

To: hdc@detroitmi.gov

The Detroit Historic Commission for Public Comment

May 14 Public Hearing

Subject: Lafayette Park Historic District Application from Detroit Thermal

The landscape of towering and flowering trees in the Meis Van der Rohe Townhouse community is part of its original design. For all the years I have lived here, I have worked to maintain the integrity of Joliet grounds, with a constant attention to the original documented landscape design.

The Honey Locust trees, many of which are over 60 feet tall with trunks over 20 inches in diameter, are in the historic plan of Van der Rohe, Caldwell, Hilberseimer et. al. They form the upper canopy of the space that is Joliet Place. We have, for decades, debated every tree scheduled for removal. We have invested considerable financial resources on the yearly and more often as needed, maintenance of the trees and planting of future canopy.

Most residents here know that they will never live to see a replacement of these large trees, or as my mother, a naturalist, said, "have the joy of sitting under something older than we are." Their shade, together, en masse, lowers the temperature in the Lafayette Park area, sometimes, 5 to 10 degrees. The trees create the lovely, dappled light on the lawns - that space for walking, for kids to play, for picnicking. These trees are truly the lungs of the east downtown area, converting carbon dioxide to oxygen. What a novelty! That we would want to preserve land and air that is conducive to life for so many.

In Joliet Park, we have carefully and at great expense replaced the second canopy, the ornamentals with a shorter life span, planted by the hundreds, in the original historic landscape plan. This second canopy is a rainbow of color in spring that brings regulars from across the city and international visitors just for the view.

Finally, the thousands of shrubs, bulbs and perennials are the deliberate, conscious plantings of generations: the idea being to maintain, always, this lovely garden area for Detroit.

No, this is not a landscape that can be "replaced in kind" in the wake of the massive demolition project proposed by Detroit Thermal. A project being promoted by corporate entities and investors who hire PR managers to support untruthful stories to hide the ruin it will bring.

They propose massive digging, "trenching" in the living areas at our front doors. They say they will surround the trees inside the construction fences with materials to protect them.

What about the roots? No protection there. What about the massive weight and disruption of trucks and equipment? They say, “oh, we haven’t planned tree removal.” No, they will just knock the trees down and kill them through soil compaction or root removal.

Who would propose a “gift” of heat to 1300 Lafayette paid for by the residents of the four historic cooperatives of Lafayette Park? Whose plan is that? A power company that stands to profit?

There are certainly ways to help residents of 1300 Lafayette East solve their heating crisis without destroying a historic landmark community. Historic landmark communities are self-sustaining and successful, attracting buyers from faraway places. New York real estate is interested in preserving these properties; shouldn’t the city be?

Detroit needs an alternative to this plan to take down a historical Detroit landmark community property that cannot be replaced. Detroit Thermal has no right to attempt to broker the sale of their energy product, one that they cannot deliver without bulldozing through our outdoor living space.

Because we live here and this is our home.

Sally E. Bier

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Joliet Townhouse Cooperatives