STAFF REPORT: NOVEMBER12, 2025 REGULAR MEETING

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: SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: SEPTEMBER 25, OCTOBER 15 AND NOVEMBER 8, 2025

SCOPE: EXPAND, ALTER, AND REHABILITATE PARK

EXISTING CONDITIONS

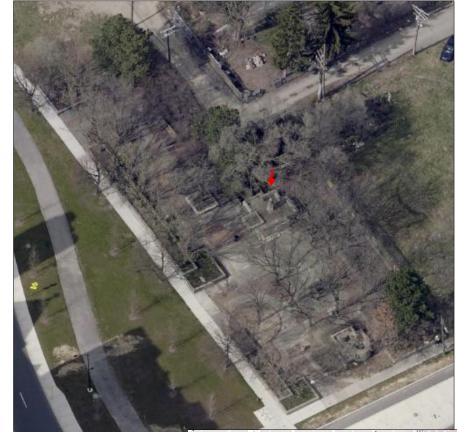
Located at the northeast corner of West Grand Boulevard and Rosa Parks Boulevard, the "L"-shaped park encompasses five parcels of land. The northeast corner of the park is bound by an alley. Since its installation in 1981, the sculpture of Dr. King has served as a central feature of the park.

A fountain, currently not operating, is centrally located at the park's southern boundary and faces the sculpture. The park includes rectangular raised concrete planters that are the base for many trees, rounded at-grade landscape beds enclosed with brick edging, and a concrete and tile paver walking surface.

Vegetation consists of deciduous and evergreen trees; flowers and shrubbery are not present within the landscape beds. Wood benches are placed throughout the park, as are a few concrete aggregate trash cans, both likely from the original park design.

The park is not internally lit - the lampposts were removed at some point in time; the concrete bases having been left behind. Many benches have deteriorated wood members and some of the clay tiles have lifted from the walkways. The park is currently used for passive recreation.





Above: Aerial view of the park looking northeast.
ConnectExplorer; April 2024.

Left: Bust of MLK Jr. located in the eastern center of the park (arrow). Staff photo, October 2025.

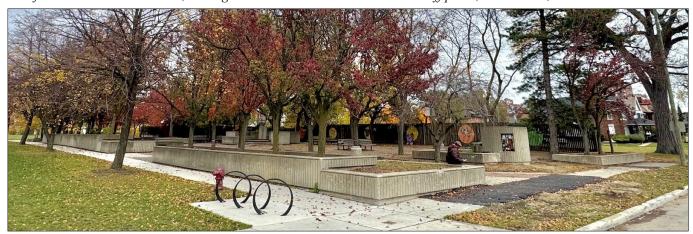
Right: Historic district map, park identified by blue dot. HDC website.



PREPARED BY: B. SALIE/A. DYE



View from Rosa Parks Boulevard, looking southeast towards W. Grand Blvd. Staff photo, November 8, 2015.



View from Rosa Parks Boulevard looking east into the park. Staff photo, November 8, 2025.



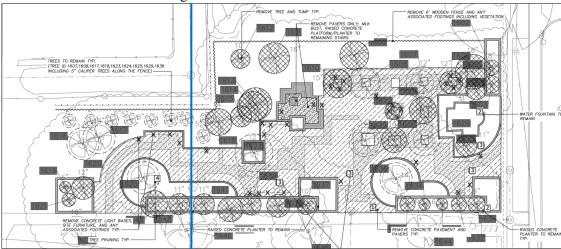
View from W. Grand Boulevard, looking northwest into the park. The back of the fountain is visible; Rosa Parks Boulevard is in the background. Google Street View, August 2025.

PROPOSAL/SCOPE OF WORK

This application encompasses the rehabilitation of and alterations to the existing park, as well as its expansion to encompass 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).

Demolition Plan

- Remove all concrete pavement and tile pavers
- Remove majority of trees; some trees will remain.
- Remove wood privacy fence located along the eastern edge of existing park and alley
- Remove wood benches and trash cans
- Remove concrete light bases

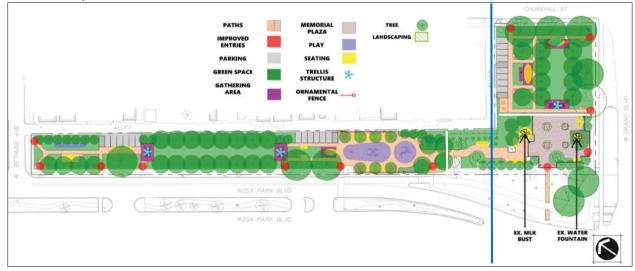


Left: Demolition plan proposed for the existing park.

Below: Proposed plan for the historic and new park.

Applicant drawings.

Staff added a blue line to identify the northern boundary of the local historic district and white lines to identify the extent of the historic park within the expanded design.



