
[EXTERNAL] Historic Voigt Park, Attn. Allan Machielse

From AnnMarie D'Anna <amdk@mac.com>

Date Thu 10/2/2025 3:38 PM

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

Ann Marie D'Anna
161 Longfellow Street
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Wednesday October 1, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am a founding member of Voigt Park Block Club (VPBC), as well as an active member of the Voigt Park Tree Committee, a concerned Detroit citizen, and Parkside resident. I have been advocating within the community, to maintain the unique historic character of Historic Voigt Park for over 20 years now. Why were concerned residents not invited to discuss details and ramifications of this development proposal? Why were no meetings organized to encourage open discussion with the Voigt Park Block Club (VPBC) members and all Historic Boston Edison District residents? This lack of opportunity for information sharing and open dialogue is unacceptable. Do we not operate in accordance with the principles of Democracy?

From its inception, Historic Voigt Park has been designated as an "Ornamental Park". A goal of the Detroit City, Parks and Recreation Dept., has been to prioritize diversity, as a guiding factor in establishing a wide variety of city parks. Historic Voigt Park is unique among city parks and needs to be maintained as such, for the benefit of all Detroit city residents. Historic Voigt Park is notable for it's unique peaceful arbor, cooling in the hot summers of Detroit - "The "City of Trees", where visitors can feel the calm of nature's beauty, while being safely surrounded by the stately homes that surround the park. The surrounding Parkside homes, due to their proximity, offer a first line of vigilant protection for all park visitors.

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation: -

Those of us living within the Detroit's Historic Boston Edison District, understand that rehabilitating a historic property requires adherence to the specific historic standards, which dictate improvements to our historic properties. All of our properties / homes, are bound to comply with these historic standards. As we were assured and relied on the existence of these Historic Standards, when deciding to invest in our homes here, compliance in the historic standards has been paramount in maintaining the historic character of the neighborhood and subsequently our Property Values. The invasion of modern materials in Historic Voigt Park, will alter and ultimately destroy the distinct historic character of our very loved Voigt Park and wonderful Boston Edison Historic District. We strongly oppose the proposed changes to the Historic character we all have invested in. We are aware of further intrusive plans for development and believe that failure to adhere to historic standards now, creates a precedent that would allow for other developmental intrusions. Historic Voigt Park is an

“Ornamental Park”. What is being ornamented - the surrounding homes, the Historic Boston Edison neighborhood and the beautiful City of Detroit as well.

We insist on an opportunity for open discussion / debate, for all stakeholders concerned, to consider the details, ramifications, and acceptable options of any proposal.

IMPORTANT DETAILS WHICH NECESSITATE FURTHER DISCUSSION INCLUDE -

1 - THE PATH AS RECENTLY PROPOSED -

The proposal to construct a partial incomplete section of a path, seems utterly ridiculous. In any event, any acceptable proposal would certainly warrant postponement until a complete path plan could be planned, funded and realized in its totality. A six-foot wide cement path with necessary accompanying pylons, placed to discourage but not negate, a variety of motor vehicles from using and joy riding on the path, would absolutely destroy the unique historic character of Historic Voigt Park. Allowing modern construction, dictating material, style and scale, to comply with contemporary regulations... presents a precedent and gateway, to further un-historic development of the park, which we know is being anticipated, and must not be allowed !

Paths were part of the original park design. However, the original paths were not obtrusive. They were asphalt type, intimate paths which were compatible with the character of our Historic residential neighborhood. These original paths were not maintained, (details of which need to be examined). The new ADA requirements of 6 foot cement construction, would completely change the look, feel and historic character of the park, as well as the historic character of the neighborhood and it will adversely affect the property values of all homes in the Boston Edison Historic District !

Historic character is intrinsic to the value of our historic homes and neighborhood. Already existing surrounding the Park, are the Parkside sidewalks -on Longfellow, Edison and on Second and Third Avenue's. These sidewalks are already ADA compliant, easily traversable wheelchair accessible and available to all.

2 - THE SECURITY RAMIFICATIONS OF BENCHES -

Concerning the bench proposal – in the wisdom of the Parks designer, note that furniture / benches, were not in the original Park plan/design. There are very good reasons that benches were never included this in an intimate residential setting. We would like to discuss this further in detail, but for purposes here, let it suffice to say, that benches would present negative repercussions for the neighborhood, especially for the primary stakeholders whose homes directly surround the Park. Are benches also being proposed for the Park medians on Boston Boulevard? While the idea of benches may seem benign however in reality, the consequences of benches are terrifying, especially for the park-side residents, as benches would allow direct observation of our homes for criminal opportunities. From their convenient perch, bench occupants may case our homes, observing resident's comings and goings and be on the ready, when packages are delivered.

