

REVISED STAFF REPORT 12-13-2023 REGULAR MEETING
STAFF REPORT REVISED ON 12-13-2023, CHANGES IN RED

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00134

ADDRESS: 795 LONGFELLOW (VOIGT PARK)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT/OWNER: GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, CITY OF DETROIT

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11-20-2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 12-04-2023

SCOPE: INSTALL BENCHES AND TREES, OTHER PARK IMPROVEMENTS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Named after the neighborhood's developer, Edward Voigt, this classic neighborhood park is a key resource for Boston-Edison. The park occupies just under 7 acres in an east-west orientation featuring over 800 feet of frontage along Longfellow and Edison, the residential streets that frame it at the north and south. It is bound by Third Avenue to the west, and Second Avenue to the east.



General view of Voigt Park, facing west. Staff photo, December 4, 2023.

The park's current condition and utility has diminished since the historic era. The tree canopy has degraded, with approximately 50 trees remaining of a much larger historic number once approaching 150. Promenade paths, planted flower beds, and even an early 20th century park shelter have all vanished from this historic landscape, mostly in the decades before historic designation. Currently extant park elements, in addition to the trees, include several historic reproduction PVC lampposts installed in the early 21st century, modern identification signage at the corners, and a single odd section of farm-style fencing along Longfellow. The park is notable in its current

condition for being without walking paths or perimeter sidewalks, excepting along the shorter Second and Third sides; given the robust historic pedestrian infrastructure throughout the district, it is somewhat awkward to approach and does not necessarily have design elements that welcomes visitors. Without interior paths, defined vistas, designed outdoor spaces, or amenities the park offers a fairly one-dimensional experience to visitors who do venture across the street, and is mostly restricted to ambulatory users. There is no invitation to linger.

The park is framed by a few dozen contributing structures, all of them large private residences of historic age, that establish the park's grand setting and imbue it with an intrinsic role as an important community and civic space, more than a mere mown field populated by trees. The park is clearly sized and sited for the enjoyment of the entire neighborhood, and is a major cultural landscape that is inextricably part of Boston-Edison's history; indeed, in a physical and urbanistic sense, it is the heart of the district, the "Boston-Edison Common," so to speak.



Parcel view of vicinity, 795 Longfellow (Voight Park) is outlined in yellow. Note that the park's name is misspelled here.



Partial view of Voigt Park, with the James Couzens mansion (610 Longfellow) visible. National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 1975. Photo taken by Eileen Kosnick in December 1973, coincident with local designation.



A second and final view of Voigt Park as included in the 1975 Designation Report, also taken by Eileen Kosnick. The view is toward Third Avenue along Longfellow, showing one of the former circulation paths.



View to the north along the Second Avenue sidewalk, with the James Couzens mansion (610 Longfellow) visible. Staff photo, December 4, 2023.



Mid-park view of non-historic PVC lamppost, looking west. The lack of visible walking paths makes the siting of such elements appear haphazard. Staff photo, December 4, 2023



View to the south from park towards houses on Edison. Staff photo, December 4, 2023.



View north along Third Avenue sidewalk. Staff photo, December 4, 2023



Mid-park view looking north towards Longfellow. Staff photo, December 4, 2023.



Mid-park view to the west, standing closer to Edison side. Staff photo, December 4, 2023

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Per the submitted drawings and documents, the city’s General Services Department proposes to plant eighteen trees and install two benches within the park:

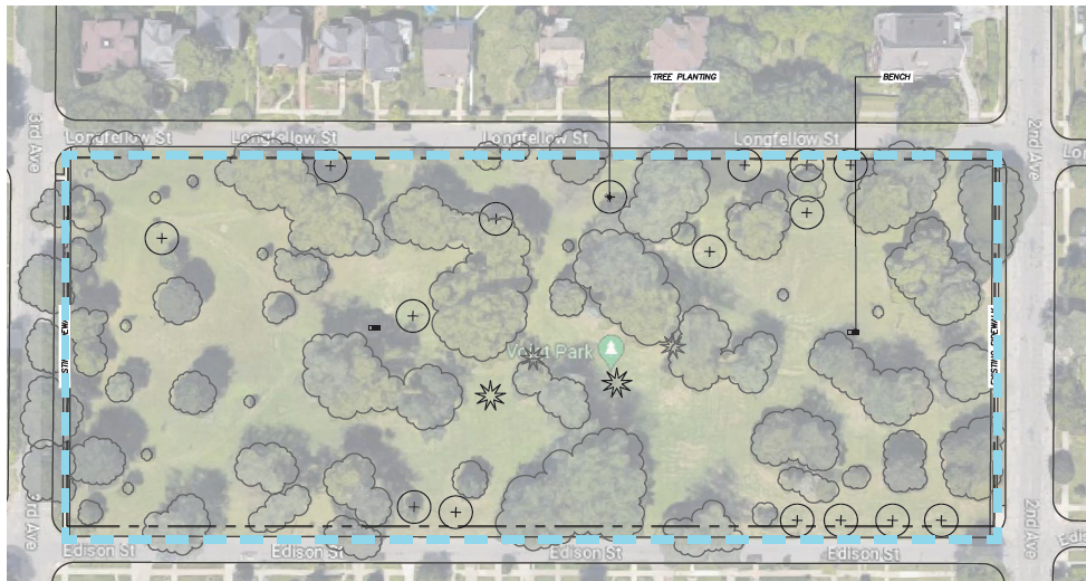
- i. 3 – Acer saccharum, ‘Green Mountain’ Silver Maple - 2 ½” caliper min.
- ii. 2 – Picea pungens, Colorado Blue Spruce – 8’-12’ tall.
- iii. 11 – Ulmus, ‘Princeton’, Elm – 2 ½” caliper min.
- iv. 2 – Quercus bicolor, Swamp White Oak – 2 ½” caliper min.

