



501 COPPER NW  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87102

Petra Morris, AICP  
Council Planning Manager  
Albuquerque City Council

27 July 2020

Re: Main Library Landmark

Dear Ms Morris:

I'm delighted to add my voice to others in support of Landmark status for Albuquerque's Main Library.

When we were celebrating the Friends' 50th Anniversary last year, we looked back at the founding of the Friends and its advocacy for a new Main Library to replace what is now Special Collections. Old Main at Edith and Central was the first library I ever visited. I remember how impressed I was as a child in the mid-1950s by the flagstone floors, the vigas, the handsome windows in the Children's Room. By the late 1960s, the building was wholly inadequate. It was described in the Albuquerque Journal as a fire hazard that failed to city codes. Said Library Director Donald Riechmann, "Inside it is chaos...the [working] conditions are...almost impossible."

The Friends advocated effectively for a new library, including a series of newspaper ads featuring diverse voices from across Albuquerque declaring, "Why I'll vote YES on library bonds." They wanted a library that answered the needs of a growing city.

I know there are those who don't care for the aesthetics of this library's design. I find it handsome, but beyond that, I consider all architecture a backdrop for life. A good building enhances the lives of its users. One of the users on opening day was a man in a wheelchair. Fifteen years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, he could enter the library without assistance and reach every public part of the building. The Main Library didn't waste space on a grand staircase, instead a functional staircase was tucked in a corner, alongside the public elevators. Study and meeting rooms lined the north walls. Senior staff had roomy offices, a conference room, space to expand to accommodate new staff, and more.

The most important feature of the library's design was and is its flexibility. Needs change, and so has the building, adding computers, printers, self-check out stations and temporary performance spaces, moving free-standing bookshelves as required. The spacious Lower Level became home to the Friends Bookshop within a year of the library's opening. In 2001, the annual sale in the Pit was replaced by a monthly book sale on the Lower Level that enabled the Friends to greatly increase their support for the library system as a whole. All because the Main Library was designed to last, with abundant flexible space.

In 1975, Old Main was 50 years old and no longer able to fulfill its role. Today's Main Library is 45 years old and still going strong. I do hope it is recognized for the Landmark it is.

Sincerely,

Tamara Coombs, President