

STAFF REPORT: 02/07/2024 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00021

ADDRESSES: 1475 RANDOLPH (BEATRICE BUCK’S PARADISE VALLEY PARK) AND GRATIOT PLAZA (ADJACENT TO 1407 RANDOLPH)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: MADISON-HARMONIE PARK

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: DANIEL WESTENBERG, PE (PROGRESSIVE AE, INC)

PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 01/16/2024

DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 01/17/2024, 01/31/2024

SCOPE: ALTER PARK AND PLAZA

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Orientation

This project consists of work proposed in two open spaces that are in and adjacent to the Madison-Harmonie Park Historic District and share Randolph Street as a common boundary. The first site, known as Beatrice Buck’s Paradise Valley Park, is triangular and located fully within the district at 1475 Randolph. It is bound by Randolph Street on the East, E. Grand River Avenue along the West, and Centre Street to the south.

The second site, known as Gratiot Plaza, is located south of Beatrice Buck’s Park and does not have an address because it lays within the right-of-way of Gratiot Avenue and Randolph Streets. This location was once the intersection of the two streets, but when Randolph Street was diverted slightly northward, after the historic district was designated, the resulting traffic curb expansion left a “plaza” that has colloquially been identified as the “Gratiot Plaza”. The limits of the Madison-Harmonie Park Historic District only include the western edge of the plaza, which is the historic centerline of Randolph street’s reach towards Gratiot (see Figure 1). The remaining area to the east is outside of the historic district’s boundaries.

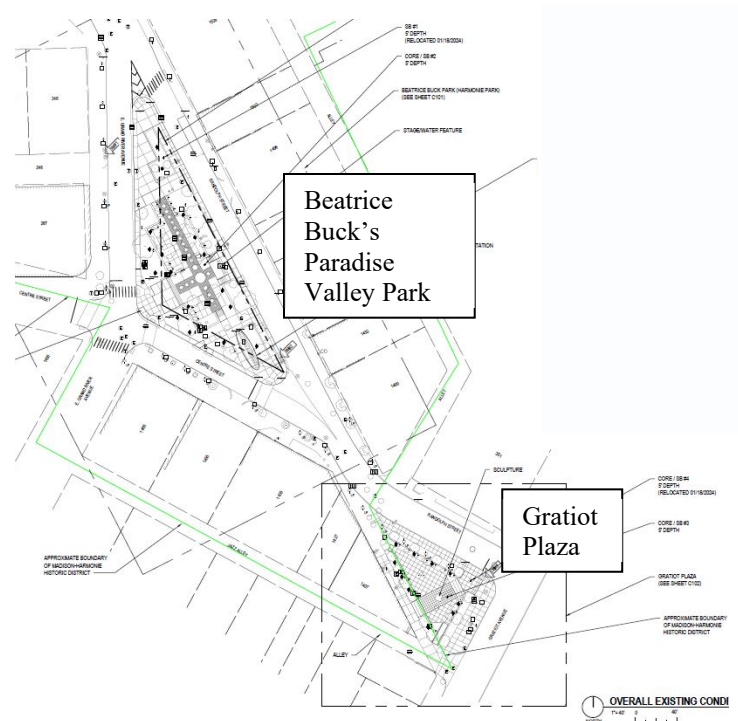


Figure 1 by Applicant: 1475 Randolph (Beatrice Buck’s Paradise Valley Park) located to the north and Gratiot Plaza (adjacent to 1407 Randolph) located to the south. The green line shows the boundary for Madison-Harmonie Park Historic District.



Site Photo 1 By Staff Jan 17, 2024, Facing West: Showing center stone wall features.

