally ended at one of at least seven points for entering Canada from Michigan. The United States Congress essentially ended slavery and involuntary servitude in Michigan by enacting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. Great Britain followed suit and in 1793 began a phased termination of slavery in Upper Canada (future Ontario). At various points in time,

<sup>5</sup> Friend Palmer, "Earlier Days in Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

enslaved people would escape to either the United States or Canada depending on the location granting the most favorable legal status.<sup>6</sup>

The large and sympathetic network of individuals and churches in Detroit, such as the Second Baptist Church, sponsored relocation via the one-mile boat trip from the downtown docks. At the peak of the Underground Railroad, it is estimated that around one-thousand-five-hundred people left from Detroit each year.<sup>7</sup> Around 1859 for example, as many as ninety-four enslaved people were transferred in one week.<sup>8</sup> Historic docks along the city's entire riverfront including the future Hart Plaza were vital to the Underground Railroad. Mariner's Church may have also been an important stop along the Underground Railroad. When the church was moved to a new location in 1955 to make way for the civic center, a brick tunnel was reportedly discovered that led to the river, suggesting it had been used to move enslaved people to the waterfront where they could board boats and be ferried across to Canada. This activity is commemorated in the present-day Gateway to Freedom memorial in Hart Plaza and its counterpart across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario.

Beginning in the 1850s warehouses and steamboat docks began to displace the small retail stores. The new warehouses constructed along the riverfront housed the American Eagle Tobacco Company, which had several warehouses and offices near the river on Atwater between Woodward and Shelby (1884), Lawson, Howard & Co, a grain merchant at Griswold and Atwater (1843), and the Detroit Steam Supply Company (1884).<sup>9</sup>

As tourism began to develop in the city in the later nineteenth century, tension developed between the needs of these two contrary riverfront industries. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated 1884 mentioned with disapproval that business and warehouse owners stored extra freight on the sidewalks on Shelby Street between Jefferson and the river, forcing pedestrians to walk in the streets. The article went on to mention that this was (regrettably in its opinion) the first sight of vacationers coming to Detroit via steamboat liner.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Katie Korth, "Hart Plaza: A History." Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. 23 April 2013, 4.

<sup>10</sup> "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

### ***The Civic Center – A City Planning Typology***

The idea of a park in the center of the city was widely discussed as early as 1891, when City of Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree gave his annual message to the Common Council. Mayor Pingree served as Detroit's mayor from 1890 to 1897 and was nationally admired for his "Potato Patch" program to feed the poor. An advanced social reformer, he led construction of the city's first public schools, public parks and free public baths, earning the nickname, "Idol of the People."

Reflecting on the prevalence of warehouses along the riverfront, Mayor Pingree stated, "a large park, in the center of the city would boom Detroit more than the establishment of half a dozen Union Depots or of 18 or 20 factories." He believed that although Grand Circus Park, further north on Woodward, was wisely designed, it was not large enough for the subsequent growth of the city. A downtown park would be a "lasting monument to the wisdom of the city fathers who procured it, and would justly entitle all who aided in the cause to the gratitude, not only of this generation, but of generations yet unborn."<sup>11</sup>

The Common Council did nothing to implement Pingree's vision of a downtown civic park. By the late 1890s, Detroit was beginning to attract national conventions, and in 1897 Pingree tried again, calling for filling in the downtown riverfront to create a convention center to accommodate the promotion of private enterprise and national conventions in the summer months. Although the riverfront was filled in, it was to support the construction of warehouses and hotels, not a convention center. Mayor Pingree left office later that same year after being elected governor of Michigan.

Pingree's vision for a downtown civic park was in line with the developing ideals of the City Beautiful movement. In 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, which featured a prominent display of monumental buildings arranged around a formal lagoon. The exhibition, with its emphasis on symmetry, beauty, and order, captured the public imagination and helped give rise to the City Beautiful movement. The private and political forces driving industrialization resulted in cities whose rapid expansion left little time for thoughtful comprehensive planning. By the early 1900s American city planners were calling for monumental arrangements surrounding open plazas and malls, so elegantly displayed by the formal groupings of buildings at the World's Columbian Exposition, as an antidote to cities that were over crowded, poorly planned, and congested.

Aside from private and commercial development, Detroit had few major public works projects in the century following Woodward's plan – with the exception of Grand Boulevard, a twelve-mile ring encircling the city perimeter, Waterworks Park, a public leisure ground at the site of the city's water intake system upriver, and plans for Belle Isle, the city's largest park that marked the eastern terminus of the Boulevard. In the wake of the Columbian Exposition, there was no

<sup>11</sup> George Galster, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 64-65.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

shortage of enthusiasm for much needed public improvements, and in the fall of 1904 the Detroit Board of Commerce invited Charles Mulford Robinson to Detroit, to make a study to recommend improvements for the city.

Robinson was a newspaper editor, author, and professor celebrated as one of the United States' first urban planners and an early proponent of the City Beautiful movement. Robinson's preliminary recommendations resulted in the creation of a Committee on Civic Improvement, which immediately invited Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. to undertake a more expansive study. As one of the nation's preeminent landscape architects and a pioneer in comprehensive city and regional planning, Olmsted was the obvious choice to guide the city in its necessary public improvements.

Although Olmsted's study offered more concrete recommendations, the separate studies by Robinson and Olmsted both provided valuable insights into Detroit's much needed public improvements. Olmsted and Robinson agreed on two key points: the importance of rectifying the improper disposition of monumental public buildings throughout the downtown core, and that linking this monumental grouping to the Detroit River was essential for the image of the future city. Robinson proposed that the commercial waterfront at the center of the city should be a "water-gate—the official entrance to the city" and reclaimed for aesthetic development.<sup>12</sup> Olmsted, as well, noted in regard to the proposed site:

[A]s the middle of the City's Front, this spot is plainly marked as the site for some great tribune, from which enthroned Detroit shall review the vast procession of the ships in the centuries to come...the day will surely come...when Detroit will here erect a great and monumental structure dominating all the aggregated buildings of the city and typifying to the traveler from afar the city's own domination. Rising from...an orderly and dignified treatment of the River Front and spanning the axis of Woodward Avenue, such a structure will be...the culminating architectural accent of the City.<sup>13</sup>

The report laid out a clear path for future planning in Detroit, and was yet another argument that the terminus of Woodward Avenue at the Detroit River was the prime location for a grouping of monumental buildings.

As cities continued to develop at a pace that left little time for thoughtful planning, turn-of-the-century city planners redirected their dreams of a comprehensive city-wide plan into a much more accessible goal: the design of a civic center, similar to what was so beautifully displayed in Chicago. It was further hoped that the typology of a civic center, an idealized city in miniature,

<sup>12</sup> Detroit Board of Commerce, *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905). This includes Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43; and Charles Mulford Robinson, "Report of Charles Mulford Robinson," 45-67, hereafter cited as one work.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

with its well-thought out placement of streets, buildings, and plazas, would serve as a model for the city at large.

In rapidly expanding cities such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Detroit, the civic center emerged as the centerpiece of comprehensive planning. In the early 1920s, the Detroit City Plan Commission and an architect and planner named Eliel Saarinen began to collaborate on a picturesque civic center plan near the Detroit riverfront.

### ***Eliel Saarinen's 1924 Civic Center Plan***

In the summer of 1921 a "soldier's memorial conference" was held in Detroit to determine the best location for a war memorial and civic auditorium. Michigan governor Alex J. Groesbeck cited the city's desire to memorialize its fallen soldiers and stressed the need for a convention hall and civic meeting place. The exact location for the building proved difficult to determine, with upwards of forty proposed locations throughout the city. The impasse was not resolved until an accomplished Finnish architect and city planner, Eliel Saarinen, was hired by the city.

Saarinen was the foremost architect of his generation in Finland before moving to the United States. By 1914 he had become widely known in Europe for his Helsinki railroad station and urban planning projects for Reval (now Tallinn), Estonia, and Canberra, Australia. In 1922 he placed second in the Chicago Tribune tower competition with a design that influenced an entire generation of skyscrapers. As a result, Saarinen was invited by Emil Lorch to teach design courses at the University of Michigan in 1923. In later years, Saarinen would create a lasting influence in the region through his architectural designs that included churches and a large part of the campus at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, at Bloomfield Hills near Detroit, where he also served as president of the academy before becoming head of the graduate department of architecture and city planning.

Not long after he arrived in the United States, Saarinen's advice for the war memorial in Detroit was sought, with his fees underwritten by the Michigan chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Memorial Hall Sub-Committee on Site. Saarinen proposed a civic center scheme at the foot of Woodward, which was the location he determined to be best suited for the proposed Memorial Hall to honor the city's war veterans. His 1924 plan was of a picturesque grouping of public buildings that included a city hall and municipal complex surrounding a wedge-shaped plaza – a sweeping vision for the site.

In speaking of the wedge-shaped plaza, Saarinen noted, "The general form of the plaza is irregular, but gives a distinct impression of formality. There is no symmetry, but the contours of the plaza and the grouping of building masses, varying in simplicity and richness, give to the whole an extraordinarily fine balance."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Eliel Saarinen, *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future* (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1943), 70.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

The buildings surrounding the plaza formed horizontal walls of uniform blocks, including a towering city hall, and a domed Memorial Hall along the riverfront with two entrances. The south-facing entrance, toward the river, was dedicated to sailors, while the north-facing entrance, on an axis with Woodward Avenue, was dedicated to soldiers. Included in his plan were design solutions to address several of the city's large-scale engineering problems, and which indicated the need for a massive public works project. Below the surface of the plaza, Saarinen designed two underground decks for motor and rail traffic and parking, and areas for mass transit and sewage works along the riverfront.

Saarinen's plan received wide acclaim from the Sub-Committee on Site, the City Plan Commission, engineers of the Rapid Transit Commission, and the local press. The proposed civic center project met its first obstacle with the price tag for the Memorial Hall. Originally budgeted at 5.5 million dollars, the Memorial Hall project ballooned into a massive twenty-year, one-hundred-million-dollar development, requiring an estimated thirty million dollars for the acquisition of property alone, and taking up twelve blocks of what was still prime city real estate.<sup>15</sup>

Even so, the Detroit Common Council was undeterred and agreed to place condemnation proceedings on the spring ballot. However, the election in 1924 of a new mayor, John W. Smith, halted the whole plan. Smith viewed the entire project as an extravagance and preferred to direct the city's resources toward more practical infrastructural improvements. Mayor Smith succeeded in blocking the ballot measure to acquire the land, and, as a result, he ended the project's momentum.

### ***Detroit's Post-War Master Plan***

During Mayor Smith's administration, which lasted from 1924 until 1928, there were no further plans for the civic center. From 1929 until the late 1940s, the Great Depression and World War II halted most construction work in the city, and city resources were generally directed toward relieving the effects of the Depression and supporting the war effort. The idea of a civic center was not completely dead, however, and it was mentioned in several planning efforts during this period. The City Plan Commission's 1939 Annual Report stated that the time was now ripe for a new comprehensive plan, and further noted, "The Detroit Plan Commission has given careful consideration to civic centers. A city of Detroit's size requires many civic centers such as retail shopping, financial, warehouse, industrial, recreational, amusement, cultural, judicial, music, institutional, etc."

In the fall of 1943 forty civic-minded architects formed the Architect's Civic Design Group to consider postwar "highways, residential developments, business and cultural centers, and suburban projects."<sup>16</sup> Foremost on their agenda was the study of waterfront development at the

<sup>15</sup> "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.

<sup>16</sup> Donald E. Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

foot of Woodward Avenue, although they also looked into design solutions to other problems that had affected the city, such as so-called blighted districts and overcrowding. A 1943 *Detroit News* article entitled, "Can We Build a City That Will Give Us Health, Happiness?" noted that the group was working out a new comprehensive plan for Detroit that would transform the city into a better place to live.

In 1944, Mayor Edward Jefferies' office issued a brochure, entitled *Post-War Improvements To Make Your Detroit a Finer City in Which to Live and Work*, which prominently featured "a dignified, unified Civic Center, which will not only symbolize our pride in our city, but which, even more importantly, will bring together at one central and accessible point the now scattered municipal departments and offices." A sketch in the brochure showed Woodward Avenue dividing into a boulevard south of Jefferson Avenue. To either side of the boulevard were low-rise buildings with a rectangular skyscraper on the west side. The boulevard terminated at the river in a circular plaza with a central monument.<sup>17</sup> The civic center plan in the brochure was not the 1924 design by Saarinen, but a newly devised plan based on the preliminary studies undertaken for the City Plan Commission by Suren Pilafian, one of the architects working with the Architect's Civic Design Group. Pilafian first came to public notice when the thirty-two-year old Turkish-born Detroit architect won a competition for a campus plan and Student's Center Building for Wayne University (later renamed Wayne State University). Pilafian later became the University's campus architect in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two years later, the City Plan Commission began to issue its Master Plan for the City of Detroit in a series of booklets that addressed recreation, the thoroughfare system, and general land use. Three of seven booklets addressed specific projects: the Cultural Center, a recreational park and development from the riverfront to the Belle Isle Bridge, and the Civic Center. The Civic Center Plan, number 3 in the Master Plan series, was published in October 1946. Although the Commission acknowledged that this site had been "for years recognized as appropriate for this development," it stated that they had surveyed the entire city to identify the best possible site and settled on the riverfront as providing the best location based on six factors, including proximity to the central business district, accessibility via both public and private transportation, relatively low land costs, historical significance, and inherent natural beauty.<sup>18</sup>

Although the booklet outlining the civic center plan credited it as "based in large part on preliminary studies undertaken for the Plan Commission by Mr. Suren Pilafian," the design had evolved considerably since the sketch in the Mayor's office brochure of two years earlier, with the City Plan Commission noting that "the final design exploits to the fullest the natural dignity of the site." The proposed civic center was now a 47.5-acre site. North of Jefferson Avenue was an administrative group, including a City-County building to the east of Woodward Avenue and

---

fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (University of Pittsburgh, 2013, 242. No listing of the architects in the group was found, but the group was chaired by Branson V. Gamber and included Suren Pilafian and Saarinen.

<sup>17</sup> Post-War Improvement Committee [Detroit], *Post-War Improvements to Make Your Detroit a Finer City in which to Live and Work* (Detroit: 1944), 4.

<sup>18</sup> City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit – A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946), 9-11.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

state and federal buildings to the west. The boulevard of Pilafian's 1944 plan now terminated just south of Jefferson Avenue in ramps leading to underground parking, while the buildings were pushed farther east and west to allow for a much wider plaza that included large lawn panels outlined with trees. The circular plaza at the riverfront was gone, replaced by a series of paved and lawn terraces of varying levels. To the west was a V-shaped Veteran's Service Building with a convention hall beyond, while to the east was a civic auditorium, recognizable as the shape of the future Ford Auditorium, but oriented east-west rather than north-south as it would eventually be executed. The brochure also noted that, "the natural slope of the land in the plaza area will make available large amounts of underground space, of which four acres will be utilized as exhibition halls. Underground accommodations for 800 automobiles have also been indicated."<sup>19</sup>

The entire civic center had a projected cost of fifty-five million dollars, with ten million dollars allocated for state and federal office buildings that would be borne by those entities. The commission noted that the investment would be well worth it, as Detroit would receive a plaza for outdoor assemblies, a "World Wars Memorial Hall" with assembly room for veterans, a twenty-thousand-seat convention space for mass meetings and other organizations that had been taking their business elsewhere, and a smaller Civic Auditorium with a seating capacity of thirty-five hundred. Furthermore, the report stated, "The civic center offers Detroit a rare opportunity to give tangible form to its own spirit, to manifest in steel and stone the dynamic drive characteristic of this great metropolis. For this Center can be more than a mere open space flanked by a group of buildings. It can truly become the symbol of the city, a monument on which the visitor will gaze with admiration, which the resident can look upon with satisfaction, proudly saying to himself, 'I am a citizen of no mean city.'"<sup>20</sup>

Although the city government had invested at least three years and two publications in Pilafian's plan, in February 1947 the Detroit Chapter of the AIA advised the Common Council and the City Plan Commission to retain Saarinen, Swanson, Saarinen Associates as consultants for the proposed civic center's plaza as well as the architectural treatment of the remaining buildings. This recommendation not only dismissed the significance of the initial contribution Pilafian had already made to the design of the civic center, but also paralleled the recommendation that had been made back in 1942, when Pilafian won the Wayne campus competition. In announcing the award of the campus competition, the jury recommended that Pilafian "be invited to restudy his design, and he should feel free to invite the collaboration of other architects [...] to achieve a more expressive quality." Furthermore, the jury hoped that Pilafian would agree to collaborate with the second-place winner—the firm of Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen. As it happened, construction was impossible during the war years and, as noted by future Wayne Provost Arthur Neef, "the forced idleness of Wayne planners afforded them the luxury of rethinking the entire program." In addition, it soon became clear that, "the specific plan which had won the competition had already outlived its usefulness."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center*, 234.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

More than twenty years had passed since Eliel Saarinen first presented his 1924 civic center design, and the architect was seventy-four years old. Now, Eliel's thirty-seven-old son, Eero Saarinen, joined his father in developing the 1947 plan. The younger Saarinen was born in Finland, but attended public schools in Michigan after moving with his family to the United States in 1923. In 1929 he studied sculpture at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris but, as he recounted years later, "it never occurred to me to do anything but follow in my father's footsteps." He studied architecture at Yale University, and conducted research on housing and city planning with the Flint Institute of Research and Planning in Flint, Michigan, before joining his father's practice in Bloomfield Hills in 1938.

Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen's design for the civic center retained several elements of the earlier Pilafian plan, including the placement of key buildings - the county-city building, state and federal buildings, Veterans' Memorial Building, convention hall (now a circular structure) and civic auditorium. The defining feature of the plaza was now an elongated tear-shaped reflecting pool along the axis of the civic auditorium with a less rectilinear and freer flowing park south of the pool including curved walks, extensive lawn areas, and trees. A later refinement to the plan was a 1,200-foot-long structure meant to combine state, federal, city, and county offices. The structure was shown in a July 1947 model as spanning across Woodward Avenue, just as Olmsted had suggested more than forty years before, but was deemed by critics as a "tired skyscraper" that had "decided to lie down and rest."<sup>22</sup> Saarinen provided several revised designs for the County-City building, and each rendition included new refinements to the surrounding civic center, especially the landscaping of the plaza below Woodward Avenue. In a refrain that was becoming almost cliché, the Common Council's reaction was unenthusiastic. The *Detroit Free Press* recorded in July 1947 that, "Common Council apparently indicated only mild interest in the proposed \$50,000,000 civic center when it was laid before it in a model, maps, sketches and verbal description Friday," further noting that after a thirty-minute explanation by a representative of Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen, "Council adjourned without a single question or word of comment."<sup>23</sup>

Despite the uncertainty surrounding approval of the plan, efforts to fund the project went forward. In the late 1940s a special progress report by the City Plan Commission was circulated with a four-page handout urging voters to pass upcoming referenda including approval of the site, a millage increase, and an eight-million-dollar bond.<sup>24</sup> The funding attempts must have proved successful, as in the early 1950s the city began to demolish waterfront structures in preparation for eventually implementing development of the civic center. At this time, the area was little more than parking lots and industrial sites. As the transportation focus of the city had moved away from the riverfront and towards rail and road travel, many of the warehouses erected on the river side of Jefferson Avenue fell into disuse and the small storefront businesses were closed, razed, and replaced with parking lots. A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows

<sup>22</sup> "Architect Gives Critics Answer," *The Detroit Times*, August 10, 1947. Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Eero Saarinen Papers, Series IV, Project Records, Box 88, folder 172, Job 4627: Detroit Civic Center, Detroit, MI, clippings.

<sup>23</sup> "Civic Center Plans Leave Council Quiet." *Detroit Free Press*, 12 July 1947.

<sup>24</sup> Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center*, 251.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

that the site included a multi-story parking lot and a store named Sam's Drugs and Shoes. The one industry that did survive along the riverfront were the excursion steamboat companies, which used the dock area. Although the steamboats attracted tourists and locals to the riverfront during the summer months, the area that would later become Hart Plaza was mostly vacant during the remainder of the year.

The one exception to the general demolition of the waterfront area was Mariners' Church, which was deemed too important to raze. In 1955 the church was relocated from the northwest corner of Woodward and Woodbridge, on a site that is now the lawn panel east of the labor union monument *Transcending*, to its current location nine hundred feet to the east.

Veterans' Memorial Hall (currently known as the UAW-Ford Center), was the first civic center building that was completed. This building was constructed in 1950 to plans by the Detroit-based architecture firm of Harley, Ellington and Day. In 1955 the same firm completed another important building anchoring the civic center – the City-County building, now the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center. A year later, in 1956, the design firm Odell, Hewlett and Luckenbach completed the Ford Auditorium. In 1960, Mayor Pingree's vision of a convention space on the riverfront was finally realized with the completion of Cobo Hall (now Cobo Center), one of the nation's first large convention centers, designed by Gino Rossetti while he was with design firm Giffels and Vallet.

The civic center buildings completed during the 1950s and 1960s were very different from the Art Deco and Neoclassical monuments envisioned in the 1924 Saarinen plan or realized buildings in the neighborhood such as the magnificent Guardian Building. All were International-style buildings sheathed in or featuring white marble. Along with Minoru Yamasaki's Michigan Consolidated Gas Building (1958), with its white precast concrete panel exterior, the civic center buildings created a modern perimeter for the future plaza. They were accented by pools, such as the reflecting pool in front of the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Building, and sculptures including Marshall Fredericks' Spirit of Detroit (on the west end of the City-County Building) and Victory Eagle (on the north side of the Veterans' Memorial Building), and Giacomo Manzu's Passo di Danza in front of the Gas Company building.

However, the centerpiece of the civic center design – the plaza – was still not implemented. In the decades that followed the construction of the civic center buildings, the City deliberated on the best approach for developing the plaza. In order to further develop the design of the civic center plaza, Saarinen brought in a partner with whom he had worked on previous projects, Dan Kiley. Kiley was a nationally-known landscape architect with a long history of collaboration with prominent architects, including Louis Kahn and I. M. Pei. In 1946, Kiley was on the winning team with Eero Saarinen for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition, known colloquially as the Saint Louis Arch, and in 1955, again with Saarinen, he designed the garden for J. Irwin Miller's family in Columbus, Indiana, perhaps the most important post World War II garden in the United States.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

In 1955, perhaps as a result of the collaboration with Kiley, the City of Detroit's Committee on Civic Design "unanimously and enthusiastically" endorsed the new design and overall shape of Saarinen's civic center plaza design, noting that, "the architectural and aesthetic unity achieved by this new concept will greatly enhance the value of the civic center plaza. We are fully aware of the fact that this plan requires further study and improvement, especially in regards to public comfort stations, location and shape of memorial gardens and plaques, as well as many other details."<sup>25</sup> A few days later, the Common Council approved Saarinen and Kiley's surface treatment for the plaza. It is unclear what refinements Kiley and Saarinen made to the plan since 1947, as no drawings or renderings have been found, and despite the approval of the Common Council, there was still no execution of the plan.

In 1962 thirty-three-year-old Jerome P. Cavanagh became Mayor of Detroit after winning a landslide victory over the incumbent Louis C. Miriani, becoming one of the country's youngest big-city majors. During his eight-year administration, he became nationally recognized as an outstanding leader who adopted Lyndon B. Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also known as the Model Cities Act), and obtained 490 million dollars in federal funding that was invested into a nine square mile section of Detroit's inner city in the hopes of setting new standards in urbanization and quelling poverty.

In a letter to Mayor Cavanagh dated June 15, 1964, Charles Blessing, Director of Detroit's City Plan Commission, wrote that since the Saarinen/Kiley plan was approved in 1955, the need for an underground parking structure and roadway across the civic center plaza had been recognized (despite these being features of plans going back to the 1940s), and a new plan which retained the "essential features" of the Saarinen design, while incorporating the garage and roadway, had been reviewed and approved by all affected city departments. Blessing concluded by recommending that the plaza plan be presented to the Common Council with Kiley in attendance to explain the design (Eero Saarinen had died in 1961) and that Kiley should be engaged to complete the detailed design and surface treatment. Once cost estimates had been obtained, the city should proceed with construction.

Blessing was both an architect and city planner, and served as Director of the City of Detroit's City Plan Commission from 1953 until 1977, so his recommendation should have carried considerable weight. Under Blessing's leadership, Detroit had carried out a series of ambitious attempts to reshape its urban landscape by sweeping aside small commercial buildings and single-family housing and replacing them with new modern buildings and parks such as the Mies van der Rohe-designed Lafayette Park residential development just east of downtown, and an industrial development in Corktown to the west, both clearance projects under the Federal Urban Renewal Act. That same year, in 1964, the Detroit City Plan Commission had received the prestigious American Institute of Planners (AIP) Honors Award in Comprehensive Planning for implementing many of the facilities plans for schools and recreational resources, which confirmed that Detroit had greatly improved the city's municipal services. Yet the realization of the civic center plaza still stymied city planners.

<sup>25</sup> Committee on Civic Design. October 14, 1955. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 – September 1965.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

Despite Blessing's firm endorsement, there was another plan under review for the plaza, by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G). In February 1965, the Common Council authorized the City of Detroit to provide funds for architectural and engineering services to Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, who were commissioned to provide construction documents for the civic center plaza and underground garage. The project amount was listed as four-hundred-and-fifteen thousand dollars for the architectural and engineering services for Smith Hinchman & Grylls to provide the construction documents.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear if at this time Smith, Hinchman and Grylls were merely expected to provide construction documents for the Saarinen and Kiley plan amended by the City Plan Commission, or to develop an entirely new plan. Since Kiley was initially retained as a consultant to SH&G, this may have been the original intention. However, it was clear by the following fall that SH&G were moving toward a very different design.

City Plan Commission staff voiced their alarm at the changes. In September 1965 senior city planner Charles McCafferty wrote to Blessing to express his concern that, "...our City Plan Commission staff position is being eroded by the direction of events in the last several weeks. I believe this is the result of not returning to the original strong commitment and endorsement of the Saarinen scheme which has been our most valuable strategic resource." He went on to state that Saarinen had studied "25 or 30 various schemes before arriving at his present scheme is proof enough to me that we can expect no more than a marginal gain at the best in further exploration of concepts." McCafferty concluded that to move forward with additional studies of the plaza would effectively dismiss all of the previous efforts and commitments made by the Plan Commission, City departments, the AIA Civic Design Committee, and would, "...give Smith Hinchman & Grylls the free hand that they want in redesigning the Plaza...In conclusion, I believe it is absolutely imperative for us to take a very firm position on the retention of the basic Saarinen scheme."<sup>27</sup>

A list of observations of the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls plaza design by the City of Detroit's design division enumerated the apparent deficits in the approved plan. The comments spanned five pages, and stated, in brief, that the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls plaza design was too self-contained, lacked central focus, was unrelated to the form of buildings surrounding it, and lacked the quality of "simplicity and repose."

Blessing relayed these comments to Mayor Cavanagh in a letter dated October 8, 1965, and summed up the view of the City Plan Commission that the Saarinen plan was far superior to the proposal by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. In providing reasons for this recommendation, Blessing stated that the elements of Saarinen's design – the reflecting pool, architectural treatment of steps, pedestrian paved areas, and the "generously sloping lawn extending from the reflecting

<sup>26</sup> No information was found on why the Common Council decided to award the contract for the plaza to Smith Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G), and there was no date found to indicate when Kiley was eventually retained as a consultant to SH&G. The contract may have been awarded to SH&G because they were based locally in Detroit, whereas Eero Saarinen had died and Kiley was based outside of Michigan.

<sup>27</sup> Charles McCafferty letter to Charles Blessing. September 1, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 – September 1965.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

pool to the river's edge" - more effectively related to the adjacent buildings, the Ford Auditorium and the Veterans' building. He also noted that Saarinen's design has "greater utility functionally in terms of the large open surface adapted to use by maximum numbers of people...and represents the ideal expression of a great city park along a beautiful river."<sup>28</sup>

When asked to explain their proposed plaza design and why it deviated from the original Saarinen concept, Sigmund Blum from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls noted that there were many problems encountered in adapting to the Saarinen plan, with one example being the slope of the meadow as too steep if the east-west roadway (Atwater Street) was to remain. Blum attributed the change in design to the change in program, and that addition of the underground parking structure and roadway access across the civic center plaza necessitated major alterations to the plan. In a meeting at the City Engineer's Office to discuss the plaza and underground garage, on August 27, 1965, Blum asked, "is City Plan holding out for Saarinen's plan because it's good or just because Saarinen did it?"<sup>29</sup> Blum's comment appeared to infer that Saarinen's plan had clear deficiencies that city planners refused to acknowledge, given Saarinen's reputation.

Despite the push of city planners to retain the integrity of the Saarinen plan, their efforts were dealt another blow in the fall of 1965 when Kiley, who had worked so closely with Eero Saarinen, withdrew from the project. Kiley had openly expressed his concerns about the design direction of the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls proposal, such as their treatment of the fountain and the scheme which he labeled as "dramatic - the scale is much too big." In an October 18, 1965 letter to Robert Hastings, president of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Kiley expressed his reasons for leaving but also indicated the importance of a new feature that would ultimately shape the future design of the plaza. Kiley wrote:

I am terribly sorry that I have found it necessary to resign from our association for the design of Detroit's Civic Center Plaza. After working on the project for a short time, I am forced to come to the conclusion that there cannot be more than one strong designer on any successful project. Therefore, since the City of Detroit has selected Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates as the principal architect, I believe it is to the best interests of everyone that I resign from the project.

I do feel that you are correct in taking the position that the program for the Civic Center project has changed materially from the one which Eero Saarinen and I worked on when we created the existing plan in 1955. Whenever any such changes are made in program, it is vitally important that the designer start anew and create a design concept around the program requirements of the time.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Jerome Cavanagh. October 8, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 - May 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Meeting Memorandum - Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. August 27, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 - September 1965.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Just to mention two changes in program that affect the design solution: the addition of a \$2,000,000 fountain becomes such an important feature that it must be considered a major focal point for the entire plaza development. The addition of underground parking places another controlling feature to the design solution...<sup>30</sup>

The fountain referenced in Kiley's letter to Robert Hastings was the first mention of what would become the central element of the plaza design. The City of Detroit had received notice of a bequest of two million dollars from Anna Thompson Dodge, in honor of her late husband, the American automotive innovator Horace E. Dodge, Sr., and their son Horace E. Dodge. While the sources do not state when Dodge notified the city of her plans, it was most likely between December 1963, when her son died, and Kiley's letter in 1965 (Dodge passed away in 1970).

SH&G's design for the plaza was a major departure from the Saarinen/Kiley plan. While Saarinen's plan was free-flowing and curvilinear, the SH&G plan was rectilinear and regimented. It centered on a large square pool surrounded by a series of small square lawn panels set in paving. Geometric groupings of trees separated the pool from the adjoining buildings and from Jefferson Avenue. A vertical sculpture element aligned along the axis of Woodward just south of Jefferson, in approximately the future location of the Pylon, but the north-south axis through the center of the pool did not align with the street grid. South of the pool was a triangular lawn panel, with a viewing platform extending out over the river at the southwest corner of the site, aligned with the main wing of the Veterans' Memorial Building. Atwater Street was carried under the plaza, and the underground parking garage was accessed by ramps in front of Cobo Center and the Veterans' building.

While the SH&G model for the plaza included a conception of the fountain for the pool, they determined that the construction of the civic center plaza surface treatment should not begin without first having an approved pool and fountain design. In a memorandum from the civic center plaza and underground garage meeting dated May 1968, Blum noted, "...since the pool and fountain area is the central theme of the Plaza, it must be a vibrant and exciting element. New ideas, capturing the spirit of Detroit, must be reflected in its design."<sup>31</sup>

In order to accomplish this objective, Blum suggested either "an international competition to select a design, or that a group of prominent Detroiters be organized to select an artist."<sup>32</sup> It was a point on which Blum and Blessing could finally agree. Blessing suggested that a memo be prepared, in the interest of identifying a fountain designer and for general discussion on the topic with the Mayor, Common Council and various Commissions concerned with the development of the Plaza.

<sup>30</sup> Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

In April 1971 an eleven-member Fountain Selection Committee was established to select a fountain designer. The Fountain Selection Committee was handpicked by Mayor Roman Gribbs and included an impressive group of Detroit notables, most of whom were well known for their dealings in business, arts and architecture. Heading the committee was Robert Hastings, Principal and Chairman of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, which had been commissioned with the overall design of the civic center plaza where the fountain was to be located. Additional members included Detroit architect and historian W. Hawkins Ferry, the editors of the *Detroit Free Press*, Lee Hills, and the *Detroit News*, Martin Hayden, Lydia Winston Malbin, an art collector and the daughter of architect Albert Kahn, African American artist Charles McGee, journalist, teacher, and patron of the arts Victoria Davenport, David Dodge, the grandson of Anna Thomson Dodge, Willis Woods, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Charles Cunningham (possibly the director of the Art Institute of Chicago during this period).

### *Noguchi and Detroit's Civic Center Plaza*

The committee chose for the fountain design a Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi's artistic work spanned from sculptures to theater set designs, and included the design of public spaces in cities throughout the world. Noguchi was born in 1904, the son of a well-educated New Yorker, Leonie Gilmour, and a Japanese poet, Yonejiro Noguchi. The two had enjoyed a collaboration as author and editor, but Yonejiro returned to Japan before Noguchi's birth. Leonie raised their son in a tent village of immigrants just outside of Los Angeles. In 1907, as anti-Japanese sentiment grew in the United States, Leonie moved to Japan so that Noguchi would not face the harsh discrimination against Asian Americans that resulted in their children attending segregated schools. He returned to the United States to attend high school at age thirteen, but the culture of Japan remained a constant influence on his work.

While still a teenager, Noguchi apprenticed briefly with Danish-American sculptor Gutzon Borglum in his Connecticut studio, with mixed results, as Borglum declared that Noguchi had no future in sculpture. Perhaps as a result of this indictment, Noguchi enrolled in Columbia University's pre-medical program, but continued to pursue his interest in sculpture through night classes at a local art school. Noguchi eventually dropped out of medical school to focus more completely on his artistic pursuits. In 1926, Noguchi received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study sculpture in Paris and travel throughout India and China. He returned to the United States and held his first solo exhibition, which firmly established him as a fixture of the New York artist community.