Rehabilitation/New Construction

- Restore memorial park water fountain
- Plant new trees and create additional landscape areas
- Install new pathways and walkway surfaces (concrete and crushed limestone)
- Install benches
- Addition of one row of parking at alley (approx. eight (8) spots
- Install two steel trellises
- Install play equipment; erect a 4'-0" high metal fence at east and west park perimeter at play area
- Install signage
- Install drinking fountain

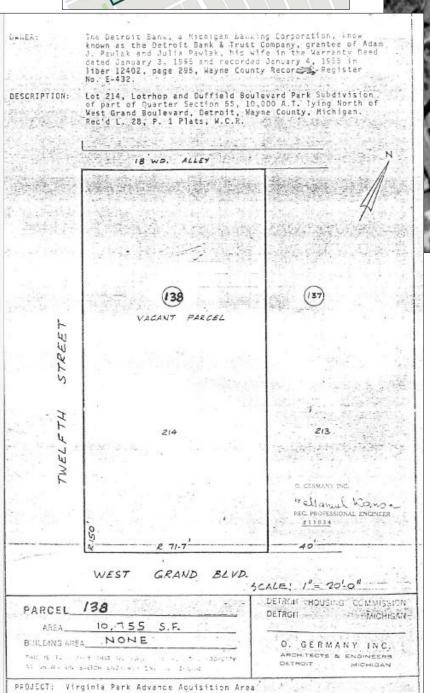
STAFF OBSERVATIONS & RESEARCH

- The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park opened to the public on November 6th, 1980. The City of Detroit held an opening ceremony to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with a keynote speech by Rosa Parks.
- The West Grand Boulevard African American Art and Business Historic District was designated on August 15, 2018.
- The final designation report for the district <u>West Grand Boulevard African American Arts and Business Historic</u> District.pdf states that its **period of significance is 1905-1975**.
- With respect to the Martin Luther King Jr. Park:
 - The district's final designation report lists the Martin Luther King Jr. Park as a **contributing resource** to the district.
 - O Per <u>Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-2. Definitions</u>, a district's Elements of Design "...are the characteristic relationships of the various features within an historic district which are significant to the appearance of the district..." Note that the Elements of Design for the West Grand Boulevard African American Art and Business Historic District makes a specific reference to the park. Specifically, Element of Design <u>13</u>) <u>Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments</u> notes that the "...Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Park, on the northeast corner of Rosa Parks Boulevard and West Grand Boulevard, is surfaced with concrete and brick."
 - Despite the designation report's identification of the property as a contributing resource to the district and
 the references to the park in the district's Elements of Design, the Historic Designation Advisory Board
 included only the portion of the park/the park's parcels along West Grand Boulevard within the district's
 boundaries.
 - Staff also notes, per GSD, that site was officially dedicated as the Martin Luther King Jr. Park in 1980, six years after the period of significance's end date of 1975.
- HDC staff contacted HDAB staff in an effort to glean insight re: property's contributing status, given the above noted anomalies but was unable to gain additional details. HDC staff therefore undertook research in order to verify the property's significance with the context of the neighborhood. See the below images to note that following:
 - The City of Detroit has had an association with parcels at the northeast corner of West Grand Boulevard and 12th Street (now Rosa Parks Boulevard) since the 1950s as the City of Detroit-Detroit Housing Commission purchased a lot at location for a project entitled the "Virginia Park Advance Acquisition Area" in 1955.
 - o A Sanborn Fire Insurance Map dating from 1969 identifies two parcels at the intersection of West Grand Boulevard and 12th Street (which front on to West Grand Boulevard, south of the alleyway) as a "Park P".
 - o In 1970, the parcel at the northeast corner of West Grand Boulevard and Rosa Parks has been identified for use as a "recreational" site by the Detroit Housing Commission.
 - A document from 1975 indicates that the city had earmarked funding for the survey and preparation of design documents for the improvement of the "Entrance Park P", which includes the portion of the park that the HDAB included in the district boundaries.
 - o A document which dates from late 1976 provides notes from a meeting which was held to "...start the planning process for the south entrance park which is to be a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King." \$300,000 in federal funds were earmarked for the project. However, the document does note that a call held after the meeting revealed that the City had previously approved funds for the design of a new park in 1975.
- HDC staff therefore does find that the park contributes to the district as the portion of the site within the district boundaries has been used the City for recreation purposes since 1969 and planning for its improvement was initiated in 1975, within the district's period of significance.



Left: Historic district boundary map. The black lines identify the footprint of the existing park; the red lines identify areas proposed for new construction/park expansion.

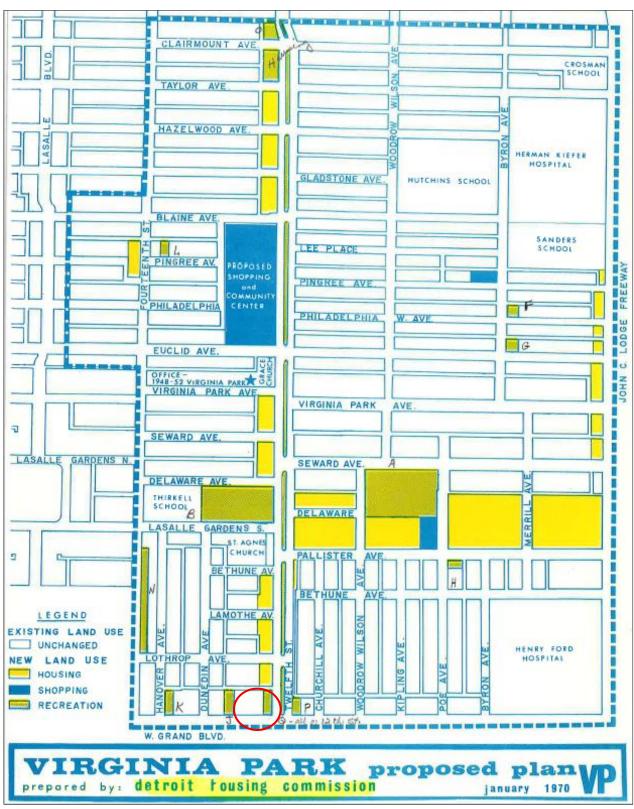
The yellow star denotes a local historic district within the boundaries of the W. Grand Blvd. district: James H. Cole Home for Funerals; a single resource district enacted 11/13/2012.



