

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES, AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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October 31st, 2019
Start: 10:15 a.m.
Recess: 1:13 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: JIMMY VAN BRAMER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joseph Borelli
Laurie Cumbo
Mark Gjonaj
Francisco Moya
Inez Barron
Ydanis Rodriguez
Fernando Cabrera

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner
Department of Cultural Affairs

Linda Johnson, President and CEO
Brooklyn Public Library

Iris Weinshall, Chief Operating Officer
New York Public Library

Dennis Wolcott, President and CEO
Queens Public Library

Gilberto Villa, New York Resident

Brody Enoch,
IFCO Pastors for Peace

Anne Mitchell, member
Cuba Si

Thomas Foley, Deputy Commissioner for Public
Buildings
Department of Design and Construction

Phil Heller, Executive Director for Libraries
Department of Design and Construction

Damien Suarez, New York Resident

Pat Fry
Committee of Correspondence for Democracy and
Socialism

Emily Thomas, volunteer
White Rose

Tom Gogan [sp?], Interim Chair
New York City Chapter of the US Labor Against
The War

Sapphire Ahmed, New York Resident

Stephen Millies [sp?], New York Resident

Yamir Chabur, New York Resident

Shernice Gatewood Ali [sp?], CEO
We Are Phenomena Woman

Showana Vaughn, director
Silent Cry

Matthew Zadrozny, President
saveNYPL.org

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[background comments]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sound check. It's
October 31st. Meeting today is being held on
cultural affairs, recorded by Keith Polite.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. Thank
you.

[Gavel]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Good morning.
My name is Jimmy Van Bramer and I am very proud to be
the Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. I
want to welcome you all to our hearing today where we
are joining both an oversight committee hearing on
upcoming capital projects with librarians, but also
hearing two very important pieces of legislation. A
resolution and an introduction, both of which all
speak to a little bit later. We are joined by
Council members Cabrera and Rodriguez who are either
primes or co-primes on those very important pieces of
legislation and both will be speaking. And I council
member Inez Barron is also coming to speak on her
very important resolution, as well. And we are also
joined by Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo. And I want
to welcome Commissioner Tom Finkelppearl who is here

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2 today and I think some people in the audience know
3 that it was announced this morning that Commissioner
4 Finkelparl will be leaving the administration and--
5 Yes. And I want to say that I have had the privilege
6 of knowing Commissioner Finkelparl for 20 some odd
7 years. If you know anything about Tom, you know is
8 incredible work with the percent for art program,
9 many, many years ago. He has worked with [inaudible
10 00:02:38] PS One. Of course, his amazing stewardship
11 of the Queens Museum, the first Museum that I ever
12 went to in my life, and, of course for nearly six
13 years, as our Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and I
14 know Tom, in your heart, that you love artists and
15 support artists and I know that you believe that
16 every single New Yorker, every single child, every
17 single adult should have equal access to the arts
18 regardless of the ZIP Code, how much money they may
19 have, their immigration status, and I know you to be
20 a fundamentally decent and good human being who cares
21 so deeply about our city and about the arts. So, I
22 just want to start by saying thank you and I know you
23 have a couple more months with us. We may or may not
24 have a hearing at which you testified during that
25 time, so this could be the final time that you

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1 testified before the committee. You may be grateful
2 for that, but I want to say thank you, on behalf of
3 New Yorkers, for years of service to the city and I
4 want to say that publicly right now.
5

6 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thanks a lot.
7 Thank you very much for that, Jimmy.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So I know that
9 maybe others are just finding this out and may want
10 to speak to your work and legacy, as well. So, to
11 the business at hand, our public library systems are
12 the fundamental bedrock of our society and democracy,
13 I believe, and there are 216 or so community
14 library's throughout the five boroughs really are
15 where New Yorkers-- all New Yorkers go to get their
16 information. And, of course, the physical plants,
17 the buildings, aren't pretty important. There is no
18 library without library staff, of course. There is
19 no library without the materials and it that improve
20 people's lives, but the physical plant is pretty darn
21 important. You need libraries that work and serve
22 and improve and we want to talk a little bit about
23 upcoming capital projects as part of our hearing
24 today. But as I mentioned, we are also hearing some
25 very important pieces of legislation and I believe

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2 that Council member Barron is on her way. But the
3 first is Introduction number 1451, a local law in
4 relation to creating a task force to review the
5 feasibility of creating a New York City Museum of
6 African-American History that is sponsored by Council
7 member Fernando Cabrera and I'm going to ask the
8 Council member to speak on his Intro in a moment.
9 We're also hearing today Resolution 1092, calling
10 upon the President to live to the Cuban embargo and
11 end the Cuban travel ban. That is sponsored by
12 Council member Barron, Council member Rodriguez, who
13 is here, and myself. These are important pieces of
14 legislation that I fully support. Oh, I want to
15 thank Commissioner Finkelparl for being here. We
16 are going to be here from the three library system
17 heads including Iris Weinshall, representing the New
18 York Public Library, and DDC. And then I know there
19 are some folks who have signed up to testify. I'm
20 going to ask my colleagues to say a few words and
21 then we're going to hear from Commissioner
22 Finkelparl. Obviously, it's a pretty momentous
23 morning in his life, so we want to be able to give
24 them the opportunity to testify and the parts as he
25 needs to. I also want to thank my legislative

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2 director, Jack Bernatawitz [sp?], my Chief of Staff,
3 Mike Wallace, and our committee finance analyst,
4 Aliyah Ali. Our legislative policy analyst, Christie
5 Dwyer, and our committee counsel, Nel Beekman [sp?],
6 for all their work on this hearing. And at this
7 moment, I will call on Council member Cabrera to
8 speak to his very important Introduction number 1451.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you to
10 the Chair and, Commissioner, I want to wish you the
11 best. I want to join the concert of best wishes to
12 you. And the chemistry that, Commissioner, you had
13 with our wonderful Chair who has been a champion-- I
14 was just relating earlier how much he loves this.
15 There are people who Chair because they have to and
16 there are Chairs that, literally, love passionately
17 what they do. And the same can be said about you.
18 And so, you guys were-- both of you where the
19 dynamic duo-- making it possible. And so, with
20 that, let me just thank the Chair, again, and
21 committee members for the opportunity to speak on
22 Intro 1451. This bill will create a task force to
23 study the feasibility of creating New York City's
24 first museum dedicated to the history of African-
25 Americans in New York. We are a city of numerous

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1 cultural institutions and museums-- so many that it
2 is hard to know exactly how many there are. Maybe
3 you know, Commissioner or the Chair. But we looked
4 at it and even Wikipedia says were not exactly sure.
5 But there are many fine cultural and historical
6 venues dedicated to African-Americans. There is none
7 that looks at the full historical impact and
8 contributions to African-Americans in the city of New
9 York, starting with the first enslaved Africans
10 brought to the colony of New Amsterdam and 1626.
11 There is a significant part of our history, as New
12 Yorkers, missing. Intro 1451 is the first step in
13 correcting this omission. I want to thank Brenda
14 McKinney, counsel to the committee, Christie Dwyer,
15 policy analyst and staff of the legislative division,
16 for their work on this bill and mine director of
17 legislation, Claire Mackleveigh [sp?]. Thank you.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
20 much, Council member Cabrera. We are still awaiting
21 Council member Barron as the prime sponsor, but I am
22 very proud to join with Council member Rodriguez on
23 supporting Reso 1092. And I want to ask Council
24 member Rodriguez, as a co-prime sponsor on the
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2 resolution to lift the Cuban embargo and end the
3 Cuban travel ban. Council member Rodriguez?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank you,
5 Chair. First of all, thank you to the advocated
6 better's been organizing around these resolutions,
7 especially those from [inaudible 00:09:58] John
8 Gibbs, who couldn't be here. As an international
9 conference happening these days. The person who, in
10 1989, when she was a lawyer, represented me when I
11 was arrested for the first time at 181st and St.
12 Nicholas Avenue. So, there is a lot of things that
13 we have in common between the advocated and those of
14 us here that I will say there has not been a better
15 time in the city of New York with a more progressive
16 group of Council members than the ones that we have
17 today. So, when we look at, you know, the need to
18 put pressure to live to the embargo, there is not a
19 better city than the city of New York that should be
20 leading them. We, as a city, [inaudible 00:10:47] as
21 if the city and sometimes we have presidents from the
22 George Bush and others that focus on invading and
23 creating war through the embargoes and today, the guy
24 that we have today, New York City having a standing
25 shoulder to shoulder from the academic, the cultural

