

From: [Biljana Lanier](#)
To: [Historic District Commission \(Staff\)](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] **Lafayette Park Historic District Application from Detroit Thermal-disregard of its historical significance
Date: Tuesday, May 13, 2025 6:56:10 PM
Attachments: [Screenshot 2025-05-13 at 6.51.17 PM.png](#)
[Screenshot 2025-05-13 at 6.52.23 PM.png](#)

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

I am a resident of 1416 Nicolet Place, a part of the Lafayette Park Historic District.

- Our neighborhood is under threat. If Detroit Thermal project gets approved it will destroy more than 40 mature trees, dozens of shrubs, countless perennials, our sprinkler system and the playground.
- This landscape took 60 years of investment from my community and cannot be replaced.
- Detroit Thermal never asked us for our input on its plans.
- As residents of a historic district we pay higher prices to keep the neighborhood historic. This includes higher utility costs and higher repair costs.
- Safety of our residents is at risk! [Buckfire Law Files Complaint on Behalf of 37 Detroit Steam Burn Victims](#). What makes anyone think that placing this in residential area near the playground and in close proximity to multiple residences is safe!

Per HDC definitions-**historic preservation includes:** protection of resources significant in history, architecture, engineering or culture.

Preserving this park checks all of that, as it took an amazing talent and **vision** of a landscaping architect Alfred Caldwell and one of the most famous 20th century architects Mies van der Rohe, **to plan and envision how project will look once vegetation matures, decades later.**

The scope of Detroit Thermal project is NOT ordinary maintenance of infrastructure that would be allowed, per HDC definition. Bringing heavy trucks, inserting 8 ft. chain-link fence in order to dig 8-12 feet deep holes and excavate asbestos-lined pipes; weld them with the new ones; and then, cementing the space around them, ensures unquestionable permanent alteration of the existing landscaped space that provides a connective link and buffer between the buildings and parking spaces. Without them, this will be barren and sad space for living, not to mention ruined historic site.

The easement they are using as a "right of way" in their proposal was granted decades earlier while this green space was possibly still Russel Street!

While I do sympathize with our neighbors at 1300 and their needs, addressing them must not come at the expense of our precious communal green space and national treasure! There must be an alternative solution.

A few personal notes, as an illustration of what living in this unique urban oasis represents to me:

When my husband accepted a position at Wayne State University 10 years ago, I had no desire to moving to Detroit. The state of the city reminded me of everything that I wanted to forget in my home country of former Yugoslavia. Our agent, luckily brought us here- and it was in that moment that I felt I can move to Detroit and enjoy my life in unexpected and delightful ways!

THIS community and architecture, but most importantly THE PARK that envelops it, reminded me of the best things that I left behind in the old country!

Slowly, many of my friends that live around Europe lined up to come and visit Detroit- their comments inevitably stating "for God's sake, you live at Mies!! Wow, we have to see that"

I have a sense of pride in choosing this place and community as a way of life! Damaging the overall look of the place would make me want to move elsewhere.

International interest:

Last year, a French artist / professor at Paris University School of Architecture, in preparation for his exhibit in Paris, decided to make a trip to Detroit in order to photograph and paint the Lafayette neighborhood. He wanted specifically to see Lafayette Housing Project that he knew well, from publications of Werner Blazer, in which they are shown without mature vegetation, with now fully mature canopy of trees. **The Project in its current state is the product of the original brilliant vision by its creators-now fully realized. We all are beneficiaries of that vision and it would be utterly irresponsible to allow it to be damaged irrevocably.**

Another significant part of his trip was illustration of the current life in Lafayette Housing Project as a living example that will be used as a part of curriculum of said School of Architecture, teaching students and established

architects interested in revival of midcentury urban ideas known for their beauty, simplicity, humanity, accessibility to the community at large while also being ecologically and economically friendly. It would simply be a shame to be ignorant and destroy this beauty, while so many connoisseurs from the rest of the world travel just to see and experience it in person. This example is just my personal experience, but I know of many many more similar examples that I've heard from my neighbors. I am enclosing (with permission) one of the painting that he recently shared with us.



Credit: Yves Bélorgey, Paris France, 2025

Also-of a more global importance for Detroit and beyond personal notes- Detroit has recently gained a Michelin star travel designation , and, of course, Lafayette park was featured among the important sites to visit while here- let's hope this does not turn into visiting the ruin of what once was a beautiful park.

"Lafayette Park-With 26 buildings, this community is the largest collection of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's work, and one of his greatest achievements. Lafayette Park was called "one of the nation's most beautiful and obscure residential developments" by the Wall Street Journal." Damaging this site -at the scale to be expected, given the nature of the project- would be a tragedy not just for the local residents but also for the global reputation of the city of Detroit.

I respectfully urge the Historic District Commission to reject Detroit Thermal's application and protect the irreplaceable historic landscape of Lafayette Park for current and future generations. Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to preserving Detroit's historic neighborhoods.

Sincerely,
Biljana Lanier
1416 Nicolet Place
Detroit