Custom Bench

The proposed benches for Voigt Park will be fabricated by Disenos Ornamental Ironwork in Southwest Detroit. The fabricated bench is the City of Detroit, General Services Department standard for historical parks.



PROPOSED SITE PLAN



STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was enacted on December 31, 1973.
- The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Boston-Edison Historic District, filed in 1975, states that its Period of Significance is 1900-1930
- As part of the research for this report, staff undertook a fresh examination of primary sources (i.e., newspapers including the Detroit Evening Times and the Detroit Free Press) concerning the status and use of Voigt Park during the Period of Significance (1900-1930).
- Staff was surprised at the number of prominent mentions of the Park in a city-wide context. On several occasions, Voigt Park is mentioned in tandem with Clark Park (now in the Hubbard Farms Historic District) as the setting for public band concerts, including on a list of city-wide activities published for the Fourth of July. In one of these cases the event was prominent enough to appear on page 1 of the Detroit Evening Times. In July 1909, a baseball team (Y.M.I., or Young Men's Institute) from Indianapolis played a team from Pittsburg in Voigt Park, a notice of which made it on to the "Sports" page of the city newspaper.
- In 1913, a "street fete" featuring Japanese lanterns and "colored electric lighting" attracted crowds of pedestrians and automobiles. A "band concert and vaudeville numbers were a feature of the entertainment in the park." This event was significant enough to be reported in both the Free Press and the Times, with the former reporting that:

The park grounds were dotted with refreshment stands, candy booths, tents, and all manners of pavilions where almost anything from an ice cream cone to a large handkerchief could be purchased...The fete gave an evening of pleasure to huge crowds of men, women and children, attracted to the scene by the object of the affair and by the glow of the thousands of lights which tinted the sky a warm pink, visible for blocks around.

See the below local newspaper clippings as they outline a sample of events held within Voigt Park during the district's Period of Significance.

