18240

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Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1D
1380 Monroe Street NW, #117
Washington, DC 20010

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Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to offer my support for the Mount Pleasant Library's proposed variance to allow it to complete construction of the addition. Although advisory neighborhood commission 1D (ANC1D) has allowed residents to speak at meetings discussing this project, I hope that this letter will contribute to that discussion with minimal burden to ANC1D's time and energy at the upcoming meeting on July 13, 2011.

To reach a balanced and fair decision, ANC1D must carefully consider all of the relevant information, including opinions from city experts already offered in this matter. The neighborhood and, indeed, all of ward 1, deserves a modern library facility just as other neighborhoods already have.[1] From discussions I have had with neighbors and from messages posted on our online forum, it is clear that the there is broad support for this library addition. Moreover, the city already has devoted roughly $11.5 million in public funds to renovate the library and an additional $1 million in legal fees and design changes to address concerns raised by neighbors and petitioners in this matter.[2] If the challengers are successful, this money would be wasted along with the cost of dismantling what has already been constructed. In addition, the library likely would remain closed indefinitely as the city is currently running a budget shortfall and members of this community along with other residents of ward 1 have discouraged public

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[1] The Watha T. Daniel library in Shaw was completed last year and received national acclaim as one of the best examples of American architecture in 2010. *See* Wall Street Journal Online, *Best Architecture of 2010* (Dec. 24, 2010), *available at* http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704457604576011463998077344.html?mod=wsj_share_twitter.

[2] *See* Washington City Paper, *Zoning Board Rules Against Mt. Pleasant Library Expansion* (June 24, 2011), *available at* http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/housingcomplex/2011/06/29/zoning-board-rules-against-mt-pleasant-library-expansion/.

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investment in this important project.

The crux of the challengers' argument against construction of the library addition appears to be fire safety. As discussed below, these concerns have been addressed and should no longer obstruct completion of the library addition or cause further waste of public funds.

I. The Fire Marshall Approved the Plans for the Addition

Although the challengers vehemently decry the Fire Marshal's statements, the fact remains that the city's top official on fire safety has approved the plans for the library addition. Plans for the library addition have been discussed since 2008 through an open and public process. The D.C. Public Library (DCPL) and D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services (DCFEMS) have considered many concerns raised by challengers and, as a result, have made several modifications to the design of the project. The final plans for the addition, which stands nearly half-complete, were approved by the Fire Marshall. In an email to Councilmember Jim Graham and DC Fire Marshal Bruce Faust, former DC Fire Chief Dennis Rubin describes a site visit with Mr. Faust to consider concerns raised regarding the need for an access road in the rear of the building. Mr. Rubin states that "[he did] not see the need nor can [he] support this suggestion as improving the fire operations and life safety requirement for any of the buildings that are adjacent to the library."[3] He explains that the risk of significant fire hazard would be reduced significantly by fully sprinkling the library. Moreover, he adds that the "very best plan for fire protection of the apartment buildings in question would be to have them sprinkled also."[4] As for access by fire hose, Mr. Rubin states that, generally, "the goal is to get a fire engine close enough to a structure so that with only 150' of fire hose it can reach all sides of a building."[5] Thus, a fire access road between the library and the apartments was unnecessary particularly given that one does not currently exist.

II. The Tragedy of the Deauville Need Not Impede Construction

In March 2008, DCFEMS responded to one of the worst fire tragedies in recent history in this city. Although the building owner had been cited for more than 7,000 housing code violations, the city had intervened and the landlord had made repairs in the two years prior.[6] Nonetheless, the nearly 200 residents of the Deauville lost most of their

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[3] June 2, 2010 email from Fire Chief Dennis Rubin *available at* http://www.mtpleasantdc.org/forum/viewtopic.php?p=23871&sid=8bdeaea14dc79a190cd39cde7ec88022.

[4] *Id.*

[5] *Id.*

[6] *See* Washington Post, *Victims of Fire Pick Up Pieces of Their Lives* (March 25,

personal belongings. Amazingly, they made it out alive thanks to the heroic efforts of DCFEMS. The residents were placed in temporary housing and since have been receiving subsidies to afford more permanent housing over the past three years.