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2 institution, the activists. Not only we broke the
3 Fidel Castros of the convention center and we broke
4 into the Bronx and broke into Harlem, but also
5 there's a lot that has happened between New York City
6 and Cuba. So, today we are welcome, you know,
7 everyone to this hearing. And, again, thank you to
8 the Chair, the lead prime, Council member Barron and
9 myself and Jimmy, that we understood that this is the
10 time. We need to take this fight not only throughout
11 the city, but through DC. And, you know, as a co-
12 prime of this bill, I believe that, when we look at
13 where we are today, there's a lot that we have to do.
14 The Congress should do the right thing. They should
15 lift the embargo and end the travel ban against the
16 people of Cuba. The ban has gone through many stages
17 and transformations throughout the years. Just this
18 week, Trump administration banned all flights to
19 Cuban cities with exception of Havana, in his last
20 move to roadblock the easing of relationship of the
21 Obama era. The embargo set in 1961, shortly after
22 the revolution takeover of Fidel Castro, was to
23 penalize the Cuban government. As we know, the
24 embargo is only served to punish the Cuban people who
25 have suffered incredible hardship for decades. And

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2 it is also hindered our ability to interact with the
3 Cuban nation on all aspects of cultural, educational,
4 financial, and trade relations. It is 2019 then many
5 of the policies set by long past administrations have
6 changed and that is unfortunately. And that's the
7 effort to bring our nation back. And we should move
8 forward. The cube in embargo is a [inaudible
9 00:13:04] of the Cold War years, which has no benefit
10 to United States security or economic interest. And
11 it is time we get rid of the policy that only serves
12 to harm us all. Today, we are calling on the United
13 States Congress to write a new page in the history of
14 the American foreign-policy by restoring our
15 relationship with Cuba. We owe it to the Cuban and
16 American people. [Speaking foreign language]. Thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And--

19 [applause]

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Majority
21 Leader Cumbo, would you like to say a few words?

22 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I will keep my
23 remarks brief because we want to hear your statement
24 and, obviously, we want to get directly to questions.
25 But I just want to thank you for your leadership over

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2 the last six years. I have been so impressed with
3 being able to work collaboratively with you. It
4 means so much to me the work that we did for
5 Weeksville and making sure that Weeksville became a
6 part of the CIG program, the expansion for the
7 percent for art program, being able to work
8 collaboratively to expand the amount of public art
9 that's throughout the city and, of course, being able
10 to include women and people of color in terms of how
11 we publicly recognize people of color throughout the
12 city of New York. The increases to the budge to make
13 sure that we are able to serve more organizations
14 through the city of New York, and I really just thank
15 you from the bottom of my heart. I don't know who we
16 are going to beat up on the way that we did for the
17 last six years and I can't believe that you are
18 leaving and it is our sixth year. And I've kind of,
19 after the six years, gotten you right where I want
20 you-- I mean, to be able to work collaboratively.
21 And you are certainly going to be menaced in your
22 legacy and what you have been able to accomplish
23 throughout the city of New York, so many capital
24 projects that have been realized. So many capital
25 projects that I pushed to make happen. It's really

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going to be a loss to not have you as part of this
administration, but your legacy will continue
throughout the city of New York. And thank you.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
much. I also want to just add that you will depart
the administration at a moment where there is record
funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs and
that is something that will always be a part of your
legacy. We have had substantial increases over the
last few years. We will continue to push for more--

[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: for culture
and the arts, but you not only were given the task of
implementing the cultural plan and making sure that
that happened and then following it up with some
meaningful resources behind those initiatives, and
you lead all of that work. So, I firmly believe that
you have been a terrific and successful Commissioner
of the Department of Cultural Affairs. And time
will-- and history will-- treat you well. I firmly
believe that. So, I want to thank you, again, for
everything you've done and, obviously, our
partnership, not just here in these roles, that when

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2 I was at the Queens public library and you were at
3 the Queens Museum and when we started our working
4 together in friendship. So, thank you for all of
5 that and, with that, I'll hand it over to-- the
6 counsel has to swear you in for your testimony.

7 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
8 hand. Do you affirm that tell the truth, the whole
9 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
10 before this committee and to respond honestly to
11 Council member questions?

12 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yes. I do.

13 LEGAL COUNSEL: Okay. Thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay. So I'll
15 just say before I read my testimony that, actually,
16 three out of four of you have worked with very
17 closely and I knew Council member Van Bramer and
18 Cumbo when they were not yet councilmembers. We had
19 started our dialogue a long time ago and it's going
20 to continue in the future. Council member Rodriguez,
21 we have had a wonderful collaboration up in your
22 district. So, we haven't worked together, but good
23 luck in the future. I guess I just want to say thank
24 you so much. It has been such a pleasure and, you
25 know, I'm not going to leave New York City, but a

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1 couple more months of this, yeah. And it is my--
2 perhaps my last hearing, so we will take it and see
3 what happens. Okay. I'm going to start my
4 testimony.
5

6 Good morning, Chair Van Bramer and
7 members of the committee. I am Tom Finkelpearl,
8 Commissioner of the New York City Department of
9 Cultural Affairs. I'm here to testify in regards to
10 Intro 1451 of 2019, a proposed local law in relation
11 to establishing a task force to review the
12 feasibility of creating a New York City Museum of
13 African-American History. I am joined by a number of
14 my colleagues from the agency. Let me begin by
15 saying we believe African-American history is New
16 York City history. Even though we are a northern
17 state, slavery wasn't fully abolished in New York
18 State until 1827. Four years ago, New York City's
19 main 18th-century slave market was marked with a
20 plaque unveiled by Mayor DeBlasio just a few blocks
21 from here. Both before and after slavery was
22 abolished in New York, black residents were very much
23 part of this city. Only last week, new interpretive
24 signage commemorating Seneca Village in Central Park
25 was installed. The legacy of free black community of

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2 Weeksville in present-day Central Brooklyn is kept
3 alive by Weeksville Cultural Center, which is on the
4 path to becoming the first new member of the Cultural
5 Institution Group in a generation. Our black
6 communities across the city, from the Bronx to Staten
7 Island, are essential to New York City's status as a
8 center, not just of black culture, but world culture.
9 Numerous monuments, statues, organizations, and
10 institutions are dedicated to preserving and
11 promoting this rich living history that continues to
12 unfold today. While we are committed to supporting
13 the organizations and communities doing important
14 work, we have some concerns about the proposed bill.
15 As we understand that, the legislation proposed the
16 creation of a task force to examine the possibility
17 of creating New York City Museum of African-American
18 History. The task force would comprise 11 members
19 and exist for 12 months. The group would meet
20 quarterly and hauled at least two public meetings to
21 seek comment on the establishment of the proposed
22 Museum. The task force would consider feasibility,
23 possible sites, outreach, and education needs and
24 city coordination, ultimately producing a report with
25 its findings and recommendations. DCLA, which is the

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second largest public funder of culture in America, after the federal government, provides funding to private nonprofit cultural organizations. We find over 1000 groups annually, including many dedicated to African-American culture and history. By and large, these organizations were not created through the sword of city led top-down approach proposed in legislation, which is more akin to how the Smithsonian Institution the federal government creates institutions. In that case, the federal government builds, staffs, and operates the institutions. Since the very first members of the cultural institution group came online 115 years ago, New York City has a public-private approach for supporting its cultural community and has helped to foster me astonishingly diverse and dynamic cultural sector we have today. The Department of Cultural Affairs has concern about the top-down approach of the creation of the new cultural institution. For one, DCLA is not structurally set up to take on financial and operational support that seems to be implied in the bill. And past experience shows that this is not necessarily the best way to create a sustainable cultural institution. A community-based

