

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Philip A. Hart Plaza

Other names/site number: Civic Center Plaza

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 1 Hart Plaza, Detroit, MI 48226

City or town: Detroit State: MI County: Wayne

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

<p>_____</p> <p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p>_____</p> <p><b>Date</b></p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>Title :</b></p> <p><b>or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p>_____</p> <p><b>Date</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>State or Federal agency/bureau</b></p>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	objects
<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Plaza

**RECREATION AND CULTURE:**

Work of Art - Sculpture

Theater- Amphitheater

Outdoor Recreation - Park

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE: Plaza

**RECREATION AND CULTURE:**

Work of Art - Sculpture

Theater- Amphitheater

Outdoor Recreation - Park

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

CONCRETE

GRANITE

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit on the banks of the Detroit River. Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, the park displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. Its major elements include a surface level plaza and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, the Pylon and Transcending sculpture, Gateway to Freedom sculpture, a sunken oval amphitheater and a pyramidal amphitheater, and the Dodge Fountain. The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. The property retains historic integrity to the period of significance.

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### Narrative Description

#### *Methodology*

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The cultural landscape of Hart Plaza is a complex collection of buildings, structures, and objects contained within one historic site. A cultural landscape methodology has been applied to documenting and evaluating the landscape. This approach is based upon federal standards guiding the evaluation of historic resources including *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*, and other pertinent documents.<sup>1</sup> The process includes building a foundation of historical information as a basis for understanding the evolution of the significant landscape, documenting existing conditions, and analyzing landscape integrity.

Within Hart Plaza’s cultural landscape, the pertinent landscape characteristics are assessed. Landscape characteristics include tangible and intangible aspects of a landscape from the historic periods; these aspects individually and collectively give a landscape its historic character and aid in the understanding of its cultural importance. Each characteristic is described and then its integrity is assessed.

Because this nomination uses a cultural landscape approach, which considers the entire Hart Plaza landscape as one contributing site, landscape characteristics and small-scale features are described as important aspects of the contributing landscape but are not counted individually. Major site buildings, structures, and objects are counted and identified within the description. A summary of contributing and non-contributing resources is included here.

Resource Type	Contributing	Non-Contributing
Sites	Hart Plaza	(None)
Buildings	Parking Access Building Fountain Control Building	(None)
Structures	Pyramid Amphitheater Sub Plaza	Hart Plaza Marquee
Objects	Dodge Fountain Cubist Water Sculpture Pylon Spiral Seating Sculpture	Transcending Gateway to Freedom Cadillac Statue Lincoln Bust

<sup>1</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, J. Timothy Keller, Genevieve P. Keller, Robert Z. Melnick, *National Register Bulletin 30: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1989, revised 1999); Robert R. Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1998), and Charles A. Birnbaum and Christine Capella Peters, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1996), 3-5.

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### ***Overview***

Philip A. Hart Plaza is a 10.8-acre public park in downtown Detroit on the banks of the Detroit River. The park is situated at the southern terminus of Woodward Avenue in the commercial core of the city between the contemporary landmarks of the remodeled Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and Renaissance Center to the east and the Cobo Center to the west. The plaza's origins lie in early twentieth century plans to develop a civic center where Woodward Avenue meets the Detroit River. Principal components of the contemporary civic center include Hart Plaza, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center (City-County Building), and the Cobo Center.

Hart Plaza lies between Jefferson Avenue to the north, an open lot formerly the site of the Henry and Edsel Ford Memorial Auditorium (demolished 2011) to the east, the Detroit River to the south, and the United Auto Workers-Ford National Programs Center building (UAW-Ford Center, formerly Veterans Memorial Building) to the west. The park is oriented with the city grid from north-northwest to south-southeast. (This form simplifies descriptions and graphics to cardinal directions).

The park generally consists of a surface level plaza and an interconnected, underground sub plaza, both of which contain numerous, discreet spaces and prominent features. The upper plaza includes a street level promenade with the Pylon obelisk and Transcending (the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark), a landscape installation featuring an arch sculpture; a plaza transitional area with the Lincoln Garden (a pre-existing green space associated with the UAW-Ford Center and incorporated into the plaza), vegetated slopes, seating nodes, and a pyramidal amphitheater; a large central plaza with the Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain), a supported metal ring that drops water and its related features, and the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue; a sub plaza with an open-air amphitheater, underground theater, loading dock, and interior rooms; and the riverbank area with wide steps, a spiral sculpture, vegetated slopes, Gateway to Freedom, (the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad), and a riverside walk. Aside from the Transcending landscape installation, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue, Lincoln Bust, and Gateway to Freedom, the main spaces and features are original to the park design.

Designed by Modernist artist Isamu Noguchi between 1972 and 1974, the park displays an abstract style featuring large-scale sculptural forms as integral elements. The site is mostly open to the sky and slopes toward the river. Convex and concave shapes join across the ground plane. From the street level to the center, primary spatial relationships are reinforced by large artistic elements including the Pylon obelisk and the Dodge Fountain. From the central plaza to the south, primary views are directed across the river to the waterfront of Windsor, Canada. The multilevel park is primarily composed of raw concrete and red and black flecked granite surfaces that are partially framed by lawn with deciduous trees.

The park is currently used for passive recreation as well as concerts and festivals. Most of these activities occur on the upper plaza level. The sub plaza spaces are currently used for

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performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance.

### *Landscape Characteristics*

#### **Natural Systems and Features**

The natural systems that have influenced the development and physical form of Hart Plaza are strongly related to its urban setting. Natural factors include the riverbank location, urban soils, hydrology as it relates to local drainage toward the river, open exposure, orientation north to south, and prevailing winds from the west. While Hart Plaza aligns with the existing river edge on the south, the plaza does not reflect the historic, natural river boundary, which was modified as dictated by the commercial needs of the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Limited overhead cover by trees and other features results in a plaza environment that reveals the day and night sky and weather conditions.

As designed, three terraces with transitional, constructed slopes define the topography of the park: the upper terrace is level with Jefferson Avenue; the central plaza makes up the middle terrace; and the riverbank area along the Detroit River makes up the lower terrace. The south-facing slope of the site is constructed on fill soils. The weight of park elements and live loads from event machinery and attendance occasionally result in areas of slope failure in the riverbank area.

#### *Natural Systems and Features Integrity Assessment*

The natural systems and features associated with this property remain pervasive and persistent, retaining integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association.

#### **Spatial Organization**

The organization of physical forms and visual associations that define and create spaces at Hart Plaza are predicated on the spatial relationships between the park, the Detroit River, and the sky. These intentional relationships are orchestrated through the design of Hart Plaza. The location of the park on the waterfront connects the city to the water. The largely open plane of the plaza provides exposure to the sky, while vertical elements direct further attention upward. General alignments within the park emphasize these relationships with major features. The trajectory of Woodward Avenue aligns to the Pylon obelisk on the Jefferson Promenade. The Pylon, located along Jefferson Avenue, is placed at the north entrance of the plaza and centered on the axis of Woodward Avenue, reinforcing the strength and significance of Detroit's main thoroughfare. It serves as a fulcrum for the diagonal axis leading down a sloped walk to the Dodge Fountain in the center of the plaza. The alignment between the Pylon and the Dodge Fountain continues down wide steps to the waterfront. The two primary elements, Dodge Fountain and the Pylon, are fundamental to determining relationships between other features and spaces in the plaza.

The park consists of five divisions that contain individual areas and features. The main spatial divisions are given descriptive names and include upper plaza, plaza transition, central plaza, sub plaza, and riverbank (refer to the spatial organization diagram).

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The upper plaza is a rectangular shaped area parallel to Jefferson Avenue. The main spatial components of this area include two original features and one recent introduction. Built between 1966 and 1973, the Jefferson Promenade is a wide walk south of the Jefferson sidewalk and historic raised lawn panels with trees. The Pylon obelisk rises from the east end of the Jefferson Promenade. Added in 2003, Transcending, a landscape installation featuring a 63-foot, incomplete steel ring sculpture, rises from an elevated plaza with numerous elaborated boulders.

The plaza transition consists of the irregularly crescent-shaped slope between the upper plaza and central plaza areas. It contains the upper slopes, the pyramid amphitheater, and the Lincoln Garden. The upper slopes with paths include planters, lawn, and east and west seating nodes that are referred to as "interludes" on plans. The amphitheater, also known as "pyramid stage" and "ziggurat," is a square-based pyramid with seating that descends to a sunken stage in the southeast corner of park, perpendicular to the diagonal axis from Pylon to Dodge. The seating faces the park and city to the north while the stage faces south.

The Lincoln Garden is a small, formal courtyard adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center in the northwest corner of the park that was incorporated into the design of Hart Plaza. The current garden is approximately eighty-three feet from east to west and ninety-six feet from north to south (7,968 square feet). Constructed around 1950 in conjunction with the building, the green space originally formed a rectangle extending from the crook of the L-shaped building to the present edge of Jefferson Avenue. Prior to the expansion of Jefferson Avenue in the late 1950s, this space abutted a rectangular lawn panel that was parallel to the roadway. Through the 1960s, the approximately ninety-eight-foot by two-hundred-and-sixty-five-foot (25,970 square feet) garden area formed a sunken green space that was separated by retaining walls from the upper, entry level of the building to the west and a lower parking lot to the east in what became the core of Hart Plaza. The garden consisted of a rectangular lawn panel bordered by a walkway with a series of niches with benches facing the building along the eastern edge of the park. The garden was reduced to its current dimensions by 1973 during construction of the upper plaza. Identified on Noguchi's plans as "existing garden," the green space became referred to as the "Lincoln Garden" after placement of a bust of President Abraham Lincoln in the central lawn panel of the garden in 1986.

The roughly circular central plaza forms the core of Hart Plaza and includes several features. The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (Dodge Fountain) marks the center of the space. A cubist water sculpture, a square-shaped water feature made up of multiple stone cubes, is located directly north of the Dodge Fountain. The plaza surface itself is the granite ground plane with a twenty-five-foot diameter concave circular depression west of the Dodge Fountain. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, a life-size statue with two historical markers, is located in a raised planting bed west of the Dodge Fountain.

The sub plaza lies under the slopes of the plaza transition and connects to the main amphitheater, which is functionally and visually connected to the underground spaces. The approximately two acres of subterranean spaces are either walled into rooms or unenclosed chambers and corridors.



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Ducts for ventilation were constructed as bulkheads in tall cylinders. Walls are primarily concrete slab with limited rooms with glass walls and windows. The main spatial components include the plaza's main amphitheater, an underground theater, a loading dock and access drive, and several interior rooms. The open-air amphitheater is the main performance space oriented such that the audience faces northwest toward the city and the performance space faces southeast toward the Dodge Fountain. North of the amphitheater, the underground theater is a small, sunken venue that is enclosed on three sides. A variety of interior rooms within the sub plaza support performances, food services and vending, restrooms, event staging, offices, security, and maintenance.

The riverbank is a linear zone along the Detroit River. This area includes several main features including riverbank steps, a spiral seating sculpture, the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, lower slopes, and a riverside walk. The riverbank steps are roughly on axis with the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. Roughly eighty-five feet wide, the steps connect a sloped walking surface to the river's edge. The spiral seating sculpture is a concrete form wrapped around a ventilation shaft located on the steps slightly north of the axis between the Dodge Fountain and the Pylon. The Gateway to Freedom sculpture and plaques are located at the base of the steps. East and west of the steps are the lower slopes that consist of trees over turf. The riverside walk is a pedestrian corridor along the river within Hart Plaza. It is a segment of a longer route known as the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza and the three-and-one-half-mile RiverWalk are part of the Detroit International Riverfront, a zone of connected green spaces and attractions that is spurring development along the riverfront and facilitating community access to the water.

#### *Spatial Organization Integrity Assessment*

The spatial organization associated with Hart Plaza is largely intact. The five basic divisions of the park remain from design and construction. Aside from the Transcending, Cadillac, and Gateway to Freedom installations, the main spaces and features are original to the park design. Spatial relationships between major landscape features remain with only minor alterations in setting due to the removal of the Ford Auditorium east of the park and in materials and design due to the placement of Transcending. In alignment with the Dodge Fountain, the tall steel ring on the Jefferson Avenue streetscape of the Upper Plaza introduces a non-historic, prominent feature that affects the integrity of the site. The feature contributes to the fragmentation of the green lawn with trees that was originally installed along Jefferson Avenue and once balanced the hard surfaces of the streetscape at the edge of the plaza. Despite these effects, the presence of all major historic features reduces the intrusive nature of the new feature. Overall, the spatial organization of the park demonstrates integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Land Use**

The principal human uses of Hart Plaza include planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, seasonal office use, and informal habitation. The park exists to provide year-round and event-based outdoor recreational space in the city. Passive recreation includes pedestrian activities such as walking, sitting, reading, playing music, observing the

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riverfront, looking at and playing on sculptures and other park features. The amphitheater is designed for winter conversion into an ice rink but no longer provides this function.

Planned events held in the park include musical and ethnic festivals with a capacity of 40,000 participants. Events make use of the above ground park and the sub plaza. Heavy weight loads associated with event staging and use have damaged paving (evinced by cracked pavers) and exacerbate subsidence on the riverbank.

The park is also used as a through-route that channels pedestrian and bicycle movement from the city center to destinations along the river via the RiverWalk. Hart Plaza also functions as a bridge over Atwater Street which connects Bates Street and Civic Center Drive from east to west. An access drive on the west side of the park connects to loading docks of the sub plaza and the UAW-Ford Center receiving area.

The sub plaza interior spaces have transitional habitation. Interior rooms provide seasonal office space for the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Detroit Police Department north of the amphitheater and south of the pyramid amphitheater. Partially enclosed spaces within the sub plaza provide informal shelter to a small number of people. Common social and sanitary issues associated with informal settlement in parks conflict with intended park uses.

#### *Land Use Integrity Assessment*

Land uses of Hart Plaza reflect continuity and change. The plaza continues to be used for planned events, passive recreation, circulation routes, delivery of supplies, and offices, but demonstrate aspects of change. Office occupation is now seasonal. Also, the removal of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) from the Ford Auditorium in 1989 (and demolition of the venue in 2011) reduced the use of the park amphitheater for concerts by the DSO. Similarly, the generally poor condition of the sub plaza spaces has reduced the use of this part of the park for planned events and eliminated the seasonal skating rink. The non-historic use of the park for informal habitation does not reflect the design intent. These alterations have reduced integrity for the aspect of feeling.

#### **Circulation**

Hart Plaza is located in relation to the city transportation grid and major circulation conduits including Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue. Within the park, systems of movement include vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and riverine systems of movement.

Vehicular access within the park includes park frontage for drop off along Jefferson Avenue to the north and the Hart Plaza Access Drive to the sub plaza from the west. Parking is available to the north and east. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Garage (under Jefferson Avenue north of Hart Plaza) has an entrance/egress portal at the northeast corner of Hart Plaza. Offsite parking occurs in a gravel lot east of Hart Plaza and south of Atwater Street and in a gravel lot north of Atwater Street on the site of the former Ford Auditorium. Atwater Street forms a through route beneath Hart Plaza via the Atwater Tunnel.

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Pedestrian circulation consists of through routes and internal routes. The sidewalk along Jefferson Avenue, access walks to the UAW-Ford Center from the Lincoln Garden, and the RiverWalk provide connections to points outside of the plaza. Internal routes can be described by the primary spatial divisions. The upper plaza includes the Jefferson Promenade and walk west of Pylon aligned to the entrance to Mariners' Church. The central plaza has generally open paving. The sub plaza contains amphitheater steps, steps between the Lincoln Garden and the lounge, steps north of the central plaza to the kitchen rooms, enclosed sub plaza walks and ramps, and a metal spiral staircase between the loading dock and fountain control room. The plaza transition area includes the main sloped walk, non-historic narrow curving walks, original straight walks between features and east and west interludes, and the pyramid amphitheater steps. The riverfront includes the riverside walk and sloped transitional walks and steps.

Bicycle circulation is primarily associated with the segment of the RiverWalk, which has a connection to the Dequindre Cut Greenway to the east.

The riverine system of movement is located adjacent to the plaza. The Detroit Princess Riverboat docks at the southwest edge of Hart Plaza, and commercial and recreational river traffic, including Great Lakes freighters, pass by Hart Plaza.

Paving surfaces form relatively level planes except for the bowl-shaped depression under the Dodge Fountain and the smaller bowl-shaped depression northwest of the fountain. Paved surfaces contain a wide variety of flush grates, drains, and utility covers.