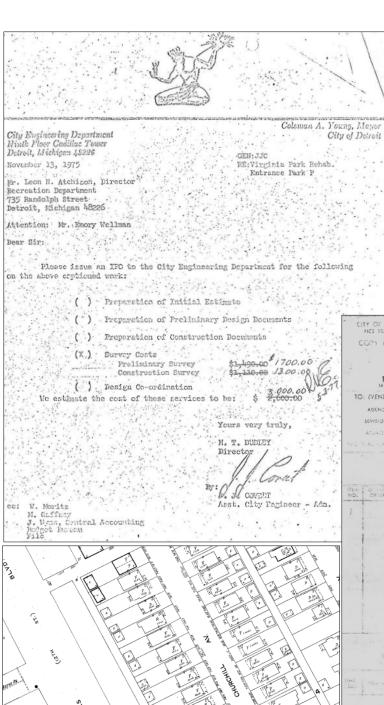
W. Grand Boulevard

Left: Warranty deed for the parcel (138) at the corner of W. Grand and 12th Street, January 1955. The City of Detroit-Detroit Housing Commission obtains the lot for the project "Virginia Park Advance Acquisition Area".

Above: DTE aerial photo (05/30/1961) shows the undeveloped lot amidst a dense residential neighborhood and mixed-use travel corridors.



1970 Detroit Housing Commission map with the northeast corner parcel highlighted and identified with a "P". The shaded yellow denotes a new land use as "recreation".



go

Left: November 13, 1975 City of Detroit Engineering Department memo requesting a purchase order be created to fund survey costs for the "Virginia Park Rehabilitation Entrance Park "P".

Below: November 21, 1975 City of Detroit Recreation Department purchase order for the "survey and design" for Entrance Park "P".

Bottom left: Sanborn map, circa 1970s*, identifying the northeast corner lots as "Park P".

*12th Street was renamed Rosa Parks Boulevard in 1976.

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CITY OF DETROIT RECREATION DEPARTMENT

MEETING REPORT

DATE: November 9, 1976

TIME: 2:00 P.M.

SUBJECT: Entrace Park "P" - South end of Rosa Parks Blvd. PLACE OF MEETING: Grace Episcopal Church, 1926 Virginia Park

REQUESTED BY: Planning Committe, Virginia Park Citizens District Council

PRESIDING: Marcellano Benemerito PERSON REPORTING: Edward H. Viall

PRESENT: M. Benemerito, Chairman, V.P.C.D.C.

Mr. Bill Parks, CEDD Project Manager

Mr. Fred Watson, Executive Director, V.P.C.D.C.

Rev. Jennings

Mrs. Hayes

Mr. Jones

Mr. & Mrs. L. Echols

E. H. Viall, Recreation Department

This meeting was called to start the planning process for the South Entrance Park which is to be a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King.

CEDD will provide us with an IPO to begin design drawings of the area. It was pointed out that for present Block Grant Projects construction must be started by May 18, 1977. I told the Committee that we needed more time than that for design, review, preparation of contract drawings and specifications, advertisement and execution of contract. It was agreed to provide only design funds for this fiscal year, and place development for the park into the 1977-78 budget. After much discussion an amount of \$300,000 was arrived at as the figure not to be exceeded for development. The design is to include the Entrace Park, a greenbelt and another development area at the southeastern corner of Pallister and Rosa Parks. Plan showing dimensions of parcels to be developed will be provided to us by Bill Lawson, CEDD. Elements in the park design shall include a bust of Dr. King, a bubbler-type fountain, flower beds, sprinkler system and landscaping.

The bust shall be by competition under the direction of the Recreation Sculpture Committee.

After the meeting a call to CEDD disclosed an IPO was already in effect for design of Entrace Park "P". It was approved 11-28-75 for \$6,934.00, IPO # R-00856.

EHV:flm

cc: E. Wellman

L. Toth

B. Lloyd

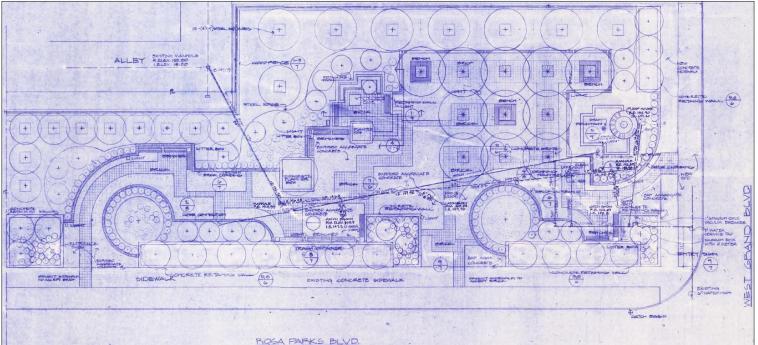
Exec. File (2)

1976 meeting report that reiterates the expenditure of funds in 1975 for the design of Entrance Park "P".

MLK Jr. Park Design

- The architect of record for the park design is David Shervish.
- Ted Viall, Chief Landscape Architect for the city, was the reviewer of record.

