

From: [Patrice McKinnon](#)
To: [Historic District Commission \(Staff\)](#)
Cc: mayorduggan@detroitmi.gov; [Michael Duggan](#); [Mike Duggan](#); [CouncilMemberSheffield](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Lafayette Park Historic District Application from Detroit Thermal
Date: Tuesday, May 13, 2025 3:28:01 PM

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

I am writing to the HDC, for both my husband, Isaiah McKinnon, and myself. I am a current board member of the Nicolet Townhouse Cooperative in Lafayette Park (LP) and we want to add our strong objection to Detroit Thermal's (DT) application for a steam project in our neighborhood.

Lafayette Park: A Department of Interior designated National Historic Landmark 2015

Mies van der Rohe Cooperatives: Added to the National Register of Historic Places 1996

We have been residents of Lafayette Park for over fifty years and are long time members of the Nicolet Townhouse Cooperative, one of four Mies co-ops, whose property is directly impacted by this project. We moved to the Pavilion high rise apartments in the mid-seventies, and when looking down from our apartment windows, we were intrigued by the beautiful green oasis of a neighborhood, with its rows of townhouse buildings, under a full canopy of trees, just east of downtown Detroit. We learned that the buildings were designed by Mies van der Rohe and are the only built examples of his row house design and the largest group collection of his buildings in the world. Shortly thereafter, we decided to move to one of the Mies cooperative townhouses, and we still reside there today.

Project Impact

In all our years living in a Lafayette Park townhome, our neighborhood co-op members have never been so disrespected, shown such a lack of transparency and a refusal to engage on a project that has such a major impact on our daily lives and may even threaten our historical designations. We see the damage that has already occurred to our carefully maintained and mature landscape. The plans submitted by Detroit Thermal for this project are not only lacking in specificity, but demonstrate a lack of understanding and respect for this neighborhood's historic status. It appears that Detroit Thermal either didn't perform their due diligence or chose to ignore the historical significance of this area and the needed City permit requirements and approvals, which they claimed didn't apply to them.

This has also been demonstrated by Detroit Thermal's work to date. These plans were developed with no input or engagement from our members. Detroit Thermal has been working in our neighborhood for more than seven months. During that time, they have cut down most of a mature magnolia tree, damaged shrubs and

flowers, and refused to meet with our neighborhood, despite many requests by our members, with the exception of a meeting just last week.

The facts are indisputable. Detroit Thermal never sought member input for this project after the initial walking tour last fall, which they described as an exploratory study to determine if the aged and closed steam lines were viable. Then they recently returned to our property with construction machinery, after leaving behind piles of dirt and fencing for months, and once again refused to produce a City permit or meet with us. Their delay resulted in months of time that DT could have used to listen to valid neighborhood concerns and to understand why a hearing before the Detroit Historic District Commission was a needed and required step. If there are any time crunch arguments raised at this point, they are company-created and result from their own inaction and refusal to engage with the impacted community in order to find alternative ways that avoid using and damaging our historical property.

Impact to the Larger Community

Serving as treasurer of the Nicolet Board for over ten years, I have interviewed many potential buyers who have been asked to explain why they want to live in Lafayette Park. They always mention the beauty of the lush landscape and the visible outdoor green space, that makes them feel like they're living in a garden or a treehouse in the city, because Mies homes have floor to ceiling glass windows on two sides of every room. Our homes are sometimes referred to as "the glass houses", since the view is part of the design and allure of Lafayette Park living. A view, that now, from many homes on the Mies property, has been obscured by construction dirt piles, fenced off areas, heavy duty equipment and landscape upheaval.

We want to point out that our meandering interior sidewalks through the forested area of our community are used, not only by the Mies co-op residents, but the many apartment and co-op residents throughout Lafayette and Elmwood Parks. Residents and guests use it for exercise, recreation, walking to and from work, to riverfront events, downtown, Greektown restaurants, the Renaissance Center, Eastern Market, our local grocery stores, for walking family pets and also taking children to our pocket parks

Lafayette Park is also considered a Detroit tourist attraction, where both local and international visitors and students of design come to tour, study and photograph our historical property and all of its design elements. Elements that taken together resulted in our historical designation and which Detroit Thermal has already scarred with damaged trees and landscape and if this project is approved, will leave our neighborhood with permanent sidewalk vents and chimneys billowing clouds of smoke. What kind of caretakers are we, if we don't lodge these concerns with our

local Historic Commissioners and public officials?

It is clear that if this project is approved, we will be left with areas spewing hot steam, and a system that will require ongoing repairs and maintenance forever. Steam heat via this route may be the least expensive one, but it shouldn't be at the expense of our neighborhood. There is no doubt the approval of this project will lead to the degradation of our landscape, a decrease in the uniqueness of our area, a lessening of a desirability to live here, along with the related impact to our property values, and could very well lead to the potential loss of Lafayette Park's federal historical designation.

Plea to the Commission;

We raise these points to explain why this project impacts the larger community not only our co-op, and for all of the above reasons, we stand in opposition to Detroit Thermal's application for this project in the Lafayette Park Historic District and ask that the Detroit Historic District Commissioners protect our neighborhood by voting to reject Detroit Thermal's application.

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

Sincerely,

Isaiah McKinnon

Patrice B. McKinnon

