

STAFF REPORT: OCTOBER 8, 2025 REGULAR MEETING **PREPARED BY:** B. SALIE
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00589
ADDRESS: 2585-2603 W. GRAND BOULEVARD (MARTIN LUTHER KING JR PARK)
HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST GRAND BOULEVARD AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTS & BUSINESS
APPLICANT: CITY OF DETROIT – GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 09/12/2025
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09/25/2025

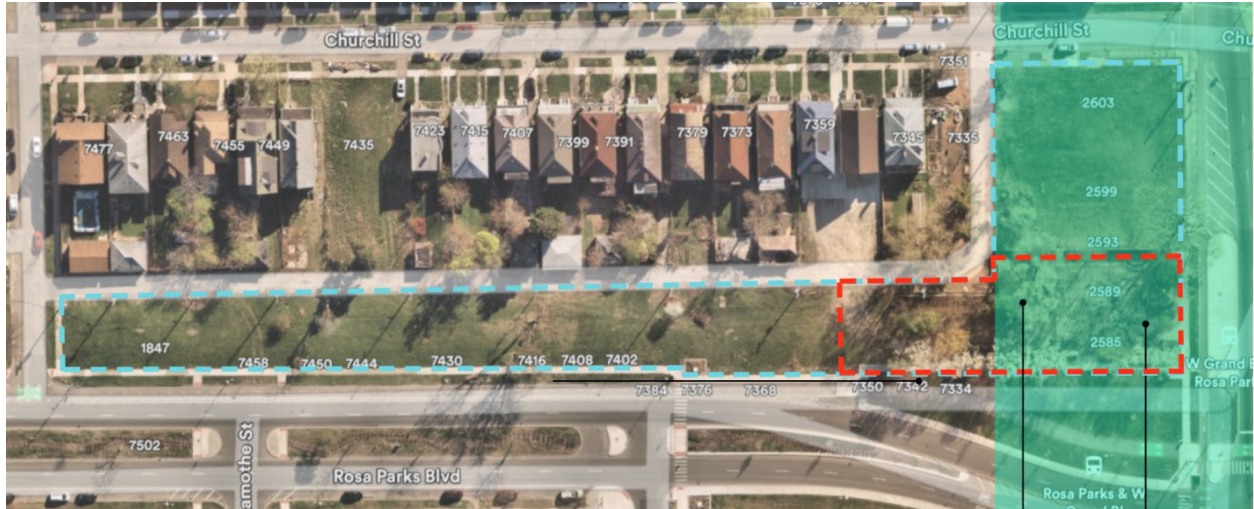
SCOPE: EXPAND, ALTER, AND REHABILITATE PARK

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park opened to the public on November 6th, 1980. Located at the intersection of West Grande Boulevard and Rosa Parks Boulevard, the City of Detroit held an opening ceremony to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with a keynote speech by Rosa Parks. Since its installation in 1981, the sculpture of Dr. King serves as a central feature of the park. The Park currently sits on five parcels. The City of Detroit intends to expand the park to include an additional 14 vacant parcels along West Grand Boulevard (within the district, to the east of the current park boundaries) and Rosa Parks Boulevard (outside of the historic district, to the north of the current park boundaries).



Photos taken by staff on 09/25/2025.



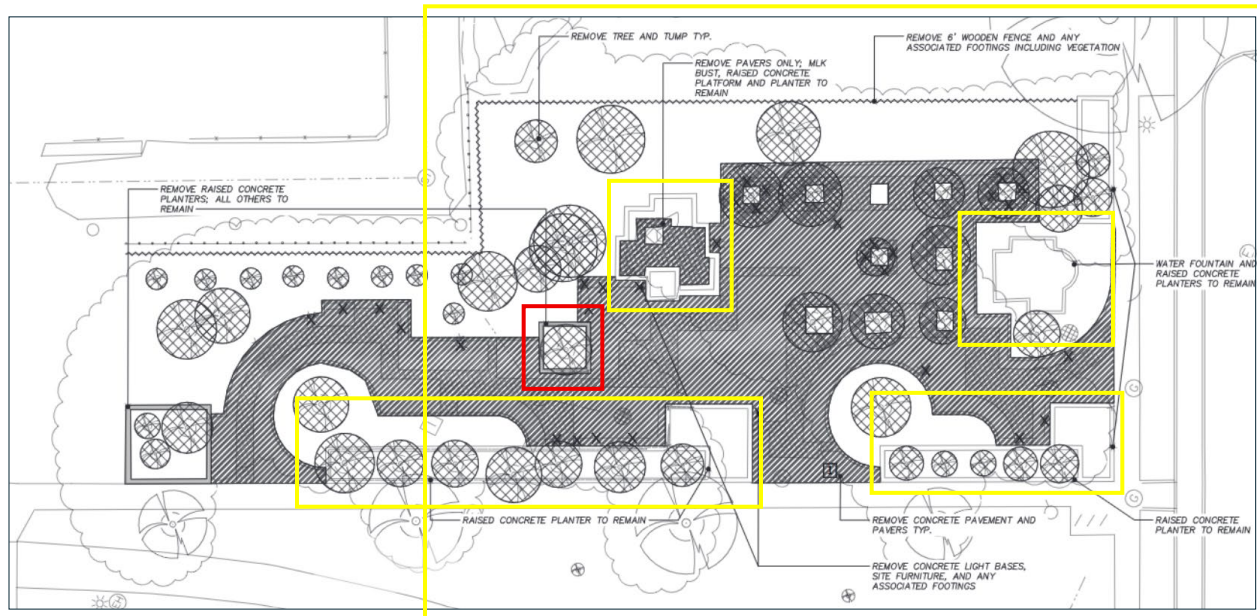
*Site Plan provided by applicant. Highlighted in blue falls within the historic district.
RED: Existing Martin Luther King Memorial Park. BLUE: Park Expansion*



