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**[EXTERNAL] Email in Opposition to Detroit Thermal Project in Lafayette Park Historic District\_James Fidler**

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**From** James Fidler <jafidler@umich.edu>

**Date** Sun 6/29/2025 4:55 AM

**To** Historic District Commission (Staff) <hdc@detroitmi.gov>

Dear Detroit Historic District Commission,

As a resident of Lafayette Park and board member of the Nicolet Townhouses Cooperative, I ask that you **deny** Detroit Thermal's application to perform work within the Lafayette Park historic district for the following reasons:

1. Detroit Thermal construction will create lasting, long-term damage to the historic landscape. This landscape took 60 years to mature; it cannot be restored in a day. Running heavy construction equipment through a large area of the historic district will have serious unintended negative impacts on the landscape despite Detroit Thermal's attempt to mitigate their impact. Replacement of damaged landscape elements is nearly impossible. Many of the species of plantings are no longer commercially available. Any replacement of understory trees will take 20+ years to mature and will appear out of place within the intact historical landscape.
2. Deep excavation poses serious risk to the honeylocust canopy trees. In its plans, Detroit Thermal has not taken sufficient steps to guarantee the survival of these historic trees. While sheet 7 calls for tree protection at the perimeter dripline roughly corresponding to the overstory canopy, plans on sheet 6 call for the fencing to be placed almost immediately adjacent to the honeylocust trunks which will not provide adequate protection for tree roots and seriously endanger the trees with excavation planned so close to the tap root. If Detroit Thermal were to provide adequate protection to tree roots, nearly the entire site would need to be fenced and off limits for excavation. Furthermore, the variety of honeylocust in Lafayette Park with its sweeping branch form is no longer commercially available and is irreplaceable. The Lafayette Park cooperatives have unsuccessfully tried to identify a commercial alternative. The only possible replacement alternative is to grow these trees from seed which would take decades to grow.
3. Any and all steam vents are inappropriate within the Lafayette Park historic district. When Lafayette Park was granted historic status, both City and Federal, it was after the steam infrastructure connecting to 1300 was decommissioned. There are no references to steam outlets being essential to the historic character of the place in the documentation of the historic districts. All references to the historic landscape note its peaceful, tranquil qualities and industrial infrastructure such as steam venting is in direct opposition to those qualities. While I appreciate that Detroit Thermal has eliminated the vent stacks from the design, steaming manhole covers are also inappropriate within the historic district and violate Department of Interior standards for rehabilitation.
4. Detroit Thermal has already proven it is not a responsible steward of a historic landscape. The grass they planted within the fenced construction area is not of the same species as the existing grasses in the Historic District, creating an obvious and unsightly difference between the new grass and the historic grasses within the landscape.

5. Detroit Thermal has proven itself to be a bad actor within the Lafayette Park community and cannot be trusted. It has not taken down a construction fence for nearly one year despite there being no construction at the site and repeated requests by the community to take it down. The fence is located in a play area for neighborhood children and has denied them use of this space for nearly a year. A year of a child's life can never be replaced. How can we trust these people to be responsible with a major construction project at the heart of our community?

6. Detroit Thermal has not lived up to the recommendations of the HDC at the May meeting. It has not met once with the Lafayette Park community since the May HDC meeting. It did not share its plans with the owners of the properties or the Lafayette Park community before submitting them to HDC for approval. It and its contractors have continued to intentionally ignore and not engage with the owners of the property and the Lafayette Park community.

For these reasons, **the Detroit Historic District Commission should deny Detroit Thermal's application to perform work within the Lafayette Park historic district.** Any decision that would allow this project to move forward would be an abdication of the responsibilities of the Historic District Commission. Please use your vote to stop this project which would irrevocably damage the historic character of the Lafayette Park historic district.

James Fidler

Resident and Board Member, Nicolet Townhouses Cooperative, Lafayette Park