

Historic District Commissioners,

First of all, thank you for your service to our city. As a co-owner in the Nicolet Co-op, we share a passion for both historic preservation and livable communities. The ethos of modern design, which the Lafayette Park Historic District is a testament to, balances aesthetics with functionality. When our neighborhood buildings were erected in the late 1950s, they were lampooned as glass boxes on an open field. It has taken more than 60 years for the landscape to mature and embody the vision of Alfred Caldwell, the original landscape architect. As it now stands, the grounds both aesthetically delight those who walk through it, and function as a community gathering space, a children's play area, a meditation garden, a community herb garden, and a shared front yard.

We value our neighbors in the 1300 Co-op and respect their need for reliable and affordable heat. It is unfortunate that Detroit Thermal has misrepresented the project to all of the area residents and stakeholders. There are indeed other routes this steam line could take\* — Detroit Thermal representatives themselves have stated that the path through our historic grounds happens to be the "shortcut." It is my hope that your commission will recommend that Detroit Thermal explores another pathway, one that does not irrevocably impact this historic treasure.

Each of the approximately 400 residents of the Mies Co-ops have made a commitment, as shared owners of this property, to preserve and defend the historic design. When our neighborhood was approved as a Historic District, the landscaping was a large part of the rationale. As noted elsewhere in the public comment, we have been informed by Dena Sanford, architectural historian with The United States Department of the Interior, that a large excavation and utility project on the grounds could threaten this historic status.

Detroit Thermal continues to minimize the impact this project would have on the landscape and the living environment. Since the release of engineered drawings last week (the first to be made public, though the project has been in planning for nearly a year), some of my neighbors put out surveyors stakes and caution tape to visualize the footprint of the project. You will see photos of the stakes and tape below. The red tape represents the footprint of the excavation site, where Detroit Thermal has claimed the digging would go 5-8 feet down.\*\* The yellow tape represents the work zone, which would be surrounded by a chain link fence for the duration of the project (we understand this to be 6-8 weeks, at a minimum.) At a meeting with leaders from the four Mies Co-ops and the 1300 Co-op last week, Detroit Thermal representatives confirmed that **the fenced-off area would be a staging area for equipment and supplies**. So while the excavation will be relegated to the red-tape area, the whole yellow-tape area will be severely impacted.

Please zoom-in to this panoramic photo to understand the scale of this work site.



### **Elements of landscape at risk**

The following landscape elements exist within the footprint of the project, as outlined by the engineered drawing shared by Detroit Thermal last week:

- 33 mature trees, including 12 Honey Locust trees
- 41 shrubs
- Countless flowers and ground covering plants
- Our sprinkler system
- Sections of the main playground and sections of the southern playground

### **Soil compaction and excavation in close proximity to mature canopy trees**

Based on reports from our contracted arborist, Sav-A-Tree, we understand that excavation and soil compaction in close proximity to the canopy trees can dramatically weaken and kill them. We have learned that for each inch of trunk, the recommended protected area is equal to a foot of diameter around the trunk. Though Detroit Thermal has committed to place fencing 4-feet around each honey locust trunk, these rings should really be 18-22 feet across. As a co-op, we have followed this recommended guidance when doing major capital projects like window and roof replacements.

### **Destruction of mature understory trees and shrubs**

The previously-noted destruction of a star magnolia tree and the planned destruction of several crabapples and dogwoods have not been acknowledged by Detroit Thermal. They seem to think anything less than a towering canopy tree is just a “replaceable shrub.” Our understory trees are often as old as the honey locusts, and worthy of preservation, as well. On the plan submitted to the HDC by Detroit Thermal, these trees are not even noted on the map. Several are in the pathway of the excavation site, and more than 20 exist within the work zone, in addition to 41 shrubs of varying kinds.

