



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

February 26, 2020

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Mayor
Government of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004
muriel.bowser@dc.gov

Councilmember Brandon Todd
Chair, Committee on Government Operations
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 105
Washington, DC 20004
btodd@dccouncil.us

RE: Need for a New, Permanent Facility for the DC Archives

Dear Mayor Bowser and Councilmember Todd,

At its regular meeting on February 19, 2020, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A (“ANC 2A” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With seven of eight commissioners present, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission voted unanimously (7-0-0), after a motion made by Commissioner Kennedy and seconded by Commissioner Epstein, to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the DC Archives and the Office of Public Records (OPR) serve the key public purpose of storing, protecting, and organizing the government documents that constitute the most universal records of District residents and those of the government that serves them.

When pieced together, these documents tell vivid stories about ordinary people of all races, classes, and genders, from all eight wards, representing both communities that exist and ones that have been lost. These documents allow both historians and family genealogists to reconstruct the lives of ordinary residents.

Additionally, the Archives holds records of public figures, objects, and private collections of public interest. Among other things, these collections chronicle the struggles for home rule and civil rights that have defined the District.

WHEREAS, the current facility used to store DC’s valuable historical documents is a converted stable in Naylor Court, off 9th Street NW in Shaw, that does not meet industry standards for security, fire protection, document preservation, and public access.

The facility was commissioned in 1990 but immediately fell into disrepair due to budget cuts in the 1990s. Between that time until the restoration of the HVAC system in 2018, poor climate control allowed DC heat and humidity to severely damage paper, photographs, and objects, many of which were never separated from mold or materials that degrade them, metal paperclips, oils, and glue.



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

Secondly, the current archive facility is too small, leaving government records scattered across District buildings and rented spaces. Indeed, the majority of public documents held by OPR are stored at a National Archives and Records Administration facility in Suitland, MD at a cost of over \$600,000 per year, and the full cost of offsite storage is difficult to calculate because this excess storage is paid for by the agencies that generated the records.

Finally, the lack of proper reading rooms means that the Archives are substantially not available to the public. The limited access citizens and historians have strained staff resources, and it is impossible to accommodate school or university instruction, a common practice elsewhere. When space is available, researchers must work in record storage areas, a major security risk.

WHEREAS, even the best conditions outlined above are not normal for peer institutions, such as ones that store state-level documents or those of major cities. Similarly, these conditions would not be considered acceptable for a university archive or private records collection.

WHEREAS, most peer organizations operate independently of the executive branch of government, either as independent agencies, or governmentally-chartered institutions. In contrast, key decisions about the DC Archives are made by the executive. The independence of other archives reflects an understanding that the cycles of government and politics are not conducive to the long-term planning and operations critical to a successful archive.

WHEREAS, between FY 2015 and FY 2019, Mayor Bowser and the DC Council appropriated over \$80 million to construct a new DC Archives facility and to transfer and conserve the records currently stored in rented spaces. This latest action occurred after a long period of citizen activism and after District agencies proposed several inappropriate locations.

In addition to this appropriation, capital funds from earlier building proposals remain assigned to OPR, unexpended, while the office’s operational budget is insufficient for the backlog of conservation work.

WHEREAS, at the September 27th, 2018 hearing on the “District Historical Records Advisory Board Amendment Act of 2018” (DC Council Bill B22-0842), the Office of the Secretary announced that a new-construction archive, record, and education facility would be constructed at the University of the District of Columbia. The Secretary stated that construction would begin in 2019.

WHEREAS, as of December 31st, 2019, no contracts for design or construction of these facilities have been issued and no land transfer agreement between the University of the District of Columbia and the Government of the District of Columbia existed, or has been made public.



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

WHEREAS, at a time of major change in the District of Columbia, ANC 2A recognizes the need for a new facility and resources to make public records a public resource.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that ANC 2A requests that the Mayor and the DC Council secure a site for the DC Archives and the Office of Public Records at the University of the District of Columbia, design a facility, and begin substantial construction within eighteen months of this resolution.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is a matter of fiscal responsibility that the Mayor and the DC Council expend funds appropriated from their constituents to preserve their own history in a timely and efficient fashion. Appropriations from earlier capital plans not dedicated to establishing a new facility at the University of the District of Columbia should be spent completing the 20-year backlog of conservation work.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mayor and the DC Council should create a lasting legacy for the citizens of the District by establishing an independent District Records and Archives Agency, governed by a Mayorally-appointed board of specialists and citizens.

This independence is the most effective way to ensure that a new facility is put to use in a timely fashion and that the operations of the Archives are consistently and freely funded in the future.

Commissioner Patrick Kennedy (2A01@anc.dc.gov) is the Commission’s representative in this matter.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Sincerely,

Patrick Kennedy
Chairperson

CC: Councilmember David Grosso, At-Large
Councilmember Elissa Silverman, At-Large
Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, Ward 1
Councilmember Trayon White, Ward 8
Beverly Perry, Senior Advisor to the Mayor
Nicole Goines, Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services



Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

“Serving the Foggy Bottom and West End communities of Washington, D.C.”

Kimberly Bassett, Secretary of the District of Columbia

Rebecca Katz, Public Records Administrator, Office of Public Records