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2 approach is much more effective than city led top-
3 down approach. To reiterate something I said
4 earlier, we are incredibly proud of New York City's
5 cultural organizations dedicated to exploring and
6 promoting creative vitality, cultural heritage, and
7 rich history of African-Americans here in New York
8 City and beyond. From studio museums and Schomburg
9 Center in Harlem to Mel Cotta and Weeksville in
10 Brooklyn, exploring black, African-American, and
11 African diaspora experience is in artistry. They
12 were created by and for community use they serve and
13 we are honored to collaborate with and support them
14 in producing a vast range of public programming. We
15 share the Counsel's commitment to supporting groups
16 that honor rich culture of African-Americans in New
17 York City. As public servants, of course, we are
18 happy to provide guidance and expertise to come many
19 groups and others interested in learning more about
20 operating cultural organizations, city support, and
21 of other resources available to them. We look
22 forward to discussing with you additional ways in
23 which we might be able to partner together to build
24 upon the great work that is being done. Thank you
25

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2 for the opportunity to testify on today's topic and I
3 would be happy to answer questions.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
5 much, Commissioner. I know because Council member
6 Cabrera has sponsored this and feels so passionately
7 about this that he has questions and I am going to
8 defer to him--

9 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: on questions
11 on this matter.

12 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
14 much. Commissioner, appreciate what you shared, the,
15 regarding this top-down approach-- the reason why we
16 need a top-down approach is because we haven't funded
17 the-- the down up approach. As a matter of fact, if
18 I could be so blunt, when I walked in here this
19 morning, I didn't see a lot of people of color in
20 this room. Most of the cultural institution are not
21 represented by people of color. People who have
22 tried to start those have not been duly funded
23 through-- for many, many, many years. So, when we
24 had years and years where African-American cultural
25 institutions have not been duly funded-- and I'm not

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2 talking about, perhaps, recent efforts-- thank God
3 for our Chair and this committee and yourself. But
4 for many, many, many years, they were neglected.
5 They were not hurt. They did not receive the funding
6 they had. How in the world were they supposed to do
7 that when we see other organizations that they got
8 the sort of funding that came from the city and they
9 could expand and attract philanthropists that would
10 have the base of operation to be able to attract.
11 So, for that reason, I felt compelled-- and not just
12 myself, but other members back, you know, felt
13 compelled that we needed to do this and this approach
14 because then we will be sitting here waiting another
15 50 years before we have an African-American Museum in
16 New York City.

17 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Is there a
18 question in--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yeah. So, the
20 question is--

21 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: based on that
23 context, how do we expect it to happen? And I guess
24 what I hear you saying is you expect it to happen
25 organically. And it hasn't happened organically and

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I don't see it happening organically anytime soon because where are the streams of funding. And this is all about funding at the end of the day.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah. So, I mean, look. First of all, if this is to happen, I think it is a great idea that this museum exists. But I am just saying that there is a different approach. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC is the closest thing we have to the European model of how cultural organizations operate in America. And that European is that they are truly public institutions. When you walk in the door, you know, of a museum in Europe or in Washington DC, they-- first of all, the museums are almost all free and, second of all, those are public employees that meet you at the door. In New York City, and it is a public-private model that has been going on for a very long period of time which is that, you know, they are private nonprofit organizations, some of which are on city property and some of which are completely independent. And the way that we are set up to work is that an organization-- let's say that this organization becomes a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, even if it doesn't have a large extensive operational

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2 history, that it comes into the system. That it
3 begins to do programming. That's the point of which
4 the policy of the city has been to say we can begin
5 to fund it. To begin to, let's say, to fund for
6 capital money, etc. So, it's not that an
7 organization has tippy, a full-blown museum before it
8 gets city support. There are a lot of steps along
9 the way. I'm just saying, from the point of youth
10 cultural affairs, from the point of view of the
11 policy, which I think is a good policy, if you look
12 at Weeksville, if you look MOCADA, look at the
13 organizations that have been making their way up
14 through this system, I think it is possible to do one
15 step at a time. So we are advocating that, if this
16 goes forward, that the organization first become--
17 if it is an organization, it becomes a nonprofit. As
18 I understand it, there's no nonprofit organization
19 that we are talking about right now. So, I mean,
20 that my position and I understand that is not your
21 position.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So, I just
23 want to make sure that I understand--

24 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah.
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: what you are
3 saying. Are you an opposition of having a task
4 force?

5 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, I-- Yeah.
6 I mean, my belief is that the best way to operate is
7 to see if the-- if an organization that can
8 organically be created to have a 501(c)(3) status and
9 then go through the process that's been, you know,
10 tried-and-true for many years. That's my opinion
11 that that is the best way to operate because then
12 there is an actual nonprofit that has a mission, that
13 is clear of what it wants, that has a sort of sense
14 of idea of where it should be in the city. And
15 that's the point at which I think the city should get
16 involved in possibly supporting this on a major
17 scale.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But the whole
19 point of the taskforce is to see the feasibility to
20 see how it would work best. It's not to come up even
21 with a nonprofit and--

22 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: the way, as I
24 understand, you have presented it, who would get to
25 choose that nonprofit? We don't have a process in

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2 place. We don't have any legislation related to
3 that. So that's why I thought the taskforce would be
4 best because that might be one of the suggestions
5 that they come forth and--

6 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah. So, and
7 look. The city doesn't have the capacity to do
8 strategic planning for the creation of a cultural
9 institution. That's not something we have done
10 before. There are, you know, organizations out
11 there. There are these planning firms. There are
12 strategic plan, you know, facility master planning
13 firms, etc., like that. So, it's just not-- I don't
14 see the capacity, certainly, within my agency to,
15 let's say, do planning around the creation of a
16 cultural institution. That's all I'm saying.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: So your office
18 don't-- Can we get funding to make sure the
19 taskforce would have the ability to do a thorough
20 feasibility study? I mean, we do that with just
21 about everything else that we do here. So--

22 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, again.
23 Look, I mean, I'm saying that the way that-- What we
24 support or what we think is the best avenue is that
25 you have nonprofits. That those organizations, if

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2 there is the energy around this, that that
3 organization is formed and that that organization
4 then comes forth to the city saying we have a
5 proposal. We want to make this work. And then, you
6 know, they could apply for funding, let's say, if
7 they are doing business and they come into our
8 portfolio, they could begin to get funding for the
9 city. And, you know, obviously, there are a lot of
10 nonprofit-- I mean, fort of foundation funders. We
11 are very interested right now in feasibility studies
12 and master planning. So I think it's very fundable.
13 There are organizations that actually focus on that
14 certain nonprofits.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Have you
16 ever--

17 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Have you ever
19 had, in the last six years, anybody approach you with
20 a project of this magnitude?

21 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, I mean,
22 organizations have come to us and said, we would like
23 to establish a museum for X, Y, and Z. and it's been
24 everything from bicycles-- honestly. There's a
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bicycle museum possibility. To other, you know,
proposals. Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: [interposing]
Yeah. I know. But, specifically, to an African-
American Museum.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I have spoken
to one gentleman who had this proposal or had this
idea. I'm not sure if it is the same idea or from
the same impetus, and I really said very something
quite similar to this gentleman who I have spoken
with a couple of times on the phone which was to say,
you know, if there is a-- So, who am I talking to?
Is there a nonprofit organization? Is there a board?
Do you have a mission? And the answer to all that
was no. I have this basic idea to do this. So, I'm
not sure this is coming from the same impetus--

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Uh-hm.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: or not. This
could be a completely independent.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Well, I don't
want to take much time here, Chair, but I firmly
believe we need a task force. We need something that
is structured. Something that has a beginning and
the end. Something, a process, in place that is not

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2 left to just one group-- just one nonprofit, but to
3 be able to have different voices coming together
4 because this is citywide project with many people
5 that are many, many ideas. And I think putting those
6 minds together and come up with something at the end
7 that might include the processes that you are
8 mentioning, I think that it will make the project
9 stronger. We will love to continue this dialogue,
10 Commissioner. I know you leave in a couple weeks,
11 but--

12 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: also with your
14 staff. Thank you so much and thank you, Mr. Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
16 much. I, too, just want to reiterate a point that
17 Council member Cabrera was making because I
18 understand some of the issues that you raised. But
19 we are talking about a task force to look at the
20 feasibility of creating a New York City Museum of
21 African-American History. What is the harm in
22 creating a task for us to consider the feasibility of
23 building a museum that we all agree needs to be
24 about?