We hope and expect that all Boston Edison residents, even if not living directly on the park, would empathize with park-side residents' real fears and join with us, in saying NO to permanently placed benches. Neighbors may prefer to bring portable seating to the park if desired. Also, Voigt Park is too close to the liquor store on Woodward Avenue and benches would provide a lovely excuse to sit and drink... providing a comfortable meeting place for activity, such as drug sales, drug use and other potential disturbances.

Our Parkside homes present a stately backdrop and also bear the burden of providing a first line of security for the park. The existence of benches would result in increased security risks, necessitating increased vigilance. We park-side residents do not want this onerous terrifying job / community responsibility. We need to involve the 10th precinct in our security assessments and distribute their growing crime statistics. Incidents of crime around the Park are certain to increase with these benches beckoning and legitimizing loitering.

3 - ESTABLISHING MORE REASONABLE FUNDING PRIORITIES -

Our priorities for the Park need to encompass the trimming and otherwise healthy maintenance of the existing trees as well as the planting of additional trees, which will contribute greatly to mitigating the ponding issues (which are largely due to the loss of large thirsty trees). This will entail a multi-phased process with thoughtful selection and placement of trees... and remains the priority for use of any funds available. Understanding the ramifications of any proposal, on the health of the trees and ponding are necessary so as not to compromise the health of the trees and ponding mitigation efforts. The solutions to the park's problems, necessitate thoughtful, long- term solutions. In historic districts, long-term solutions, are often understandably necessary.

(Please see the two attached letters from local Certified Arborists - attachment 1. Indicating that the path's construction would be damaging to trees in Voigt Park and also attachment 2. Support from Kevin Sayers, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator, DNR, Lansing MI)

4 - TRASH RECEPTACLES -

Yes, we need suitable garbage receptacles with lids to keep out vermin / animals. Also better receptacle placement to discourage passing cars from depositing their trash, as people are often observed filling the existing receptacles. We would like to find "historic type" receptacles for Historic Voigt Park.

5 - MAINTAIN THE ORIGINAL CHARACTER AS AN "HISTORIC ORNAMENTAL PARK" -

Historic Voigt park offers serenity and a safe cooling refuge, for all residents in Detroit, "The City of Trees" Detroit Parks and Recreation has long had as a guiding mission - to support a "wide diversity", of types of parks. There are many wonderfully developed parks a short distance from Voigt Park. We believe that Historic Voigt Park, has a specific value to the city that needs to be maintained and protected. Originally deeded as an "Ornamental Park", it has been maintained as an open Arbor, with two flowerbeds. (A structure for maintenance equipment in the park was demolished years ago due to safety and security issues, which were not at issue when the park was planned early in the 20th century.)

Maintaining the park's original function as an "Ornamental Park" is ideal, for the community, allowing for large versatile neighborhood events as well as city, community, school, family and peaceful personal use.

Historic Voigt Park offers all Detroiters a unique experience, nestled in the heart of the city for all to enjoy. It is a quiet, majestic arbor where one can feel safe among the trees and historic homes that surround the park, beckoning one to linger in what some refer to as "Nature's Cathedral". This Park provides sublime space for desired tranquility and spiritual contemplation, needed in Detroit and in this world, now perhaps more than ever.

It's evident that too many significant issues remain without informing concerned residents and allowing thorough examination and discussion. The un-historic nature of these new proposals will adversely affect the property values of the Historic Boston Edison District homes and would be a great loss for all Detroit's residents, as well as for Historic Preservation efforts. This hurried, reckless un-debated proposal is an assault to a fair and open Democratic process and as such, must be justly rejected.

Sincerely with Conviction,
One of many supporters of maintaining
an Historic Voigt Park,

ATTACHMENTS SEE BELOW -

1. *Singing Tree, Certified Arborists - Path construction is damaging to trees in Voigt Park.*
2. *Support Letter from Kevin Sayers, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator DNR, Lansing*

1.

From Certified Arborists - indicating path construction - disruptive and not healthy for the trees in Voigt Park !

From: Emily or Kevin Bingham <singingtreeinfo@gmail.com>

Date: January 7, 2020 at 2:03:48 PM EST

To: redriverbird@mac.com

Subject: Voight Park

Key Points for talking about Voight Park

There seems to be a clash of values when it comes to park renovations. Many of the city parks are being revamped and changed. One of the things that I love about the City of Detroit is that there is a wildness to it. Some people think that natural spaces need to be tamed and well manicured. Some people, would prefer that nature have its way with natural spaces.

