

1 July 2025

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

I am writing to maintain my strong opposition to Detroit Thermal's revised application for a project in the Lafayette Park Historic District. Despite a revised plan, I oppose the proposed project because it would irrevocably damage my neighborhood's historic landscape, which is central to our National Historic Landmark Designation. Detroit Thermal continues to show they don't care about the Historic District.

The cover letter is representative of their mischaracterizations of their work from the beginning of this project. The letter, dated June 11 misstates (by a factor of 2) the number of residential units they claim to be serving: "...delivering steam heat to the 600 residential units at 1300 Lafayette."

1300 E. Lafayette has 26 residential floors, each originally with 12 units per floor. Over the decades, several units have been joined to create combined units, bringing the total number of units within the building to fewer than 300.

While Detroit Thermal attempts to respond to concerns about the landscape by engaging an arborist to prepare detailed plans, they have not heard the concerns about engagement with the community, nor have done their due diligence concerning similar considerations of the historic district. I have reviewed the updated proposal and note that there are no explicit references to protecting many of the physical elements of the site, so we are only left to hope that they take care, but without these being explicitly in their plan, there is little chance. Within their application:

- There is no explicit mention of protecting the various buildings' underground utilities, such as water lines, sanitary lines, irrigation lines, etc.
- There is no explicit mention of protecting the historic bench in the central space, or any other unique elements beyond the raised garden beds they are replacing.
- There is no explicit mention of protecting ground amenities, such as signage, waste cans, or other elements provided by the neighborhood.
- Concrete sidewalks are left to the corner of a civil engineering plan, as "Concrete Pavement Replacement," without any acknowledgment of the physical characteristics of these walkways.
- There is no explicit mention of the sidewalks in the park. Many flags were replaced by the city 10 years ago and those replacements are in worse condition today than the original flags installed in the 1960s. Can we expect a similar performance here? If we're lucky. The recently installed flags were a generic broom-swept concrete, different than

what was originally installed. Which will Detroit Thermal install? I suspect we'll get what we get. Will Detroit Thermal be replacing all of the flags in the park they drive over (whether currently damaged, or soon to be damaged) to get access to their work areas, or will we see plywood and metal protective sheets from E. Lafayette all the way to the work sites?) I predict they will drive over them unprotected, break several more, and leave it to the city and the public school department to repair with their budgets (meaning they will not be replaced and we'll be left with a physical reminder of Detroit Thermal's contempt for our neighborhood for years to come. The Historic District is simply an obstacle to its customers.

There is no mention of engagement, communication, transparency, or accountability. Detroit Thermal is presenting this plan, but what are the means of accountability? How will information be shared? To what extent will Detroit Thermal be engaging with the community and its representatives? They continue to steamroll the neighborhood. Will the landscape work be bonded, and for how long? Will the physical work be bonded, and for how long?

Detroit Thermal has claimed this to be a dispute between neighbors while they stand ready to work. Convenient for them to be casually on the sidelines despite calls for and agreeing to meet with our neighborhood. And when this project is completed, that's exactly where they'll return. A so-called "born-and-run Detroit Company." More like skip-and-run.

Historic places don't happen by chance, or with ease. What's easy is how quickly they can be lost, so I will again close my letter with Alfred Caldwell's own words about the Lafayette Park landscape upon his visit in August of 1992: "...anybody can have it – all you have to do is not to be a moron, all you have to do is to care."<sup>1</sup>

Our neighborhood cares. Does the HDC care too?

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Notes

1. *Creating Community: Lafayette Park*, Written, Produced, & Directed by June Finfer, Lost and Found Productions, 1999. Accessed May 12, 2025 on Kanopy.com (25:00–27:51). <https://www.kanopy.com/en/umich/watch/video/63609>.