Paving materials vary by purpose and location and consist of the following historic types:

- Historic, large carnelian granite pavers, four-foot square in size and finished with a parallel grooved surface texture (identified as "mellogroove" in construction documents) delineate primary walkways in the central plaza and wrap widely around the fountain and highlight the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the UAW-Ford Center;
- Historic, small carnelian granite paving setts six-inch square in size with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges that pave most walks of the plaza transition, provide a sweeping form around the amphitheater, cover the sloped walks on the riverbank, and along the water front;
- Historic, variably sized carnelian granite pavers with rough finish and irregular guillotine edges decreasing from six inches in size under and around the Dodge Fountain and northwest plaza depression;
- Historic, variably sized granite pavers with dimensions greater than eight inches at the upper ring of the amphitheater;
- Historic, precast hexagonal concrete pavers throughout the sub plaza;
- Historic six-inch low limestone curbs, forming edges of lawn panels of the upper plaza that predated the construction of Hart Plaza.

Non-historic paving materials include poured concrete, concrete brick pavers, and stone tiles. Non-historic concrete includes multiple types:

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- Rectangular slabs at edges of the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition;
- Concrete ring as footing for bollards around the Dodge Fountain;
- Single surface concrete of platform of Transcending sculpture and for ice rink in center of amphitheater;
- Concrete with four-foot scoring between the central plaza and the riverbank, west of the pyramid amphitheater, at the performance level of the pyramid amphitheater, and surrounding the main amphitheater of the sub plaza;
- Concrete sidewalk with six-foot scored panels of alternating dark and light gray surface treatment to create bands along the riverside walk;
- Concrete paving and curbs, twelve inches wide and eight inches high, with red surface treatment at the upper ring of the amphitheater.

Non-historic concrete brick pavers occur in various locations throughout the plaza. There are large areas of non-historic concrete brick pavers in herringbone pattern with red colors in the center of the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete brick in a basketweave pattern with gray colors occurs along the edges of the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete brick in herringbone pattern with beige color also occurs on the sloped entry walk of the plaza transition. On the riverside walk below the Gateway to Freedom sculpture, non-historic concrete brick pavers are laid in a stack bond pattern with light and dark gray colors and memorial donor names. Twelve-foot square, non-historic stone tile is used as pavers at the base of Transcending north of the Jefferson Promenade.

#### *Circulation Integrity Assessment*

Circulation features associated with Hart Plaza demonstrate historic integrity despite poor condition of materials. Historic routes persist with only one area of introduced pathways in the plaza transition north of the amphitheater. While substantial areas of the central plaza and sub plaza and the rectilinear walks of the plaza transition retain original paving materials, the majority of historic paving is in poor condition. Most granite pavers of the central plaza are highly fractured; however, the condition of historic paving on the paths of the plaza transition is fair to good. Generally good condition, non-historic paving is found throughout the upper plaza and riverbank and on the curving walks of the plaza transition. Original materials in the central plaza reflect the historic design intent. Circulation features reflect integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Vegetation**

Vegetation of Hart Plaza consists of historic and non-historic deciduous and evergreen trees over turf, evergreen shrubs, and herbaceous flowering plants in the beds of the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation can be described by area.

Upper plaza vegetation includes two rectangular lawn panels with an incomplete grid of historic Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) planted four trees wide from north to south and separated by the Transcending sculpture. Less than fifty percent of the original trees remain from the block planted between 1966 and 1973. Historically, the planter contained rows five trees wide from north to south and was stylistically incorporated by Noguchi into the design of Hart Plaza by the

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inclusion of a now-removed, single row of Norway maple along the south side of the Jefferson Promenade. These and all existing Norway maple are free growing but design documents specify that they were intended to be topped and tightly pruned into the shape of an inverted glass. The upper plaza also contains a recently installed, narrow planting bed of day lilies along the western portion of the south side of the Jefferson Promenade above the Lincoln Garden.

Vegetation of the plaza transition area includes several lawn panels with trees. The northeast sloping lawn panel contains older, historic Norway maple and more recently planted northern hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) in a scattered pattern. The east raised lawn panels around the east interlude contain Norway maple and one American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*). The raised panels east and west of the pyramid amphitheater are planted with Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*). The central sloping lawn panel contains Norway maple and flowering cherry (*Prunus* sp.) adjacent to the angular walk. The northwest sloping lawn panel includes Norway maple, flowering cherry adjacent to the angular walk, crab apple (*Malus* sp.) near west steps to sub plaza, and dwarf beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) southwest of the amphitheater. The west lawn panel includes Norway maple by the amphitheater, Austrian pine at the western boundary and crab apple at the west interlude. The west raised lawn panels around the west interlude contain crab apple. The west sloping lawn panel south of the UAW-Ford Center contains alternating red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and little-leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*) on the north side, crab apple on the west and south sides, and a thirty-two-inch wide bed of rugosa rose (*Rosa rugosa*). The Lincoln Garden has four outer lawn panels and a central square lawn panel with roses (*Rosa* sp.), grasses, and other herbaceous perennial flowers.

The central plaza contains little vegetation. One crab apple grows in a raised lawn panel south of the Cadillac statue.

Riverbank vegetation includes sloping lawn panels with trees. The southeast sloping lawn contains northern hackberry, red maple, honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* 'inermis'), and little-leaf linden. The southwest sloping lawn panel has little-leaf linden, honey locust, elm (*Ulmus* sp.), and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). One ginkgo is identified with a small stone and plaque as the "1984 Peace Tree." The plaque indicates that the tree was presented by the Detroit Westown and Downtown Windsor Lioness Clubs, but no further information on the circumstances of its dedication were found. Crab apple and river birch (*Betula nigra*) are planted close to the RiverWalk. The west sloping lawn panels north and west of the angled access walk contain Austrian pine, crab apple, and river birch. The eastern lawn panels north of the riverside walk contain river birch and crab apple.

Vegetation is absent from the sub plaza. Stumps in planters remain by the steps east of the auditorium. Offsite, one older crab apple remains directly east of Hart Plaza by the courtyard of the Ford Auditorium.

#### *Vegetation Integrity Assessment*

At the overall level, the vegetation of Hart Plaza reflects a general, historic pattern of large canopy trees surrounding a hardscaped plaza with flowering crabapples toward the center and

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east and west edges formed by evergreen trees. Within this larger structure, aspects of the designed plantings are diminished. Replanting in recent decades includes both exotic and native trees, but neither conform to the historic design. Specific designed aspects of vegetation are absent from the park. Missing elements include the uniform grid of trees along Jefferson Avenue, the entire shrub and ground cover (understory layer) of plantings, and the controlled pruning of trees. Some individual, historic trees remain; however, because the overall, modern style of design used large groups of uniform species to create effects, the survival of individual plants is not highly significant.

Individual instances of historic, extant vegetation include partially intact patterns of canopy trees in informal clusters throughout the plaza transition and the riverbank areas of the park. Also, groupings of Austrian pine remain along the east and west edges of the plaza transition. Remaining historic trees pertain to a primarily non-native mixture including Norway maple, Austrian pine, various types of crabapple, and honey locust. Remaining crabapple trees remain around the central plaza, near the west interlude, and flanking the steps to the riverside walk. The vegetation of Hart Plaza carries integrity at a high level order of design. All other aspects of integrity are significantly impacted.

### **Views and Vistas**

Hart Plaza affords numerous expansive views and controlled vistas that are predicated on individual landscape features. The strength of the Noguchi design for Hart Plaza is reflected in the persistence of these characteristic views, which include views to and from the plaza. Views of Hart Plaza from Woodward Avenue and surrounding streets focus on the Pylon. Other outside views of Hart Plaza are afforded by the multistory buildings along Jefferson Avenue and in the general area.

Places within Hart Plaza offer relatively expansive views to locations outside of the plaza. The Jefferson Promenade provides views to the central plaza and Detroit River. The view from the Dodge Fountain and central plaza reveals the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. Open views from the riverbank provide a panorama of the Detroit River and Windsor waterfront. In the sub plaza, views through partially enclosed spaces to areas with natural light include a large circular light well in the northwest part of the sub plaza, open staircases, the opening at the amphitheater performance level, and north and south side exits east toward the former Ford Auditorium and courtyard.

Characteristic, controlled vistas to individual features abound at Hart Plaza. These linear visual relationships include:

- The vista between the walk west of Pylon and the Mariners' Church entrance;
- The vista from Jefferson Promenade to the bust of Abraham Lincoln;
- The vista through Jefferson Promenade to Pylon;
- The vista between Pylon and the Dodge Fountain;
- The vista between the Dodge Fountain and sculptural features including the spiral seating sculpture, pyramid amphitheater, cubist water sculpture, Pylon, and the Transcending sculpture;

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- The vista between the east and west interludes and the Dodge Fountain; and
- The east-to-west sub plaza vistas that reinforce a linear range of vision between structural columns.

External vistas also exist between the central plaza and individual skyscrapers in the general area. Specific buildings with a visual relationship to the central plaza include One Woodward to north, the central tower of the Renaissance Center to the east, the Coleman A. Young Municipal Building to the northeast, and Crowne Plaza to the northwest.

#### *Views and Vistas Integrity Assessment*

Views and vistas associated with Hart Plaza are reliant on the upright, individual landscape features such as sculptures and other unique park features like the pyramid amphitheater. These original designed features remain intact and enable views and vistas to demonstrate integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **Buildings and Structures**

At both surface and subsurface levels, the Hart Plaza landscape contains buildings that shelter human activities and structures, which are the functional elements constructed for purposes other than sheltering human activity.

Above ground buildings include the fountain control building (**contributing building**) located in the corner of a raised lawn bed west of the Dodge Fountain and south of the main amphitheater and a Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building located at the northeast corner of the park along the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk. The fountain control building has concrete walls, a curved metal roof, and a row of narrow glass windows that view the fountain and the amphitheater. The Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building (**contributing building**) has black granite, glass, and metal walls and a terraced metal roof over the steps and escalators that descend to the parking structure.

The sub plaza is one underground structure (**contributing structure**) with a series of spaces and rooms that are named for present or past uses (see sub-surface features diagram). Materials include concrete slab and block walls, exposed or dropped grid ceilings with acoustic tiles, and floors of synthetic tile, carpet, or concrete. Most interior spaces are in poor condition. The exterior sub plaza spaces create corridors of covered movement between rooms.

The sub plaza includes the concrete amphitheater and a concrete block beverage booth with a circular, concrete block wall located east of the amphitheater and north of the kitchen rooms. Clockwise from the northwest, the sub plaza rooms include a warming room, a cafeteria, and office and support rooms. The warming room, formerly used by skaters in the winter and presently as a backstage area in the summer, contains restrooms and three-foot-high rectangular glass windows that face south toward the amphitheater and glass walls that face east toward the cafeteria. The cafeteria contains a kitchen, bathrooms, and a long, rectangular glassed-in lounge that faces south to the center of the amphitheater and west toward the back stage rooms. East of

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the cafeteria and north of the amphitheater, a cluster of rooms includes an event operations office, a seasonally occupied office of the Detroit Police Department, a park operations office with camera control area, a maintenance and boiler room, and a seasonally occupied group of offices for the Department of Parks and Recreation. South of these rooms and across an underground corridor, the sub plaza contains a gallery room and a concessions area with twenty-six kitchen stalls. South of the loading docks are utility, maintenance, and storage rooms. A cluster of rooms farther south near the pyramid amphitheater include storage and changing rooms and restrooms. South of the Atwater Tunnel are utility rooms and the Office of Detroit Police Department with an entrance on the riverside walk.

Above ground structures include the pyramid amphitheater, a marquee, utility features, and a variety of retaining and free standing walls. The convex and concave pyramid amphitheater (**contributing structure**) is located in the southeast corner of the park. Reminiscent of Mesoamerican pyramids, the square-based structure is composed of a series of shallow steps with a small, rectangular room at the top. Exposed materials above the plaza surface level are concrete and materials below that level are granite. The south end of the structure is a convex pyramid with seating that is integrated into an open-air stage on the north. Concrete and stone seating is partially submerged below the plaza grade. The walls of the performance area are concrete with integrated light wells along the upper edge of the walls forming a sunken performance area. The shape of the pyramid amphitheater echoes the square, pyramidal roof of the Bob-Lo Boat Office Building that was formerly in this location prior to the construction of Hart Plaza. Boats historically transported people from this location to an amusement park that operated on Bois Blanc (“Bob-Lo”) Island, Ontario, from 1910 to 1993.

The marquee (**non-contributing structure**) is located at the Jefferson Avenue sidewalk edge directly north of the Pylon. The current structure replaced an earlier marquee around 2005. It has a six-foot-square footprint and metal, T-shaped facades. Above ground utility structures include vents and pipes. Seven cylindrical concrete vents are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and in the plaza transition area north, east, and west of the Dodge Fountain. The vents are six feet in diameter and variable in height with an average height of six feet at the bottom of the slanted top opening. Two tall metal vents, approximately eighteen feet high, are located at the upper ring of the amphitheater and along the eastern edge of the plaza transition near the former Ford Auditorium. Low metal relief pipes with curved ends are located throughout the park.

Retaining walls of varying heights (from approximately two to twenty feet) are integrated throughout the plaza design. The walls are either eight inches or twenty-four inches wide. Most retaining walls are raw concrete and feature expansion and construction joints at 4-foot intervals. Retaining walls under four feet typically form edges of variously sized vegetated panels or serve as independent planters. Walls of various heights and widths have integrated benches. Retaining walls that are bulkheads play an important role in defining and transitioning between upper and lower levels of the plaza. These walls also create stairwells and may form edges of planters or parapet walls at the surface level. Some of these walls include integrated railings such as at the north side of the auditorium.



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The materials vary across the retaining walls of Hart Plaza. Most concrete retaining walls are twelve inches thick with four-foot scoring. Other concrete retaining walls are two feet thick and may have integrated metal hand rails and guardrails that are five inches in diameter and variably silver or painted black. A concrete, double-stacked seat wall is located along the riverside walk. It is constructed in three-foot by six-foot sections with integral, square lights. Polished red granite-faced, concrete retaining walls, parapet walls, and cheek walls are located at the steps flanking the Gateway to Freedom sculpture. These decorative walls feature a black granite base course and coping with integrated metal hand rails. Marble faced concrete walls associated with the UAW-Ford Center form the three- to six-foot high south and west boundary walls of the Lincoln Garden.

Freestanding walls include low concrete landscape walls generally less than four feet high. In addition, a massive, largely free-standing concrete slab forms a sloped backdrop to the pyramid amphitheater's stage.

#### *Buildings and Structures Integrity Assessment*

The buildings and structures of Hart Plaza retain integrity with some modifications to the buildings. Structures, which primarily consist of various types of walls, typically demonstrate integrity and remain in generally good condition. As an exception, there are low retaining walls on the west side of the plaza transition area that demonstrate failure at corners. Replacement of some features, such as the black railings integrated into the concrete wall forming the north edge off the auditorium, have changed the character of the site. Historically, the railing in this location was a single metal tube with integrated lights.

Buildings are in relatively poor condition with the exception of the Ford Auditorium Underground Parking entry and egress building. The underground structure of the sub plaza has been modified with some addition of rooms, partitioning with walls, and interior modifications due to changing uses. Characteristic elements including the glass walls of the warming room and the cafeteria remain. In general, integrity is reflected in the design and materials of the buildings and structures, but is moderated by poor conditions.

#### **Small-Scale Features**

Numerous small-scale features provide detail and diversity for both functional needs and interpretive or aesthetic concerns at Hart Plaza. Most small-scale features are recently added as utilitarian features and are not essential to the overall design and character of the plaza. Small-scale features include lights, upright poles, bollards, trash receptacles, benches, rails, and interpretive elements.

Lights consist of ground mounted light fixtures near the west interlude and in the Lincoln Garden, flood lights along the Jefferson Promenade, and approximately one hundred globe lights. The ubiquitous globe lights, installed throughout the park around 2000, have a glass globe lantern bracketed by aluminum bands on thirteen-foot-tall posts formed of four independent poles set on one aluminum base.

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Upright poles include security poles with cameras and sensors over the Jefferson Promenade and flagpoles. Approximately twenty flagpoles with U.S. flags employ the same stylistic details as the globe lights and are located along the Jefferson Promenade and at the east and west edges of the park. Shorter flagpoles with a variety of colored flags are set in mobile, concrete bases at the south edge of the central plaza.

Other small-scale features are dispersed throughout the park. Planter bollards and circular concrete planters line the Jefferson Promenade. Concrete and steel bollards surround the Dodge Fountain and cubist water sculpture. They also run down the center of the Jefferson Promenade and the wide, sloped walk of the plaza transition. Various types of plastic and metal garbage and recycling receptacles are placed in the landscape depending on use and seasonality. Synthetic wood benches are located along the Jefferson Promenade and in the Lincoln Garden. Two wood benches are located in the sub plaza by the cafeteria and stairwell north of the amphitheater. Guardrails along a concrete sidewalk in the plaza transition directly north of the amphitheater consist of unpainted, round steel pipe that is four inches in diameter. Other tubular metal handrails and guardrails that are typical throughout the park are five-inch-diameter pipe variably painted either black or gray.

