



**Testimony of
Caroline Petti
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
before the
Committee on Executive Administration and Labor
of the Council of the District of Columbia**

**Public Roundtable: DC Archives Building Project
December 14, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's Public Roundtable on the DC Archives Building Project before the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor. My name is Caroline Petti and, though I am a former member of the Council of the District of Columbia's Archives Advisory Group, I am testifying today on behalf of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. The Committee of 100 is the oldest non-profit planning organization in the District of Columbia. Founded in 1923, the Committee of 100 is dedicated to safeguarding and advancing historic distinction, natural beauty, and all that makes Washington, DC a desirable and inclusive place to live, work, and play.

The Committee of 100 appears before you today in strong support of the new DC Archives.

At present, DC's historic records, documents, artifacts and ephemera are scattered in temporary storage in various locations, many in a converted stable at 1300 Naylor Court in the Shaw neighborhood. Birth and death records. Marriage records. Land records going back to circa 1790. Wills. Frederick Douglass' will. George Washington's will. The original cast mold of a sculpture of Young Abraham Lincoln. So much of Washington's rich history stacked, uncategorized, in boxes and virtually inaccessible to historians or the public. I don't think anyone would disagree: the current arrangement in an old horse stable and scattered at various repositories across the country is simply inadequate.

After years of fits and starts, it's heartening to see a new consolidated Archives finally on a path to fruition. A site on the Van Ness Campus of the University of the District of Columbia has been selected and it's one that will mutually benefit the University, its students, and the success of the Archives. A contract has been awarded to one of DC's most respected architectural firms - Hartman-Cox - to design and engineer the new building. An esteemed State Archivist (Dr. Lopez Matthews) has been appointed to oversee the Office of Public Records and Archives. Core funding to build the new Archives has been budgeted and appropriated. And, now most recently, federal and local zoning and design reviews have been initiated and are nearly complete. Much progress has been made. There will be challenges ahead, but many are now behind us thanks in no small part to a constituency of effective advocates, a focused commitment by Mayor Bowser and key appointees such as Dr. Matthews, Beverly Perry and

Kimberly Bassett, and long-standing support from you, Chairperson Bonds, the Chairman of the Council and other Councilmembers. Congratulations to all who have worked so hard to bring this project to this point.

With regards to where we go from here, I'd like to say a few words about the opportunity the new Archives building affords for showcasing the District's commitment to environmental leadership. We should not let the opportunity go by. Whether it's record-breaking heat waves, wildfires, or flooding, not a day goes by that we aren't reminded of the environmental catastrophe threatening our planet and our city. The case for government leadership could not be more compelling and, considering how significantly construction and buildings figure into DC's environmental condition, we should focus much of our efforts there.

At this stage in the Archives design and development process, DGS plans for environmental performance should be more clear, but to a large extent they remain a mystery.

To her credit, Mayor Bowser continues to issue strong edicts on climate and environmental leadership. The University of the District of Columbia does, as well. How then to explain the apparent lackluster approach to sustainability at the new Archives? Even the National Capital Planning Commission has commented on it. Their design review comments on the project identified a number of important environmental improvements that ought to be considered:

- Encourages the applicant to consider designing to a LEED Platinum standard for the project given the urgency of climate change and the District's larger goals of sustainability.
- Encourages the applicant to plant additional trees, incorporate milkweed and other pollinator plant species
- Design all new proposed outdoor lighting to comply with International Dark-Sky Association standards.
- Recommends the applicant coordinate with the District Department of Energy and Environment regarding stormwater management requirements.

DGS' push-back on complying with the Greener Government Amendment Act of 2022, which requires government buildings to be designed to net-zero energy standards, is particularly troubling. According to DC's Department of Energy and Environment, all-electric net-zero energy buildings are essential for the District to achieve its climate commitment to be carbon neutral by 2045.

It could be that the details of DGS' plans to assure the environmental sustainability of the new Archives building have yet to be fully formulated or articulated. The Committee of 100 respectfully requests that the Committee on Executive Administration and Labor do what it can to encourage Mayor Bowser to direct DGS to improve environmental sustainability at the Archives building and live up to the District's climate commitments. In addition, we urge the Committee to request that DGS provide specific information on its plans for environmental protection and sustainability at the new Archives. Such request should include DGS' plans for complying with the Greener Government Amendment Act of 2022 and net-zero requirements,

DGS' response to NCPC's comments, and DGS' plans for incorporating environmental sustainability into each phase of Archives development including demolition of Building 41 and construction and operation of the new Archives building. Considering the decline of bird species, the Committee's request should include a request for information about DGS plans for bird-friendly design.

In summary, the Committee of 100 enthusiastically supports the establishment of a new Archives at the UDC Van Ness Campus. Renowned American historian, David McCullough, said it beautifully when he said, "History is who we are and why we are the way we are. We have to know who we were if we're to know who we are and where we're headed." We look forward to the day we all gather to celebrate the ground-breaking of a world-class Archives and model of urban sustainability.

Caroline Petti, Member
Committee of 100 on the Federal City
carolinepetti@yahoo.com