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2 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Look, this
3 will be my successor's question, for sure.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure.

5 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: But I'm saying
6 that this model that you are talking about is very
7 familiar to me as the model of the Smithsonian. The
8 Smithsonian, I'm sure, had a task force in the
9 creation of their Museum of African-American History
10 and Culture. They built the building. They staff
11 it. They run it. That is of federal impetus-- I
12 mean, there is private funding in there, of course,
13 but it is a public museum and this-- and, again, in
14 that European model it was planned by the government
15 and it is run by the government. What I am saying is
16 we have a hybrid model here, which is really half
17 way, and away, between the European model and the
18 American model. But that the impetus for something
19 like that is usually comes from the private sector
20 from a group of people who mobilize around an idea.
21 And this is, again I mean, we have a woman at your
22 table who mobilize an organization, created a
23 nonprofit from scratch-- I'm talking about MOCADA,
24 obviously, and Laurie Cumbo. That is the normal way
25 it works. It shows community support. That shows

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2 capacity and that kind of bubbling up of ideas is the
3 way that I support and not our agencies supports
4 doing it.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So I hear what
6 you are saying, but if it is not happening that way,
7 then does not the city of New York have been
8 obligation to actually step in the creation of a
9 museum that the city of New York has a vested
10 interest in making sure actually happens? I
11 understand how you believe it should happen, but if
12 for whatever reason it's not happening in the way
13 that you think it should have been, shouldn't the
14 city of New York take a much more proactive role in
15 making sure that it happens? Because I believe the
16 city of New York should have the position that this
17 museum must be in existence, right? And absolutely
18 has to exist. You started your testimony off by--

19 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Right.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: sort of saying
21 that. But then, if it is not happening, I think what
22 Council member Cabrera is getting at is, well,
23 lengths, at least, put together a task force to talk
24 about the feasibility, which means how is the best
25 way to do it? What do we do? And at least put the

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city of New York on notice that this is, in fact,
something we have to pursue.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Look. I think
I have expressed my opinion. And I think the model
of, and awake, and doing that planning around the
creation of a cultural institution from scratch is
not something that the city has done in the past. It
doesn't mean that it can't be done in the future.
But that the best model, in my opinion, and in the
opinion of the agency, is to support organizations
that already exist as nonprofits. Again, it doesn't
have to be-- they could be something that builds
over a period of time. So, I think that having it
work that way is the best model. It's a model that
is worked for the city and, you know, that's the
opinion. I understand your opinion, as well. I
mean, I think I will leave it at that.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you. I think
you can imagine that I would have a little interest
in this topic.

COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I am fully
prepared to believe that.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: So, when we look at
the Smithsonian model and we look at the national

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2 African-American Museum, right? So, we look at when
3 that museum opened, it opened and, within three
4 months, 600,000 people came to visit that museum,
5 right? And then, by 2018, the museum had received 5
6 million visitors from all over the world that came to
7 visit this particular museum. And, the investment
8 that the federal government made-- and this museum
9 which inspired me, ultimately, to found my own
10 institution, this road began in the 1970s, so it took
11 from the 1970s to 2018 for it to actually to become
12 reality. To locate the space, to raise the funding,
13 but, ultimately, to have a legislature that would
14 believe that this would be important. So, when the
15 city of New York is planning culturally to have 5
16 million visitors come to the city of New York that
17 would impact hotels, transportation, public
18 transportation, restaurants, small business is--
19 when we look at that type of investment, does the
20 city ever look at how to bring revenue into the city,
21 utilizing cultural institutions as a viable way to do
22 that? Because tempering 5 million people to New York
23 City for a cultural experience is, if you are only
24 looking at the economics of a verse is the cultural
25 impact of it-- and that's just one way we are

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2 looking at an-- does the city not find Matt to be a
3 viable investment in terms of bringing revenue, job
4 creation, and everything else to the city?

5 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: so, first of
6 all, I'm one of those people who has been to that
7 museum a number of times. It is a fantastic place
8 to--

9 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Wonderful.

10 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thank you very
11 much. So, but, again, the model there is different
12 from the model here. That is a federal museum that
13 is run by the government.

14 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

15 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: that has been
16 planned by the government. And, again, that is not
17 the way we have done business here. Again, you know,
18 that is-- So the Smithsonian Institution is 80
19 percent publicly funded and 20--

20 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

21 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: percent
22 privately funded.

23 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

24 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: The cultural
25 institution group was just the-- by the way, it has

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2 about the same attendance as the Smithsonian, is the
3 flipside, which is 20 percent, on average, 22 percent
4 publicly funded and 78 percent privately funded. So,
5 what you end up with is organizations that have to,
6 and away, be able to stand on their own feet with
7 private funding even if you are a CIG, which is the
8 best deal that you have in terms of supporting. So,
9 again, that idea of the top down planning that
10 happened for that museum, which is true for other
11 news Smithsonian's, as well, makes sense for an
12 organization that will be, essentially, funded by the
13 public. I am saying to demonstrate some capacity as
14 a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to say, we are here. We have
15 an idea. We have a mission. Is the direction, I
16 think-- and I also just-- you know, this is the
17 same thing with capital projects. I always think
18 there has to be an institution with a vision to
19 create a capital project. You should not build a
20 museum and then have the director and the staff move
21 into it. And so, psychologically or sort of
22 conceptually, that is what we are talking about here.
23 Which is to create a structure and then build the
24 staff into it. We have, in the situation of studio
25 Museum, folks like Mary Schmidt Campbell who are the

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2 architects of an idea that is now bearing fruit 50
3 years later with a new building on 125th Street with
4 Thelma Goldin at the helm, but it was imagined by
5 people like Mary. And you created MOCADA with a
6 vision of what it needed to be. I'm saying that we
7 need that visionary leader who is an arts and culture
8 person, a history person, who is the home of an
9 organization, even if it's a very nascent
10 organization. I think that is the best model. I'm
11 sort of repeating myself, but I am just trying to
12 flesh it out a bit with some examples.

13 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay. Let me, that
14 at another angle. So, segregation ended in this
15 country around 1964 where it ended throughout our
16 local and state municipalities all throughout the
17 country. So, that's a little less than 55 years ago.
18 So, when you look at African-American culture and you
19 are looking at the time that we came to this country,
20 it was 400 years of the decimation of the people on
21 all levels. To bring up financially would be silly.
22 I'm talking more about your cultural, your rays, your
23 religion. Your identity. Your name. A total
24 decimation and a wipeout of a culture that was, in
25 many ways, upon the ending of slavery, meant to self-

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2 destruct, in a way, and left to its own devices to do
3 that. So, if we go to 1964 and then we fast-forward,
4 it's only 55 years. So, the way that the city of New
5 York looks at funding cultural institutions is saying
6 there was a European and now white America that
7 benefited from 400 years of free labor and then, 55
8 years later, we are saying, okay. You showed all be
9 at the same space. You showed all be at the same
10 place. You should have all gotten all your wealth
11 together in these 55 years. We're going to start a
12 raise for resources. Go. Right? And that is
13 unrealistic because, to talk about public and private
14 partnerships, for me to create MOCADA and for the
15 founders of the studio Museum and now at the home of
16 Thelma Goldin, the ability for-- and let's just say
17 these artistic cultural space is, not historical
18 institutions like the Philadelphia African-American
19 Museum or other museums by Margaret Burroughs out and
20 Washington and-- excuse me. At the Dusable [sp?].
21 These are historical institutions. New York City
22 does not have a historical institution, so the
23 challenge that we have as people of color is that,
24 when you talk about private and public partnerships,
25 we don't have-- and it should be reflected in an