<p>SOCIAL and PERSONAL</p> <p>The street fete given, Thursday evening, on Longfellow and Edison-aves., in the vicinity of Voigt park, under the auspices of Detroit suffragists, was a marked success. The streets, with their beautiful homes and verandas, prettily lighted with colored electric lights and Japanese lanterns, were crowded with pedestrians and automobiles throughout the evening. Musical programs were given on various porches along the streets, and a band concert and vaudeville numbers were features of the entertainment in the park. Pretty booths with attractive girls in charge did a thriving business in light refreshments, flowers, candies and other dainty things. Little boxes which were passed among the crowds, held many coins before the fete was over. The money will be divided between the Bay Court Convalescent home and the suffrage campaign fund.</p>	<p>TODAY'S CONCERTS IN CLARK AND VOIGT PARKS</p> <p>Schmeman's Military band, Herman W. Schmeman director, renders the following program in Clark park this afternoon, beginning at 2:30, and in Voigt park this evening at 8 o'clock:</p> <p>March, "Bulgarian" (Straus); overture, "Jolly Robbers" (Suppe); light opera, "The Fortune Teller" (Herbert); waltzes, "On the Beautiful Rhine" (Keler-Bela); grand selection from "Rigoletto" (Verdi); Spanish serenade, "La Paloma" (Yradier); gems from "Sweethearts" (Herbert); intermezzo, "Cavalleria Rusticana" (Mascagni); "Star Spangled Banner."</p>	<p>FOURTH OF JULY AMUSEMENTS FOR DETROITERS.</p> <p>Celebration by North Woodward avenue residents, speeches, parade and fireworks.</p> <p>Grand parade, speechmaking and fireworks display on Warren avenue west in charge of the West Warren Residents' association.</p> <p>Fireworks at D. A. C. grounds in the evening.</p> <p>Church of the Blessed Sacrament holds celebration afternoon and evening at Voigt's park, Second avenue and Boston boulevard.</p> <p>Concerts at the public parks.</p> <p>Concerts at Electric park, Wolff's park and other resorts at the entrance of Belle Isle bridge.</p> <p>Special musical programs and dinners at the clubhouses along Lake St. Clair, St. Clair river, Detroit river, and hotels on the inland lakes within easy trolley ride of the city.</p> <p>Steamer lines out of Detroit offer a tempting array of trips for today and tomorrow. The rates are "right," and in some cases are effective for several days. The schedule includes the following:</p> <p>D. & C. and D. & B. lines—To Buffalo and Niagara Falls, to Cleveland, to Put-in-Bay and Cleveland (day trip), to Toledo, to St. Clair and Port Huron, Lake Huron shore points and Straits of Mackinac.</p> <p>White Star line—To Flats, Tashmoo park, Port Huron and nearby ports; to Sugar Island park and Toledo; moonlight to the Flats.</p> <p>D. B. I. & W. Ferry Co.—Frequent trips to Bois Blanc park during day and evening of July 4th; usual service to Belle Isle park.</p> <p>Ashley & Dustin—Steamer Frank E. Kirby to Put-in-Bay.</p> <p>Good music will be a feature on most of the steamers, and travelers by water are assured of everything that makes for a healthful combination of pleasure and recreation.</p> <p>The railroads also offer inducements to those who wish to be with friends in other cities on this day. The Michigan Central makes a fare and a third to all points in the state and a fare plus 50 cents to the northern resorts. The Wabash offers a fare and a third to Chicago and the Pere Marquette also announces a fare and a third rate.</p>
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RECREATION BAND CONCERT

The recreation department band will play at Voigt park, Second and Longfellow avenues, Friday at 7:30 p. m. The program follows:

March, "National Emblem".....	Bagley
Waltz, "It Happened in Monterey"	Rose and Wayne
"Glow Worm".....	Linke
"Manhattan Beach".....	Sousa
Vocal solo, "Dancing with Tears in My Eyes".....	Siazinski
Band accompaniment.	
"Nola".....	Arndt
"Old-Timers' Waltz".....	Lake
"Stein Song".....	Brockton
Victor Herbert Hits.	
Tenor solo, "Springtime in the Rockies".....	Siazinski
March, "Vienna Forever".....	Schrammel
"Four Little Blackbirds".....	O'Connor
E. W. KATZ, Conductor.	

Y. M. I. League Games at 9:00.

The Y. M. I. league games, scheduled for Sunday, will be played at 9 o'clock, instead of 10, as heretofore. The Indianapolis team now leads the league with a perfect record and will meet Pittsburg at Voigt park.

- Another through-line of discussion in period sources were the efforts to develop and improve the park:

SEVERAL CITIZENS IN THE VICINITY of Voigt park are complaining about its neglected condition. The park is situated in one of the best residential parts of the city, being bounded by Longfellow, Edison, Second and Third avenues. At the city hall it is said the time to have made protests effectual was when the common council and the board of estimates were considering the park commission budget. The commission was allowed \$1,000 a year ago and spend \$800 for water pipes, sewers, walks and tree planting. One of the complaints is that the trenches for the drains are still open and that the sidewalk material is lying in heaps. At the park commission office it was declared yesterday that the balance of \$200 was not sufficient to complete any part of the work and that for that reason no contract was entered into.

Residents of Parkhill subdivision, that part of the city lying between Taylor-ave. and Glyn-ct., will meet in the North Congregation church next Monday night to form an improvement association. One of the first things to be taken up is the improvement of Voigt park. Residents assert that the park has been shamefully neglected, and is now almost in a state of nature. Last summer cattle were herded there.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

URGES VOIGT PARK AS MEMORIAL HALL SITE

To the Editor: May one who has given the subject of the location of Memorial hall a considerable amount of study suggest a site which will eliminate the question of expending a great portion of the fund for land purchase and save it to the citizens?

The site which I suggest is in the center of Voigt park, bounded by Second, Third, Edison and Longfellow avenues.

This property is now owned by the city. Its use for park purposes will not be destroyed. A great area will remain for such use, forming at once an appropriate setting for Memorial hall and still being available for the use of the public for the recreational purposes to which it is now put. Voigt park is really a breathing spot, not used for formal games, and as such would be ornamented by Memorial hall.

