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TO: Detroit City Council

FROM: David D. Whitaker, Director
Legislative Policy Division Staff 

DATE: November 16, 2018

RE: Chene Park Amphitheater Reports

This report is in response to Council President Pro Tem Mary Sheffield's July 30, 2018 memorandum requesting the City Planning Commission (CPC) and the Detroit Entertainment Commission (DEC) provide an analysis and recommendation on how the Chene Park Amphitheatre can co-exist with the envisioned residential mixed use community for the east riverfront as a part of the Detroit East Riverfront Framework Plan submitted by the Planning and Development Department on March, 15, 2017.

The stated intention of the East Riverfront Framework Plan states in part:

"While new development is essential for the East Riverfront, the preservation of its historic assets, local character and existing community are equally essential in ensuring a successful, inclusive future. Respecting the inherent value of its heritage helps to target public investments and to catalyze responsible private development that advances a comprehensive vision worthy of this one-of-a kind waterfront."

There are various aspects of the East Riverfront Framework Plan which speak to the principles of building on the uniqueness of each neighborhood. As it relates to the Chene Park Amphitheater there is a specific reference to existing historic building fabric and large mixed-use anchors providing different starting points for a diverse blend of development approaches. Specifically, the report states:

“Infill/Heritage zones, new riverfront development tracts, higher density opportunities on Jefferson Avenue and a cultural core focused around Chene Park provides a rich range of building fabric rooted in the unique character of the East Riverfront.”

The East Riverfront Framework Plan stresses that the area north of Chene Park can be developed to enhance an expanded arts and cultural experience along the Riverfront. Future development could balance cultural, educational recreational uses with a variety of residential buildings.

Upon reviewing the framework plan, there are no indications that the elimination or relocation of the Chene Park Amphitheater were contemplated at the time the plan was drafted. CPC staff is aware of the circulating speculation regarding the future of the Chene Park Amphitheater site, noting that conceptual rendering of the Hart Plaza site located at Jefferson Avenue and Woodward Avenue have shown an outdoor amphitheater, thought to be a potential replacement for Chene Park Amphitheater.

Since the release of the East Riverfront Framework Plan there have been many developments directly associated with the Chene Park Amphitheater site, including the passing of Aretha Franklin, which lead to a Mayoral Proclamation, City Council resolution as well as the enactment of an ordinance renaming the Chene Park Amphitheater to the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater. Additionally, a study is currently underway by the Historic Designation Advisory Board to establish the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater as a local historic district. Should the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater historic district be established, demolition of the site would require an act by the City Council to first undesignated the site as historic, prior to any demolition taking place.

In regards to the ability of the Aretha Franklin Amphitheater being able to co-exist with mixed use residential/commercial development, there are many examples throughout the United States where commercial development, entertainment venues and residential developments thrive in close proximity.

If Council has any other questions or concerns regarding this subject, LPD will be happy to provide further research and analysis upon request.