Beatrice Buck's Paradise Valley Park



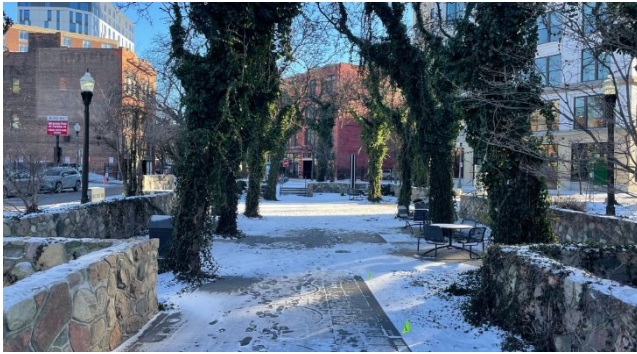
Site Photo 2 by WSU 1968, showing park conditions twenty years prior to historic designation in 1988, showing young honey locusts, low growing plantings within the planting beds and stone walls. Harmonie Club is located at the upper left.

The Madison-Harmonie Historic District encompasses an intact piece of the original 1805 Woodward plan, which includes Judge Woodward's vision for laying out a new street plan for Detroit, which was influenced by streets radiating out from parks in the form of circles, triangles, and squares, like Washington D.C.'s plan. Originally known as "North Park" and then "Harmonie Park", the Historic Designation Advisory Board's (HDAB) Final Report characterized historic conditions as such (*emphasis added*):

*"Streets radiating from the public spaces and major diagonal thoroughfares were created, the results being **the interesting vistas and public spaces**, as exemplified by Harmonie Park, a triangular space, and Madison Avenue, a street radiating out from Grand Circus Park. Harmonie Park forms a triangle bounded by Randolph, East Grand River (formerly Wilcox) and Center Streets. A 1901 News-Tribune account of Harmonie Park describes it as "facing Harmonie Hall on one side and a row of old-fashioned dwellings on the other. The park is patronized by a few speckled chickens that peck sedately among the grass in search of worms and then dignified, cross the street and creep under the gates (News-Tribune, 9-22-01)." Harmonie Park, originally called North Park before it was renamed after the Harmonie Club, is the focal point of an unexpected pocket of downtown Detroit just off major thoroughfares. The street pattern has left this park somewhat isolated from the main flow of automobile and pedestrian traffic so that **it remains a relatively unspoiled and quiet enclave** within the downtown."*

No historic physical features remain in the park as it was redesigned in 1976. On June 19, 2009, the park was renamed "Beatrice Buck's Paradise Valley Park" for historian, activist, and playwright Beatrice M. Buck (1930-2007). She was known for her life's work to preserve the history and culture of Paradise Valley, which thrived in

Detroit from the 1920s through the 1960s. Paradise Valley was a core of civic life populated by African American residents and historical personalities that was considered perhaps only paralleled by the Harlem Renaissance. A plaque, in her honor, is located on the west side of the park, with a quote that states, “Hold on to what you have, learn to appreciate what you have and take care of it.” Beatrice M. Buck.



Site Photo 2 by Staff Jan 17, 2024, Facing South: Showing center walkway, stone walls and allée of trees overtaken by ivy.



Site Photo 3 by Staff Jan 17, 2024, detail of one of a series of Paradise Valley commemorative terrazzo paver images by artist Hubert Massey, to remain in place.

Today, this ¼ acre park retains its historic triangular form and open vistas and views that date to its inception. Many of the surrounding buildings, especially along Randolph, were demolished and later replaced with surface parking. The park is nearly oriented along a north-south axis with a central pathway that is lined with commemorative pavers that celebrate the icons of Paradise Valley (see Site Photos 2-3). The view north is oriented towards Comerica Park with a glimpse of the Tigers scoreboard, the view to the south points to the Renaissance Center. The path is outlined with a mid-height rock wall that orients outward to create an interior courtyard of seating areas, each separated with series of low planting areas and trees that appear to have been overtaken by ivy and are in poor condition. Streetlamps and shade trees outline the perimeter of the park, along with a low planting of shrubs and ivy, which has overtaken many of the trees. There are two water features in the park: a water blade fountain and stage on the east side of the park and a sawtooth sculpture at the southwest side of the park. None of these physical features have been found to be of historic age. There is a Michigan Historic Site marker on the west side of the park that commemorates nearby Germantown, Greektown, and The Harmonie Club, and a Detroit Recreation Department plaque commemorating Beatrice Buck’s Paradise Valley Park. Overall, in staff’s assessment, the area continues to feature the “unspoiled and quiet” character highlighted in the historic designation report.