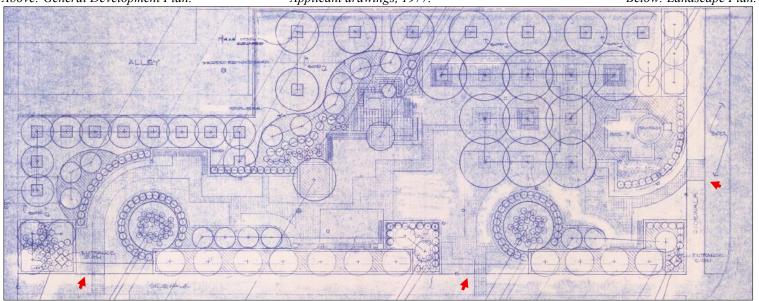




Above: General Development Plan.

Applicant drawings, 1977.

Below: Landscape Plan.



These drawings document an integrated, holistic design, where equal focus on hardscape and landscape elements create a purposeful spatial experience for people when entering the park through any one of three park entrances.

■ The 1981 DTE aerial photo shows the park shortly after completion. This view shows the asymmetrical balance between the natural landscaped areas enclosing the eastern side of the park and the concrete planters/landscaped beds enclosing, or framing, the park's west boundary. landscape

• Also, the parcels to the north of the park have been cleared, and only one building remains to the east.





The following photos offer views of the existing park, starting at the southeast corner (\bigstar). Yellow lines define area of the page's photos. Staff photos, September/October 2025, unless noted otherwise.







This is the section of the park adjacent to the district boundary; however, the design components are part of the connected design. Looking south Looking north

Looking south toward the park

Undeveloped lots included in this application. New seating, paving, and park components are proposed.





View north of undeveloped land.



View northeast of undeveloped land. The easternmost concrete planter is visible at lower left.

Park Materials – All photos taken by staff in September – November 2025, unless otherwise noted.

Architectural Concrete (concrete designed for use on the exterior of a building or structure):



• The fountain includes a pool which is enclosed by concrete retaining walls in the same dimensional pattern as the planters and sculptural platform. All architectural concrete structures will remain in the new design.

Ground surfaces



Brick Pavers



Aggregate Concrete



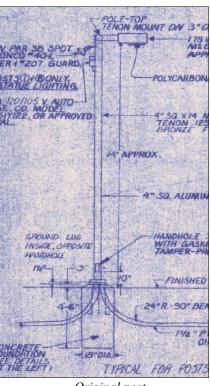
Brick Edging at landscape beds

- The majority of the brick pavers and aggregate concrete remain in good condition with a few instances of cracked pavement, missing, chipped pavers, and uneven mortar joints. There is one location where the pavers and tree opening were replaced with four small concrete slabs (which occurred prior to district designation).
- The applicant proposes to remove the entirety of the park's walking surfaces (brick pavers and aggregate concrete) and install a uniform layer of crushed limestone.
- The brick pavers within the sculpture platform are also to be removed and replaced with a poured concrete surface.
- The brick edging throughout the park is in very good shape. The proposal is to retain some, but not all, of this material.



Lighting







Light posts, no longer existing

Original post

Proposed Lights

The original light post design was consistent with the modern style of the park; however no original posts remain. The applicant has proposed the city's light standard as a replacement which the applicant states is being installed in the right-of-way in other historic neighborhoods throughout the city (and is specified for areas around Cass Park and within Fort Wayne – both late 19th century established parks in which this style is a compatible design).

Benches







Original Wood Benches, staff photos.

Proposed replacement benches, applicant photo.

Most, if not all, of the original wood benches remain; however, most are in varying degrees of deterioration. While wood benches are a material contrast with the brick and aggregate concrete materials of the park, their unadorned and unpainted design allowed the seating to blend with the wooded landscape elements within the park. Many of the benches are weathered, which are visible by chipping, warping and missing wooden planks. All the benches are proposed for replacement with either flat (no back) or backed wood (Douglas fir) benches. Based on the photo and lack of written specification, it isn't clear to staff if the wood members will be allowed to weather or if they will have a painted/stained finish to keep the "fresh wood" appearance as shown in the above photo.

Trash Cans





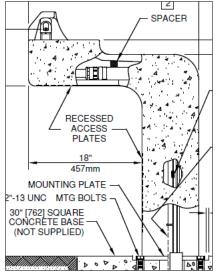
Aggregate concrete Trash bin

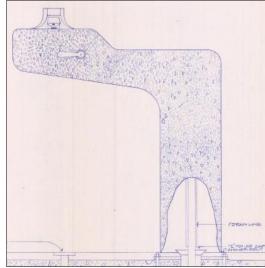
Newer trash bins

- The park retains several aggregate concrete trash bins, which are likely original as they match the existing aggregate used on the walkways, and their rounded edges echo the rounded shape of the landscape beds and fountain. There is no sign that these have deteriorated beyond repair and should therefore be retained.
- The new plastic bins provide no appeal to the historic aspect of the existing park.

Drinking fountain







Proposed fountain - photo and drawing

Original fountain from 1977 drawing set

• The original drinking fountain, located adjacent the water fountain, is no longer within the park, but it's former location/plumbing connection is still visible in the concrete. The application proposes a new fountain in the historic location. The proposed fountain's aggregate finish and serpentine shape, interestingly enough, is compatible to the original fountain design in material and design.

Trees



This photo shows some of the trees and tree planting locations proposed for removal. The original plan had 11 trees planted in this central area, the current proposal reduces this number to four.

