

Testimony on the FY2011 Performance of the District of Columbia Public Library
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Susan B. Haight

Ward 2 Resident
President of the West End Library Friends, Washington, DC
President of the Federation of Friends of the DC Public Library

Chairman Wells and members of the Committee:

Good afternoon----

Your role in providing oversight for the operations of the District of Columbia Public Library System is an important and much appreciated one. I and the members of the Federation of Friends and individual Friends groups applaud your efforts.

I am testifying on behalf of the West End Library Friends (WELF). I have been a resident of the West End for the last ten years and President of the Friends since 2007. We are a non-profit 501 (c) 3 incorporated in 1990 to support the West End Library Branch, its various activities and programs.

In 2011 our group had approximately 80 dues paying members almost all of whom live in the West End/Foggy Bottom neighborhood. We are looking forward to a new facility, presently scheduled for 2015, as the Zoning Commission gave preliminary approval of the PUD for the West End project where our new facility will be located at Monday night's hearing. We proactively supported this re-development process since its inception, and we are extremely pleased that this project has been approved..

This afternoon I am going to make three requests:

1. That you continue to actively support the West End project to ensure that the end result is a new modern library that is fully equipped with the requisite materials and staffing and allocated funds necessary for proper maintenance and security to meet the changing needs of the community,
2. That you increase the Library budget by \$10M for FY 2012-2013, and
3. That when new or expanded facilities are planned, such as the West End Library, you give deference to documented community groups made up of neighborhood residents and local users of the branch library over activists. This would allow the library system to keep transforming itself in a timely and cost-efficient manner.

Regarding funding:

I believe the Chief Librarian and the library staffs are doing a Herculean job in providing well balanced library services that honor the "wants and needs" of the public they serve. I understand that budget cuts required tough choices and there are many challenges to maintaining a vibrant operating entity with existing funds.

If you look at the numbers, DCPL IS doing much more with less money. Library use has increased by 300%, serviceable square footage has increased by 30% with further expansions underway, yet funding has decreased for library materials, maintenance, security, and staffing. An increase of funds from approximately \$34M to \$44M would go a long way to offset the cumulative reduction of \$__ million in funding implemented over the last _ years.

Lack of funding has reduced evening hours and forced our neighborhood organizations to scramble to find other locations for their evening meetings or to suspend them entirely, and children, teens, and entire families have been denied a place to gather and thrive because the West End Library is no longer open on Sunday.

An increase in funding will go a long way to not jeopardize the library services our community so clearly needs.

As you review the libraries performance for 2011, please consider how an additional \$10M will significantly help improve library service for 2012, 2013 and beyond.

Regarding deference to documented Community groups:

As I stated previously WELF has been involved in the redevelopment process for our new facility for _ years. In light of a resolution to excess the property for a pending public-private development of Square 37, where the West End Library is located, our branch was cut from the 2009-2012 DCPL capital budgets. The Friends were concerned that there would be no capital available to build a new facility. To be proactive, we became integral to the collaborative and consensus building public-private process which resulted in the recently approved West End project proposal. We believe that this proposal provides the best opportunity for a new, modern and revitalized library in the West End in spite of the objection from activists who are not from our community, namely the DC Library Renaissance Project.

Our ANC, the Foggy Bottom Association, the West End Friends, and West End Civic Association ---all community groups ---continue to support our position. The objection of the DC Library Renaissance Project and the association it formed recently to participate at the Dec./Jan. Zoning Commission hearing and spearhead recent lobbying efforts, created considerable consternation in our community because they are pursuing an agenda that is not aligned with majority of West End residents and neighbors. There is much concern that this activist group has the potential of delaying a much needed new library facility for the West End.

We submit that these “activists” have assumed a destructive mantle each time they’ve come in to a community and yet claiming to have the interest of good libraries at heart, and we do not want that to happen during the West End Library development process. We respectfully request that you defer to the documented community groups involved.

Thank you.

Susan B. Haight