

Nicolet Townhouse Cooperative
1300-1418 Nicolet Place
Detroit, MI 48207

May 12, 2025

Detroit Historic District Commission
Planning and Development Department
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 808
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

The Board of Directors of the Nicolet Townhouse Cooperative strongly opposes Detroit Thermal's application for a project on our private property and in our neighborhood, the Lafayette Park Historic District. We oppose the proposed project because it would irrevocably damage our neighborhood's historic landscape, which is a central component of Lafayette Park's National Historic Landmark designation.

Our Board is charged with overseeing the management of 46 housing units that more than 100 Detroit residents call home. Our Board is comprised of residents of the cooperative, elected by our neighbors. Our neighborhood is a local historic district within the city of Detroit and is one of Detroit's nine National Historic Landmarks. Preserving the historic integrity of our neighborhood is one of the responsibilities of our Board. This responsibility carries additional work and additional costs. Improvements to the neighborhood, both its building's exteriors and its landscape, require HDC approval. Renovations inside our homes require approval by our Board to ensure that the historic integrity of our homes is preserved inside and out. Our cooperative and its members pay higher utility costs because of a commitment to preserving the neighborhood's historic character, which limits utility upgrade options. These higher costs are investments in preservation that our neighborhood requires and to which our Board is committed.

The project proposed by Detroit Thermal would generate a significant adverse effect on our historic landscape, which is a contributing resource to our National Historic Landmark status. The project will kill and damage mature trees that define our historic landscape, shrubs and planting beds. It will also disconnect our irrigation system that provides the water our landscape needs to survive. The project plans to convert the most sensitive and most beloved portion of our historic landscape into a work site. More than 9,000 square feet of our historic landscape is to be enclosed by a chain-link fence. Within the fence, the project plans acknowledge damage to the landscape as the entire area is labeled as "disturbance" with "restoration in-kind." This area is the jewel of our historic landscape. By our estimation, it contains at least 33 mature trees, 41 shrubs, countless flowers and ground-covering plants, and even sections of our neighborhood's original playground. This is not the only area of our historic landscape that will be damaged. A smaller section, located near Lafayette Avenue, that also contains mature trees, shrubs and plantings is also identified as "disturbance" with "restoration in-kind." Our 60-year-old landscape cannot be "restored." It took 60 years of time, investment, and stewardship to become what it is today. This

is affirmed by the role of the landscape in our historic designation. The landscape's intact condition qualified it as a contributing resource. Detroit Thermal's plan to damage the historic landscape with a promise of replanting it shows a core lack of comprehension of preservation.

The plans submitted for this project by Detroit Thermal demonstrate its lack of understanding and respect for our neighborhood's historic status. This lacking is also demonstrated by Detroit Thermal's work to date in our neighborhood. These plans were developed with no input or engagement from our neighborhood. We first learned of the project in the late summer of 2024. Detroit Thermal met with our Board President and board members from other Lafayette Park housing cooperatives. Detroit Thermal described a minimally invasive exploratory project that would have no physical impact on our property. An excavation area was fenced off. After months of inactivity and after Detroit Thermal destroyed two-thirds of a mature Magnolia tree, we began contacting Detroit Thermal to request an update on its work. Detroit Thermal eventually agreed to meet with us but cancelled the meeting the day before it was scheduled and failed to reply to any communication from us thereafter. The plans submitted by Detroit Thermal to the Detroit Historic District Commission show no recognition for the standards of planning and execution that our neighborhood's historic status requires.

Our Board is 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. We have no evidence and thus no confidence that the impact on our historic neighborhood was considered by Detroit Thermal in the development of these plans.

We are 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,

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1324 Nicolet Place

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