Today, these residents have much to celebrate. With over $4 million in public funding, the tenant association of 3145 Mount Pleasant purchased the property and, with over $10 million in additional public funding, the association is now poised to reconstruct.[7] There also is good reason to believe that the reconstructed Monsenor Romero Apartments will be far superior to the former facilities. The same construction team, architect and builder, is responsible for the rehabilitation of the nearby St. Dennis and Parkfair apartments. The rehabilitation of the St. Dennis has been praised as a total reconstruction offering many modern conveniences to low-income residents.[8] In addition, the building will offer larger units meaning less density in the dwellings, which is a serious fire concern. According to IBF development, we can expect the same from the Monsenor Romero Apartments.[9]

Considering the progress made on securing safe and modern housing available to low-income residents, there is no reason to fear the development of the library expansion. As described above, the city has invested millions of public funds in the purchase and reconstruction of the Deauville. Through this, the city has proven its dedication to the residents who lost so much in that fire in 2008. It would be unreasonable for the city to promote a public project, such as the library, if it was not convinced that the project would not cause any substantial risk to its investment at the Deauville. As described above, the city's former fire chief and fire marshal agreed that the construction of the library addition will not pose any threat to the apartments on Mt. Pleasant Street and the best protection against fire for both the library and the apartments is the installation of a sprinkler system, which has become a standard practice in new construction in D.C. In fact, under the D.C. Code, the Fire Protection Study Commission has the authority to identify categories of buildings that should be required to install sprinkler systems.[10]

2008) *available at*: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/24/AR2008032403126.html.

[7] *See* IBF Development, *The Monsenor Romero Apartments available at*: http://www.ibfdevelopment.com/?page_id=1088. According to this web site, the tenants association has secured roughly $14.2 million in public funds towards the acquisition and reconstruction costs totaling $16.9 million.

[8] *See Strong Hearts, Crumbling Brick* (May 2011) *available at*: http://dcmud.blogspot.com/2011/05/strong-hearts-crumbling-brick.html.

[9] *See Supra* note 7.

[10] D.C. Code § 3-1103 (2011).

Finally, it is important to note that the tragedy of the Deauville was not the fault of a poor response from DCFEMS. The emergency personnel who responded to the fire worked tirelessly and heroically to rescue the residents of the building. There is no reason to now question their judgment on the fire safety associated with construction of the library addition.

III. The Expanded Library Will Allow Sufficient Fire Access

Although the Fire Marshal and representatives at DCPL may not have pointed this out as part of the fire safety plan, the expanded library maintains sufficient open space for fire personnel to access the rear of the apartment and condo buildings on Mt. Pleasant Street. This access is obvious from the official site plan rendering used by Commissioner Jack McKay in his poster announcing this special meeting.[11] According to the official rendering, the expanded library maintains the existing south side yard, which leads directly to the rear of the library and the residences on Mt. Pleasant Street. In addition, the expanded library maintains the existing north side yard leading from Lamont Street to the rear of the library and the Mt. Pleasant Condo. In the event of an emergency, these side yards could be used as access to the rear of the library and the residences on Mt. Pleasant. Thus, there is sufficient access for emergency personnel.

IV. Unless ANC1D Votes to Oppose DCPL's Variance, Chairperson Gregg Edwards Should Not Represent ANC1D on this Matter

Gregg Edwards has expressed his support of the District Dynamos, who oppose the construction of the library addition. Unless ANC1D votes to support the efforts of the District Dynamos, ANC1D should not allow Mr. Edwards to represent the ANC. Mr. Edwards has expressed fanatic opposition to the library addition and his behavior before the board has been cited as "totally inappropriate."[12] For these reasons, I urge ANC1D to consider appointing another representative in this matter; a representative who can represent the views of ANC1D in an impartial and professional manner.

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[11] *See* July 5, 2011 from Jack McKay to ANC Listserv, *available at* http://groups.google.com/group/anc1d/browse_thread/thread/5fd936c3e7389656#.

[12] *See* Somer Mathis, *Mt. Pleasant Library Fight Still Percolating Amid Construction* (Feb. 2, 2011) *available at*: http://www.tbd.com/blogs/tbd-neighborhoods/2011/02/mt-pleasant-library-fight-not-over-yet-8004.html.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the members of ANC1D to not oppose DCPL's proposed variance, which would allow them to complete construction of the Mt. Pleasant Library.

Sincerely,

/s/ A. Cory Lankford