Noguchi's work was not widely recognized in the United States until he completed a large-scale sculpture in 1938 that symbolized the freedom of the press. The project was commissioned for the Associated Press building in Rockefeller Center, New York City. The commission became the first of his public works celebrated worldwide, and reflected his belief in the social significance of sculpture. Noguchi collaborated with artists working in a wide range of disciplines, including stage sets that he created for the dancer/choreographer Martha Graham in the 1930s, as well as dancers/choreographers Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, and George



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Balanchine. In 1937, he designed a Bakelite intercom for the Zenith Radio Corporation, and in 1947 his glass-topped table was produced by Herman Miller – a design which is still being produced today. In the 1960s, he began working with stone carver Masatoshi Izumi, a collaboration that continued until his death. Noguchi also collaborated from 1960 to 1966 with architect Louis Kahn on a playground design.<sup>33</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, anti-Japanese sentiment was high. While Japanese-Americans on the East Coast were not as liable to relocation to internment camps as those on the West Coast, Noguchi decided to work as the sole volunteer at an internment camp in Arizona where he hoped to use art and community activity to establish an “ideal cooperative community.” Recognizing the need for improved morale among those forced to live in internment camps, Noguchi created a design for parks, recreational facilities, and a traditionally inspired cemetery that he hoped would bridge the cultural divide between the east and the west. The War Relocation Authority refused to implement his design, but his unrealized plans for a park in the internment camp was his first landscape design project. The notion of public spaces that inspire and provide a cultural bridge between two worlds remained a permanent feature in his emerging ethos.

By the time Noguchi was approached by Detroit’s Fountain Selection Committee, he had designed smaller scale landscapes for corporations, museums and institutions throughout the United States, and overseas in Israel, France, and Japan. Noguchi had designed a fountain for Expo ’70, a world’s fair held in Suita, Osaka, Japan, where the designs astounded visitors with a display of water that “jetted down one hundred feet, stated, sprayed, and swirled...disappeared and reappeared as a mist.”<sup>34</sup> The fountains were a collaboration between Noguchi and Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, and set the stage for Noguchi’s later work as a designer of exterior artistic installations and the complementary landscapes that surround them.

Noguchi’s selection as artist for the fountain almost immediately sparked contention. Much of it came from David Elgin Dodge, a member of the selection committee who had also submitted his own design. In September 1971, Dodge complained that Noguchi had not submitted a sketch of his design, only a verbal description. He also pointed out a technicality: The location of Noguchi’s fountain was to be at the center of the plaza, not the foot of Woodward Avenue as stipulated by Anna Thomson Dodge (her will used the phrase ‘the fountain in the park at the foot of Woodward’). The fact that SH&G’s 1960s design for the plaza also placed the fountain at the center of the plaza appears to reinforce the idea that this was sour grapes on the part of Dodge. A friend of the Dodge family defended him, saying that Dodge “is a registered architect who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, not just some little rich boy who says: ‘I’m going to do this because grandma gave the money.’...David Dodge [living in Switzerland] is understandably unhappy because his plan, sweated out with William Wesley Peters, chief architect of the Wright Foundation’s Taliesin Institute, didn’t win.”<sup>35</sup> The issue was finally resolved by the city agreeing

<sup>33</sup> “Biography,” The Noguchi Museum. “Musings on Isamu Noguchi’s Hart Plaza,”

<https://www.noguchi.org/noguchi/biography> (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), 174.

<sup>35</sup> Ladd Neuman, “Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

to name the plaza “Dodge Brothers Plaza” in return for the family’s agreement to drop the requirement that the fountain be on the plaza’s street edge.<sup>36</sup>

Another development was that Hastings, with the support of the selection committee, recommended that Isamu Noguchi be awarded the commission not just for the fountain but the entire plaza. It was particularly remarkable as Hastings was the chairman of SH&G, which had just completed an entirely new design for the plaza. It also represented Noguchi’s official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Despite his early start in designing a park in an internment camp, Noguchi’s executed civic site design commissions took place relatively late in his career. While Noguchi was accustomed to considering urban spaces as relationships to a whole rather than as singular objects, Hart Plaza would be his first opportunity to execute a commission at this scale. His modernist public spaces consisted of plazas and parks with landscapes designed as sculptural experiences, setting him apart from traditional landscape architects. Noguchi and Japanese-American architect Shoji Sadao formed a new partnership, Noguchi Fountain & Plaza, Inc., in 1971, working with Smith, Hinchman & Grylls as local on-site architects and engineers, to complete the project.<sup>37</sup>

Noguchi’s plaza design contained two primary elements: the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza, and the Pylon at the Jefferson Avenue entrance. In designing the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. In describing the fountain, he noted that he wanted it to “represent our times and our relationship to outer space.”<sup>38</sup> His futuristic design motif was in keeping with the times. The 1960s was the decade of the first manned space shuttle flights, and the safe landing of Apollo 11 on the surface of the moon. Noguchi even referenced space travel in his description of the fountain during a presentation to the Fountain Selection Committee in the spring of 1973.

The great fountain, projected to be the most significant of modern times, will rise from the plateau of primal space. It will be an engine for water, plainly associating its spectacle to its source of energy, an engine so deeply a part of Detroit. It will recall and commemorate the dream that has produced the automobile, the airplane, and now the rocket, a machine become a poem.<sup>39</sup>

The base of the stainless steel fountain was set in a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The Dodge Fountain was a technological spectacle, with three hundred water jets within the ring capable of creating thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.

<sup>36</sup> Julie Morris, “King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Jenny Dixon, “Musings on Isamu Noguchi’s Hart Plaza”, [docomomo-us.org. https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza](https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza). (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Martin Friedman, *Noguchi’s Imaginary Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum. 1978), 80.

<sup>39</sup> Isamu Noguchi, typescript of presentation to Fountain Selection Committee, March 1973. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975-79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Noguchi sited the Pylon at the north entrance of the plaza along the centerline of Woodward Avenue, where it served as the fulcrum for a dramatic diagonal axis leading to the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza. The concept of the pylon was first introduced in an early plan by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. The architecture firm had conceived of a tall tower placed at the entrance of the plaza, which Noguchi later transformed into a 120-foot stainless steel pylon, seven feet square at its base, that twisted into a helix as it rose toward the sky. The form of the helix had recently captured the public imagination when it was discovered, in the 1950s, that the molecular structure of DNA had the smooth three-dimensional curve of a helix. In order to translate the form into a 120-foot tall structure, the pylon required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. Noguchi later claimed that he had donated the Pylon, "a free gift to get things going"<sup>40</sup> to the city, although it is not clear from the context if he was referring to the design of the piece, or the fabrication itself. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated November 1977 reported that the Pylon cost around 425,000 dollars and was paid for entirely by private donations.<sup>41</sup>

The remaining elements in the plaza were designed and placed relative to the Pylon and Dodge Fountain: the pyramid amphitheater at the southeast corner of the plaza, placed perpendicular to the diagonal axis, and the oval amphitheater at the northwest, the pyramid amphitheater's visual counterpart, which led into the underground promenade. Approximately one hundred feet west of the fountain, the granite tiles dipped into a shallow circular depression set into the surface. Noguchi provided a playful visual counterpart to this circular depression to the north, mirrored along the axis established by the amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater, with a fountain and play structure set in a rectangle of square granite slabs of varying heights.

The entire plaza was paved with carnelian granite—a red and black flecked stone from South Dakota. Large pavers, four feet square and finished with a horizontally raked surface specified as "mellogroove" in construction documents and clean cut on the edges, delineated the primary walkways through the plaza, wrapping widely around the fountain and highlighting the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the Veterans' Memorial Building. Smaller six-inch square pavers with a rougher finish and an irregular "guillotine" edge encircled the fountain, and provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater and along the waterfront. In writing of his design of the civic center plaza, Noguchi stated, "What is important above all is the sense of space that Hart Plaza supplies. An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people."<sup>42</sup>

The project began with a great deal of optimism, buoyed by the vision of a public waterfront park that the citizens of Detroit could enjoy throughout the seasons. Noguchi's design of the plaza was generally well received and accepted "as the only way to have it harmonize with the

<sup>40</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>41</sup> "Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza", *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.

<sup>42</sup> *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space* (Exhibition catalogue, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 29.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

fountain.”<sup>43</sup> Blessing and Mayor Roman Gribbs offered Noguchi enthusiastic approval and city support. The Common Council approved Noguchi’s design in the spring of 1973. A press release from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls dated March 30, 1973, announcing the presentation to the Detroit Common Council indicates Noguchi’s intentions:

In addition to the fountain, the plaza now has the strong emphasis on a wide variety of uses by both large and small groups of people, many of which can occur simultaneously. ... The fountain itself, a 30 foot high ring floating above a walled circular pool, is a refinement of the original concept of an ‘engine for water.’ ... The plaza now makes provision for a number of public activities on different levels, including a large circular festival amphitheater that can be used for outdoor music, dance, theater, or can be converted to ice skating; a tourist center, a smaller gathering place for a variety of entertainment or educational uses; shopping facilities; a riverfront restaurant directly overlooking the water; a riverside promenade; and underground restrooms, dressing rooms, service areas, etc.<sup>44</sup>

By the fall of 1973 the civic center plan had passed through several mayoral administrations, and was now in the hands of Mayor Coleman Young, Detroit’s first African American mayor, who asked Noguchi how the plaza would accommodate the annual Ethnic Festivals which had been inaugurated under Young’s predecessor Roman Gribbs and had grown from three festivals held in the summer to over twenty.<sup>45</sup>

Plans for the plaza already had it sitting well above grade, having been located on the site of a former parking lot and elevated, due to poor soil conditions, on piles sixteen feet above the riverbank. Noguchi quickly revised his design to include a lower level with space for a riverside service road, a restaurant, and an amphitheater large enough to accommodate the ethnic festivals.

### ***Dedication of Hart Plaza***

Construction of Hart Plaza took place over several years, and the City held a series of ceremonies to commemorate the completion of its major sculptural elements, its naming and its formal opening. In August 1974, Mayor Young presided at ceremonies marking the construction of the Pylon, the first component of the Plaza, where he noted, “this distinctive landmark is a big step in developing an outstanding, people-oriented, riverfront-downtown area.” The presentation of a plaque honoring the role of Robert Hastings, who had recently died, was also part of the ceremony.<sup>46</sup>

The plaza was projected for completion in 1976, in time for the 275th anniversary of Detroit and the bicentennial of the United States. By that summer, however, it was still under construction.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sculpture of Space*, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, Hinchman & Grylls press release, March 30, 1973.

<sup>45</sup> “Ethnic Festivals on Weekends,” Detroit Free Press, June 24, 1979.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear if this plaque is still on the site. It was not observed during field investigations.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

With a backdrop of cranes and in the presence of Noguchi, Mayor Young, and other invited guests, dedicated the Dodge Fountain on the afternoon of July 24, 1976. The ceremony took place among the foundations of the sub plaza but open to the sky since the only completed portion of the plaza surface was the circular, granite-paved area directly below the fountain. The water was briefly turned on for the event, but final performance testing did not occur until the fall of 1977.

Although the city had agreed to name the plaza in honor of the Dodge brothers in 1972, by 1977 other considerations took precedence. In 1977 the plaza was officially named Philip A. Hart Plaza in honor of the United States Senator from Michigan, Philip Aloysius Hart, who had died in office on December 26, 1976. On May 18, 1978, Jane Hart, the wife of the plaza's namesake, unveiled the Hart Plaza dedication plaque with Mayor Young and other attendees.

Philip A. Hart was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, in 1912. He studied at Georgetown University, graduating from there in 1934. Hart then studied law at the University of Michigan, and, after completing his legal education, was admitted to the Michigan bar and practiced law in the state until World War II. At the conclusion of the war Hart returned to Michigan, and served in various public posts, including lieutenant governor (1955-1958) until he was elected to the United States Senate in 1958. Hart served eighteen years in the Senate, during which time he was instrumental in passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, among other legislation. Hart was not only respected by his colleagues, his integrity, political courage, and humility resulted in Hart being recognized as "the Conscience of the Senate." In addition to Hart Plaza, several public buildings have been named in Hart's honor, including the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Philip A. Hart Visitor Center in Empire, Michigan; the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D. C., the only congressional office building to be named for a sitting senator;<sup>47</sup> and the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center (formerly the Battle Creek Sanitarium) in Battle Creek, Michigan, among others.

Noguchi was back in Detroit in April 1979, for Hart Plaza's final, official dedication and opening. Concurrent with the dedication of the plaza, the Detroit Institute of Arts held an exhibit of Noguchi's work entitled "Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes." In the days leading up to the dedication ceremony, Noguchi attended a formal dinner at the DIA honoring his achievements, and conducted a forum connected with the exhibit opening, along with architect Walter Netsch, art critic Dore Ashton, and curator Jay Belloli, where he shared his thoughts on public projects in Detroit and the world. Noguchi's public speeches framed Hart Plaza in relation to other public projects around the world.

The formal opening of the plaza took place on the afternoon of Friday, April 20, 1979. The announcement for the 1979 dedication ceremony emphasized inclusivity, "Come to Downtown's new Hart Plaza and enjoy... Hart Beat. The People's Dedication of the Phillip A. Hart Plaza in

<sup>47</sup> "Philip A. Hart: A Featured Biography." United States Senate.  
[www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured\\_Bio\\_Hart.htm](http://www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_Hart.htm).



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

the Civic Center, Foot of Woodward ... Bring your lunch, bring your camera, bring a friend.”<sup>48</sup> Festivities included a mime troupe, a dance company, a church choir, and jazz bands. Mayor Young praised Noguchi to the crowd, who responded with a “long ovation” for the artist and crowded around him after the ceremony, expressing their appreciation for his work and requesting autographs. Noguchi responded modestly “There’s nothing I can add. I’ve spoken through the fountain.”<sup>49</sup>

However, Noguchi did use the occasion to express his unhappiness at the condition of the fountain, and urged the Mayor to maintain it properly. As the *Detroit Free Press* would observe nearly ten years later, “The fountain was supposed to have five primary designs and 30 different patterns, taking a half hour to complete its repertoire. It never did. It gurgled, fizzled, spit and just plain didn’t work.” Noguchi blamed it on lack of proper maintenance. “The problem doesn’t seem to be with the design and construction as much as lack of know-how on how to maintain and run the fountain. Some of the pipes have been left on in winter.... It seems an elementary precaution to drain water lines in winter with something costing \$3 million, or \$300 for that matter... A five-gallon paint can [was] dropped into the fountain’s filter.... Noguchi [noted] the fountain needs a permanent maintenance man.” Mayor Young was annoyed at the public criticism, noting that the city’s budget did not run to a full-time maintenance person. Although Young and Noguchi both expressed regret at their words that day, the fountain’s operation continued to be an issue. It had a highly sophisticated computerized system to control the light and water within the fountain that frequently clogged due to dirt and debris, a situation not helped when pipes were left on during the winter causing damage from freezing. The fountain continued to limp on, suffering from a lack of maintenance and engineering knowledge at the local level, until 1988 when the city committed eight-hundred thousand dollars to rebuild the fountain, with all new valves and computers.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the contretemps over the fountain maintenance, reaction to Hart Plaza was generally favorable. *Detroit Free Press* art critic Marsha Miro summed up the appeal of the plaza as “a wonderful place to be, to lounge, to laze, to gaze in. It is comfortable, pleasant, harmonious. You don’t feel overwhelmed or oppressed by the urban hubbub, but somehow able to cope. It is a people place. Just what we needed.”<sup>51</sup> Director of Public Information for the City of Detroit Joyce Garrett praised Hart Plaza as “the new hub of Detroit,” and informed Noguchi that he would be “thrilled by the throngs of joyous people who are experiencing its facilities daily.”<sup>52</sup>

Noguchi continued his interest in the development of the plaza in the following years, writing letters to express his concerns with how the plaza was used and elements that were added.

<sup>48</sup> Hart Plaza Dedication, August 20, 1979. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Heldman, “Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

<sup>50</sup> “Dodge Fountain; It works – after 10 years,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988; “Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979; Louis Heldman, “Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

<sup>51</sup> Marsha Miro, “What Noguchi’s Genius Brought to Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.

<sup>52</sup> Joyce F. Garrett, letter to Isamu Noguchi, July 9, 1979, in the Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Noguchi renewed his criticisms to Mayor Young several months after the dedication, complaining that the plaza was not designed to accommodate 100,000 people for the city's large festivals, and expressing his distress that kiosks were placed in the parkway to the west, adding, "This may have been a stop gap measure needed to cope with the sudden crowds. But the long range solution would be to go back to the original idea of having the overload handled in a more suitable place that does not ruin the view."<sup>53</sup>

Although the plaza had been officially opened, several key landscape features still remained incomplete. In 1979, the chairman of the J.L. Hudson Company, located in downtown Detroit, wrote Noguchi expressing his appreciation at having "left us the Plaza and Fountain" and furthermore stated, "I can assure you that many of us will keep a watchful eye on the completion of the landscaping and other details that are still left unattended."

Despite the praise for the plaza, by the early 1980s Noguchi was still frustrated at the lack of progress on the completion of his design. In February of 1982, he sent two thousand dollars to the City of Detroit's Department of Engineering and Planning with a letter that stated, "The purpose, as you know, is to purchase eight trees which are to be planted in the Hart Plaza in a location which I discussed with Mrs. Larson, in an arc starting near the flagpoles and going towards the river." Half of the donation was from an honorarium he received from a recent talk at the University of Michigan, and the other half was his own personal contribution. Noguchi concluded by stating that the intention of the eight trees is that, "...they will grow to a size which would permit the viewing of the plaza from beneath the branches."

A letter to the director of the Central Business District Association, penned in 1988 a few months before his death, was more exacting in his criticism and reflective of his misgivings:

As you must know I am the one who worked on what there is there starting in 1971, over a period of seven years. The design is mine to the smallest detail...the company I formed, together with Shoji Sadao to assist me, received hardly anything because the working drawings which accurately followed our specifications had to be done by Smith Hinchman & Grylls and they took 60%, I hope you will appreciate that I feel I deserve consideration in whatever transpires in Hart Plaza...

The flagpoles are a hodgepot [sic] of flags with light fixtures; the light stands entirely decorative...I suggested that tall poles for general lighting could be used at the perimeter...Imagine my shock on visiting Hart Plaza on July 3<sup>rd</sup> and finding a forest of bright aluminum poles crowding in on the fountain; in direct confrontation with the fountain. This type of fussy light fixtures [is] no doubt intended to bring interest to buildings where this is lacking. The globes of light are intended to light themselves, to draw attention, and are not an efficient source of lighting for the space. This is probably why there are so many.

<sup>53</sup> Isamu Noguchi Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, August 22, 1979. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

It would be nice and appropriate if the designers work could be respected when changes or “improvements” are made by others. I was not informed. I hope you will understand my distress.<sup>54</sup>

### *Social Use of Hart Plaza*

From its inception, Hart Plaza was a hub of Detroit’s cultural and social events. The plaza was active year-round, serving as a popular location for weekend festivals, concerts, and rallies in the warmer months and for ice-skating in the wintertime. Well before its completion, Hart Plaza was being used for informal activities, such as picnics and sunbathing, as well as a few more formal events like Detroit concert band performances in the summer of 1977. That same year, local radio station WDET and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra held an impromptu rally to protest a state legislative committee’s recommendation to slash funds for the arts.

The most significant events held in Hart Plaza in its early years were the popular Ethnic Festivals, inaugurated under Mayor Gribbs. As Gribbs’ wife wrote in 1974, "The summer Ethnic Festivals on the riverfront were the idea of Mayor Gribbs and as a result millions of metropolitan Detroiters have has a magnificent time enjoying the cultural, the art and the food of many Ethnic people who have contributed so much to make Detroit the great city that it is. We started with 3 Festivals in the summer of 1970. By 1973 the number have grown to 20. The Ethnic Festivals are the first of their kind in the U.S. to be done over every consecutive weekend throughout the summer."<sup>55</sup> Festivals included Greek, Italian, Polish, Irish, and African American heritage, later expanding to include the celebration of other many other cultures, including the Festival of India, Festival of Captured Nations, and a Slovenia Festival.

The festivals initially took place at Michigan Avenue and Third Street. Following his election as Mayor, Coleman Young requested that Noguchi alter his design for Hart Plaza to accommodate the festivals, and Noguchi created a lower level to house facilities for the festivals. Organizers had hoped to hold the festivals at Hart Plaza in the summer of 1978, but plans had to be deferred due to delays in construction. Finally, the festivals were first held in Hart Plaza in 1979. With only 21 weeks in the summer, each group was assigned its own weekend and sometimes different ethnic groups had to share Hart Plaza during the same weekend. The profile of the Ethnic Festivals was raised considerably by their location in such a prominent downtown space, and they dominated the program of the plaza in its early years, with millions of people attending the festivals every year.

During the week, Hart Plaza remained active with weekday programs specifically suited for nearby office workers. Local radio stations set up in the plaza and provided noontime concerts with live performances by artists who were promoting their new albums. The Detroit Symphony

<sup>54</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Katherine Gribbs, handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Orchestra, which was headquartered at the Ford Auditorium during Hart Plaza's early years, held outdoor performances on the plaza.

During the winter, the city operated the amphitheater's lower surface as an ice rink. There were condensers under the sunken amphitheater that were used to create and maintain the ice. The lower level had spaces for skate rental and a warming room. It was a popular destination for winter recreation during the weekend, and equally as popular during the week where office workers often came by for a skating break during their lunch hour.

Given its central location and ability to accommodate large crowds, Hart Plaza was a natural setting for events featuring visiting dignitaries. One of the most significant of these was an address by Pope John Paul II in 1987. It was the first time that a pope had visited the state of Michigan, and an important moment in Michigan's religious history, especially for Catholics. In addition to appearances in heavily Polish Catholic Hamtramck and a Mass in the Pontiac Silverdome, the pope gave a speech on social justice at Hart Plaza on September 19, 1987. The city's annual Labor Day Parade always ended at Hart Plaza and, due to Detroit's importance in the labor movement, the current President or Vice-President usually came to Hart Plaza to speak during the parade, including Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore.

In the early 1980s, attendance at the Ethnic Festivals at Hart Plaza began to wane. There were several contributing factors: an increase in crime, cultural assimilation as young Detroiters expressed less an interest in attending ethnic events, and urban sprawl as many groups moved outside of the city and took their festivals with them. But with a decline in the Ethnic Festivals came a rise in "Themed Festivals" organized by promoters. These included the International Freedom Festival, a two-week celebration that ended with fireworks at Hart Plaza, the Hoe Down, which was initially sponsored by Budweiser, the Detroit Blues Festival, food-oriented festivals like the Chili Cook-off, Great American Rib Fest, and Ribs & Soul, and the Detroit Riverfront Festival.

Another major annual event held at Hart Plaza was the International Jazz Festival. Founded as the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival, it was the largest free jazz festival in North America, first held over Labor Day Weekend 1980. It was the idea of Robert E. McCabe, the founding president of Detroit Renaissance, an organization created to provide economic stimulus projects for the city in 1971 including housing developments and construction of what is now the GM Renaissance Center. McCabe's inspiration for the jazz festival was "Detroit's history as a great jazz center back in the 1920s and the strong music heritage of the public schools. Music was a very important factor, and it was time to revive it." The festival was developed concurrently with the Detroit Grand Prix and the International Freedom Festival to complement the physical developments of Detroit Renaissance and provide a "more rapid economic impact on the downtown area." Originally called the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival to reflect its partnership with an international jazz festival in Montreux, Switzerland, the festival merged with Detroit's Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in 1991, and is now managed and produced by the



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

Detroit International Jazz Festival Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed in 2006.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning in the late 1980s there were significant changes to the programs and maintenance of Hart Plaza. In 1989 the Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved its home base from the nearby Ford Auditorium to Orchestra Hall in 1989. The plaza also suffered from cutbacks in maintenance. Initially, the running of Hart Plaza was a three-office operation. The City of Detroit's Recreation Department was responsible for all operations and programming, the Civic Center Department was in charge of maintenance, and the Department of Public Works kept the plaza clean, such as snow removal and cleaning up after the weekend festivals. Unfortunately, the city's best efforts to successfully manage Hart Plaza were impacted by larger forces taking shape throughout the city, which was facing an economic downturn, the loss of wealth to the outlying suburbs, and a struggling middle class. In 1992 the Recreation Department had to lay off many of its staff. Some were eventually hired back, but by then the use of Hart Plaza had changed. Vendors requested to use their own cooking equipment and booths "upstairs" at the plaza level to provide increased visibility from Jefferson Avenue, resulting in the downstairs kitchens and equipment falling into disuse. In the early 2000s the Civic Center Department pulled back from their involvement with Hart Plaza and an independent cleaning company had to be commissioned to clean up the plaza after events. With dwindling staff and financial resources, the maintenance and upkeep of Hart Plaza began to decline.

In 2004, Campus Martius Park in downtown Detroit was completed, with two performance stages and its own ice-skating rink, and the ice skating rink at Hart Plaza was permanently closed. By that time, the city was trying to get out of the business of funding events at Hart Plaza. The last event that the city collaborated with was the Detroit Electronic Music Festival in 2002. Held every year over Memorial Day weekend, the festival, known by various names over the years but currently called Movement Detroit, celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of the international Techno movement.

### ***Later Additions to Hart Plaza***

Beginning shortly before Noguchi's death in 1988 various additions have been made to Hart Plaza. In 1986 the works of Noguchi and his former instructor Gutzon Borglum were integrated when Borglum's bust of Abraham Lincoln was incorporated into the formal green space adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center within Hart Plaza. The space has been referred to as the Lincoln Garden since erection of the sculpture.

Several pieces were added to Hart Plaza to commemorate Detroit's tercentennial in 2001. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel west of the Dodge Fountain.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Graff, "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years," *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

On the southern edge of the plaza, facing the river, sits *Gateway to Freedom*, which illustrates a black family pointing across the river to Canada where freedom and prosperity wait, marking the Detroit terminus of the Underground Railroad's safe passage for escaped enslaved people. The companion monument entitled "Tower of Freedom" is located across the river in Windsor, Canada. The monument in Windsor depicts a formerly enslaved man raising his arms to celebrate his freedom while a Quaker woman offers assistance to a woman and her child.

Edward Dwight, the artist who sculpted both works, was a veteran of the United States Air Force and trained as the first black astronaut. Although he occasionally "built things with scrap metal," he harbored no artistic intent until George Brown, Colorado's first black lieutenant governor, asked him to create a statue for the state capitol building in 1974. The commission was a success, and helped launch his second career as a sculptor memorializing the struggle for civil rights. Dwight's body of work would eventually encompass more than 120 memorials, monuments and public art installations as well as gallery sculptures including statues of Martin Luther King Jr., Hank Aaron and Harriet Tubman.<sup>57</sup>

In March 2001 the Michigan Labor History Society invited over 120 artists and sculptors from across the country to gather in Detroit and envision a monument to the history of the labor movement at Hart Plaza along Jefferson Avenue. The location held an important place in labor history as the site of Detroit's early industries including the fur and ship building trades, as well as more modern industries such as the auto industry which was founded just a few blocks east of Hart Plaza. The site was also in an area of many important events in Detroit's labor history, from the big organizing rallies of the 1930s to the Labor Day parades to the historic civil rights march of 1963 which all took place within a few blocks of the future site of Hart Plaza.

Two months after that initial gathering of artists, the Society received fifty-five proposals for the monument. A panel of five jurists reviewed the submissions and selected three finalists, before agreeing on a joint collaboration between David Barr and Sergio De Giusti. The monument was made possible by donations from more than 1,800 rank-and-file workers and individuals from dozens of unions, organizations and enterprises including the United Auto Workers, Detroit Federation of Teachers, Iron Workers and Roofers Union. In 2003 the monument was completed and installed in Hart Plaza. The artists entitled their joint collaboration "Transcending." It rises 63 feet above street level in the form of two stainless-steel arcs. The arcs are geared on the inside to reflect Detroit's industrial might, and open at the apex to symbolize labor's unfinished work.<sup>58</sup>

In 2006 the Dodge Fountain was refurbished and rededicated by Gretchen Carhartt Valade, philanthropist, chair of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation, and chairwoman emeritus of Detroit-based Carhartt, Inc., sponsor of the free jazz festivals held annually at Hart Plaza. The fountain's computerized water designs were reprogrammed to reflect Noguchi's original intent.

<sup>57</sup> Interview of Edward Dwight by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed: July 20, 2018)

<sup>58</sup> Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit (Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006).



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

A small cast stone monument was installed on the southern edge of the plaza to mark Valade's contribution.

In 2011 the Ford Auditorium, which had sat virtually vacant since around 1990, was demolished, removing one of the major buildings of the original civic center and altering the spatial organization of the east side of Hart Plaza.

### *Noguchi's Later Public Spaces*

Hart Plaza was the first of Noguchi's major civic space designs, and his experience in Detroit informed much of his work prior to his death in 1988. His designs during these years included several public spaces associated with urban renewal efforts such as the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza in Los Angeles, California (1980); California Scenario in Costa Mesa, California; and Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida (1986).

In 1980, the Japanese American Community Center (JACCC) received funds to develop a half-acre plaza as an entryway to the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center Building and the JACCC Theater. The purpose of the plaza was to facilitate the diverse cultural needs of the community and encourage interaction among the residents of the surrounding neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. One of the funding criteria was a major sculptural element, which the Friends of Little Tokyo Arts (FOLTA) offered to fund.

FOLTA invited Noguchi to design a sculptural piece for a large passageway between the existing community center and a proposed theater, school and gym. Noguchi imagined the site becoming an active core for Little Tokyo. Just as he had done in Detroit, Noguchi parlayed his selection as sculptor into a larger role. Rather than accepting the commission for a sculpture in a transitional space, he insisted that the planned orientation of the site be modified and the proposed gym be relocated to a new site so that the plaza could serve as a true gathering space for ceremonies and assemblies.

In his interviews and writings on the space, Noguchi noted that while his sculptural pieces secured his invitation as the plaza's designer, the entire plaza acted as a sculpture to draw people into the space, an approach he had pioneered in Detroit. His design for the plaza contained two primary elements: a central elevated sculpture and a fountain. The sculpture, *To the Issei*, situated in the heart of the plaza, consisted of two twelve-foot Japanese basalt monoliths on a fan-shaped platform and was designed as a tribute to the first generation of Japanese who immigrated to America.<sup>59</sup>

Noguchi also designed a public space at Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida, on waterfront land that the city purchased from the railway company in 1922. In 1924 the city commissioned Boston landscape architect Warren Henry Manning to design a passive park on the sixty-acre parcel. The park was added to over time, but by the 1960s it was underused and poorly received by the

<sup>59</sup> Alexandra Eve Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013, 71-6.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

public. In 1978, following the opening of the Walker Art Museum's exhibition on Noguchi's works, *Imaginary Landscapes*, Noguchi was contacted by Kitty Roedel, the Director of Marketing at the Miami Development Authority. Roedel requested that Noguchi look at the park and propose a solution.

In a letter to Roedel, Noguchi condemned developments surrounding Bayfront Park and reasoned, "Miami must have a totally new park because all the modern buildings have made the present facility incongruous."<sup>60</sup> Noguchi re-envisioned the space, which became his largest American landscape design, covering twenty-eight acres and taking over a decade to complete. His design acknowledged the existing layout of Bayfront Park, but reorganized the space to act as a village green where people could congregate and interact. The park contains a number of elements that Noguchi first used in Detroit, including the play of geometric shapes, a circular fountain plaza, two amphitheaters, and circulation patterns such as the "interludes" alongside paths. The park was completed in 1996, nearly eight years after Noguchi's death, at a cost of approximately forty million dollars.<sup>61</sup>

### *Archaeological Resources*

During the excavation of the riverfront site that would become Hart Plaza (then known as Civic Center Plaza) (20WN327) in 1975 and 1976, Charles Martinez, of the Michigan Archaeological Society, led archaeological investigations at the site. While it should be noted that Martinez's work was conducted in "an emergency situation in which neither funds more sufficient manpower" could be utilized, the investigators nonetheless identified thirteen features within the site (Section 3 of the Governor and Judges' Plan of Detroit, 1806-07) dating between 1830 and 1905. Among the artifacts recovered were nearly two thousand ceramic sherds, wooden brush handles, square cut nails, and glass vessels. Additionally, the investigation team identified a privy and two mortared limestone foundations that appeared to date to the mid-nineteenth century. Both foundations were located in the southwest section of the site. The foundation identified as Feature 3 was thirty inches long and rested on four-inch-thick timber supported by an eight-inch-diameter log. The second foundation, identified as Feature 4, was ninety-three inches long, twenty-five inches high, and approximately eighteen inches thick. The foundation appeared to correspond to the south wall of a warehouse identified on an 1853 map of the city drawn by Henry Hart.<sup>62</sup>

Martinez found no features or artifacts dating to the French occupation of the site, and while not excavated, Martinez observed "two upright wooden posts or pilings... east of the Veteran's Memorial Terrace. These posts were about ten feet below the Terrace level and might have been part of an old wharf or foundation support." The site was in proximity to the Merchant's Wharf,

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Isamu Noguchi to Kitty Roedel. August 27, 1979. Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, 1981, Folder 1 of 24, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>61</sup> Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

formerly located south of Woodbridge Street between Shelby Street and Griswold Street, roughly in the west end of the current Promenade.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

After nearly a century of vision and planning by internationally renowned architects, city planners, and landscape architects, the idea of a civic center plaza in the heart of the city was finally realized in Hart Plaza in the late 1970s, overcoming the intervening obstacles of depression, war, funding challenges, and disagreements about its design. It was, in the end, the vision of artist Isamu Noguchi whose design shaped the riverfront plaza and created its major sculptural elements that finally gave substance to the long-heralded gathering space for the city of Detroit. By the time Noguchi was approached with a public commission to design a fountain at the civic center, Noguchi had designed landscapes of various scales for corporations, museums and institutions throughout the United States, and overseas in Israel, France, and Japan. Unlike his early work, Detroit's civic center plaza represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Its place as one of the few and earliest public spaces created by an internationally recognized master of Modern design, Isamu Noguchi, and the integrity of its design within Noguchi's body of work, marks it as exceptionally significant.