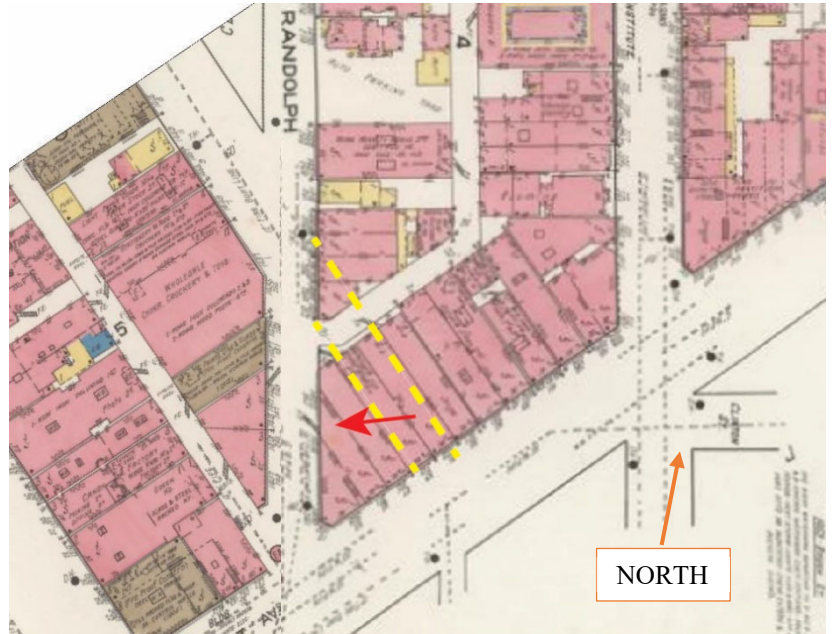
Site Photo 4 by WSU 1976, Facing West: Harmonie Club and west edge of the park.



Site Photo 5 by Staff Jan 17, 2024, looking west, with Harmonie Club in the background.

Gratiot Plaza

Gratiot Plaza is the result of the redesign of the intersection of Randolph Street and Gratiot Avenue, which occurred after historic designation, where Randolph Street was redirected through parcels that were once on the east side of Randolph Street as shown in Sanborn 2 below. Note that the plaza did not exist prior to the district's designation and is not of historic age. The historic centerline of Randolph, as described above, remains as the boundary for the historic district for Madison-Harmonie Park. The 1921 Sanborn maps indicate that Germantown, as this area of Detroit once was called, was lined with brick buildings, that lined the street, and rounded the corners of this vibrant commercial community. Today, a central stair from the street corner leads into this triangular plaza, which is depressed below street grade and has a surrounding canopy of crabapple trees and ivy plantings that have taken over the concrete retaining wall enclosure. The plaza features a centrally placed painted steel sculpture, called "The Entrance" by Piet, 1975, which originally stood in Grand Circus Park until 1997. This vibrant fire-engine red, feature reaches over twenty feet tall and contrasts against the darker elements of the plaza. Streetlights are spaced evenly around the triangle. There are no furnishings or benches in the plaza. As the plaza was established after the historic district's designation, none of the extant physical elements of the plaza which are in the district's boundaries contribute to its historic character.



Sanborn2 1921 Vol. 3, 117, showing Randolph and Gratiot prior to change in Randolph Street. The yellow dashed lines show the approximate modern-day configuration of Randolph. The red arrow shows the observer location and view direction of the modern-day photograph (see site photo 7 below). Note that the photographer position, and the direction of the view, would have been in the middle of buildings during the historic era.



Site Photo 7 by Staff Jan 31, 2024, Gratiot Plaza, current conditions.