The use of a public park for such public purposes is not without precedent in Detroit. The square on which the old public library now stands and which the board of education building is to occupy, was once East park. Old Central High

TO SEEK IMPROVEMENT OF VOIGT PARK

The need of improvement in Voigt park, which lies west of Woodward ave. in the northern end of the city, was discussed in a meeting of residents of that neighborhood held in the North Congregational church, Woodward and Blaine-aves., Monday evening. Frank W. Blair presided.

It was decided to ask for an appropriation of \$5,000 to conduct the work, Secretary M. P. Hurlbut, of the park department, stating that this would be enough to do the necessary work. A committee headed by David B. Stewart was chosen to push the project and see that the wants of the district are given proper consideration by the board of estimates.

Those present in the meeting decided to ask the North Woodward improvement association to extend its boundaries so as to take in more territory on the western side of the avenue.

ARCHITECTS A. W. CHITTENDEN and Charles Kottling have submitted to Park Commissioner Hurlbut a design for a shelter station in Voigt park, for which the board of estimates appropriated \$1,800 last spring. The plan calls for a structure of classical architecture, 60x12 feet. The design will be submitted to the new city plan and improvement commission. It will be the first definite project of the kind to come before the new commission.

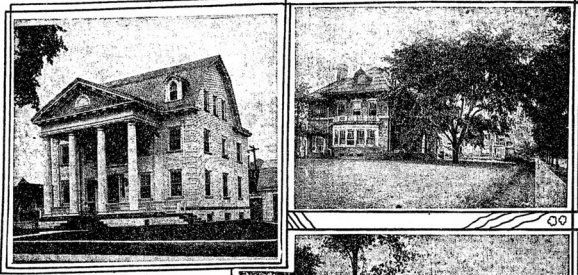
- The early 20th century activities and plans for Voigt Park are consistent with recent scholarship concerning the evolution of urban parks in American cities. Landscape and parks historian Alan Tate, writing in *Environment and History* in February 2018, summarizes the evolution of urban park design that shows “a transition from early [19th century] pastoral models, via form-driven Beaux-Arts and City Beautiful models, to [20th century] function-driven modernist approaches...these approaches to the design of urban parks reflect changes in the social and political purposes for which they were intended, evolving from being seen as escapes from infernal cities, then as places for active physical recreation.” From the various clues offered by contemporary sources here in Detroit, staff argues that Voigt Park was developed as a thoroughly 20th century park, aligned with the modernist aspirations of Detroit’s professional and business class who flocked to what later would be known as Boston-Edison, and that Voigt Park would have been unlikely to be designed or used exclusively as a pastoral or passive space during the district’s Period of Significance.
- In addition to the various public events described in period accounts, Voigt Park is mentioned hundreds of times in period real estate listings and reporting, as a major attraction for what was originally described by developers as the exclusive “Park Hill” neighborhood. Properties fronting on Voigt Park were invariably highlighted as being desirable:

LONGFELLOW AVENUE,
northwest corner of Third,
facing Voigt Park; an ideal
home in prettiest part of De-
troit. Shown by appointment
only. Call Hemlock 2375. *

City 6406.
LONGFELLOW AVE., 50x125, second
block, facing Voigt park. Box R, No.
5, Free Press, Detroit, Mich.

DARCAIN SNAP!

SECTION OF POPULAR NORTH WOODWARD DISTRICT WHICH IS BEING BEAUTIFIED VERY RAPIDLY



The fine residence shown in one of the pictures at the top is that of Walter C. Hartman, 75 Edison avenue. It was only recently completed. The other picture above is a view east on Edison avenue toward Woodward avenue, from Second avenue, directly across the street from the Hartman house and from Voigt park. The Henry Ford home is the one in a far line of residences. The lower picture gives a view of the block shown. Building has progressed rapidly.

Fine Homes Are Being Built on Very Large Handsome Sites—More Residences Soon to Be Begun.

The pictures above give glimpses of a section of the North Woodward district which is being substantially and beautifully built up. The handsome residences just recently completed by Walter C. Hartman at 75 Edison avenue is one example of the type of building in the locality. It is the southeast corner of Second and Edison avenues, across from Voigt park, on the northwest cor-

ner of Longfellow and Second, also opposite the park, a residence is now under way for James Conroy, which is to cost \$20,000, according to the present estimate. It is one of the finest residences in the district and is in immediate prospect. It is said that \$25,000 worth of the finest material has been sold on Boston boulevard in the same immediate locality within the last few days of the week and the sites are such that handsome homes are almost sure to follow.