### ***Period of Significance***

The period of significance for Philip A. Hart Plaza is 1974 to 1979. While nearly a century of planning efforts took place before the city's civic center plaza came to fruition, the design of sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi was implemented from 1974, when construction began, to 1979, when it was essentially completed, although some of the space's details would be completed over the next several years. The social uses for which Hart Plaza is also significant, such as the ethnic festivals, concerts, and passive recreational use, began within that time period as well. Hart Plaza also meets National Register Criteria Consideration G, for properties less than fifty years old.

<sup>63</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### *Books, Reports, Dissertation & Thesis:*

- City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit – A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946).
- Detroit Board of Commerce. *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmstead, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905).
- Friedman, Martin. *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes*. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Museum, 1978.
- Frost, Karolyn Smardz. *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Galster, George. *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2012.
- Gara, Larry. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996.
- Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space* Exhibition catalogue. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980.
- Kirby, Alexandra Eve. *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013.
- Korth, Katie. *Hart Plaza: A History*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. Wayne State University, 23 April 2013.
- Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit*. Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006.
- Martinez, Charles. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.
- Mull, Carol E. *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987.
- Post-War Improvement Committee [Detroit], *Post-War Improvements to Make Your Detroit a Finer City in which to Live and Work* (Detroit: 1944).
- Roberts, Ellis Robert. *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present*. Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855s.
- Saarinen, Eliel. *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future* (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1943).
- Simpson, Donald E. *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Pittsburgh, 2013.



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Articles and Online Sources:**

- "Architect Gives Critics Answer," *The Detroit Times*, August 10, 1947. Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Eero Saarinen Papers, Series IV, Project Records, Box 88, folder 172, Job 4627: Detroit Civic Center, Detroit, MI, clippings.
- "Biography of Eliel Saarinen," Britannica.com. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eliel-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Biography of Eero Saarinen," Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eero-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Civic Center Plans Leave Council Quiet." *Detroit Free Press*, 12 July 1947.
- Dixon, Jenny. "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza", [docomomo-us.org](http://docomomo-us.org). <https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza>. (Accessed June 10, 2018).
- "Dodge Fountain; It works – after 10 years." *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988.
- Dwight, Edward, Interview by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed: July 20, 2018).
- "Ethnic Festivals on Weekends." *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1979.
- "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.
- Graff, Gary. "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 40 Years." *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.
- Heldman, Louis. "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.
- "Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza." *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.
- Miro, Marsha. "What Noguchi's Genius Brought to Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.
- Morris, Julie. "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan." *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.
- Neuman, Ladd. "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful?" *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.
- "Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City." *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979.
- "November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries. <https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).
- Palmer, Friend. "Earlier Days in Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.
- "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.
- "Statuary and Memorial Commemorating Detroit's Role in the Underground Railroad at the Detroit River in Hart Plaza in downtown Detroit," Detroit 1701. <http://detroit1701.org/UndergroundRailroad.htm>. (Accessed online: June 14, 2018).
- "Underground Railroad." Detroit Historical Society. <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/underground-railroad>. (Accessed online: June 14, 2018).

**Archival Collections:**



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

City of Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection. City Planning Commission Civic Center Plaza, Folder 1 and 2. Referenced files include:

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, undated.*

*Committee on Civic Design, Oct. 14, 1955.*

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, Oct 18, 1955.*

*Minutes of Departmental Committee, Detroit City Plan Commission, on the Civic Center Plaza, March 15, 1963.*

*Memorandum of Conference from Dept of Public Works, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, May 15, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, June 15 1964.*

*William Finnin Director of Municipal Parking Authority, letter to Common Council, July 27, 1964.*

*City of Detroit Resolution dated Feb 2 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. August 27, 1965.*

*McCafferty, Senior City Planner, letter to Charles Blessing, Sept 1, 1965.*

*Undated Cumulative Lists of Observations – Design Division.*

*Charles Blessing letter to City of Detroit City Plan Commission, October 8, 1965.*

*Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings, October 18, 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968.*

Gribbs, Katherine. Handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum Archives. References files include:

*1973 04 to ca1980 PH plan notes and aerial photos MS\_PROJ\_157\_041*

*1973 03 Typescript of Noguchi Presentation to Fountain Selection Committee*

*1975 07 14 Letter Noguchi to Turkin MS\_PROJ\_157\_001.pdf*

*1975 08 04 Letter Turkin to Sadao MS\_PROJ\_157\_002.pdf*

*1979 04 20 Manuscript plaza dedication notice MS\_PROJ\_157\_025*

*1979 04 24 Letter Hudson to Noguchi*

*1979 04 25 Letter Noguchi to Hustable (NYT)*

*1979 07 03 Letter Noguchi to Hudson*

*1979 08 14 Letter Denison to Meathe*

*1979 08 22 Letter Noguchi to Young*

*1979 08 27 Letter Noguchi to Roedel*

*1982 02 11 Letter Noguchi to Viall*

*1988 07 08 Letter Noguchi to Edgewater*

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.

University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts.

Charles Mulford Robinson Papers Manuscript Collection 1010.

[http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date\\_facet%3A%221900-](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date_facet%3A%221900-)



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

1950%22%20AND%20subject\_topic\_facet%3A%22United%20States%22&id=PACSC  
L\_UPENN\_RBML\_PUSpMsColl1010&. (Accessed online on June 10, 2018)  
Wayne State University Walter Reuther Library. Cavanagh Collection, Abstract and boxes 135  
and 472.

***Interviews:***

Telephone interview of Phillip A. Talbert. June 13, 2018.

Returned



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other

Name of repository:

Noguchi Museum, New York  
Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library  
City of Detroit  
Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 10.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.327662 | Longitude: -83.046069 |
| 2. Latitude: 42.328654 | Longitude: -83.043812 |
| 3. Latitude: 42.326720 | Longitude: -83.042735 |
| 4. Latitude: 42.325809 | Longitude: -83.045882 |

Or

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

NAD 1927 or

☐

NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of Noguchi's design, extending roughly from Jefferson Avenue on the north to the Detroit River on the south, and between the former site of Ford Auditorium on the east and the Veterans Memorial Building on the west. See attached map for exact boundaries.

Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of the area designed by Isamu Noguchi, which fit around adjacent, preexisting features.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Ruth E. Mills, Gregory W. DeVries  
organization: Quinn Evans Architects  
street & number: 4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301  
city or town: Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48201  
e-mail rmills@quinnevans.com  
telephone: 313-462-2550  
date: July 31, 2018

Returned



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne, MI  
County and State

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Philip A. Hart Plaza

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Photographer: Ruth Mills, except as noted.

Date Photographed: March 28 – July 17, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 50. Aerial view, looking north. Image via Google Earth. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0001.
- 2 of 50. Oblique aerial view, looking south. Image via Google Earth. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0002.

Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

- 3 of 50 . General view, looking southeast from Jefferson Promenade in northwest corner of the plaza. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0003.
- 4 of 50 . View of promenade, looking east. Pylon sculpture in background, center. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0004.
- 5 of 50 . General view of western Jefferson Promenade, looking southeast. Amphitheater and Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain in background. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0005.
- 6 of 50 . View of underground amphitheater from above-ground plaza, looking southwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0006.
- 7 of 50 . View of eastward from Hart Plaza Marquee. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0007.
- 8 of 50 . View of the base and lower shaft of Pylon sculpture, Hart Plaza Marquee, and Jefferson Promenade (background), looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0008.
- 9 of 50 . View south from Hart Plaza Marquee. Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain and Detroit River in background. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0009.
- 10 of 50 . Stairs to lower level, looking northwest. Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain in background. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0010.
- 11 of 50 . View of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac statue and "The Landing of Cadillac" Michigan Historical Marker on eastern lawn of the plaza, looking southeast. Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain in background. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0011.
- 12 of 50 . View of Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain from Pyramid Amphitheater, looking northwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0012.
- 13 of 50 . View of Detroit Riverwalk from southeast corner of plaza, looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0013.
- 14 of 50 . View of Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain from south end of the central plaza, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0014.
- 15 of 50 . View of the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad (rear), Detroit River, and Windsor, Ontario, Canada, looking south from southern end the central plaza. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0015.
- 16 of 50 . View of Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain from the central plaza, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0016.
- 17 of 50 . View of a portion of the central plaza and the top of the underground Amphitheater, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0017.
- 18 of 50 . View of western portion of Detroit Riverwalk, looking northwest to plaza above. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0018.
- 19 of 50 . View of Detroit Riverwalk from west end of plaza, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0019.
- 20 of 50 . View of the Atwater Street Tunnel, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0020.
- 21 of 50 . View east from west side of riverbank area of plaza. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0021.



Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

- 22 of 50 . View west from west side of riverbank area of plaza, Renaissance Center in the background. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0022.
- 23 of 50 . View of riverbank lawn, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0023.
- 24 of 50 . View of West Interlude, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0024.
- 25 of 50 . View of west path around underground Amphitheater, looking northwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0025.
- 26 of 50 . Interior view of Department of Parks and Recreation offices, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0026.
- 27 of 50 . View of subplaza light well, MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0027.
- 28 of 50 . View of subplaza, park offices at right and in background, looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0028.
- 29 of 50 . View of Underground Theater, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0029.
- 30 of 50 . View of subplaza lightwell, looking northeast. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0030.
- 31 of 50 . View of stairway to upper plaza, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0031.
- 32 of 50 . View of cafeteria, subplaza amphitheater at left, looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0032.
- 33 of 50 . View of cafeteria and subplaza amphitheater, looking southwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0033.
- 34 of 50 . View of subplaza warming room, looking northwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0034.
- 35 of 50 . View of subplaza warming room, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0035.
- 36 of 50 . View of subplaza amphitheater, looking northeast from loading dock and ramp. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0036.
- 37 of 50 . View of entrance to the Hart Plaza Loading Dock, looking east. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0037.
- 38 of 50 . View of the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Structure Access Building, looking northeast. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0038.
- 39 of 50 . View of the Fountain Control Building, looking northeast. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0039.
- 40 of 50 . View of the Pyramid Amphitheater, in the southeast corner of Hart Plaza, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0040.
- 41 of 50 . View of the screening wall of the Pyramid Amphitheater, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0041.
- 42 of 50 . View of the Hart Plaza Marquee, looking northeast. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0042.
- 43 of 50 . View of the Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain from the central plaza, looking northwest. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0043.
- 44 of 50 . View of the Cubist water sculpture, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0044.
- 45 of 50 . View of the Pylon, looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0045.

Philip A. Hart Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne, MI

County and State

- 46 of 50 . View of the spiral seating sculpture and exhaust pipe, looking west. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0046.
- 47 of 50 . View of Transcending, sculpture dedicated to Michigan's labor legacy, looking north. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0047.
- 48 of 50 . View of Gateway to Freedom, the international memorial to the Underground Railroad (corresponding piece located opposite the Detroit River in Windsor, Ottawa, Canada). MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0048.
- 49 of 50 . View of the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, to the east of the central plaza, looking northeast. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0049.
- 50 of 50 . View of the Abraham Lincoln bust, located in the Lincoln Garden in the northwest corner of the plaza, near the UAW-Ford National Programs Center building. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0050.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

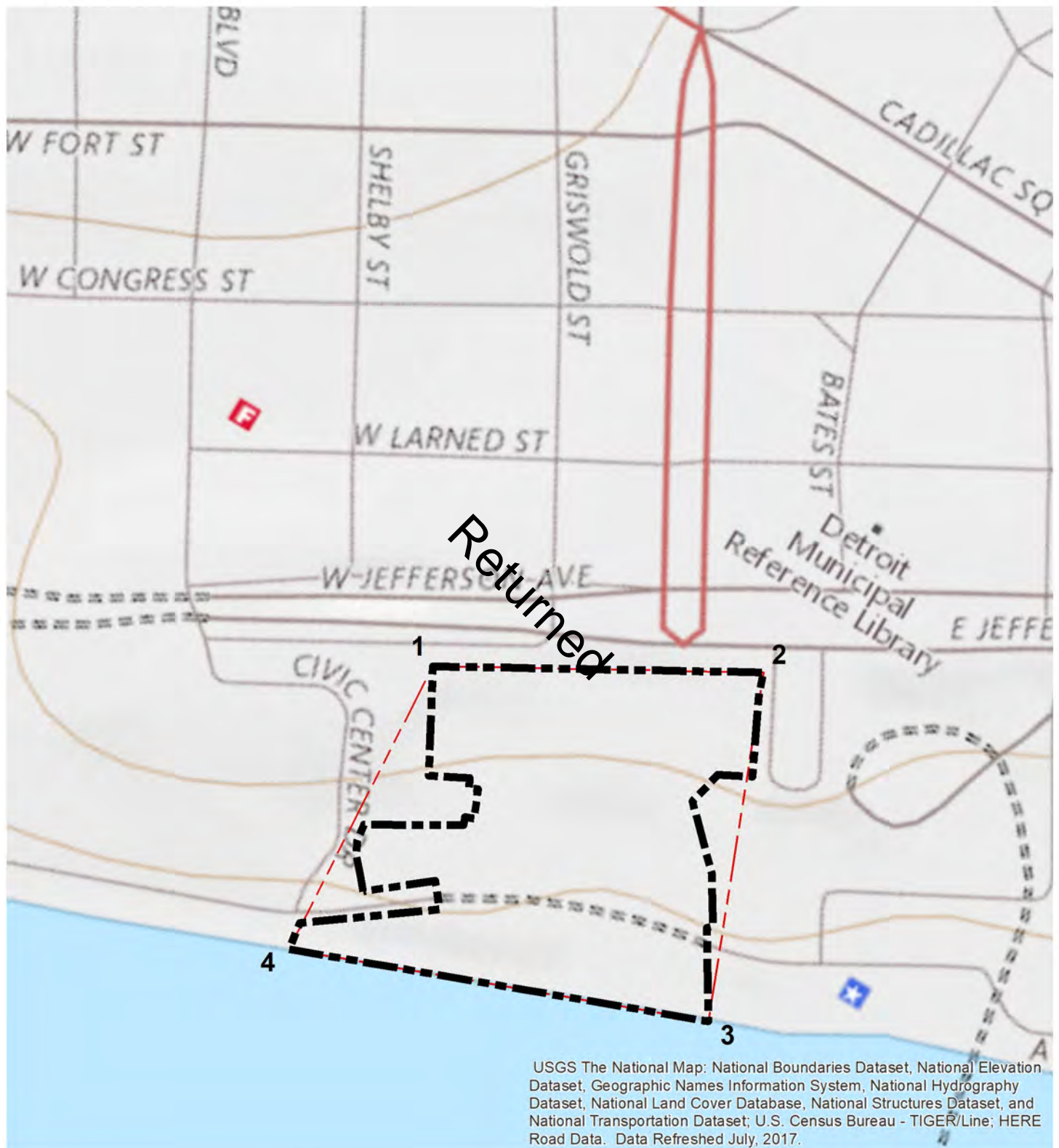
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza USGS Map

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



0 150 300 600 Feet  
1 inch = 300 feet

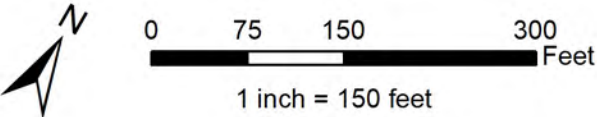
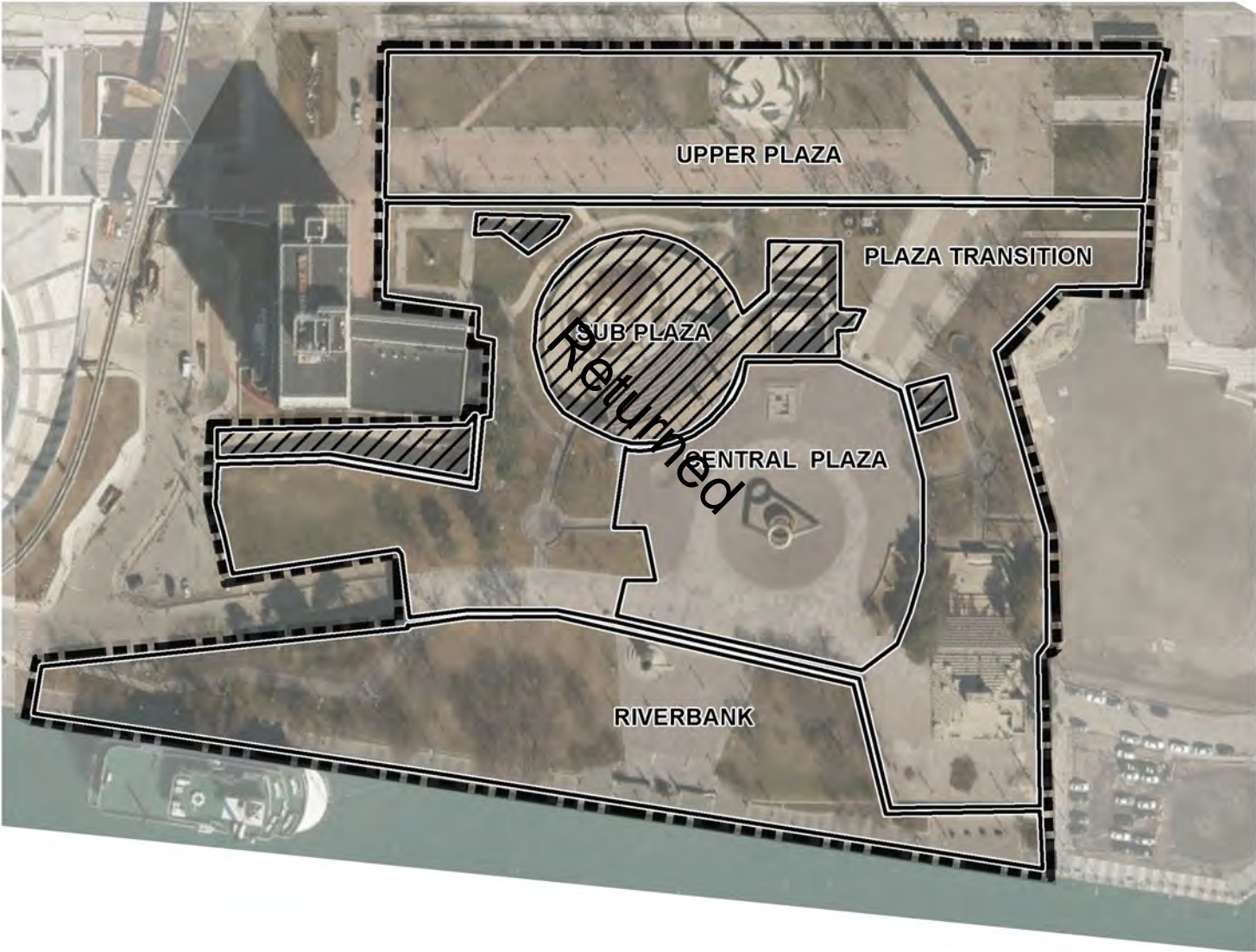


National Register District Boundary

Coordinates Polygon Boundary

**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Spatial Organization Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



- Spatial Divisions
- ▨ Sub Plaza Open at Surface
- ⌈ National Register District Boundary



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Surface Features Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



## CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

### Site: 1

Hart Plaza (indicated by NR District Boundary)

### Buildings: 2

Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Structure Access Building (A)  
Fountain Control Building (B)

### Structures: 2

Pyramid Amphitheater (C)  
Sub Plaza (indicated by Exposed Sub Plaza line)

### Objects: 4

Pylon (D)  
Cubist water sculpture (E)  
Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (F)  
Spiral seating sculpture (G)

## NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

### Structures: 1

Hart Plaza Marquee (H)

### Objects: 4

Transcending, Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark (I)  
Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue (J)  
Gateway to Freedom, International Memorial to the Underground Railroad (K)  
Abraham Lincoln Bust in Lincoln Garden (L)

## FEATURES THAT ARE PART OF THE CONTRIBUTING SITE

Jefferson Promenade (M)  
Circular Depression (N)  
West Interlude (O)  
East Interlude (P)  
Peace Tree (Q)  
Detroit RiverWalk (R)

## FEATURES THAT ARE PART OF THE CONTRIBUTING SUB PLAZA STRUCTURE

Amphitheater (S)  
Loading Dock Access (T)  
Note: See Sub Surface Features Diagram



0 75 150 300 Feet  
1 inch = 150 feet



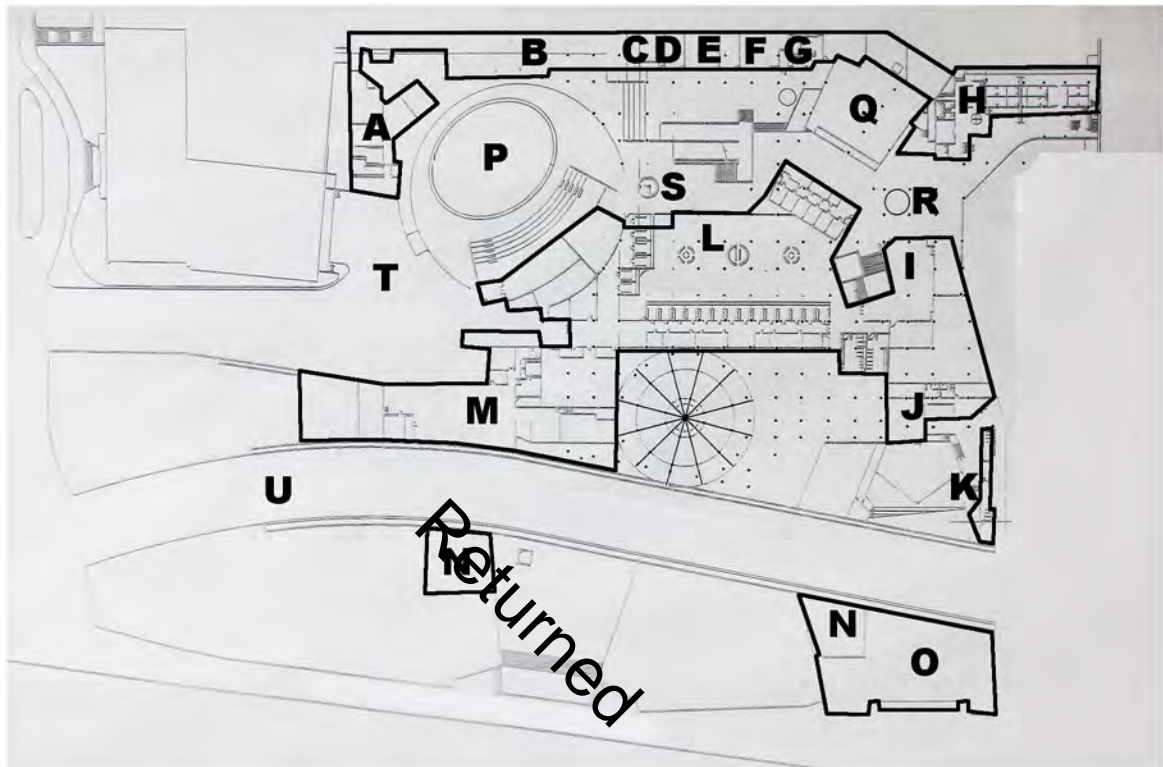
Exposed Sub Plaza

National Register District Boundary

# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Sub Surface Features Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



## SUB PLAZA (ONE CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE)

### Enclosed Spaces

- A. Warming room
- B. Cafeteria with kitchen, bathrooms, and lounge
- C. Event operations office
- D. Office of Detroit Police Department, north
- E. Park operations office
- F. Maintenance room
- G. Restrooms (north)
- H. Office rooms of Department of Parks and Recreation
- I. Gallery room
- J. Storage and changing rooms
- K. Restrooms (south)
- L. Concessions area with kitchen rooms
- M. Utility, maintenance, and storage rooms
- N. Utility rooms
- O. Office of Detroit Police Department, south

### Partially Enclosed Spaces

- P. Amphitheater
- Q. Underground Theater
- R. Light Well (main)
- S. Beverage Kiosk
- T. Loading Dock and Ramp
- U. Atwater Street Tunnel



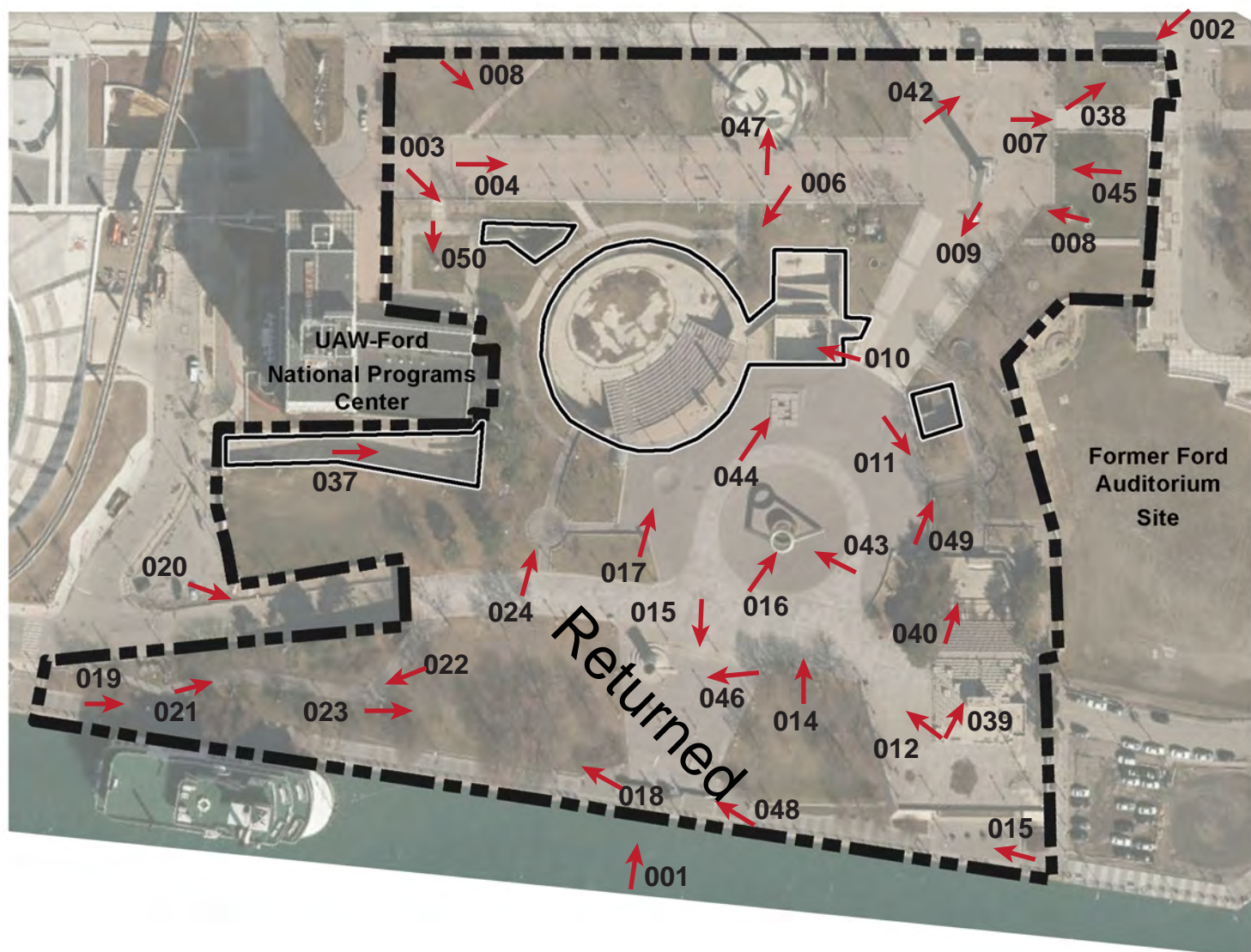
0 75 150 300 Feet  
1 inch = 150 feet



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Photo Key

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



— Exposed Sub Plaza



National Register District Boundary



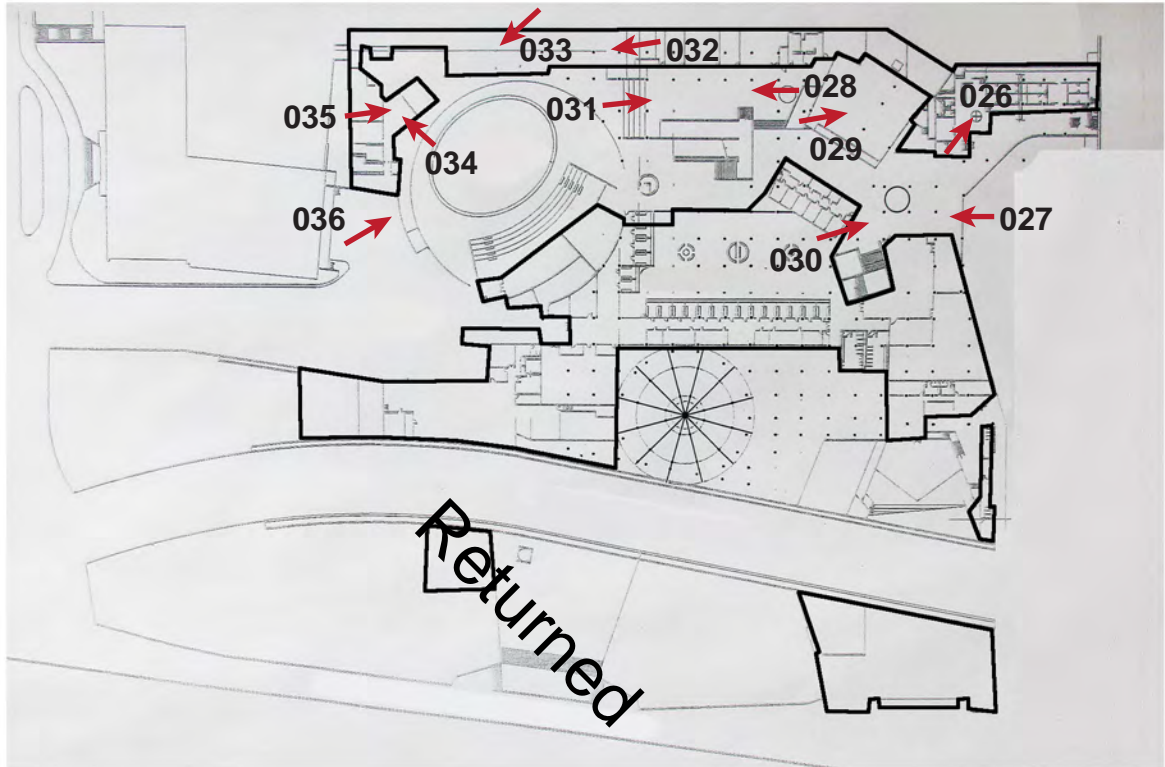
0 75 150 300 Feet

1 inch = 150 feet

# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Photo Key

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



0 75 150 300 Feet  
1 inch = 150 feet



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:	Nomination	
Property Name:	Hart, Philip A., Plaza	
Multiple Name:		
State & County:	MICHIGAN, Wayne	

Date Received: 2/12/2019      Date of Pending List: 3/7/2019      Date of 16th Day: 3/22/2019      Date of 45th Day: 3/29/2019      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:	SG100003554
Nominator:	Other Agency, SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☐ Accept      ☒ Return      ☐ Reject      3/28/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:	
-------------------------------	--

Recommendation/ Criteria	
-----------------------------	--

Reviewer	<u>Barbara Wyatt</u>	Discipline	<u>Historian</u>
Telephone	<u>(202)354-2252</u>	Date	<u></u>

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places**

**Comments  
Evaluation/Return Sheet**

**Property Name:** Philip A. Hart Plaza

**Property Location:** Detroit, MI

**Reference Number:** 10003554

**Return Comments Date:** 4-5-2019

**Reason for Return**

The nomination for the Philip A. Hart Plaza is returned due to the issues described below, including the need for a stronger justification for national significance.

**Summary of Significance**

Hart Plaza was nominated for its local significance in the area of Community Planning and Development under Criterion A and for its national significance in Landscape Architecture and Art under Criterion C. Significance under Criterion A references development of the plaza as part of Detroit's long-contemplated civic center. Significance under Criterion C references the association with artist/landscape designer Isamu Noguchi, who was the major designer of the space. Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls were secondarily associated as designers, but in this nomination their involvement is not considered a point of national significance.

Criterion Consideration G was applied because the plaza and its period of significance are less than 50 years old. The period of significance was identified as 1974 to 1979, reflecting the years the plaza was under construction.

**Section 7, Description**

The authors explain that a landscape methodology was applied to documenting and evaluating the landscape, and various NPS publications are cited as presenting "federal standards" for this approach. National Register (NR) nominations should be prepared according to guidelines established by the National Register program, which are explained in its many bulletins. The treatment guidelines and cultural landscape report guidance cited in the nomination were not developed by or for the National Register program, although evaluations and nominations are certainly outcomes. NR Bulletin 30 presents a landscape approach, although not by that term, and it is cited in this nomination. The others should not be cited as primary sources of NR guidance, methodology, or standards.



As described on page 5, use of the landscape approach implies the plaza should be considered one contributing site. Regardless of the approach, basic National Register guidance considers a plaza to be a site (see NR Bulletin 16, page 15, “designed landscape”), so this is not a reflection of the landscape approach, but standard NR classification. Regardless of approach, all buildings, structures, sites, districts, and objects must be included in the inventory and counted as either contributing or noncontributing. Mostly those that fall below the scale of “object” are not counted, but they should be described as contributing or noncontributing landscape features. As a planning document, an NR nomination should address those features that contribute to history and design significance (or not!). Comments that follow address this more specifically.

- The description and integrity assessment of small-scale features on pages 17-19 summarizes them as “largely non-historic and (they) do not have integrity”. This may refer to the lighting, benches, bollards, pipe railing, guardrails, and flagpoles, although depending on extent and scale, pipe railing and guardrails that are part of a fence or barrier system may be contributing structures. Please clarify if any of them are historic (meaning, within the period of significance) and for those that are explain how integrity has been lost.
- Paved surfaces generally are considered structures. Some of the paving at the Hart Plaza is historic and should be counted as a contributing structure if it is not associated with another structure. For example, historic paving associated with the Dodge Fountain, the sub plaza, and the pyramid amphitheater may simply be a contributing aspect of the structure (not a separate structure); if so, it should be so noted in the context of the structure not as a separate circulation structure. A comparable example might be a slate roof on a house that contributes to the significance of the house but isn’t separable.
- Other paving might be counted separately as contributing structures, particularly the Riverwalk and Jefferson Promenade. Even if the paving in these walks is not historic, presumably the routes are part of the original design. A change in paving can be discussed in the integrity analysis. On the Riverwalk, the stairs may be a component of the structure. Please describe and explain.
- Certain items may have been counted as objects that seem to be structures. The “circular depression” (p. 19) may be an example. Is this also known as the “West Interlude”? It seems to be a paved depression, which doesn’t seem like an object, although the description is not clear. Please clarify the description and reconsider the classification. The Central Plaza may also be a contributing structure. Although part of the overall site, it seems to be a built component—a structure.
- The inventory table on pages 5-6 is very useful, but it would be better placed as a summary at the conclusion of Section 7, with numbers added so it becomes a check on the resource count. Make sure each resource on the table is named on the map.

