

CITY OF OAKLAND



OAKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY • 125 - 14TH STREET • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94612

February 19, 2019

Jahmese Myres, Chairperson
Oakland Planning Commission
250 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza
Oakland CA 94612

RE: Downtown Specific Plan

Dear Chairperson Myres,

In January, Joanna Winter and Alicia Parker from City Planning presented an overview of Downtown Specific Plan to the Library Advisory Commission. We were interested in the breadth and detail of the plan but dismayed by the complete absence of additional/enhanced library services or facilities. Library advocates have attended planning meetings and expressed their desire for the inclusion of a New Main Library for Oakland in the plan since the community outreach meetings of 2015, and we have reminded city staff of the importance of the library and the need to plan for expanded library services which cannot be accommodated in its current site. The library is a city function and a city responsibility—a core city service that needs to be included in the plan for a new downtown as the city is evolving.

While the role of libraries is changing, the need is not: great cities need great libraries. And this need is especially evident when you look at the vital role libraries play in addressing the key disparities your new plan purports to address, namely housing cost burden, homelessness, displacement, disconnected youth and the unemployment rate. Libraries meet the stated priorities of the plan, serving the disconnected, disempowered and homeless, and also serving as a community center and center for employment searches and resume assistance. Libraries are an important public place where culture is shared, and they play a critical role in community health. (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2017/03/30/how-public-libraries-help-build-healthy-communities/>)

As you plan for the transformation of downtown Oakland, we hope that the Planning Commission will direct staff to put the same level of analysis into getting a new Main Library built that it has put into analyzing vacant and underutilized lots for private sector development. The city of Chicago has been incorporating branch libraries into its affordable housing program in innovative ways, and we feel that Oakland needs to prioritize this vital city service as well. (<https://news.wttw.com/2019/01/24/new-chicago-buildings-combine-libraries-public-housing>) The Asian, Chavez and 81st Avenue branches of the Oakland Public Library were all built in partnership with new development, and the Downtown Plan has a unique opportunity to realize a similar private/public development model with a new Main Library as well.

Thank you in advance for your consideration, and feel free to contact the Library Advisory Commission for any additional information or input you may need. Please visit this site for the Oakland Public Library's most recent Annual Report which details the breadth and effectiveness of library services in Oakland. (<http://oaklandlibrary.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017-18%20Annual%20Report%20OPL%20online.pdf>)

Sincerely,

Lesley Mandros Bell, Chairperson
Library Advisory Commission