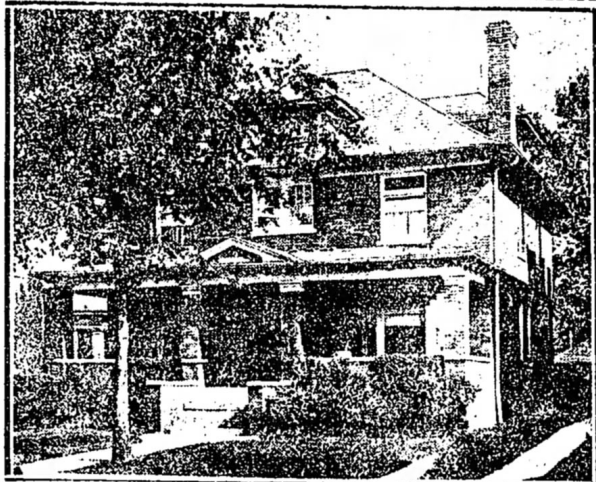
Tells of Much Good Work Done

Grand Rapids Building and Loan Man Writes to Realty Board President.

It seems there is no intention to

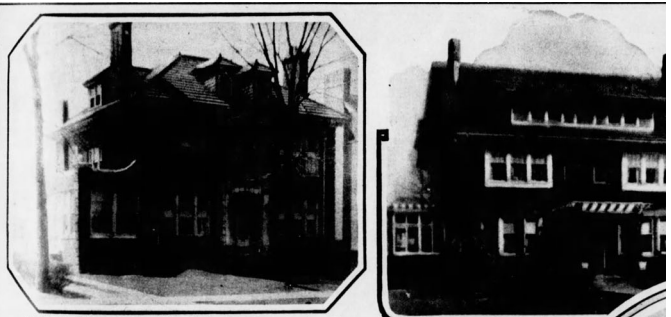
become useful to the real estate interests of the city and the community in which they are operating. Through ownership improvement surrounding and in that way, better values. The purely local building and loan does not invite deposits, but it makes payments, and only pays interest in case of the withdrawal of the shares. It does not pay dividends or any interest on the account unless the account is withdrawn. It does not have any interest on the account unless the account is withdrawn. It does not have any interest on the account unless the account is withdrawn.

ALEXANDER HENDERSON TAKES HOME OPPOSITE VOIGT PARK



99 EDISON AVE.

Alexander Henderson has purchased the attractive eight-room home, with pressed brick front, and lot 50x125 feet, at 99 Edison avenue, from Marion Young. The house overlooks Voigt park. The property is valued at about \$19,000. H. N. Johnson, with the Sanders-Drennan-Schinbine company, represented both the buyer and the seller.



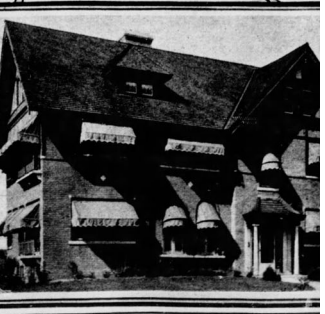
EDISON AVE., opposite Voigt Park. Ideal for a family with children. First floor—five spacious rooms, formal hall and staircase, lavatory. Second floor—four very large sleeping chambers, two baths. Third floor—servants' quarters, billiard room. Construction and equipment of the very best. 70-foot lot; 2-car garage.

A residence on delightfully exclusive ARDEN PARK implies an appreciation of the restful charm of magnificent trees, wide expanse of lawn and comparatively untraveled thoroughfare. We offer an eleven-room residence of substantial construction, completely appointed, at a price which represents an actual loss of thousands of dollars to the present owner. Will accept a reasonable trade.

At right—LONGFELLOW AVE., near Third. Proximity to schools, street car, bus and stores makes this ten-room home very suitable to a family with children. Two baths and first floor lavatory. Layout is exceptional. Five very nice sleeping chambers.



LONGFELLOW AVENUE, near Voigt Park. Eight delightful rooms. Side drive, garage, hot water heating system and Frigidaire go to make a most attractive residence. A quiet, restricted avenue—one block to bus.



At right—NORTHEAST CORNER LA SALLE and CALVERT. One of the most beautiful and complete duplexes ever built. Eight large, airy rooms, two tiled baths in each apartment. All decorations on Sanitas, Frigidaire, vacuum steam heat, four-car garage with separate driveways for owner and tenant. In fact, two absolutely complete homes under one roof. Cannot be adequately described here. At least contact Joe, overlooking new Roosevelt School Group.

