

July 2, 2025

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

**Subject: Opposition to Detroit Thermal's Proposed Project in the Lafayette Park Historic District (National Historic Landmark)**

Dear City of Detroit Historic District Commissioners,

I oppose this project because it is not historically appropriate, poses significant detriment to our private property, and offers no benefit to this cherished National Historic Landmark. The proposed plans involve the removal and damage of intact historic trees, shrubs, and other landscaping features, much of which is on our private property and is not initiated by us, the property owners.

The opposition is rooted in several critical concerns, as detailed in the joint Cooperative submission and corroborated by recent reports:

1. **Lack of Legal Easement and Consent:** Detroit Thermal plans to reactivate a long-abandoned steam pipe through our 18-acre communal landscape. This land is part of the nationally designated Mies van der Rohe Residential District. Detroit Thermal has not demonstrated a legal easement to access our private property and has failed to obtain the necessary permissions. They have, in their plans, inaccurately labeled our private property as a public Right of Way.
2. **Inaccurate and Incomplete Plans:** Detroit Thermal's submitted plans are inaccurate and incomplete, particularly concerning their tree inventory. A Registered Consulting Arborist, Kay Sicheneder, with over 30 years of experience, identified at least 18 errors in species misidentification or significant underestimation of tree size, including mature honey locust trees being labeled as yew shrubs. The plans also lack a comprehensive inventory of other landscaping elements.
3. **Extensive Damage to Historic Landscape:** Despite Detroit Thermal's claims, their plans acknowledge and will cause significant damage to the historic landscape. Our consulting arborist determined that at least 23 historic trees would suffer injury during construction, with 11 having the potential for severe impact leading to removal. This vastly misrepresents the impact compared to Detroit Thermal's plans, which only identify impact for four trees. The project will also

disconnect our irrigation system, vital for the landscape's survival.

4. **Non-Compliance with Preservation Standards:** The proposed work is not historically appropriate and fails to meet the Secretary's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes or the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation or Preservation. Specifically, it does not conform to Standards #2 and #5, as it fails to protect, maintain, and preserve historically significant landscape elements and proposes work that will damage features integral to the landscape.
5. **Detrimental Work to a National Historic Landmark:** Approving this project would contradict the very intent of the Standards, which are predicated on the notion that proposed work benefits the historic property. This project offers no benefit to Lafayette Park; instead, it exclusively harms this National Historic Landmark.
6. **Unauthorized Work and Prior Damage:** Detroit Thermal commenced preliminary work in April without HDC approval, leading to a stop-work order from the City of Detroit. During this unauthorized occupation of our private property, they allegedly destroyed part of a mature magnolia tree and damaged a historic concrete bench near the playground. An abandoned porta-potty is also causing unsanitary conditions.
7. **Concerns from National Park Service:** The National Park Service has expressed concern regarding Detroit Thermal's plans and expects the design review process to include alternative options, which have not been presented.

Our Cooperatives are unified in our assertion that Detroit Thermal's plans are not historically appropriate and will cause irreparable harm to the Lafayette Park National Historic Landmark. We urge the Detroit Historic District Commission to deny Detroit Thermal's application.

Thank you for your time and commitment to preserving Detroit's historic places.

Sincerely,

Angela Fortino  
LaSalle Cooperative, Board Director