Interpretive, small-scale elements include plaques and signs. A Veterans Memorial brass plaque on polished granite is located in the southwest corner of the Lincoln Garden. A Michigan Historic Site interpretive sign entitled "The Landing of Cadillac" is located north of the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue. It is a standard metal plaque painted green with brown metal posts. South of the statue is an interpretive marker entitled "The Cadillac Convoy," which was placed in December 2001 by the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan. The black metal sign with gray metal posts commemorates Detroit's tercentennial. A Hart Plaza dedication marker, a replacement donated by Herman Miller Cares in 2016, is located by steps to the sub plaza on the east side of the park. A rededication marker for The Dodge Fountain is located at the edge of the plaza and south of the fountain. It is a small, granite and limestone monument on a concrete unit block base. The north face contains a plaque dated August 31, 2006, marking the refurbishment of the fountain and revitalizing the waterfront through the support of Gretchen C. Valade. The south face contains a rectangular metal plaque that was part of the dedication of the fountain on July 24, 1976, prior to the dedication ceremonies for Hart Plaza in 1978 and 1979. The plaque describes the fountain as "'An Engine of Water' at the Gateway to a Great City." Since the plaza was under construction at the time of the 1976 event, the original location of the plaque is not known. On the riverbank slope west of the fountain dedication monument, a metal plaque with the words "1984 Peace Tree" is embedded in a stone at the base of a ginkgo tree.

#### *Small-Scale Features Integrity Assessment*

Small-scale features of Hart Plaza are largely non-historic and do not have integrity. As originally designed, the park contained very few furnishings or free standing lights. Bollards, flagpoles, and independent monuments were not part of the original design but are found throughout the park today. These vertical elements detract from the open, uncluttered landscape as designed.

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## Sculptures and Constructed Water Features

Sculptures and constructed water features include five elements original to the historic design of Hart Plaza and four elements that are not part of the design.

The Pylon (**contributing object**) is located at the east end of the Jefferson Promenade and in line with Woodward Avenue. The 120-foot-tall stainless steel pylon is seven feet square at its base and twists into a helix as it rises toward the sky. The pylon design required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers.

The Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (**contributing object**) is located above a bowl-shaped depression in the central plaza. In designing the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. At the base of the stainless steel fountain sits a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The two-foot square convex brass features protrude from the paving north and south of the fountain. The fountain has three hundred water jets within the ring capable of offering thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.

The circular depression (**part of the contributing site**) is located two hundred feet west of the Dodge Fountain. It is formed by granite setts that dip into a shallow bowl-shaped depression that echoes the depression under the fountain.

The cubist water sculpture (**contributing object**) is located north of the Dodge Fountain. The rectangle of protruding square granite slabs of varying heights forms a visual counterpart to the depression. It is mirrored along the axis established by the main amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater. It was labeled as a play sculpture and fountain in the original drawings, with mechanicals for pumps, flow, and drainage. However, there is no evidence if it was ever functional.

The spiral seating sculpture (**contributing object**) is located southeast of the Dodge Fountain at the top of the sloped walk descending to the riverbank. It consists of three approximately eighteen-inch-high concrete steps in a spiral pattern that lead to a central concrete ramp and wrap around a cylindrical concrete air shaft that serves to ventilate the sub plaza near the Atwater Tunnel.

Sculptures added to Hart Plaza after the design and initial construction include the Abraham Lincoln bust, Transcending, the Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue, and the Gateway to Freedom sculpture.

The Abraham Lincoln bust (**non-contributing object**) is a seventy-two-inch-high marble sculpture of the sixteenth U.S. president set on a black granite pedestal in the center of the Lincoln Garden adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center. Created by Gutzon Borglum, a one-time

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instructor of Noguchi in 1918, the bust was a gift of Ralph Herman Booth to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) in 1924.<sup>2</sup> Following the redesign of the base by Marshall Fredericks in 1954, the composition was dedicated by American Citizens of German Ancestry through the German American Cultural Center in 1956. In 1986, the bust was restored and placed in Hart Plaza through the joint efforts of the DIA, Detroit Parks and Recreation, and the Civic Center.

Transcending, the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark, by David Barr and Sergio de Guisti (**non-contributing object**), was dedicated in 2003. The sixty-three-foot-tall, incomplete (or open) steel ring set on its edge has a low plaza-like plinth and outer circle of boulders. It is located in a panel of lawn and trees along Jefferson Avenue and in line with the Dodge Fountain.

The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue (**non-contributing object**), installed in 2001, is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel west of the Dodge Fountain, approximately fifteen feet south of the Michigan Historic Site sign and approximately fifteen feet north of the French Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan interpretive sign.

Gateway to Freedom, the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad, by Edward J. Dwight Jr. (**non-contributing object**), was installed in 2001 at the double steps by the riverside walk. A central, multi-figural bronze sculpture features six people preparing to board a boat. The sculpture of a man with an outstretched finger represents George de Baptiste, a local business leader and Virginia-born free man who also transported fugitives aboard his steam ship, the T. Whitney. Two marble pillars with brass flames flank the main sculpture. Donor names are engraved on bricks of the walk and on the polished granite-faced walls flanking the sculpture to the east and west. Gateway to Freedom is the U.S. component of the memorial that is also commemorated by a Canadian sculpture located in Windsor, Ontario almost directly across the Detroit River from Hart Plaza. Part of the same commission, the complementary sculpture by Dwight entitled "Tower of Freedom" shares complementary design elements such as brass figures and a marble pillar with brass flames. The Canadian sculpture depicts a man raising his arms in celebration of emancipation, a Quaker woman assisting a woman and her child, and a young girl glancing back toward Detroit.

#### *Sculptures and Constructed Water Features Integrity Assessment*

Sculptures and constructed water features are mostly intact, retaining integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the original design intent of Isamu Noguchi. All original features remain. Sculptures that have been recently added to the park are distinct from the historic features; however, the large Transcending ring detracts from the designed spatial organization of the site.

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<sup>2</sup> "Abraham Lincoln, sculpture," IAS 76000536. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian Institution Research Information System.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Landscape Architecture

Art

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1974 to 1979

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1924

1955

1979

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls

Isamu Noguchi

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Philip A. Hart Plaza is significant under National Register Criterion A, at the local level, as the culmination of a decades-long effort to establish a civic center at the foot of Woodward Avenue where it meets the Detroit River. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the Detroit city government initiated a series of planning efforts in an attempt to create a grouping of buildings and open spaces to accommodate the city government and other civic and social functions. Although city planning beautification efforts began in the later years of the nineteenth century, it was internationally significant architect Eliel Saarinen who provided the first plan for a civic center in the 1920s, an unrealized effort that was later taken up by his son Eero Saarinen in the 1950s. It was not until the 1970s, however, that the plan for a civic center plaza was executed by another internationally recognized designer and sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. Since its completion in 1979, Hart Plaza has served as the social heart of Detroit's civic center, a publically accessible space that hosts music and cultural festivals and provides year-round passive recreation activities.

Hart Plaza is also significant under National Register Criterion C, at the national level, as the first of only four public spaces designed by Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a widely respected artist with significant works in the United States and abroad. Although the local architectural firm Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls was the architect of record for the plaza, the design is credited to Noguchi. At first commissioned only to create the centerpiece Horace A. Dodge and Son Fountain, Noguchi ultimately designed the entire plaza, creating an interplay of positive and negative spaces that blend monumental sculptures, diagonal axes, and playful forms that balance each other across wide expanses, all focused on the centerpiece of the Dodge Fountain. While subsequent additions and the depredations of time have somewhat impacted Noguchi's original design, the fundamental character of Noguchi's Hart Plaza remains distinctive and largely intact.

The period of significance, 1974 to 1979, reflects the period during which Hart Plaza was constructed. Its place as one of the few public spaces created by an internationally recognized master of Modern design, and the integrity of its design within Noguchi's body of work, meets the criteria of exceptional significance (Criteria Consideration G) for properties less than fifty years old.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### *Detroit's Early Riverfront*

Detroit's present day civic center (a series of buildings and open spaces arranged to accommodate the city government and other social and civic functions) is built at the narrowest point of the strait between present-day Detroit and Windsor, Canada. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Anishinaabe or "Three Fires" people, which included the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, lived around the Great Lakes. Anishinaabe people shared a similar culture and language, and the riverfront location at this narrow point was a natural gathering place to share news, hunt, fish, and trade. When the fur trade brought Europeans to the region, the Anishinaabeg traded beaver pelts for European goods such as tools, food, and weapons.

In 1701, French officer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac led an expedition to establish a fort, named Fort Pontchartrain for the French chancellor, at this location in order to control the fur trade on the lower Great Lakes. This became the first permanent European settlement in the region. The layout of farmland adjacent to Fort Pontchartrain was one of the first public efforts to impose form along Detroit's riverfront. These "ribbon farms" were often as narrow as two hundred feet wide, extending up to three miles inland, and were situated perpendicular to the riverfront to facilitate river access for farmers. The streets along Detroit's riverfront were often laid out along the property lines between these early ribbon farms, and many of them still bear the family names of Detroit's early French settlers.

Following the establishment of permanent Euroamerican settlements, the region's original inhabitants, the Anishinaabeg, were gradually displaced after losing their land through a series of treaties signed and enacted during the early to mid-1800s. The Treaty of Detroit, signed on November 17, 1807, transferred land in what is now southeast Michigan and northwest Ohio from the Anishinaabeg to the United States. The treaty was signed in Detroit by William Hull, governor of the Michigan Territory and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of 1836 transferred nearly half of Anishinaabe land in the Upper Peninsula to the United States, as well as the northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula. In 1837, the land acquired by the United States became part of Michigan, the 26<sup>th</sup> state.

In the summer of 1805, a fire destroyed all evidence of Detroit's riverfront settlement except for one house and a few outlying farms. The devastating fire had at least one positive outcome – it provided a blank slate upon which to rebuild. The new territorial governor and his three-justice

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<sup>3</sup> "November 17, 1807: Treaty of Detroit Signed" MSU Libraries. <https://blogs.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2017/nov/november-17-1807-treaty-detroit-signed/> (accessed June 14, 2018).



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judiciary were instructed by Congress to “lay out a new town including the site of the one destroyed and ten thousand acres of adjacent land.”<sup>4</sup>

Augustus Woodward, Chief Justice of the Michigan Territory, was the first of the new administrative delegation to arrive following the fire. Woodward was a Columbia-educated lawyer who was personally acquainted with both Thomas Jefferson, who appointed him to the post of Chief Justice, and Charles Pierre L’Enfant, whose Baroque design had been implemented in planning the layout of the District of Columbia. Woodward had a personal interest in surveying and city planning, and he seized the opportunity given by the destruction of Detroit to plan his own American city. For Detroit, he proposed an ambitious plan that improved on L’Enfant’s plan for the District of Columbia, which had merely imposed diagonal avenues and public circles on the existing gridiron, by creating a unified pattern of equilateral triangles four thousand feet in length on each side, converging on circular plazas or “circuses”. Woodward Avenue, running from the riverfront to Grand Circus Park, the first of the envisioned public circuses, became the main axis of what came to be known as the Woodward Plan.

Woodward’s plan was only partially implemented before local politics intervened and the remainder of the city was laid out on the more traditional rectilinear grid. However, portions of the plan are still visible on the landscape of downtown, as are traces of the city’s earlier history in the narrow grid of streets perpendicular to the river along the borders of the old French ribbon farms, and the hub of American Indian trails intersecting at the riverfront and Woodward Avenue that later became the city’s major radial streets.

During the early 1800s, as the city continued to grow, farmland on the river side of Jefferson Avenue was divided into smaller lots for businesses. By the 1830s, the riverfront had so many stores, taverns and boarding houses, it became known as the “dollar” side of Jefferson Avenue.<sup>5</sup> Advertisements in the *Detroit Free Press* during the 1830s and 1840s indicate that businesses along the riverfront sold dry goods, groceries, cutlery, hardware and stoves.

The shoreline of the Detroit River was continuously filled in and expanded to make more room for hotels, bringing in tourists and seamen. The Mansion House, built in 1836, became a gathering place for mariners and was later converted into a charity home for unemployed sailors. Although the building became somewhat rundown as a result, it was still viewed by Detroiters as a charitable and worthy institution and remained in use as late as 1920. Mariners were also welcomed at the Mariner’s Church on the northwest corner of Woodward Avenue and Woodbridge Street, built in 1848 to serve traveling seamen and sailors.

Given its strategic location and proximity to Canada, Detroit became an early station on the Underground Railroad, with the height of this activity occurring between 1838 and 1865. The intricate network of safe houses and routes transferring enslaved people away from slave-holding

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Ellis Roberts, *Sketches of the City of Detroit, State of Michigan, Past and Present* (Detroit: R.F. Johnstone & Co., 1855), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Friend Palmer, “Earlier Days in Detroit.” *Detroit Free Press*, 28 January 1906.

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states generally ended at one of at least seven points for entering Canada from Michigan. The U.S. Congress essentially ended slavery and involuntary servitude in Michigan by enacting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787. Great Britain followed suit and in 1793 began a phased termination of slavery in Upper Canada (future Ontario). At various points in time, enslaved people would escape to either the U.S. or Canada depending on the location granting the most favorable legal status.<sup>6</sup>

The large and sympathetic network of individuals and churches in Detroit, such as the Second Baptist Church, sponsored relocation via the one-mile boat trip from the downtown docks. At the peak of the Underground Railroad, it is estimated that around one-thousand-five-hundred people left from Detroit each year.<sup>7</sup> Around 1859, for example, as many as ninety-four enslaved people were transferred in one week.<sup>8</sup> Historic docks along the city's entire riverfront including the future Hart Plaza were vital to the Underground Railroad. Mariner's Church may have also been an important stop along the Underground Railroad. When the church was moved to a new location in 1955 to make way for the civic center, a brick tunnel was reportedly discovered that led to the river, suggesting it had been used to move enslaved people to the waterfront where they could board boats and be ferried across to Canada. This activity is commemorated in the present-day Gateway to Freedom memorial in Hart Plaza and its counterpart across the Detroit River in Windsor, Ontario.

Beginning in the 1850s, warehouses and steamboat docks began to displace the small retail stores. The new warehouses constructed along the riverfront housed the American Eagle Tobacco Company, which had several warehouses and offices near the river on Atwater between Woodward and Shelby (1884), Lawson, Howard & Co, a grain merchant at Griswold and Atwater (1843), and the Detroit Steam Supply Company (1884).<sup>9</sup>

As tourism began to develop in the city in the later nineteenth century, tension developed between the needs of these two contrary riverfront industries. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated 1884 mentioned with disapproval that business and warehouse owners stored extra freight on the sidewalks on Shelby Street between Jefferson and the river, forcing pedestrians to walk in the streets. The article went on to mention that this was (regrettably in its opinion) the first sight of vacationers coming to Detroit via steamboat liner.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, (1961) reprint, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Katie Korth, "Hart Plaza: A History." Submitted in partial fulfillment for a Masters in Archaeology. 23 April 2013, 4.

<sup>10</sup> "Shelby Street." *Detroit Free Press*, 9 July 1884.

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### ***The Civic Center – A City Planning Typology***

The idea of a park in the center of the city was widely discussed as early as 1891, when City of Detroit Mayor Hazen S. Pingree gave his annual message to the Common Council. Mayor Pingree served as Detroit's mayor from 1890 to 1897 and was nationally admired for his "Potato Patch" program to feed the poor. An advanced social reformer, he led construction of the city's first public schools, public parks and free public baths, earning the nickname, "Idol of the People."

Reflecting on the prevalence of warehouses along the riverfront, Mayor Pingree stated, "a large park, in the center of the city would boom Detroit more than the establishment of half a dozen Union Depots or of 18 or 20 factories." He believed that although Grand Circus Park, further north on Woodward, was wisely designed, it was not large enough for the subsequent growth of the city. A downtown park would be a "lasting monument to the wisdom of the city fathers who procured it, and would justly entitle all who aided in the cause to the gratitude, not only of this generation, but of generations yet unborn."<sup>11</sup>

The Common Council did nothing to implement Pingree's vision of a downtown civic park. By the late 1890s, Detroit was beginning to attract national conventions, and in 1897 Pingree tried again, calling for filling in the downtown riverfront to create a convention center to accommodate the promotion of private enterprise and national conventions in the summer months. Although the riverfront was filled in, it was to support the construction of warehouses and hotels, not a convention center. Mayor Pingree left office later that same year after being elected governor of Michigan.

Pingree's vision for a downtown civic park was in line with the developing ideals of the City Beautiful movement. In 1893, Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition, which featured a prominent display of monumental buildings arranged around a formal lagoon. The exhibition, with its emphasis on symmetry, beauty, and order, captured the public imagination and helped give rise to the City Beautiful movement. The private and political forces driving industrialization resulted in cities whose rapid expansion left little time for thoughtful comprehensive planning. By the early 1900s, American city planners were calling for monumental arrangements surrounding open plazas and malls, so elegantly displayed by the formal groupings of buildings at the World's Columbian Exposition, as an antidote to cities that were over crowded, poorly planned, and congested.

