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Call WACIF to RSVP:
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Additional WACIF information can be found at www.wacif.org
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Interim Library Reviews Mixed

Washington Highlands Construction Negotiations Still Promised

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

The Washington Highlands interim library unlocked its doors, just after December's big snow, with none of the usual "opening" hoopla. Reaction to the interim location, 4037 South Capitol St. SW, has been mixed, while disagreements regarding the permanent location, 115 Atlantic St. SW, persist.

"The interim location was not discussed with the community in advance," Advisory Neighborhood Commission 8D Chair Theresa Jones told a special meeting held on Jan. 20 at Hadley Hospital. Neighbors worry about children and elders crossing the busy thoroughfare. The glass windows have become targets for snowballs.

In addition, says ANC Commissioner Kay Armstead (8E06), "The new location is not a safe haven for kids. Now that it's on the main street, everything that goes on on the main street is carried over into the library."

Manager Laura Gonzales, who joined the Washington Highlands staff in September 2008, reports, however, "Aside from the occasional disruptive student - which we had at the old location, too - we haven't had fights." On the contrary, she says, more elementary students are using the library.

"We're much busier than we were when we were around the corner," Gonzales adds. "And we've had a lot of positive feedback about the new location and layout."

Gonzales finds community members excited about the prospect of a new building.

Jones, meanwhile, says the community is still waiting for promised negotiations regarding the new design, local job creation and safety of neighboring buildings during construction.

"Eventually the debate has to stop," Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry said at the Jan. 20 meeting, noting that construction contracts are signed.

"I know that the conversation has to stop somewhere," Jones responded. "But it has to start. I have asked for a negotiation meeting between the ANC and the Library staff, but we have never been able to have that."

Community leaders asked for memos of understanding regarding various aspects of the project.

Barry's last words to the Jan. 20 gathering were, "We are going to put together a negotiating session."

Asked on Jan. 26 about the status of this negotiation, Barry said he had no time for this topic; a staff member directed to answer the question did not follow up.

A Library spokesperson reports: "The Library will be working with residents to come up with an agreement where the Library will repair any damage caused by construction of the new library. The ANC will be included in the discussions about that agreement." No meetings were scheduled as of Feb. 1.

Contact Washington Highlands Library at 202-243-1184 or visit dclibrary.org/washingtonhighlands. ★



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Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor, Government of the District of Columbia