PROPOSAL

PLEASE NOTE: The applicant revised their project scope late Friday, February 2, 2024 to withdraw significant changes in the landscape plan (L201, L202, L203 were removed from view). Changes such as replacement of established trees, etc., are no longer being proposed in the current landscape plan. The new landscape plan is much more maintenance oriented. HDC staff therefore has removed the outdated application materials from the website/the project's property page. The **updated plan** is described below and has been posted on the property page (See drawings C001-E602, on the property page, in file named, "2024 02 06 Paradise Valley Historical District Commission Review").

Paradise Valley Cultural and Entertainment District Conservancy (PVC) has retained Progressive AE, Inc. (as Architect and Engineer – Progressive AE) and Premier Group Associates LC (as Construction Manager – PGA) to plan, design, bid, and provide construction oversight for the redevelopment and upgrade of Beatrice Buck Park (i.e., "the Park") and Gratiot Plaza (i.e., "the Plaza"). The work will be undertaken in phases. Specifically, per the recently submitted documents, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to undertake the following work items within the Beatrice Buck Park and the portion of the Gratiot Plaza which extends within the district's boundaries:



Figure 2 by Applicant: Beatrice Buck Park Plan, showing the proposal. Changes include introduction of tall hedgerows near walls and festoon and overhead festive lighting.

Beatrice Buck's Paradise Valley Park

Hardscape

- Repair and replace perimeter concrete sidewalk with concrete sidewalk where needed.
- Stone walls: Cleaned, mortar replaced, and re-pointed to restore to original condition.
- Terrazzo Historic Paver Medallions (Artist Hubert Massey): Featuring historical figures of Paradise Valley, are to be cleaned and remain in place.

- Interior Park Pavers: Where cracked, will be replaced and repaired, power-washed to refresh.
- Stairs and Handrails: To be removed and replaced per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Handrail downlights would illuminate the stairs between dusk and dawn hours.
- Install 16 feet x 24 feet modular aluminum stage expansion over existing concrete stage. (Future phase)

Plantings

- Retain all existing trees. Remove all existing ivy from the upper canopy of all trees to the lower branches. Prune all dead wood, broken branches, as required, consulting with a certified arborist.
- Remove all English ivy from base of trees, walls, lights, and other vertical elements where ivy is undesired.
- Install new planter pots for landscaping per attached drawings.
- Install new annuals, perennials, bulbs and grasses in coordination with the City's General Services Department (GSD).
- Planting areas will be covered with a minimum of 4" of shredded hardwood bark mulch.

Other Park Changes

- Paint street art on crosswalks and mid-block murals per City approval and Michigan Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices guidelines.
- Perimeter Pole Luminaires: Acorn top lights to remain, upgrade to LED fixtures. Ornamental fluted poles and bases to be re-painted. Where fixtures are damaged, will be replaced in kind.
- 100W and 300W projection lighting to be installed for Paradise Valley image projections onto nearby buildings at: 267 Grand River Avenue, 1465 Center Street, and sidewalk adjacent and interior to Park (not in roadway).
- Install new festoon lighting and poles.
- Interior uplights in pavers, wall washers, and tree uplights would be removed and replaced with LED fixtures, as well as the light under the concrete stage.
- Interior black sawtooth sculpture would be cleaned and relocated into the northerly planting island of the park. The water blade fountain would remain in place.
- Sound speakers, furniture, and litter receptacles would be removed and replaced per attached details.
- Michigan Registered Historic Site Markers "Germantown" and "The Harmonie Club" would remain, as well as Detroit Recreation Departments' "Beatrice M. Buck" Paradise Valley Park marker.
- The MoGo electric bike station would remain in place.
- Replace power pedestals with Legrand 30A and 20A GFI receptacles for food truck plug-ins and device charging stations.
- (A former proposal for high grass pillar structures depicted in earlier concept drawings has been deleted from this proposal.)