### **Ongoing harm from regular steam system maintenance**

Detroit Thermal has also been evasive about the ongoing harm due to future maintenance. Steam systems are not self-managing and require regular access with heavy machinery. We see this all over the central area of the city. Our neighborhood greenspace, playground and landscape should be protected from regular access by crane and pump trucks.

### **Benefits not worth the harm, immediate and ongoing**

There are viable alternatives to this project. Clearly the 1300 building needs heat. Detroit Thermal has baked-in the cost of reactivating the steam line under our grounds to the 20-year contract with the 1300 Co-op. Excavation and reactivation of the steam lines along Rivard or from the Chrysler School may be more expensive, but that additional expense could/should be integrated into the existing service contract.

It has taken more than 60 years for the trees, shrubs and groundcover to mature to its current state. It would take at least as long for the grounds to recover from the harms of this project, intentional or not on the part of Detroit Thermal and Kaltz Excavating. Their promise to “replace in-kind” rings hollow because this landscape is an irreplaceable artifact of midcentury urban design. These companies may be experts on utility projects on streets and hardscapes, but certainly not historic landscapes. They should not be trusted with one of Detroit’s most treasured landscapes. Please deny their proposal.

~ Susannah Goodman, 1402 Nicolet PI

Please see the photos below for a better understanding of the landscape within the footprint of the work area.



Here you see where the line noting the edge of the excavation area is only 24in from a fully-mature honey locust. A 5-8 foot excavation along the red tape line would devastate the root system and this tree would be gravely endangered. Please review the drawing submitted by Detroit Thermal to confirm this proximity.



Here you can see that the work zone would indeed encompass the playscape, and the excavation abuts many tree and shrub species.





This is the neighborhood's meditation garden. This picture shows the density of the landscape, with mature redbuds, dogwoods and crabapple trees all within the proposed construction staging area. As noted previously, the understory trees have not been accounted for in Detroit Thermal's maps or plans.



This is the neighborhood community garden. This is a view from within the proposed staging area/workzone, facing the proposed access gate. Detroit Thermal plans to remove the black fence and drive their excavators and cranes and pumping trucks through this pathway, which leads to Lafayette Plaisance Public Park. On the right is a young honey locust - we have struggled to cultivate canopy replacement trees, but this is one success.

\*Detroit Thermal representatives have shared that there are (at least) three alternative routes to reactivate the 1300 Building's steam system - via the line under Chrysler School, via Rivard Street, or via the service drive along I-375. I understand these may be more expensive than the current contract for the work. The fact that Detroit Thermal priced and executed a contract with the 1300 Co-op before gaining the appropriate approvals (and thus accurate cost) would likely fall under the purview of the Michigan Public Service Commission.

\*\*Detroit Thermal will likely use Kaltz Excavating as a subcontractor to actually do this work. They are the company who was working insite until the stop work order was issued two weeks ago. Kaltz Excavating specializes in utility digs on roads and in bodies of water - I have no reason to believe they are trained in conservation of landscapes through the course of their work. In fact, upon reading their customer reviews, I have inferred that they are not. Below you can find some of their google reviews which are relevant to their experience working on private property green spaces.

**R Robin Allison**  
2 reviews

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 6 years ago

KALTZ Excavating trashed my back yard and destroyed my plants that have been there for five years!!! When they excavated my yard they dug up rocks. They left them there!!! I personally picked up the big ones. They just threw straw over the entire mess !! I want and expect this to be redone immediately!!! If not, I will call an attorney!

👍 6

**A Andy Smith**  
15 reviews · 6 photos

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 2 years ago

Watched these guys dig a hole in my yard for Consumers Energy and proceed to fill it with all of their trash. Didn't realize my yard was a landfill. This company won't respect your property at all- wouldn't recommend.



👍 2

**E Erica Clark**  
2 reviews

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ a year ago

This company is horrible. They ruined my landscaping on my home. I recently bought new flowers and they just stepped on them for no reason. This company has no respect or compassion for their customers home and it shows!!! I plan on calling to see who can refund me for the damages.

👍 2