



## **ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3E**

**TENLEYTOWN   AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK   FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS**

**CHEVY CHASE                      WAKEFIELD                      FORT GAINES**

**c/o Lisner-Louise-Dickson-Hurt Home 5425 Western Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20015**

**[www.anc3e.org](http://www.anc3e.org)**

February 13, 2020

Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on Government Operations  
Chairperson Brandon T. Todd  
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**Whereas**, the DC Archives and the Office of Public Records 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 events, 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**Whereas**, the current facility used to store DC's valuable historical documents is a converted stable in Naylor Court, off 9th Street in Shaw, that does not meet industry standards for security, fire protection, document preservation, and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, such as metal paperclips, oils, and glue.

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 other rented facilities are paid for by the agencies that generated the records.

Finally, the lack of proper reading rooms means the archives are substantially not available to the public. The limited access offered to citizens and historians has strained staff resources, and it is impossible to accommodate school or university instruction, a common practice elsewhere. When space is available, researchers often 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 D.C. 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 FY2015 and FY2019, Mayor Bowser and the D.C. Council appropriated over 80 million dollars to construct a new D.C. 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 the office, unexpended, while its operational budget is insufficient for the backlog of conservation work.

**Whereas**, at the September 27th, 2018 hearing on District Historical Records Advisory Board Amendment Act of 2018 (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 exists, or has been made public.

**Whereas**, at a time of major change in the District of Columbia, this Commission recognizes the need for a new facility and resources to make public records a public resource.

**Therefore, Be It Resolved** that the Mayor and the Council secure a site for the DC Archives and 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 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 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 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.

At its regular meeting on February 13, 2020, the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 3E considered the matter of Funding for the DC Archives. With Commissioners Bender, Hall, McHugh and Quinn in attendance, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission approved the following resolution by a unanimous vote of 0-0-0.

On Behalf of the Commission,

Jon Bender, Chairperson

CC

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