Figure 3 by Applicant: Gratiot Plaza Plan, showing the proposal. Changes include closing off opening to Randolph and Gratiot corner with new wall, moving sculpture to the corner from the center of the plaza, adding a new stair to the middle center of the plaza, and adding festoon/ overhead lighting, tables, and chairs. The area below the dashed orange line includes the portion of the plaza/outlines the work which is located with the district's boundaries. The area of the plaza above the dashed orange line is outside of the district. Therefore, only the proposed work below the dashed orange line is subject to HDC review while the area of work above the dashed

Gratiot Plaza

Hardscape

- Repair and replace perimeter concrete sidewalk with concrete sidewalk where needed.
- Stairs and Handrails: To be removed and replaced per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Handrail downlights would illuminate the stairs between dusk and dawn hours.
- Interior uplights in pavers, wall washers, and tree uplights would be removed and replaced with LED fixtures.
- Replace power pedestals with Legrand 30A and 20A GFI receptacles for food truck plug-ins and device charging stations.

Plantings

- Retain all existing trees. Remove all existing ivy from the upper canopy of all trees to the lower branches. Prune all dead wood, broken branches, as required, consulting with a certified arborist.
- Remove all English ivy from base of trees, walls, lights, and other vertical elements where ivy is undesired.
- Install new planter pots for landscaping per attached drawings.
- Install new annuals, perennials, bulbs and grasses in coordination with City's GSD.
- Planting areas will be covered with a minimum of 4" of shredded hardwood bark mulch

Other Park Changes

- Perimeter Pole Luminaires: Acorn top lights to remain, upgrade to LED fixtures. Ornamental fluted poles and bases to be re-painted. Where fixtures are damaged, will be replaced in kind.
- Interior uplights in pavers, wall washers, and tree uplights would be removed and replaced with LED fixtures.
- Install new festoon lighting and poles.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

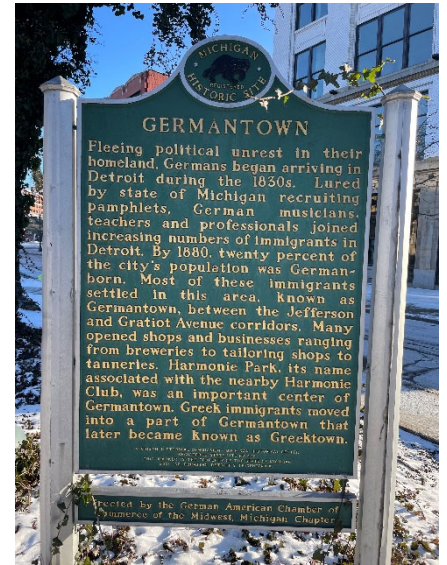
- Madison-Harmonie Historic District was established in 1988.
- Staff found the following Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) for Beatrice Buck Park:
 - March 2009: “Paradise Valley Streetscape and Open Space Improvement Project Phase II”
 - April 2009: installation of post and gateway signage
 - July 2009: install Beatrice Buck Park plaque/sign
 - May 2017: install a bike rack.
- As an aid to identifying distinctive historic character-defining features which require preservation, establishing a period of significance for a district is important. The HDAB designation report does not provide a period of significance. For the Madison-Harmonie Historic District, staff posits that the period of significance is 1895-1924, which is when most of the district’s historic buildings were constructed. As previously noted, staff determined that no physical elements remain in the park from the district’s period of significance. However, in staff’s opinion, the park retains certain non-tangible, historically significant features which remain from the district’s period of significance and therefore should be retained, to include the following:
 - The remaining historic buildings surrounding the park create *walls of continuity* that enhance the edge of the park visually and structurally.
 - Historically, the park has had *flexible use*, accommodating temporary changes over time, and is *open and accessible* for all. Entertainment, music, nightlife, but also study, repose and quiet have all been historic uses of this space.
 - Although slightly lower than street grade, and surrounded by a mid-height rock wall, views into, through and across the park creates a “town square” in and around the park, *maintaining visual sightlines* that creates a visual connection from the building edge across the park to building edge.
- It is staff’s opinion that the work proposed to be undertaken within the park, per the revised application made final on Feb 2nd, will not destroy historic materials, features, or spatial relationships that characterize the property and/or nearby surrounds within the district.
- For information only, and not included in the historic district, the following items are proposed at the Plaza outside of and adjacent to the district (see Figure 3):