Photos taken by staff on 09/25/2025.

PROPOSAL

The demolition plan (shown below), outlines the scope of the work proposed to be undertaken within the historic district boundaries:



*Demolition Plan (within the park's current footprint), submitted by applicant. RED: concrete planters to be **removed**, YELLOW: Concrete planters to **remain**. Dark hashed area indicated the area of concrete and brick pavers proposed for removal. Light hashed areas indicates trees proposed for removal.*

Demolition Plan (within the historic district boundary):

1. Remove all concrete pavement and brick pavers
2. Remove existing trees
3. Remove wood gate

The proposed scope of work (within historic district boundary):

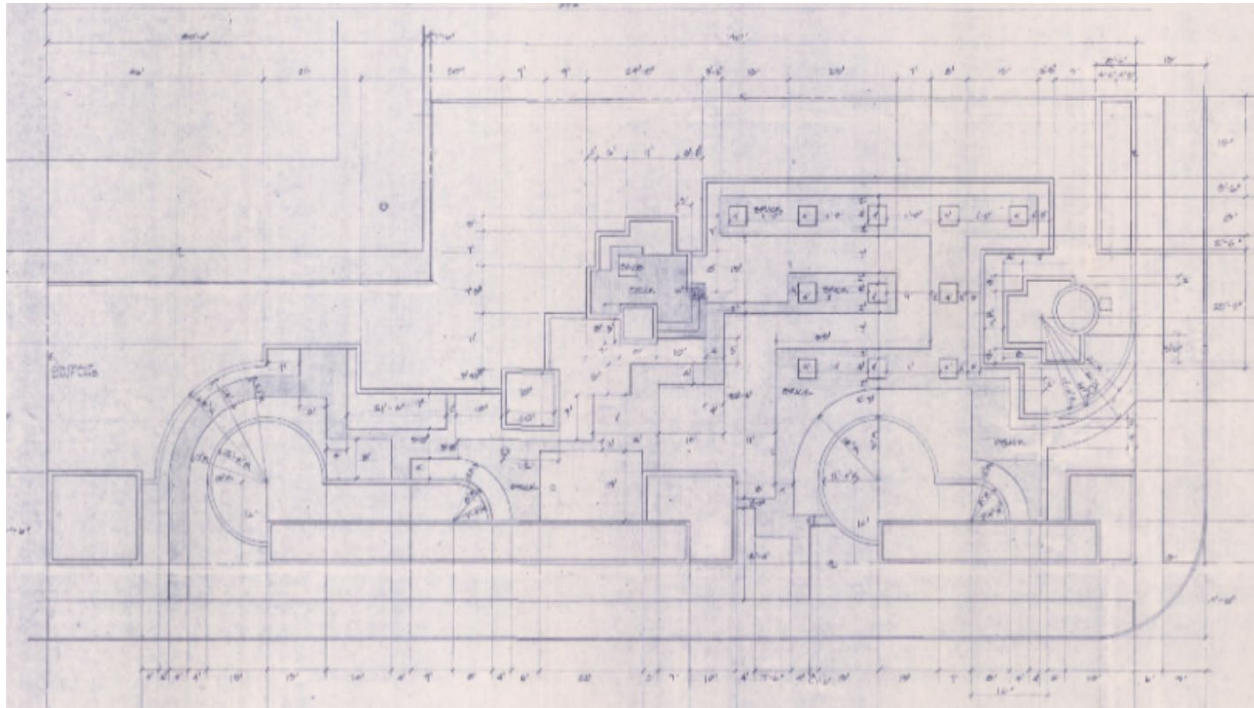
1. Restore memorial plaza
 - a. Water fountain will be restored to use
2. Addition of parking
3. Plant new trees
4. Install benches
5. Install pathways
6. Install concrete plaza
7. Install two steel trellises
8. Install signage
9. Erect a 4'-0" high metal fence at park perimeter

Site Plan of the proposed conditions within the district boundaries, provided by applicant.