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2 understanding in the city. We don't have the same
3 base of the spendable income. We don't have the same
4 base of the savings. We don't have the same base of
5 deep pockets. And those rooms where all of that
6 negotiating and who gets the funding and those 10,000
7 dollars a plate dinners, people of color are
8 generally not in those spaces and in those rooms. I
9 was fortunate, in many ways, to have people, I guess,
10 in some ways, look favorably upon me and say, I will
11 invite you to the 10,000 dollar a plate dinner. I'll
12 pay for you or I will invite you, but those were, in
13 some ways, people having a level of sympathy for me
14 for people saying, I know you can't get in these
15 rooms. I know you can't negotiate with these people.
16 I will bring you in the room so that you can
17 negotiate and to you can meet these people. Those
18 are anomalies situations. It's not really a model.
19 So, the concept of this task force and yours speaking
20 about and as we've always done business approach. We
21 have always done it this way. But as we have always
22 done it this way, it is not revealed in the result
23 that we want. I believe this task force is important
24 to look at a top-down and a down up approach and
25 somehow we meet in the middle, recognizing that all

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2 people are not-- I would say we are all created
3 equal, but once we get here on the earth, you inherit
4 a very different history and culture and financial
5 capacity once you get here. We have to recognize
6 that as a city. We have to recognize that not
7 everyone is starting at the same place and do
8 something proactively about it versus falling into
9 the "this is how we have always done business" and
10 this is how it should always go.

11 [Applause]

12 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, I think
13 that your-- Yeah. That was great. Yeah. I think
14 that-- by the way, my possible last Council hearing,
15 and it's like, yeah. This is what we do. Right?
16 You're talking about the difference in equity and
17 equality, right?

18 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Right.

19 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: So, if you
20 say-- but I agree with that. And I think the thing
21 is that we have really been focused and I think that,
22 you know, what you and the administration and
23 everybody did with Weeksville is to say, let's put a
24 foundation down there for future permanence and most
25 CIG. You know, that assuming climate change doesn't

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2 destroy the city, 150 years from now Weeksville will
3 still be a CIG.

4 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Uh-hm.

5 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Right? That
6 kind of permanence-- I agree. Look. I think that
7 the administration has focused on an equitable
8 approach to funding, trying to change the formula.
9 Trying to open doors. Trying to make sure the
10 capital budget-- and you guys have done the same
11 thing and this very progress city Council to focus on
12 building my studio museum. Finding a permanent home
13 for MOCADA. Firm making Weeksville a CIG. Now, a
14 lot of stuff has been done. You know, the National
15 Black Theater, etc. So, you know, I think you can
16 look across different sectors in terms of places in
17 the city, that there is an equity approach. I am,
18 really, and away, just talking about the first step.
19 And you are proposing the first step that is a
20 different first step then what I am proposing. And
21 the first step that I am proposing is one that
22 requires huge amounts of financial stability or lots
23 of money. It is simply the creation of an
24 organization does say, there is an organization which
25 has a vision. And I'm just saying I think that is

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2 the best first step. I understand what you are
3 saying that business as usual is not a good excuse.
4 And I don't really think that-- I mean, maybe that
5 is how you interpret what I am saying, but I'm saying
6 that I think that that idea of working with an
7 organization that has some structure to it, that has
8 been formed, is my idea of the first step. And I
9 know you don't agree.

10 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I think that--

11 Again, I think that both things can happen because
12 this task force, in terms of identifying a historical
13 institution, is important, but we also have two
14 recognize that the cultural institutions of color
15 that are in existence-- and I'll be perfectly frank
16 with you-- knowing most of these institutions with,
17 let's say, the exception of the studio Museum, which
18 is a CIG and has had that status for some time, most
19 of these organizations are one grant missing from
20 closing their doors. So, one grant to signs, you
21 know, oh, we don't like you anymore. Oh, that
22 exhibition didn't meet our standards. Oh, we have a
23 new director that has another vision. We are going
24 to pull that 150,000 dollars. It means that some of
25 these organizations are going to close. If you were

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2 to look at the financial health of each of these
3 organizations and to look at their endowments, to
4 look at their giving from their board members and the
5 public, you would find organizations that are not
6 financially healthy. So, it's important that we
7 recognize that 55 years is certainly not enough time
8 for all of these organizations and the community is
9 and the cultures and the deep pockets to recognize
10 that this rubric is the rubric that is needed in
11 order to fund these institutions. So, I would hope
12 that you would consider looking at the viability of
13 the institutions that are already there, recognizing
14 that 55 years is certainly not ample time in order to
15 be able to have a whole city or nation recognize that
16 there needs to be a different type of investment to
17 shore up these institutions because simply hasn't
18 been enough time for up to compete with our white
19 counterparts and all things being fair and equal.
20 So, I just want to close my comments with and hope
21 that, as you begin to exit, that this task force
22 would be a major part of your legacy that everybody
23 would read and every bio moving forward when they
24 talk about Tom Finkelpearl.

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2 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay. And to
3 just to be sentimental, that was a perfect Laurie
4 Cumbo ending, which is the thing that enlists you
5 into her cause as the hero, right? So, I just--
6 Look, I want to thank-- Are we finished or you're
7 going to-- You have more questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I was going to
9 say one more thing.

10 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But if you
12 want to say something--

13 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I'll say one--
14 Yeah. One thing.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

16 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Just, look,
17 I'm so honored to have been across the table from you
18 all for these five and a half, six years. And I
19 think we have accomplished a lot together. I think
20 the budgets have been amazing because of four people
21 have fought for. I think equities come to the front
22 page. I will for this idea that this museum could
23 its ghost in the future. I think that that is the
24 great thing about what has been going on as we all
25 have the same values. The question is how to get

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2 there. So, you know, maybe we argue over this stuff.
3 Maybe the task force happens with my successor. But
4 I just want to say what an honor it is been to be at
5 these Council hearings even when I get yelled at or
6 whatever. And thank you so much for allowing me to
7 do that.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, was
9 going ask you another really tough question and then
10 you went and said really nice things about us. So--

11 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: I'm all right.
12 It's all right.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That was like
14 your closing statement of your career. How could I
15 messed that up with like a tough question?

16 MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You can just come
17 back with another one.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I will just
19 say this. I believe that we will follow up very
20 strongly with the mayor of the city of New York.

21 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And this
23 administration who absolutely should and their
24 opposition to a task force for a feasibility study
25 about this museum. In the city of New York has to

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2 take a much, much, much more aggressive and proactive
3 approach to making this a reality because of
4 everything you have just heard. Having said that, I
5 will also say it is been an honor and a privilege to
6 be the Chair of this committee for the last 10 years,
7 but for the last six we have worked together and,
8 again, it is not an easy role. It is sometimes
9 adversarial, but I do very much embrace what you said
10 about our shared values and there is been so much
11 accomplished over the last six years where we have
12 all worked together to make sure that culture and the
13 arts was prioritized. And I will just say that I
14 don't think that was always easy. I do think that
15 was always easy for you. I think we pushed really,
16 really hard, but I know that you were pushing on the
17 inside, as well. And different mayors have different
18 priorities and different areas of focus and interest
19 and I think we all, you and I in this committee made
20 sure the various speakers, made sure that culture in
21 the yards was a priority. That it got additional
22 funding. That we were able to achieve all these
23 great things together. So, I know we will continue
24 to our dialogue. We will continue to work together.
25 That may be in different capacities in the future,

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2 but I want to thank you, again, Commissioner
3 Finkelpearl.

4 COMMISSIONER FINKELPEARL: Thanks a lot.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And with that,
7 we will allow Commissioner Finkelpearl to move on and
8 call the three library systems. Well, that's nice.

