

Testimony of Brooksie Koopman

Although I am Chairman of the Library Board, I speak as an individual today as the Board has not voted on the green roof issue.

I speak this afternoon about the tremendous cuts the library system has taken in the 2009 and 2010 budgets and the proposed cuts for 2011 which bring us to more than a 13% reduction from the 2009 budget. To absorb these cuts, the library system eliminated almost 36% of its materials budget, maintained 25 staff vacancies, reduced one branch to an operation of three days per week and one Saturday a month, and canceled cleaning and security contracts. In July, every library will cut its hours by opening later and closing earlier. At the same time, library usage has increased more than 15% from two years ago.

The City administration explains that there is not enough budget money and that all groups must bear their share of cuts in this difficult economic environment. The library system has been a team player by reducing almost \$1 million from its budget since 2009.

The Library Board was surprised to find out that the City did, however, authorize \$172,000 from the 2010 capital budget to match a federal grant to put a new green roof on the Burke Library across from Hammond Middle School. This is even more extraordinary considering that the roof is only 13 years old, has never leaked, and has a useful life of 20 to 25 years.

The green roof proposal is ill-conceived. The project is driven by the availability of matching federal funds (a 55/45 match) and the laudable desire to enhance the City's reputation as a green community. The current roof structure is insufficient to support the additional weight of a green roof and the load-bearing capacity of the roof support system must be doubled to support the new roof. The library will be closed "perhaps" (according to TS & E staff) for three weeks while beams are installed.

I know the green roof funds come from the capital budget and the library desperately needs operating funds. I also know that it is rare to redeploy funds between capital and operational budgets and across years. Council approved the grant proposal last fall, but it is not clear that all parties were aware of the tremendous cost, understood that a perfectly good roof would be demolished, and that major structural work would be required. Specifically, the library staff and the Library Board were never consulted before the proposal was approved by Council.

I have a straightforward request. Transfer the capital budget funds for the green roof to the library's operating budget. This will allow the library system to provide services to the people of Alexandria--our fundamental mission. If our system were to receive \$173,000, it would allow all of our libraries to retain their current schedules for FY

2011. We recognize that a budget transfer of this type is unusual, but these are unusual times in which the library system has absorbed unusually large cuts.

The library system serves almost a million visitors per year and circulates in excess of 1.3 million items per year. The Burke Library roof does not need to be replaced at this time. Please transfer the roof funds to the library system's operating budget and consider other ways to supplement the library's 2011 budget so that we can continue to serve the citizens of Alexandria.

I am glad to answer any questions about my testimony. I can be reached at 703-549-3169, 703-615-2295 (cell) or at mreaton@comcast.net.