- The existing trees are mature and likely date from the park's construction. Staff noted that some of the openings for trees no longer retain trees, and at least one opening was removed and covered with concrete (yellow arrow) prior to district designation. On staff's most recent site visit, it was noted that a few deciduous trees are without any leaves, and a few of the evergreen trees are without many limbs, both possibly identifying poor health. However, many of the trees appear to remain in good health and retain a broad leaf canopy. A tree survey was not included in the application.
- The original landscape plan called for many low-rise trees/shrubs to be planted to reinforce the geometry of the park both its circular and angled forms as well as asymmetrically placed mass plantings. These landscape elements were no longer in place at time of designation.
- The proposed plan intends to retain only four of the existing trees (shown on page 9 of the applicant's document), and most of the at-grade trees with grates between the fountain and sculpture platform will be removed.
- GSD stated in the reply to staff questions that "most likely a ground-cover" will be installed in the historic landscape beds.

Historic significance of the park's design

- To better understand the existing park design and its related materials and hardscape/landscape features, it is important to consider the era in which the park was designed and installed.
- It is staff's opinion that the article, Exploring the Legacy of Modernism in Landscape Architecture, offers a comprehensive overview of landscape architecture in the latter decades of the 20th century:
 - The Modernist landscape architecture movement emerged in the early to mid-20th century as a response to the profound societal transformations brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and the aftermath of the world wars. Prior to this period, landscape design was dominated by formal European styles, characterized by ornate gardens and elaborate, decorative elements that reflected a more rigid, classical approach.
 - At the core of Modernist landscape architecture is the principle of functionalism, which prioritizes the use and purpose of space over purely decorative concerns... this translated into the creation of spaces that were not just visually appealing but also served practical purposes, such as public parks, plazas, and residential gardens designed for social interaction, recreation, and relaxation.
 - This simplicity extended to the selection of materials, with a preference for natural elements like stone, wood, and concrete that could weather gracefully over time, enhancing the landscape's connection to its surroundings.

Another key principle was the emphasis on spatial composition and the creation of outdoor rooms. Landscape architects used plants, hardscaping elements, and sculptural forms to create dynamic spaces that guided movement and framed views. The seamless integration of hardscape (paths, walls, and structures) with softscape (plants and natural elements) allowed for a fluid interaction between built and natural environments, embodying the Modernist ideal of blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces.

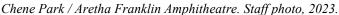
Additional examples of late 20th century modernist landscapes rendered in modern form with architectural concrete:

Detroit

■ Chene Park/Aretha Franklin Amphiteathre (1981 – 1984)

Designed by Shervish, Vogel and Merz (company co-founded by David Schervish, within a year of his completing the design for MLK Jr. Park). The use of architectural concrete for the park's terraced structural forms was articulated in a similar way to the concrete structural forms at MLK Jr. Memorial Park (which was erected 2-3 years prior).







MLK Park Water Fountain

■ Hart Plaza (1974 – 1979)

Designed by Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. Concrete (gray, colored and etched) and square, dark red granite pavers were used to reinforce the geometry of the hardscape as well as create intentional pathways within the park. Trees were planted in the raised planters which help support the "outdoor room" qualities of the park.







Staff photos, November 8. 2025.



Minneapolis

• Peavy Plaza (1975).

Designed by M. M. Paul Friedberg and Associates. Located in downtown Minneapolis is another example of a modernist landscape outdoor plaza/park design that includes vertically etched concrete planters, terraced, sculptural forms as well as an integrated fountain.





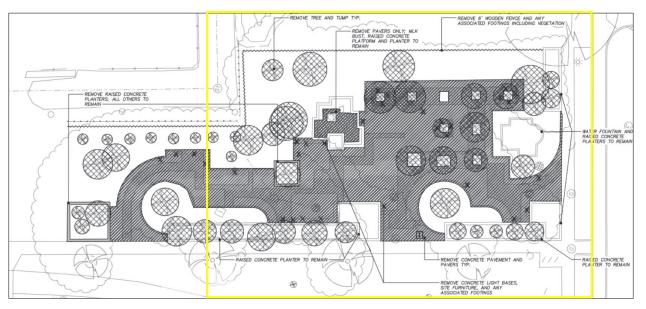
Staff photos, September 2023.

Contributing features

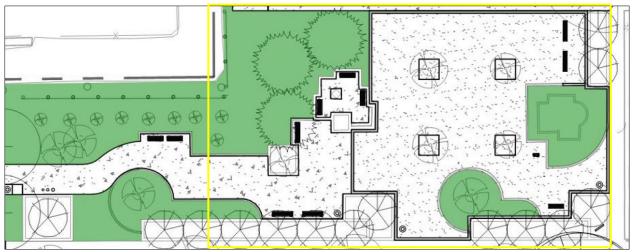
- The park consists of organized, intentionally asymmetrical, rectilinear and rounded, interconnected features and spaces. Exposed concrete is the dominant material, used for planters, terraced structures, pathway surface as well as trash cans. Masonry brick and pavers are used as landscape edging and contrasting walk surfaces that were designed to lead a person through the space and physically connect the structures and planters.
- The intentional spatial arrangement of the landscape and hardscape create an outdoor room in which the integration and interdependence of the built and natural forms are equally important, thus allowing all elevations and views to be character-defining features.
- This property retains almost all the original materials, physical features (including its siting and setting), and decorative details; all of which combine to create its historic character and appearance. Therefore, it is staff's opinion that this property meets the seven aspects of integrity (as characterized by the National Park Service): location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Existing	Character-	Deteriorated beyond	Remain in proposed plan?	New Component
Component	defining feature?	repair?		
Aggregate	Yes	No	Remove	Crushed limestone and
concrete paving				concrete
surface				
Brick pavers	Yes	No	Remove	Crushed limestone;
				concrete (at sculpture)
Brick edging	Yes	No	Remove;	Concrete edging
			Remain at landscape beds,	
Concrete	Yes	No	Remain	N/A
planters				
Water Fountain	Yes	No	Remain	N/A
Sculpture/bust	Yes	No	Remain	N/A
Benches	Yes	Yes and no	Replace with new wood	Compatible design and
			benches of similar design	material, must confirm finish
Trash bins	Yes	No	??	??
Lighting	N/A	None remain	Replace	Historical early 20 th -century
				classical style
Drinking	N/A	Does not remain	Replace	Compatible design and
Fountain				material
Trees	Yes	No	All but four trees to be	New tree species; in-
			removed. Removal of	ground/grated tree openings
			some tree planters	reduced from 10 to 4.
Landscape	Yes	No	Remain, but landscape will	Greenspace removed within
areas			change	sculptural structure, ground
				plantings (flowers? Grass?)
				not identified