## **Section 8, Statement of Criterion A Significance**

The following issues need to be addressed in Section 8:

### **Period of Significance and Criterion A Areas of Significance**

The period of significance begins in 1972, several years before the plaza is completed. This is problematic, because integrity is tied to the period of significance and this period of significance starts before the plaza is a fully formed “place” with significance. For much of the stated period of significance, the plaza was a construction site or a partially completed work. The period of significance should not begin until 1979 when the plaza was completed, and the end date depends on if and how Criterion A is developed.

When Community Planning and Development is associated with one building or site, it is generally because of the impact that property had on development of the surrounding area. Other development may have been inspired by the pioneering work—either by its design, function, or location. Contrary to this scenario, the planning significance for the Hart Plaza seems to be its very long incubation period. Decades passed before construction began on the civic center buildings and even more time passed before the plaza design and construction were completed. The intent may have been to have the plaza mark the culmination of a drawn-out planning period, but this is problematic if the time period included years before the nominated property was built or completed. The nomination does not explain this area of significance well. Please elaborate on the exact nature of the community planning and development significance and how it relates to the period of significance.

The nomination explains “social uses of the plaza” even though this extra information is not necessary given the significance claimed. Could the plaza be locally significant in the area of Entertainment/Recreation or Social History under Criterion A? Perhaps the section “Social Use of Hart Plaza” could be edited to justify either Entertainment/Recreation or Social History, if one is considered significant. The nomination would need to develop a context and place the plaza within that framework and provide a comparison with similar properties in Detroit. Two areas of significance, of course, are not needed and Criterion C could be used alone to explain the significance of the plaza.

### **Criterion C Significance**

Justification for national significance in Art and Landscape Architecture must be tied, in part, to a comparison with other works by the designer. Often, it is essential to include a comparison with works by other designers of the period who are working in the same genre to establish the national significance of the designer. Scholarly analyses are generally used to substantiate the significance of the subject designer. With reference to Noguchi, this probably is not needed, although a comparison with his similar works is essential.

The Hart Plaza nomination mentions Bayfront Park in Miami, the JACCC Plaza in Los Angeles, and the California Scenario in Costa Mesa, California. No description or analysis has been provided for the California Scenario. Art as an area of significance is not addressed. It is essential to place Noguchi within the framework of modern landscape architecture and art and describe Hart Plaza in the context of Noguchi’s other works. Although more than one work can



be considered of national significance, presumably the superiority of a particular design and its high level of integrity contribute heavily to an evaluation of national significance for a work by a nationally significant designer/artist. Please provide this discussion to justify national significance in the areas of Art and Landscape Architecture for the Philip Hart Plaza. Please also provide an explicit justification for the application of Criterion Consideration G.

#### Technical Issues

- Section 8: "Significant Dates" are listed that pre-date the period of significance or the existence of the plaza. These dates should be removed (1924 and 1955).
- Some of the text is highlighted in grey. Although it's barely visible on the pdf, it's more prominent when the nomination is printed. See page 8-48, for example.

If you have any questions about these comments, please contact me at 202-354-225 or at [barbara\\_wyatt@nps.gov](mailto:barbara_wyatt@nps.gov).



Barbara Wyatt, Historian  
National Register of Historic Places



GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN STRATEGIC FUND  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

QUENTIN L. MESSER, JR.  
PRESIDENT

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed file contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Philip A. Hart Plaza, 1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan**. This property is being submitted for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination is a        New Submission   X   Resubmission        Additional Documentation        Removal.

  1   Signed National Register of Historic Places Registration Form  
  2   Locational maps (incl. with registration form)  
  4   Sketch map(s) / figures(s) / exhibits(s) (incl. with registration form)  
  0   Piece(s) of correspondence  
 49  Digital photographs  
n/a Other: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

       Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed.  
       This property has been approved under 36 CFR 67.  
       The enclosed owner objections constitute a majority of property owners.  
       This nomination has been funded by the following NPS grant:  
Underrepresented Communities Grant (2019)  
       Other:

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator, at (517) 331-8917 or walsht@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,

Martha MacFarlane-Faes  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer



300 NORTH WASHINGTON SQUARE • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48913  
michigan.gov/shpo • (517) 335-9840



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Hart, Philip A., PlazaOther names/site number: Civic Center Plaza

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 1 Hart PlazaCity or town: Detroit State: MI County: WayneNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

X national    statewide    local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A    B X C    D

		Deputy SHPO	November 23, 2022
Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date	
<u>Michigan State Historic Preservation Office</u>			
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government			

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register  
\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

2nd Return

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☒

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☐  
District ☒  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	objects
<u>11</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

---

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

---

---

---

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/plaza

RECREATION AND CULTURE/work of art

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/outdoor recreation

---

---

---

2nd Return



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE, GRANITE,

METAL: Steel/Stainless, METAL: Aluminum

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

### Summary Paragraph

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit, Michigan, on the banks of the Detroit River. Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974 and dedicated in 1979, the park displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements to a planned spatial design. Its major contributing features include a surface level broken into three somewhat distinct plaza structures and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, the Pylon sculpture, a sunken oval amphitheater and a pyramidal amphitheater, the central Dodge Memorial Fountain, several smaller sculptural pieces, and a series of intentional views and vistas that lead to and from the individual elements toward the adjoining Detroit River and surrounding landmarks. The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as events such as concerts and festivals. Despite the introduction of a few additional sculptures, a recent pavement replacement project and other small changes, the property retains historic integrity to its original Noguchi design and the period of significance.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## Narrative Description

### *Methodology*

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a complex collection of buildings, structures, and objects contained within a single surface and subsurface property. A cultural landscape methodology has been applied to documenting and evaluating the plaza property. This approach is based upon *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, and additional federal documentation that addresses the evaluation of historic landscapes, including: *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and other pertinent documents.<sup>1</sup> The process included building a foundation of historical information as a basis for understanding the evolution of the significant landscape, documenting existing conditions, and analyzing landscape integrity.

Within Hart Plaza, the pertinent landscape characteristics are assessed. Landscape characteristics include tangible and intangible aspects of a landscape from the historic periods; these aspects individually and collectively give a landscape its historic character and aid in the understanding of its cultural importance. Each characteristic is described and then its integrity is assessed. An overall assessment of the historic integrity of the Hart Plaza property concludes this section.

Because this nomination uses a cultural landscape approach, which considers the entire Hart Plaza landscape as a single property, landscape characteristics and small-scale features are described as important aspects of the contributing landscape but are not counted individually. Major buildings, structures, and objects are counted and identified within the relevant descriptions in the sections which follow.

### *Overview*

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit, Michigan, on the banks of the Detroit River. The park is situated at the southern terminus of Woodward Avenue in the commercial core of the city between the contemporary landmarks of the remodeled Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and Renaissance Center to the east and the Huntington Place (until recently known as Cobo Hall, and referred to with its historical name in this nomination) convention center to the west. The plaza's origins lie in early twentieth century plans to develop a civic

<sup>1</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, Robert Z. Melnick, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1989, revised 1999); Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), and Charles A. Birnbaum and Christine Capella Peters, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 3-5.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

center where Woodward Avenue meets the Detroit River. Principal components of the contemporary civic center include Hart Plaza, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (formerly the City-County Building), and Cobo Hall.

Hart Plaza lies between Jefferson Avenue to the north, an open lot formerly the site of the Henry and Edsel Ford Memorial Auditorium (demolished 2011) to the east, the Detroit River to the south, and the United Auto Workers-Ford National Programs Center building (commonly the UAW-Ford Center, formerly Veterans' Memorial Building) to the west. The park is oriented with the city grid from north-northwest to south-southeast. (This form simplifies descriptions and graphics to cardinal directions).

The park generally consists of a surface level plaza (made up of three contributing plaza structures) and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, all of which contain numerous, discreet spaces and prominent features. The upper plaza includes a street level promenade with the Pylon obelisk and Transcending (the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark), a landscape installation featuring an arch sculpture; a large central plaza centered on the Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain), a supported metal ring that drops water and its related features, and the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, surrounded by the plaza transitional area including the Lincoln Garden (a pre-existing green space associated with the Veterans' Memorial Building and incorporated into the plaza), vegetated slopes, seating nodes, and a pyramidal amphitheater; a sub plaza beneath with an open-air amphitheater, underground theater, loading dock, and interior rooms; and the riverbank area with wide steps, a spiral sculpture, vegetated slopes, Gateway to Freedom (the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad), and a riverside walk. Aside from the Transcending landscape installation, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, Lincoln Bust, and Gateway to Freedom, the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, the plaza displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. The plaza is mostly open to the sky and slopes toward the river. Convex and concave shapes join across the ground plane. From the street level to the center, primary spatial relationships are reinforced by large artistic elements including the Pylon obelisk and the Dodge Fountain. From the central plaza to the south, primary views are directed at and across the river to the waterfront of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The multilevel plaza is primarily composed of raw and tinted concrete and remaining, original red and black flecked granite surfaces that are framed by lawn with deciduous trees, giving it a decidedly park-like feel.

The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. Most of these activities occur on the surface plaza level. The sub plaza spaces are currently used for performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance. With the construction of the Detroit RiverWalk over the past fifteen years, the Hart Plaza sidewalk directly fronting the river is now an active link in a larger series of parks and public spaces providing access to the Detroit River.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## *Landscape Characteristics*

### **Natural Systems and Features**

The natural systems that have influenced the development and physical form of Hart Plaza are strongly related to its urban setting. Natural factors include the riverbank location, urban soils, hydrology as it relates to local drainage toward the river, open exposure, orientation north to south, and prevailing winds from the west. While Hart Plaza aligns with the existing river edge on the south, the plaza does not reflect the historic, natural river boundary, which was modified as dictated by the commercial needs of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Limited overhead cover by trees and other features results in a plaza environment that reveals the day and night sky and weather conditions.

As designed, three terraces with transitional, constructed slopes define the topography of the park: the upper terrace is level with Jefferson Avenue; the central plaza makes up the middle terrace; and the riverbank area along the Detroit River makes up the lower terrace. The south-facing slope of the site is constructed on fill soils. The weight of park elements and live loads from event machinery and attendance occasionally result in areas of slope failure in the riverbank area.

### *Natural Systems and Features Integrity Assessment*

The natural systems and features associated with this property remain pervasive and persistent, retaining integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association.

### **Spatial Organization**

The organization of physical forms and visual associations that define and create spaces at Hart Plaza are predicated on the spatial relationships between the park, the Detroit River, and the sky. These intentional relationships are orchestrated through the design of Hart Plaza. The location of the park on the waterfront connects the city to the water. The largely open plane of the plaza provides exposure to the sky, while vertical elements direct further attention upward. General alignments within the park emphasize these relationships with major features. The trajectory of Woodward Avenue aligns to the Pylon obelisk on the Jefferson Promenade. The Pylon, located along Jefferson Avenue, is placed at the north entrance of the plaza and centered on the axis of Woodward Avenue, reinforcing the strength and significance of Detroit's main thoroughfare. It serves as a fulcrum for the diagonal axis leading down a sloped walk to the Dodge Fountain in the center of the plaza. The alignment between the Pylon and the Dodge Fountain continues down wide steps to the waterfront. The two primary elements, Dodge Fountain and the Pylon, are fundamental to determining relationships between other features and spaces in the plaza.

The park consists of four divisions that contain individual areas and features. The main spatial divisions are given descriptive names and include upper plaza, central plaza with surrounding plaza transition, sub plaza, and riverbank (refer to the Resource Map diagram).



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

The upper plaza is a rectangular shaped area parallel to Jefferson Avenue. The main spatial components of this area include two original features and one recent introduction. Built between 1966 and 1973, the Jefferson Promenade is a wide walk south of and parallel to the Jefferson sidewalk with historic raised lawn panels with trees. The Pylon obelisk rises from the east end of the Jefferson Promenade. Added in 2003, Transcending, a landscape installation featuring a 63-foot, incomplete steel ring sculpture, rises from an elevated plaza with numerous elaborated boulders near the foot of Griswold Street.

The roughly circular central plaza forms the core of Hart Plaza and includes several features. The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain) marks the center of the space, surrounded by a shallow bowl of granite pavers. A cubist water sculpture, a square-shaped resource made up of multiple stone cubes, is located directly north of the Dodge Fountain. The plaza surface itself consists of mostly level concrete paving. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, a life-size statue with two historical markers, is located in a raised planting bed west of the Dodge Fountain. The central plaza and the surrounding plaza transition are located at roughly the same elevation.

The plaza transition consists of a wide and irregularly crescent-shaped slope between the upper plaza and central plaza areas. It contains the upper slopes, the pyramid amphitheater, and the Lincoln Garden. The upper slopes with paths include planters, lawn, and east and west seating nodes that are referred to as "interludes" on plans. The amphitheater, also known as "pyramid stage" and "ziggurat," is a square-based pyramid with stepped seating that descends to a sunken stage in the southeast corner of park, perpendicular to the diagonal axis from Pylon to Dodge Fountain. The seating faces the park and city to the north while the stage faces south.

The Lincoln Garden is a small, formal courtyard adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center in the northwest corner of the park that was incorporated into the design of Hart Plaza. The current garden is approximately eighty-three feet from east to west and ninety-six feet from north to south (7,968 square feet). Constructed around 1950 in conjunction with the building, the green space originally formed a rectangle extending from the crook of the L-shaped building to the present edge of Jefferson Avenue. Prior to the expansion of Jefferson Avenue in the late 1950s, this space abutted a rectangular lawn panel that was parallel to the roadway. Through the 1960s, the approximately ninety-eight-foot by two-hundred-and-sixty-five-foot (25,970 square feet) garden area formed a sunken green space that was separated by retaining walls from the upper, entry level of the building to the west and a lower parking lot to the east in what became the core of Hart Plaza. The garden consisted of a rectangular lawn panel bordered by a walkway with a series of niches with benches facing the building along the eastern edge of the park. The garden was reduced to its current dimensions by 1973 during construction of the upper plaza. Identified on Noguchi's plans as "existing garden," the green space became referred to as the "Lincoln Garden" after placement of a bust of President Abraham Lincoln in the central lawn panel of the garden in 1986.

The sub plaza lies under the slopes of the plaza transition and connects to the main amphitheater, which is functionally, structurally, and visually incorporated into the underground spaces. The approximately two acres of subterranean spaces are either walled into rooms or unenclosed

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

chambers and corridors. Ducts for ventilation and illumination were constructed as bulkheads in tall concrete or metal cylinders. Walls are primarily concrete slab with some outer rooms featuring glass walls and windows. The main spatial components include the plaza's main amphitheater, an underground kitchen, a loading dock and access drive, and several interior rooms. The open-air amphitheater is the main performance space oriented such that the audience faces northwest toward the city and the performance space faces southeast toward the Dodge Fountain. A variety of interior rooms within the sub plaza support performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance.

The riverbank is a generally linear zone oriented toward the Detroit River. This area includes several main features including riverbank steps, a spiral seating sculpture, the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, lower slopes, and a riverside walk. The riverbank steps are roughly on axis with the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. Roughly eighty-five feet wide, the steps connect a sloped walking surface to the river's edge. The spiral seating sculpture is a concrete form wrapped around a ventilation shaft located on the steps slightly north of the axis between the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. The Gateway to Freedom sculpture and plaques are located at the base of the steps. East and west of the steps are the lower slopes that consist of trees over turf descending toward the river. The riverside walk is a pedestrian corridor along the river within Hart Plaza. It is a segment of a longer route known as the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza and the three-and-one-half-mile RiverWalk are part of the Detroit International Riverfront, a zone of connected green spaces and attractions that is spurring development along the riverfront and facilitating community access to the water.

#### *Spatial Organization Integrity Assessment*

The historic spatial organization associated with Hart Plaza is largely intact. The four basic divisions of the park remain from design and construction. Aside from the Transcending, Cadillac, and Gateway to Freedom installations, the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Spatial relationships between major landscape features remain with only minor alterations in setting due to the removal of the Ford Auditorium east of the park and in materials and design due to the placement of Transcending. In alignment with the Dodge Fountain, the tall steel ring on the Jefferson Avenue streetscape of the Upper Plaza introduces a non-historic, prominent feature that affects the integrity of the site. The feature contributes to the fragmentation of the green lawn with trees that was originally installed along Jefferson Avenue and once balanced the hard surfaces of the streetscape at the edge of the plaza. Despite these effects, the presence of all major historic features reduces the intrusive nature of the new feature. Overall, the spatial organization of the park demonstrates integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Land Use**

The principal human uses of Hart Plaza include planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, seasonal office use, and informal habitation. The park exists to provide year-round and event-based outdoor recreational space in the city. Passive recreation includes pedestrian activities such as walking, sitting, reading, playing music, observing the



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

riverfront, looking at and playing on sculptures and other park features. The amphitheater is designed for winter conversion into an ice rink but no longer provides this function.

Planned events held in the park include musical and ethnic festivals with a capacity of 40,000 participants. Events make use of the above ground park and the sub plaza. Heavy weight loads associated with event staging and use have damaged paving (evinced by cracked pavers) and exacerbate subsidence on the riverbank.

The park is also used as a through-route that channels pedestrian and bicycle movement from the city center to destinations along the river via the RiverWalk. The Hart Plaza surface functions as a bridge over Atwater Street which connects between Bates Street and Civic Center Drive from east to west. An access drive on the west side of the park connects to loading docks of the sub plaza and the United Auto Workers-Ford Center receiving area.

The sub plaza interior spaces have transitional habitation. Interior rooms provide seasonal office space for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Detroit Police Department north of the amphitheater and south of the pyramid amphitheater. Partially enclosed spaces within the sub plaza provide informal shelter to a small number of people. Common social and sanitary issues associated with informal settlement in parks conflict with intended park uses.

#### *Land Use Integrity Assessment*

Land uses of Hart Plaza reflect continuity and change. The plaza continues to be used for planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, and offices, but demonstrate aspects of change. Office occupation is now seasonal. Also, the removal of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) from the Ford Auditorium in 1989 (and demolition of the venue in 2011) reduced the use of the park amphitheater for concerts by the DSO. Similarly, the generally poor condition of the sub plaza spaces has reduced the use of this part of the park for planned events and eliminated the seasonal skating rink. The frequent non-historic use of the park for informal habitation by a transient population does not reflect the design intent. These alterations have reduced integrity for the aspect of feeling.

#### **Circulation and Paving**

Hart Plaza is centrally located in relation to the city transportation grid and major circulation conduits including Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. Within the park, systems of movement include vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and riverine systems of movement.

Vehicular access within the park includes park frontage for drop off along Jefferson Avenue to the north and the Hart Plaza Access Drive to the sub plaza loading dock from the west. Parking is available to the north and east. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Garage (under Jefferson Avenue north of Hart Plaza) has an entrance/egress portal building on the surface at the northeast corner of Hart Plaza. Offsite parking occurs in a gravel lot east of Hart Plaza and south of Atwater Street and in a gravel lot north of Atwater Street on the site of the former Ford Auditorium. Atwater Street forms a through route beneath Hart Plaza via the Atwater Tunnel.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Pedestrian circulation consists of through routes and internal routes. The sidewalk along Jefferson Avenue, access walks to the UAW-Ford Center from the Lincoln Garden, and the RiverWalk provide connections to points outside of the plaza. Internal routes can be described by the primary spatial divisions. The upper plaza includes the Jefferson Promenade and walk east of Pylon aligned to the entrance to Mariners' Church. The central plaza has generally open paving, while the plaza transition area includes the main sloped walk, non-historic narrow curving walks, original straight walks between features and east and west interludes, and the pyramid amphitheater steps.. The sub plaza contains amphitheater steps, steps between the Lincoln Garden and the lounge, steps north of the central plaza to the kitchen rooms, enclosed sub plaza walks and ramps, and a metal spiral staircase between the loading dock and fountain control room. The riverbank includes the RiverWalk and sloped transitional walks and steps.

Bicycle circulation is primarily associated with the segment of the RiverWalk, which has a connection to the Dequindre Cut Greenway to the east.

The riverine system of movement is located adjacent to the plaza. The *Detroit Princess* riverboat presently docks at the southwest edge of Hart Plaza, and commercial and recreational river traffic, including Great Lakes freighters and ocean-going "salties," pass by Hart Plaza. The Detroit-Wayne County Port Authority Building sits along the river to the east of Hart Plaza and its dock welcomes passenger cruise vessels throughout the navigation season.

Paving surfaces form relatively level planes except for the shallow bowl-shaped depression surrounding the Dodge Fountain. Paved surfaces contain a wide variety of flush grates, drains, and utility covers.

Paving materials vary by purpose and location and consist of the following historic types:

- Historic, large carnelian granite pavers, four-foot square in size and finished with a parallel grooved surface texture (identified as "mellogroove" in construction documents) once delineated primary walkways in the central plaza and wrapped widely around the Dodge Fountain and highlighted the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the UAW-Ford Center. After a 2021 repaving project, these large pavers can now only be found only along the eastern and northern passageways along the pyramid amphitheater;
- Historic, small carnelian granite paving setts six-inch square in size with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges once paved most walks of the plaza transition, provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater, and covered the sloped walks toward the riverbank, and along the riverfront. In the 2021 repaving project, the pavers on the sloping primary passage from the upper plaza to the central plaza were removed, along with those that swept around the Dodge Fountain beyond the bowl and those sloping toward the river. They remain in the plaza transition side passageways and interludes, on the southwest access ramp, and in a trapezoidal shaped form at the extreme southeast corner of the property on the RiverWalk;
- Historic, variably sized carnelian granite pavers with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges decreasing from six inches in size under in a shallow bowl surrounding and beneath the Dodge Fountain;



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

- Historic, variably sized granite pavers with dimensions greater than eight inches at the upper ring of the amphitheater;
- Historic, precast hexagonal concrete pavers throughout the sub plaza;
- Historic six-inch low limestone curbs, forming edges of lawn panels of the upper plaza that predated the construction of Hart Plaza.

Non-historic paving materials include poured concrete, concrete brick pavers, and stone tiles.

Non-historic concrete includes multiple types:

- Slab concrete poured to replace the large carnelian granite pavers along most primary walkways, including the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition, central plaza surrounding the shallow bowl of the Dodge Fountain, east-west axis, sloped surface toward Gateway to Freedom and the river, and the south and west passageways around the pyramid amphitheater;
- Single surface concrete of platform of Transcending sculpture and for ice rink in center of amphitheater;
- Concrete with four-foot scoring between the central plaza and the riverbank, west of the pyramid amphitheater, at the performance level of the pyramid amphitheater, and surrounding the main amphitheater of the sub plaza;
- Concrete with square panels scored at a forty-five degree angle, tinted light red which replaced non-historic concrete paving brick laid at in a herringbone pattern along the Jefferson Promenade to the west of Pond;
- Concrete sidewalk with six-foot scored panels of alternating dark and light gray surface treatment to create bands along the RiverWalk perpendicular to the river;
- Concrete paving and curbs, twelve inches wide and eight inches high, with red surface treatment at the upper ring of the amphitheater.

Non-historic concrete brick pavers occur in various locations throughout the plaza. Concrete brick in a basketweave pattern with gray colors occurs along the edges of the Jefferson Promenade and as bands in regular intervals between the red-tinted concrete sections. On the riverside walk below the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, non-historic concrete brick pavers are laid in a stack bond pattern with light and dark gray colors and memorial donor names. Twelve-foot square, non-historic stone tile is used as pavers at the base of Transcending north of the Jefferson Promenade.

A significant project in 2021 replaced more than fifty percent of paving materials across the surface level of the plaza, removing both historic and non-historic pavements and replacing them with new material largely due to deteriorated conditions. Nearly all of the historic large carnelian granite pavers were replaced with poured concrete, as were several sections of smaller carnelian granite pavers on primary walkways. The visual impression of Noguchi's original paving pattern ringing the shallow bowl beneath the Dodge Fountain is maintained with the use of red-tinted concrete outlining the same dimensions and form. All previously in-place pavement borders remain unchanged. As part of this effort, the Circular Depression, an original Noguchi-designed object to the west of the Dodge Fountain, was eliminated and replaced with level concrete and no longer exists.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

### *Circulation and Paving Integrity Assessment*

Circulation and paving features associated with Hart Plaza demonstrate limited historic integrity. Historic routes persist with only one area of introduced pathways in the plaza transition north of the amphitheater. Due to deteriorated conditions, substantial areas of the central plaza and upper plaza and the rectilinear walks of the plaza transition were recently repaved with non-historic new materials that do not match the Noguchi-designed originals. Pavement routes and boundaries are generally unchanged from the Noguchi design. The condition of remaining historic paving on the paths of the plaza transition, in the bowl of the Dodge Fountain and on granite steps is fair to good. Generally good condition, non-historic paving is found throughout the upper plaza and riverbank and on the curving walks of the plaza transition. Some of the Noguchi-designed concrete features, particularly the pyramid amphitheater, show deteriorated conditions of original materials. Replacement materials in the central plaza reflect the historic design intent. Remaining Noguchi-specified pavement remains in fair to good condition. Overall, the integrity of circulation and paving is compromised. Specifically, circulation and paving features reflect integrity of location, design, and feeling.

### **Vegetation**

Vegetation of Hart Plaza consists of historic and non-historic deciduous and evergreen trees over turf, evergreen shrubs, and herbaceous flowering plants in the beds of the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation can be described by area:

Upper plaza vegetation includes two rectangular lawn panels with an incomplete grid of historic Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) planted four trees wide from north to south and separated by the Transcending sculpture. Less than fifty percent of the original trees remain from the block planted between 1966 and 1973. Historically, the planter contained rows five trees wide from north to south and was stylistically incorporated by Noguchi into the design of Hart Plaza by the inclusion of a now-removed, single row of Norway maple along the south side of the Jefferson Promenade. These and all existing Norway maple are free-growing but design documents specify that they were intended to be topped and tightly pruned into the shape of an inverted glass. The upper plaza also contains a recently installed, narrow planting bed of day lilies along the western portion of the south side of the Jefferson Promenade above the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation of the transition area of the central plaza includes several lawn panels with trees. The northeast sloping lawn panel contains older, historic Norway maple and more recently planted northern hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) in a scattered pattern. The east raised lawn panels around the east interlude contain Norway maple and one American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*). The raised panels east and west of the pyramid amphitheater are planted with Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). The central sloping lawn panel contains Norway maple and flowering cherry (*Prunus* sp.) adjacent to the angular walk. The northwest sloping lawn panel includes Norway maple, flowering cherry adjacent to the angular walk, crab apple (*Malus* sp.) near west steps to sub plaza, and dwarf beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) southwest of the amphitheater. The west lawn panel includes Norway maple by the amphitheater, Austrian pine at the western boundary and crab apple at the west interlude. The west raised lawn panels around the west interlude contain crab apple. The west sloping lawn panel south of the UAW-Ford Center contains



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

alternating red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and little-leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*) on the north side, crab apple on the west and south sides, and a thirty-two-inch wide bed of rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*). The Lincoln Garden has four outer lawn panels and a central square lawn panel with roses (*Rosa* sp.), grasses, and other herbaceous perennial flowers.

The central plaza core contains little vegetation. One crab apple (*Malus*) tree grows in a raised lawn panel south of the Cadillac statue.

Riverbank vegetation includes sloping lawn panels with trees. The southeast sloping lawn contains northern hackberry, red maple, honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* 'inermis'), and little-leaf linden. The southwest sloping lawn panel has little-leaf linden, honey locust, elm (*Ulmus* sp.), and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). One ginkgo is identified with a small stone and plaque as the "1984 Peace Tree." The plaque indicates that the tree was presented by the Detroit Westtown and Downtown Windsor Lioness Clubs, but no further information on the circumstances of its dedication were found, and it is not believed to be related to Noguchi's design. Crab apple and river birch (*Betula nigra*) are planted close to the RiverWalk. The west sloping lawn panels north and west of the angled access walk contain Austrian pine, crab apple, and river birch. The eastern lawn panels north of the riverside walk contain river birch and crab apple.

Vegetation is absent from the sub plaza. Stumps and stems in planters remain by the steps east of the amphitheater. Offsite, one older crab apple remains directly east of Hart Plaza by the courtyard of the Ford Auditorium.

#### *Vegetation Integrity Assessment*

At the overall level, the vegetation of Hart Plaza reflects a general, historic pattern of large canopy trees surrounding a hardscaped plaza with flowering crabapples toward the center and east and west edges formed by evergreen trees. Within this larger vegetation plan, aspects of the designed plantings are diminished. Replanting in recent decades includes both exotic and native trees, but neither conform to the historic design. Specific designed aspects of vegetation are absent from the park. Missing elements include the uniform grid of trees along Jefferson Avenue, the entire shrub and ground cover (understory layer) of plantings, and the controlled pruning of trees. Some individual, historic trees remain; however, because the overall, modern style of design used large groups of uniform species to create effects, the survival of individual plants is not highly significant.

Individual instances of historic, extant vegetation include partially intact patterns of canopy trees in informal clusters throughout the plaza transition and the riverbank areas of the park. Noguchi's intent that the river should be visible beneath the tree canopy overhead is maintained in some area. Also, groupings of Austrian pine remain along the east and west edges of the plaza transition. Remaining historic trees pertain to a primarily non-native mixture including Norway maple, Austrian pine, various types of crab apple, and honey locust. Remaining crab apple trees remain around the central plaza, near the west interlude, and flanking the steps to the riverside walk. The vegetation of Hart Plaza carries integrity at a high level order of design. All other aspects of integrity are significantly impacted.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

### Views and Vistas

Hart Plaza affords numerous expansive views and controlled vistas that are predicated on individual landscape features. The strength of the Noguchi design for Hart Plaza is reflected in the persistence of these characteristic views, which include views to and from the plaza. Views of Hart Plaza from Woodward Avenue and surrounding streets focus on the Pylon. Other outside views of Hart Plaza are afforded by the multistory buildings along Jefferson Avenue and in the general area.

Places within Hart Plaza offer relatively expansive views to locations outside of the plaza. The Jefferson Promenade provides views to the central plaza and Detroit River. The view from the Dodge Fountain and central plaza reveals the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. Open views from the riverbank provide a panorama of the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront, and across the central plaza toward the downtown Detroit skyline toward the north. In the sub plaza, views through partially enclosed spaces to areas with natural light include a large circular light well in the northwest part of the sub plaza, open staircases, the opening at the amphitheater performance level, and north and south side exits east toward the former Ford Auditorium and courtyard.

Characteristic, controlled vistas to individual features abound at Hart Plaza. These linear visual relationships include:

- The vista between the walk west of Pylon and the Mariners' Church entrance;
- The vista from Jefferson Promenade to the bust of Abraham Lincoln;
- The vista through Jefferson Promenade to Pylon;
- The vista between Pylon and the Dodge Fountain;
- The vista between the Dodge Fountain and sculptural features including the spiral seating sculpture, pyramid amphitheater, cubist water sculpture, Pylon, and the Transcending sculpture;
- The vista between the east and west interludes and the Dodge Fountain; and
- The east-to-west sub plaza vistas that reinforce a linear range of vision between structural columns.

External vistas also exist between the central plaza and individual skyscrapers in the general area. Specific buildings with a visual relationship to the central plaza include One Woodward to north, the central tower of the Renaissance Center to the east, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Building to the northeast, and Crowne Plaza to the northwest. All of these adjacent buildings existed at the time of Hart Plaza's completion.

### *Views and Vistas Integrity Assessment*

Views and vistas associated with Hart Plaza are reliant on the upright, individual landscape features such as sculptures and other unique park features like the pyramid amphitheater. These original designed features remain intact and enable views and vistas to demonstrate integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## Buildings and Structures

The Hart Plaza landscape contains both surface and subsurface structures as the core built elements of the plaza's design, and individual buildings that shelter human activities.

Above ground buildings include the fountain control building (**one contributing building**) located in the corner of a raised lawn bed west of the Dodge Fountain and south of the main amphitheater and a Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building located at the northeast corner of the park along the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk. The fountain control building has concrete walls, a curved metal roof, and a row of narrow glass windows that view the fountain and the amphitheater. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building along Jefferson Avenue (**one contributing building**) has black granite, glass, and metal walls and a terraced metal roof over the steps and escalators that descend to the parking structure.

Three individual structures constitute the surface of Hart Plaza. These are generally in alignment with the spatial divisions highlighted in the spatial organization section of this document:

The upper plaza (**one contributing structure**) occupies the northern quarter of Hart Plaza and consists of the Jefferson Promenade, the rectangular lawn panel to the immediate north, and the entry plaza surrounding Pylon. Although the Jefferson Promenade actually predates the construction of the rest of Hart Plaza, it was incorporated with slight modifications into Noguchi's overall plan for Hart Plaza, anchored at the east end by Noguchi's Pylon.

The central plaza (**one contributing structure**) occupies the center half of Hart Plaza and consists of the central plaza area surrounding the Dodge Fountain, and the plaza transition area which forms a roughly crescent-shaped surround to the north, east, and west. These two spaces together constitute the nucleus of the site and provide direct access to and from this nucleus generally at the same elevation. Despite changes in paving, Noguchi's patterns of use and original design intent is largely present.

The riverbank (**one contributing structure**) consists of the surface areas of the plaza lowest in elevation, closest to the Detroit River. This structure incorporates the RiverWalk paved pathway along the seawall and related pathways and greenspace panels which are all oriented toward the water.

The sub plaza is a single underground structure (**one contributing structure**) with a series of spaces and rooms occupied on a seasonal or as-needed basis. Materials include concrete slab and block walls, exposed or dropped grid ceilings with acoustic tiles, and floors of synthetic tile, carpet, or concrete. Most interior spaces are in poor condition. The exterior sub plaza spaces create corridors of covered movement between rooms.

