
[EXTERNAL] Concerns about Voigt Park HDC Application

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To Historic District Commission (Staff) <hdc@detroitmi.gov>; Public Spaces Planning Unit <PSPU@detroitmi.gov>

Cc CouncilMemberSheffield <CouncilMemberSheffield@detroitmi.gov>; Joshua Roberson <Joshua.Roberson@detroitmi.gov>; Keith Butler <Keith.Butler@detroitmi.gov>; Jkinloch@waynecountymi.gov <Jkinloch@waynecountymi.gov>; Theresa Mcarleton <theresa.mcarleton@detroitmi.gov>

Dear Historic District Commission,

I am writing in regards to [HDC Application 2025-00576](#) to be considered at the [October 8, 2025 Historic District Commission meeting](#).

In its current form, **I do not support the proposed plan** for installing new infrastructure in Voigt Park. While I do not oppose restoring the historic paths, or adding benches and trash receptacles, I am deeply concerned by the design and plan as it is currently proposed – as well as the Parks Department's lack of resident engagement before proposing these changes. **I respectfully request that HDC not approve the current plan presented**, allowing the City of Detroit Parks Department to engage the community on the proposed amenities and return with a revised plan based on the feedback of the neighbors and users of Voigt Park. Specifically, I have the following concerns regarding this application:

- **Excessive width and elevation of the proposed park paths.** The planned paths are overly obtrusive and will cause visual blight to Voigt Park's historic natural landscape due to their proposed 6 foot width and the plan to have them elevated above ground level. 6 foot paths are wider than the sidewalks in front of many of our homes and accessible path standards only require 3 feet in width. In order to minimize the visual impact of the paths on the historic landscape, the paths should be reduced to 3 feet and installed to be flush or level with the ground. Many park users would not adhere to the paths and may trip navigating the green space.
- **Impervious concrete pathway materials.** Seasonal flooding and stormwater runoff are ongoing issues for Voigt Park, and the addition of significant amounts of impervious concrete will only serve to exacerbate the issue. There are many permeable solutions available while maintaining accessibility standards and not detracting from the historic landscape. I would note that some of our City's most recognized and celebrated parks, such as Campus Martius and Cadillac Square (notably located in Historic Districts) make good use of natural materials for walkways instead of concrete. The Voigt Park paths should be revised to be constructed of natural and/or permeable materials to enhance the look and feel of the historic landscape.
 - Additional resources on standards for accessible pathways and natural materials are available here:
 - [American Trails: ADA Trail Improvements with Naturally Occurring, Sustainable Materials](#)
 - [US Forest Service: Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails](#)

- [U.S. Access Board: Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards - Sec. 403.5.1 \(Guidelines for Clear Width\)](#)
- **Installation of benches and garbage receptacles on concrete pads.** Similar to the issues above, concrete pads for these amenities are unsightly, impervious, and unnecessary. I urge the City's Parks Department to utilize a different method to secure these items in the park, such as anchoring to an underground concrete post.
- **Community input on design and materials for park amenities.** According to the [Detroit Parks Department's Strategic Plan](#), Voigt Park is slated for a parks planning process in "Phase 4 - 6", taking place sometime between 2026 and 2028. The City of Detroit Parks Department usually conducts a standard community engagement process when planning upgrades to its parks. Unfortunately, the plans presented to HDC have not been formed in any sort of public process. While I understand that the Parks Department has had several private conversations with the Historic Boston Edison Association (HBEA) and Voigt Park Neighborhood Block Club, the broader community has not been engaged on these proposed changes. The Block Club has been proactive in letting neighbors know about the plans and gaining feedback, but that is not a substitute for the Detroit Parks Department taking responsibility to engage with residents before moving forward with such a significant change to Voigt Park. Ideally, any decisions about park improvements, design, and materials should be determined at the time of the Voigt Park's scheduled planning process in Phase 4 - 6 of the City's Parks Strategic Plan. At a bare minimum, I request that the Parks Department hold at least one Design Charette with neighbors adjacent to Voigt Park so that consensus can be reached on the design of these elements. Additionally, action should be taken on improving the tree canopy and mitigating seasonal flooding in the park. Via several efforts to poll and gather resident feedback, these have long been identified as priorities for park users and neighbors living near Voigt Park. We have worked successfully with the Detroit Parks Department to plant and maintain trees in the park, but more plantings are needed to restore Voigt Park's historic forest canopy of hardwood and native trees.
- **Timing of Improvements - no partial construction, instead prioritize interim improvements via tree planting and flooding mitigation.** I understand that the City only has funding to complete approximately one third of the pathways at this time, with no guarantee or identified source of funds to complete the remainder of the paths. In order to minimize disruption to the park and park users through multiple construction periods, the City should not commence with construction of paths until they have the resources to complete the pathway. This will also allow time for the City to conduct additional outreach and engagement, ensuring that the plan is supported by neighbors. In the interim, I request that the City continue to prioritize the health of Voigt Park's historic forest by planting additional trees as well as studying the seasonal flooding issues and making a plan for mitigating the standing water issues that is a barrier to the use and enjoyment of the park several months out of the year.

I thank the Historic District Commissioners and the City of Detroit Parks Department staff for their attention to this important issue for our neighborhood. I am fully confident that when the Parks Department engages with residents who live adjacent to and frequently use Voigt Park, we can have a plan for our beloved park that truly reflects the desires and priorities of nearby residents.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your commitment to preserving Detroit's history, buildings and landscapes.

Sincerely,

JS Lee (resident of Boston-Edison since 2005)