• Comparing the demolition plan and proposed site plan, in conjunction with the GSD response document to staff questions, staff offers the following comments on the proposed alterations:



Demolition Plan (within the park's current footprint), submitted by applicant. Dark hashed area indicated concrete and brick pavers proposed for removal. Light hashed areas show trees proposed for removal.



Proposed Site Plan, proposed changes to the existing Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park

Historic park within historic district boundary

Aggregate concrete, brick pavers, brick edging

- The footprint of the park's walking surface will remain the same. However, the design and materials of the surfacing will change, including the floor of the sculptural platform.
 - The removal of the aggregate concrete, brick pavers, and brick edging will eliminate the intentionally designed pathways through the park and the sense of spatial movement between landscape and hardscape elements, all of which combine to be a distinctive-character-defining feature of the park.
 - The coloring, pattern and surface texture of the brick pavers on the sculptural platform floor offset the monolithic gray and solid massing of the surrounding concrete walls and stairs. The verticality of the pedestal, in contrast with the deep red tiles, is pronounced; befitting its supporting role for the MLK Jr. bust.
- Brick edging will remain at the water fountain and two rounded/oblong landscape beds.

Benches

- The existing benches are at different levels of deterioration, due to the 40+ years of weathering on the flat surfaces of the unfinished wood.
- The benches are a manufactured product, and the proposed replacement bench matches the existing historic benches in material and design.
- Staff's concerns relate to the lack of in-kind replacement, specifically the reduced number and new locations of the benches. The applicant must also confirm if any finish (i.e., stain or paint) will be applied which would alter their appearance and ability to weather to a muted gray, similar to the condition of the historic benches.

Lighting

- The confirmed placement of the original lights is known as the round concrete bases remain intact.
- The applicant's proposal is to install new lighting, using a ubiquitous early 20th century replica design. This new post is not compatible with the park's mid-century modern design and would create a false sense of history.
- The applicant has fabrication/installation drawings of the original lights (a portion of which is shown on page 15 of this report); staff recommends the applicant consider installing lights that match the original specifications or propose a contemporary designed light that is compatible with the park's modern setting.

Trees

- Staff counted the number of trees proposed for removal in the demolition plan as well as the number of new trees within the proposed site plan; the reduction is from 42 to 25.
- The historic and existing (although sparse) linear arrangement of trees at the north and east boundary mirrors the linear arrangement of trees (within planters) at the western boundary. The proposed tree placement on the outer edges of the park appear to be compatible with existing conditions and in keeping with the original design.
- Conversely, the historic tree arrangement within the central space between the fountain and sculpture platform, is dense. The original plan included 11 grated trees; the current grate openings are 10 (with nine having trees). The proposed tree count at this area is four. The loss of so many trees will disrupt the organic flow of this space and the strong landscape connection placed between the organic forms of the water fountain and sculpture platform.

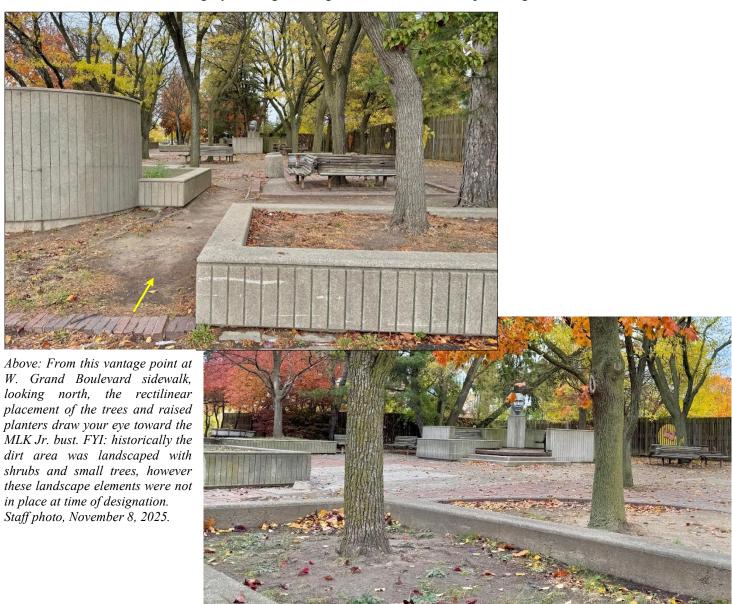
Landscape

- The landscape areas, denoted in green on the proposed site plan, match the areas on the historic plan, but no further detailing is included.
- The applicant stated in a reply to staff that "Planting beds will have 'to be determined' planting material most likely a ground-cover. Green spaces = both lawn and plant bed areas."
- Staff notes that any proposed landscaping must be submitted to HDC staff for review/approval prior to planting.

