

Friends of the D.C. Archives organizing meeting
Ben's Chili Bowl
April 18, 2014 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Attending: Bill Branch, Andrew Cassidy-Amstutz, Danna Bell, Clarence Davis, Bill Rice, Trudy Peterson, Lucy Barber, Mary Beth Corrigan, Kevin Clinton, Anne McDonough, John Suau, Bergis Jules, Bernard Demczuk, Matt Watson, Susan McElrath, Jennifer Krafchik. Not present: Ida Jones, Bill Brown.

Current state of D.C. Archives

There an appropriation of \$44 million scheduled for disbursement between 2014 and 2016. There is a legitimate fear this money will be absorbed into other projects. The appropriation includes the relocation of three divisions into one facility: DC Archives, Office of Public Records, Library & Gov't information. Now, records are scattered throughout metro area, effort is to bring all of those under one roof, 44 is nowhere near enough money.

Sewell Chan's 2003 article about neglect at Naylor and resulting outcry led Mayor Williams to include \$40 million in capital budget for DC Archives near end of administration, but funds evaporated after Fenty took office. The Gray administration responded to Secretary and Archives who established that, if there is no additional space, the documentary record of the city's history will be lost. The situation has only become worse.

Currently the city spends millions of dollars spent for storage of records throughout the city. Archives has been compiling a comprehensive inventory of city's records throughout the city to help plan an appropriate space. The inventory includes records held by the National Archives that will transfer once there is an appropriate facility for the city archives.

Department of General Services is overseeing this project and has selected a designer. Bill Rice pointed out that Gregory Hunter has been engaged as a consultant. Is he the designer? The group agreed that we needed more information on this consultant.

Developers want the Naylor Court property and have offered lots of money. That money could go towards constructing new building or renovating a building.

Cynthia is forming an advisory panel that will offer advice regarding the design of the building. (Includes Danna and Trudy).

The city has a history of not planning these facilities well. At this time, the city is also planning a renovation of MLK Library and Events DC is entering into a partnership with HSW. At this time, the city has not established temporary homes

for either of these repositories. The discussion was focused on the actions this group could take to hold the city to this appropriation.

Clarence asked for an outside advocate to bring pressure to bear to get adequate appropriations]. The group agreed. In the words of Bernie: "we are your lobbyist, Clarence." The group would advocate specifically for the D.C. Archives. It would be an ongoing group. This is especially important because there is no advocate for the Archives.

Potential advocates:

Clarence noted that there is no one within DGS who is an advocate for the Archives. Bernie said he would work on that, as he is having lunch with Allen Lew, City Administrator. He believed that someone in his office should be advocate. Clarence and Bernie will work on that. Bernie is having lunch with Allen Lew next week.

Bill said that the two most interested city council members are David Grasso, and Kenyon McDuffie, head of Government Operations Committee. Both of them have toured the DC Archives. McDuffie's staff is interested in this.

Bill has also been talking to Steven Campbell, head of planning at DGS. He believes that we should approach Brianne Nadeau (who has not been elected as council member of Ward 1). He mentioned that John McGaw, capital budget, is not an advocate but not a hindrance.

Trudy said that she could approach with Tommy Wells and his successor Charles Allen.

Bernie has been appointed to the 40th anniversary of home rule committee. The Archives should be part of that programming. Clarence mentioned that the DC Archives has records that document the relationship between home rule and emancipation.

Budget hearing is May 1. Bill Rice recommended that we testify as a group. The more testimony, the better. We should be advocating for more money.

Outreach

John pointed out that HSW has a membership database can lend support, over 10,000 names. He requested a press release about the formation of the Friends of the DC Archives. There should be a fact sheet. Anne offered to photograph storage locations, but Clarence said that he had these photos already. Photographs can help people visualize the problems with the city's records management practices.

Discussion around what should be included in the building. Matt pointed out that the Recorder of Deeds Building hold a significant body of records, including the

Register of Wills and deeds. There was discussion of other buildings where caches of records were held. DC Schools, Fire and Police Department records are held separately. Perhaps, this is an interesting angle to get people interested in the Archives. These records are endangered.

The Phase I survey of the records has been completed. Phase II is in process. The survey has not included the electronic records yet. Danna mentioned that NARA has been wrestling with problems with managing electronic records. DC Archives will need to wrestle with the same regulations. DC Archives is involved in State Electronic Records Initiative.

Lucy said that the focus should stay on the need for a building. Without the building we are nowhere. There should be language that points up the need to anticipate technological needs from the ground up.

How do we present our case to the public? We need anecdotal evidence of what we're losing. Success with elected representatives is using stories about people have found value in archives. The challenge is messaging.

Danna mentioned that there was a campaign following the announcement by the state of Georgia that it would dramatically reduce the staffing of its state archives. They used amazing stories and managed to get their funding back

[Lessons Learned While Saving the Georgia Archives:
<http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol31/iss1/6>; example of community call put out to support Georgia Archives:
<http://duluth.patch.com/groups/pamela-nyes-blog/p/bp--save-the-georgia-archives>; National Coalition for History call for support:
<http://historycoalition.org/2012/09/17/action-alert-help-save-the-georgia-state-archives/> ; "The Society of Georgia Archivists put together a [great slide show](#) filled with information about why saving the Archives is important. The show also provides background on the budget. Pack your letters to elected officials with these facts!"]

Trudy said that DC Archives will need to plan for new technologies and plan for the second expansion because you will not get the money again.

What is this group to be called? John suggested a formation of a coalition to gain grassroots support for history organizations. What is the role of historical organizations like AASLH, AHA, OAH, and NCPH.

Lucy pointed out that it is best to keep it simple. "Friends of" groups are formed commonly to raise money, circumvent regulations, and advocate when they are endangered. John wanted the group to think more broadly, but Bernie and others said that we would advocate for HSW when appropriate, but this focus of this

organization needed to be the DC Archives. The most important goal is to get a proper building.

Bergis said that we needed to communicate the national significance of the DC Archives. Convey the scope of the building. Talk about the extent of records (Anne suggested to measure it in miles). Convey as concretely as possible the dangers.

Bernie made a motion that we form the Friends of the DC Archives. The organization gets five minutes to testify, three minutes as an individual. Trudy, a DC resident, will testify for the group. Mary Beth and Trudy are co-chairs. Approved unanimously.

Lucy will look into whether Kathleen Williams, executive director of NHPRC, can testify (depends upon Clarence's opinion). Perhaps John LeGloahec should testify for MARAC.

Bill pointed out that the DC Archives is woefully short of staff. Any proposal needs to recognize staff along with buildings and technology. We need to address long-term sustainability of Archives.

Matt pointed out that testimony has virtually no impact. We need to do but more important is getting staff members at the council, looking for after the new people come in January, that there's someone in every office.

Next steps

- Press release prepared by Bill Rice that will address the following topics: the need for more money; planning that should include survey, consultant, and plans for electronic records from the beginning; summarize the needs, dangers, risks and rewards. Bill is to pass it by Mary Beth and Trudy. We are to pass it on to Anne. This should be ready for distribution by Thursday, April 24.
- May 1 hearing: compile list of people to testify
- Reach out to major professional organizations: AHA, AASLH, etc. (Andrew to bring issue to MARAC DC Caucus and steering committee).
- Lunch and learn on May 16: Bernie conducts "lunch and learn" sessions with council staff. The next session is on May 16 and it will be on the DC Archives.
- Reach out to researchers who use DC Archives
- Tours of the Archives

- Meetings with Grasso, Catania and Bowser – timing TBD
- Next meeting of the group to be schedule in 3-4 weeks when we will discuss outreach, including online visibility and community meetings.