



Outlook

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**[EXTERNAL] Fwd: Lafayette Park/Detroit Thermal: What come next? Who's liable?**

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**From** Liz Boone <lizboone@ymail.com>**Date** Tue 7/1/2025 8:11 AM**To** Historic District Commission (Staff) <hdc@detroitmi.gov>

Forwarding important questions:

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Liz Boone <lizboone@ymail.com>**Date:** June 22, 2025 at 9:11:58 AM EDT**To:** alexa.bush@detroitmi.gov, tiffanydemetra@gmail.com, mayorduggan@detroitmi.gov, michael.duggan@detroitmi.gov, dugganm@detroitmi.gov, sheffieldm@detroitmi.gov, landsbergg@detroitmi.gov**Subject: Lafayette Park/Detroit Thermal: What come next? Who's liable?**

*Dear the People Who can Make a Difference,*

*I am a Detroit resident in District 5 in the Lafayette Park Historic District neighborhood. 1320 Joliet Place. Our neighborhood has learned that Detroit Thermal will not be completing any of the community engagement steps that were promised to us by the City of Detroit following the May 14 public hearing and that a new public hearing for the project is scheduled with the Detroit Historic District Commission on Wednesday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> at 4:30 PM.*

*I am contacting you to express my outrage over the special meeting date and the lack of community engagement follow through. I'm writing to ask "what's next? and "who's responsible/liable"? I'm writing to ask you to reject their proposal submitted without community engagement. Further, scheduling a meeting under a veritable cloud of darkness (our nation's birthday holiday weekend) is also insulting to our community. It should be moved to accomodate our members.*

*If you approve this destruction to our historic community, the question remains: what's next?*

**FAILURE CONCERNS/SAFETY**

If Detroit Thermal succeeds in going forward with the steam pipes throughout our historic neighborhood, shouldn't we be informed of the ongoing maintenance plan and

what it includes? How often and what will it entail as well as ongoing implications for our community beyond the initial installation? What if there's a pipeline that blows out/fails? What are the worst case scenarios?

### 1. Pipe Blowouts and Explosions

- **Risk:** Aging infrastructure, improper installation, or sudden pressure build-up can lead to high-pressure steam or hot water pipe ruptures.
- **Impact:** These can cause **massive street-level explosions, scalding injuries, death, or significant property damage.**
- **Example:** NYC has experienced several major steam pipe explosions (notably in 2007 and 2018), sending debris and steam hundreds of feet into the air. The last one resulted in one fatality and 45 injuries due to the failure of an 83-year-old underground pipe. How old are our pipes (100 years?)

### 2. Toxic Steam Exposure.

- No one has commented on the smell from those pipes. I've walked near many of the steam pipes and manhole covers and the smell is awful. Has anyone looked at an environmental study of the steam. The steam released most commonly occurs as a result of other water sources, such as groundwater, coming in contact with the steam pipes. What toxins are in the ground water?
- **What is the makeup of all the materials in the system?** (e.g., pre-insulated pipes or asbestos?)
- **Risk:** While steam itself reportedly not toxic, **asbestos insulation, chemical contaminants, or soil contaminants** disturbed by ruptures can be aerosolized into the steam.
- **Impact:** Exposure to **asbestos, oil-based insulating materials, or lead-contaminated dust** can pose serious long-term health risks to first responders and residents.
- **Example:** In the 2007 NYC steam pipe explosion, asbestos-laden steam prompted a large-scale evacuation and decontamination effort.

### 3. Flooding and Property Damage

- **Risk:** Ruptured hot water pipes (as in hot-water-based district heating systems) can cause severe flooding and steam damage.
- **Impact:** Damage to building foundations, interiors, and underground infrastructure (electrical, fiber optics, etc.)

**What if something bad *does* happen?** What is the Emergency response plan? Will Detroit Thermal coordinate with utilities and first responders. Who pays?

### FREQUENCY OF STEAM?

We should ask for data on how often steam is released. They said it's only happens when steam "needs" to be released. In my experience with the manholes and pipes is

that it's almost always releasing steam...especially when you can see it at night. Is this what we want our community to look [like?](#)

#### FUTURE HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONCERNS

Sure, for now they say they'll put in the "sleek" 8 ft steam pipes, but what happens if those fail? Who's to say they won't replace them with their standard, awful orange/white striped pipes seen all over town (see attached).

If they approved this risky abomination, it's a slippery slope we're on, what's next?

#### OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

- **Lock-in and Infrastructure Risk - delay our transition toward renewables.** Detroit Thermal primarily generates its steam energy using natural gas. Natural gas is primarily methane (CH<sub>4</sub>)—a greenhouse gas 84–86x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 20-year period.
- Installing natural gas boilers or expanding pipelines creates **long-lived infrastructure** that can **delay the transition to renewables** by decades.
- These investments often come with **stranded asset risks** as regulations tighten and decarbonization accelerates. What happens then

*Sincerely,*

*Liz Boone*

*1320 Joliet Place*