PARK HILL

Let the Sunshine in

You, in the sun shine in. Sunshine is the source of light, life and power, and every man should have as much of it as he can. In buying a site for a building, where you can have it, in Park Hill the average man would be well advised to buy one of our parks and breathe fresh air. It is the only place where you can secure for the family the comfort and blessings of

Light, Life and Health

they get with plenty of fresh air and sunshine. Park Hill has none of the disagreeable features that exist in other parts of the city. The eastern and western end of our district are equipped in a cloud of smoke and dirt, which is

No Dirt and Smoke Nuisance

In Park Hill you get all of the benefits of pure, wholesome country air, and still have all the advantages of the city and are within twenty minutes' ride from its very heart.

Boston Boulevard

Boston Boulevard is the most beautiful residence avenue in Detroit. A large number of residences are to be built upon it this season. It will be still further improved and beautified. Get a site while you can.

Longfellow Avenue

Longfellow Avenue is also a beautiful street. Located along Woodward Avenue to Voigt Park, a beautiful park residence eight blocks of ground and more than twice the size of Chest Park. A large number of homes are being built on it, and sites are selling rapidly.

Atkinson Avenue

Atkinson Avenue shows to be a beautiful avenue. It has a charming line of trees on either side. There will be fine homes built on it in the street this season. We are daily setting sites on all of these streets, and are making special prices to people who will build at once. Investigate our prices and terms, and the

Cash Bonus

that we give for immediate building. Do not fail to see us in case you wish to get the Park Hill on the most favorable terms. If you are going to build this season do not fail to see us.

WE FURNISH SEVENTY-FIVE PER CENT OF THE MONEY NECESSARY TO BUILD WHEN DESIRED.

Detroit Real Estate Investment Co.

601-603 Mackay Building, DETROIT, MICH.
Telephone Main 1024
ALBERT L. STORREN, CHAS. H. HENDEL, MRS. A. BLANDINA
Executives

- Based on the above, staff assesses that Voigt Park, *during the Period of Significance*:
 - Was a community destination and public space that hosted both neighborhood and city-wide cultural or entertainment events, and was not limited to the use of nearby residents
 - Did not function regularly as formal sporting or recreational grounds, but was a continuing object of improvement and development for community benefit, programming, and functions, and was not considered limited to a scenic or “natural” role devoid of buildings and amenities.
- The Voigt Park Neighborhood Block Club (hereafter, VPNBC), which reports its officers as James Hamilton (President), Aaron Goodman (Vice-President), Kevin Patelczyk (Secretary), Megan Royal (Treasurer), and Victoria Koski, in emails received by the Office of Historic Preservation dated June 4, 2023, and July 5, 2023, has sent several communications to the administration concerning the future of the Park.
- In regards to the current application, the VPNBC, in a statement received by HDC staff on Sunday, December 3rd but not reviewed until December 13th, states its support of the limited scope under review by the Commission. This statement has been added to the application website.
- Staff also reviewed, in its entirety, a report submitted to the Planning Department/HDC staff by the Voigt Park Neighborhood Block Club in June 2023. The VPNBC further requested in their December 3rd email that this report be distributed to the Commission in advance of tonight’s review. Titled “Historic Landscape Report,” the document posits three expectations, namely:
 - *Preserve and restore any surviving historic elements of the landscape*
 - *Replace missing elements for which there is documentation*
 - *Do not add new elements that compromise the character or the historic landscape*

The report then summarizes four elements representing this organization’s vision, as such:

1. *Restore 100+ missing historic trees in their historic locations with comparable species*
2. *Reconstruct the network of walkways that were in the park*
3. *Reconstruct the missing flower and planting beds that were in the park*
4. *Not add any new elements to the park*

Note that Chapter 21 of the Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-78c, states that the Commission must refer to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for **Rehabilitation** when reviewing applications for historic appropriateness. The first three points stated above, concerning *restoration* and *reconstruction* treatments, are indeed *permissible* under the *rehabilitation* treatment standard that binds the Commission’s reviews. However, the rehabilitation standards **do not** in fact require the exact *reproduction* of lost historic elements by any property owner, including the city, in the same way that a porch that was (legally) removed from a house prior to designation does not have to be restored based on exacting historic documentation, in lieu of any other potentially appropriate design. Indeed, the National Park Service’s *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes* states that “of the four treatments, only *rehabilitation* includes an opportunity to make possible an efficient contemporary use through alterations and additions...” as long as such alterations do not destroy a cultural landscape’s character-defining features or historic materials Rehabilitating: The Approach / Cultural Landscape Guidelines (nps.gov) The Commission is free to approve any design or rehabilitation plan that it deems appropriate for any resource in the city’s districts. For instance, a reconfigured network of paths that accommodate modern circulation patterns or uses might be appropriate, as would relocated flower beds or trees (as long as no historic trees were impacted). The Commission is not bound by a “restoration” or “reconstruction” treatment; if the proposed alterations protect the overall historic character of the resource, and preserve extant historic features. This is the essence of the rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines. Historic designation does not compel restoration of the lost past; indeed, it is public anxiety and misunderstanding around such a theoretical burden to “restore it back to the way it was in 1920,” for instance, that often foils efforts to

create new historic districts. The city, as owner, cannot be held to a higher restoration standard than other property owners, especially a Standard that has no basis in state or local law.

