

Dear Historic District Commission,

After in-person learning was severely impacted at the start of the pandemic, gauging how to safely educate students was a complicated issue to resolve. However, the public learned that being outdoors, in the fresh air, was historically the most ideal means of avoiding most infectious disease transmission - and this fresh air approach appeared to apply to COVID-19 as well.

The Detroit Waldorf School has always promoted outdoor play and learning, in sun and rain and snow, and the school does not incorporate computers in the learning curriculum. To retain this focused approach to learning in a real environment, while also staying as safe as possible, it was proposed that students simply learn outdoors - students would easily adjust to longer outdoor time, and there were already many established and successful outdoor schools to model this approach. Faculty, staff, parents, and family members resolved to support the professional design of outdoor classroom shelters, where students would primarily learn and play. Through summer months, the efforts of the Waldorf community, volunteers (including help from even the youngest students ready to return) and donations, these shelters became a reality in time for the start of the 2020 school year – Pre-K – 8th grade students returned safely to 5 days a week, in-school learning. The children were thrilled to be outdoors, to set up, decorate and make each shelter their own special space, and to see and hear each other and their community across a wide-open landscape of learning and play.

As a parent of two Waldorf students (a Pre-K student, and 2nd grader who love going to their outdoor classrooms each and every day), and as a Detroit resident living in Indian Village, I am proud of the determined work of the Detroit Waldorf community in support of permanent status for the outdoor classrooms. The shelters were, and still are, critical to the success of in-person learning. They have also evolved to become spaces for school festivals, day camps, cultural events, and local community-oriented activities.

The shelters are appropriate additions and have been integrated into the school's outdoor space and natural landscape without impacting the school property or the historical nature of the neighborhood. There has been neighboring community and local and national support for the outdoor classrooms. The structures reflect well-thought, functional design and balance in a natural setting. They also visually illustrate the school philosophies of exceptional education, innovation, inspired minds, and responsible community. Moreover, the outdoor classrooms have become more than an extension of the Detroit Waldorf School – they represent *what the Detroit Waldorf School experience now is* for the students and Waldorf community. They are now part of the School's story, and also places of comfort and shelter - literal and symbolic - for so many.

Cassandra Pettiford
3496 Burns Street