The sub plaza includes the concrete amphitheater and a concrete block beverage booth with a circular, concrete block wall located east of the amphitheater and north of the kitchen rooms.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Clockwise from the northwest, the sub plaza rooms include a warming room, a cafeteria, and office and support rooms. The warming room, formerly used by skaters in the winter and presently as a backstage area in the summer, contains restrooms and three-foot-high rectangular glass windows that face south toward the amphitheater and glass walls that face east toward the cafeteria. The cafeteria contains a kitchen, bathrooms, and a long, rectangular glassed-in lounge that faces south to the center of the amphitheater and west toward the backstage rooms. East of the cafeteria and north of the amphitheater, a cluster of rooms includes an event operations office, a seasonally occupied office of the Detroit Police Department, a park operations office with camera control area, a maintenance and boiler room, and a seasonally occupied group of offices for the Department of Parks and Recreation. South of these rooms and across an underground corridor, the sub plaza contains a gallery room and a concessions area with twenty-six kitchen stalls. South of the loading docks are utility, maintenance, and storage rooms. A cluster of rooms farther south near the pyramid amphitheater include storage and changing rooms and restrooms. South of the Atwater Tunnel are utility rooms and an office of Detroit Police Department with an entrance on the RiverWalk pathway.

The convex and concave pyramid amphitheater (**one contributing structure**) is located in the southeast corner of the park. Reminiscent of Mesoamerican pyramids, the square-based structure is composed of a series of shallow steps with a small, rectangular room at the top. Exposed materials above the plaza surface level are concrete and materials below that level are granite. The south end of the structure is a convex pyramid with seating that is integrated into an open-air stage on the north. Concrete and stone seating is partially submerged below the plaza grade. The walls of the performance area are concrete with integrated light wells along the upper edge of the walls forming a sunken performance area. The shape of the pyramid amphitheater echoes the square, pyramidal roof of the Bob-Lo Island Boat Office Building that was formerly in this location prior to the construction of Hart Plaza. Boats historically transported people from this location to an amusement park that operated on Bois Blanc ("Bob-Lo") Island, Ontario, from 1910 to 1993.

Above ground utility evidence include vents and pipes, integrated into the structural design. Seven cylindrical concrete vents are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and in the plaza transition area north, east, and west of the Dodge Fountain. The vents are six feet in diameter and variable in height with an average height of six feet at the bottom of the slanted top opening. Two tall metal vents, approximately eighteen feet high, are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and along the eastern edge of the plaza transition near the former Ford Auditorium. Low metal relief pipes with curved ends are located throughout the park.

Retaining walls of varying heights (from approximately two to twenty feet) are integrated throughout the plaza design. The walls are either eight inches or twenty-four inches wide. Most retaining walls are raw concrete and feature expansion and construction joints at four-foot intervals. Retaining walls under four feet typically form edges of variously sized vegetated panels or serve as independent planters. Walls of various heights and widths have integrated benches. Retaining walls that are bulkheads play an important role in defining and transitioning between upper and lower levels of the plaza. These walls also create stairwells and may form edges of planters or parapet walls at the surface level. Some of these walls include integrated



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

railings such as at the north side of the auditorium. These walls are generally considered part of other named structures and features in the course of this nomination and are not classified individually.

The materials vary across the retaining walls of Hart Plaza. Most concrete retaining walls are twelve inches thick with four-foot scoring. Other concrete retaining walls are two feet thick and may have integrated metal hand rails and guardrails that are five inches in diameter and variably silver or painted black. A concrete, double-stacked seat wall is located along the riverside walk. It is constructed in three-foot by six-foot sections with integral, square lights. Polished red granite-faced, concrete retaining walls, parapet walls, and cheek walls are located at the steps flanking the Gateway to Freedom sculpture. These decorative walls feature a black granite base course and coping with integrated metal hand rails. Marble faced concrete walls associated with the UAW-Ford Center form the three- to six-feet high south and west boundary walls of the Lincoln Garden.

Freestanding walls include low concrete landscape walls generally less than four feet high. In addition, a massive, largely free-standing concrete slab forms a sloped backdrop to the pyramid amphitheater's stage.

#### *Buildings and Structures Integrity Assessment*

The buildings and structures of Hart Plaza remain integrity with some modifications to the buildings. Structures, which primarily consist of three distinct surface sections of Hart Plaza and the sub plaza below grade, have historic integrity of Noguchi's original design and is also reflected in location, setting, feeling, and association. Various types of walls support and border these primary structures and typically have integrity and remain in generally good condition. As an exception, there are low retaining walls on the west side of the plaza transition area that demonstrate failure at corners. The interior of the underground structure of the sub plaza has been modified with some addition of rooms, partitioning with walls, and interior modifications due to changing uses. Characteristic elements including the glass walls of the warming room and the cafeteria remain. Replacement of some features, such as the black railings integrated into the concrete wall forming the north parapet edge of the main Amphitheatre, have changed the character of the site. Historically, the railing in this location was a single metal tube with integrated lights.

The Fountain Control Building is in relatively poor condition while the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building is in generally good condition. In general, integrity is reflected in the design and materials of the buildings and structures.

#### **Sculptures and Constructed Water Features**

Sculptures and constructed water features include four resources original to the historic design of Hart Plaza and four resources that are not part of the design. One non-historic object was added in 2005. One historic sculpture was recently removed.

The Pylon (**one contributing object**) is located at the east end of the Jefferson Promenade and in line with Woodward Avenue. The 120-foot-tall stainless steel-frame pylon is seven feet square at

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

its base and twists into a helix as it rises toward the sky. The pylon design required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. Pylon is faced in one-quarter-inch anodized aluminum plate.

The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (**one contributing object**) is located above a bowl-shaped depression in the central plaza. In designing the Dodge Fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. At the base of the stainless steel fountain sits a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The two-foot square convex brass features protrude from the paving north and south of the fountain. The fountain has three hundred water jets within the ring capable of offering thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.

The cubist water sculpture (**one contributing object**) is located north of the Dodge Fountain. The rectangle of projecting and recessed square granite slabs of varying heights forms a visual counterpart to the one-time circular depression to the southwest and the two together framed the path from the Dodge Fountain to the amphitheater. It was labeled as a play sculpture and fountain in the original drawings, with mechanicals for pumps, flow, and drainage. However, there is no evidence it was ever functional as a water feature.

The spiral seating sculpture (**one contributing object**) is located southwest of the Dodge Fountain at the top of the sloped walk descent to the riverbank. It consists of three approximately eighteen-inch-high concrete steps in a spiral pattern that lead to a central concrete ramp and wrap around a cylindrical concrete air shaft that serves to ventilate the sub plaza near the Atwater Tunnel. Modern security camera equipment is mounted to the apex.

Sculptures added to Hart Plaza after the design and initial construction include the Abraham Lincoln bust, Transcending, the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, and the Gateway to Freedom sculpture.

The Abraham Lincoln bust (**one non-contributing object**) is a seventy-two-inch-high marble sculpture of the sixteenth U.S. president set on a black granite pedestal in the center of the Lincoln Garden adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center. Created by Gutzon Borglum, a one-time instructor of Noguchi in 1918, the bust was a gift of Ralph Herman Booth to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in 1924.<sup>2</sup> Following the redesign of the base by Marshall Fredericks in 1954, the composition was dedicated by American Citizens of German Ancestry through the German American Cultural Center in 1956. In 1986, the bust was restored and placed in Hart Plaza through the joint efforts of the DIA, Detroit Parks and Recreation, and the Civic Center.

Transcending, the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark, by David Barr and Sergio de Guisti (**one non-contributing object**), was dedicated in 2003. The sixty-three-foot-tall, incomplete (or open) steel ring set on its edge has a low plaza-like plinth and outer circle of boulders. It is located in a

<sup>2</sup> "Abraham Lincoln, sculpture," IAS 76000536. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

panel of lawn and trees along Jefferson Avenue and in line with the Dodge Fountain and Cubist Water Sculpture.

The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue (**one non-contributing object**), installed in 2001, is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel east of the Dodge Fountain, approximately fifteen feet south of a Michigan Historical Marker commemorating Cadillac's founding of Detroit in 1701 and approximately fifteen feet north of the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan interpretive sign.

Gateway to Freedom, the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad, by Edward J. Dwight Jr. (**one non-contributing object**), was installed in 2001 at the double steps by the riverside walk. A central, multi-figural bronze sculpture features six people preparing to board a boat. The sculpture of a man with an outstretched finger represents George de Baptiste, a local business leader and Virginia-born free man who also transported fugitives aboard his steam ship, the *T. Whitney*. The other figures depict women and men of various ages, including an infant. Two marble pillars with brass flames flank the main sculpture. Donor names are engraved on bricks of the walk and on the polished granite-faced walls flanking the sculpture to the east and west. Gateway to Freedom is the United States' component of the memorial that is also commemorated by a Canadian sculpture located in Windsor, Ontario, almost directly across the Detroit River from Hart Plaza. Part of the same commission, the complementary sculpture by Dwight entitled "Tower of Freedom" shares complementary design elements such as brass figures and a marble pillar with brass flames. The Canadian sculpture depicts a man raising his arms in celebration of emancipation, a Quaker woman assisting a woman and her child, and a young girl glancing back toward Detroit.

The marquee (**one non-contributing object**) is located at the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk edge directly north of the Pylon. The current structure replaced an earlier marquee around 2005. It has a six-foot-square footprint and metal, T-shaped facades facing all four directions. This object functions as dynamic signage which can advertise upcoming events at the plaza.

In 2021, a large-scale repaving effort at Hart Plaza eliminated the circular depression, a Noguchi-designed historic object. The depression was located approximately one hundred feet west of the Dodge Fountain. It was formed by granite setts that dipped into a shallow bowl-shaped depression that echoed the bowl under the fountain. The circular depression was replaced with level poured concrete.

### *Sculptures and Constructed Water Features Integrity Assessment*

Sculptures and constructed water features are mostly intact, retaining integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the original design intent of Isamu Noguchi. Four of Noguchi's five original sculptures remain. Sculptures that have been recently added to the park are distinct from the historic features; however, the large Transcending ring detracts from the designed spatial organization of the site due to its scale. Although the circular depression was a more minor object, its design was a part of the Noguchi vocabulary, that has

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

now been lost. Security equipment, such as that mounted on the spiral seating sculpture, visually detracts from Noguchi's simple design but is not permanent.

### Small-Scale Features

Numerous small-scale features provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and interpretive or aesthetic concerns at Hart Plaza. Most small-scale features are recently added as utilitarian features and are not essential to the overall design and character of the plaza. Small-scale features include lights, upright poles, bollards, trash receptacles, benches, rails, and interpretive elements.

Lights consist of ground mounted light fixtures near the west interlude and in the Lincoln Garden, flood lights along the Jefferson Promenade, and approximately one hundred globe lights. These ubiquitous globe lights, installed throughout the park around 2000, have a glass globe lantern bracketed by aluminum bands on thirteen-foot-tall posts formed of four independent poles set on one aluminum base. Globe lamps of this type were recently removed from the Jefferson Promenade and replaced with LED lighting mounted on adjoining flag poles.

Upright poles primarily include security poles with cameras and sensors over the Jefferson Promenade, and flagpoles. The security poles consist of a tubular metal upright with a cantilevered metal pole extending out over the Promenade. Approximately twenty flagpoles generally flying United States flags employ the same stylistic details as the globe lights and are located along the Jefferson Promenade, above the stage area of the main amphitheatre, and at the east and west edges of the park. Four taller flagpoles present in early photographs of the plaza behind the stage of the main amphitheater were replaced with flagpoles matching the standard design. Shorter flagpoles with a variety of colored flags are set in moveable, concrete bases presently at the south edge of the central plaza.

Other small-scale features are dispersed throughout the park. Planter bollards and circular concrete planters line the Jefferson Promenade. Various types of plastic and metal garbage and recycling receptacles are placed in the landscape depending on use and seasonality. Synthetic wood benches are located along the Jefferson Promenade and in the Lincoln Garden. Two wood benches are located in the sub plaza by the cafeteria and stairwell north of the amphitheater. Guardrails along a concrete sidewalk in the plaza transition directly north of the amphitheater consist of unpainted, round steel pipe that is four inches in diameter. Other tubular metal handrails and guardrails that are typical throughout the park are five-inch-diameter pipe variably painted either black or gray.

Interpretive, small-scale elements include plaques and signs. A Veterans Memorial brass plaque on polished granite is located in the southwest corner of the Lincoln Garden. An aluminum Michigan Historical Marker interpretive sign entitled "The Landing of Cadillac" is located north of the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, installed in 2001. It is a standard metal plaque painted green with gold text and brown metal posts. South of the statue is an interpretive marker entitled "The Cadillac Convoy," which was placed in December 2001 by the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan. The black metal sign with gray metal posts commemorates Detroit's tricentennial. A second Michigan Historical Marker entitled "Ford Motor Company" is



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

placed opposite the Cadillac marker to the southwest of the Dodge Fountain. The marker discusses the incorporation of the Ford company in 1903 which took place near this site. The marker is dated 1978 and archival paperwork notes it was installed “at the corner of Jefferson and Griswold,” but it is unclear if it was ever located at the actual streetcorner and later moved or has always occupied the current location since Hart Plaza opened. A Hart Plaza dedication marker, a replacement donated by Herman Miller Cares in 2016, is located by steps to the sub plaza on the east side of the park. A rededication marker for The Dodge Fountain is located at the edge of the plaza and south of the fountain. It is a small, granite and limestone monument on a concrete unit block base. The north face contains a plaque dated August 31, 2006, marking the refurbishment of the fountain and revitalizing the waterfront through the support of Gretchen C. Valade. The south face contains a rectangular metal plaque that was part of the dedication of the fountain on July 24, 1976, prior to the dedication ceremonies for Hart Plaza in 1978 and 1979. The plaque describes the fountain as “‘An Engine of Water’ at the Gateway to a Great City.” Since the plaza was under construction at the time of the 1976 event, the original location of the plaque is not known. On the riverbank slope west of the fountain dedication monument, a metal plaque with the words “1984 Peace Tree” is embedded in a stone at the base of a ginkgo tree.

#### *Small-Scale Features Integrity Assessment*

Small-scale features of Hart Plaza are largely non-historic and do not have integrity. As originally designed, the Noguchi’s design for the park contained very few furnishings or free-standing lights. Existing bollards, flagpoles, planters, and independent monuments were not part of the original design but are found throughout the park today. The few flagpoles present in the original design no longer exist. The security equipment, while a modern necessity, diminishes the views in certain areas of the property. These vertical elements detract from the open, uncluttered landscape as designed.

#### *Overall Historic Integrity*

Despite the addition of several sculptural objects which post date the period of significance, the replacement of paving materials, the selective loss of vegetation and incursion of small scale features not associated with the original design, Hart Plaza retains historic integrity and conveys its historic significance as a designed landscape created by sculptor and landscape designer Isamu Noguchi and functioning as the home of significant cultural and social activities, not just for Detroit, but for the wider southeast Michigan area. The basic form, design, and use of Noguchi’s key spaces remains intact and visible. The plaza continues to reflect Noguchi’s philosophy that sculpture and space are meant to be mobile and experienced. Circulation patterns, envisioned when the plaza opened but initially unfounded due to activities beyond plaza borders, have increased passive recreation. Evident aspects of location, setting, design, feeling, and association reflect the intentional abstract style where large-scale sculptural forms function as integral elements to the overall planned spatial design.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

A summary of extant contributing and non-contributing resources is presented here.

Hart Plaza Resource Type	Contributing (11)	Non-Contributing (5)
<i>Buildings</i>	Parking Access Building	(None)
	Fountain Control Building	
<i>Structures</i>	Upper Plaza	(None)
	Central Plaza	
	Riverbank	
	Pyramid Amphitheater	
	Sub Plaza	
<i>Objects</i>	Dodge Memorial Fountain	Transcending
	Cubist Water Sculpture	Gateway to Freedom
	Pylon	Cadillac Statue
	Spiral Seating Sculpture	Lincoln Bust
		Hart Plaza Marquee

2nd Return



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

2nd Return

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☒ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Landscape Architecture

Social History

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1979-2002

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Noguchi, Isamu

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls

\_\_\_\_\_

2nd Return



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Philip A. Hart Plaza is significant under National Register Criterion A, at the local level, in the areas of community development and planning and social history as the embodiment of a decades-long effort to establish a civic center at the foot of Woodward Avenue where it meets the Detroit River in Detroit, Michigan. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the Detroit city government initiated a series of planning efforts in an attempt to create a grouping of buildings and open spaces to accommodate the city government and other civic and social functions. It was not until the 1970s, however, that a plan for a civic center plaza was executed by internationally recognized designer and sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. Since its completion in 1979, Hart Plaza has served as the social heart of Detroit's civic center, a publicly accessible space that hosts music and cultural festivals and provides year-round passive recreation activities connecting the downtown with the Detroit River.

Hart Plaza is also significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of landscape architecture, at the national level, as the first constructed expression of a large form sculptural landscape designed by Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a widely respected artist with significant works in the United States and abroad. Over Noguchi's career prior to Hart Plaza, he designed a series of conceptual landscapes while honing a unique vocabulary of elements, inspired by his philosophy of play. Although prominent Detroit architectural firm Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls was the architect of record for Hart Plaza, the design is credited to Noguchi. At first commissioned only to create the centerpiece Horace H. Dodge and Son Fountain, Noguchi ultimately designed the entire 10.8-acre plaza, creating an interplay of positive and negative spaces that blend monumental sculptures, diagonal axes, and playful forms that balance each other across wide expanses, all focused on the centerpiece of the Dodge Fountain. While subsequent additions and the depredations of time have slightly impacted Noguchi's original design, the fundamental character of Noguchi's Hart Plaza remains distinctive and intact. Hart Plaza, in turn, informed his later design vocabulary toward three other large public spaces that he designed prior to his death.

The period of significance is 1979-2002, which includes represents the period of time between when Hart Plaza was completed, and the City of Detroit's Recreation Department divested itself of involvement in Hart Plaza events and activities.

Although Hart Plaza has not yet surpassed the fifty-year threshold, the property meets Criteria Consideration G as it holds exceptional architectural and historical significance. The plaza is exceptionally significant under Criteria A due to its unique and important role in the social history of Detroit. The opening of Hart Plaza provided an important and unique social space within the city and represents the intentional transformation of Detroit's downtown riverfront from a center of industry and commerce into a usable public space that reflected the development of city in the twentieth century and the city's ethnic diversity. Since its opening, Hart Plaza has hosted numerous important festivals and events in Detroit, including the series of Ethnic Festivals that began there in 1976, the Detroit-Windsor International Freedom Festival, and

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

numerous music festivals. Hart Plaza has also served as the site of important social and political events, including an address by Pope John Paul II on September 18, 1987.

Hart Plaza is also exceptionally significant under Criteria C as the embodiment of key design philosophies of Isamu Noguchi that he had begun to explore in his sculptural work as early as the 1930s. Hart Plaza is important as the initial practical, large-scale implementation of several of his concepts, meant to be experienced by the public at large. Expanding beyond his earlier work, which was composed of smaller, often private spaces and singular sculptural forms, Detroit's civic center plaza represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Several design philosophies that were employed at Hart Plaza were refined and seen again in Noguchi's later public plaza spaces in Florida and California. Hart Plaza's integrity of design is largely intact, maintaining these concepts for the next generation.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

***Detroit's Early Riverfront***

Detroit's present-day civic center (a series of buildings and open spaces arranged to accommodate the city government and other social and civic functions) is built at the narrowest point of the strait between present-day Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Anishinaabe or "Three Fires" people, which included the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, lived around the Great Lakes. Anishinaabe people shared a similar culture and language, and the riverfront location at this narrow point was a natural gathering place to share news, hunt, fish, and trade. When the fur trade brought Europeans to the region, the Anishinaabeg traded beaver pelts for European goods such as tools, food, and weapons.

In 1701, French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac led an expedition to establish a fort, named Fort Pontchartrain for the French chancellor, at this location in order to control the fur trade on the lower Great Lakes. This became the first permanent European settlement in the region. The layout of farmland adjacent to Fort Pontchartrain was one of the first public efforts to impose form along Detroit's riverfront. These "ribbon farms" were often as narrow as two hundred feet wide, extending up to three miles inland, and were situated perpendicular to the riverfront to facilitate river access for farmers. The streets along Detroit's riverfront were often laid out along the property lines between these early ribbon farms, and many of them still bear the family names of Detroit's early French settlers.

Following the establishment of permanent Euroamerican settlements, the region's original inhabitants, the Anishinaabeg, were gradually displaced after losing their land through a series of treaties signed and enacted during the early to mid-1800s. The Treaty of Detroit, signed on November 17, 1807, transferred land in what is now southeast Michigan and northwest Ohio from the Anishinaabeg to the United States. The treaty was signed in Detroit by William Hull,



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

governor of the Michigan Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of 1836 transferred nearly half of Anishinaabe land in the Upper Peninsula to the United States, as well as the northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula. In 1837 the land acquired by the United States became part of Michigan, the twenty-sixth state.

In the summer of 1805, a fire destroyed all evidence of Detroit's riverfront settlement except for one house and a few outlying farms. The devastating fire had at least one positive outcome – it provided a blank slate upon which to rebuild. The new territorial governor and his three-justice judiciary were instructed by Congress to “lay out a new town including the site of the one destroyed and ten thousand acres of adjacent land.”<sup>4</sup>

Augustus Woodward, Chief Justice of the Michigan Territory, was the first of the new administrative delegation to arrive following the fire. Woodward was a Columbia-educated lawyer who was personally acquainted with both Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him to the post of Chief Justice, and Charles Pierre L'Enfant, whose Baroque design had been implemented in planning the layout of the District of Columbia. Woodward had a personal interest in surveying and city planning, and he seized the opportunity given by the destruction of Detroit to plan his own American city. For Detroit, he proposed an ambitious plan that improved on L'Enfant's plan for the District of Columbia, which had merely imposed diagonal avenues and public circles on the existing gridiron, by creating a unified pattern of equilateral triangles four thousand feet in length on each side, converging on circular plazas or “circuses.” Woodward Avenue, running from the riverfront to Grand Circus Park, the first of the envisioned public circuses, became the main axis of what came to be known as the Woodward Plan.

Woodward's plan was only partially implemented before local politics intervened and the remainder of the city was laid out on the more traditional rectilinear grid. However, portions of the plan are still visible on the landscape of downtown, as are traces of the city's earlier history in the narrow grid of streets perpendicular to the river along the borders of the old French ribbon farms, and the hub of Native American trails intersecting at the riverfront and Woodward Avenue that later became the city's major radial avenues.

During the early 1800s as the city continued to grow, farmland on the river side of Jefferson Avenue was divided into smaller lots for businesses. By the 1830s the riverfront had so many stores, taverns, and boarding houses, it became known as the “dollar” side of Jefferson Avenue.<sup>5</sup> Advertisements in the *Detroit Free Press* during the 1830s and 1840s indicate that businesses along the riverfront sold dry goods, groceries, cutlery, hardware and stoves.

<sup>3</sup> “November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed” MSU Libraries.  
<https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Ellis Roberts, *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present* (Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Friend Palmer, “Earlier Days in Detroit.” *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

The shoreline of the Detroit River was continuously filled in and expanded to make more room for hotels, bringing in tourists and seamen. The Mansion House, built in 1836, became a gathering place for mariners and was later converted into a charity home for unemployed sailors. Although the building became somewhat rundown as a result, it was still viewed by Detroiters as a charitable and worthy institution and remained in use as late as 1920. Mariners were also welcomed at the Mariner's Church on the northwest corner of Woodward Avenue and Woodbridge Street, built in 1848 to serve traveling seamen and sailors.

Given its strategic location and proximity to Canada, Detroit became an early station on the Underground Railroad, with the height of this activity occurring between 1838 and 1865. The intricate network of safe houses and routes transferring enslaved people away from slave-holding states generally ended at one of at least seven points for entering Canada from Michigan. The United States Congress essentially ended slavery and involuntary servitude in Michigan by enacting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. Great Britain followed suit and in 1793 began a phased termination of slavery in Upper Canada (future Ontario). At various points in time, enslaved people would escape to either the United States or Canada depending on the location granting the most favorable legal status.<sup>6</sup>

The large and sympathetic network of individuals and churches in Detroit, such as the Second Baptist Church, sponsored relocation via the one-mile boat trip from the downtown docks. At the peak of the Underground Railroad, it is estimated that around 1,500 people left from Detroit each year.<sup>7</sup> Around 1859 for example, as many as ninety-four enslaved people were transferred in one week.<sup>8</sup> Docks along the city's entire riverfront including the future Hart Plaza site were vital to the Underground Railroad. Mariner's Church may have also been an important stop along the Underground Railroad. When the church was moved to a new location in 1955 to make way for the civic center, a brick tunnel was reportedly discovered that led to the river, suggesting it had been used to move enslaved people to the waterfront where they could board boats and be ferried across to Canada. This route is commemorated in the present-day Gateway to Freedom memorial in Hart Plaza and its counterpart directly across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario.

Beginning in the 1850s warehouses and steamboat docks began to displace the small retail stores. The new warehouses constructed along the riverfront housed the American Eagle Tobacco Company, which had several warehouses and offices near the river on Atwater between Woodward and Shelby (1884), Lawson, Howard & Co, a grain merchant at Griswold and Atwater (1843), and the Detroit Steam Supply Company (1884).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Katie Korth, "Hart Plaza: A History." Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. 23 April 2013, 4.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

As tourism began to develop in the city in the later nineteenth century, tension developed between the needs of these two contrary riverfront industries. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated 1884 mentioned with disapproval that business and warehouse owners stored extra freight on the sidewalks on Shelby Street between Jefferson and the river, forcing pedestrians to walk in the streets. The article went on to mention that this was (regrettably in its opinion) the first sight of vacationers coming to Detroit via steamboat liner.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Before Noguchi – Detroit's Civic Center Plans***

The idea of a park in the center of the city along the waterfront was widely discussed as early as 1891, when City of Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree gave his annual message to the Common Council. For the next sixty years, ideas were proposed, plans were drafted, architects and landscape designers were consulted, but no meaningful construction took place. This section will briefly summarize the legacy of these early efforts.

Pingree's vision for a downtown civic park was in line with the developing ideals of the City Beautiful movement. In 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, which featured a prominent display of monumental buildings arranged around a formal lagoon. The exhibition, with its emphasis on symmetry, beauty, and order, captured the public imagination and helped give rise to the City Beautiful movement. By the early 1900s American city planners were calling for monumental arrangements surrounding open plazas and malls, so elegantly displayed by the formal groupings of buildings at the World's Columbian Exposition, as an antidote to cities that were overcrowded, poorly planned, and congested. The Common Council took no action to implement a new riverfront park for the burgeoning downtown.

Aside from private and commercial development, Detroit had few major public works projects in the century following Woodward's plan, with the exception of Grand Boulevard, a twelve-mile ring encircling the city perimeter, Waterworks Park, a public leisure ground at the site of the city's water intake system upriver, and plans for Belle Isle, the city's largest park that marked the eastern terminus of the Boulevard. In the wake of the Columbian Exposition, there was no shortage of enthusiasm for much needed public improvements, and in the fall of 1904 the Detroit Board of Commerce invited Charles Mulford Robinson to Detroit, to make a study to recommend improvements for the city.

Robinson was a newspaper editor, author, and professor celebrated as one of the United States' first urban planners and an early proponent of the City Beautiful movement. Robinson's preliminary recommendations resulted in the creation of a Committee on Civic Improvement, which immediately invited Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. to undertake a more expansive study. As one of the nation's preeminent landscape architects and a pioneer in comprehensive city and regional planning, Olmsted was the obvious choice to guide the city in its necessary public improvements.

<sup>10</sup> "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Although Olmsted's study offered more concrete recommendations, the separate studies by Robinson and Olmsted both provided valuable insights into Detroit's much needed public improvements. Olmsted and Robinson agreed on two key points: the importance of rectifying the improper disposition of monumental public buildings throughout the downtown core, and that linking this monumental grouping to the Detroit River was essential for the image of the future city. Robinson proposed that the commercial waterfront at the center of the city should be a "water-gate—the official entrance to the city" and reclaimed for aesthetic development.<sup>11</sup>

As cities continued to develop at a pace that left little time for thoughtful planning, turn-of-the-century city planners redirected their dreams of a comprehensive city-wide plan into a much more accessible goal: the design of a civic center, similar to what was so beautifully displayed in Chicago. It was further hoped that the typology of a civic center, an idealized city in miniature, with its well-thought-out placement of streets, buildings, and plazas, would serve as a model for the city at large. In the early 1920s the Detroit City Plan Commission and renowned architect and planner Eliel Saarinen collaborated on a picturesque civic center plan near the Detroit riverfront.

Saarinen was hired by the city in 1921 to help design and select the most appropriate location for a locate a war memorial and civic auditorium to memorialize its fallen soldiers and serve the growing need for a convention hall and civic meeting place. He was the foremost architect of his generation in Finland before moving to the United States. By 1914 he had become widely known in Europe for his Helsinki railroad station and urban planning projects for Reval (now known as Tallinn), Estonia, and Canberra, Australia. In 1922 he placed second in the Chicago Tribune tower competition with a design that influenced an entire generation of skyscrapers. As a result, Saarinen was invited by Emil Lorch to teach design courses at the University of Michigan in 1923. In later years, Saarinen created a lasting influence through his architectural designs that included churches and a large part of the campus at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, at Bloomfield Hills near Detroit, where he also served as president of the academy before becoming head of the graduate department of architecture and city planning.

Saarinen proposed a civic center scheme at the foot of Woodward, which was the location he determined to be best suited for the proposed Memorial Hall to honor the city's war veterans. His 1924 plan envisioned a picturesque grouping of public buildings that included a city hall and municipal complex surrounding a wedge-shaped plaza.

Saarinen's plan was a sweeping vision for the site, and it received wide acclaim from the Sub-Committee on Site, the City Plan Commission, engineers of the Rapid Transit Commission, and the local press. The proposed civic center project met its first obstacle with the price tag for the Memorial Hall. Originally budgeted at just over \$5 million, the Memorial Hall project ballooned

<sup>11</sup> Detroit Board of Commerce, *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905). This includes Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43; and Charles Mulford Robinson, "Report of Charles Mulford Robinson," 45-67, hereafter cited as one work.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

into a massive twenty-year, \$100-million development, requiring an estimated \$30 million for the acquisition of property alone, and taking up twelve blocks of what was still prime city real estate.<sup>12</sup> The Detroit Common Council was undeterred and agreed to place condemnation proceedings on the spring ballot. However, the election in 1924 of a new mayor, John W. Smith, halted the whole plan. Smith viewed the entire project as an extravagance and preferred to direct the city's resources toward more practical infrastructural improvements. Saarinen's plan remained just a vision.

During Mayor Smith's administration, which lasted from 1924 until 1928, there were no further plans for the civic center. From 1929 until the mid-1940s, the Great Depression and World War II halted most construction work in the city, and city resources were generally directed toward relieving the effects of the Depression and supporting the war effort.

In the fall of 1943 forty civic-minded architects formed the Architect's Civic Design Group to consider postwar "highways, residential developments, business and cultural centers, and suburban projects."<sup>13</sup> Foremost on their agenda was the study of waterfront development at the foot of Woodward Avenue, although they also considered design solutions to other problems that had affected the city, such as so-called blighted districts and overcrowding. A 1943 *Detroit News* article entitled, "Can We Build a City That Will Give Us Health, Happiness?" noted that the group was working out a new comprehensive plan for Detroit that would transform the city into a better place to live.

In 1944, Mayor Edward Jefferies' office issued a brochure, entitled *Post-War Improvements To Make Your Detroit a Finer City in Which to Live and Work*, which prominently featured "a dignified, unified Civic Center, which will not only symbolize our pride in our city, but which, even more importantly, will bring together at one central and accessible point the now scattered municipal departments and offices." The civic center plan in the brochure was not the 1924 design by Saarinen, but a newly devised plan based on the preliminary studies undertaken for the City Plan Commission by Suren Pilafian, one of the architects working with the Architect's Civic Design Group.

Pilafian first came to public notice when the thirty-two-year-old Turkish-born Detroit architect won a competition for a campus plan and Student's Center Building for Wayne University (later renamed Wayne State University). Pilafian later became the University's campus architect in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>12</sup> "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.

<sup>13</sup> Donald E. Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (University of Pittsburgh, 2013, 242. No listing of the architects in the group was found, but the group was chaired by Branson V. Gamber and included Suren Pilafian and Saarinen.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Two years later, the City Plan Commission began to issue its Master Plan for the City of Detroit in a series of booklets that addressed recreation, the thoroughfare system, and general land use. The Civic Center Plan, number 3 in the Master Plan series, was published in October 1946. Although the Commission acknowledged that this site had been “for years recognized as appropriate for this development,” it stated that they had surveyed the entire city to identify the best possible site and settled on the riverfront as providing the best location based on six factors, including proximity to the central business district, accessibility via both public and private transportation, relatively low land costs, historical significance, and inherent natural beauty.<sup>14</sup>

Although the booklet outlining the civic center plan credited it as “based in large part on preliminary studies undertaken for the Plan Commission by Mr. Suren Pilafian,” the design had evolved considerably since the sketch in the Mayor’s office brochure of two years earlier, with the City Plan Commission noting that “the final design exploits to the fullest the natural dignity of the site.” To the west was a V-shaped Veteran’s Service Building with a convention hall beyond, while to the east was a civic auditorium, recognizable as the shape of the future Ford Auditorium, but oriented east-west rather than north-south as it would eventually be executed. The brochure also noted that, “the natural slope of the land in the plaza area will make available large amounts of underground space, of which four acres will be utilized as exhibition halls. Underground accommodations for 800 automobiles have also been indicated.”<sup>15</sup>

Although the city government had invested at least three years and two publications in Pilafian’s plan, in February 1947 the Detroit Chapter of the AIA advised the Common Council and the City Plan Commission to retain Saarinen, Swanson, Saarinen Associates as consultants for the proposed civic center’s plaza as well as the architectural treatment of the remaining buildings. This recommendation not only dismissed the significance of the initial contribution Pilafian had already made to the design of the civic center, but also paralleled the recommendation that had been made back in 1942, when Pilafian won the Wayne campus competition. In announcing the award of the campus competition, the jury recommended that Pilafian “be invited to restudy his design, and he should feel free to invite the collaboration of other architects [...] to achieve a more expressive quality.” Furthermore, the jury hoped that Pilafian would agree to collaborate with the second-place winner – the firm of Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen.