The final point, concerning the prohibition of “any new elements to the park,” is plainly out of step with the rehabilitation standards and guidelines. New elements are constantly being added to historic districts and resources across the city, as long as the Commission finds them compatible with the authentic historic character rooted in its Period of Significance. New buildings are erected on vacant lots, additions are added to historic houses, and improvements of all kinds are made to city parks, including large playgrounds in Hubbard Farms and Indian Village, among others. The very first Standard for Rehabilitation, Standard #1, directs that “a property shall be used for its *historic purpose* or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the *defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment* (italics added). The historic purpose, and its defining characteristics, are that which was accommodated from 1900-1930, per the National Park Service.

The “historic Voigt Park” is *not* as it existed in 1974. The legal designation of a district does not confer historic significance for the date or era of designation, but for the period defined by the district’s Period of Significance. The status at designation is not its “historic” condition for regulatory purposes under Chapter 21; the date of designation merely begins a period of heightened regulatory review with regard to historic character as defined by the designation report.. The historic Voigt Park is instead as it existed during its Period of Significance from 1900-1930; any remaining historic character from that era that survived from that era, and continues today, is thus protected. If Voigt Park was uniquely documented *during its historic period* as a cohesive passive or pastoral historic landscape, dating to its inception, and further that this purposeful landscape design specifically emphasized the lack of infrastructure/amenities, and finally had this condition survived from the defined historic period, then such pastoral character would absolutely be distinctive and important to preserve. Similar protection might occur if the Period of Significance was revised by the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB), or understood by this Commission, to extend into the 1970s, thus capturing the later post-war character of the park within the regulatory window. But neither is the case, and revising the Period of Significance would be a high bar for Boston-Edison. The current passive “design” of the park is merely an artifact of its deterioration as a welcoming public space, not a historic condition to be regulated and preserved. The park has hosted active uses and once featured a building erected during its Period of Significance. There is nothing under historic rehabilitation standards that would prevent the reintroduction of such permanent elements.

Similarly, the Voigt Park Neighborhood Block Club errs when it claims that “under the historic ordinance, historic preservation would center on the preservation of the neighborhood as it was at the time of designation.” Instead, the standards of review protect only the *historic character* of the neighborhood as it was at the time of designation. This is a subtle but important distinction, and leads naturally to an assessment of what is authentic historic character, and what are later pre-designation changes to the district that are not inviolate. The entire question of “appropriateness” hinges on this analysis, for every property and proposal reviewed by the Commission. The Block Club’s report does not, in staff opinion, make the case that the condition at *designation*, even as it might survive today, fully represents and embodies the *historic (1900-1930) character* of the park. Certainly Voigt Park is not devoid of historic character (the trees and lawn contribute to it), and it cannot be treated by the city as a blank slate, but the post-historic disappearance of hard infrastructure or elements is not “historic character” under a regulatory analysis.

- In so much as the Park, at designation in 1974 and in the years since, was devoid of active use infrastructure and correspondingly limited to passive uses, staff assesses that this situation was a result of decades of post-war disinvestment in urban parks (also well-documented in scholarship), and not a significant historical (1900-1930, in this case) characteristic that needs to be perpetuated and preserved, at least under historic preservation standards. In any case, the condition of the park (or any resource in any

of our districts) at time of designation is not relevant for an understanding of significance. Designation merely establishes the surviving historic materials that date to the Period of Significance. The Commission's role, writ large, is to manage change so that such surviving historic character is not destroyed, and that extant historic elements that express the resource or district's Period of Significance are preserved in this context of useful modern changes and updates allowing historic properties to serve today's citizens and their contemporary expectations; the Commission's role is not to freeze the district to the condition it was at designation, but to allow desired changes to proceed, excepting only those that are demonstrably at odds with the significant historic character.

