

James Fidler  
1418 Nicolet Pl.  
Detroit, MI 48207

May 11, 2025

Dear Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

Over the course of the last 8 months, Detroit Thermal, its staff, engineers, and contractors, have proven themselves incapable of performing work to the standards of a local historic district and should be **DENIED** permission by the Detroit Historic District Commission to do work in the Lafayette Park historic district. Below is a summary of the evidence in overwhelming support of that statement:

1. In September 2024, when Detroit Thermal representatives first presented the project to the neighborhood, they misrepresented the scope, scale, and schedule of the project to cooperative board members and property managers. There was no mention of steam venting. The location and extents of the excavation were not explained. No plans were provided.
2. In September 2024, Detroit Thermal undertook an “exploratory excavation” without an approved building permit. During the excavation, Detroit Thermal contractors snapped a 60-year old magnolia tree “because it was in the way,” and cut down major portions of a yew shrub for access to a manhole. They left a large hole in the lawn area next to the playground unattended for several weeks.
3. In October 2024, Detroit Thermal contractors returned to fill in the hole, leaving a four-foot-tall mound of dirt and various other construction debris in the lawn next to the playground. A poorly constructed 42” high fence (roughly 40’x20’) was erected using wood posts set in concrete, 2x4s, and cheap orange plastic netting. This fencing was then abandoned for eight months. Residents sent multiple emails to Detroit Thermal asking what was the purpose of the fence and for its removal, but with no response or action from Detroit Thermal.
4. On February 27, 2025, Detroit Thermal sent a flyer through cooperative property managers, notifying that parking spaces at the end of Nicolet Place would be fenced off for contractors to access a manhole. No other information regarding the project was provided to residents. Repeated attempts were made by residents to contact Detroit Thermal about the construction fence next to the playground and asking for more information on the project, but no information was provided.
5. Over the following two months, Detroit Thermal representatives met with some cooperative property managers, but did not include board members or residents.

Information on the project was released in a piecemeal fashion without clear plans being shared with the board or the broader community.

6. In March and April 2025, Detroit Thermal and its contractors undertook unpermitted excavation work at the end of Nicolet Place.
7. In April 2025, Detroit Thermal stated that it would no longer talk to residents. Plans for the project had still not been shared with property managers, board members, or the community at the time communication was ceased.
8. On April 26, 2025, after growing community frustration with Detroit Thermal and on-going and repeated outreach to elected City Leadership and City Departments, including the Councilwoman Sheffield, Mayor Duggan, Historic Commission staff, Building Safety Environmental and Engineering Department staff, Department of Public Works staff, the City Building Department put a Stop Work order on the project for building without an approved permit.
9. On May 2, 2025, after Detroit Thermal followed the law by submitting the project to the Detroit Historic District Commission, were residents finally able to review the plans posted to the DHDC website. However, Detroit Thermal would still not meet with residents to share the plans.
10. Finally, on May 7, 2025, one week prior to the meeting at the Historic District Commission, at the urging of the City of Detroit District Manager, Keith Butler, Detroit Thermal agreed to meet with two board members from each of the four Mies co-ops and 1300 board members to present their plans. Instead of the actual plans posted to the HDC website, Detroit Thermal representatives presented diagrams with no detail of the impact that the project would have on the neighborhood. When questioned by Mies board members regarding details of the plans, it became evident that the Detroit Thermal representatives themselves did not understand the full extents of the excavation or the proposed fence lines as submitted in their own drawings, denying details of the plans, until they were presented with them and had to acknowledge what was shown on the drawings.

The Detroit Thermal plans, created by Giffels Webster Engineers, that were posted to the DHDC website were hastily and shoddily assembled with numerous errors in the drawings and reflect a highly inaccurate survey of the existing conditions of the site.

1. It is clear from the issue dates on the drawings that the plans were quickly assembled after Detroit Thermal was notified that they were building without a valid permit. They were only first issued on 4/18/25 after construction work had been performed for several weeks prior and then amended on 4/24 and 5/2 after Detroit Thermal understood that the plans had to be submitted to DHDC in order to receive a permit. The whole time to create these plans took a matter of weeks.

2. The extents of chainlink fencing on the plans are in excess of 150' x 40' though dimensions on the plans are spotty and imprecise. Those extents include the full width of the utility easement in both the east-west and north-south direction despite work only being performed in a much smaller portion of that area.
3. The chainlink fencing on the drawings is shown being set on top of planted beds, runs through a 60-year old hawthorn hedge that would need to be removed for placement, penetrates other shrubs and perennial plantings, none of which are indicated on the drawings. The multiple species of hawthorns including the hedges and understory trees are no longer commercially available and would be impossible to replace. Furthermore, the chainlink fencing obstructs multiple heavily used pedestrian walkways that connect the co-ops.
4. The amount of excavating indicated on the drawings is extensive and will require heavy equipment including dump trucks and excavators to enter the fenced area. Access will require the removal of a black wrought iron fence and adjacent planted beds. That heavy equipment will be run over concrete sidewalks that will all need to be replaced due to the weight of the equipment. Inside the fence, yew bushes and other perennial shrubs will need to be removed in order for the heavy equipment to access the excavation.
5. The proposed area for excavation is massive. It is nearly 100' long x 30' wide. It includes concrete pavers from the playground, planted beds, and 60-year old hawthorn trees, none of which are indicated on the drawings. It will create a permanent scar on the landscape that will be impossible to "restore" as the drawings indicate.
6. While the drawings indicate that the 60-year old honeylocust canopy trees will be protected. The area of protection is not the full extents of the dripline of the trees and roots of the trees will inevitably be cut and snapped in the excavation. If the trees do not die immediately as a result of the excavation, their long-term health will be significantly compromised.
7. The location of both overstory canopy trees and understory trees and planted beds indicated on the drawings are both highly inaccurate or entirely omitted. Despite the drawings stating that the landscape will be restored, due to the incomplete nature of the drawings, it would be impossible for even the best landscape contractor to be able to restore the landscape based on this drawing set.
8. All of the standard details in the drawing set are for projects that are conducted within a city street. It references concrete and pavement. It is very clear from this drawing set that neither Detroit Thermal nor its engineers or contractors have ever worked within a residential neighborhood in a park-like setting, let alone one within a local historic district.

9. The drawings indicate two venting steam pipes: one at the end of Nicolet Place and one at the end of Joliet Place. The height of the steam pipe is not dimensioned on the drawing, but calls for a standard detail and based on the scale of other dimensions in the drawing appears to be eight to twelve feet in height. The venting steam pipes are not indicated in the roadway, but rather along pedestrian walkways and in planter beds. These steaming pipes would have significant impact on the pedestrian-scaled landscape, billowing smoke all year round, and completely incompatible with the peaceful and tranquil park-like setting. Despite Detroit Thermal running its infrastructure under Lafayette Park, at no time in its history, have steam pipes been a part of the Mies van der Rohe townhouse landscape. This represents a new and completely incompatible element to the district.

A 60-year old landscape cannot be restored after a major construction project. It took 60-years for it to be created. Based on our experience with Detroit Thermal and the drawing set that they have submitted to the Detroit Historic District Commission, it is abundantly clear that Detroit Thermal is incapable of performing acceptable work to the standards set within a local historic district. Detroit Thermal and its engineers and contractors are used to performing work in city streets. A city street is exactly where this project belongs.

We, the residents, of Lafayette Park ask the Historic Commission to **DENY** a Certificate of Appropriateness to Detroit Thermal to do work in our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Fidler". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

James Fidler

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