More than twenty years had passed since Eliel Saarinen first presented his 1924 civic center design, and the architect was seventy-four years old. Now, Eliel’s thirty-seven-old son, Eero Saarinen, joined his father in developing the 1947 plan. The younger Saarinen was born in Finland but attended public schools in Michigan after moving with his family to the United States in 1923. In 1929 he studied sculpture at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris but, as he recounted years later, “it never occurred to me to do anything but follow in my father’s footsteps.” He studied architecture at Yale University and conducted research on housing and city planning with the Flint Institute of Research and Planning in Flint, Michigan, before joining his father’s practice in Bloomfield Hills in 1938.

<sup>14</sup> City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit - A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946), 9-11.

<sup>15</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 13.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen's design for the civic center retained several elements of the earlier Pilafian plan, including the placement of key buildings - the county-city building, state and federal buildings, Veterans' Memorial Building, convention hall (now a circular structure) and civic auditorium. The defining feature of the plaza was now an elongated tear-shaped reflecting pool along the axis of the civic auditorium with a less rectilinear and freer flowing park south of the pool including curved walks, extensive lawn areas, and trees. Saarinen provided several revised designs for the County-City building, and each rendition included new refinements to the surrounding civic center, especially the landscaping of the plaza below Woodward Avenue. The proposed cost was \$50 million.

### *Detroit's Civic Center takes shape*

In the early 1950s the city began to demolish waterfront structures in preparation for implementation of the civic center. the area had developed into a patchwork collection of parking lots, dock buildings, and industrial sites. As the transportation focus of the city had moved away from the riverfront and towards rail and road travel, many of the warehouses erected on the river side of Jefferson Avenue fell into disuse and the small storefront businesses had been closed, razed, and replaced with parking lots. A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that the site included a multi-story parking lot and a store named Sam's Drugs and Shoes. The one industry that did survive along the riverfront were the excursion steamboat companies, which used the dock area. Although the steamboats attracted tourists and Detroit residents to the riverfront during the summer months, the area that became Hart Plaza was mostly vacant during the remainder of the year.

The one exception to the general demolition of the waterfront area was Mariners' Church, which was deemed too important to raze. In 1955 the church was relocated from the northwest corner of Woodward and Woodbridge, on a site that is now the lawn panel east of the labor union monument *Transcending*, to its current location nine hundred feet to the east to the corner of Jefferson and Randolph.

Veterans' Memorial Hall (currently known as the UAW-Ford Center), was the first civic center building to be completed, along the civic center's west boundary. This building was constructed in 1950 to plans by the Detroit-based architecture firm of Harley, Ellington and Day. In 1955 the same firm completed another important building anchoring the civic center - the City-County building, now known as the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, at the northeast corner of Jefferson and Woodward. A year later, in 1956, the design firm Odell, Hewlett and Luckenbach completed the Ford Auditorium along the eastern boundary. In 1960, Mayor Pingree's vision of a convention space on the riverfront was finally realized with the nearby completion of Cobo Hall (later Cobo Center, now Huntington Place), one of the nation's first large convention centers, designed by Gino Rossetti while he was with design firm Giffels and Vallet.

The civic center buildings completed during the 1950s and 1960s were very different from the Art Deco and Neoclassical monuments envisioned by the 1924 Saarinen plan or the realized buildings in the immediate neighborhood of the same era. All were International-style buildings sheathed in or featuring white marble. Along with Minoru Yamasaki's Michigan Consolidated

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Gas Building (1962) at the northwest corner of Jefferson and Woodward, with its vibrant white precast concrete panel exterior, the civic center buildings created a modern, uniform perimeter for the future plaza. They were accented by pools, such as the reflecting pool in front of the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Building, and sculptures including Marshall Fredericks' Spirit of Detroit (on the west end of the City-County Building) and Victory Eagle (on the north side of the Veterans' Memorial Building), and Giacomo Manzu's Passo di Danza in front of the Gas Company building.

However, the centerpiece of the civic center design – the plaza – was still not implemented, and aerial imagery from the period shows the shining white marble buildings surrounding acres of surface parking lots below. In the decades that followed the construction of the civic center buildings, the City deliberated on the best approach for developing the plaza. To further develop the design of the civic center plaza, Saarinen brought in a partner with whom he had worked on previous projects, Dan Kiley. Kiley was a nationally known landscape architect with a long history of collaboration with prominent architects, including Louis Kahn and I. M. Pei. In 1946, Kiley was on the winning team with Eero Saarinen for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition, known colloquially as the Saint Louis Arch, and in 1955, again with Saarinen, he designed the garden for J. Irwin Miller's family in Columbus, Indiana, perhaps the most important postwar garden in the United States.

In 1955, perhaps as a result of the collaboration with Kiley, the City of Detroit's Committee on Civic Design "unanimously and enthusiastically" endorsed the new design and overall shape of Saarinen's civic center plaza design. A few days later, the Common Council approved Saarinen and Kiley's surface treatment for the plaza. It is unclear what refinements Kiley and Saarinen made to the plan since 1947, as no drawings or renderings have been found, and despite the approval of the Common Council, there was still no execution of the plan.

In 1962 thirty-three-year-old Jerome P. Cavanagh became Mayor of Detroit after winning a landslide victory over the incumbent Louis C. Miriani, becoming one of the country's youngest big-city mayors. During his eight-year administration, he became nationally recognized as an outstanding leader who adopted Lyndon B. Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also known as the Model Cities Act) and obtained \$490 million in federal funding that was invested into a nine square mile section of Detroit's inner city in the hopes of setting new standards in urbanization and quelling poverty.

In a letter to Mayor Cavanagh dated June 15, 1964, Charles Blessing, Director of Detroit's City Plan Commission, wrote that since the Saarinen/Kiley plan was approved in 1955, the need for an underground parking structure and roadway across the civic center plaza had been recognized (despite these being features of plans going back to the 1940s), and a new plan which retained the "essential features" of the Saarinen design, while incorporating the garage and roadway, had been reviewed and approved by all affected city departments. Blessing recommended that the plaza plan be presented to the Common Council with Kiley in attendance to explain the design (Eero Saarinen had died in 1961) and that Kiley should be engaged to complete the detailed design and surface treatment. Once cost estimates had been obtained, the city should proceed with construction.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Blessing was both an architect and city planner and served as Director of the City of Detroit's City Plan Commission from 1953 until 1977, so his recommendation should have carried considerable weight. Under Blessing's leadership, Detroit had carried out a series of ambitious attempts to reshape its urban landscape by sweeping aside small commercial buildings and single-family housing and replacing them with new modern buildings and parks such as the Mies van der Rohe-designed Lafayette Park residential development just east of downtown, and an industrial development in Corktown to the west, both clearance projects under the Federal Urban Renewal Act. That same year, in 1964, the Detroit City Plan Commission had received the prestigious American Institute of Planners (AIP) Honors Award in Comprehensive Planning for implementing many of the facilities plans for schools and recreational resources, which confirmed that Detroit had greatly improved the city's municipal services. Yet the realization of the civic center plaza still stymied city planners.

Despite Blessing's firm endorsement, there was another plan under review for the plaza, by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G). In February 1965, the Common Council authorized the City of Detroit to provide funds for architectural and engineering services to SH&G, who were commissioned to provide construction documents for the civic center plaza and underground garage. The project amount was listed as \$415,000 for the architectural and engineering services for SH&G to provide the construction documents.<sup>16</sup> It is unclear if at this time SH&G were merely expected to provide construction documents for the Saarinen and Kiley plan amended by the City Plan Commission, or to develop an entirely new plan. Since Kiley was initially retained as a consultant to SH&G, this may have been the original intention. However, it was clear by the following fall that SH&G were moving toward a very different design.

City Plan Commission staff voiced their alarm at the changes. In a letter dated October 8, 1965, Blessing relayed to Mayor Cavanagh the view of the City Plan Commission that the Saarinen plan was far superior to the proposal by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. In providing reasons for this recommendation, Blessing stated that the elements of Saarinen's design – the reflecting pool, architectural treatment of steps, pedestrian paved areas, and the “generously sloping lawn extending from the reflecting pool to the river's edge” - more effectively related to the adjacent buildings, the Ford Auditorium and the Veterans' building. He also noted that Saarinen's design has “greater utility functionally in terms of the large open surface adapted to use by maximum numbers of people...and represents the ideal expression of a great city park along a beautiful river.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> No information was found on why the Common Council decided to award the contract for the plaza to Smith Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G), and there was no date found to indicate when Kiley was eventually retained as a consultant to SH&G. The contract may have been awarded to SH&G because they were based locally in Detroit, whereas Eero Saarinen had died, and Kiley was based outside of Michigan.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Jerome Cavanagh. October 8, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Despite the push of city planners to retain the integrity of the Saarinen plan, their efforts were dealt another blow in the fall of 1965 when Kiley, who had worked so closely with Eero Saarinen, withdrew from the project. Kiley had openly expressed his concerns about the design direction of the SH&G proposal, such as their treatment of the fountain and the scheme which he labeled as “dramatic – the scale is much too big.” In an October 18, 1965, letter to Robert Hastings, president of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Kiley expressed his reasons for leaving but also indicated the importance of a new feature that would ultimately shape the future design of the plaza. Kiley observed that for the project to be successful there should only be “one strong designer.”<sup>18</sup> He also noted that the plaza program had changed considerably since he and Eero Saarinen had devised their plan in 1955.<sup>19</sup> Among the significant changes to the plaza, Kiley called attention to the fountain, which he called “a major focal point for the entire plaza development,” and the underground parking structure, which had become “a controlling feature to the design solution.”<sup>20</sup>

The fountain referenced in Kiley’s letter to Robert Hastings was the first mention of what would become the central element of the plaza design. The City of Detroit had received notice of a bequest of \$2 million from Anna Thompson Dodge, in honor of her late husband, the American automotive innovator Horace E. Dodge, Sr., and their son Horace E. Dodge. While the sources do not state when Dodge notified the city of her plans, it was most likely between December 1963, when her son died, and Kiley’s letter in 1965 (Dodge passed away in 1970).

SH&G’s design for the plaza was a major departure from the Saarinen/Kiley plan. While Saarinen’s plan was free-flowing and curvilinear, the SH&G plan was rectilinear and regimented. It centered on a large square pool surrounded by a series of small square lawn panels set in paving. Geometric groupings of trees separated the pool from the adjoining buildings and from Jefferson Avenue. A vertical sculpture element aligned along the axis of Woodward just south of Jefferson, in approximately the future location of the Pylon, but the north-south axis through the center of the pool did not align with the street grid. South of the pool was a triangular lawn panel, with a viewing platform extending out over the river at the southwest corner of the site, aligned with the main wing of the Veterans’ Memorial Building. Atwater Street was carried under the plaza, and the underground parking garage was accessed by ramps in front of Cobo Hall and the Veterans’ building.

While the SH&G model for the plaza included a conception of the fountain for the pool, they determined that the construction of the civic center plaza surface treatment should not begin without first having an approved pool and fountain design. In a memorandum from the civic center plaza and underground garage meeting dated May 1968, Sigmund Blum of SH&G noted,

<sup>18</sup> Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

"...since the pool and fountain area is the central theme of the Plaza, it must be a vibrant and exciting element. New ideas, capturing the spirit of Detroit, must be reflected in its design."<sup>21</sup>

In order to accomplish this objective, Blum suggested either "an international competition to select a design, or that a group of prominent Detroiters be organized to select an artist."<sup>22</sup> It was a point on which Blum and Blessing could finally agree. Blessing suggested that a memo be prepared, in the interest of identifying a fountain designer and for general discussion on the topic with the Mayor, Common Council and various Commissions concerned with the development of the Plaza. An eleven-member Fountain Selection Committee was established in April 1971 to select a fountain designer. The Fountain Selection Committee was handpicked by Mayor Roman Gribbs and included Detroiters who were well known for their expertise and achievements in business, arts, and architecture.

### *Isamu Noguchi and Detroit's Civic Center Plaza*

The committee chose for the fountain design Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi's artistic work spanned from sculptures to theater set designs, and included the design of public spaces in cities throughout the world. Noguchi was born in 1904, the son of a well-educated New Yorker, Leonie Gilmour, and a Japanese poet, Yonejiro Noguchi. The two had enjoyed a collaboration as editor and author, but Yonejiro returned to Japan before Isamu's birth. Leonie raised their son in a tent village of immigrants just outside of Los Angeles. In 1907, as anti-Japanese sentiment grew in the United States, Leonie moved to Japan so that Noguchi would not face the harsh discrimination against Asian Americans that resulted in their children attending segregated schools. He returned to the United States to attend high school at age thirteen, but the culture of Japan remained a constant influence on his work.

While still a teenager, Noguchi apprenticed briefly with Danish-American sculptor Gutzon Borglum in his Connecticut studio, with mixed results, as Borglum declared that Noguchi had no future in sculpture. Perhaps as a result of this indictment, Noguchi enrolled in Columbia University's pre-medical program, but continued to pursue his interest in sculpture through night classes at a local art school. Noguchi eventually dropped out of medical school to focus more completely on his artistic pursuits. In 1926, Noguchi received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study sculpture in Paris and travel throughout India and China. He returned to the United States and held his first solo exhibition, which firmly established him as a fixture of the New York artist community.

Noguchi's work was not widely recognized in the United States until he completed a large-scale sculpture in 1938 that symbolized the freedom of the press. The project was commissioned for the Associated Press building in Rockefeller Center, New York City. The commission became the first of his public works celebrated worldwide, and reflected his belief in the social significance of sculpture. Noguchi collaborated with artists working in a wide range of

<sup>21</sup> Meeting Memorandum - Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 - May 1970.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

disciplines, including stage sets that he created for the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham in the 1930s, as well as dancers and choreographers Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, and George Balanchine. In 1937 he designed a Bakelite intercom for the Zenith Radio Corporation, and in 1947 his glass-topped table was produced by Herman Miller – a design which is still produced today. In the 1960s he began working with stone carver Masatoshi Izumi, a collaboration that continued until his death.<sup>23</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, anti-Japanese sentiment was high. While Japanese-Americans on the East Coast were not as liable to relocation to internment camps as those on the West Coast, Noguchi decided to work as the sole volunteer at an internment camp in Arizona where he hoped to use art and community activity to establish an “ideal cooperative community.” Recognizing the need for improved morale among those forced to live in internment camps, Noguchi created a design for parks, recreational facilities, and a traditionally inspired Japanese cemetery that he hoped would bridge the cultural divide between the east and the west. The War Relocation Authority refused to implement his design, but his unrealized plans for a park in the internment camp was his first landscape design project. The notion of public spaces that inspire and provide a cultural bridge between two worlds remained a permanent feature in his emerging ethos.

Noguchi’s exploration of playscapes and sculpture began in the early 1930s and led to his wider view of shaping landscapes. A plaster model produced in 1933 showed the three-dimensional landscape he proposed for a full city block park in New York, consisting of a low stepped pyramid, with sweeping semi-circular ramp leading around to the apex, and concave depression at the foot. Dubbed “Play Mountain,” it provided a design for an equipment-less playground, where the sculpture of the land itself provided varied surfaces for creative play. Play Mountain was never constructed, but Noguchi’s experimentation with playscapes continued. He designed several creative playground structures with a focus on unique geometry or materials in their construction, which achieved some acclaim. He later described Play Mountain as “the kernel out of which have grown all my ideas relating sculpture to the earth.”<sup>24</sup>

Noguchi also collaborated from 1960 to 1966 with architect Louis Kahn on a playground design for Riverside Park, on the upper west side of New York City. Numerous models were created by the duo as they sought to refine their design. Prominent in several versions are stepped pyramids, semi-circular terraced landforms, and structures formed of large square blocks of various heights stepped for sitting or jumping. Politics eventually terminated the Riverside Park project. Though the designs exist only as models, the foundation of Noguchi’s concepts of a sculptured land was already being honed.

By the time Noguchi was approached by Detroit’s Fountain Selection Committee, he had designed smaller-scale landscapes for corporations, museums, and institutions throughout the United States, and in Israel, France, and Japan. His invitation to design a patio in an area of the new UNESCO Headquarters site in Paris by architect Marcel Breuer provided his first

<sup>23</sup> “Biography,” The Noguchi Museum. “Musings on Isamu Noguchi’s Hart Plaza,” <https://www.noguchi.org/noguchi/biography> (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 22.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

application of larger landscape planning – from a sculptor’s point of view. In what would become a recurring theme, Noguchi ultimately designed a space much larger than his initial patio, considering the design of the surrounding buildings as he sought to lay out and fill this undeveloped space. Inspired by the traditional design of Japanese gardens, his plan incorporated sculpted, terraced land surrounding a centered, lower-level lake, with interplay between pathways, a stream, topography, and intentional use of green space. Noguchi personally selected rocks from Japan and native Japanese plantings were imported and installed under the direction of Japanese gardener Toemon Sano. Defined as a garden and not as a plaza, Noguchi instructed that UNESCO is “...an ambulatory garden, the enjoyment of which is enhanced by walking in it whereby one perceives the relative value of all things.”<sup>25</sup> The completed project in 1958 provided a haven of peace in the heart of Paris. Although small by later comparative standards, and typically only open to UNESCO employees and delegates instead of truly a public space, elements and textures of this design came to be seen again in the final design for Hart Plaza and Noguchi’s later public spaces.

Water features interested Noguchi. He designed a fountain for Expo '70, a world’s fair held in Suita, Osaka, Japan, where the designs astounded visitors with a display of water that “jetted down one hundred feet, rotated, sprayed, and swirled...disappeared and reappeared as a mist.”<sup>26</sup> The fountains were a collaboration between Noguchi, Japanese-American architect Shoji Sadao, and Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, and set the stage for Noguchi’s later work as a designer of exterior artistic installations and the complementary landscapes that surround them. Charles Blessing cited the Osaka fountain design in a personal letter to Noguchi in the summer of 1971 as he encouraged him to submit a proposal to Detroit.<sup>27</sup> Noguchi submitted his fountain proposal to the Fountain Selection Committee in late August 1971.

Noguchi’s selection as artist for the fountain almost immediately sparked contention. Much of it came from David Elgin Dodge, a member of the selection committee who had also submitted his own design. In September 1971, Dodge complained that Noguchi had not submitted a sketch of his design, only a verbal description. He also pointed out a technicality: The location of Noguchi’s fountain was to be at the center of the plaza, not the foot of Woodward Avenue as stipulated by Anna Thomson Dodge (her will used the phrase ‘the fountain in the park at the foot of Woodward’). The fact that SH&G’s 1960s design for the plaza also placed the fountain at the center of the plaza appears to reinforce the idea that this was sour grapes on the part of Dodge. A friend of the Dodge family defended him, saying that Dodge “is a registered architect who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, not just some little rich boy who says: ‘I’m going to do this because grandma gave the money.’...David Dodge [living in Switzerland] is understandably unhappy because his plan, sweated out with William Wesley Peters, chief architect of the Wright

<sup>25</sup> “Garden of Peace,” UNESCO. *Le Courier*, Special Edition. November 1958, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), 174.

<sup>27</sup> Charles A. Blessing letter to Isamu Noguchi. July 15, 1971, Detroit, Michigan. MS\_PROJ\_156\_003, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Foundation's Taliesin Institute, didn't win."<sup>28</sup> The issue was finally resolved by the city agreeing to name the plaza "Dodge Brothers Plaza" in return for the family's agreement to drop the requirement that the fountain be on the plaza's street edge.<sup>29</sup>

While Noguchi may have had Dodge as an adversary, Charles Blessing appeared to be a supporter. The city planning director was familiar with Noguchi's work at least as early as April 1959, when he penned a letter to Noguchi while was staying at the Beaux Arts Hotel in New York City "I am very hopeful of meeting with you tomorrow – Thursday to talk about a wonderful program we are considering in Detroit, Michigan – a "master plan" of Recreational Hills, recalling your Jefferson National Memorial Competition Submittal. We will have 60,000,000 cubic yards of expressway excavation and we propose using this for a new aspect of the urban scene."<sup>30</sup> Although this particular project never came to fruition, Blessing was clearly aware of Noguchi's concepts of space and distance much earlier than Noguchi's initial Civic Center Fountain plan presentation in 1971.

Another development was that SH&G's Hastings, with the support of the selection committee, recommended that Isamu Noguchi be awarded the commission not just for the fountain but the entire plaza. It was particularly remarkable as Hastings was the chairman of SH&G, which had just completed an entirely new design for the plaza. It also represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and public civic space. While Noguchi was accustomed to considering urban spaces as relationships to a whole rather than as singular objects, Hart Plaza would be his first opportunity to execute a commission at this scale. His modernist public spaces consisted of plazas and parks with landscapes designed as sculptural experiences, setting him apart from traditional landscape architects. Noguchi and Shoji Sadao formalized a new partnership, Noguchi Fountain and Plaza, Inc., in 1971, working with Smith, Hinchman & Grylls as local on-site architects and engineers, to complete the project.<sup>31</sup>

Noguchi wrote of his design:

Emerging out of classical symmetry toward a controlled asymmetry and the river beyond, the mood is that of the primeval land we inhabit within America. The vista is defined by the primary forms which themselves invite participation as

<sup>28</sup> Ladd Neuman, "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful," *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.

<sup>29</sup> Julie Morris, "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Charles A. Blessing letter to Isamu Noguchi. April 22, 1959. Beaux Arts Hotel, New York City. MS\_PROJ\_257\_007, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>31</sup> Jenny Dixon, "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza", [docomomo-us.org](https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza). <https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza>. (Accessed June 10, 2018).



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

places of relaxation: to sit and listen to the sounds of the river, the sound of voices, or even music and theater at times...<sup>32</sup>

Noguchi's plaza design for Detroit contained two primary elements inspired by recent events: the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza, and the Pylon at the Jefferson Avenue entrance. In refining the design of the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two, cylindrical stainless, steel legs supporting a large twenty-six-foot diameter ring thirty feet above the ground. In describing the fountain, he noted that he wanted it to "represent our times and our relationship to outer space."<sup>33</sup> His futuristic design motif was in keeping with the times. The 1960s was the decade of the first manned space flights, the development of the powerful Saturn V rocket, and the safe landing of Apollo 11 on the surface of the moon. Noguchi even referenced space travel as an inspiration for the fountain during a presentation to the Fountain Selection Committee in the spring of 1973.

The great fountain, projected to be the most significant of modern times, will rise from the plateau of primal space. It will be an engine for water, plainly associating its spectacle to its source of energy, an engine so deeply a part of Detroit. It will recall and commemorate the dream that has produced the automobile, the airplane, and now the rocket, a machine become a poem.<sup>34</sup>

The base of the stainless steel fountain was set in a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The Dodge Fountain was a technological spectacle, with three hundred water jets within the ring capable of creating thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to the Horace E. Dodge Fountain Selection Committee, August 25, 1971. NFP\_DET\_071\_001. Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Friedman, *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum. 1978), 80.

<sup>34</sup> Isamu Noguchi, typescript of presentation to Fountain Selection Committee, March 1973. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975-79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>35</sup> For a technical discussion about the operation of the Dodge Fountain's mechanical systems, examine "Splashy fountain bejewels motor city plaza." *Engineering News Record*, October 6, 1977, 64, 67, and see also numerous memos and other technical correspondence in the archive of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State



Figure 1: The Dodge Fountain in operation, with both upper and lower water features functioning. Pylon rises in the distance to the right. Circa 1980. Photographer: Balthazar Korab, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office collection.

Noguchi sited the Pylon at the north entrance of the plaza along the centerline of Woodward Avenue, where it served as the fulcrum for a dramatic diagonal axis leading to the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza, and the Detroit River beyond. The concept of the pylon was first introduced in an early plan by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. The architecture firm had conceived of a tall tower placed at the entrance of the plaza, which Noguchi later transformed into a 120-foot stainless steel framed pylon, seven feet square at its base, that twisted into a helix as it rose toward the sky, clad in shining anodized aluminum plate. The form of the helix had recently captured the public imagination when it was discovered, in the 1950s, that the molecular structure of DNA had the smooth three-dimensional curve of a helix. In order to translate the form into a 120-foot-tall structure, the pylon required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. Noguchi later claimed that he had donated the Pylon, “a free gift to get things going”<sup>36</sup> to the city, although it is not clear from the context if he was referring to the design of the piece, or the fabrication itself. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated November 1977 reported that the Pylon cost around \$425,000 and was paid for

<sup>36</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

entirely by private donations.<sup>37</sup> Due in part to the complexity of the fountain design, the Pylon was actually the first element of the plaza to be completed, and a dedication ceremony was held on August 28, 1974.<sup>38</sup>

The remaining elements of Noguchi's plaza plan were designed and placed relative to the Pylon and Dodge Fountain: the stepped pyramid amphitheater reminiscent of Play Mountain at the southeast corner of the plaza, placed perpendicular to the diagonal axis, and the oval amphitheater at the northwest, the pyramid amphitheater's visual counterpart, which led into the underground promenade. Approximately one hundred feet west of the fountain, the granite tiles dipped into a shallow circular depression set into the surface. Noguchi provided a playful visual counterpart to this circular depression to the north, mirrored along the axis established by the amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater, with a fountain and play structure set in a rectangle of square granite slabs of varying heights.

The entire plaza was paved with carnelian granite – a red and black flecked stone from South Dakota. Large pavers, four feet square and finished with a horizontally raked surface specified as “mellogroove” in construction documents and clean cut on the edges, delineated the primary walkways through the plaza, wrapping widely around the fountain and highlighting the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the Veterans' Memorial Building above the Atwater Tunnel. Smaller six-inch square pavers with a rougher finish and an irregular “guillotine” edge encircled the fountain, and provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater and along the waterfront. In writing of his design of the civic center plaza, Noguchi stated, “What is important above all is the sense of space that Hart Plaza supplies. An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people.”

Atwater Street's continuation parallel to the river and beneath the plaza was incorporated into Noguchi's design. The roadway was realigned into a serpentine path, further away from the river where it passed closest to the Dodge Fountain. The roof of the road tunnel was paved in the same large, four-foot-square pavers found on other primary walkways. The tunnel roof therefore afforded direct sightlines to the river from the fountain, both to the east up the Detroit River to Belle Isle, and to the southwest, downriver toward the Ambassador Bridge. The height requirement for vehicle traffic beneath required the surface design to be largely level from Jefferson Street to the Atwater tunnel. Lawn panels then stepped down toward the river, embodying a more natural connection to the water.

Like UNESCO before it, Hart Plaza was meant to be moved through to be experienced. One could not find every plaza feature or experience every viewpoint by standing in a single location. The horizon of the water feels far away, until you move through the growing tree cover and suddenly the water spreads before you, and you can hear it. From the water, your eyes can't

<sup>37</sup> “Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza.” *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.

<sup>38</sup> “Pylon Ceremonies in Civic Center.” City of Detroit News Release, August 28, 1974.

<sup>39</sup> *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space* (Exhibition catalogue, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 29.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

reach the skyline of downtown skyscrapers without first being interrupted by the Dodge Fountain and Pylon in the foreground.

The project began with a great deal of optimism, buoyed by the vision of a public waterfront park that the citizens of Detroit could enjoy throughout the seasons. Noguchi's design of the plaza was generally well received and accepted "as the only way to have it harmonize with the fountain."<sup>40</sup> Blessing and Mayor Roman Gribbs offered Noguchi enthusiastic approval and city support. The Common Council approved Noguchi's design in the spring of 1973. A press release from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls dated March 30, 1973, announcing the presentation to the Detroit Common Council indicates Noguchi's intentions:

In addition to the fountain, the plaza now has the strong emphasis on a wide variety of uses by both large and small groups of people, many of which can occur simultaneously. ... The fountain itself, a 30 foot high ring floating above a walled circular pool, is a refinement of the original concept of an 'engine for water.' ... The plaza now makes provision for a number of public activities on different levels, including a large circular festival amphitheater that can be used for outdoor music, dance, theater, or can be converted to ice skating; a tourist center, a smaller gathering place for a variety of entertainment or educational uses; shopping facilities; a riverfront restaurant directly overlooking the water; a riverside promenade; and underground restrooms, dressing rooms, service areas, etc.<sup>41</sup>

By the fall of 1973 the civic center plan had passed through several mayoral administrations, and was now in the hands of Mayor Coleman A. Young, Detroit's first African American mayor, who asked Noguchi how the plaza would accommodate the annual Ethnic Festivals which had been inaugurated under Young's predecessor Roman Gribbs and had grown from three festivals held in the summer to over twenty.<sup>42</sup>

Plans for the plaza already had it sitting well above grade, having been located on the site of a former parking lot and elevated, due to poor soil conditions, on piles sixteen feet above the riverbank. Noguchi quickly revised his design to include a lower level with space for a riverside service road, a restaurant, and an amphitheater large enough to accommodate the ethnic festivals. A working model of basswood and metal from ca. 1978 shows all key structures and features of the built Noguchi design in place, with only minor changes (including replacing the stepped lawn panels with a gentle slope) undertaken in the as-built final product.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Dedication of Philip A. Hart Plaza***

<sup>40</sup> *The Sculpture of Space*, 178.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, Hinchman & Grylls press release, March 30, 1973.

<sup>42</sup> "Ethnic Festivals on Weekends," Detroit Free Press, June 24, 1979.

<sup>43</sup> Model for Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit, Michigan, 1977-1978, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, <https://archive.noguchi.org/Detail/artwork/6469>. (accessed: May 20, 2022)



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Construction of Hart Plaza took place over several years, and the City held a series of ceremonies to commemorate the completion of its major sculptural elements, its naming and its formal opening. In August 1974, Mayor Young presided at ceremonies marking the completion of the Pylon, the first component of the Plaza, where he noted, "this distinctive landmark is a big step in developing an outstanding, people-oriented, riverfront-downtown area." The presentation of a plaque honoring the role of Robert Hastings, who had recently died, was also part of the ceremony.<sup>44</sup>

The plaza was projected for completion in 1976, in time for the 275th anniversary of Detroit and the bicentennial of the United States. By that summer, however, it was still under construction. With a backdrop of cranes and in the presence of Noguchi, Mayor Young, and other invited guests, dedicated the Dodge Fountain on the afternoon of July 24, 1976. The ceremony took place among the foundations of the sub plaza but open to the sky since the only completed portion of the plaza surface was the circular, granite-paved area directly below the fountain. The water was briefly turned on for the event, but final performance testing did not occur until the fall of 1977.

Although the city had agreed to name the plaza in honor of the Dodge brothers in 1972, by 1977 other considerations took precedence. In 1977 the plaza was officially named Philip A. Hart Plaza in honor of the United States Senator from Michigan, Philip Aloysius Hart, who had died in office on December 26, 1976. On May 18, 1978, Jane Hart, the wife of the plaza's namesake, unveiled the Hart Plaza dedication plaque with Mayor Young and other attendees.

Philip A. Hart was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, in 1912. He studied at Georgetown University, graduating from there in 1934. Hart then studied law at the University of Michigan, and, after completing his legal education, was admitted to the Michigan bar and practiced law in the state until World War II. At the conclusion of the war Hart returned to Michigan, and served in various public posts, including lieutenant governor (1955-1958) until he was elected to the United States Senate in 1958. Hart served eighteen years in the Senate, during which time he was instrumental in passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, among other legislation. Hart was not only respected by his colleagues, his integrity, political courage, and humility resulted in Hart being recognized as "the Conscience of the Senate." In addition to Hart Plaza, several public buildings have been named in Hart's honor, including the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Philip A. Hart Visitor Center in Empire, Michigan; the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, D. C., the only congressional office building to be named for a sitting senator;<sup>45</sup> and the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center (formerly the Battle Creek Sanitarium) in Battle Creek, Michigan, among others.

<sup>44</sup> It is unclear if this plaque is still on the site. It was not observed during field investigations.

<sup>45</sup> "Philip A. Hart: A Featured Biography." United States Senate.  
[www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured\\_Bio\\_Hart.htm](http://www.cop.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_Hart.htm)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Noguchi was back in Detroit in April 1979, for Hart Plaza's final, official dedication and opening. Concurrent with the dedication of the plaza, the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) held an exhibit of Noguchi's work entitled "Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes." In the days leading up to the dedication ceremony, Noguchi attended a formal dinner at the DIA honoring his achievements, and conducted a forum connected with the exhibit opening, along with architect Walter Netsch, art critic Dore Ashton, and curator Jay Belloli, where he shared his thoughts on public projects in Detroit and the world. Noguchi's public speeches framed Hart Plaza in relation to other public projects around the world.

The formal opening of the plaza took place on the afternoon of Friday, April 20, 1979. The announcement for the 1979 dedication ceremony emphasized inclusivity: "come to Downtown's new Hart Plaza and enjoy... Hart Beat. The People's Dedication of the Philip A. Hart Plaza in the Civic Center, Foot of Woodward ... Bring your lunch, bring your camera, bring a friend."<sup>46</sup> Festivities included a mime troupe, a dance company, a church choir, and jazz bands. Mayor Young praised Noguchi to the crowd, who responded with a "long ovation" for the artist and crowded around him after the ceremony, expressing their appreciation for his work and requesting autographs. Noguchi responded modestly, "there's nothing I can add. I've spoken through the fountain."<sup>47</sup>

However, Noguchi did use the occasion to express his unhappiness at the condition of the fountain, and urged the Mayor to maintain it properly. As the *Detroit Free Press* observed nearly ten years later, "the fountain was supposed to have five primary designs and 30 different patterns, taking a half hour to complete its repertoire. It never did. It gurgled, fizzled, spit and just plain didn't work." Noguchi blamed it on lack of proper maintenance:

the problem doesn't seem to be with the design and construction as much as lack of know-how on how to maintain and run the fountain. Some of the pipes have been left on in winter.... It seems an elementary precaution to drain water lines in winter with something costing \$3 million, or \$300 for that matter... A five-gallon paint can [was] dropped into the fountain's filter.... Noguchi [noted] the fountain needs a permanent maintenance man.