Aside from private and commercial development, Detroit had few major public works projects in the century following Woodward's plan – with the exception of Grand Boulevard, a twelve-mile ring encircling the city perimeter, Waterworks Park, a public leisure ground at the site of the city's water intake system upriver, and plans for Belle Isle, the city's largest park that marked the

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<sup>11</sup> George Galster, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 64-65.

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eastern terminus of the Boulevard. In the wake of the Columbian Exposition, there was no shortage of enthusiasm for much needed public improvements, and in the fall of 1904 the Detroit Board of Commerce invited Charles Mulford Robinson to Detroit, to make a study to recommend improvements for the city.

Robinson was a newspaper editor, author, and professor celebrated as one of the United States' first urban planners and an early proponent of the City Beautiful movement. Robinson's preliminary recommendations resulted in the creation of a Committee on Civic Improvement, which immediately invited Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. to undertake a more expansive study. As one of the nation's preeminent landscape architects and a pioneer in comprehensive city and regional planning, Olmsted was the obvious choice to guide the city in its necessary public improvements.

Although Olmsted's study offered more concrete recommendations, the separate studies by Robinson and Olmsted both provided valuable insights into Detroit's much needed public improvements. Olmsted and Robinson agreed on two key points: the importance of rectifying the improper disposition of monumental public buildings throughout the downtown core, and that linking this monumental grouping to the Detroit River was essential for the image of the future city. Robinson proposed that the commercial waterfront at the center of the city should be a "water-gate—the official entrance to the city" and reclaimed for aesthetic development.<sup>12</sup> Olmsted, as well, noted in regard to the proposed site:

[A]s the middle of the City's Front, this spot is plainly marked as the site for some great tribune, from which enthroned Detroit shall review the vast procession of the ships in the centuries to come....the day will surely come...when Detroit will here erect a great and monumental structure dominating all the aggregated buildings of the city and typifying to the traveler from afar the city's own domination. Rising from...an orderly and dignified treatment of the River Front and spanning the axis of Woodward Avenue, such a structure will be...the culminating architectural accent of the City.<sup>13</sup>

The report laid out a clear path for future planning in Detroit, and was yet another argument that the terminus of Woodward Avenue at the Detroit River was the prime location for a grouping of monumental buildings.

As cities continued to develop at a pace that left little time for thoughtful planning, turn-of-the-century city planners redirected their dreams of a comprehensive city-wide plan into a much more accessible goal: the design of a civic center, similar to what was so beautifully displayed in Chicago. It was further hoped that the typology of a civic center, an idealized city in miniature,

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<sup>12</sup> Detroit Board of Commerce, *Improvement of the City of Detroit: Reports made by Professor Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior, and Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson to the Detroit Board of Commerce* (Detroit: 1905). This includes Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43; and Charles Mulford Robinson, "Report of Charles Mulford Robinson," 45-67, hereafter cited as one work.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., "Report of Frederick Law Olmsted," 42-43.

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with its well-thought out placement of streets, buildings, and plazas, would serve as a model for the city at large.

In rapidly expanding cities such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Detroit, the civic center emerged as the centerpiece of comprehensive planning. In the early 1920s, the Detroit City Plan Commission and an architect and planner named Eliel Saarinen began to collaborate on a picturesque civic center plan near the Detroit riverfront.

### ***Eliel Saarinen's 1924 Civic Center Plan***

In the summer of 1921, a "soldier's memorial conference" was held in Detroit to determine the best location for a war memorial and civic auditorium. Michigan governor Alex J. Groesbeck cited the city's desire to memorialize its fallen soldiers and stressed the need for a convention hall and civic meeting place. The exact location for the building proved difficult to determine, with upwards of forty proposed locations throughout the city. The impasse was not resolved until an accomplished Finnish architect and city planner, Eliel Saarinen, was hired by the city.

Saarinen was the foremost architect of his generation in Finland before moving to the United States. By 1914, he had become widely known in Europe for his Helsinki railroad station and urban planning projects for Reval (now Tallinn), Estonia, and Canberra, Australia. In 1922, he placed second in the Chicago Tribune tower competition with a design that influenced an entire generation of skyscrapers. As a result, Saarinen was invited by Emil Lorch to teach design courses at the University of Michigan in 1923. In later years, Saarinen would create a lasting influence in the region through his architectural designs that included churches and a large part of the campus at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, at Bloomfield Hills near Detroit, where he also served as president of the academy before becoming head of the graduate department of architecture and city planning.

Not long after he arrived in the United States, Saarinen's advice for the war memorial in Detroit was sought, with his fees underwritten by the Michigan chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Memorial Hall Sub-Committee on Site. Saarinen proposed a civic center scheme at the foot of Woodward, which was the location he determined to be best suited for the proposed Memorial Hall to honor the city's war veterans. His 1924 plan was of a picturesque grouping of public buildings that included a city hall and municipal complex surrounding a wedge-shaped plaza – a sweeping vision for the site.

In speaking of the wedge-shaped plaza, Saarinen noted, "The general form of the plaza is irregular, but gives a distinct impression of formality. There is no symmetry, but the contours of the plaza and the grouping of building masses, varying in simplicity and richness, give to the whole an extraordinarily fine balance."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Eliel Saarinen, *The City: Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future* (Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1943), 70.

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The buildings surrounding the plaza formed horizontal walls of uniform blocks, including a towering city hall, and a domed Memorial Hall along the riverfront with two entrances. The south-facing entrance, toward the river, was dedicated to sailors, while the north-facing entrance, on an axis with Woodward Avenue, was dedicated to soldiers. Included in his plan were design solutions to address several of the city's large scale engineering problems, and which indicated the need for a massive public works project. Below the surface of the plaza, Saarinen designed two underground decks for motor and rail traffic and parking, and areas for mass transit and sewage works along the riverfront.

Saarinen's plan received wide acclaim from the Sub-Committee on Site, the City Plan Commission, engineers of the Rapid Transit Commission, and the local press. The proposed civic center project met its first obstacle with the price tag for the Memorial Hall. Originally budgeted at \$5.5 million, the Memorial Hall project ballooned into a massive twenty-year, one hundred million dollar development, requiring an estimated thirty million dollars for the acquisition of property alone, and taking up twelve blocks of what was still prime city real estate.<sup>15</sup>

Even so, the Detroit Common Council was undeterred and agreed to place condemnation proceedings on the spring ballot. However, the election in 1924 of a new mayor, John Smith, halted the whole plan. Smith viewed the entire project as an extravagance and preferred to direct the city's resources toward more practical infrastructural improvements. Mayor Smith succeeded in blocking the ballot measure to acquire the land, and, as a result, he ended the project's momentum.

### ***Detroit's Post-War Master Plan***

During Mayor Smith's administration, which lasted from 1924 until 1928, there were no further plans for the civic center. From 1929 until the late 1940s, the Great Depression and World War II halted most construction work in the city, and city resources were generally directed toward relieving the effects of the Depression and supporting the war effort. The idea of a civic center was not completely dead, however, and it was mentioned in several planning efforts during this period. The City Plan Commission's 1939 Annual Report stated that the time was now ripe for a new comprehensive plan, and further noted, "The Detroit Plan Commission has given careful consideration to civic centers. A city of Detroit's size requires many civic centers such as retail shopping, financial, warehouse, industrial, recreational, amusement, cultural, judicial, music, institutional, etc."

In the fall of 1943, forty civic-minded architects formed the Architect's Civic Design Group to consider postwar "highways, residential developments, business and cultural centers, and

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<sup>15</sup> "Financing of Memorial Hall Puzzles Council," *The Detroit Times*, June 27, 1924. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Box 16, folder: News Clippings, 1924-30.

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suburban projects.”<sup>16</sup> Foremost on their agenda was the study of waterfront development at the foot of Woodward Avenue, although they also looked into design solutions to other problems that had affected the city, such as so-called blighted districts and overcrowding. A 1943 *Detroit News* article entitled, “Can We Build a City That Will Give Us Health, Happiness?” noted that the group was working out a new comprehensive plan for Detroit that would transform the city into a better place to live.

In 1944, Mayor Edward Jefferies’ office issued a brochure, entitled *Post-War Improvements To Make Your Detroit a Finer City in Which to Live and Work*, which prominently featured “a dignified, unified Civic Center, which will not only symbolize our pride in our city, but which, even more importantly, will bring together at one central and accessible point the now scattered municipal departments and offices.” A sketch in the brochure showed Woodward Avenue dividing into a boulevard south of Jefferson Avenue. To either side of the boulevard were low-rise buildings with a rectangular skyscraper on the west side. The boulevard terminated at the river in a circular plaza with a central monument.<sup>17</sup> The civic center plan in the brochure was not the 1924 design by Saarinen, but a newly devised plan based on the preliminary studies undertaken for the City Plan Commission by Suren Pilafian, one of the architects working with the Architect’s Civic Design Group. Pilafian first came to public notice when the 32-year old Turkish-born Detroit architect won a competition for a campus plan and Student’s Center Building for Wayne University (later renamed Wayne State University). Pilafian later became the University’s campus architect in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two years later, the City Plan Commission began to issue its Master Plan for the City of Detroit in a series of booklets that addressed recreation, the thoroughfare system, and general land use. Three of seven booklets addressed specific projects: the Cultural Center, a recreational park and development from the riverfront to the Belle Isle Bridge, and the Civic Center. The Civic Center Plan, number 3 in the Master Plan series, was published in October 1946. Although the Commission acknowledged that this site had been “for years recognized as appropriate for this development,” it stated that they had surveyed the entire city to identify the best possible site and settled on the riverfront as providing the best location based on six factors, including proximity to the central business district, accessibility via both public and private transportation, relatively low land costs, historical significance, and inherent natural beauty.<sup>18</sup>

Although the booklet outlining the civic center plan credited it as “based in large part on preliminary studies undertaken for the Plan Commission by Mr. Suren Pilafian,” the design had

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<sup>16</sup> Donald E. Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center: The Grouping of Public Buildings in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit and the Emergence of the City Monumental in the Modern Metropolis*. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (University of Pittsburgh, 2013, 242. No listing of the architects in the group was found, but the group was chaired by Branson V. Gamber and included Suren Pilafian and Saarinen.

<sup>17</sup> Post-War Improvement Committee [Detroit], *Post-War Improvements to Make Your Detroit a Finer City in which to Live and Work* (Detroit: 1944), 4.

<sup>18</sup> City Plan Commission [Detroit], *The Civic Center Plan [City of Detroit – A Master Plan Report, No. 3 of a Series]*, (Detroit: October 1946), 9-11.

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evolved considerably since the sketch in the Mayor's office brochure of two years earlier, with the City Plan Commission noting that "the final design exploits to the fullest the natural dignity of the site." The proposed civic center was now a 47.5-acre site. North of Jefferson Avenue was an administrative group, including a City-County building to the east of Woodward Avenue and state and federal buildings to the west. The boulevard of Pilafian's 1944 plan now terminated just south of Jefferson Avenue in ramps leading to underground parking, while the buildings were pushed farther east and west to allow for a much wider plaza that included large lawn panels outlined with trees. The circular plaza at the riverfront was gone, replaced by a series of paved and lawn terraces of varying levels. To the west was a V-shaped Veteran's Service Building with a convention hall beyond, while to the east was a civic auditorium, recognizable as the shape of the future Ford Auditorium, but oriented east-west rather than north-south as it would eventually be executed. The brochure also noted that, "the natural slope of the land in the plaza area will make available large amounts of underground space, of which four acres will be utilized as exhibition halls. Underground accommodations for 800 automobiles have also been indicated."<sup>19</sup>

The entire civic center had a projected cost of fifty-five million dollars, with a ten million dollar cost for state and federal office buildings that would be borne by those entities. The commission noted that the investment would be well worth it, as Detroit would receive a plaza for outdoor assemblies, a "World Wars Memorial Hall" with assembly room for veterans, a twenty-thousand-seat convention space for mass meetings and other organizations that had been taking their business elsewhere, and a smaller Civic Auditorium with a seating capacity of thirty-five hundred. Furthermore, the report stated, "The civic center offers Detroit a rare opportunity to give tangible form to its own spirit, to manifest in steel and stone the dynamic drive characteristic of this great metropolis. For this Center can be more than a mere open space flanked by a group of buildings. It can truly become the symbol of the city, a monument on which the visitor will gaze with admiration, which the resident can look upon with satisfaction, proudly saying to himself, 'I am a citizen of no mean city.'"<sup>20</sup>

Although the city government had invested at least three years and two publications in Pilafian's plan, in February 1947 the Detroit Chapter of the AIA advised the Common Council and the City Plan Commission to retain Saarinen, Swanson, Saarinen Associates as consultants for the proposed civic center's plaza as well as the architectural treatment of the remaining buildings. This recommendation not only dismissed the significance of the initial contribution Pilafian had already made to the design of the civic center, but also paralleled the recommendation that had been made back in 1942, when Pilafian won the Wayne campus competition. In announcing the award of the campus competition, the jury recommended that Pilafian "be invited to restudy his design, and he should feel free to invite the collaboration of other architects [...] to achieve a more expressive quality." Furthermore, the jury hoped that Pilafian would agree to collaborate with the second place winner –the firm of Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen. As it happened,

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<sup>19</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Civic Center Plan*, 5.



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construction was impossible during the war years and, as noted by future Wayne Provost Arthur Neef, “the forced idleness of Wayne planners afforded them the luxury of rethinking the entire program.” In addition, it soon became clear that, “the specific plan which had won the competition had already outlived its usefulness.”<sup>21</sup>

More than twenty years had passed since Eliel Saarinen first presented his 1924 civic center design, and the architect was seventy-four years old. Now, Eliel’s thirty-seven-old son, Eero Saarinen, joined his father in developing the 1947 plan. The younger Saarinen was born in Finland, but attended public schools in Michigan after moving with his family to the United States in 1923. In 1929, he studied sculpture at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris but, as he recounted years later, “it never occurred to me to do anything but follow in my father’s footsteps.” He studied architecture at Yale University, and conducted research on housing and city planning with the Flint Institute of Research and Planning in Flint, Michigan, before joining his father’s practice in Bloomfield Hills in 1938.

Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen’s design for the civic center retained several elements of the earlier Pilafian plan, including the placement of key buildings - the county-city building, state and federal buildings, Veterans’ Memorial Building, convention hall (now a circular structure) and civic auditorium. The defining feature of the plaza was now an elongated tear-shaped reflecting pool along the axis of the civic auditorium with a less rectilinear and more free-flowing park south of the pool including curved walks, extensive lawn areas, and trees. A later refinement to the plan was a 1,200-foot-long structure meant to combine state, federal, city, and county offices. The structure was shown in a July 1947 model as spanning across Woodward Avenue, just as Olmsted had suggested more than forty years before, but was deemed by critics as a “tired skyscraper” that had “decided to lie down and rest.”<sup>22</sup> Saarinen provided several revised designs for the County-City building, and each rendition included new refinements to the surrounding civic center, especially the landscaping of the plaza below Woodward Avenue. In a refrain that was becoming almost cliché, the Common Council’s reaction was unenthusiastic. The *Detroit Free Press* recorded in July 1947 that, “Common Council apparently indicated only mild interest in the proposed \$50,000,000 civic center when it was laid before it in a model, maps, sketches and verbal description Friday,” further noting that after a thirty minute explanation by a representative of Saarinen, Swanson, and Saarinen, “Council adjourned without a single question or word of comment.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the uncertainty surrounding approval of the plan, efforts to fund the project went forward. In the late 1940s a special progress report by the City Plan Commission was circulated with a 4-page handout urging voters to pass upcoming referenda including approval of the site, a

<sup>21</sup> Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center*, 234.

<sup>22</sup> “Architect Gives Critics Answer,” *The Detroit Times*, August 10, 1947. Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library, Eero Saarinen Papers, Series IV, Project Records, Box 88, folder 172, Job 4627: Detroit Civic Center, Detroit, MI, clippings.

<sup>23</sup> “Civic Center Plans Leave Council Quiet.” *Detroit Free Press*, 12 July 1947.

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millage increase, and an \$8 million dollar bond.<sup>24</sup> The funding attempts must have proved successful, as in the early 1950s the city began to demolish waterfront structures in preparation for eventually implementing development of the civic center. At this time, the area was little more than parking lots and industrial sites. As the transportation focus of the city had moved away from the riverfront and towards rail and road travel, many of the warehouses erected on the river side of Jefferson Avenue fell into disuse and the small storefront businesses were closed, razed, and replaced with parking lots. A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that the site included a multi-story parking lot and a store named Sam's Drugs and Shoes. The one industry that did survive along the riverfront were the excursion steamboat companies, which used the dock area. Although the steamboats attracted tourists and locals to the riverfront during the summer months, the area that would later become Hart Plaza was mostly vacant during the remainder of the year.

The one exception to the general demolition of the waterfront area was Mariners' Church, which was deemed too important to raze. In 1955, the church was relocated from the northwest corner of Woodward and Woodbridge, on a site that is now the lawn panel east of the labor union monument *Transcending*, to its current location 900 feet to the east.