Overall comments

- The park was designed with landscape and sculptural forms (at-grade as well as raised) in an abstract style. The individual and collective components create spatial relationships and intentional circulation patterns, giving the park its historic character.
- The district's Elements of Design specifically identifies the park as a contributing feature:

 13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments—... Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Park, on the northeast corner of Rosa Parks Boulevard and West Grand Boulevard, is surfaced with concrete and brick and is landscaped with raised planters, trees, and bushes
- The park offers numerous expansive views and controlled vistas that are predicated on individual landscape and hardscape features. The majority of the original designed features remain intact and enable views and vistas to demonstrate integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



Above: From this vantage point at the Rosa Parks Bouelvard sidewalk, looking northeast, the terraced and raised sculpture platform, visually supported by the surrounding rectilinear planters and contrasting brick pavers draw your eye into the park and toward the MLK Jr. bust. Staff photo, November 8, 2025.

- The proposed design removes many of the distinctive character-defining features of the park, including but not limited to:
 - Ground materials integrated design of concrete and brick tiles and brick edging. They are not deteriorated beyond repair, and the applicant did not offer an assessment for the repair, or in-kind replacement of the broken or missing brick pavers and brick edging, which is required by Standard Six. It has not been demonstrated to staff that the existing path surfaces can't be retained in conjunction with the park's expansion to the east and north. The brick edging offers a highly visible dimensionality and cohesive materiality for the landscape beds.
 - The reduction and symmetrical alignment of the trees between the fountain and sculpture create an openness that is incompatible with the holistic design of the park.



Staff photo, October 15, 2025.

The placement of the existing seating is abundant; the proposed design does not match the number and location of the existing benches. Note the alternating use of paving materials for the seating area that repeats and reinforces its location within the park.



- New materials/components for the park are not compatible with the park's specific and distinctive modernist design:
 - Crushed limestone and concrete (devoid of any decorative/dimensional qualities) are not compatible replacements for the multiple smooth-faced walking surfaces that reinforce the geometry and pathways that link the park's sculptural forms.





Staff photos, November 10, 2025

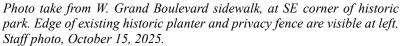
- The installation of early 20th century-style lamp posts is not consistent with the integrated design of the park and could potentially create a false sense of historical development. The applicant should consider a design similar to the original lights, as was done for the selected wood benches and concrete aggregate drinking fountain.
- Additional information is needed:
 - The landscaped beds, and the plantings within them, are integral features of the park and originally reinforced the geometry and spatial relationships of the park's overall design. A fully detailed landscape plan is necessary to confirm if the proposed treatment is compatible with the historic features of the park.



Staff photo, November 8, 2025.

New park on easternmost parcels on W. Grand Boulevard

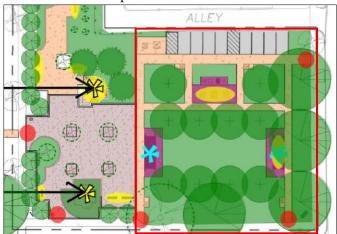




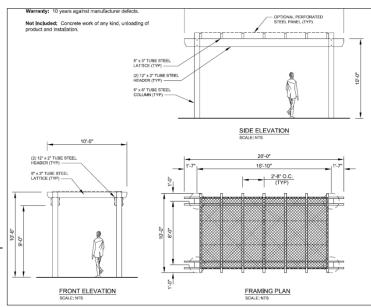


Aerial view of lots, April 2024. ConnectExplorer.

The design for the new park on the empty lots to the east of the historic park is designed as a gathering space with minimal activity/structures. The abundance of open greenspace will be anchored by a steel trellis at the east and west end of the lawn. The trellis' minimal ornamentation and steel finish create focal points that do not overpower or compete with the architectural concrete planters and structures within the historic park.



Above: Applicant plan, new work in red. Right: Applicant cut sheet of trellis.





This view from the SW corner of the park, looking northeast, shows the existing wood fence that will be removed to join the new park space with the existing historic park. Staff photo, October 15, 2025.

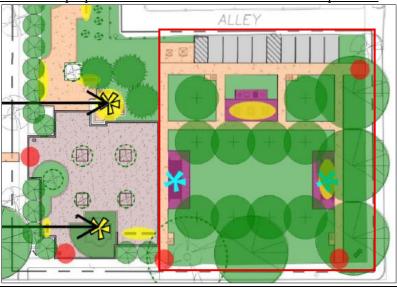
- A privacy fence currently runs the eastern property line of the historic park and is an element of the original/historic park plan. The wood panel fence is a utilitarian design and was installed to enclose the park from the then-existing adjacent structure(s) and alley. It is not a character-defining feature and can be removed as proposed in this application.
- In addition to the removal of the fence, the application proposes to remove the brick edging enclosing the historic park's existing eastern landscape bed and expand the crushed limestone park surface to the edge of the property.
- The brick edging and landscape bed are distinctive features. Their removal will alter the features and spaces of the site.



View of brick edging/eastern landscape bed (looking north) that is proposed for removal to allow full access between the two parks.

