

WE ARE FAMILY

Senior Outreach Network



Concerns About the Proposed New Ramp at Mount Pleasant Library

October 20, 2009

I am writing to you on behalf of We Are Family, an award-winning outreach and advocacy network that assists low-income seniors in Wards One and Six of Washington, D.C., in order to express our concern about the new ramp proposed for the renovated Mount Pleasant library. This library is a crucial community institution, intended to serve all of Ward One; we need to make sure it is fully accessible to senior citizens and disabled residents. We fear that the proposed new ramp is too long, too steep, and not inviting or dignified.

We Are Family is a community non-profit deeply rooted in this neighborhood. We do an immense amount of work on slender resources, bringing services, advocacy, and companionship into seniors' homes by mobilizing hundreds of community volunteers in the Columbia Heights, Mount Pleasant, Adams-Morgan, North Capitol Street, and Shaw neighborhoods. Our organization rises directly out of the elder population, using a uniquely effective model in serving our seniors. Many of those with the greatest need frequently do not know about the services available, or have difficulty accessing them. As a result, it is critical to build a bridge between those in need and the resources that exist in DC.

With senior leaders who live in our service areas operating as our front-line ambassadors and most effective volunteers, We Are Family creates that bridge. We reach out to needy seniors in their own homes with services, advocacy, and friendship to help them live independently and well for as long as possible. Grounded in grassroots senior leadership, and driven by our diverse roster of volunteers, We Are Family brings services, advocacy, and friendship into the homes of over 450 isolated, low-income seniors each month. Ultimately, we construct a network of caring eyes and ears that enables vulnerable seniors to age in place, and to retain a voice in community affairs.

We know that many of our seniors might have difficulty utilizing the proposed new ramp, which seems too steep and too long. In addition, we find it deeply unfortunate that the ramp's design would force them to essentially enter the library through the back door – a situation that not only has ugly historical resonance, but simply is not dignified or respectful. Community institutions need to take special care to be inclusive, not only of disabled folks in general, but especially of those elders who built our community in the first place.

Our seniors grew in a Washington, DC that was deeply segregated. They witnessed the terrible destruction of the 1968 riots, and lived with its heart-wrenching aftermath of poverty, drugs, gangs, and violence. As gentrification brings both danger and opportunity, we need now more than ever to be sure to listen to the voices of those who came before, those who built the community.

We look forward to helping our seniors participate more fully in the redesign of the Mount Pleasant library. We hope that those responsible in city government will listen closely to the voices of our elders and reconsider this poorly designed ramp.

Sincerely,

Mark Andersen, Co-Director, We Are Family senior outreach network

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