Veterans' Memorial Hall (currently known as the UAW-Ford Center), was the first civic center building that was completed. This building was constructed in 1950 to plans by the Detroit-based architecture firm of Harley, Ellington and Day. In 1955 the same firm completed another important building anchoring the civic center – the City-County building, now the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center. A year later, in 1956, the design firm Odell, Hewlett and Luckenbach completed the Ford Auditorium. In 1960, Mayor Pingree's vision of a convention space on the riverfront was finally realized with the completion of Cobo Hall (now Cobo Center), one of the nation's first large convention centers, designed by Gino Rossetti while he was with design firm Giffels and Vallet.

The civic center buildings completed during the 1950s and 1960s were very different from the Art Deco and Neoclassical monuments envisioned by the 1924 Saarinen plan or realized buildings in the neighborhood such as the magnificent Guardian Building. All were International-style buildings sheathed in or featuring white marble. Along with Minoru Yamasaki's Michigan Consolidated Gas Building (1958), with its white precast concrete panel exterior, the civic center buildings created a modern perimeter for the future plaza. They were accented by pools, such as the reflecting pool in front of the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company Building, and sculptures including Marshall Fredericks' Spirit of Detroit (on the west end of the City-County Building) and Victory Eagle (on the north side of the Veterans' Memorial Building), and Giacomo Manzu's Passo di Danza in front of the Gas Company building.

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<sup>24</sup> Simpson, *Civic Center and Cultural Center*, 251.

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However, the centerpiece of the civic center design – the plaza – was still not implemented. In the decades that followed the construction of the civic center buildings, the City deliberated on the best approach for developing the plaza. In order to further develop the design of the civic center plaza, Saarinen brought in a partner with whom he had worked on previous projects, Dan Kiley. Kiley was a nationally-known landscape architect with a long history of collaboration with prominent architects, including Louis Kahn and I.M. Pei. In 1946, Kiley was on the winning team with Eero Saarinen for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition, also known as the St. Louis Arch, and in 1955, again with Saarinen, he designed the garden for J. Irwin Miller's family in Columbus, IN, perhaps the most important post World War II garden in the United States.

In 1955, perhaps as a result of the collaboration with Kiley, the City of Detroit's Committee on Civic Design "unanimously and enthusiastically" endorsed the new design and overall shape of Saarinen's civic center plaza design, noting that, "the architectural and aesthetic unity achieved by this new concept will greatly enhance the value of the civic center plaza. We are fully aware of the fact that this plan requires further study and improvement, especially in regards to public comfort stations, location and shape of memorial gardens and plaques, as well as many other details."<sup>25</sup> A few days later, the Common Council approved Saarinen and Kiley's surface treatment for the plaza. It is unclear what refinements Kiley and Saarinen made to the plan since 1947, as no drawings or renderings have been found, and despite the approval of the Common Council, there was still no execution of the plan.

In 1962, thirty-three-year-old Jerome P. Cavanagh became Mayor of Detroit after winning a landslide victory over the incumbent Louis C. Miriani, becoming one of the country's youngest big-city majors. During his eight-year administration, he became nationally recognized as an outstanding leader who adopted Lyndon B. Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also known as the Model Cities Act), and obtained \$490 million in federal funding that was invested into a nine square mile section of Detroit's inner city in the hopes of setting new standards in urbanization and quelling poverty.

In a letter to Mayor Cavanagh dated June 15, 1964, Charles Blessing, Director of Detroit's City Plan Commission, wrote that since the Saarinen/Kiley plan was approved in 1955, the need for an underground parking structure and roadway across the civic center plaza had been recognized (despite these being features of plans going back to the 1940s), and a new plan which retained the "essential features" of the Saarinen design, while incorporating the garage and roadway, had been reviewed and approved by all affected city departments. Blessing concluded by recommending that the plaza plan be presented to the Common Council with Kiley in attendance to explain the design (Eero Saarinen had died in 1961) and that Kiley should be engaged to complete the detailed design and surface treatment. Once cost estimates had been obtained, the city should proceed with construction.

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<sup>25</sup> Committee on Civic Design. October 14, 1955. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 – September 1965.

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Blessing was both an architect and city planner, and served as Director of the City of Detroit's City Plan Commission from 1953 until 1977, so his recommendation should have carried considerable weight. Under Blessing's leadership, Detroit had carried out a series of ambitious attempts to reshape its urban landscape by sweeping aside small commercial buildings and single-family housing and replacing them with new modern buildings and parks such as the Mies van der Rohe-designed Lafayette Park residential development just east of downtown, and an industrial development in Corktown to the west, both clearance projects under the Federal Urban Renewal Act. That same year, in 1964, the Detroit City Plan Commission had received the prestigious American Institute of Planners (AIP) Honors Award in Comprehensive Planning for implementing many of the facilities plans for schools and recreational resources, which confirmed that Detroit had greatly improved the city's municipal services. Yet the realization of the civic center plaza still stymied city planners.

Despite Blessing's firm endorsement, there was another plan under review for the plaza, by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G). In February 1965, the Common Council authorized the City of Detroit to provide funds for architectural and engineering services to Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, who were commissioned to provide construction documents for the civic center plaza and underground garage. The project amount was listed as four-hundred-and-fifteen thousand dollars for the architectural and engineering services for Smith Hinchman & Grylls to provide the construction documents.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear if at this time Smith, Hinchman and Grylls were merely expected to provide construction documents for the Saarinen/Kiley plan amended by the City Plan Commission, or to develop an entirely new plan. Since Kiley was initially retained as a consultant to SH&G, this may have been the original intention. However, it was clear by the following fall that SH&G were moving toward a very different design.

City Plan Commission staff voiced their alarm at the changes. In September 1965, senior city planner Charles McCafferty wrote to Blessing to express his concern that, "...our City Plan Commission staff position is being eroded by the direction of events in the last several weeks. I believe this is the result of not returning to the original strong commitment and endorsement of the Saarinen scheme which has been our most valuable strategic resource." He went on to state that Saarinen had studied "25 or 30 various schemes before arriving at his present scheme is proof enough to me that we can expect no more than a marginal gain at the best in further exploration of concepts." McCafferty concluded that to move forward with additional studies of the plaza would effectively dismiss all of the previous efforts and commitments made by the Plan Commission, City departments, the AIA Civic Design Committee, and would, "...give Smith Hinchman & Grylls the free hand that they want in redesigning the Plaza...In conclusion,

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<sup>26</sup> No information was found on why the Common Council decided to award the contract for the plaza to Smith Hinchman & Grylls (SH&G), and there was no date found to indicate when Kiley was eventually retained as a consultant to SH&G. The contract may have been awarded to SH&G because they were based locally in Detroit, whereas Eero Saarinen had died and Kiley was based outside of Michigan.

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I believe it is absolutely imperative for us to take a very firm position on the retention of the basic Saarinen scheme.”<sup>27</sup>

A list of observations of the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls plaza design by the City of Detroit’s design division enumerated the apparent deficits in the approved plan. The comments spanned five pages, and stated, in brief, that the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls plaza design was too self-contained, lacked central focus, was unrelated to the form of buildings surrounding it, and lacked the quality of “simplicity and repose.”

Blessing relayed these comments to Mayor Cavanagh in a letter dated October 8, 1965, and summed up the view of the City Plan Commission that the Saarinen plan was far superior to the proposal by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. In providing reasons for this recommendation, Blessing stated that the elements of Saarinen’s design – the reflecting pool, architectural treatment of steps, pedestrian paved areas, and the “generously sloping lawn extending from the reflecting pool to the river’s edge” - more effectively related to the adjacent buildings, the Ford Auditorium and the Veterans’ building. He also noted that Saarinen’s design has “greater utility functionally in terms of the large open surface adapted to use by maximum numbers of people...and represents the ideal expression of a great city park along a beautiful river.”<sup>28</sup>

When asked to explain their proposed plaza design and why it deviated from the original Saarinen concept, Sigmund Blum from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls noted that there were many problems encountered in adapting to the Saarinen plan, with one example being the slope of the meadow as too steep if the east-west roadway (Atwater Street) was to remain. Blum attributed the change in design to the change in program, and that addition of the underground parking structure and roadway access across the civic center plaza necessitated major alterations to the plan. In a meeting at the City Engineer’s Office to discuss the plaza and underground garage, on August 27, 1965, Blum asked, “is City Plan holding out for Saarinen’s plan because it’s good or just because Saarinen did it?”<sup>29</sup> Blum’s comment appeared to infer that Saarinen’s plan had clear deficiencies that city planners refused to acknowledge, given Saarinen’s reputation.

Despite the push of city planners to retain the integrity of the Saarinen plan, their efforts were dealt another blow in the fall of 1965 when Kiley, who had worked so closely with Eero Saarinen, withdrew from the project. Kiley had openly expressed his concerns about the design direction of the Smith, Hinchman & Grylls proposal, such as their treatment of the fountain and the scheme which he labeled as “dramatic – the scale is much too big.” In an October 18, 1965 letter to Robert Hastings, president of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Kiley expressed his reasons

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<sup>27</sup> Charles McCafferty letter to Charles Blessing. September 1, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 – September 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Blessing letter to Mayor Jerome Cavanagh. October 8, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. August 27, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1955 – September 1965.

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for leaving but also indicated the importance of a new feature that would ultimately shape the future design of the plaza.

I am terribly sorry that I have found it necessary to resign from our association for the design of Detroit's Civic Center Plaza. After working on the project for a short time, I am forced to come to the conclusion that there cannot be more than one strong designer on any successful project. Therefore, since the City of Detroit has selected Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates as the principal architect, I believe it is to the best interests of everyone that I resign from the project.

I do feel that you are correct in taking the position that the program for the Civic Center project has changed materially from the one which Eero Saarinen and I worked on when we created the existing plan in 1955. Whenever any such changes are made in program, it is vitally important that the designer start anew and create a design concept around the program requirements of the time.

Just to mention two changes in program that affect the design solution: the addition of a \$2,000,000 fountain becomes such an important feature that it must be considered a major focal point for the entire plaza development. The addition of underground parking places another controlling feature to the design solution...<sup>30</sup>

The fountain referenced in Kiley's letter to Robert Hastings was the first mention of what would become the central element of the plaza design. The City of Detroit had received notice of a bequest of two million dollars from Anna Thompson Dodge, in honor of her late husband, the American automotive innovator Horace E. Dodge, Sr., and their son Horace E. Dodge. While the sources do not state when Dodge notified the city of her plans, it was most likely between December 1963, when her son died, and Kiley's letter in 1965 (Dodge passed away in 1970).

SH&G's design for the plaza was a major departure from the Saarinen/Kiley plan. While Saarinen's plan was free-flowing and curvilinear, the SH&G plan was rectilinear and regimented. It centered on a large square pool surrounded by a series of small square lawn panels set in paving. Geometric groupings of trees separated the pool from the adjoining buildings and from Jefferson Avenue. A vertical sculpture element aligned along the axis of Woodward just south of Jefferson, in approximately the future location of the Pylon, but the north-south axis through the center of the pool did not align with the street grid. South of the pool was a triangular lawn panel, with a viewing platform extending out over the river at the southwest corner of the site, aligned with the main wing of the Veterans' Memorial Building. Atwater Street was carried under the plaza, and the underground parking garage was accessed by ramps in front of Cobo Center and the Veterans' building.

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<sup>30</sup> Dan Kiley letter to Robert Hastings. October 18, 1965. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

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While the SH&G model for the plaza included a conception of the fountain for the pool, they determined that the construction of the civic center plaza surface treatment should not begin without first having an approved pool and fountain design. In a memorandum from the civic center plaza and underground garage meeting dated May 1968, Blum noted, "...since the pool and fountain area is the central theme of the Plaza, it must be a vibrant and exciting element. New ideas, capturing the spirit of Detroit, must be reflected in its design."<sup>31</sup>

In order to accomplish this objective, Blum suggested either "an international competition to select a design, or that a group of prominent Detroiters be organized to select an artist."<sup>32</sup> It was a point on which Blum and Blessing could finally agree. Blessing suggested that a memo be prepared, in the interest of identifying a fountain designer and for general discussion on the topic with the Mayor, Common Council and various Commissions concerned with the development of the Plaza.

In April 1971, an eleven-member Fountain Selection Committee was established to select a fountain designer. The Fountain Selection Committee was handpicked by Mayor Roman Gribbs and included an impressive group of Detroit notables, most of whom were well known for their dealings in business, arts and architecture. Heading the committee was Robert Hastings, Principal and Chairman of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, which had been commissioned with the overall design of the civic center plaza where the fountain was to be located. Additional members included Detroit architect and historian W. Hawkins Ferry, the editors of the *Detroit Free Press*, Lee Hills, and the *Detroit News*, Martin Hayden, Lydia Winston Malbin, an art collector and the daughter of architect Albert Kahn, African American artist Charles McGee, journalist, teacher, and patron of the arts Victoria Davenport, David Dodge, the grandson of Anna Thomson Dodge, Willis Woods, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Charles Cunningham (possibly the director of the Art Institute of Chicago during this period).

### ***Noguchi and Detroit's Civic Center Plaza***

The committee chose for the fountain design a Japanese-American sculptor, Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi's artistic work spanned from sculptures to theater set designs, and included the design of public spaces in cities throughout the world. Noguchi was born in 1904, the son of a well-educated New Yorker, Leonie Gilmour, and a Japanese poet, Yonejiro Noguchi. The two had enjoyed a collaboration as author and editor, but Yonejiro returned to Japan before Noguchi's birth. Leonie raised their son in a tent village of immigrants just outside of Los Angeles. In 1907, as anti-Japanese sentiment grew in the United States, Leonie moved to Japan so that Noguchi would not face the harsh discrimination against Asian Americans that resulted in their children

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<sup>31</sup> Meeting Memorandum – Civic Center Plaza and Underground Garage. May 13, 1968. Detroit Public Library, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit City Plan Commission Records, Civic Center Plaza, October 1965 – May 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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attending segregated schools. He returned to the United States to attend high school at age thirteen, but the culture of Japan remained a constant influence on his work.

While still a teenager, Noguchi apprenticed briefly with Danish-American sculptor Gutzon Borglum in his Connecticut studio, with mixed results, as Borglum declared that Noguchi had no future in sculpture. Perhaps as a result of this indictment, Noguchi enrolled in Columbia University's pre-medical program, but continued to pursue his interest in sculpture through night classes at a local art school. Noguchi eventually dropped out of medical school to focus more completely on his artistic pursuits. In 1926, Noguchi received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study sculpture in Paris and travel throughout India and China. He returned to the United States and held his first solo exhibition, which firmly established him as a fixture of the New York artist community.

Noguchi's work was not widely recognized in the United States until he completed a large-scale sculpture in 1938 that symbolized the freedom of the press. The project was commissioned for the Associated Press building in Rockefeller Center, New York City. The commission became the first of his public works celebrated worldwide, and reflected his belief in the social significance of sculpture. Noguchi collaborated with artists working in a wide range of disciplines, including stage sets that he created for the dancer/choreographer Martha Graham in the 1930s, as well as dancers/choreographers Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, and George Balanchine. In 1937, he designed a Bakelite intercom for the Zenith Radio Corporation, and in 1947 his glass-topped table was produced by Herman Miller – a design which is still being produced today. In the 1960s, he began working with stone carver Masatoshi Izumi, a collaboration that continued until his death. Noguchi also collaborated from 1960 to 1966 with architect Louis Kahn on a playground design.<sup>33</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, anti-Japanese sentiment was high. While Japanese-Americans on the East Coast were not as liable to relocation to internment camps as those on the West Coast, Noguchi decided to work as the sole volunteer at an internment camp in Arizona where he hoped to use art and community activity to establish an "ideal cooperative community." Recognizing the need for improved morale among those forced to live in internment camps, Noguchi created a design for parks, recreational facilities, and a traditionally inspired cemetery that he hoped would bridge the cultural divide between the east and the west. The War Relocation Authority refused to implement his design, but his unrealized plans for a park in the internment camp was his first landscape design project. The notion of public spaces that inspire and provide a cultural bridge between two worlds remained a permanent feature in his emerging ethos.

By the time Noguchi was approached by Detroit's Fountain Selection Committee, he had designed smaller scale landscapes for corporations, museums and institutions throughout the

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<sup>33</sup> "Biography," The Noguchi Museum. "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza," <https://www.noguchi.org/noguchi/biography> (Accessed June 10, 2018).



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United States, and overseas in Israel, France, and Japan. Noguchi had designed a fountain for Expo '70, a world's fair held in Suita, Osaka, Japan, where the designs astounded visitors with a display of water that "jetted down one hundred feet, rotated, sprayed, and swirled...disappeared and reappeared as a mist."<sup>34</sup> The fountains were a collaboration between Noguchi and Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, and set the stage for Noguchi's later work as a designer of exterior artistic installations and the complementary landscapes that surround them.