9 [Applause]

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We have
11 Dennis Wolcott from the Queens Public Library. Linda
12 Johnson from the Brooklyn Public Library and Iris
13 Weinshall from the New York Public Library. If you
14 all would take your seats, we will begin that portion
15 and we will then go back to the public testimony on
16 the introduction and the resolutions, as well. And
17 hope to still be joined by Council member Barron to
18 speak on the Cuban embargo resolution. But we will
19 hear from the three library systems.

20 [Background comments]

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Wow. I just
22 turned my head for a second and things happened here.
23 Wow. That may demand instagram post, Linda Johnson.
24 It was going to go first. Smile, Linda. You are on
25

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instagram. Thank you. Who is going first? Okay.
Edgar Allan Poe. Go ahead, Linda.

LINDA JOHNSON: Great. Good morning,
everyone. Happy Halloween. Chairman Van Bramer,
Majority Leader Cumbo, and members of the committee,
thank you for your ongoing commitment to our cities
public library and for holding this oversight
hearing. I am Linda Johnson. I am president and CEO
of Brooklyn Public Library. Libraries are vital for
our city. We are the ultimate democratic space.
Doors open wide to accommodate everyone for free and
we are grateful to you and to the speaker and to the
mayor for your outstanding work to help us meet the
challenge of providing the best possible service to
the public. With your help, the city may significant
investments in library infrastructure and we are
beginning to reap the benefits. Brooklyn Public
Library is amid our most significant era of
rebuilding in history, has one third of our branches
will be renovated or reconstructed over the next five
years. Across the borough, we are improving
neighborhood libraries with projects ranging from
small restorations to full-scale renovations. There
is considerable progress to report on today even as

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2 we face substantial capital need. In addition to
3 renovation projects in every part of the borough, we
4 have built partnerships to fund them and help provide
5 interim service, undertaken extensive community
6 engagement, reduce our carbon footprint, and being
7 kind new projects to complement our building
8 upgrades. Without the city's continued support, this
9 would not be possible. I am excited to share that
10 Brooklyn Public Library is adding its first new
11 branch and more than 35 years. Adams Street Library
12 will be our 60th branch located on the Brooklyn
13 waterfront. For the first time, residents of Vinegar
14 Hill, Dumbo, and Farragut will have a local branch.
15 The library will be stocked with books, meeting
16 rooms, and programming space for children, teens, and
17 adults. Like so many of the projects you will hear
18 about today, we undertook an extensive community
19 engagement process, holding public design sessions
20 and town halls to ensure that the space and its
21 program are designed to meet neighborhood needs and
22 priorities. We expect you to be cutting the ribbon a
23 year from now and I hope we will see you there. In
24 just a few months, Greenpoint residents will be
25 welcomed back to a stunning new facility. The

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Greenpoint Library and environmental education Center have been completely rebuilt from the ground up and will offer increased indoor and outdoor space, expanded programs, and special collections. Funded collectively by the Greenpoint community and environmental funds, the state education department, state assembly, and the city, our new branch is a model of sustainable development, exceeding lead gold building certification requirements. In fact, across our branches and renovations, we aim to be stewards of the environment by saving energy and lowering the missions. We have reduced our omissions of greenhouse gases by 40 percent since 2006, avoiding the equivalent of the carbon dioxide released from burning 3.8 million pounds of coal. In traditional lighting has been replaced with LED at 45 branches and we have installed 22 smart systems to better manage heat, light, and air-conditioning, as well as upgrading 30 HVAC systems. In Crown Heights, a new library space is being created through an innovative partnership that is also saving us money. We will relocate the existing Brower Park library and the Brooklyn children's Museum, avoiding in a million-dollar renovation and creating a new branch designed

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1
2 in consultation with the community. Our success is
3 possible thanks to the Council, the Brooklyn
4 children's Museum, and investments from the mayor and
5 borough president. The final designs are well-
6 received and work is underway in the branch will open
7 next winter. The Brooklyn Heights and Sunset Park
8 community use wells soon benefit from the completion
9 of larger and inspiring new library use. Brooklyn
10 Heights Library will open in late 2020 and sunset
11 Park Library follows in 2021. Strong partnerships
12 are also enabling us to turn an infrastructure
13 project that Walt Whitman library into a
14 comprehensive building renovation. Initially scoped
15 to replace the HVAC system and just fire safety and
16 accessibility. The project now includes a new garden
17 space, exterior restoration, and interior upgrades,
18 funded by the city and proceeds from other Brooklyn
19 Heights Library redevelopment. We procured
20 additional funds through the downtown revitalization
21 initiative, working with the state and the borough
22 president. Qualifying for funding allows for a much-
23 needed interior renovation and reconfiguration of the
24 main floor and meeting room. And thanks to Majority
25 Leader Cumbo's allocation in the last budget, we will

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1
2 have a dedicated team space for young adults in the
3 community. Comprehensive 20 million dollar branch
4 overhauls are underway at five libraries. Projects
5 at Eastern Parkway, New Lots, Canarsie, Brownsville,
6 and New Utrecht Libraries demonstrate the importance
7 of being included in the city's 10 year capital plan.
8 Full-scale renovations like these are only possible
9 because of a onetime inclusion of funds provided five
10 years ago. Additionally, and a process in new to our
11 DDC managed projects, Eastern Parkway, Brownsville,
12 and New Utrecht library are developing the plans for
13 these spaces guided by an interactive public session
14 and design and [inaudible 01:00:53]. Stakeholder
15 engagements help us draw inspiration from local
16 community members incorporating neighborhood desires,
17 while maintaining the core role of the library. The
18 overhaul of New Lots library, for example, will
19 highlight the significance of the area as one's
20 unacknowledged African burial ground. Council member
21 Behrens additional 6 million dollar allocation to the
22 project, our single largest ever from a Council
23 member will help still live are fully updated state
24 of the art library for East New York that builds on
25 the site's rich history. Our most ambitious project,

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1
2 though, is the sorely needed renovation of central
3 library on grand Army Plaza. As our largest and most
4 visited branch, we are undertaking the logistical
5 challenge-- some good call that a nightmare-- of
6 renovating the 352,000 square five and 78-year-old
7 building without any closures. Working with
8 internationally renowned Toshiko Moree Architects, we
9 will modernize the building, make more areas
10 accessible to the public, and allows central library
11 to better meet the needs of its millions of users,
12 while restoring its original historic character.
13 Thanks to a 25 million dollar allocation from the
14 city, the project is moving forward. Throughout
15 these renovations, our priority is always to ensure
16 that the public has uninterrupted access to our
17 material and services whenever possible. Fresh
18 thinking about how to provide interim service enables
19 us to minimize the impact of long-term branch
20 closures. Our librarians have strong relationships
21 in their communities, so, in many cases, we have been
22 able to work with local partners to host off-site
23 library programming, offering small dedicated
24 collections and computer services and effective
25 neighborhoods. Two weeks ago, East Flatbush library

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1
2 staff opened a pop up library to minimize the impact
3 of their closed branch on the neighborhood. Three
4 days a week, we offer services, including printing,
5 Internet access, and a small collection of books and
6 a free, dedicated space at Brookdale Hospital. This
7 project, known as library in transit, will serve as a
8 vital resource while the branch undergoes a
9 comprehensive renovation over the next year. And
10 thanks to a partnership with Brooklyn Bridge Park, we
11 are opening a temporary outpost at One John Street to
12 serve patrons while the new Adams Street is under
13 construction. It will be called the BPL Annex. It
14 will include a laptop loan program, a small
15 collection, and the place for patrons to pick up
16 books on hold. Additional programming for children,
17 teens, and adults will be phased in over time.
18 Likewise, we count on our bookmobile fleet to help
19 provide relief to page trends when a neighborhood
20 branches closed. So, if we are reinventing our
21 bookmobile-- we are reinventing our bookmobile
22 surveys, replacing the aging fleet, and creating a
23 new service delivery model. Next fall, we will put a
24 new custom-designed tech mobile on the road, funded
25 by borough president, Eric Adams. It will offer

