

STAFF REPORT 02-09-2022 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

ADDRESS: 2231 MICHIGAN AVENUE (AKA ROOSEVELT PARK)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: ADJACENT TO CORKTOWN HD

PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT/GSD

SPONSORING CITY AGENCY/AUTHORITY: GSD (GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT)

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 01-14-22

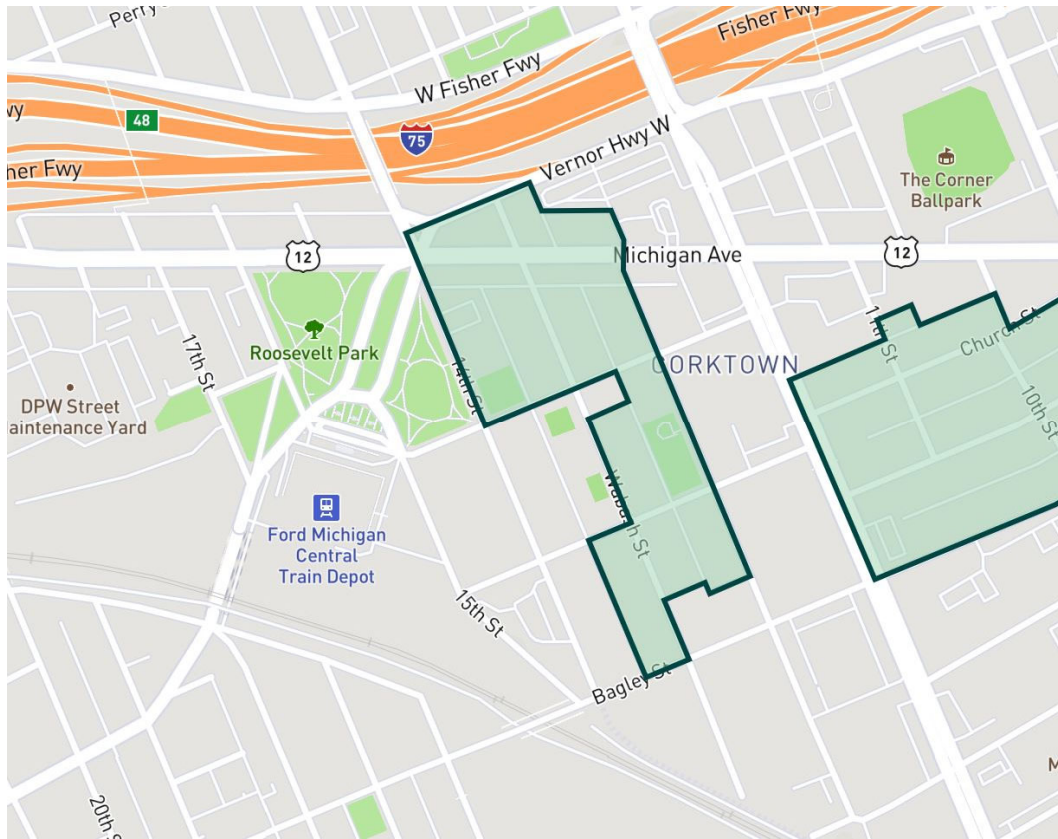
PROPOSED SCOPE: ALTER AND REHABILITATE PUBLIC PARK (ADVISORY OPINION PER SECTION 21-2-5)



View of the existing park to the southeast, with the Michigan Central Terminal building at far right. Staff photo, January 14, 2022.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Roosevelt Park in its current configuration was conceptually planned in conjunction with the erection of the Michigan Central Railroad Terminal in 1913. It opened in 1920 with a more evolved design. Today it exists as several disconnected public lawns bisected by automobile thoroughfares. Several dozen large, mature trees adorn the site, but whatever flowers, perennial beds or other grace notes may have existed have long since been abandoned, and many trees have disappeared. Sidewalks exist but are not well-maintained and add little to the experience and the park's integrity. Some historic fabric exists, including a concrete retaining wall at the far western boundary of the park, along 17th Street, which features recessed concrete stoops to non-existent houses. There are some objects of (non-historic) curiosity, including a raised berm enclosed by a rusty steel retaining wall, and a sculpture/art installation toward the southeast corner. The park serves as a neighborhood amenity to the Corktown district and serves as a mustering point for large events and occasional festivals.



Extents of the Corktown Historic District, shown in green. Roosevelt Park is immediately adjacent to the western portion of the District, across 14th Street.



View of the former drive through the park, already closed to automobile traffic. Little historic character remains. Staff photo, January 14, 2022.



The redesign of the park benefited from a public engagement process. Staff photo, January 14, 2022.



Steel retaining wall in park, west of the axial drive. Staff photo, January 14, 2022.



View of the historic concrete retaining wall at 17th Street. Notice original stoops intact. Staff photo, January 14, 2022.



A Michigan Avenue facing view down the former "promenade." Staff photo, January 14, 2022.

PROPOSAL

Per the submitted documentation by the General Services Department, the city proposes to replan and rehabilitate the park by removing the automobile traffic thoroughfares, creating a superparcel, and then redesigning the park to serve as a comprehensive and unified amenity for the Corktown vicinity. The historic “promenade” boulevard on axis with the train station will be reconfigured as a pedestrian space.



Proposed redesign of the park, per the submission materials.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984
- The boulevard (divided driveway) formerly on axis with the train station is proposed to be replaced by a single pedestrian thoroughfare, also oriented perpendicularly to the station's main facade. In staff's opinion, this proposed change retains the historic spirit of the axis while stitching the park into a usable whole. The current divided boulevard, originally designed for horses, promenaders, and slow-moving early automobiles, had long lost its original integrity and had become less of an asset and more of an obstacle to park use by actual park visitors. Additionally, the "drives" had been widened over the years, with additional cuts and bites out of the park's usable space to accommodate faster automobile traffic.
- The remainder of the park has been sensitively designed, in accordance with a community engagement project, to re-emerge as a unified and community-focused outdoor space.
- Staff agrees with the contributing and non-contributing elements as analyzed in GSD's submission.

ISSUES

- Staff has no issues with the proposal and recommends that the Commission find the proposed project to have a demonstrable effect on the adjacent Corktown district, and that such effect would be beneficial.

COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission is asked to provide comment under Section 21-2-5 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, as outlined below.

Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts

The Commission is requested to make a finding concerning the "demonstrable effects of the proposed project and report same to the Mayor and City Council." The intent of this section is to provide guidance to city government prior to committing to a particular course of action, under the following requirement:

A City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development project shall be considered to have a demonstrable effect on a designated or proposed historic district when any condition of the project creates a change, beneficial or adverse, in the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, social or cultural significance that qualified the property for designation as an historic district or that may qualify the property for designation as an historic district. Generally, adverse effects occur under conditions which include:

- (1) Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;*
- (2) Isolation from or alteration of the surrounding environment of a resource;*
- (3) Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the resource and its setting;*
- (4) Transfer or sale of a City-owned resource without adequate conditions or restrictions regarding preservation, maintenance, or use; and*
- (5) Neglect of a resource resulting in its deterioration or destruction.*