Noguchi's selection as artist for the fountain almost immediately sparked contention. Much of it came from David Elgin Dodge, a member of the selection committee who had also submitted his own design. In September 1971, Dodge complained that Noguchi had not submitted a sketch of his design, only a verbal description. He also pointed out a technicality: The location of Noguchi's fountain was to be at the center of the plaza, not the foot of Woodward Avenue as stipulated by Anna Thomson Dodge (her will used the phrase 'the fountain in the park at the foot of Woodward'). The fact that SH&G's 1960s design for the plaza also placed the fountain at the center of the plaza appears to reinforce the idea that this was sour grapes on the part of Dodge. A friend of the Dodge family defended him, saying that Dodge "is a registered architect who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, not just some little rich boy who says: 'I'm going to do this because grandma gave the money.'...David Dodge [living in Switzerland] is understandably unhappy because his plan, sweated out with William Wesley Peters, chief architect of the Wright Foundation's Taliesin Institute, didn't win."<sup>35</sup> The issue was finally resolved by the city agreeing to name the plaza "Dodge Brothers Plaza" in return for the family's agreement to drop the requirement that the fountain be on the plaza's street edge.<sup>36</sup>

Another development was that Hastings, with the support of the selection committee, recommended that Isamu Noguchi be awarded the commission not just for the fountain but the entire plaza. It was particularly remarkable as Hastings was the chairman of SH&G, which had just completed an entirely new design for the plaza. It also represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Despite his early start in designing a park in an internment camp, Noguchi's executed civic site design commissions took place relatively late in his career. While Noguchi was accustomed to considering urban spaces as relationships to a whole rather than as singular objects, Hart Plaza would be his first opportunity to execute a commission at this scale. His modernist public spaces consisted of plazas and parks with landscapes designed as sculptural experiences, setting him apart from traditional landscape architects. Noguchi and Japanese-American architect Shoji Sadao formed a new partnership, Noguchi Fountain & Plaza, Inc., in 1971, working with Smith, Hinchman & Grylls as local on-site architects and engineers, to complete the project.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), 174.

<sup>35</sup> Ladd Neuman, "Dodge Fountain Artistic or Awful," *Detroit Free Press*, September 7, 1971.

<sup>36</sup> Julie Morris, "King Size Letters Stall Dodge Tower Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, August 2, 1972, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Jenny Dixon, "Musings on Isamu Noguchi's Hart Plaza", [docomomo-us.org. https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza](https://docomomo-us.org/news/musings-on-isamu-noguchi-s-hart-plaza). (Accessed June 10, 2018).

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Noguchi's plaza design contained two primary elements: the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza, and the Pylon at the Jefferson Avenue entrance. In designing the fountain, Noguchi chose a futuristic form composed of two cylindrical stainless steel legs supporting a large ring thirty feet above the ground. In describing the fountain, he noted that he wanted it to "represent our times and our relationship to outer space."<sup>38</sup> His futuristic design motif was in keeping with the times. The 1960s was the decade of the first manned space shuttle flights, and the safe landing of Apollo 11 on the surface of the moon. Noguchi even referenced space travel in his description of the fountain during a presentation to the Fountain Selection Committee in the spring of 1973.

The great fountain, projected to be the most significant of modern times, will rise from the plateau of primal space. It will be an engine for water, plainly associating its spectacle to its source of energy, an engine so deeply a part of Detroit. It will recall and commemorate the dream that has produced the automobile, the airplane, and now the rocket, a machine become a poem.<sup>39</sup>

The base of the stainless steel fountain was set in a granite pool, approximately six feet in height, with a stainless steel grate around its base to collect water. The Dodge Fountain was a technological spectacle, with three hundred water jets within the ring capable of creating thirty-three different combinations of water flow and pumping forty-five thousand gallons of water per hour.

Noguchi sited the Pylon at the north entrance of the plaza along the centerline of Woodward Avenue, where it served as the fulcrum for a dramatic diagonal axis leading to the Dodge Fountain at the center of the plaza. The concept of the pylon was first introduced in an early plan by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls. The architecture firm had conceived of a tall tower placed at the entrance of the plaza, which Noguchi later transformed into a 120-foot stainless steel pylon, seven feet square at its base, that twisted into a helix as it rose toward the sky. The form of the helix had recently captured the public imagination when it was discovered, in the 1950s, that the molecular structure of DNA had the smooth three-dimensional curve of a helix. In order to translate the form into a 120-foot tall structure, the pylon required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing and the assistance of a team of engineers. Noguchi later claimed that he had donated the Pylon, "a free gift to get things going"<sup>40</sup> to the city, although it is not clear from the context if he was referring to the design of the piece, or the fabrication itself. An article in the *Detroit Free Press* dated November 1977 reported that the Pylon cost around 425,000 dollars and was paid for entirely by private donations.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Friedman, *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum. 1978), 80.

<sup>39</sup> Isamu Noguchi, typescript of presentation to Fountain Selection Committee, March 1973. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975-79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>40</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>41</sup> "Many Pieces Make Hart Plaza", *Detroit Free Press*, November 29, 1977.

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The remaining elements in the plaza were designed and placed relative to the Pylon and Dodge Fountain: the pyramid amphitheater at the southeast corner of the plaza, placed perpendicular to the diagonal axis, and the oval amphitheater at the northwest, the pyramid amphitheater's visual counterpart, which led into the underground promenade. Approximately one hundred feet west of the fountain, the granite tiles dipped into a shallow circular depression set into the surface. Noguchi provided a playful visual counterpart to this circular depression to the north, mirrored along the axis established by the amphitheater and the pyramid amphitheater, with a fountain and play structure set in a rectangle of square granite slabs of varying heights.

The entire plaza was paved with carnelian granite –a red and black flecked stone from South Dakota. Large pavers, four feet square and finished with a horizontally raked surface specified as “mellogroove” in construction documents and clean cut on the edges, delineated the primary walkways through the plaza, wrapping widely around the fountain and highlighting the east-west axis between the pyramid amphitheater and the rear of the Veterans' Memorial Building. Smaller six inch square pavers with a rougher finish and an irregular “guillotine” edge encircled the fountain, and provided a sweeping form around the amphitheater and along the waterfront. In writing of his design of the civic center plaza, Noguchi stated, “What is important above all is the sense of space that Hart Plaza supplies. An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people.”<sup>42</sup>

The project began with a great deal of optimism, buoyed by the vision of a public waterfront park that the citizens of Detroit could enjoy throughout the seasons. Noguchi's design of the plaza was generally well received and accepted “as the only way to have it harmonize with the fountain.”<sup>43</sup> Blessing and Mayor Roman Gribbs offered Noguchi enthusiastic approval and city support. The Common Council approved Noguchi's design in the spring of 1973. A press release from Smith, Hinchman & Grylls dated March 30, 1973 announcing the presentation to the Detroit Common Council indicates Noguchi's intentions:

In addition to the fountain, the plaza now has the strong emphasis on a wide variety of uses by both large and small groups of people, many of which can occur simultaneously. ... The fountain itself, a 30 foot high ring floating above a walled circular pool, is a refinement of the original concept of an ‘engine for water.’ ... The plaza now makes provision for a number of public activities on different levels, including a large circular festival amphitheater that can be used for outdoor music, dance, theater, or can be converted to ice skating; a tourist center, a smaller gathering place for a variety of entertainment or educational uses; shopping facilities; a riverfront restaurant directly overlooking the water; a riverside promenade; and underground restrooms, dressing rooms, service areas, etc.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space* (Exhibition catalogue, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 29.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sculpture of Space*, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, Hinchman & Grylls press release, March 30, 1973.

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By the fall of 1973, the civic center plan had passed through several mayoral administrations, and was now in the hands of Mayor Coleman Young, Detroit's first African American mayor, who asked Noguchi how the plaza would accommodate the annual Ethnic Festivals which had been inaugurated under Young's predecessor Roman Gribbs and had grown from three festivals a summer to over twenty.<sup>45</sup>

Plans for the plaza already had it sitting well above grade, having been located on the site of a former parking lot and elevated, due to poor soil conditions, on piles sixteen feet above the riverbank. Noguchi quickly revised his design to include a lower level with space for a riverside service road, a restaurant, and an amphitheater large enough to accommodate the ethnic festivals.

### *The Dedication of Hart Plaza*

Construction of Hart Plaza took place over several years, and the City held a series of ceremonies to commemorate the completion of its major sculptural elements, its naming and its formal opening. In August 1974, Mayor Young presided at ceremonies marking the construction of the Pylon, the first component of the Plaza, where he noted, "this distinctive landmark is a big step in developing an outstanding, people-oriented, riverfront-downtown area." The presentation of a plaque honoring the role of Robert Hastings, who had recently died, was also part of the ceremony.<sup>46</sup>

While the plaza was projected for completion in 1976, in time to mark the 275th anniversary of Detroit and the bicentennial of the United States, by that summer it was still under construction. With a backdrop of cranes and in the presence of Noguchi, Mayor Young, and other invited guests, the Dodge Fountain was dedicated on the afternoon of July 24, 1976. The ceremony took place among the foundations of the sub plaza but open to the sky since the only completed portion of the plaza surface was the circular, granite-paved area directly below the fountain. The water was briefly turned on for the event; however, final performance testing did not occur until the fall of 1977.

Although the city had agreed to name the plaza in honor of the Dodge Brothers in 1972, in 1977 the plaza was officially named Philip A. Hart Plaza to honor the United States Senator from Michigan, Philip Aloysius Hart, who had died in office on December 26, 1976. On May 18, 1978, Jane Hart, the wife of the plaza's namesake, unveiled the Hart Plaza dedication plaque with Mayor Young and other attendees.

Noguchi was back in Detroit in April, 1979, for Hart Plaza's final, official dedication and opening. Concurrent with the dedication of the plaza, the Detroit Institute of Arts held an exhibit of Noguchi's work entitled "Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes." In the days leading up to the dedication ceremony, Noguchi attended a formal dinner at the DIA honoring his achievements,

<sup>45</sup> "Ethnic Festivals on Weekends," Detroit Free Press, June 24, 1979.

<sup>46</sup> It is unclear if this plaque is still on the site. It was not observed during field investigations.

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and conducted a forum connected with the exhibit opening, along with architect Walter Netsch, art critic Dore Ashton, and curator Jay Belloli, where he shared his thoughts on public projects in Detroit and the world. Noguchi's public speeches framed Hart Plaza in relation to other public projects around the world.

The formal opening of the plaza took place on the afternoon of Friday, April 20, 1979. The announcement for the 1979 dedication ceremony emphasized inclusivity, "Come to Downtown's new Hart Plaza and enjoy... Hart Beat. The People's Dedication of the Phillip A. Hart Plaza in the Civic Center, Foot of Woodward ... Bring your lunch, bring your camera, bring a friend."<sup>47</sup> Festivities included a mime troupe, a dance company, a church choir, and jazz bands. Mayor Young praised Noguchi to the crowd, who responded with a "long ovation" for the artist and crowded around him after the ceremony, expressing their appreciation for his work and requesting autographs. Noguchi responded modestly "There's nothing I can add. I've spoken through the fountain."<sup>48</sup>

However, Noguchi did use the occasion to express his unhappiness at the condition of the fountain, and urged the Mayor to maintain it properly. As the *Detroit Free Press* would observe nearly ten years later, "The fountain was supposed to have five primary designs and 30 different patterns, taking a half hour to complete its repertoire. It never did. It gurgled, fizzled, spit and just plain didn't work." Noguchi blamed it on lack of proper maintenance. "The problem doesn't seem to be with the design and construction as much as lack of know-how on how to maintain and run the fountain. Some of the pipes have been left on in winter.... It seems an elementary precaution to drain water lines in winter with something costing \$3 million, or \$300 for that matter... A five-gallon paint can [was] dropped into the fountain's filter.... Noguchi [noted] the fountain needs a permanent maintenance man." Mayor Young was annoyed at the public criticism, noting that the city's budget did not run to a full-time maintenance person. Although Young and Noguchi both expressed regret at their words that day, the fountain's operation continued to be an issue. It had a highly sophisticated computerized system to control the light and water within the fountain that frequently clogged due to dirt and debris, a situation not helped when pipes were left on during the winter causing damage from freezing. The fountain continued to limp on, suffering from a lack of maintenance and engineering knowledge at the local level, until 1988 when the city committed eight-hundred thousand dollars to rebuild the fountain, with all new valves and computers.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the contretemps over the fountain maintenance, reaction to Hart Plaza was generally favorable. *Detroit Free Press* art critic Marsha Miro summed up the appeal of the plaza as "a wonderful place to be, to lounge, to laze, to gaze in. It is comfortable, pleasant, harmonious. You

<sup>47</sup> Hart Plaza Dedication, August 20, 1979. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>48</sup> Louis Heldman, "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

<sup>49</sup> "Dodge Fountain; It works – after 10 years," *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1988; "Noguchi: The Fountain and the Artist Deserve Better of the City," *Detroit Free Press*, April 23, 1979; Louis Heldman, "Nice Day, Hidden Tiff, and Fountain," *Detroit Free Press*, April 21, 1979, 3A, 15A.

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don't feel overwhelmed or oppressed by the urban hubbub, but somehow able to cope. It is a people place. Just what we needed."<sup>50</sup> Director of Public Information for the City of Detroit Joyce Garrett praised Hart Plaza as "the new hub of Detroit," and informed Noguchi that he would be "thrilled by the throngs of joyous people who are experiencing its facilities daily."<sup>51</sup>

Noguchi continued his interest in the development of the plaza in the following years, writing letters to express his concerns with how the plaza was used and elements that were added. Noguchi renewed his criticisms to Mayor Young several months after the dedication, complaining that the plaza was not designed to accommodate 100,000 people for the city's large festivals, and expressing his distress that kiosks were placed in the parkway to the west, adding, "This may have been a stop gap measure needed to cope with the sudden crowds. But the long range solution would be to go back to the original idea of having the overload handled in a more suitable place that does not ruin the view."<sup>52</sup>

Although the plaza had been officially opened, several key landscape features still remained incomplete. In 1979, the chairman of the J.L. Hudson Company, located in downtown Detroit, wrote Noguchi expressing his appreciation at having "left us the Plaza and Fountain" and furthermore stated, "I can assure you that many of us will keep a watchful eye on the completion of the landscaping and other details that are still left unattended."

Despite the praise for the plaza, by the early 1980s Noguchi was still frustrated at the lack of progress on the completion of his design. In February of 1982, he sent \$2,000 to the City of Detroit's Department of Engineering and Planning. His letter stated, "The purpose, as you know, is to purchase eight trees which are to be planted in the Hart Plaza in a location which I discussed with Mrs. Larson, in an arc starting near the flagpoles and going towards the river." Half of the donation was from an honorarium he received from a recent talk at the University of Michigan, and the other half was his own personal contribution. Noguchi concluded by stating that the intention of the eight trees is that, "...they will grow to a size which would permit the viewing of the plaza from beneath the branches."

A letter to the director of the Central Business District Association, penned in 1988 a few months before his death, was more exacting in his criticism and reflective of his misgivings:

As you must know I am the one who worked on what there is there starting in 1971, over a period of seven years. The design is mine to the smallest detail...the company I formed, together with Shoji Sadao to assist me, received hardly anything because the working drawings which accurately followed our specifications had to be done by Smith Hinchman & Grylls and they took 60%, I hope you will appreciate that I feel I deserve consideration in whatever transpires in Hart Plaza...

<sup>50</sup> Marsha Miro, "What Noguchi's Genius Brought to Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1979, 13C.

<sup>51</sup> Joyce F. Garrett, letter to Isamu Noguchi, July 9, 1979, in the Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>52</sup> Isamu Noguchi Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, August 22, 1979. Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3, Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

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The flagpoles are a hodgepot [sic] of flags with light fixtures; the light stands entirely decorative...I suggested that tall poles for general lighting could be used at the perimeter...Imagine my shock on visiting Hart Plaza on July 3<sup>rd</sup> and finding a forest of bright aluminum poles crowding in on the fountain; in direct confrontation with the fountain. This type of fussy light fixtures [is] no doubt intended to bring interest to buildings where this is lacking. The globes of light are intended to light themselves, to draw attention, and are not an efficient source of lighting for the space. This is probably why there are so many.

It would be nice and appropriate if the designers work could be respected when changes or "improvements" are made by others. I was not informed. I hope you will understand my distress.<sup>53</sup>

### **Social Use of Hart Plaza**

From its inception, Hart Plaza was a hub of Detroit's cultural and social events. The plaza was active year-round, serving as a popular location for weekend festivals, concerts, and rallies in the warmer months and for ice-skating in the wintertime. Well before its completion, Hart Plaza was being used for informal activities, such as picnics and sunbathing, as well as a few more formal events like Detroit concert band performances in the summer of 1977. That same year, local radio station WDET and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra held an impromptu rally to protest a state legislative committee's recommendation to slash funds for the arts.

