



# HISTORIC MOUNT PLEASANT

January 11, 2010

Mr. Harry Thomas, Jr., Chairman  
Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 105  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: Roundtable on Library Capital Contracts and Community Engagement Activities

Dear Councilmember Thomas:

Historic Mount Pleasant welcomes the invitation for further public discussion of the D.C. Public Library's (DCPL) ambitious construction program but regrets that, as the notice for today's event was not posted until this past Friday, we will be unable to appear and present the kind of statement the situation merits. We request that a full public hearing be scheduled as soon as possible with appropriate notice so that all interested groups and individuals can participate.

In testimony before the committee on March 16, 2009, I described some of the failings of public notice in our neighborhood that led to an inadequate design process for a substantial addition to the historic Mount Pleasant Branch Library. While a design has now been approved in concept by both the US Commission of Fine Arts and the Historic Preservation Review Board, opposition to it remains widespread among residents and potential users. The fundamental problems that continue to be raised regarding the "design," however, really call into question the "program" developed by DCPL for this site. Established "design review" processes, including our own within Historic Mount Pleasant, look primarily to property owners to decide how to use their buildings and lot areas.

The two issues that seem to underlie continuing opposition are the overall size of the addition and the length of the ramp. The size, as my testimony last March indicated, is required primarily by DCPL's desire to have a 100-person meeting room, the need for which many have questioned. The length of the proposed ramp follows from DCPL's insistence – again, against the repeated objections of residents and other users, notably disability rights advocates – that the library should have one point of controlled entry, preferably on the first floor. As the first floor is seven feet above grade, and the lower level three feet below, moving the "accessible" entrance to the upper level as proposed necessarily involves substantially lengthening the ramp. The need for a single point of entry reflects, we understand, DCPL's concern over likely budgetary shortages in the future that will prevent it from fully staffing both levels of the renovated library.

In short, while we have worked with DCPL to improve the design for the addition, we remain disappointed with the result. The Mount Pleasant Branch Library is in urgent need of renovation. It is also the last and the largest of the three Carnegie branch library buildings and a unique architectural

asset to the city as a whole. We would have expected any substantial change to it would have been proposed only after a thorough review of citywide library needs and facilities and development of a master plan that took into account both the special place of the Carnegie buildings in the system and their individual attributes. Instead, Takoma Park has now been beautifully restored inside and out, and Mount Pleasant is proposed for a thorough renovation including substantial interior demolition and a dramatic change in the overall appearance of the building.

We do not believe the broader issues concerning the renovation of the Mount Pleasant Branch Library have received the attention they deserve. We would welcome an opportunity to address them in more detail in the future.

Sincerely,

*Fay Armstrong*

Fay Armstrong  
President

cc: Mr. David Catania  
Mr. Kwame Brown  
Mr. Phil Mendelson  
Ms. Yvette Alexander  
Mr. Jim Graham