

TESTIMONY
Before the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor

On behalf of the Archives Advisory Group of the Council of the District of Columbia
by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, Chairperson

February 10, 2023

My name is Trudy Huskamp Peterson. I am testifying on behalf of the Archives Advisory Group. Our mandate, as outlined in the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Support Act of 2020, is to “advise the Council of the District of Columbia about Project AB102C in the District’s Capital Improvement Plan to construct a new archives facility for the District of Columbia.” The Group was sworn in on November 18, 2021 and has provided the Council with two semiannual reports.

Today I am providing the views of the Archives Advisory Group on the current conditions and capacities of the Office of the Secretary with regard to the planning and development of a new archives facility for the District of Columbia. First, I will discuss the major steps that have been taken during calendar year 2022. Then I will turn to the issues the Archives Advisory Group thus far has identified that affect the construction, move and operation of the new archives facility. Finally, I will summarize what needs to happen now to have a safe, successful move into the new facility.

A. Achievements in 2022

The Archives Advisory Group applauds the progress that was made in 2022 by the Office of the Secretary for the advancement of the Archives of the District of Columbia.

The appointment of professional archivist and historian Dr. Lopez Matthews as the State Archivist and Public Records Administrator is an enormous step towards realizing an archives that is professionally managed and a vibrant resource for the city. His cooperation with the AAG has been excellent, and we look forward to a fine continuing relationship with him.

Also in 2022 Hartman-Cox Architects with EYP provided both a preliminary (September) and final (November) Program of Requirements for the new archives facility, followed by a Concept Design Submission in December. Each of these is a substantial document that points the way to the development of a state-of-the-art archival facility. The AAG met with representatives of Hartman-Cox to discuss the first Program of Requirements and also submitted written comments on it; unfortunately, DGS did not make public either of the other two documents until the first week of February 2023 and provided no opportunity for public input.

B. Issues affecting the construction, move into and operation of a new archives facility

The Archives Advisory Group has identified issues that are critical to the successful completion of the new archives facility. We stress that these issues long predate the current personnel of the Office of the Secretary and that resolving them has been greatly impeded by the Covid crisis and by lack of funds allocated to the archives program. Nevertheless, they need immediate attention by the Administration in support of the Office of the Secretary.

1. Ensuring adequate staff to prepare for the move and to operate the facility.

Years of neglect have resulted in a staff sized to barely keep the door open, retrieve records and put them away again. The 7-person staff (one more person than in 2021) cannot possibly conduct the survey of holdings in agencies that is required to prepare for the move, nor can it

do the essential coordination of identifying where the records are now located and where they will be placed in the new repository.

No master list exists of the location or nature of all the records destined for the new Archives building. Records in archives' custody are stored in the current Naylor Court building and with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, but agency records are in at least two dozen other facilities, according to Hartman-Cox. The current Hartman-Cox calculation of storage capacity required in the new building is based on statistical assumptions because, the consultants wrote, there is an "absence of accurate survey data." They strongly urged the city to conduct agency records inventories and appraisals in order to reconcile the assumptions and planning premises: "effective move planning will require it."

It is absolutely necessary—and we will testify as such at the budget hearing—that the Secretary be given the authority to hire and the funds needed to increase the permanent staff and to contract for the additional, special work needed to prepare and effect the move.

2. Increasing public awareness and support. The Archives Advisory Group is aware of the near invisibility of the archives among many of the citizens of the District of Columbia. We believe that this period of planning and construction of the new facility is the right time to inaugurate a public outreach program showing the stages of the building process, the work that goes into it, and the opportunities that the public will have to use the new facility. Again, the Secretary's tiny staff will be hard-pressed to do this, but surely the time is now.

C. Summary of needs for a safe, successful move into the new facility

The Archives Advisory Group advises that to undertake serious move preparation, the Office of the Secretary needs:

1. Authority to hire and funding for personnel required for planning and executing the move.
2. Resources to complete a comprehensive survey of the city's records.
3. Funds for the rest of the planning phases and for the construction of the facility.
4. A series of public engagements, to help OPR review and refine the public programming contemplated for the new facility.

Building an archives facility for the District of Columbia is a once-in-a-generation opportunity. Administrators, archivists, architects, researchers and all interested others must work closely together to ensure that the building will be a landmark worthy of a capital city and its citizens.

Thank you for your attention, and I would be happy to answer any questions.