

Archives Advisory Group

Semiannual report to the Council of the District of Columbia

May 2022

The Archives Advisory Group (AAG) was established by the Archives Advisory Group Act of 2020 and sworn in on November 18, 2021. The Group is charged with advising the Council of the District of Columbia on the construction of a new archives facility for the District, with “access to all draft and final documents relevant to planning and costing a new archives facility” so long as the requests for documents are made through the Chairman of the Council.

Since the swearing-in, the AAG has held a public meeting every second week (with the exception of the end-of-year holidays) and testified in the oversight and budget hearings for the Office of the Secretary (OS), the Department of General Services (DGS), and the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). AAG members met with staff members of Councilmember Mary Cheh, in whose Ward the new archives facility will be constructed at UDC/Van Ness. The Group has also corresponded with Chairman Mendelson and Councilmember Anita Bonds, whose Committee on Housing and Executive Administration oversees the Office of the Secretary, which is responsible for the archives. AAG members toured the Naylor Court building of the DC Archives and the DC History Center and provided information to a reporter from the *Washingtonian*, whose brief piece on the facility appeared in the magazine’s May issue.

Real advances have been made in establishing a foundation for the new archives. Most important, Dr. Lopez Matthews was appointed to the post of Public Records Administrator and State Archivist, filling a position that had been vacant for over a year and a half. The AAG is also pleased that DGS initiated a sole source contract with the architectural and engineering firm Hartman-Cox for the design of the facility, as Hartman-Cox has been the contractor for most of the studies previously undertaken for the new facility and has designed other archives facilities in the United States. We are puzzled, however, that this contract, the bid for which closed on February 5, has not been awarded as of late May 2022. The AAG was encouraged that the Senior Advisor to the Mayor testified that additional funds for construction will be proposed in the FY 2024 city budget.

The AAG notes with satisfaction the interest in the archives facility project shown by Councilmembers Bonds and Robert White, the chairs of both key Council committees responsible for the archives construction project. We are encouraged that Councilmember Bonds suggested a hearing devoted to the planning for the archives facility and that Councilmember White proposed moving \$1 million from his Committee on Government Operations and Facilities to that of the Committee on Housing and Executive Administration to energize the planning for the archives facility; we regret that proposal was not included in the final budget. The AAG also appreciates the language in the budget reports of the Committee on Housing and

Executive Administration and the Committee on Governments Operations and Facilities urging DGS and OCTO to work with the public and AAG while planning the new archives.

The AAG is frustrated that, despite our legislated authority, DGS has not responded to our requests for documents on the planning for construction of the facility, in particular the elements of the sole source contract it is issuing to the architectural and engineering firm Hartman-Cox for the design of the archives.

After six months of careful attention to the planning for the new archives facility, the Archives Advisory Group has the following principal concerns:

1. The budget for the construction of the archives facility, currently \$71 million, is seriously inadequate to construct a building that will meet the needs of the archives program. DGS must update the estimated cost of the facility, the Council must be ready to act upon the revised estimate, and contractor Harman-Cox must be informed of the projected amount while in the design phase of the project.
2. The staffing of the Office of Public Records Management, Archival Administration and Library of Government Information (OPR) is completely inadequate to the demands of preparing and moving into a new facility and operating it once it is open. The Council needs to ensure that the construction project is not impeded by the lack of personnel resources, both official FTE and contractors to OPR, and to provide additional funding to meet the needs.
3. The legislation governing OPR is outdated. It needs review and revision to ensure it is an adequate legal framework for the 21st century archives.
4. DGS is not responsive to the AAG's request for documents related to the archives project, despite the specific legislative authorization for the AAG to have access to them.

This is a pivotal year for the archives facility construction project. The Archives Advisory Group will be closely monitoring the project as it goes forward.

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