Mayor Young was annoyed at the public criticism, noting that the city's budget did not support a full-time maintenance person. Although Young and Noguchi both expressed regret at their words that day, the fountain's operation continued to be an issue. It had a highly sophisticated computerized system to control the light and water within the fountain that frequently clogged due to dirt and debris, a situation not helped when pipes were left on during the winter causing damage from freezing. The fountain continued to limp on, suffering from a lack of maintenance

<sup>46</sup> Hart Plaza Dedication, August 20, 1979. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Heldman, "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

and engineering knowledge, until 1988 when the city committed \$800,000 to rebuild the fountain, with all new valves and computers.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the contretemps over the fountain maintenance, reaction to Hart Plaza was generally favorable. *Detroit Free Press* art critic Marsha Miro summed up the appeal of the plaza as “a wonderful place to be, to lounge, to laze, to gaze in. It is comfortable, pleasant, harmonious. You don’t feel overwhelmed or oppressed by the urban hubbub, but somehow able to cope. It is a people place. Just what we needed.”<sup>49</sup> Director of Public Information for the City of Detroit Joyce Garrett praised Hart Plaza as “the new hub of Detroit,” and informed Noguchi that he would be “thrilled by the throngs of joyous people who are experiencing its facilities daily.”<sup>50</sup>



Figure 2: An aerial view of a well-attended event at Hart Plaza looking generally south, with the Detroit River at top and Jefferson Avenue just out of view at the bottom. The incomplete lawn beds near the river suggest a date around 1980. Photographer: Balthazar Korab, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office collection.

<sup>48</sup> “Dodge Fountain; It works - after 10 years,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988; “Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979; Louis Heldman, “Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

<sup>49</sup> Marsha Miro, “What Noguchi’s Genius Brought to Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.

<sup>50</sup> Joyce F. Garrett, letter to Isamu Noguchi, July 9, 1979, in the Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Noguchi continued his interest in the development of the plaza in the following years, writing letters to express his concerns with how the plaza was used and elements that were added. Noguchi renewed his criticisms to Mayor Young several months after the dedication. He complained that the plaza was not designed to accommodate 100,000 people for the city's large festivals, expressed his distress that kiosks were placed in the parkway to the west, and added, "this may have been a stop gap measure needed to cope with the sudden crowds. But the long range solution would be to go back to the original idea of having the overload handled in a more suitable place that does not ruin the view."<sup>51</sup>

Although the plaza had been officially opened, several key landscape features remained incomplete. In 1979, the chairman of the J.L. Hudson Company, located in downtown Detroit, wrote Noguchi expressing his appreciation at having "left us the Plaza and Fountain" and stated, "I can assure you that many of us will keep a watchful eye on the completion of the landscaping and other details that are still left unattended."

Despite the praise for the plaza, by the early 1980s Noguchi was still frustrated at the lack of progress on the completion of his design. In February 1982, he sent \$2,000 to the City of Detroit's Department of Engineering and Planning with a letter that stated, "the purpose, as you know, is to purchase eight trees which are to be planted in the Hart Plaza in a location which I discussed with Mrs. Larson, in an arc starting near the flagpoles and going towards the river." Half of the donation was from an honorarium he received from a recent talk at the University of Michigan, and the other half was his own personal contribution. Noguchi concluded by stating that the intention of the eight trees is that, "...they will grow to a size which would permit the viewing of the plaza from beneath the branches."

In a letter to the director of the Central Business District Association, penned in 1988 a few months before his death, Noguchi was more exacting in his criticism and reflective of his misgivings:

As you must know I am the one who worked on what there is there [sic] starting in 1971, over a period of seven years. The design is mine to the smallest detail...the company I formed, together with Shoji Sadao to assist me, received hardly anything because the working drawings which accurately followed our specifications had to be done by Smith Hinchman & Grylls and they took 60%, I hope you will appreciate that I feel I deserve consideration in whatever transpires in Hart Plaza...

The flagpoles are a hodgepot [sic] of flags with light fixtures; the light stands entirely decorative...I suggested that tall poles for general lighting could be used at the perimeter...Imagine my shock on visiting Hart Plaza on July 3rd and finding a forest of bright aluminum poles crowding in on the fountain; in direct confrontation with the fountain. This type of fussy light fixtures [is] no doubt

<sup>51</sup> Isamu Noguchi Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, August 22, 1979. Detroit, Michigan - Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 - 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

intended to bring interest to buildings where this is lacking. The globes of light are intended to light themselves, to draw attention, and are not an efficient source of lighting for the space. This is probably why there are so many.

It would be nice and appropriate if the designers work could be respected when changes or “improvements” are made by others. I was not informed. I hope you will understand my distress.<sup>52</sup>

It is not clear if Noguchi received a letter in reply or if his concerns were considered in later improvements.

### *Later Additions to Hart Plaza*

Beginning shortly before Noguchi’s death in 1988 various additions have been made to Hart Plaza. In 1986 the works of Noguchi and his one-time instructor Gutzon Borglum were integrated when Borglum’s bust of Abraham Lincoln was incorporated into the formal green space adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center within Hart Plaza. The space has been referred to as the Lincoln Garden since erection of the sculpture.

Several pieces were added to Hart Plaza to commemorate Detroit’s tricentennial in 2001. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located on a raised lawn panel west of the Dodge Fountain.

On the southern edge of the plaza, facing the river, sits Gateway to Freedom, which illustrates an African American family pointing across the river to Canada where freedom and prosperity wait, marking the Detroit terminus of the Underground Railroad’s safe passage for escaped enslaved people. The companion monument entitled Tower of Freedom is located directly across the river in Windsor, Ontario. The monument in Windsor depicts a formerly enslaved man raising his arms to celebrate his freedom while a Quaker woman offers assistance to a woman and her child.

Edward Dwight, the artist who sculpted both works, was a veteran of the United States Air Force and trained as the first Black astronaut. Although he occasionally “built things with scrap metal,” he harbored no artistic intent until George Brown, Colorado’s first Black lieutenant governor, asked him to create a statue for the state capitol building in 1974. The commission was a success, and helped launch his second career as a sculptor memorializing the struggle for civil rights. Dwight’s body of work would eventually encompass more than one-hundred-twenty memorials, monuments and public art installations as well as gallery sculptures including statues of Martin Luther King Jr., Hank Aaron and Harriet Tubman.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane J. Edgewater. July 8, 1988.

<sup>53</sup> Interview of Edward Dwight by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed: July 20, 2018)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

In March 2001 the Michigan Labor History Society invited over 120 artists and sculptors from across the country to gather in Detroit and envision a monument to the history of the labor movement at Hart Plaza along Jefferson Avenue. The location held an important place in labor history as the site of Detroit's early industries including the fur and ship building trades, as well as more modern industries such as the auto industry which was founded just a few blocks east of Hart Plaza. The site was also in an area of many important events in Detroit's labor history, from the big organizing rallies of the 1930s to the Labor Day parades to the historic civil rights march of 1963 which all took place within a few blocks of the future site of Hart Plaza.

Two months after that initial gathering of artists, the Society received fifty-five proposals for the monument. A panel of five jurists reviewed the submissions and selected three finalists, before agreeing on a joint collaboration between David Barr and Sergio De Giusti. The monument was made possible by donations from more than 1,800 rank-and-file workers and individuals from dozens of unions, organizations and enterprises including the United Auto Workers, Detroit Federation of Teachers, Iron Workers and Roofers Union. In 2003 the monument was completed and installed in Hart Plaza. The artists entitled their joint collaboration "Transcending." It rises 63 feet above street level in the form of two stainless-steel arcs. The arcs are geared on the inside to reflect Detroit's industrial might, and open at the apex to symbolize labor's unfinished work.<sup>54</sup>

In 2006 the Dodge Fountain was refurbished and rededicated by Gretchen Carhartt Valade, philanthropist, chair of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation, and chairwoman emeritus of Detroit-based Carhartt, Inc., sponsor of the free jazz festivals held annually at Hart Plaza. The fountain's computerized water designs were reprogrammed to reflect Noguchi's original intent. A small cast stone monument was installed on the southern edge of the plaza to mark Valade's contribution.

In 2011 the Ford Auditorium, which had sat virtually vacant since around 1990, was demolished, removing one of the major buildings of the original civic center and altering the spatial organization to the immediate east of Hart Plaza.

Public access to Hart Plaza has also changed in more recent times. An important goal of the Noguchi design was to connect the city with its river. The original Noguchi-designed riverfront walk supplied this but was an isolated segment and never fully achieved this goal. In 2003, the non-profit Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was established to plan for and link together various unrelated public access points along the Detroit River into a continuous five-mile public pathway known as the Detroit RiverWalk. Work in the vicinity of Hart Plaza got underway in the mid-2000s, better linking to Cobo Hall to the west, and a connection behind the former Ford Auditorium to the east in 2011. Hart Plaza is now a geographically central component of the RiverWalk, inviting users exploring the riverfront up into its public spaces, and as a welcoming point into the central business district of the city.

### ***Social Use of Hart Plaza***

<sup>54</sup> "Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit." Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

From its inception, Hart Plaza was a hub of Detroit's cultural and social events. The plaza was active year-round, serving as a popular location for weekend festivals, concerts, and rallies in the warmer months and for ice-skating in the wintertime. Well before its completion, Hart Plaza was used for informal activities, such as picnics and sunbathing, as well as organized events like Detroit concert band performances in the summer of 1977. That same year, local radio station WDET and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra held an impromptu rally to protest a state legislative committee's recommendation to slash funds for the arts.

The most significant events held in Hart Plaza in its early years were the popular Ethnic Festivals, inaugurated under Mayor Gribbs. As Gribbs' wife wrote in 1974:

the summer Ethnic Festivals on the riverfront were the idea of Mayor Gribbs and as a result millions of metropolitan Detroiters have has a magnificent time enjoying the cultural, the art and the food of many Ethnic people who have contributed so much to make Detroit the great city that it is. We started with 3 Festivals in the summer of 1970. By 1973 the number have grown to 20. The Ethnic Festivals are the first of their kind in the U.S. to be done over every consecutive weekend throughout the summer.<sup>55</sup>

Festivals included Greek, Italian, Polish, Irish, and African American heritage, later expanding to include the celebration of other many other cultures, including the Festival of India, Festival of Captured Nations, and a Slovenia Festival.

The festivals initially took place at Michigan Avenue and Third Street. Following his election as Mayor, Coleman Young requested that Noguchi alter his design for Hart Plaza to accommodate the festivals, and Noguchi created a lower level to house facilities for the festivals. Organizers had hoped to hold the festivals at Hart Plaza in the summer of 1978, but plans had to be deferred due to delays in construction. Finally, the festivals were first held in Hart Plaza in 1979. With only twenty-one weeks in the summer and shoulder seasons, each group was assigned its own weekend and sometimes different ethnic groups had to share Hart Plaza during the same weekend. The profile of the Ethnic Festivals was raised considerably by their location in such a prominent downtown space, and they dominated the program of the plaza in its early years, with millions of people attending the festivals every year.

During the week, Hart Plaza remained active with weekday programs specifically suited for nearby office workers. Local radio stations set up in the plaza and provided noontime concerts with live performances by artists who were promoting their new albums. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, which was headquartered at the adjoining Ford Auditorium during Hart Plaza's early years, held outdoor performances on the plaza.

<sup>55</sup> Katherine Gribbs, handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society,  
<http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

During the winter, the city operated the amphitheater's lower surface as an ice rink. There were condensers under the sunken amphitheater that were used to create and maintain the ice. The lower level had spaces for skate rental and a warming room. It was a popular destination for winter recreation during the weekend, and equally as popular during the week where office workers often came by for a skating break during their lunch hour.

Given its central location and ability to accommodate large crowds, Hart Plaza was a natural setting for events featuring visiting dignitaries. One of the most significant of these was an address by Pope John Paul II in 1987. It was the first time that a pope had visited the state of Michigan, and an important moment in Michigan's religious history, especially for Catholics. In addition to appearances in heavily Polish Catholic Hamtramck and a Mass in the Pontiac Silverdome, the pope gave a speech on social justice at Hart Plaza on September 19, 1987. The city's annual Labor Day Parade always ended at Hart Plaza and, due to Detroit's importance in the labor movement, the current President or Vice-President of the United States usually came to Hart Plaza to speak during the parade, including Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore.

In the early 1980s, attendance at the Ethnic Festivals at Hart Plaza began to wane. There were several contributing factors: an increase in crime, cultural assimilation as young Detroiters expressed less an interest in attending ethnic events, and urban sprawl as many groups moved outside of the city and took their festivals with them. But with a decline in the Ethnic Festivals came a rise in "Themed Festivals" organized by promoters. These included the International Freedom Festival, a two-week celebration that ended with fireworks at Hart Plaza, the Hoe Down, which was initially sponsored by Budweiser, the Detroit Blues Festival, food-oriented festivals like the Chili Cook-off, Great American Rib Fest, and Ribs & Soul, and the Detroit Riverfront Festival.

Another major annual event held at Hart Plaza was the International Jazz Festival. Founded as the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival, it was the largest free jazz festival in North America, first held over Labor Day Weekend 1980. It was the idea of Robert E. McCabe, the founding president of Detroit Renaissance, an organization created to provide economic stimulus projects for the city in 1971 including housing developments and construction of what is now the GM Renaissance Center. McCabe's inspiration for the jazz festival was "Detroit's history as a great jazz center back in the 1920s and the strong music heritage of the public schools. Music was a very important factor, and it was time to revive it." The festival was developed concurrently with the Detroit Grand Prix and the International Freedom Festival to complement the physical developments of Detroit Renaissance and provide a "more rapid economic impact on the downtown area." Originally called the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival to reflect its partnership with an international jazz festival in Montreux, Switzerland, the festival merged with Detroit's Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in 1991, and is now managed and produced by the



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Detroit International Jazz Festival Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed in 2006.<sup>56</sup>

Beginning in the late 1980s there were significant changes to the programs and maintenance of Hart Plaza. In 1989 the Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved from the adjoining Ford Auditorium to the recently restored Orchestra Hall. The plaza also suffered from cutbacks in maintenance. Initially, the running of Hart Plaza was a three-office operation. The City of Detroit's Recreation Department was responsible for all operations and programming, the Civic Center Department was in charge of maintenance, and the Department of Public Works kept the plaza clean, such as snow removal and cleaning up after the weekend festivals. Unfortunately, the city's best efforts to successfully manage Hart Plaza were impacted by larger forces taking shape throughout the city, which was facing an economic downturn, the loss of wealth to the outlying suburbs, and a struggling middle class. In 1992 the Recreation Department had to lay off many of its staff. Some were eventually hired back, but by then the use of Hart Plaza had changed. Vendors requested to use their own cooking equipment and booths "upstairs" at the plaza level to provide increased visibility from Jefferson Avenue, resulting in the downstairs kitchens and equipment falling into disuse. In the early 2000s the Civic Center Department pulled back from their involvement with Hart Plaza and an independent cleaning company had to be commissioned to clean up the plaza after events. With dwindling staff and financial resources, the maintenance and upkeep of Hart Plaza began to decline.

In 2004, Campus Martius Park in downtown Detroit was completed, with two performance stages and its own ice-skating rink, and the ice-skating rink at Hart Plaza was permanently closed. By that time, the city was trying to get out of the business of funding events at Hart Plaza. The last event that the city collaborated with was the Detroit Electronic Music Festival in 2002. Held every year over Memorial Day weekend, the festival, known by various names over the years but currently called Movement Detroit, celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of the international Techno movement. The festival continues to use Hart Plaza, but without direct city involvement.

Hart Plaza has also been the destination for a number of large-scale, singular events in recent memory. Starting with their 1996-1997 Stanley Cup winning season, the Detroit Red Wings hockey team celebrated their National Hockey League victory with a mile long parade ending down Woodward Avenue at Hart Plaza. Aerial imagery of the event shows a sea of people attending the event clad in the team's red and white colors, filling almost every available surface of the plaza. News coverage of the event estimated attendance of over one million people, one tenth of Michigan's total population.<sup>57</sup> Parades were repeated again for Stanley Cup victories in

<sup>56</sup> Gary Graff, "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years," *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> "From the Vault: Coverage from 1997 Red Wings Stanley Cup victory parade in Detroit." WDIV Detroit Channel 4, [clickondetroit.com](https://www.clickondetroit.com/video/sports/2022/06/02/from-the-vault-coverage-from-1997-red-wings-stanley-cup-victory-parade-in-detroit/).  
<https://www.clickondetroit.com/video/sports/2022/06/02/from-the-vault-coverage-from-1997-red-wings-stanley-cup-victory-parade-in-detroit/> (accessed August 3, 2022.)

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

1998, 2002, and 2008, and for a Detroit Pistons' National Basketball Association championship parade in 2004, each terminating with a celebratory community rally at Hart Plaza. It is likely the only outdoor facility large enough to accommodate gatherings of this scale in the downtown area.

### *The Noguchi Vocabulary*

Time and again, Isamu Noguchi emphasized in his correspondence that a single individual sculpture must take into account its surroundings. In a similar vein, a plaza, garden, or park must look to how it would interact with what surrounds it in order to function properly. In his own words

I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space: a beginning, and a groping to another level of sculptural experience and use: a total sculpture space experience beyond individual sculptures. A man may enter such a space: it is in scale with him; it is real. An empty space has no visual dimension or significance. Scale and meaning enter when some thoughtful object or line is introduced. This is why sculptures, or rather sculptural objects, create space. Their function is illusionist. The size and shape of each element is entirely relative to all the others and the given space. What may be incomplete as sculptural entities are of significance to the whole.

...[i]ts viewing is polydirectional. Its awareness is in depth. With the participation of mobile man all points are central. Without a fixed point of perspective all views are equal, continuous motion with continuous change. The imagination transforms this into a dimension of the infinite.<sup>58</sup>

With this mindset, Noguchi tailored each commission to its particular landscape. While no two installations are identical, a common vocabulary of features and structures emphasize his interests and priorities.

### Experiential Sculpture

Noguchi landscapes were not simply a series of elements set in lines, they were meant to be experienced, and only when you experienced one might you be led to the next. A visitor to Detroit might be drawn from blocks down Woodward Avenue by the Pylon, and from there to the Dodge Fountain. It is only at this time that they discover smaller features such as the cubist water sculpture, which was not visible before. Turning around, the expanse of the Detroit River invites them downward to the water's edge, which had been partially hidden behind the foliage of intentionally-planted shade trees. Turning back, they are suddenly greeted by the gleam of the civic center buildings in the distance, set off by the Dodge Fountain and Pylon at intervening distances, leading you back toward the hustle and bustle.

### Terraces and Platforms for Seating, Performances, and Play

<sup>58</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968, 161.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Play Mountain, Noguchi's early design for an equipment-less playscape of the 1930s, provided his initial inspiration toward play, where the design of the landscape itself provided platforms, treatments and landforms for people of all ages to express themselves. No definitive structures were created in Play Mountain for this purpose, and this mindset is exhibited in Hart Plaza as well. Visitors young and old alike might make structural elements of Hart Plaza their own to enjoy – the uneven steps of the pyramid amphitheater, the circular path of the spiral seating sculpture, or the scattered blocks of the cubist water sculpture, where water was never implemented, all afford a visitor the chance to make the sculpture their own.

#### Fountains and Water Features

Noguchi's landscape work regularly formed around a centralized water feature. These were not uniform in materials, design, or scale. Rather than consider how a water feature might form a draw in the space, it appears Noguchi's water features were designed based on how he wanted visitors to interact with the water. In Hart Plaza, the Dodge Fountain is a powerful, but approachable centerpiece. Visitors can walk down the gently sloping stone pavers right up to the fountain's charging water, reaching out to touch the cascading torrents as they overflow the pool, or feel the spray on their face when it catches the wind. The fountain seems to invite them in, and once they are there, they are welcomed in another direction, to experience something else new.

2nd Return

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

***Noguchi's Later Public Spaces***

Public spaces as defined in this section constitute those landscapes designed by Noguchi which were intentionally built for the public (either with public or private funding) and incorporate his design philosophy. Spaces meant to be private, such as corporate courtyards, may embody some of the same stylistic cues and values but were not meant to be accessible for all. Likewise, individual, large-format sculpture where the individual piece is not part of a wider Noguchi-designed landscape are also not considered for comparative analysis here.

Hart Plaza was the first of Noguchi's major civic space designs, and his experience in Detroit informed much of his later work prior to his death in 1988. His designs during these years included three public spaces associated with public redevelopment efforts in America: the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza in Los Angeles, California (1980-1983); California Scenario in Costa Mesa, California (1981-1982); and Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida (1986-1996). The Dodge Fountain, specifically, is largely akin to the Noguchi-designed structural sculpture known as Sky Gate, located in Honolulu, Hawaii (1977).

In 1980, the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC) received funds to develop a half-acre plaza along San Pedro Street in Los Angeles, California, as an entryway to the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Building and the JACCC Theater. The purpose of the plaza was to facilitate the diverse cultural needs of the community and encourage interaction among the residents of the surrounding neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. One of the funding criteria was a major sculptural element which the Friends of Little Tokyo Arts (FOLTA) offered to fund.

FOLTA invited Noguchi to design a sculptural piece for a large passageway between the existing community center and a proposed theater, school and gym. Noguchi imagined the site becoming an active core for Little Tokyo. Just as he had done in Detroit, Noguchi parlayed his selection as sculptor into a larger role. Rather than accept the commission for a sculpture in a transitional space, he insisted that the planned orientation of the site be modified, and the proposed gym be relocated to a new site so that the plaza could serve as a true gathering space for ceremonies and assemblies. In the end, he was offered the commission to design the enlarged one-acre plaza. The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center complex was designed by the architectural firm of Adachi, Sawano & Matsunaga in collaboration with landscape architects Uesgi-Tong, completed in 1980.

In his interviews and writings on the JACCC space, Noguchi noted that while his sculptural pieces secured his invitation as the plaza's designer, the entire plaza acted as a sculpture to draw people into the space, an approach he had pioneered in Detroit. His design for the plaza contained two primary elements: a central elevated sculpture and a fountain. The sculpture, *To the Issei*, situated in the heart of the plaza, consisted of two twelve-foot Japanese basalt



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

monoliths on a fan-shaped platform and was designed as a tribute to the first generation of Japanese who immigrated to America.<sup>59</sup>

The JACCC Plaza is elevated from the surrounding landscape, and, as a large and mostly open space, has the feel of an intersection, providing an impression similar to areas of the much larger Hart Plaza and Bayfront Park. Unlike at his other public spaces paved with stone, JACCC is paved entirely in red brick, perhaps in a manner to set off the massive stones which comprise *To the Issei*. Set upon a raised quarter-circle foundation, the stepped base of *To the Issei* mirrors the stepped pyramids seen in at Hart Plaza and elsewhere, and provides a secondary purpose as a performance stage, opening out to the center of the plaza. Stepped geometric tiers line the perimeter, with a series of cubes placed at the outer edges for sitting.

Also seen at Hart Plaza, circular elements anchor the JACCC Plaza. A raised circular fountain anchors one corner, just inside the primary stairway up from San Pedro Street, set within a square foundation at an angle to the rest of the plaza. Consisting of a low convex disc, water projects from a central pipe over the rough stone surface. Less of a statement that the Dodge Fountain at Hart Plaza or the Pepper Fountain at Bayfront Park, it nevertheless is impossible to miss within the plaza landscape. The circular fountain in the southwest corner is countered in the opposite corner by a circular raised planter in the southeast corner. The center of the plaza is anchored by a large circular ring design of brick. Within the ring, paving bricks are hexagonal in shape, subtly emphasizing this space from the surrounding traditional rectangular pavers. Although not exactly the same as Hart Plaza's lost circular depression, the visual cue is similar.

California Scenario differed in scope somewhat from Hart Plaza, JACCC, and Bayfront, but its purposes were largely in alignment with the three other public spaces. Entrepreneur and philanthropist Henry T. Segerstrom commissioned Noguchi to design a garden for his expanding South Coast Plaza shopping center development in California's booming Orange County. At 1.6 acres in size, it is similar in scale to the JACCC Plaza. Segerstrom first became aware of Noguchi when the Dodge Fountain at what was to become Hart Plaza was featured on a magazine cover in the late 1970s. Segerstrom stated he "remember[ed] being impressed by the strength of the design, its uniqueness, the creative force that he was able to bring to bear, and its gracefulness, combined with the strength of function." C.J. Segerstrom & Sons development of the South Coast Plaza was underway at the time, and Segerstrom was determined to meet with Noguchi to discuss the design of a garden.<sup>60</sup>

Tailored to the new surrounding development, Noguchi's design was to occupy a roughly rectangular shape parcel between several office buildings and an elevated parking deck. Dubbed "California Scenario" but more formally known as the Noguchi Garden, the plan incorporated five sculptural elements "designed to create a tranquil setting in a dramatic abstract of California

<sup>59</sup> Alexandra Eve Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013, 71-6.

<sup>60</sup> Interview of Henry T. Segerstrom by Cathy Curtis, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1989. MS\_PROJ\_200\_014, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

environment,” according to Noguchi. These were titled *The Forest Walk*; *Energy Fountain*; *Land Use*; *Water Source and Water Use*; and *The Desert Land*.<sup>61</sup> A sixth element was crafted directly by Noguchi at Segerstrom’s request, as he wanted “something in the garden that was done by his hand as well as by his mind.” To honor the Segerstrom’s family’s successful background in the lima bean industry, this sixth piece became *The Spirit of the Lima Bean*.<sup>62</sup>

While the California Scenario site does not have the same robust topography that the other three offer, the Noguchi signature vocabulary is still largely evident. The primary foundation is paving formed by large sandstone slabs, meant to weather with time. These are visually broken up by each of the six elements, most of which use a sculptured mound of earth to form a distinct presence. A water feature occupies the central space, although *Water Source and Water Use* is but a contemplative trickle compared to the possibilities of the Dodge Fountain. *Energy Fountain* offers a dynamic water feature set at the junction of two primary entry paths and viewsheds. Granite benches provide a place to rest. Distinctive plantings separate each element from the others, and all represent native flora to the state of California. Unlike the other public sites, there is less emphasis on multifunctionality, and is more akin to an actual garden. Surrounded by the hustle and bustle of busy Orange County, with reflective office buildings on one side and the concrete wall of the parking deck on the other, it is a quiet place.

Noguchi’s largest public space was also his last, Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida. Much like Hart Plaza fronting the Detroit River, Bayfront Park also seeks to connect the core of Miami with its primary body of water, Biscayne Bay. Unlike at Hart Plaza, the Miami property was already a public park space, but one that was underused and suffered from poor design. Designed primarily for passive recreation, the park also suffered from the construction of a central library near its center. While the library brought a new audience to the area, it completely blocked the dramatic view of the bay from downtown and isolated the waterfront from the city. Other redevelopment projects along the borders of the park changed the surrounding landscape. In 1978, following the opening of the Walker Art Museum’s exhibition on Noguchi’s works, *Imaginary Landscapes*, Noguchi was contacted by Kitty Roedel, the Director of Marketing at the Miami Development Authority. Roedel requested that Noguchi look at the park and propose a solution.

In a letter to Roedel, Noguchi condemned developments surrounding Bayfront Park and reasoned, “Miami must have a totally new park because all the modern buildings have made the present facility incongruous.”<sup>63</sup> In re-envisioning the space, he acknowledged the existing layout but sought to give it his own fingerprint. The realization of Noguchi’s Bayfront Park design began in 1985 with the demolition of the library. This large twenty-eight-acre parcel became his largest landscape design.

<sup>61</sup> “Background on the California Scenario,” California Scenario: A Noguchi Celebration. Program pamphlet. March 24, 1982. MS\_PROJ\_199\_001, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>62</sup> Interview of Henry T. Segerstrom by Cathy Curtis, *The Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1989. MS\_PROJ\_200\_014, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Isamu Noguchi to Kitty Roedel. August 27, 1979. Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, 1981, Folder 1 of 24, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

Noguchi was intrigued by Bayfront's position on Biscayne Bay:

The bay there is a tremendous opening, like a huge window. That kind of space and opening interests me. On the one side you have the big buildings and the boulevard and the other side is ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, and off beyond is Europe. I think I am driven by the idea of the place and its possibilities.<sup>64</sup>

Noguchi had previously described Hart Plaza's relationship to the Detroit River as "An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people." Connecting people with the water, but also serving as the path between big buildings, a major thoroughfare, and the horizon above water in the distance form a commonality first embodied at Hart Plaza.

Bayfront Park contains a number of elements that Noguchi first used in Detroit. Central to the Noguchi plan for Bayfront Park is a substantial water feature, the Mildred and Claude Pepper Fountain, surrounded by a circular plaza. Like the Dodge Fountain in Detroit, the Pepper Fountain is a visual focal point and employed cutting edge technology for its time. Noguchi designed the fountain to be able to mimic the actions of nearby Biscayne Bay through all types of weather events, using eleven distinct phased patterns. Dramatic effects for water jets, wave action, and even fog were carefully crafted into the design. It has also endured the same lament about infrequent use, and a complex computer system for control. The fountain was damaged during Hurricane Andrew in 1992, but even in its early years of operation the *South Florida Sun-Times* noted it was only operating three and a half hours each day on weekdays, and cost forty-two dollars an hour for electricity.<sup>65</sup> An attempt to draw more tourists to the park in 2007 launched the Miami SkyLift, a large balloon which lifted passengers up to a height of five hundred feet above the park to admire the view. To properly anchor the balloon, large cylindrical concrete piers were spaced within the fountain's basin, substantially eroding the clean look of the conical volume.

Beyond the fountain, familiar Noguchi vocabulary include the play of geometric shapes, two amphitheaters, and circulation patterns such as the "interludes" alongside paths. Surface treatments and materials are similar as well, employing frequent use of concrete and large granite pavers. In addition to the Pepper Fountain, two Noguchi sculpture were later incorporated into the park's design: the *Challenger Memorial* (designed in 1986 but not installed until after his death in 1988), and white marble *Slide Mantra*, which was crafted and installed at the 1986 Venice Biennale, and then found a permanent home in Miami. The park was completed in 1996, nearly eight years after Noguchi's death, at a cost of approximately \$40 million.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Interview of Isamu Noguchi by Kitty Roedel, *The City Slant*, Miami-Dade Community College. Spring 1986. MS\_PROJ\_253\_001, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum

<sup>65</sup> Woods, Joan, "3.2 Million Coins in the Fountain," *South Florida Sun-Times*, July 26, 1990.

<sup>66</sup> Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, 46.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Noguchi's interest in structural sculpture went beyond fountains. In 1975, he entered a competition to design a new sculpture on the grounds of the park-like campus of Honolulu City Hall in Hawaii. The sculpture which emerged is remarkably similar to the design of the Dodge Fountain, employing tubular sections of steel, where a large undulating ring is supported by a tripod of tubular legs approximately twenty-four-feet above the ground. Again, Noguchi's interest in experienced views and vistas serves as an inspiration. Visitors are encouraged to step up onto a centered plinth and gaze heavenward, where the ring defines the unobstructed limits of the celestial sky above. Despite the irregular nature of the ring, twice each year, at a time known locally as Lāhainā Noon, when the sun is perfectly overhead, the shadow of the ring loses its irregular shape and becomes a perfect circle. Completed in 1977, *Sky Gate* is another executed example of Noguchi's interest in connecting humans with unique experiences and experimentation with unusual forms and materials.

### *Archaeological Resources*

Not easily apparent from land, the perspective of Hart Plaza from the Detroit River shows a landscape that dramatically rises from the seawall up nearly twenty feet to the elevation of the downtown some three blocks inland. The shoreline of the Detroit River has been altered several times since Cadillac and his French landing party arrived in 1701. Seeking to increase useable land for farming and later for docks and the shipment of cargo, the shoreline was moved southward and straightened on at least two occasions in the nineteenth century. Later the site of shops and businesses, and parking lots, successive layers of history covered over what lay beneath.

As Hart Plaza was being planned, it was determined that all of the fill needed to bring the plaza up to the elevation of the downtown blocks inland of Jefferson Avenue would cause the existing shoreline to become unstable. The solution was to elevate the plaza atop five hundred concrete columns to an elevation of fifteen to eighteen feet. Envisioned as a uniform grid of columns, engineers were forced to make numerous adjustments to work around existing submerged foundations and other obstacles discovered during construction.<sup>67</sup> This work enabled Hart Plaza to be built as envisioned at the surface level, but certainly compromised surface and subsurface deposits below.

During the excavation of the riverfront site that would become Hart Plaza (20WN327) in 1975 and 1976, Charles Martinez, of the Michigan Archaeological Society, led archaeological investigations at the site. While it should be noted that Martinez's work was conducted in "an emergency situation in which neither funds nor sufficient manpower" could be utilized, the investigators nonetheless identified thirteen features within the site (Section 3 of the Governor and Judges' Plan of Detroit, 1806-07) dating between 1830 and 1905. Among the artifacts recovered were nearly two thousand ceramic sherds, wooden brush handles, square cut nails, and glass vessels.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the investigation team identified a privy and two mortared

<sup>67</sup> "Splashy fountain bejewels motor city plaza." *Engineering News Record*, October 6, 1977, 64, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Artifacts collected from Martinez's Hart Plaza recovery effort are in the collection of the Gordon L. Grosscup Museum of Anthropology at Wayne State



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

limestone foundations that appeared to date to the mid-nineteenth century. Both foundations were located in the southwest section of the site. The foundation identified as Feature 3 was thirty inches long and rested on four-inch-thick timber supported by an eight-inch-diameter log. The second foundation, identified as Feature 4, was ninety-three inches long, twenty-five inches high, and approximately eighteen inches thick. The foundation appeared to correspond to the south wall of a warehouse identified on an 1853 map of the city drawn by Henry Hart.<sup>69</sup>

Martinez found no features or artifacts dating to the French occupation of the site, and while not excavated, Martinez observed “two upright wooden posts or pilings... east of the Veteran’s Memorial Terrace. These posts were about ten feet below the Terrace level and might have been part of an old wharf or foundation support.” The site was in proximity to the Merchant’s Wharf, formerly located south of Woodbridge Street between Shelby Street and Griswold Street, roughly in the west end of the current Promenade.<sup>70</sup>

No known burial sites were noted in Martinez’s work. A historic cemetery survey of Wayne County undertaken by Karen Krepps suggests the British Garden Cemetery was located to the south of Jefferson Avenue near the foot of Griswold Street, in the general proximity of the Transcending sculpture. This would date to the British occupation of Detroit in the 1760-1787 time period, before what later become Michigan was given to the fledgling United States in the Treaty of Paris. Although the sinking of columns to bedrock and modern construction overtopped the Hart Plaza site, the potential remains that subsurface archaeological deposits may yet be uncovered on the Hart Plaza site.