The most significant events held in Hart Plaza in its early years were the popular Ethnic Festivals, inaugurated under Mayor Gribbs. As Gribbs' wife wrote in 1974, "The summer Ethnic Festivals on the riverfront were the idea of Mayor Gribbs and as a result millions of metropolitan Detroiters have had a magnificent time enjoying the cultural, the art and the food of many Ethnic people who have contributed so much to make Detroit the great city that it is. We started with 3 Festivals in the summer of 1970. By 1973 the number have grown to 20. The Ethnic Festivals are the first of their kind in the U.S. to be done over every consecutive weekend throughout the summer."<sup>54</sup> Festivals included Greek, Italian, Polish, Irish, and African American heritage, later expanding to include the celebration of other many other cultures, including the Festival of India, Festival of Captured Nations, and a Slovenia Festival.

The festivals initially took place at Michigan Avenue and Third Street. Following his election as Mayor, Coleman Young requested that Noguchi alter his design for Hart Plaza to accommodate the festivals, and Noguchi created a lower level to house facilities for the festivals. Organizers had hoped to hold the festivals at Hart Plaza in the summer of 1978, but plans had to be deferred due to delays in construction. Finally, the festivals were first held in Hart Plaza in 1979. With

<sup>53</sup> Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988.

<sup>54</sup> Katherine Gribbs, handwritten note, ca. 1974, in the collections of the Detroit Historical Society, <http://detroithistorical.pastperfectonline.com/archive/07C8FC93-B191-4340-98D8-310096414479>.

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only 21 weeks in the summer, each group was assigned its own weekend and sometimes different ethnic groups had to share Hart Plaza during the same weekend. The profile of the Ethnic Festivals was raised considerably by their location in such a prominent downtown space, and they dominated the program of the plaza in its early years, with millions of people attending the festivals every year.

During the week, Hart Plaza remained active with weekday programs specifically suited for nearby office workers. Local radio stations set up in the plaza and provided noontime concerts with live performances by artists who were promoting their new albums. The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, which was headquartered at the Ford Auditorium during Hart Plaza's early years, held outdoor performances on the plaza.

During the winter, the city operated the amphitheater's lower surface as an ice rink. There were condensers under the sunken amphitheater that were used to create and maintain the ice. The lower level had spaces for skate rental and a warming room. It was a popular destination for winter recreation during the weekend, and equally as popular during the week where office workers often came by for a skating break during their lunch hour.

Given its central location and ability to accommodate large crowds, Hart Plaza was a natural setting for events featuring visiting dignitaries. One of the most significant of these was an address by Pope John Paul II in 1987. It was the first time that a pope had visited the state of Michigan, and an important moment in Michigan's religious history, especially for Catholics. In addition to appearances in heavily Polish Catholic Hamtramck and a Mass in the Pontiac Silverdome, the pope gave a speech on social justice at Hart Plaza on September 19, 1987. The city's annual Labor Day Parade always ended at Hart Plaza and, due to Detroit's importance in the labor movement, the current President or Vice-President usually came to Hart Plaza to speak during the parade, including Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore.

In the early 1980s, attendance at the Ethnic Festivals at Hart Plaza began to wane. There were several contributing factors: an increase in crime, cultural assimilation as young Detroiters expressed less an interest in attending ethnic events, and urban sprawl as many groups moved outside of the city and took their festivals with them. But with a decline in the Ethnic Festivals came a rise in "Themed Festivals" organized by promoters. These included the International Freedom Festival, a two-week celebration that ended with fireworks at Hart Plaza, the Hoe Down, which was initially sponsored by Budweiser, the Detroit Blues Festival, food-oriented festivals like the Chili Cook-off, Great American Rib Fest, and Ribs & Soul, and the Detroit Riverfront Festival.

Another major annual event held at Hart Plaza was the International Jazz Festival. Founded as the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival, it was the largest free jazz festival in North America, first held over Labor Day Weekend 1980. It was the idea of Robert E. McCabe, the founding president of Detroit Renaissance, an organization created to provide economic stimulus projects



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for the city in 1971 including housing developments and construction of what is now the GM Renaissance Center. McCabe's inspiration for the jazz festival was "Detroit's history as a great jazz center back in the '20s and the strong music heritage of the public schools. Music was a very important factor, and it was time to revive it." The festival was developed concurrently with the Detroit Grand Prix and the International Freedom Festival to complement the physical developments of Detroit Renaissance and provide a "more rapid economic impact on the downtown area." Originally called the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival to reflect its partnership with an international jazz festival in Montreux, Switzerland, the festival merged with Detroit's Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in 1991, and is now managed and produced by the Detroit International Jazz Festival Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed in 2006.<sup>55</sup>

Beginning in the late 1980s, there were significant changes to the programs and maintenance of Hart Plaza. In 1989, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved its home base from the nearby Ford Auditorium to Orchestra Hall in 1989. The plaza also suffered from cutbacks in maintenance. Initially, the running of Hart Plaza was a three-office operation. The City of Detroit's Recreation Department was responsible for all operations and programming, the Civic Center Department was in charge of maintenance, and the Department of Public Works kept the plaza clean, such as snow removal and cleaning up after the weekend festivals. Unfortunately, the city's best efforts to successfully manage Hart Plaza were impacted by larger forces taking shape throughout the city, which was facing an economic downturn, the loss of wealth to the outlying suburbs, and a struggling middle class. In 1992, the Recreation Department had to lay off many of its staff. Some were eventually hired back, but by then the use of Hart Plaza had changed. Vendors requested to use their own cooking equipment and booths "upstairs" at the plaza level to provide increased visibility from Jefferson Avenue, resulting in the downstairs kitchens and equipment falling into disuse. In the early 2000s, the Civic Center Department pulled back from their involvement with Hart Plaza and an independent cleaning company had to be commissioned to clean up the plaza after events. With dwindling staff and financial resources, the maintenance and upkeep of Hart Plaza began to decline.

In 2004, Campus Martius Park in downtown Detroit was completed, with two performance stages and its own ice skating rink, and the ice skating rink at Hart Plaza was permanently closed. By that time, the city was trying to get out of the business of funding events at Hart Plaza. The last event that the city collaborated with was the Detroit Electronic Music Festival in 2002. Held every year over Memorial Day weekend, the festival, known by various names over the years but currently called Movement Detroit, celebrates Detroit as the birthplace of the international Techno movement.

### ***Later Additions to Hart Plaza***

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<sup>55</sup> Gary Graff, "Detroit Jazz Festival Celebrates 30 Years," *The Oakland Press*, August 30, 2009.

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Beginning shortly before Noguchi's death in 1988, various additions have been made to Hart Plaza. In 1986, the works of Noguchi and his former instructor Gutzon Borglum were integrated when Borglum's bust of Abraham Lincoln was incorporated into the formal green space adjacent to the UAW-Ford Center within Hart Plaza. The space has been referred to as the Lincoln Garden since erection of the sculpture.

Several pieces were added to Hart Plaza to commemorate Detroit's tercentennial in 2001. The Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac statue is a seven-foot-six-inch-tall statue of Cadillac with a flag by William Kieffer and Ann Feeley. It is located in a raised lawn panel west of the Dodge Fountain.

On the southern edge of the plaza, facing the river, sits *Gateway to Freedom*, which illustrates a black family pointing across the river to Canada where freedom and prosperity wait, marking the Detroit terminus of the Underground Railroad's safe passage for escaped enslaved people. The companion monument entitled "Tower of Freedom" is located across the river in Windsor, Canada. The monument in Windsor depicts a formerly enslaved man raising his arms to celebrate his freedom while a Quaker woman offers assistance to a woman and her child.

Edward Dwight, the artist who sculpted both works, was a veteran of the United States Air Force and trained as the first black astronaut. Although he occasionally "built things with scrap metal," he harbored no artistic intent until George Brown, Colorado's first black lieutenant governor, asked him to create a statue for the state capitol building in 1974. The commission was a success, and helped launch his second career as a sculptor memorializing the struggle for civil rights. Dwight's body of work would eventually encompass more than 120 memorials, monuments and public art installations as well as gallery sculptures including statues of Martin Luther King Jr., Hank Aaron and Harriet Tubman.<sup>56</sup>

In March 2001, the Michigan Labor History Society invited over 120 artists and sculptors from across the country to gather in Detroit and envision a monument to the history of the labor movement at Hart Plaza along Jefferson Avenue. The location held an important place in labor history as the site of Detroit's early industries including the fur and ship building trades, as well as more modern industries such as the auto industry which was founded just a few blocks east of Hart Plaza. The site was also in an area of many important events in Detroit's labor history, from the big organizing rallies of the 1930s to the Labor Day parades to the historic civil rights march of 1963 which all took place within a few blocks of the future site of Hart Plaza.

Two months after that initial gathering of artists, the Society received 55 proposals for the monument. A panel of five jurists reviewed the submissions and selected three finalists, before agreeing on a joint collaboration between David Barr and Sergio De Giusti. The monument was made possible by donations from more than 1,800 rank-and-file workers and individuals from

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<sup>56</sup> Interview of Edward Dwight by AM Brune, *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/28/ed-dwight-honouring-americas-black-heroes-in-sculpture>  
(accessed: July 20, 2018)

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dozens of unions, organizations and enterprises including the United Auto Workers, Detroit Federation of Teachers, Iron Workers and Roofers Union. In 2003, the monument was completed and installed in Hart Plaza. The artists entitled their joint collaboration “Transcending.” It rises 63 feet above street level in the form of two stainless-steel arcs. The arcs are geared on the inside to reflect Detroit’s industrial might, and open at the apex to symbolize labor’s unfinished work.<sup>57</sup>

In 2006 the Dodge Fountain was refurbished and rededicated by Gretchen Carhartt Valade, philanthropist, chair of the Detroit Jazz Festival Foundation, and chairwoman emeritus of Detroit-based Carhartt, Inc., sponsor of the free jazz festivals held annually at Hart Plaza. The fountain’s computerized water designs were reprogrammed to reflect Noguchi’s original intent. A small cast stone monument was installed on the southern edge of the plaza to mark Valade’s contribution.

In 2011 the Ford Auditorium, which had sat virtually vacant since around 1990, was demolished, removing one of the major buildings of the original civic center and altering the spatial organization of the east side of Hart Plaza.

### *Noguchi’s Later Public Spaces*

Hart Plaza was the first of Noguchi’s major civic space designs, and his experience in Detroit informed much of his work prior to his death in 1988. His designs during these years included several public spaces associated with urban renewal efforts such as the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza in Los Angeles, California (1980) and Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida (1986).

In 1980, the Japanese American Community Center (JACCC) received funds to develop a half-acre plaza as an entryway to the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center Building and the JACCC Theater. The purpose of the plaza was to facilitate the diverse cultural needs of the community and encourage interaction among the residents of the surrounding neighborhood known as Little Tokyo. One of the funding criteria was a major sculptural element, which the Friends of Little Tokyo Arts (FOLTA) offered to fund.

FOLTA invited Noguchi to design a sculptural piece for a large passageway between the existing community center and a proposed theater, school and gym. Noguchi imagined the site becoming an active core for Little Tokyo. Just as he had done in Detroit, Noguchi parlayed his selection as sculptor into a larger role. Rather than accepting the commission for a sculpture in a transitional space, he insisted that the planned orientation of the site be modified and the proposed gym be relocated to a new site so that the plaza could serve as a true gathering space for ceremonies and assemblies.

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<sup>57</sup> Labor’s Legacy: A Landmark for Detroit (Detroit: Michigan Labor History Society. 2006).

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In his interviews and writings on the space, Noguchi noted that while his sculptural pieces secured his invitation as the plaza's designer, the entire plaza acted as a sculpture to draw people into the space, an approach he had pioneered in Detroit. His design for the plaza contained two primary elements: a central elevated sculpture and a fountain. The sculpture, *To the Issei*, situated in the heart of the plaza, consisted of two twelve-foot Japanese basalt monoliths on a fan-shaped platform and was designed as a tribute to the first generation of Japanese who immigrated to America.<sup>58</sup>

Noguchi also designed a public space at Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida, on waterfront land that the city purchased from the railway company in 1922. In 1924, the city commissioned Boston landscape architect Warren Henry Manning to design a passive park on the 60-acre parcel. The park was added to over time, but by the 1960s it was underused and poorly received by the public. In 1978, following the opening of the Walker Art Museum's exhibition on Noguchi's works, *Imaginary Landscapes*, Noguchi was contacted by Kitty Roedel, the Director of Marketing at the Miami Development Authority. Roedel requested that Noguchi look at the park and propose a solution.

In a letter to Roedel, Noguchi condemned developments surrounding Bayfront Park and reasoned, "Miami must have a totally new park because all the modern buildings have made the present facility incongruous."<sup>59</sup> Noguchi re-envisioned the space, which became his largest American landscape design, covering twenty-eight acres and taking over a decade to complete. His design acknowledged the existing layout of Bayfront Park, but reorganized the space to act as a village green where people could congregate and interact. The park contains a number of elements that Noguchi first used in Detroit, including the play of geometric shapes, a circular fountain plaza, two amphitheaters, and circulation patterns such as the "interludes" alongside paths. The park was completed in 1996, nearly eight years after Noguchi's death, at a cost of approximately forty million dollars.<sup>60</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

After nearly a century of vision and planning by internationally renowned architects, city planners, and landscape architects, the idea of a civic center plaza in the heart of the city was finally realized in Hart Plaza in the late 1970s, overcoming the intervening obstacles of depression, war, funding challenges, and disagreements about its design. It was, in the end, the vision of artist Isamu Noguchi whose design shaped the riverfront plaza and created its major sculptural elements that finally gave substance to the long-heralded gathering space for the city

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<sup>58</sup> Alexandra Eve Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 2013, 71-6.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Isamu Noguchi to Kitty Roedel. August 27, 1979. Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, 1981, Folder 1 of 24, Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

<sup>60</sup> Kirby, *Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi*, 46.

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of Detroit. By the time Noguchi was approached with a public commission to design a fountain at the civic center, Noguchi had designed landscapes of various scales for corporations, museums and institutions throughout the United States, and overseas in Israel, France, and Japan. Unlike his early work, Detroit's civic center plaza represented Noguchi's official entrance into the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space. Its place as one of the few and earliest public spaces created by an internationally recognized master of Modern design, Isamu Noguchi, and the integrity of its design within Noguchi's body of work, marks it as exceptionally significant.

### *Period of Significance*

The period of significance for Philip A. Hart Plaza is 1974 to 1979. While nearly a century of planning efforts took place before the city's civic center plaza came to fruition, the design of sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi was implemented from 1974, when construction began, to 1979, when it was essentially completed, although some of the space's details would be completed over the next several years. The social uses for which Hart Plaza is also significant, such as the ethnic festivals, concerts, and passive recreational use, began within that time period as well. Hart Plaza also meets National Register Criteria Consideration G, for properties less than 50 years old.

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*1979 04 25 Letter Noguchi to Hustable (NYT)*

*1979 07 03 Letter Noguchi to Hudson*

*1979 08 14 Letter Denison to Meathe*

*1979 08 22 Letter Noguchi to Young*

*1979 08 27 Letter Noguchi to Roedel*

*1982 02 11 Letter Noguchi to Viall*

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***Interviews:***

Telephone interview of Phillip A. Talbert. June 13, 2018.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Noguchi Museum, New York  
Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library  
City of Detroit  
Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 10.8 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.327662 | Longitude: -83.046069 |
| 2. Latitude: 42.328654 | Longitude: -83.043812 |
| 3. Latitude: 42.326720 | Longitude: -83.042735 |
| 4. Latitude: 42.325809 | Longitude: -83.045882 |

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

D 1927 or

NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of Noguchi's design, extending roughly from Jefferson Avenue on the north to the Detroit River on the south, and between the former site of Ford Auditorium on the east and the Veterans Memorial Building on the west. See attached map for exact boundaries.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary identified for Hart Plaza is the original extent of the area designed by Isamu Noguchi, which fit around adjacent, preexisting features.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Ruth E. Mills, Gregory W. DeVries  
organization: Quinn Evans Architects  
street & number: 4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301  
city or town: Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48201  
e-mail: rmills@quinnevans.com  
telephone: 313-462-2550  
date: July 31, 2018

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of \_\_\_\_.

