

**Testimony before the Committee of the Whole, Phil Mendelson, Chair,
Monday, March 7, 2016, 10 am, Room 412**

The Association of the Oldest Inhabitants is the District of Columbia's oldest civic organization. Founded in 1865, we have long promoted the preservation of and access to the District's history. The city's evolution and history are preferred topics at our well-attended monthly luncheon meetings. We were the driving force in returning Shepherd Statue to the front of the Wilson Building, keeping the DC War Memorial on the Mall from being re-designated as the national WWI Memorial, directing attention to recognizing and improving Pershing Park and promoting the preservation and maintenance of both the L'Enfant and McMillan plans.

We have strongly supported the requests of multiple administrations to rehabilitate or replace the DC Archives. We are encouraged that plans seem to be progressing which would stabilize the current facility on Naylor Court to protect its contents while efforts continue to design, build and staff a new facility to permanently house the District's historic records and, for once, help to ensure compliance with legislation regarding the city's administration of its public records.

We are anxious to see the planning for the D.C. Archives to proceed and a top-notch facility created. It is most important that planning for this new facility embrace the highest possible level of inter-agency cooperation. This will help ensure that the new facility integrates the storage and preservation of physical records and objects with the rapidly changing digital business processes to make material and information easily available both online and in-person. Equally important is improved and reliable funding to properly staff the new facility. It is critically important in the meantime to stabilize and secure the Naylor Court facility to ensure the safety of its irreplaceable contents.

Cooperation across agencies is particularly important when it comes to preserving the large volume of existing District government records. As we noted in our comments to OP on the District's historic preservation plan, these records include building plans, permits, photographs, surveyor's records and other materials that show the historically important changes to our buildings and environment. It is all too common for these records to be scattered, un-inventoried, inaccessible and in danger of being discarded or destroyed through neglect. This is why we are reaching out to key agency directors and the Council. Secretary of State Vaughn seems enthusiastic about the progress and scope of this initiative and wants to ensure there is Council support behind it.

The AOI has always had an intimate interest in the physical wellbeing of the District's archives' Naylor Court building not only because of the wealth of city history which it contains but interestingly, and not known to many, because our Past President Dr. Philip W. Ogilvie served as the District's first archivist and promoted the consolidation of the archives at the Naylor Court location under the leadership of former Mayor Barry which both viewed as further evidence of Home Rule and self-determination. We feel compelled to continue this vision but in a state-of-the-art facility.

Since 2005, the AOI has sought to call attention to the 'plight' of the District's historic records -- the DC Archives, the Historical Society of Washington, the Recorder of Deeds, the Washingtoniana Division and the Sumner School Museum and Archives. The condition of many of

these repositories has improved during the intervening years. The AOI and other preservation groups are thoroughly behind these efforts.

In order for all of these historic repositories to be successful, they each need to be recognized for their unique mission and plans for each of them should separately address their individual needs and the funding for each should be approved and applied appropriately.

If the District and its leaders can identify funds for and negotiate deals for stadiums and practice facilities for its sports teams, certainly they can ascribe the same – if not more -- importance to the preservation of our city's historic records.

Thank you on behalf of our members, our Board of Directors, other preservation organization with shared goals and on behalf of the District's citizens for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William N. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "W".

William N. Brown, President
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