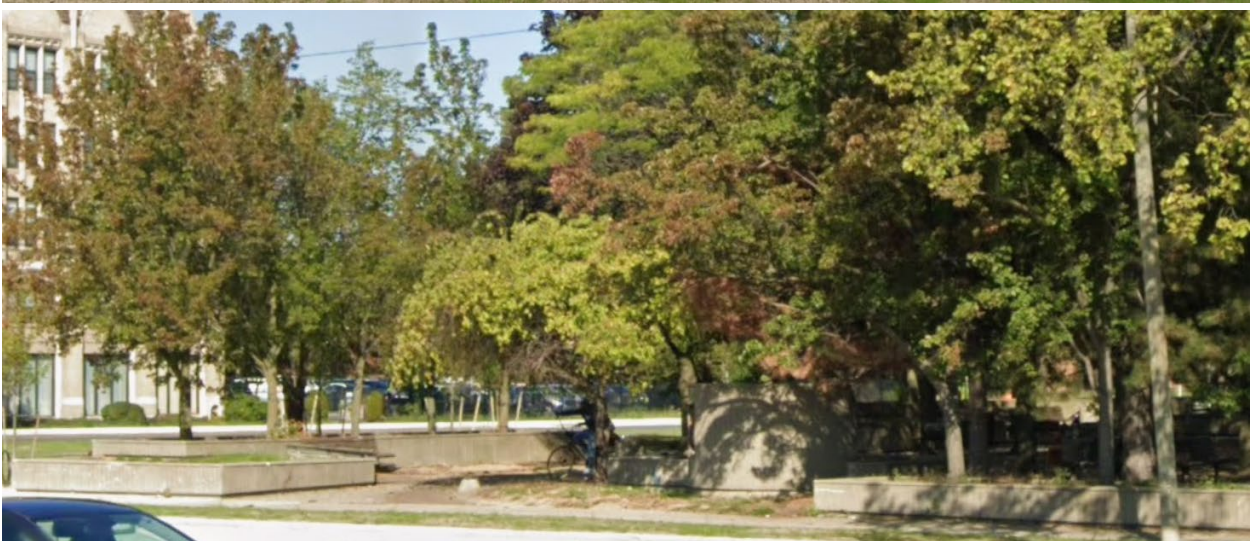
STAFF OBSERVATIONS & RESEARCH

- West Grand Boulevard African and American Art and Business was established as a local historic district in 2018, with a period of significance from 1905-1975.
- The designation report for the district states that the existing park contributes to the district, noting that it, "... is surfaced with concrete and brick and features raised planters with trees and bushes."
- The district's **Element of Design # (13): Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments** specifically identifies the park and notes that it "...is surfaced with concrete and brick and is landscaped with raised planters, trees, and bushes."
- The applicant has provided the original plan of the plan (see below) and noted that the city acquired the parcels in 1975, the park was opened/dedicated in 1980, and the Martin Luther King Jr. bust was completed in 1982.



Original plans of the park, provided by applicant.

- Staff visited the park and found that it remains as a good example of a 1970s/1980s neighborhood park. A review of the original plan indicates that its present appearance closely resembles the original and it retains sufficient historic integrity to convey its historical association. Specifically, the park retains a significant number of character-defining features, to include the original planters, artwork, benches hardscape, landscape, and overall layout to the extent that the visual, spatial, and contextual relationships of the property can be clearly understood.



Google Street View Images



Photos taken by staff on 09/25/2025

- The proposed project will modify the original, character-defining elements of the park in the following manner:
 - Two of the concrete planters will be removed
 - All of the existing wood benches will be removed
 - All of the original trees/landscaping will be removed
 - All of the original hardscape (concrete and brick pavers) will be removed
 - The original park layout/plan will be destroyed
 - The boundaries will be expanded with the incorporation of several parcels to the east and north
- Staff visited the park and found that the items which are proposed for removal appear to be in good condition.

- While Staff does not object to the proposed expansion of the park, Staff does note that the proposed rehabilitation of its original elements does not meet the standards as it will destroy the park's original layout and will result in the removal of a number of original, character-defining elements.

ISSUES

- Per the historic designation advisory board, the park contributes to the district. The proposed project will result in the removal/destruction of a number of the park's character-defining features to include the existing hardscape, landscape, and two planters. The project will also completely alter the park's original layout.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission

Recommendation 1 of 1 – Denial – Expand, alter, and rehabilitate park

Staff recommends that the proposed work will not be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the West Grand Boulevard African and American Art and Business Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically *Standards 2, 5, 6, 9, & 10*:

(2) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

(5) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

(6) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

(9) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

(10) New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

And Elements of Design #: 13

For the following reasons:

- The park contributes to the district. The proposed project will result in the removal/destruction of a number of the park's character-defining features to include the existing hardscape, landscape, and two planters. The project will also completely alter the park's original layout.