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1
2 additional computers, technology, and programming to
3 patrons who rely happily on the library for access to
4 technology. During upcoming branch closures, our
5 bookmobile's will not only bring a circulating
6 collection relevant to the neighborhood, but also
7 offer patrons the opportunity to pick up books they
8 requested from the online catalog. Our renewed fully
9 will offer a walk-up service model, incorporating
10 space on sidewalks for patrons to browse mobile book
11 club displays under a protective canopy, pick up a
12 hold, and get a library card, or work with staff
13 through a service window on the side of the vehicle.
14 Everyone is welcome in our libraries, however, many
15 building exteriors do not convey that message. So we
16 are developing a new initiative to eliminate
17 defensive architecture without compromising safety.
18 By removing outdated security measures like fences
19 and window gates, and adding new features like
20 lighting, signage, security cameras, landscaping, and
21 potentially outdoor furniture, bike racks, and bunk
22 drops, we will create a more inviting environment.
23 Budget permitting, we aim to pilot these enhancements
24 at select libraries, assess their impact, and develop
25 standards to guide future upgrades for all of our

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1
2 branches. This is a transformational. For
3 Brooklyn's libraries. For the first time in more
4 than 50 years, Brooklyn is adding new and improved
5 space as to our portfolio. Modern and inspirational
6 facilities able to support the countless ways people
7 use libraries today. Your assistance brought us to
8 this point. Over the last five years, the city
9 budget has included funding to begin addressing
10 deferred maintenance projects, project shortfalls,
11 and to embark on some new and exciting projects.
12 These investments are crucial and we are relying on
13 you to help us maintain and increase them. At the
14 end of last fiscal year, Brooklyn Public Library was
15 fortunate to have a DDC engineering firm, conduct
16 physical needs assessments at five of our buildings.
17 These reports detail the upgrades necessary to bring
18 the buildings into a state of good repair with real
19 time costs estimates for the extensive work. There
20 are figures starkly illustrate this desperate need
21 for robust capital funding. Today we face shortfalls
22 of nearly 27 million dollars over 12 projects
23 throughout the borough. We are forced to assign the
24 bulk of the unallocated capital funding we receive
25 each year keeping projects initiated years ago moving

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1 forward. Awaiting the budget outcome to determine
2 which projects can advance and which will stall is an
3 efficient, more costly, and hampers our ability to
4 serve the public. We must be able to plan future
5 projects beyond addressing emergency use and carry
6 out more full-scale resolutions-- renovations of our
7 branches. Though we have been able to approach some
8 of our buildings comprehensively and we have done
9 noble work together to reduce our deferred
10 maintenance, Brooklyn Public libraries still face is
11 250 million dollars in unmet needs. While there is
12 no easy solution to our capital predicament,
13 providing a reliable, recurring source of funding for
14 libraries in the 10 year capital plan is absolutely
15 critical. I know I am preaching to the choir. We
16 truly appreciate the council's advocacy to include
17 libraries in the 10 year capital plan, though the
18 outcome was ultimately disappointing. We thank you
19 for working with us to ensure that libraries are
20 supported. Brooklyn Public Library is committed to
21 helping meet our capital challenge is through
22 identifying creative projects and additional funding
23 streams. Coupled with a long-term and sustained
24 investment by the city of New York, we can build upon
25

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1
2 the progress we have made. I am heartened by your
3 focus on library capital projects and your
4 recognition that we must collectively rise to this
5 challenge. Thank you for this opportunity to testify
6 and I would be happy to answer any questions.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

8 Linda, as you know, I am going into my 20s second
9 year of these hearings. First 11 that is Queens
10 Public libraries staff person. I have listened to
11 several different directors or CEOs of the Brooklyn
12 Public Library delivered testimony. This is one of
13 the most exciting BPL testimonies that I have ever
14 seen and all of those years, I have to say. There
15 are a lot of really big and exciting projects
16 underway in Brooklyn and it makes me very proud that,
17 together, we have worked to put a lot more money in
18 the budget, right? And the Brooklyn delegation.

19 And--

20 LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: your elected
22 officials, but there is a lot of really, really good
23 things in there and the 10 year capital plan is
24 absolutely critical. You know that we agree with
25 that.

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LINDA JOHNSON: Yeah. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Who is next?

IRIS WEINSHALL: Me.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Iris.

IRIS WEINSHALL: Good morning. My name is Iris Weinshall and I am the chief operating officer of the New York Public Library. I would like to thank Speaker Corey Johnson, Committee Chair Jimmy Van Bramer, the committee members, and the entire city Council for holding this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to testify and would like to thank the Counsel for your steadfast support of libraries. We are here today to discuss the capital projects in libraries. Our success is, our ongoing capital needs, and ways we are working with the city to improve the capital process. As you well know, the NYPL system is large and requires significant ongoing improvements to ensure that libraries are functional, safe spaces for our patrons. Our physical infrastructure is significant, with 93 buildings and 62 current capital projects underway, including 25 in the Bronx, 30 in Manhattan, and seven on Staten Island. These current projects represent 484 million in total costs. With city, state, and private

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1
2 support, we have been able to significantly advance
3 our capital program. We have worked hard to adapt
4 our buildings to best meet the needs of our patrons
5 and we continue to improve and expand our physical
6 footprint. Just a few examples. We recently
7 celebrated the grand opening of our new Van Cortlandt
8 branch in the Bronx. The new location is 5800 square
9 feet, more than double the size of the former branch
10 which was 2700 square feet. A 685 square foot
11 McCombs Bridge is our smallest branch, located inside
12 a New York City housing project called Harlem River
13 house, the branch offers only 12 seats. A new Coombs
14 library is currently under construction at 3300
15 square feet, which will be five times the size of the
16 current library. It is scheduled to open in early
17 2020. Our Roosevelt Island library is also moving to
18 a new location and will increase its size from 3400
19 square feet to 5200 square feet. It is also expected
20 to open in early 2020. We recently broke ground on a
21 new Charleston library in Staten Island. The 10,000
22 square-foot library, with dedicated adult, teen, and
23 children's areas is located in a shopping area that
24 will make it easier for families to visit. We
25 anticipate that the new Charleston library will open

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2 in early 2021. Our biggest project is the Midtown
3 campus, which includes a complete renovation of our
4 largest circulating branch, the Stavros Niarchos
5 Foundation Library, previously the mid-Manhattan
6 library. The project is currently in construction
7 and scheduled to open in 2020, with brand-new spaces
8 for adults, teens, and children, a business center,
9 and new program and educational spaces, just to name
10 a few things. The Midtown camp this project also
11 includes upgrades, increased public space, and more
12 dedicated space for quiet research at the Stephen A.
13 Schwartzman building on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue.
14 The project is currently in the second phase. Most
15 recently, the nine rooms Center for research in the
16 humanities just opened on the second floor of the
17 building, adding 56 seats exclusively dedicated to
18 the quiet study and work with our research
19 collections. Lastly, as a result of our inclusion in
20 the city's 10 year capital plan, and fiscal year 16,
21 we are in the midst of a complete renovation of five
22 of our historic Carnegie libraries in high need
23 neighborhoods. The libraries are Hunts Point and
24 Melrose in the Bronx, Fort Washington and 125th
25 Street in Manhattan, and Port Richmond in Staten

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1
2 Island. The city committed 100 million dollars in
3 capital funding towards these much-needed
4 renovations. Without allocated funding over 10
5 years, such major renovations would not be possible.
6 Additionally, as information hubs and one of the
7 city's key public computing centers, NYPL continues
8 to improve its technology infrastructure. We
9 currently have approximately 18 million dollars in
10 system wide technology projects that are either being
11 implemented or planned. They include the replacement
12 of desktop computers and printers, upgrades to our
13 system wide Wi-Fi and improved access to our digital
14 collections. Investing in technology allows us to
15 help bridge the digital divide for the estimated 2.4
16 million New York residents who don't have broadband
17 Internet access at home. For capital projects, there
18 is no doubt that we have been offended from the
19 support of individual council members, borough
20 presidents, the speaker, and the mayor. And we are
21 grateful for all the support. However, despite the
22 progress we've made and the support we have received,
23 the NYPL still faces nearly 412 million of new
24 capital needs. This number comprises all of our
25 possible projects, including full renovations of