Staff photo, November 8, 2025.

New work proposed within historic district on undeveloped land



The components and landscaping proposed for the new park construction on the empty lots are compatible with the historic district.

Work proposed to historic park that is adjacent to the historic district boundary:

- Per Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts:
 - o The Commission shall determine if the proposed work will, or will not, have a demonstrable effect on the district; as well as if the effect is beneficial and/or adverse.



Above: Applicant park plan.

Left: Looking north at historic park area that is outside of/adjacent to the historic district. Greenspace in the background is where the largest part of the new park expansion will occur. Staff photo, November 8, 2025.

- It is not clear to staff if the brick edging at the east side of the path (☆) will remain in the historic park within the district and how the transition of edging will be completed at the path outside of the district.
- The existing entryway at the northwest corner will be removed; this is one of three original entrances. The path between the rounded landscape bed and raised concrete planter is to be infilled with turf; the applicant states the brick edging will remain. It isn't clear to staff how the brick edging will be maintained when surrounded by grass, and if the bricks will be damaged by lawn cutting equipment and the bricks ultimately removed. Staff questions why the existing entrance cannot be retained, thus allowing the brick edging and existing historic pathway to remain in situ.
- The planting of new trees at the fence line is compatible with the existing tree placement.



Left: Looking south at area of the historic park area that is outside of/adjacent to the historic district. Staff photo, November 8, 2025.

Comments on new construction proposed for empty lots to the north, along Rosa Parks Boulevard



Above: Applicant plan, new construction in red.

Right: Existing lot condition, staff photo October 15, 2025.

• It is staff's opinion that the work offered at this location is compatible in use and design to the historic park.



ISSUES

- Elements of Design #13 identifies the concrete and brick surface, raised planters, trees and bushes as distinctive and character-defining features.
 - The park was designed with landscape, hardscape (paths, walls), and sculptural forms in an abstract, asymmetrical style; therefore, all the historic elements within the park are distinctive character-defining features. The individual and collective components generated a spatial composition and the sense of an outdoor room, and created intentional movement through the space, offering numerous expansive views and controlled vistas.
 - O This park retains almost all of the original materials, physical features (including its siting and setting), and decorative details; all of which combine to create its historic character and appearance. Therefore, this property meets the seven aspects of integrity (as characterized by the National Park Service): location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association
 - O The historic materials are not deteriorated beyond repair, and the applicant didn't offer an assessment for the repair or in-kind replacement of the broken or missing pavers which is required by Standard Six. It has not been demonstrated that the existing park surfaces cannot be retained and repaired as needed in conjunction with the park's proposed expansion to the north and east. Additionally, the proposed park surfaces of crushed limestone and gray monolithic concrete do not match the existing materials in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities.
 - The replacement of missing features, such as the light posts, should be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
 - The landscape plan is not clearly defined. It doesn't specify the groundcover proposed for the landscape beds nor its arrangement/placement. Many of the existing trees are likely from the initial park planting and a tree survey has not been submitted to substantiate the condition of the trees proposed for removal and/or replacement. Conversely, the historic tree arrangement within the central space between the fountain and sculpture platform, is dense. The original plan included 11 grated trees; the current grate openings are 10 (with nine having trees) and the proposed tree count at this area is four. The loss of so many trees will disrupt the organic flow of this space and the strong landscape connection placed between the organic forms of the water fountain and sculpture platform, thus alter the features and spaces that characterize the property.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 2 – Denial – Expand, alter, and rehabilitate park

Staff recommends that the proposed work for the historic park 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:

- Elements of Design #13 identifies the concrete and brick surface, raised planters, trees and bushes as distinctive and character-defining features.
 - The park was designed with landscape, hardscape (paths, walls), and sculptural forms in an abstract, asymmetrical style; therefore, all the historic elements within the park are distinctive character-defining features. The individual and collective components generated a spatial composition and the sense of an outdoor room, and created intentional movement through the space, offering numerous expansive views and controlled vistas.
 - This park retains almost all of the original materials, physical features (including its siting and setting), and decorative details; all of which combine to create its historic character and appearance. Therefore, this property meets the seven aspects of integrity (as characterized by the National Park Service): location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association
 - The historic materials are not deteriorated beyond repair, and the applicant didn't offer an assessment for the repair or in-kind replacement of the broken or missing pavers which is required by Standard Six. It has not been demonstrated that the existing park surfaces can be retained and repaired as needed in conjunction with the park's proposed expansion to the north and east. Additionally, the proposed park surfaces of crushed limestone and gray monolithic concrete does not match the existing in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities.
 - The replacement of missing features, such as the light posts, should be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
 - The landscape plan is not clearly defined. It doesn't specify the groundcover proposed for the landscape beds nor its arrangement/placement. Many of the existing trees are likely from the initial park planting and a tree survey has not been submitted to substantiate the condition of the trees proposed for removal and/or replacement. Conversely, the historic tree arrangement within the central space between the fountain and

sculpture platform, is dense. The original plan included 11 grated trees; the current grate openings are 10 (with nine having trees) and the proposed tree count at this area is four. The loss of so many trees will disrupt the organic flow of this space and the strong landscape connection placed between the organic forms of the water fountain and sculpture platform, thus alter the features and spaces that characterize the property

Recommendation 2 of 2 – COA – Erection of new park on parcels to the east of MLK Jr. Park

Staff recommends that the proposed work for the new park construction to the east of MLK Jr. Park will 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.