

June 19, 2012

To: Mayor and City Council  
City of Riverside

Subject: Comments regarding proposed improvements to the Downtown Library

The City should ideally develop a master plan for the entire Downtown Library complex – interior design, exterior structure, public plaza, facility programming, and parking. The master plan should be developed through a much improved public involvement process since this library belongs to the people of the City and not its elite. The process should include public scoping, charrettes, and design reviews with real outreach to the public and a real effort to involve children in the design process. Since there is no clear current funding for making significant improvements, I hope this is possible and that the City considers this longer-term approach.

It was a mistake in the 1960s to destroy the original Carnegie Library to make way for a larger, more modern Downtown Library. Today, the City is on the verge of making the same mistake again. Although those that dislike the current structure will likely never grow to accept it, please do not repeat bad decisions of the past. Destroying the current structure or its historic character will simply lead to another generation of citizens that have lost memories of a place they grew up with but are no longer there.

Of the current options presented, Option 1 is the only one that tries to maintain the original character of the library. The extent of new glass on the building walls is a little too much and should be limited to reflect other New Formalism structures of merit and protect the integrity of the dove screens. If more natural light is the goal for the interior, consider creating a two-story atrium feature in the center of the building with skylights that draw more natural light to the first floor. Such a feature could also be extended to bring natural light to the basement.

Options 2a, 2b, and 3 are completely inappropriate for the structure and the context of the structure's surroundings.

Any exterior improvements should be considered simultaneously with public plaza landscape design improvements. Over the past 25 years, the City has periodically made changes to the public space in front of the library to replace broken fountains and hide the structure. These improvements not only took away from the architecture, they eliminated a once usable public space. The public plaza in front of the library should be redesigned to compliment the architecture and purposes of the library. It should create a usable public space for people and events that includes water features, youthful components, whimsy, shade, and modern, simple lines.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

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