

Zoning Commission Hearing
McMillan Park and Sand Filtration Plant Site
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Library Renaissance Project
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Organization

Library Renaissance Project (LRP) is a nonprofit organization that researches and provides information about the DC Public Library (DCPL) to its members and the general public in the interest of advocating for the institution of the public library in Washington DC.

Relationship to McMillan

McMillan Park came to our attention because local members alerted us that there had been strong interest in seeing a public library included in the redevelopment plan for the park and historic sand filtration plant site. We found that provision of a library was among the recommendations in a report from the Office of Planning & Department of Housing and Community Development entitled *McMillan Sand Filtration Site: Summary of Recommendations for Site Revitalization*, dated February 2002 (already submitted in agency record).

Recent History of Library Planning in DC

DCPL has been planning and undergoing a system-wide “transformation” consisting of rebuilding and building new libraries city-wide for the past two decades. Nearly \$500M has been expended or committed so far for 18 libraries including the central MLK Jr. Memorial Library. Transformation of the entire system of 26 existing libraries will be completed within five years.

Periodically throughout this process, the Board of Library Trustees has entertained ideas for additional library sites but LRP could find no references to McMillan. When asked about McMillan, the Trustees' Facilities Committee Chairman Neil Albert noted that McMillan met DCPL's requirements for location. However, there has been no coordination between DC planning agencies and DCPL regarding McMillan. Therefore, it had not come to the Trustees' attention.

10A DCMR 1317.2

One of the basic purposes of the Comprehensive Plan is to improve the linkage between development and capital improvement decisions.

There appears to have been no linkage between citizens' request for a library, duly published in 2002 as a recommendation by the Office of Planning, and DCPL-- the agency responsible for considering, funding and constructing a public library facility. This seems to be a clear violation of the “purposes” of the Comprehensive Plan: to “provide linkage between development and capital improvement decisions.” What makes this especially egregious is the ongoing planning for transformation of the DC Public Library system, including consideration of new library locations, throughout the very same time

period as that of planning for McMillan Park and Sand Filtration Plant redevelopment. The enormity of the opportunity missed is immeasurable.

1103.14 Policy CSF – 1.18 : Co-location

Encourage the co-location of multiple community services in the same facility provided that the uses are compatible.

Not meeting the recommendation of local citizens to build a library as part of the redevelopment is particularly poor planning as it could have been co-located with a planned recreation center. DCPL has co-located four libraries highly successfully as part of its transformation: Northwest One with a school, Parklands Turner in a shopping center, and two libraries Rosedale and Deanwood with Recreation Centers.

Libraries and Gentrification

Libraries uniquely serve all populations, at all ages, and all economic and education levels. The digitization of information has altered our dependency on physical books, newspapers, encyclopedias and other information resources traditionally housed in libraries. Yet, libraries remain highly popular. In fact, their use and growth continues to increase. Libraries have always been places for passive cultural activities -- like lectures and viewing displays of art and photography – as well as civic meetings, but have become in recent years alternative locations for meeting friends and even working. As people increasingly teleport or work from portable digital devices, the Library has become a workspace, a lounge, and even a creative outlet through access to recording studios, musical instruments and lessons, and “maker”space with access to tools and 3D printers.

Everyone benefits from access to libraries but those citizens who are less financially secure or even homeless rely on libraries for much else – safe space, a bridge across the digital divide with free computer access, literacy and GED training including citizenship and language lessons for new residents, lifelong learning for seniors, health screenings, prenatal information, even opportunities for families of the incarcerated to skype with relatives in the DC jail.

Building a substantial new development without access to a library, especially one that met DCPL requirements for location, one that could have been integrated into an ongoing library planning and funding process, if only planning agencies had carried out the coordination called for in the Comprehensive Plan, is a missed opportunity that affects everyone. However, the lack of a library with its free access to so many resources – from safe space to music lessons to college scholarship application access – will much more severely affects those at the lower end of the economic scale.

Respectfully submitted,



Robin S. Diener