

City Council Public Hearing
March 15th, 2003

My name is Sheryl Gorsuch and I am PTA President for Mount Vernon Community School. Our request is for City Council to mandate that the Duncan Library expansion project should include a specific plan for the public green space adjacent to that area and that a clear and visible entrance for the school be accommodated before a final footprint for the building has been chosen.

Our support for expanding Duncan library is not in question. Our families and students use the library everyday and we know that it is a highly used facility desperately in need of more space. Our main concerns lie in the common area between the MV Recreation Center, MV Community School and the library. This green space is used for many things including a fire drill assembly area for over 125 students and staff, an open space for children to run in, a waiting area for parents picking up children after school and as a place to read a good book outside.

The leading proposal for the Duncan Library Expansion appears to be one in which most of this open grass space would be lost when the library is expanded. This would also further obscure the school entrance from Commonwealth Ave. We are proud of our school and feel that as a central component of the community, it deserves prominent attention. We ask the school's prominence be maintained in some way, perhaps through a special awning for the school entrance, improvements to the signage and / or enhancements to the building façade. We are also concerned with the risk that a larger building poses for pedestrians, especially children walking to and from school. We would definitely need well marked crosswalks at driveway entrance on E. Uhler Ave and at the intersection with Commonwealth Ave.

A recent community survey asked "Which is more important to our community, library expansion or preservation of public space". We see the library expansion and the preservation of public space as equally important, and believe that a compromise could address both of these needs and balance these interests. One idea for the area which would create both an attractive and an appropriate use for the space would be a reading garden that could be used by library patrons, congregating parents, and students as an outdoor classroom. A central campus style area which integrates the 3 city buildings at this site would provide a coherent use of the common area. The school will still need space to accommodate a third of its students in the event of a building evacuation. We should be looking at ways to maximize the usefulness, aesthetics and greenery of the remaining space to balance against what would be lost to building construction.

The architects and General Services staff have received many ideas and concerns from the community yet there is little mention of these in the current proposals for the library expansion. We are concerned that there will be no definitive plan or funding considerations given for the remaining open space unless City Council gives clear direction for these issues to be addressed now. We are not asking for more money. Instead we are asking for the acknowledgement that compromises of space and cost decisions will be necessary to achieve the proper balance and greatest benefit for our community.

The best plan for the Duncan library expansion would be one that addresses these issues and could be cost effective if considered as part of the project. Please ensure we make the best long term decisions for this small corner in our community with a vision for the remaining open space and adequate consideration for school concerns while expanding the library space.