



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Interior Regions 3, 4, 5
601 Riverfront Drive
Omaha, NE 68102

1.A.4 (MWR-CR/HPP)

April 30, 2025

Mr. Russell Baltimore
Assistant Director of Design Review
Planning and Development Department
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Avenue - Suite 808
Detroit, MI 48226
Via email to baltimorer@detroitmi.gov

Dear Mr. Baltimore:

Information has been submitted to the National Park Service (NPS) by the Nicolet Townhouse Cooperative regarding a project to install new steam infrastructure within the Lafayette Park National Historic Landmark (NHL) in Detroit, which may have the potential to adversely affect the NHL. Lafayette Park received NHL designation on July 21, 2015, which followed the property's previous Detroit local historic designation of February 16, 2003. As the NPS has the responsibility to monitor the condition of NHLs per 36 C.F.R. § 65.7, the following information is provided for your consideration.

Lafayette Park was determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant as one of the earliest planned, most fully realized and most successful urban renewal projects of the mid-twentieth century. Lafayette Park succeeded as an ethnically diverse community that continues to thrive today, attracting residents with its combination of good design, diverse housing, and community amenities. It is generally regarded as one of the best and most successful examples of a residential urban renewal development in the nation, a rarity in a movement usually noted for its spectacular failures rather than its quiet successes. Lafayette Park also represents a collaborative design endeavor among one of the twentieth century's most influential Modern architects, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, developer Herbert Greenwald, planner Ludwig Hilberseimer, and landscape architect Alfred Caldwell. Lafayette Park's outstanding integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association is equally based on its architecture and landscape, which together create an urban neighborhood within a lush, mature setting. Caldwell's Prairie style design ties together the development's site plan and architecture to create a naturalistic setting which remains attractive to city dwellers. The strong verticality of the high-rise buildings is balanced with wide horizontal planes created by clusters of townhouses and the open green space of the park. The landscape design provides a series of public open spaces, semi-private, and private outdoor spaces in a variety of scales and characters.

Of concern to the NPS are elements of a plan by Detroit Thermal to reactivate/retrofit a pre-existing steam infrastructure that runs (via public easement) through the NHL/local historic district, to meet the heating needs of a nearby housing cooperative which is not included in the NHL district. Physical work to support that project has been described as requiring extensive excavation within the designed historic landscape, a contributing resource of the NHL. Work could impact mature honey locust trees, irrigation infrastructure, and planted beds with ornamental trees and shrubs. Excavation would also occur in the playground area, and apparently include

installation of an eight-foot steam stack, along with installation of vents throughout the landscape. If undertaken as proposed, this would substantially and adversely affect the integrity of the Lafayette Park NHL.

The National Park Service appreciates that the City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department is currently involved in resolving the situation, and that the Historic District Commission proposes to undertake design review for permitting purposes as described on the City's [Making Exterior Changes within Local Historic Districts | City of Detroit](#) website. We are confident that the design review process will involve consideration of alternative design options that will avoid adverse effects to the NHL while meeting the heating needs of the housing cooperative.

Thank you for considering this information.

Sincerely,

Dena Sanford, Architectural Historian

cc:

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