Hardscape

- Repair and replace perimeter concrete sidewalk with concrete sidewalk where needed.
- Stairs and Handrails: To be removed and replaced per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Handrail downlights would illuminate the stairs between dusk and dawn hours.

Plantings

- Retain all existing trees. Remove all existing ivy from the upper canopy of all trees to the lower branches. Prune all dead wood, broken branches, as required, consulting with a certified arborist.
- Remove all English ivy from base of trees, walls, lights, and other vertical elements where ivy is undesired.
- Install new planter pots for landscaping per attached drawings.
- Install new annuals, perennials, bulbs and grasses in coordination with City’s GSD.
- Planting areas will be covered with a minimum of 4” of shredded hardwood bark mulch.



Site Photo 8, by Staff January 17, 2024: Historic State Marker for Germantown, located at the west edge of the park.

Other Park Changes

- Relocate the sculpture “The Entrance” by John Piet from the center of the plaza to the corner of the street per the attached drawings. Clean and repaint sculpture.
 - Remove corner entrance stairs, connect concrete retaining walls, add interior plaza paver area.
 - Perimeter Pole Luminaires: Acorn top lights to remain, upgrade to LED fixtures. Ornamental fluted poles and bases to be re-painted. Where fixtures are damaged, will be replaced in kind.
 - Install new festoon lighting and poles.
 - Paint street art on crosswalks and mid-block murals per City approval and Michigan Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices guidelines.
 - Replace power pedestals with Legrand 30A and 20A GFI receptacles for food truck plug-ins and device charging stations.
- Staff observed that the streets surrounding the park, Randolph, Centre, and E. Grand River, are made of non-historic materials: asphalt, concrete curbs and concrete. It is staff’s opinion that the proposed street art may be appropriate. However, staff observed that the proposal does not yet include a specific design, color and material finish (paint type) to fully understand the visual impact of the proposed street art.
 - The City of Detroit’s General Services Department (GSD) has indicated that they are generally in support of the project’s direction and defers to the Commission regarding the work’s requirement to meet historic district guidelines.
 - It is staff’s opinion that the work proposed within the portion of the Gratiot Plaza which extends into the district meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and complies with the district’s Elements of Design.



Figure 4 by Applicant: Gratiot Plaza rendering, showing proposed alterations. Changes include closing off opening to Randolph and Gratiot corner with new wall, moving the sculpture “The Entrance” to the new location, closing the corner intersection from the center of the plaza, installing a new stair at the back center area of the plaza, and adding festoon/ overhead lighting, tables and chairs.

ISSUES

Beatrice Buck Park

- Staff observed that some details for the proposed planting plan, street art, and banners have not been fully developed. Staff offers the following guidelines as these plans move forward for development, based on the district's Elements of Design and the historic, character-defining features of the park previously described:
 - Staff recognizes that Harmonie Park has had a history of entertainment, night life and is a part of the urban fabric of the city. The main features of the park described in the Elements of Design are the sunken central area surrounded by the stone wall, the stone (blade) fountain wall and the spacious seating areas under the shade of the locust trees. Staff offers an overall recommendation to maintain the general historic spatial organization of the park, which creates a “quiet enclave” as described in the HDAB report above, by resisting the potential to overfill the park with programming or physical things, thus, maintaining the *flexible use* and *accessibility* characteristics of the park as previously described.
 - Plants, banners, or other features shall maintain historic sightlines throughout the park, so as not to overpower, block or obscure open viewsheds in or outside the park.
 - The final planting/landscape plan once developed, unless minor in scope, will be returned to the Commission for review.
 - Street art or street murals are introduced at a minimal and appropriate scale so as not to overtake or call undue attention to itself or overpower the park.
 - Colors of street art or signs may reflect the historic character of the park that reflect or echo those of the parks surroundings, as described in the Elements', *Relationship of Colors*, whose list of colors are extracted from the surrounding architecture of the park: red, buff, white, brown brick, colored tiles, green and tan mosaics, tan Mankato stone, and gray masonry.

