

February 5, 2009

VIA E:MAIL AND REGULAR MAIL

Ms. Ginnie Cooper
Chief Librarian
D.C. Public Library
901 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Mount Pleasant Branch Library Renovation

Dear Ms. Cooper:

As organizations deeply committed to the Mount Pleasant neighborhood, we are writing to request an urgent meeting with you to discuss the proposed renovation and expansion of the Mount Pleasant Branch Library. In addition to its importance to Mount Pleasant, this structure is a center of community life for neighboring communities that do not have libraries of their own. Like your agency, we are anxious to see the library restored and updated to serve the communities of Ward One. However, we believe that further public dialogue and consultation is necessary to meaningfully inform the design process.

The library is the most significant architectural structure in Mount Pleasant and was identified as such in the 1985 application to designate our neighborhood as a historic district under D.C. law. The application noted that although the library had been “[p]lagued throughout the years by inadequate staffing and funding,” it had not fallen “prey to serious remodeling and retains its original design and details.” As DCPL’s plans have become clearer, strong opposition has emerged within the neighborhood to the principal new element being proposed – an addition on Lamont Street that many find objectionable from aesthetic, historic and functional perspectives. A few specific points illustrate our serious concerns about the proposed design:

- A guiding principle in historic districts is to place building additions at the rear, where there is little or no visibility from the street. A clear opportunity exists to do that in this case, but the architects propose instead to place it on the street, significantly altering the overall appearance of the building.
- The proposed two-story glass addition appears to have been formulated without consideration for the larger surrounding neighborhood. Additions to historic structures should be deferential in impact to the original building. The proposed glass box draws the eye away from the original façade and detracts from the original building. Given its location on a narrow residential street, it would serve at night as an intrusive bright light into the windows of the low-rise residential buildings nearby.

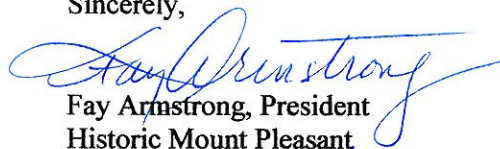
- Proposed changes to the front entrance would make building access more rather than less difficult than it is today for individuals not able to climb the steep front stairs. In place of the current accessible entrance that many use for its convenience, the architects propose 155 feet of switchback ramps to allow individuals in wheelchairs or with strollers to get up to the existing front door. Better alternatives are surely available in a project this size.
- The material proposed for the side of the ramp, COR-TEN steel, is not compatible with the limestone façade of the original building and is not appropriate for such prominent use in a historic district. Moreover, the ramp and related berm would further alter the symmetry and balance of the architectural design of the building.

Historic Mount Pleasant (HMP) had planned to address design concerns – which generally relate to the exterior of buildings in the historic district – in the ordinary course of business with the Historic Preservation Office and Review Board. However, after finally having had the opportunity to meet with the architects and the DCPL project manager last week, it became clear that the exterior design has been largely driven by the use requirements (the “program”) laid out by DCPL. Accordingly, we believe the design issues cannot be successfully resolved without considering at the same time how the internal space is being used.

The identification of resources to make long overdue repairs and improvements to the library presents an important opportunity for everyone who cares about the library and how it relates to our communities to be heard. According to your agency’s website, DCPL held three sparsely-attended “community” meetings last year: 14 community members attended a meeting in March; 19 attended a meeting in June; and 25 attended a meeting in October. At the October meeting, the President of HMP provided DCPL project managers with her card and asked to meet with them and their architects to discuss the design. However, it was not until last week that this meeting occurred. The architects acknowledged that at the time of the October “community” meeting, virtually all of their design work was completed. So, as far as we know, the proposed design reflects no meaningful consultation within our neighborhood about the significant changes to the library under consideration.

We ask you to meet with us at your earliest convenience to discuss these issues. Please contact HMP President Fay Armstrong at either 202-387-2734 or 202-375-3739 or via e:mail at farmstrong@verizon.net.

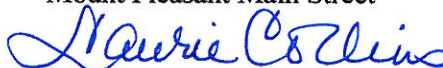
Sincerely,



Fay Armstrong, President
Historic Mount Pleasant



Adam Hoey, President
Mount Pleasant Main Street



Laurie Collins, President
Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Alliance



Phil Lepanto, Steering Committee Member
Hear Mount Pleasant
and ANC Commissioner for ANC1D-01

Cc: Councilmember Jim Graham
Sarah Latterner—Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services