

**Performance Oversight Hearing:
Committee on Government Operations
Councilmember Brandon Todd, Chair**

Office of the DC Secretary

Friends of the DC Archives

Testimony of Carl Bergman

Wilson Building Room 412

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, DC, 20004

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

9:00 am

Good morning, Chairman Todd and members of the Committee. My name is Carl Bergman and I represent the Friends of the DC Archives. (FDCA). Formed six years ago, FDCA is a group of professional archivists and concerned citizens interested in the preservation and management of the DC Government's records and archives.

DHRAB Funding. Today, my testimony centers on the state of planning for the new archives facility at UDC. Before I address that issue, I want to comment, briefly, on the need to fund the District Historic Records Advisory Board or DHRAB and the Office of Public Records' (OPR) budget.

As the committee is aware, the DHRAB needs \$200,000 to begin its work. Similarly, OPR's current funding is inadequate. We will expand on these issues when we testify on the Office of Secretary's budget.

DC Archives Facility. In July 2018, the Office of Secretary and UDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding to locate the new Archives at UDC.

The plan required UDC to vacate its Building 41, which would be demolished for the Archives. In turn, UDC would move its Building 41's operation to 4250 Connecticut Avenue, NW.

Since then, however, we know of no real progress. That is, no contracts for any work have been let in two years. We have been told that the Archive's cost estimate of \$73 Million is too low. Furthermore, we're told UDC's 4250 Connecticut Avenue funding also is inadequate, but we have no hard information on either.

Planning History. As I will spell out, the history of planning for the new Archives is replete with dire warnings and missed opportunities. Here are some examples:

2003 Post article, "*City's Records Center Compiles a History of Neglect.*" It quoted: Sherryl Hobbs Newman then the District Secretary:

The archives have not been a priority and "absolutely" need more staff and money.

Prompted by the Post article, the Society of American Archivists wrote Mayor Williams:

We sincerely hope that you and the members of the City Council will take steps to ensure that the DC Archives receives the funding that it needs to survive, and that work begins at once to save these records from loss.

For ten years the issue made no progress.

2013 - The FY 2014 budget included \$44.5 Million for an: "Archives Building comparable to state archives in managing their historical records."

2014- Hunter Vision Report. DC hired Dr. Gregory Hunter, a noted expert in both government and corporate archives, to review its holdings and develop a vision for the future. He made several findings and recommendations:

Another 10 year delay will cause irreparable harm to the historical legacy of the District, including the failure to capture and preserve records now created in digital form.

OPR does not have a current inventory of District records, which makes planning very difficult. A detailed records inventory is an essential part of the architectural programming phase for a new facility.

2015 - DGS hired Hartman-Cox to determine the Archives' requirements. Its Preliminary Programming Report recommended a 135,000 gross square foot facility at a cost of \$75 Million. The report said:

Further survey work and appraisal is needed in order to finalize designs for storage spaces and shelving systems.

In order to be of value for the design process, this survey work needs to be performed by a qualified archival appraising firm or by trained records management personnel.

DC needs to allocate temporary resources to OPR to undertake this process. OPR does not have the space, staff, or other necessary resources to complete this work.

We recommend that the City engage a move consultant as soon as possible.

2016 - FY2017. Capital Budget for new facility increased to \$84 Million. The request stated that the funding will allow the Archives to relocate to a site that meets several criteria outlined in the Hartman-Cox report.

2017 - FY2018 Archives Capital budget set the appropriation at \$81.3 Million. The \$3 Million drop was not explained. The project had no activity planned until FY2020.

2018 - Hartman-Cox's OPR & UDC Co Location Feasibility Study. The consultants were hired by DGS to look at the MOA's potential. After Hartman-Cox performed considerable analysis, the SOW was modified to make the new facility meet a lower funding level.

The design team met with the Office of the Senior Advisor on September 13, 2018 to present the draft report of Study Cases 1-3 as outlined in the MOA. Following the discussions, which included the review of the budget projections, the project team was asked to set aside the MOA criteria and to consider a scheme that could potentially be implemented within the limits of the capital funding that the City has already allocated for this project. "P18.

2019. FY2020 Without explanation, Budget drops to \$73 Million.

Recommendations' Status. First, let's look at where the two major studies' major recommendations stand. Table I Archives Recommendations shows where these stand.

Table I Archives Recommendations			
Year	Report	Recommendation	Status
2013	Hunter Vision Report	A detailed records inventory is an essential part of the architectural programming phase for a new facility.	Not Done
2015	Hartman-Cox Programming Report	Further survey work and appraisal is needed in order to finalize designs for storage spaces and shelving systems.	Not Done
		DC needs to allocate temporary resources to OPR to undertake this process.	Not Done
		We recommend that the City engage a move consultant as soon as possible.	Not Done

Each of these is a major, necessary step to determine how large the facility will be. The move recommendations are needed to know just what should be moved and the resources needed to do it. However, planning has moved ahead without laying this groundwork.

LEED Certification. In 2017, Mayor Bowser announced:

We are proud to be recognized as the world's first LEED Platinum city. Our commitment to these issues will not yield, and we look forward to continuing to build a greener, more resilient, and more sustainable DC."

When Hartman-Cox was ordered to modify its work to reduce the project, there were only so many corners it could cut. In order to stay within the budget, it cut \$3.98 Million for LEED certification.

LEED certification is a methodology to insure that a building meets its requirements in an economical, efficient, and environmentally sound manner. This approach permeates each phase of planning to operation.

The new DC Archives facility will be the most environmentally, mechanically and architecturally challenging facility ever undertaken by the city. To begin this project without the full knowledge of what is to go inside it, what logistics it will require, lacking a sound methodology and making fit an arbitrary budget is unwise to say the least. As plans now stand, on the day the new Archives opens it may well be obsolete, inadequate and costly. The city would have spent \$73 Million and failed in almost every respect.

Planning Dysfunction. The history of planning for the new facility is worth reviewing as an object lesson in the District's haphazard approach to planning its facilities. In this I do

not blame the Office of Secretary, DGS, or UDC. They bear some culpability but are more victims than offenders. Rather, it's the failure of the District to establish a central, facilities planning function.

No agency in the DC government looks at public needs and then develops facilities to meet them. As a result, our agencies build a lot of single use buildings. The few exceptions, such as the new Shepherd Park Community Center by Recreation and Schools, proves the rule.

As a result, we strongly urge the committee to examine the full nature of planning for the new facility. There are many issues that need to be explored, both about the adequacy of the UDC proposal.

Finally, we recommend that the committee report to the full council on the need to review our current facility planning process and to fashion a policy that addresses the needs of the public and the city government.

