

From: [Candyce Sweda](#)
To: [Historic District Commission \(Staff\)](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Detroit Waldorf School Hearing May 11 2022
Date: Wednesday, May 11, 2022 1:34:02 PM

May 11, 2022

Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

I speak to you today as a 19-year resident of Indian Village (1970-1989), a City Planner in the City of Detroit for 25 years, the former Vice-President of River Place Properties and a 48-year member of the Detroit Waldorf School as a parent, Board member, administrator and faculty member.

All of you know, and some of you have lived through, the roller coaster of the past fifty-five years of Detroit's seismic political, economic and social transformations. The Detroit Waldorf School has, through sacrifice and community commitment, endured all of these changes and crises to remain the only independent school left in the City of Detroit. Perhaps you are aware that during one of these crises in the late 90's, the school community was facing excruciating financial challenges and questioned whether or not to remain in Detroit. The decision was made: we were the DETROIT Waldorf School, and live or die, we would remain in our birth city, Detroit, and in our birth home, Indian Village.

While financial resources have always been lean, our faculty has consistently valued the well-being of our students and the preservation of our beloved home ahead of their own gain. (Our school is faculty-governed.) Our latest challenge was the historic Covid pandemic. The viability of the school was challenged both philosophically and economically. Our entire school community rose to meet this harrowing circumstance by providing the donated labor and quality building materials to build outdoor classrooms so that in-person learning was possible for our students. As a result, DWS was able to continue functioning with few interruptions. One only needs to read about the deficits that students in other schools experienced in their schooling to realize how critical this was to assure solid educational outcomes. Thus the structures have become indispensable to our educational mission.

That brings us to the present and to the fate of the outdoor classrooms. Surely these structures must be considered by the Commission to be an integral part of our program as an educational institution. The classrooms have proven enduring value for our pedagogical approach which emphasizes experiential learning. In addition, the structures have made it possible for class plays, music festivals, and graduations to allow safe congregation of community members outdoors. The structures have also been used by Detroit cultural organizations such as our recent Storytelling Festival where Mosaic Youth Theater, Shakespeare in Detroit, InsideOut, Detroit Disability Power, Ruth Ellis Center and Ecoworks performed.

Finally we should note that there have been 3 pandemics in the past 20 years. Health experts have stated flatly that more can be expected. The outdoor classrooms are the one

proven tool that will allow for safe, in-person learning for our students and for other venues seeking a safe way to congregate. Removing the structures would be not only inadvisable but foolish in light of predictable future pandemic outbreaks. We are a small community. The expense, both financially and in human energy, would make rebuilding structures in the future most infeasible. The pandemic may be recent, but it was certainly historic, and to remain viable the school must be able to meet future challenges.

Once the permanency of the structures is assured, the school can engage with the Commission and the neighborhood to continue to address any concerns about the aesthetics of the existing structures during the upcoming summer months.

Thank you for your service to Detroit and the incredible historical legacy that we all revere and treasure. And thank you for the opportunity to speak to this matter.

Sincerely,
Candyce Sweda

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