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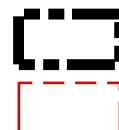
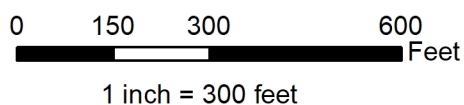
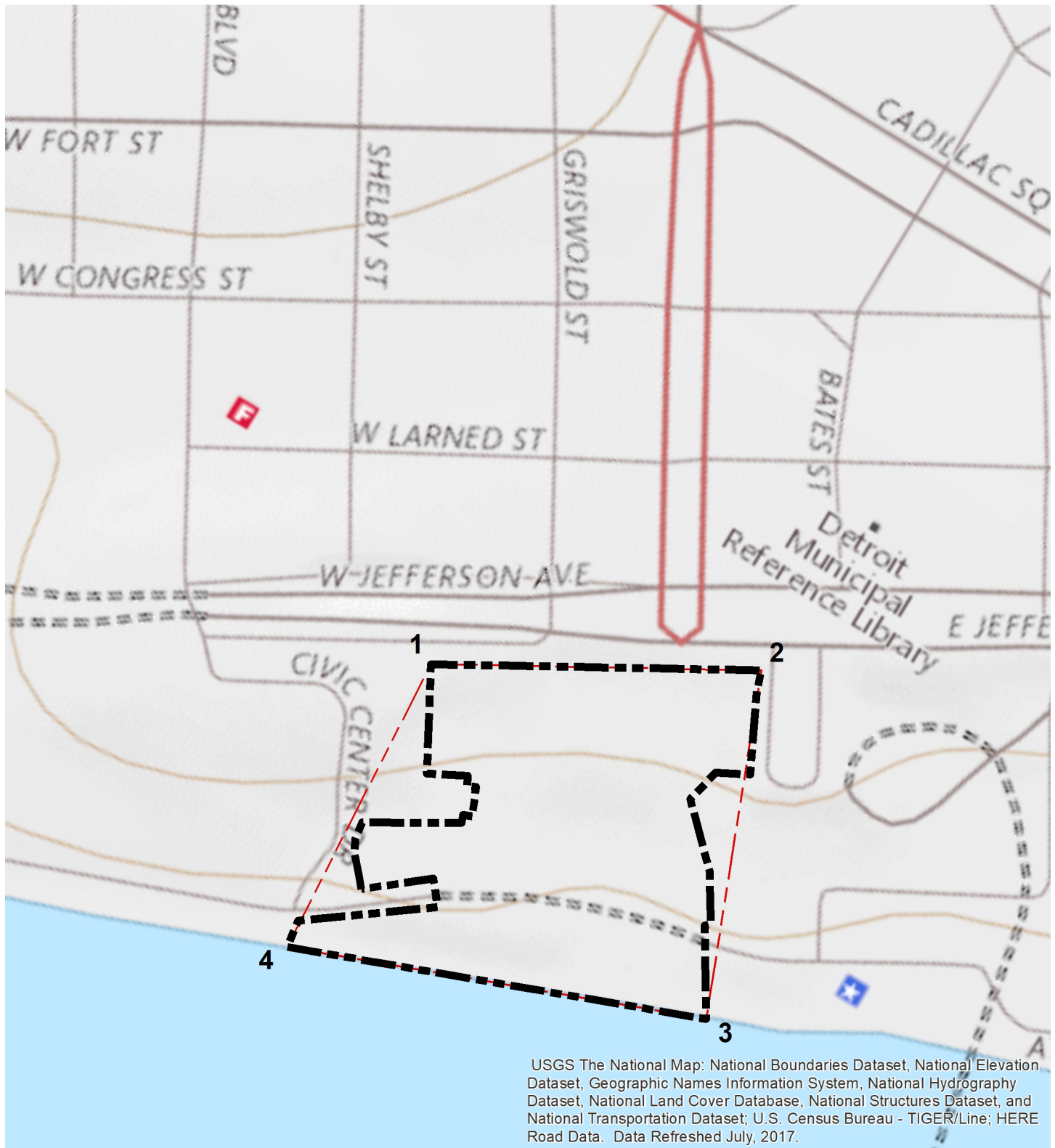
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza USGS Map

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



National Register District Boundary

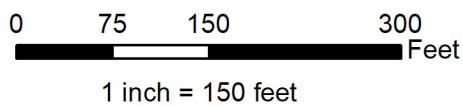
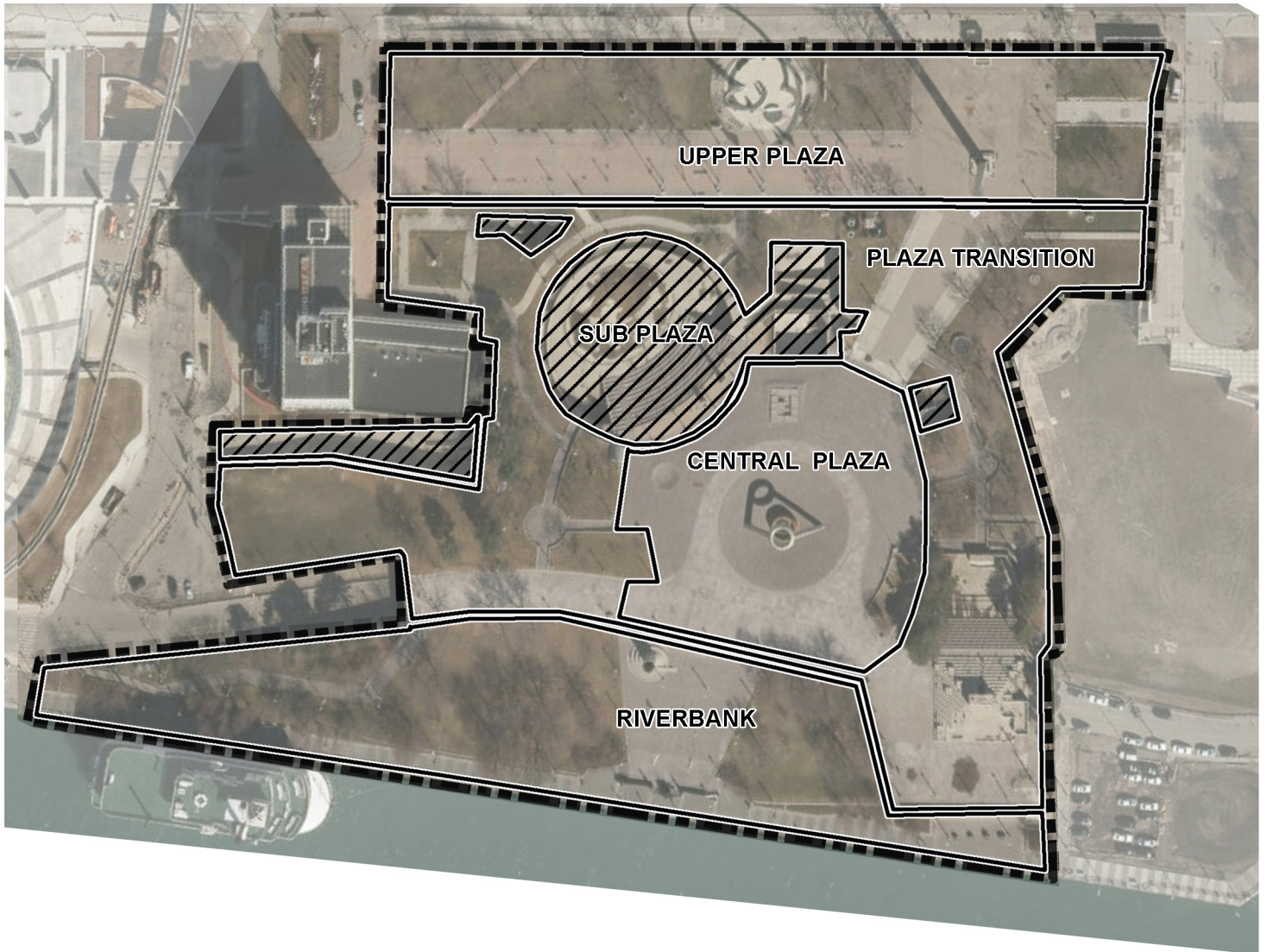
Coordinates Polygon Boundary


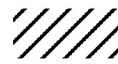



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Spatial Organization Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



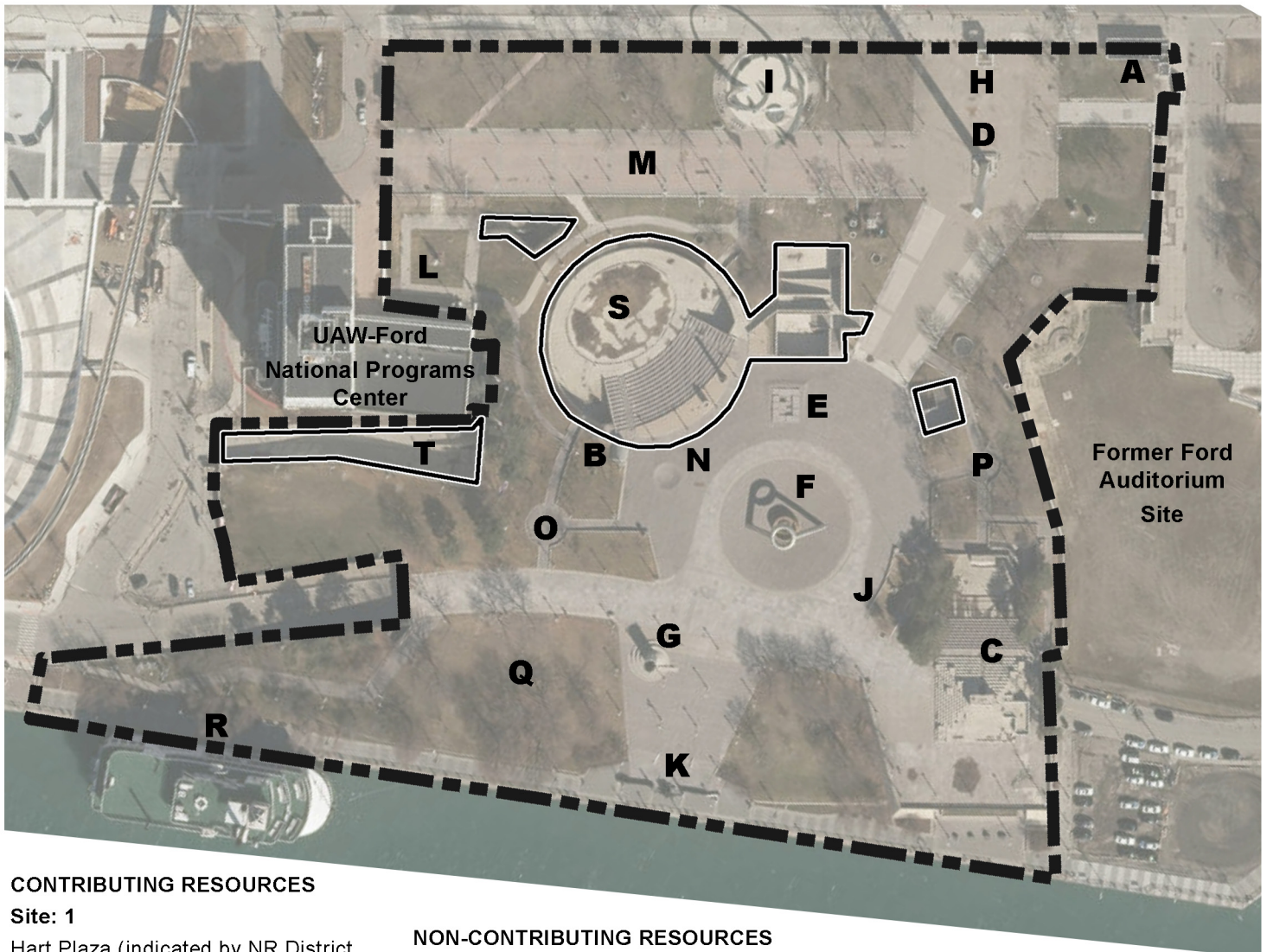
-  Spatial Divisions
-  Sub Plaza Open at Surface
-  National Register District Boundary



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Surface Features Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



## CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

### Site: 1

Hart Plaza (indicated by NR District Boundary)

### Buildings: 2

Ford Auditorium Underground Parking Structure Access Building (A)  
Fountain Control Building (B)

### Structures: 2

Pyramid Amphitheater (C)  
Sub Plaza (indicated by Exposed Sub Plaza line)

### Objects: 4

Pylon (D)  
Cubist water sculpture (E)  
Horace E. Dodge and Son Memorial Fountain (F)  
Spiral seating sculpture (G)

## NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

### Structures: 1

Hart Plaza Marquee (H)

### Objects: 4

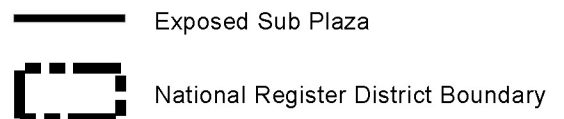
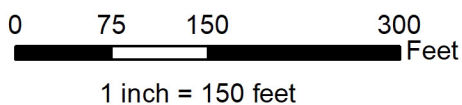
Transcending, Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark (I)  
Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac Statue (J)  
Gateway to Freedom, International Memorial to the Underground Railroad (K)  
Abraham Lincoln Bust in Lincoln Garden (L)

## FEATURES THAT ARE PART OF THE CONTRIBUTING SITE

Jefferson Promenade (M)  
Circular Depression (N)  
West Interlude (O)  
East Interlude (P)  
Peace Tree (Q)  
Detroit RiverWalk (R)

## FEATURES THAT ARE PART OF THE CONTRIBUTING SUB PLAZA STRUCTURE

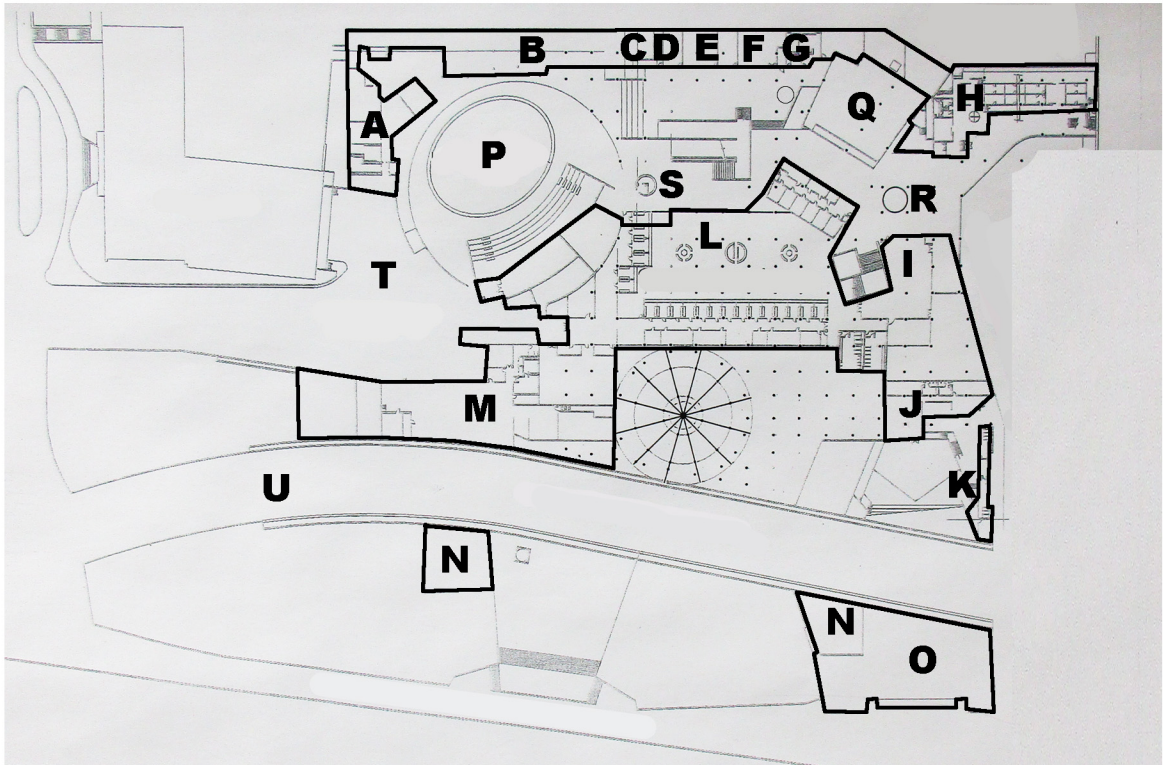
Amphitheater (S)  
Loading Dock Access (T)  
Note: See Sub Surface Features Diagram



# Philip A. Hart Plaza

National Register of Historic Places Nomination  
Hart Plaza Sub Surface Features Diagram

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



## SUB PLAZA (ONE CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE)

### Enclosed Spaces

- A. Warming room
- B. Cafeteria with kitchen, bathrooms, and lounge
- C. Event operations office
- D. Office of Detroit Police Department, north
- E. Park operations office
- F. Maintenance room
- G. Restrooms (north)
- H. Office rooms of Department of Parks and Recreation
- I. Gallery room
- J. Storage and changing rooms
- K. Restrooms (south)
- L. Concessions area with kitchen rooms
- M. Utility, maintenance, and storage rooms
- N. Utility rooms
- O. Office of Detroit Police Department, south

### Partially Enclosed Spaces

- P. Amphitheater
- Q. Underground Theater
- R. Light Well (main)
- S. Beverage Kiosk
- T. Loading Dock and Ramp
- U. Atwater Street Tunnel