Gratiot Plaza

- Strictly within the limits of the historic district, staff has no issue with the addition of a stair and other planting recommendations in the plaza.

DETROIT CITY CODE SECTION 21-2-5 – EFFECTS OF PROJECTS ON DISTRICTS

Per *Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-5, Effects of Projects on Districts*, the Commission is required to provide comment to the Mayor and City Council as to the “demonstrable effects” of any “City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development” within or adjacent to an historic district. To reiterate, the current project proposes to undertake work in the Beatrice Buck Park, which is located within the district, and the Gratiot Plaza, which is partially located within the district. As both properties are owned by the City of Detroit, the work shall be defined as a City authorized physical development project in and adjacent to the Madison Harmonie Historic District and is therefore subject to HDC comment regarding any effects it might have on the district. However, given the operating agreement in effect for this and other downtown parks, it does not appear that the City holds any additional discretionary review over the proposed changes. Per the above observations:

- It is staff's opinion that the work proposed within the Beatrice Buck's Park meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and therefore is likely to have a beneficial effect on the district
- It is staff's opinion that the work proposed within the portion of the Gratiot Plaza that extends into the district meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and therefore is likely to have a beneficial effect on the district
- The work proposed within the portion of the Gratiot Plaza that is located outside of /adjacent to the district includes the following:
 - Hardscape
 - Repair and replace perimeter concrete sidewalk with concrete sidewalk where needed.
 - Stairs and Handrails: To be removed and replaced per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Handrail downlights would illuminate the stairs between dusk and dawn hours.

Plantings

- Retain all existing trees. Remove all existing ivy from the upper canopy of all trees to the lower branches. Prune all dead wood, broken branches, as required, consulting with a certified arborist.
- Remove all English ivy from base of trees, walls, lights, and other vertical elements where ivy is undesired.
- Install new planter pots for landscaping per attached drawings.
- Install new annuals, perennials, bulbs and grasses in coordination with City's GSD.
- Planting areas will be covered with a minimum of 4" of shredded hardwood bark mulch.

Other Park Changes

- Relocate the sculpture "The Entrance" by John Piet from the center of the plaza to the corner of the street per the attached drawings. Clean and repaint sculpture.
 - Remove corner entrance stairs, connect concrete retaining walls, add interior plaza paver area.
 - Perimeter Pole Luminaires: Acorn top lights to remain, upgrade to LED fixtures. Ornamental fluted poles and bases to be re-painted. Where fixtures are damaged, will be replaced in kind.
 - Install new festoon lighting and poles.
 - Paint street art on crosswalks and mid-block murals per City approval and Michigan Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices guidelines.
 - Replace power pedestals with Legrand 30A and 20A GFI receptacles for food truck plug-ins and device charging stations.
- It is staff's opinion that the above-listed work items which are proposed for completion within the portion of the plaza that is outside of /adjacent to the district does not have the potential to adversely affect the historic district.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness

It is staff's opinion that the project generally conforms to the Elements of Design for the district and meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the Master Plan as proposed with the following conditions:

- The signage and street art plan be reviewable by staff for appropriateness or returned to the Commission for further review.

Section 21-2-5, Effects of Projects on Districts

The Commission is asked to provide an advisory opinion concerning the potential effect of the proposed development project both in and adjacent to the district. This is distinct from the permit review decision based on Section 21-2-78, above.

Conditions under which adverse effects generally occur, as suggested by City Code Section 21-2-5:

1. Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;
2. Isolation from or alteration of all or part 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.