Detroit's parks have largely been left alone for the past 40 or so years. This has been great for the trees in these parks as trees prefer less maintenance to more. They like leaf litter beneath their canopies, deadwood and cavities offer homes to wildlife, the absence of pruning allow the trees to do the maximum amount of photosynthesizing, and less stringent concrete and asphalt maintenance allows roots to grow where they like and take up water from where they need to.

It sounds like many of the residents around Voight Park like the wildness of the park as it is, they like the mature trees full and healthy, they like that there is no interference from brightly colored structures, they like the wildlife that a space like this supports.

Overall, the trees on this site are healthy. Trees benefit us in many different ways, please visit <https://www.arborday.org/> for more information. You can use some of the statistics here to make a case for why mature trees should not be sacrificed in order to make changes to the park.

Additional things to consider and advocate for while undergoing changes are as follows.

1) Stay outside of the drip zone.

If there are going to be new structures or construction of any kind, including additional sidewalks, the construction should be as far away as possible from the trunk of the tree. The drip zone is the outer reaches of the canopy, construction should take place outside of the drip zone of all trees, farther out that that is even better.

2) Compaction is a threat.

Heavy machinery can impact the soil. It can compact soil under trees and make it inhospitable for the tree to continue living. Heavy machinery has no place in a park with mature trees and landscaping. If heavy machines are necessary, they also should stay well outside the drip zone of each tree.

3) No grade changes.

Mature trees cannot handle grade changes. Park replanning should not involve changes to the grade of the soil.

4) Mature trees help manage excess water.

A mature tree drinks between 5,000 and 15,000 gallons of water per year. This is per ONE tree. trees should not be overlooked when considering solutions to drainage problems on site.

The benefit of these

Hope this helps. Let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Emily Brent
Singing Tree LLC

313-319-0583
Detroit, Michigan
Quality tree and soil care

2.

From: Ann-Marie D'Anna <amdk@mac.com>

Date: November 16, 2023 at 10:34:12 PM EST

To: Ann-Marie D'Anna <amdk@mac.com>, Paul Kashat <kashatpj@gmail.com>

Subject: Kevin Sayers - DNR, support letter

On Jan 22, 2020, at 10:19 PM, Sayers, Kevin (DNR) <SAYERSK@michigan.gov> wrote:

Hi Ann Marie, Sorry for the delay in confirming receipt of this and getting back to you. I took a 'virtual' drive around the park (via google streetview) and it is an amazing little oasis in the neighborhood. I can see the appeal of leaving it as it is to maintain the unique (undeveloped) character of a natural park setting and which is consistent with the historic appearance of the surrounding neighborhood. The letters you provided confirm this sentiment, though I imagine that there are others who would welcome some or all of the proposed improvements. There always seems to be two sides to every story. :)

Since my role with the DNR is focused on urban and community forestry, my attention and resources are mostly directed towards the trees and their management. I do work with city parks and rec. staff but not typically on matters related to park management or improvement, aside from tree issues. There is, however, a lot of overlap between parks, urban forestry and people that its often hard to separate the interplay of issues. Open, honest and ongoing discourse is where solutions are arrived at, often with compromises being made.

I would hope that the city, county and any others who are responsible for management, maintenance and financial support for the park (including improvements) are listening to the residents opinions and desires. Public input is so important and is one of the reasons we advise communities to make sure they get approval from homeowners before planting a tree in front of their house. It just doesn't make sense to waste limited resources in areas or on things that are not desired or are outright not wanted. Too many times we've seen what happens when a tree is planted where it's not wanted. It either withers and dies from lack of care or is vandalized or removed in protest. Sounds similar to the bench issue described in one of your letters.

All this is to say, I understand your and your fellow neighbors desires to keep things as they are and, if improvements are to be made, direct them towards better care and management of what's there (e.g. tree and lawn maintenance). I think the historic preservation angle will be a strong part of your case in this regard.

I'd be happy to direct you to staff within the DNR's Parks and Recreation Division for further assistance from our end. However, it seems like this is an issue of local decision and you're already working with the appropriate city/county staff and through your neighborhood group to advocate your interests

appropriately. I know the Detroit City Forester (XXX) and I believe the Parks contact is XXX. Let me know if you need contact information for either of them and i'll pass it along. Also, if you're not already familiar with the Greening of Detroit, they are an excellent local nonprofit that can assist you in a variety of ways on all issues related to local tree planting, maintenance, education and neighborhood engagement.

Thanks again for getting in touch with me to share your interest and to make me aware of this park and your neighborhood group. I certainly trust that the park and surrounding neighborhood are in good hands with engaged citizens like yourself at the helm.

Let me know if there's anything else I can assist with.

My best,

Kevin S.