

July 16, 2010

Aaron Sage City of Berkeley Planning Dept. 2120 Milvia Street Berkeley, CA 94704

Re: South Berkeley Branch Library EIR comments

Dear Mr. Sage:

The Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA) is astonished at the lack of public process in the matter of the South Berkeley Branch Library EIR. We have seen no public announcements of the EIR public scoping meeting that was held on July 12, 2010. Although BAHA received notification by certified letter in late June, Peter Warfield of the Library Users Association informed us that he was notified by telephone a mere three hours before the public scoping meeting.

Was anyone else notified of the public scoping meeting? How was the meeting publicized, if it was publicized at all?

The current plans for demolition and rebuilding of the South Berkeley Branch Library are to be funded by the Library Bond Measure FF, which passed in the Nov. 2008 election. The language of Measure FF in the election ballot clearly stated (italics ours):

This bond measure would authorize the issuance of \$26 million of general obligation bonds. The bond measure specifies that *bond proceeds would be limited to renovation, construction,* seismic, and disabled access improvements, and expansion of program areas at the City's four neighborhood branch libraries, but not the Central Library downtown. Current plans for renovation include *restoration and refurbishment of historic features at the branch libraries as part of any renovation.*

We are therefore dismayed to find that current plans call for demolishing two branch libraries instead of renovating them as specified in Measure FF.

The South Berkeley Branch Library, designed by John Hans Ostwald in 1961, is

an architecturally significant building and a very fine example of Mid-Century Modern architecture. The building received the Berkeley Civic Arts Commission Community Award in 1965 and the American Institute of Architects/American Library Association Award of Merit in 1966. The meeting room addition of 1974 was designed by Ostwald's office, and its design is highly compatible with that of the original library building.

Subsequent to his design of the South Berkeley Branch Library, Ostwald was retained by the City of Berkeley to make alterations in the City Hall Annex (1963), design an addition to the Main Public Library (1965), and design the Art and Music Room in the Main Public Library (1968). Throughout the 1960s, Ostwald was in essence the chief library architect in Berkeley.

In the Branch Libraries Facilities Master Plan released in July 2008, Historic Consultant Frederic Knapp stated that "Ostwald was a relatively prolific architect, achieving recognition in the region for designs exemplifying many contemporary architectural values. It appears the property is eligible to the California Register for its association with him and potentially for its design characteristics."

In the same Facilities Master Plan, Noll & Tam Architects recommended the following (italics ours):

Stabilization and repair: The exterior portions of the original building are among its most deteriorated features, *though they appear very easy to restore*. The concrete block, windows, trim, and other portions should be repaired and repainted as needed.

Reversal of incompatible alterations: The adult reading room could be restored in large part by removal of the existing lighting, repair of the original ceiling, and replication of lost features. Restoration of the original lighting would measurably increase the historical integrity of the building in a way likely to be readily understood by many visitors. The same is true of the skylights.

The Initial Study dated June 10, 2010 found Potentially Significant Impacts in the following areas:

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES

a) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in Section 15064.5?

XVIII. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

a) Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the

major periods of California history or prehistory?

The above determinations indicate the inclusion of alternatives to demolition in the CEQA review.

One alternative to demolition should be relocation of the library to a nearby site. The City of Berkeley and the Berkeley Unified School District own other properties in the immediate vicinity, including the former Edison Junior High School site at 1707 Russell Street.

We hope that the EIR will include an evaluation of alternative sites for a new library building and options for adaptive reuse of the existing building.

Sincerely,

Daniella Thompson

Sanite B

President