

From: [katie fontana](#)
To: [Historic District Commission \(Staff\)](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Lafayette Park Historic District Application from Detroit Thermal
Date: Sunday, May 11, 2025 6:25:20 PM

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

My name is Katherine Fontana and I am a resident of Lafayette Park. I am writing to state my strong opposition to Detroit Thermal's plan for a project in the Lafayette Park Historic District. The plan requires the digging of large trenches in the middle of one of the main shared spaces in the neighborhood, adjacent to the main playground where my kids and other neighbors gather and play. The area has fully mature shade trees, shrubs, ornamental trees, planting beds, well maintained grass, all of which will be at risk of being permanently ruined. This kind of construction project requires huge equipment (backhoes, excavators, welding equipment) that will need to be here for months to complete the project, and then will need to come back whenever maintenance needs to be done. All of the compression from the heavy equipment, and moving it in and out, will permanently damage the root system of all the mature honey locust trees and all the surrounding shrubs, planting beds and grass. The landscape architecture by Alfred Caldwell is a central component of my neighborhood's National Historic Landmark designation. Tourists from all over the world come here all the time to tour the grounds (I see them out my windows), there's no other place like this in the world and the proposed project would irrevocably damage the neighborhood's historic landscape. It took 60 years of investment and stewardship to create this landscape and it cannot be "restored."

When looking at my unit before buying it 16 years ago, it was early August and we couldn't believe how much cooler it was inside the neighborhood vs outside the neighborhood. This is entirely due to the shade tree canopy which is severely at risk if this project would move forward.

I often walk along Antietam to get to Gratiot to go downtown. There is a Detroit Thermal steam vent outside the Horatio Williams building, there are currently about 15 steel plates piled on top of one another, on top of steam vents and manhole covers. The grass that was there is very patchy now, a backhoe has been parked beside the area for over a week. I am attaching a photo of the area, this is not what a historically designated landmark should look like and there is a good chance this is what the center of our neighborhood will look like for all the years the steam pipe will be in service. In going around and seeing other parts of the city that have steam vents, I saw similar examples with patchy grass and construction cones.

The plans submitted for this project by Detroit Thermal and the work that has been done thus far demonstrate its lack of understanding and respect for my neighborhood's historic status. The plans were developed with no input or engagement from me or my neighborhood. Detroit Thermal has been working in my neighborhood for more than seven months. During that time, it has cut down most of a mature magnolia tree, damaged shrubs and planting beds, and has refused to meet with me and/or provide information to my neighborhood in response to our concerns.

I am also concerned that the project could damage the historic character of our neighborhood in other ways, including by installing new steam vents and conducting deep excavation near the foundations of our historic homes. I have no confidence that the impact on our historic neighborhood was considered in the development of these plans.

I am asking that the Detroit Historic District Commission reject Detroit Thermal's application to prevent it from irreparably harming our historic neighborhood.

Thank you kindly for your time and your commitment to serving the residents of Detroit and preserving the city's historic places.

Sincerely,

Katherine Fontana
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Thank you!