University, Detroit. A selection may be viewed online at  
<http://www.clas.wayne.edu/anthromuseum/Hart-Plaza-Artifacts>.

<sup>69</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.

<sup>70</sup> Charles H. Martinez. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

***Books, Reports, Dissertation & Thesis:***

- City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit – A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946).
- Detroit Board of Commerce. *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmstead, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905).
- Friedman, Martin. *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes*. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Museum, 1978.
- Frost, Carolyn Smardz. *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Galster, George. *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- Gara, Larry. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996.
- Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980.
- Kirby, Alexandra Eve. *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013.
- Korth, Katie. *Hart Plaza: A History*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. Wayne State University, 23 April 2013.
- Labor's Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit*. Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006.
- Martinez, Charles. *Preliminary Report on Archaeological Investigation of Civic Center Plaza, Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: Michigan Archaeological Society. 1977.
- Mull, Carol E. *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *A Sculptor's World*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1968.
- Noguchi, Isamu. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987.
- Play Mountain: Isamu Noguchi + Louis I. Kahn. Tokyo: Marumo Publishing
- Post-War Improvement Committee [Detroit], *Post-War Improvements to Make Your Detroit a Finer City in which to Live and Work* (Detroit: 1944).
- Roberts, Ellis Robert. *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present*. Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855s.
- Saarinén, Eliel. *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future*. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1943.
- Simpson, Donald E. *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the*



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

*Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Pittsburgh, 2013.

Torres, Ana Maria. *Isamu Noguchi: A Study of Space*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2000.

### **Articles and Online Sources:**

"Architect Gives Critics Answer," *The Detroit Times*, August 10, 1947. Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Eero Saarinen Papers, Series IV, Project Records, Box 88, folder 172, Job 4627: Detroit Civic Center, Detroit, MI, clippings.

"Biography of Eliel Saarinen," Britannica.com. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eliel-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).

"Biography of Eero Saarinen," Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eero-Saarinen> (accessed June 10, 2018).

"Civic Center Plans Leave Council Quiet." *Detroit Free Press*, 12 July 1947.

Dixon, Jenny. "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza", [docomomo-us.org](http://docomomo-us.org). <https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza>. (Accessed June 10, 2018).

"Dodge Fountain; It works – after 10 years." *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988.

Dwight, Edward, Interview by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture> (accessed July 20, 2018).

"Ethnic Festivals on Weekends." *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1979.

"Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.

Graff, Gary. "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years." *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.

Heldman, Louis. "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

Larrivee, Shaina D. "Playscapes: Isamu Noguchi's Designs for Play," *Public Art Dialogue*, April 8, 2011. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21502552.2011.536711> (accessed March 28, 2022).

"Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza." *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.

Miro, Marsha. "What Noguchi's Genius Brought to Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.

Morris, Julie. "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan." *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.

Neuman, Ladd. "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful?" *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.

"Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City." *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979.

"November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries. <https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).

Palmer, Friend. "Earlier Days in Detroit." *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.

"Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.

"Statuary and Memorial Commemorating Detroit's Role in the Underground Railroad at the Detroit River in Hart Plaza in downtown Detroit," Detroit 1701.

<http://detroit1701.org/UndergroundRailroad.htm>. (Accessed online: June 14, 2018).

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

"Underground Railroad." Detroit Historical Society.

<https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/underground-railroad>.

(Accessed online: June 14, 2018).

### **Archival Collections:**

City of Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection. City Planning Commission Civic Center Plaza, Folder 1 and 2. Referenced files include:

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, undated.*

*Committee on Civic Design, Oct. 14, 1955.*

*Eero Saarinen letter to Edmund Kuhlman, President of Detroit City Plan Commission, Oct 18, 1955.*

*Minutes of Departmental Committee, Detroit City Plan Commission, on the Civic Center Plaza, March 15, 1963.*

*Memorandum of Conference from Dept of Public Works, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, May 15, 1964.*

*Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Cavanaugh, June 15 1964.*

*William Finnin Director of Municipal Parking Authority, letter to Common Council, July 27, 1964.*

*City of Detroit Resolution dated Feb 27, 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. August 27, 1965.*

*McCafferty, Senior City Planner, letter to Charles Blessing, Sept 1, 1965.*

*Undated Cumulative Lists of Observations – Design Division.*

*Charles Blessing letter to City of Detroit City Plan Commission, October 8, 1965.*

*Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965.*

*Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968.*

Gribbs, Katherine. Handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum Archives. References files include:

*1973 04 to ca1980 PH plan notes and aerial photos MS\_PROJ\_157\_041*

*1973 03 Typescript of Noguchi Presentation to Fountain Selection Committee*

*1975 07 14 Letter Noguchi to Turkin MS\_PROJ\_157\_001.pdf*

*1975 08 04 Letter Turkin to Sadao MS\_PROJ\_157\_002.pdf*

*1979 04 20 Manuscript plaza dedication notice MS\_PROJ\_157\_025*

*1979 04 24 Letter Hudson to Noguchi*

*1979 04 25 Letter Noguchi to Hustable (NYT)*

*1979 07 03 Letter Noguchi to Hudson*

*1979 08 14 Letter Denison to Meathe*

*1979 08 22 Letter Noguchi to Young*

*1979 08 27 Letter Noguchi to Roedel*

*1982 02 11 Letter Noguchi to Viall*

*1988 07 08 Letter Noguchi to Edgewater*



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Name of Property

Wayne County, MI

County and State

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.

University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts. Charles Mulford Robinson Papers Manuscript Collection 1010.

[http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date\\_facet%3A%221900-1950%22%20AND%20subject\\_topic\\_facet%3A%22United%20States%22&id=PACSC\\_L\\_UPENN\\_RBML\\_PUSpMsColl1010&](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/cocoon/dla/pacscl/ead.html?fq=date_facet%3A%221900-1950%22%20AND%20subject_topic_facet%3A%22United%20States%22&id=PACSC_L_UPENN_RBML_PUSpMsColl1010&). (Accessed online on June 10, 2018)

Wayne State University Walter Reuther Library. Cavanagh Collection, Abstract and boxes 135 and 472.

### **Interviews:**

Telephone interview of Phillip A. Talbert. June 13, 2018.

### **Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

### **Primary location of additional data:**

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: Noguchi Museum, Long Island City, New York  
Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit  
City of Detroit  
Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 10.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.327662 | Longitude: -83.046069 |
| 2. Latitude: 42.328654 | Longitude: -83.043812 |
| 3. Latitude: 42.326720 | Longitude: -83.042735 |
| 4. Latitude: 42.325809 | Longitude: -83.045882 |

2nd Return

Or

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of Noguchi's design, extending roughly from Jefferson Avenue on the north to the Detroit River on the south, and between the former site of Ford Auditorium on the east and the Veterans' Memorial Building on the west. See attached map for exact boundaries.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of the area designed by Isamu Noguchi, which fit within adjacent, preexisting features.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Nathaniel Nietering/Ruth E. Mills and Gregory W. DeVries  
organization: Michigan State Historic Preservation Office/Quinn Evans Architects  
street & number: 300 N. Washington Square/4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301  
city or town: Lansing/Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48913/48201  
e-mail nieteringn1@michigan.gov/rmills@quinnevents.com  
telephone: 517-331-6024/313-462-2550  
date: August 29, 2022

Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Philip A. Hart Plaza

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne State: Michigan

Photographer: Rebecca Savage, City of Detroit

Date Photographed: May 2022 unless otherwise noted

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0001

View looking southeast from Joe Louis Fist center median in the intersection of Jefferson and Woodward Avenues showing Pylon set behind the Hart Plaza marquee.

2 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0002

View looking south-southeast across the expanse of Hart Plaza from foot of Woodward Avenue, with Pylon, Dodge Fountain, and Detroit River in the far background.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

3 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0003

View looking west-southwest of Woodward entry at Hart Plaza marquee.

4 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0004

View looking southwest from Woodward entry of grassy lawn space separating Jefferson Avenue from the Jefferson Promenade. Transcending is visible at center.

5 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0005

View looking northeast from Woodward entry of promenade leading out of Hart Plaza across Bates Street toward Mariners' Church.

6 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0006

View looking southeast from Woodward entry of sidewalks and lawn panels toward the Detroit River.

7 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0007

View looking east of the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building in foreground with Renaissance Center in the background.

8 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0008

View looking northwest from Woodward entry across Jefferson Avenue and up Woodward Avenue, Detroit's "Main Street."

9 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0009

View looking southwest of the Jefferson Promenade toward Cobo Hall (now Huntington Place). The Veteran's Memorial Building (now UAW-Ford Programs Center) is at left.

10 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0010

View looking northeast from about the halfway point of the Jefferson Promenade looking toward base of Pylon.

11 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0011

View looking southeast from Jefferson Avenue sidewalk across lawn panels, Jefferson Promenade, and Dodge Fountain plaza toward Detroit River.

12 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0012

View looking northeast from the west end of the Jefferson Promenade, with Pylon at center.

13 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0013

View looking south of Abraham Lincoln bust.

14 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0014

View looking north along west side sidewalk surrounding the sunken amphitheater.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

15 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0015

View looking north of sunken main amphitheater performance area, also used historically as an ice-skating rink, toward the sub plaza structure. Transcending, nearly circular, rises in the background along the Jefferson Promenade.

16 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0016

View looking northeast of main amphitheater stepped seating with the sloping walkway from the Woodward entry beyond.

17 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0017

View looking northwest from sloping walkway of sub plaza office space with original hexagonal concrete blocks.

18 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0018

View looking south down the sloping walkway from Pylon to the Dodge Fountain and central plaza, with Detroit River behind.

19 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0019

View looking north up sloping walkway from Dodge Fountain area showing Pylon as a clear visual node against the Detroit skyline.

20 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0020

View looking north from top of sloping walkway near Pylon with original stone curbing, toward Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building with Detroit City-County Building (now Coleman A. Young Municipal Center) behind.

21 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0021

View looking northwest from east interlude on surface of sub plaza ventilation and illumination cylinders.

22 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0023

View looking northwest along east side pedestrian walk toward the east interlude, showing integrated concrete seating and elevated lawn panels. August 2022

23 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0023

Detail view looking northwest of the east interlude showing original carnelian granite pavers extant, and integrated concrete seating. August 2022

24 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0024

View looking southeast of the east side pedestrian walk toward the east interlude, showing detail of the smaller carnelian granite pavers. August 2022

25 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0025

Detail view of smaller carnelian granite pavers showing cut, surface finish, texture, and color. August 2022



Hart, Philip A., Plaza  
Name of Property

Wayne County, MI  
County and State

26 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0026

Detail view looking southeast of large carnelian granite pavers showing cut, surface finish, texture, and color in the vicinity of the pyramid amphitheater. August 2022

27 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0027

View looking north of the above-surface pyramid amphitheater showing stepped and irregular stepped sides.

28 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0028

View looking northwest of southeast corner of pyramid amphitheater.

29 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0029

View looking west from eastern edge of pyramid amphitheater toward sunken performance space at bottom.

30 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0030

View looking south from north corner of pyramid amphitheater showing detail of irregular stepped pyramid design.

31 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0031

View looking northeast of top of unique concrete "bandshell" along the northwest wall of the sunken portion of the pyramid amphitheater.

32 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0032

View looking southeast from performance floor of the pyramid amphitheater toward the above-surface structure pinnacle.

33 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0033

View looking northeast of sub plaza and access stairway with landing to the immediate north of the pyramid amphitheater performance space.

34 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0034

View looking north from the spiral seating sculpture of the central plaza surrounding the Dodge Fountain situated within its shallow bowl, with the sloping walkway leading up to Pylon in the distance.

35 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0035

View looking northeast of Dodge Fountain with Renaissance Center in the distance.

36 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0036

View looking west-southwest showing detail of carnelian granite pavers comprising the Dodge Fountain bowl, and base of fountain structure.

Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

37 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0037

Detail view looking northwest of Dodge Fountain base (non-functioning in photo).

38 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0038

View looking south-southeast from east-west axis down showing concrete sidewalk toward the Detroit River and Windsor, Ontario beyond. The individuals silhouetted against the water are the figures comprising the Gateway to Freedom sculpture.

39 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0039

View looking north from behind Gateway to Freedom looking up the sloping sidewalk toward Dodge Fountain showing elevation changes extending away from the river.

40 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0040

View looking east of the spiral seating sculpture.

41 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0041

View looking south of the cubist water sculpture.

42 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0042

View looking northeast from east-west axis showing west sidewalk and interlude at left and lawn panels beneath crabapple trees.

43 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0043

View looking east-northeast along east-west axis showing new concrete, looking toward pyramid amphitheater in the distance.

44 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0044

View looking east-northeast near the southwest corner of Hart Plaza showing sloped lawn panels and trees separating the east-west axis at left and the Detroit RiverWalk route along the seawall and railing at right.

45 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0045

View looking east-northeast near the top of the southwest access passage showing sloping lawn panels and the spiral seating sculpture in the distance.

46 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0046

View looking south from the west end of the east-west axis down the southwest access passage toward the Detroit River.

47 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0047

View looking west-southwest down the east-west axis toward the end of the axis with a view toward the Ambassador Bridge connecting to Canada over the Detroit River far beyond.



Hart, Philip A., Plaza

Wayne County, MI

Name of Property

County and State

48 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0048

View looking west-southwest down the Detroit RiverWalk sidewalk along the Detroit River, with Gateway to Freedom sculpture at center right and the docked Detroit Princess boat in the distance.

49 of 49. MI\_Wayne County\_Hart Plaza\_0049

View looking north-northwest from the back of the Gateway to Freedom sculpture of the downtown Detroit skyline rising above elements of Hart Plaza in the foreground.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80525.

2nd Review





**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Latitude	Longitude
1. 42.327662	-83.046069
2. 42.328654	-83.043812
3. 42.326698	-83.042725
4. 42.325745	-83.046003

Solid Black Line: Property Boundary  
Dotted White Line: Polygon Boundary





## Philip A. Hart Plaza

1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

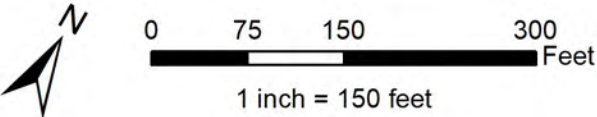
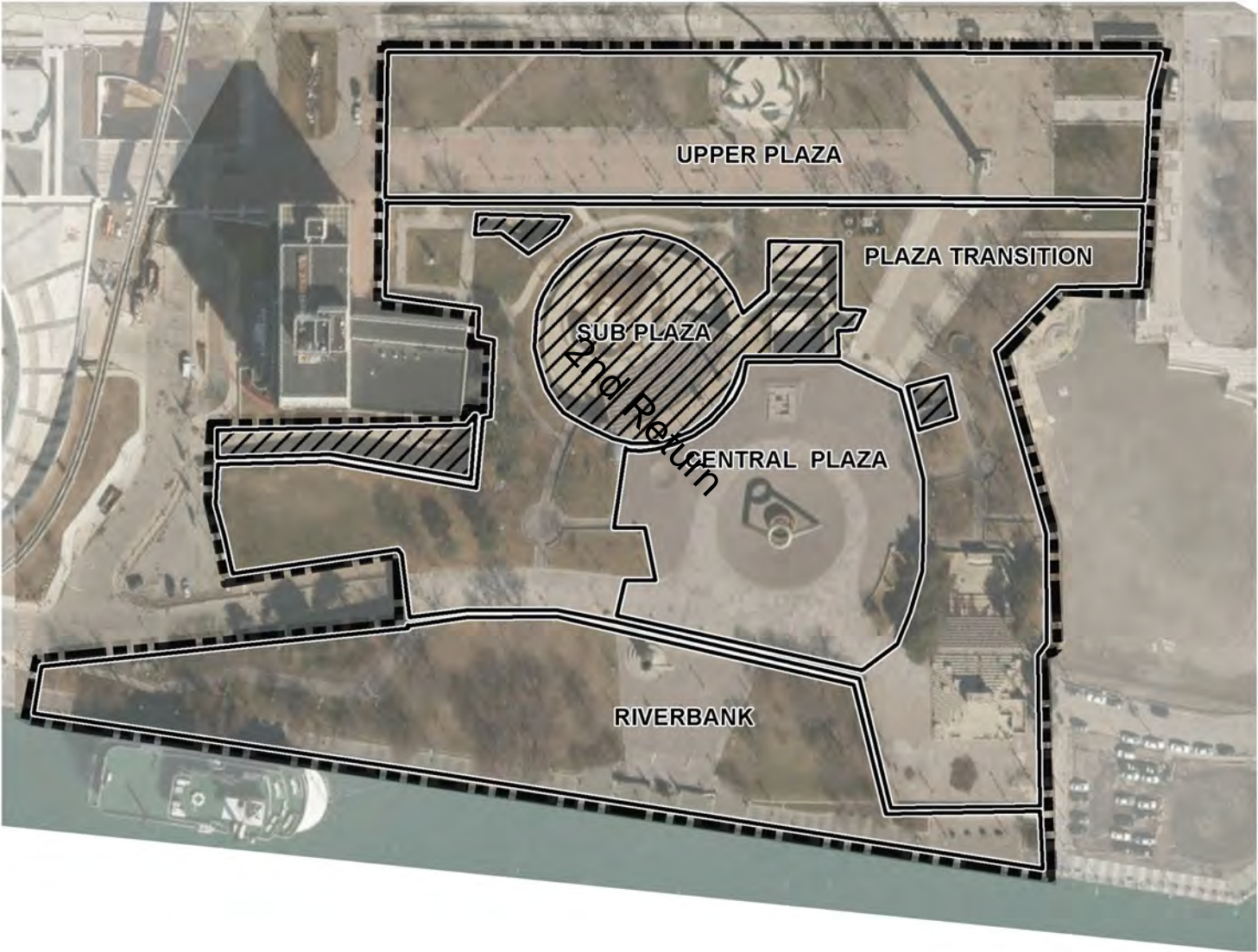
Latitude	Longitude
1. 42.327662	-83.046069
2. 42.328654	-83.043812
3. 42.326698	-83.042725
4. 42.325745	-83.046003


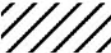

Solid Black Line: Property Boundary  
Dotted White Line: Polygon Boundary



**Philip A. Hart Plaza**  
National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Spatial Organization Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



-  Spatial Divisions
-  Sub Plaza Open at Surface
-  National Register District Boundary





## Philip A. Hart Plaza

1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Bird's eye aerial imagery of Hart Plaza before completion of the 2021 pavement replacement project with Noguchi-specified paving mostly still in place, showing relation of all primary buildings, structures, objects, and passageways. Bing Maps ca. 2019



Philip A. Hart Plaza  
1 Hart Plaza, Detroit  
Wayne County, Michigan  
Photo Key





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:	Resubmission	
Property Name:	Hart, Philip A., Plaza	
Multiple Name:		
State & County:	MICHIGAN, Wayne	

Date Received: 11/23/2022      Date of Pending List:      Date of 16th Day:      Date of 45th Day: 1/9/2023      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:	RS100003554
Nominator:	Other Agency, SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☐ Accept      ☒ Return      ☐ Reject      1/9/2023 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:	Areas and period of significance not adequately justified.
-------------------------------	--

Recommendation/ Criteria	Return.
-----------------------------	---------

Reviewer	<u>Lisa Deline</u>	Discipline	<u>Historian</u>
Telephone	<u>(202)354-2239</u>	Date	<u></u>

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

**United States Department of the  
Interior National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places**

**Comments  
Evaluation/Return  
Sheet**

**Property Name:** Philip A. Hart Plaza

**Property Location:** Detroit, MI

**Reference Number:** 10003554

**Return Comments Date:** 1/19/2023

**Reason for Return**

The nomination for the Philip A. Hart Plaza is returned due to the issues described below, including the need for a stronger justification for national significance.

**Summary of Significance**

The 2022 revised Hart Plaza nomination was submitted for local significance in Community Planning and Development and Social History under Criterion A and for its national significance in Landscape Architecture under Criterion C. Significance under Criterion A references development of the plaza as part of Detroit's long-contemplated civic center and for the social uses of the plaza for various music and cultural festivals. Significance under Criterion C references the association with artist/landscape designer Isamu Noguchi, who was the major designer of the space. Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls were secondarily associated as designers, but in this nomination their involvement is not considered a point of national significance.

Criterion Consideration G was applied because the plaza and its period of significance are less than 50 years old. The revised period of significance was identified as 1979-2002.

**Section 8. Statement of Significance**

As per our 1/12/2023 video call discussion, the justifications under Community Planning and Development and Social History have not been adequately addressed. The nomination has also not addressed how under Social History, the musical and ethnic festival activities are considered exceptionally important up through 2002. In order to move this nomination forward, recommend dropping these areas at this time.



The nomination claims national significance for Landscape Architecture under Criterion C. However, some additional information is needed to support this area and at the level of significance.

### **Criterion C. Landscape Architecture Significance**

While the resubmission provided further justification for national significance by providing comparisons with Noguchi's other plaza works and emphasizing this early design for Hart Plaza informed his later design vocabulary, additional information is needed to further understand Noguchi's contributions within the realm of modern landscape architecture. Please provide some additional perspective on what is considered his influence or impact within the realm of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century landscape architecture design. What are some of his perhaps innovative characteristics or associations of his designs that are considered significant within the context of modern landscape architecture? Is he perhaps known for his environmental art/sculpture approach that leads to larger civic space designs or are his sculptural pieces the key element that sets him apart from what other modern landscape architects were doing at this time? How is his work considered unique or significant within the realm of what other designers such as Lawrence Halprin or Hideo Sasaki were creating? As the early return comments mentioned, often, it is essential to include a comparison with works by other designers of the period who are working in the same genre to establish the national significance of the designer. Scholarly analyses are generally used to substantiate the significance of the subject designer.

If plans or aerial views are available for Noguchi's later plaza designs (JACCC, Bayfront Park, and California Scenario) please consider including these as Figures with this nomination and reference them in the narrative as comparables. This will help visually support how Hart Plaza informed his later design work.

Included with these return comments are two National Register nominations that are significant under Criterion C for landscape architecture at the national level. While both properties are for landscapes designed by Lawrence Halprin, they may provide some additional guidance on what level of documentation and support is needed to make the case for national level and for properties under Criterion Consideration G for exceptional importance. The two nominations are for the Heritage Park Plaza in Fort Worth, TX (SG10000253) and Open Space Sequence in Portland, OR (SG13000058). Another source to check for information on Hart Plaza, Noguchi's design work, and other contemporary landscape designers practicing during this time is via The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF): <https://www.tclf.org>. While TCLF does have some information on Noguchi's JACCC Plaza in Los Angeles on their webpage, staff may have additional information available to assist with this nomination.

**Period of Significance.** As per our earlier conversation, since the focus will be Criterion C, please revise the period of significance accordingly.

### **Technical Issues**

In Section 7, if possible and to help with readability, please insert photo numbers that relate to the described plaza features.

In Section 5, Revise contributing and noncontributing resource counts according to the period of significance. If specific dates are known for the resources listed in the inventory table on page 24, please add.

Please add page numbers. They are missing after Section 7.

The information in the nomination regarding Detroit's Civic Center Plans and early redevelopment history does provide a useful historical context. Recommend editing this material and placing it under a separate heading "Additional Context/History" at the end of the Section 8. In the future, perhaps a larger historic area could be considered that encompasses some of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century civic buildings from this period of Detroit's planning history.

If you have any questions about these comments, please contact me at [Lisa\\_Deline@nps.gov](mailto:Lisa_Deline@nps.gov).

Lisa Deline, Senior Historian  
National Register of Historic Places





STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN STRATEGIC FUND  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

QUENTIN L. MESSER, JR.  
PRESIDENT

Wednesday, July 17, 2024

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed file contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for **Philip A. Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan**. This property is being submitted for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination is a ☐ New Submission ☒ Resubmission ☐ Additional Documentation ☐ Removal.

- ☐ 1 Signed National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- ☐ 2 Locational maps (incl. with nomination file)
- ☐ 12 Sketch map(s) / figures(s) / exhibits(s) (incl. with nomination file)
- ☐ 5 Pieces of correspondence (incl. with correspondence file)
- ☐ 49 Digital photographs
- ☐ Other (incl. with nomination file): \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

- ☐ Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed.
- ☐ This property has been approved under 36 CFR 67.
- ☐ The enclosed owner objections constitute a majority of property owners.
- ☐ This nomination has been funded by the following NPS grant:
- ☐ Other:

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator, at (517) 331-8917 or [walsht@michigan.gov](mailto:walsht@michigan.gov).

Sincerely yours,

Ryan M. Schumaker  
State Historic Preservation Officer



**Certified Local Government  
National Register Nomination Review Report**

Michigan State Historic Preservation Office  
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

- \* **Complete and return to:** National Register Coordinator, Michigan State Historic Preservation \*
- \* Office, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, 735 East Michigan Avenue, PO Box \*
- \* 30044, Lansing, Michigan 48909 \*

**Name of Property:** ~~Grande Ballroom~~ HART PLAZA  
**Address:** ~~8952-8970 Grande River Avenue~~ Hart Plaza, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan  
**Owner:** Chapel Hill Missionary Baptist Church  
**Date Complete Nomination Approved by the SHPO:** August 10, 2018

\*\*\*\*\*

The Certified Local Government (CLG) agrees with the SHPO to expedite the review period for this nomination.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ (date of agreement) \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

  
Signature of CLG Commission Chairperson

9/13/18  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Elected Chief Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*\*\*\*\*

Date(s) of commission meeting(s) when the nomination was reviewed: 9/13/18

Date of written notice to property owner of commission meeting: 8/10/18

The CLG provided the following opportunities for public participation in the review of this nomination:

Were any written comments received by the CLG? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Attached  
Was the nomination form distributed to CLG commission members? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Was a site visit made to the property by CLG commission members? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X  
If yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_



Did the CLG seek assistance of the SHPO in evaluating the eligibility of this property for the National Register? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X

VERIFICATION of Professional Qualifications of Commission in accordance with 36 CFR 61, Appendix 1, of Michigan's Certified Local Government Program.

List those commission members who meet the 36 CFR 61 qualifications required to review this type of resource.

**Commission Member**

**Professional Qualifications**

1. Keith Dye, Historian
2. Louis Fisher, Architect
3. Melanie Bazil, Historian
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Was an outside consultant used? YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, provide the name and list the 36 CFR 61 qualifications the person meets:

Ruth Mills, QEA

The CLG Commission finds that the property meets the following National Register criteria of significance: A+C

The CLG Commission finds that the property meets the National Register standards of integrity.

YES X NO \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation of CLG Commission:

APPROVAL X

DENIAL \_\_\_\_\_ (specify reasons on a separate sheet of paper)

Signature of Chief Elected Official \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date of transmittal of this report to the SHPO 9/14/18

Date of receipt of this report by the SHPO \_\_\_\_\_



CITY OF DETROIT  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

COLEMAN A. YOUNG MUNICIPAL CENTER  
2 WOODWARD AVENUE SUITE 808  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226  
(313) 224-1339 • TTY: 711  
(313) 224-1310  
WWW.DETROITMI.GOV

September 12, 2018

Mr. Todd A. Walsh  
National Register Coordinator  
State Historic Preservation Office  
735 East Michigan Ave., PO Box 30044  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Mr. Todd Walsh,

The City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department received the invitation to comment on the Philip A. Hart Plaza nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. We would very much like to begin a conversation with your office as we will be launching a Comprehensive Feasibility Study to assess existing conditions of the structural components and other features of the Plaza. This will serve as the basis to begin a community engagement process and a design competition. We look forward to a productive collaboration on this important public asset.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Cox  
Director of Planning & Development Department  
City of Detroit



Historic Designation Advisory Board  
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 218  
Detroit, MI. 48226

State Historic Preservation Office  
735 East Michigan Avenue  
P.O. Box 30044  
Lansing, MI. 48909

September 12, 2018

Dear Advisory Board and Preservation Office Members,

This letter is written in support of designating Hart Plaza on the National Historic Register. For the last fourteen years our company, Paxahau, has been fortunate to produce the Movement Electronic Music Festival each Memorial Day weekend and the Detroit Jazz Festival each Labor Day weekend in Hart Plaza. Movement celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of Techno and its impact globally over the last 35 years, while Jazz Festival celebrates being the largest free Jazz Festival in the world and will embrace its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019.

To say that Hart Plaza has become a symbolic beacon or nucleus for the hundreds of thousands of attendees over the last fourteen years we have produced festivals there would be a profound understatement. The landmarks and monuments at the park have become icons in the minds of these youth from the next generation who associate these symbols with the city and the memories they forge each year at the festival. This mirrors our memories as children during the 1980's while attending the various ethnic and civic festivals at Hart Plaza. Running around the vast expanse of granite and concrete, fountains and ramps - a seemingly alien environment designed by Mr. Noguchi, not seen anywhere else in the world - has created a lasting impression on us that lasts to this day.

The significance of Hart Plaza being the largest project of this kind that Mr. Noguchi executed is something that should be cherished and maintained, now and into the future. The protection of his original design concept for this space, in our minds, should be protected from attempts in the future for sweeping change. It's too often that the importance of such spaces is swept aside in the name of progress while not valuing the significance of the accomplishment itself. We sincerely hope that the historic designation will at the very least create pause in the minds of those who may need reminding of the relevance this park has had in the historic timeline of Mr. Noguchi and the beautiful City of Detroit.

Sincerely,

Jason Huvaere and Sam Fotias  
Paxahau

**Board of Directors**

Theodore Prudon  
PRESIDENT

Robert Meckfessel  
VICE-PRESIDENT

Flora Chou  
TREASURER

Jack Pyburn  
SECRETARY

Meredith Arms Bzdak  
Todd Grover  
T. Gunny Harboe  
Anna Mod  
Robert Nauman  
Robert Pullum  
Michelangelo Sabatino  
Monica Schaffer  
Barry Solar  
Bradford J. White  
John Wieland Jr.  
Barbara Yanni

Liz Waytkus  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Docomomo US Chapters**

Chicago/Midwest  
DC  
Florida  
Georgia  
Hawaii  
Michigan  
Mid Tex Mod  
Minnesota  
New England  
New Orleans/Louisiana  
New York/Tri-State  
Northern California  
North Texas  
Oregon  
Philadelphia  
Southern California  
Western Washington

**Friend Organizations**

Houston Mod  
Indiana Modern  
Landmark Columbus  
Modern STL  
North Carolina  
Modernist Houses  
Palm Springs Modernism  
Week

September 13, 2018

State Historic Preservation Office  
735 East Michigan Avenue  
PO Box 30044  
Lansing, MI 48909  
walsht@michigan.gov

Re: Philip A. Hart Plaza National Register Nomination

Dear Colleagues,

Docomomo US is pleased to support the nomination of the Philip A. Hart Plaza located at 1 Hart Plaza in Detroit, Michigan and designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi to the National Register of Historic Places. As the nation's only non-profit historic preservation organization dedicated to preserving modern architecture and design, we applaud the efforts of the City of Detroit, Historic Designation Advisory Board in their efforts to designate the first of only four public spaces designed by Isamu Noguchi, one of the most well-known and respected artists of the mid-twentieth century.

Hart Plaza is of exceptional national, if not international, significance by a renowned designer and features an abstract composition of form, sculpture and public space. Hart Plaza is by far Noguchi's most impressive and comprehensive landscape that masterfully connects a series of positive and negative spaces that was built for and continues to be utilized for a variety of public events, cultural festivals and general recreational activities.

Designed to be the heart of Detroit's civic activity, Hart Plaza is an important example of post-World War II modern civic space. While it has been plagued with deferred maintenance and vandalism over the years, Hart Plaza remains unchanged in its design since its opening forty years ago. While the landscape is significant for its architectural merits, it continues to contribute successfully to the development of Detroit as a city of international commerce and design.

Docomomo US is the United States chapter of Docomomo International, a non-profit organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement. Through advocacy, education and documentation, Docomomo US provides leadership and knowledge by demonstrating the importance of modern



design principles including the social context, technical merits, aesthetics and settings of these important pieces of American history.

Docomomo US enthusiastically supports the nomination of Hart Plaza to the National Register of Historic Places and encourages the State Historic Preservation Office to designate this exceptional landscape for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz Waytkus", with a stylized, flowing script.

Liz Waytkus  
Executive Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:	Resubmission	
Property Name:	Hart, Philip A., Plaza	
Multiple Name:		
State & County:	MICHIGAN, Wayne	

Date Received: 7/18/2024      Date of Pending List:      Date of 16th Day:      Date of 45th Day: 9/3/2024      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:	RS100003554
Nominator:	Other Agency, SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☒ Accept      ☐ Return      ☐ Reject      8/30/2024 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:	<p>AOS: Landscape Architecture; POS: 1979; LOS: State. Philip A. Hart Plaza is significant in the area of Landscape Architecture, at the state level, as the only large-form sculptural landscape in Michigan designed by master landscape architect and designer Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a widely respected artist with significant works in the United States and abroad. Over Noguchi's career prior to Hart Plaza, he designed a series of conceptual landscapes while honing a unique vocabulary of elements, inspired by his philosophy of play. Although prominent Detroit architectural firm Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls was the architect of record for Hart Plaza, the design is credited to Noguchi. At first commissioned only to create the centerpiece Horace A. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain, Noguchi ultimately designed the entire 10.8-acre plaza, creating an interplay of positive and negative spaces that blend monumental sculptures, diagonal axes, and playful forms that balance each other across wide expanses, all focused on the centerpiece of the Dodge Fountain. While subsequent additions and the depredations of time have slightly impacted Noguchi's original design, the fundamental character of Noguchi's Hart Plaza remains distinctive and intact. Hart Plaza, in turn, informed his later design vocabulary toward three other large public spaces that he designed prior to his death. Hart Plaza remains one of the only large-scale civic plazas constructed in a large Michigan city.</p>
-------------------------------	---

Recommendation/ Criteria	NR Criterion C.
-----------------------------	-----------------

Reviewer Lisa Deline      Discipline Historian



Telephone (202)354-2239

Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.