- It is indisputable that Voigt Park's current status is that of a sleepy neighborhood green space little known outside of Boston-Edison. It certainly has taken a markedly different path than Clark Park, which is now chock-a-block with playgrounds, athletic fields, and an ice rink that welcomes visitors from all over the city. However, in the opinion of professional staff, a passive and pastoral Voigt Park with almost no permanent infrastructure is simply not an authentic historic condition that merits protection and preservation by this Commission. We cannot speak, of course, for other city and neighborhood policies that may direct its future, outside of the jurisdiction of this body. But as to historic character, modest improvements such as the current application will not be problematic, in staff's opinion.
- A central tenet of historic preservation in a rehabilitation context is the careful improvement of buildings and landscapes for reasonable modern use while preserving important elements and character. Technical and financial feasibility are relevant. No one (or almost no one) would insist that the various streets, sidewalks, or driveways in our historic districts should be returned to stone slabs, wood planks, gravel paths, or other loose paving materials used a century or more ago, excepting very limited areas (brick streets/alleys) that have survived authentically intact. Just as these infrastructure elements in our districts accommodate modern users (including of course, wheelchair users, ubiquitous baby strollers, and children on bikes or roller skates), paths and elements proposed for city parks can and should reasonably accommodate such a diversity of users by being created with modern pavements. Loose paving materials such as crushed stone may be appropriate for private gardens, but are difficult for non-ambulatory and wheelchair-dependent users, may not conform to modern ADA standards unless carefully constructed with stabilizing binders, and may present challenges with snow removal and other basic maintenance, curtailing year-round enjoyment of park spaces.
- Another ~~apparent neighborhood organization~~ **entity**, the Friends of Voigt Park, appears to have an alternate vision for the park. On their website ~~this organization has is presented what they describe as the~~ **there exists what is presented as a** "Consensus Plan", which is intended to "make Voigt Park inclusive, accessible, and beautiful through commonsense redevelopment that is historically sensitive." Friends of Voigt Park, among other things, recommends:
 - That the 1928 template for the park should act as a guide, but not interpreted literally, and that there should be features and amenities that make the park inclusive which were not part of the original survey
 - Walking paths, with a paved perimeter sidewalk and crushed stone interior circulation modified as necessary to improve the aesthetic appeal or functionality of the park
 - Strategic plantings, benches, and central monuments such as a pavilion, sculpture, fountain, or architectural folly
 - Improved lighting
 - A playground up to ¼ acre in size, built of quality and visually compatible materials. On this point, the group notes that *"there is strong demand for a playground at Voigt Park. The Boston-Edison District is currently home to some 400 children representing approximately 25% of the population of the district. In the area surrounding the park, within a 15-minute walk, there are roughly 2,000 children according to American Community Survey data for 2019. Children make up 21% of the population in the wider surrounding area."*
- In general, in professional staff opinion and subject to actual review, the tenor of changes described by the Friends of Voigt Park above are likely to be historically appropriate as they represent a modern

rehabilitation approach to the resource. Note that only trees and benches are proposed by the city in today's application.

- In the district's Elements of Design, Voigt Park's features are referenced in the following elements:
 - **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.** *The Public Lighting Commission's ornamental poles ("O.P.") with cast iron bases (Pattern #10 and Cast Iron Panel Pattern #16A) and wooden shafts are placed at regular intervals primarily on the medians on Boston Boulevard and Chicago Boulevard, and on the tree lawns on other east-west streets. Lighting on the north-south side streets consists of steel poles, some of which are fluted, with either ornate pendants or simple cranes. There are historic upright poles along the periphery of Voigt Park. Concrete and brick entrance piers exist at Woodward Avenue and Longfellow Street.*
 - Staff note: The original PLC (Bishop style) poles were unfortunately replaced in Boston-Edison during the first decade of the 21st century, apparently without the approval of the Historic District Commission, including those at Voigt Park described above.
 - **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures.** *Open space in the district occurs in the form of vacant land, a City park, side lots, and grassy median strips in the boulevards. There are no houses facing Woodward Avenue. Ample open space is provided at Woodward Avenue and Boston Boulevard, creating a park-like entrance into the district. The John C. Lodge Freeway is depressed and forms a visual and physical gap in the district. All houses have rear yards as well as front yards. Where an original or early arrangement of house and grounds included, and still includes, landscaped lots which form part of the landscaping plan for the residence, such landscaped lots have significant landscape features.*
 - Staff note: Staff note: The character and use of open space in a city park is fundamentally different than open space used to form medians in boulevards. Parks are meant to be used and visited, medians are meant to be viewed.
 - **Element 22, General environmental character.** *The Boston-Edison District, with its long straight streets, two boulevards, large-to-moderate-sized, stately single-family homes, and Voigt Park and Woodward Avenue's open space, has an urban, substantial, low density residential character.*

ISSUES

- Staff finds that the planting of eighteen trees and installation of two park benches in Voigt Park is compatible and historically appropriate under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, as it does not destroy any distinctive character-defining features, and the historic character of the park is preserved and retained. No issues.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff recommends that the proposal to add benches and trees to Voigt Park should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design.