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2 branches, state of good repair projects such as ADA
3 accessibility, HVAC, boilers, façades, and roofs,
4 technology upgrades and funding shortfalls on
5 existing projects. Additionally, many branches need
6 to be reconfigured for how New Yorkers use libraries
7 today. With increased programming, educational, and
8 community space. At NYPL, the average age of our
9 libraries is 70 years old, with many branches dating
10 back more than 100 years, making the challenge of
11 keeping our physical infrastructure in good condition
12 and even more acute. We understand that access
13 starts at the front door of our libraries and we are
14 working to make our buildings fully accessible with
15 accessibility and integral part of the design of all
16 of our new branches and full renovations. The
17 capital work that we need to is necessary to be able
18 to provide the level of library services and the
19 safe, accessible space is that our staff and users
20 deserve. Together, we made great progress on the
21 libraries capital projects. In the NY PL has
22 significantly improved the capital commitment rate to
23 40 percent in fiscal year 19 and continues to work
24 with the city to think creatively on how to make the
25 process better. While we have had successes, we

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1
2 continue to face a number of challenges. Thanks to
3 your support and advocacy, in fiscal year 2016, we
4 were included in the city's 10 year capital plan for
5 the first time and received 100 million dollars,
6 which allowed us to do full renovations of five
7 branches. This was truly a game changer, however, we
8 have not received any new funding under the 10 year
9 process since then. We hope to remain part of the
10 city's 10 year capital planning conversation and to
11 build on the progress we have made. We continue to
12 work with DDC to find what is to improve the
13 management and delivery of library capital projects.
14 We remain hopeful that DDC's front and planning
15 process will lead to more consistent budgets and
16 faster timelines for library projects. However, DDC
17 project shortfalls remain a major concern. Nearly
18 all of our DDC managed projects are coming back with
19 significant funding shortfalls. Not only delay--
20 this not only delays projects, but also impacts our
21 entire capital portfolio, as we are forced to
22 allocate finite capital dollars to shortfalls as
23 opposed to new needs. We are encouraged about the
24 possibility of the design build authority from the
25 stay for DDC managed to library projects. This

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1
2 important piece of legislation was recently approved
3 by both houses and awaits the governor's approval.
4 We are also working with deputy mayor Bean and her
5 offense to find innovative ways to advance our
6 capital program. Construction of our five Carnegie
7 libraries, as well as our new Charleston branch is
8 being managed by EDC. When appropriate, we are going
9 to certain projects-- when appropriate, we are doing
10 certain projects as cultural pass-throughs, including
11 the property purchase of the recently opened van
12 Cortland branch and the Midtown campus project.
13 However, increasing the number of cultural grant
14 projects is not financially sustainable and,
15 therefore, not something we are eager to do. We are
16 also working with the city's department of housing
17 preservation and development and the Robin Hood
18 foundation to develop the Inwood Library. This
19 innovative project features a mixed-use development
20 that well how is a brand-new library, 100 percent
21 affordable housing, a community center, a STEM
22 center, and a universal pre-K site. Finally, we are
23 working with the city to make purchase of public use
24 laptops capitally eligible and are hopeful that the
25 details will be worked out very soon. More major

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capital projects has also meant an increase in the number of branches that will be subject to long-term temporary closure. The temporary closures of the library means the loss of library services to the community, something that we take very seriously. We have developed a three-pronged approach to temporary services during branch closures, including partnering with local community organizations to secure temporary program space, regular bookmobile services, and enhanced services that nearby branches. We appreciate how important temporary library services are to a community during extended closures and we will do all that we can within our limited funding to creatively provide for these communities. For more than a century, NYPL's network of libraries across the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island have served as powerful engines of individual and community empowerment and development, but they require capital investment and an efficient city capital process to ensure that we can continue to provide all New Yorkers with the tools and with the essential public space is that they need and they deserve. Whether it is a newly renovated van Cortland or recent fully renovations at the Stapleton library and Staten

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1
2 Island for the Washington Heights library in
3 Manhattan, the impact of improved facilities is
4 clear. Circulation, program attendance, and visits
5 grow significantly after capital investments. For
6 example, the first full year after Washington Heights
7 was renovated, the branch saw 105 percent increase in
8 program attendance and a 47 percent increase in
9 visits and a 45 percent increase in circulation over
10 the last full year. These are typical numbers that
11 show the importance of offering New Yorkers
12 inspiring, functional, modern spaces. Together we
13 have made great progress on our capital program and
14 we need to continue to build on that progress. We
15 are grateful to the Council's long time support of
16 libraries and look forward to working with you in the
17 future. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to
18 testify on this important issue. I remain available
19 to answer any questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
21 much, Iris Weinshall. Before we hear from Dennis
22 Wolcott, I just want to acknowledge we have been
23 joined by Councilwoman Inez Barron from Brooklyn and
24 I know, in a few moments, she will speak about her
25 very important resolution on ending the Cuban

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embargo, which we spoke about a little bit earlier when Council member Rodriguez was here, but first we will hear from presidency over the Queens Public Library, Dennis Wolcott before we go back to the cultural portion of our hearing.

DENNIS WOLCOTT: Thank you, sir. And good morning to you, Chair. And I am Dennis Wolcott, the president and CEO of the Queens Public Library. And to Councilwoman Barron, as well, then morning to you. It's always a pleasure to see you. Thank you, Chair Van Bramer and members of the distinguished committee for the opportunity to testify. Before I give my formal presentation, I just want to take a moment to thank you, Chair, for your leadership. It is truly been inspiring. It has allowed us to talk about our projects, which has taken place already in moving forward and, without you and the members of the Council and the Speaker and the Mayor's Office-- but especially you, this would not be possible. So, I just want to take a moment to say thank you. Thanks to the investments made by elected officials over the many years, in particular, the Chair and the members of the city Council of the DeBlasio administration, the Queens Borough President's

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2 office, we have capital improvements happening at
3 many of our libraries across the Queens Public
4 Library System. Every Queens City Council district
5 has an active or planned capital project in place.
6 The Department of Design and Construction, DDC,
7 manages the Queens Public Library projects. There
8 are currently 42 projects either active or in various
9 stages of DDC's front end planning unit with the
10 portfolio value totaling 255 million dollars.
11 Projects in this portfolio include, but are not
12 limited to, roof repair, HVAC replacement, interior
13 renovations, building expansions, and brand-new
14 libraries. In the Chair's district, there will be a
15 complete interior renovation of the Broadway Library
16 where DDC anticipates work beginning autumn of 2020.
17 We will also into a complete interior renovation of
18 the Woodside library and are actively fundraising for
19 this project, as well. In Council member Koslowitz's
20 district, a brand-new library will be built in Rigo
21 Park. Has been something the community has been
22 wanting for a great deal of time, so I am happy that
23 that work is underway on that project. In Council
24 member Moya's district, the Corona Library will
25 undergo an expansion to accommodate the growing

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2 population and the ever-increasing number of programs
3 we offer there. In District 19, a brand-new library
4 will be built for the Douglaston community. In
5 District 28, a brand-new elevator will be installed
6 in Flushing library, as well as an upgrade to the
7 original elevator system. All that is taking place
8 while we cannot close down Flushing, so this is going
9 to be one of our more complex projects. The Flushing
10 library is the busiest library branch and so this
11 project is essential to helping customers move more
12 quickly and more efficiently throughout the building.
13 Similarly, in District 22, a new elevator will be
14 installed in the Astoria library, as well as other
15 upgrades to the building to make it more accessible
16 to the public. In District 23, the Queens Village
17 library will undergo an interior renovation with the
18 work also being done to replace the roof and upgrade
19 the HVA system. In District 24, the Briarwood
20 library will be expanded and renovated. Similarly,
21 in District 25, the Jackson Heights library will be
22 expanded and renovated, as well. In District 27 and
23 District 28, the South Hollis library and the Baisley
24 Park library, respectively, will undergo complete
25 interior renovations. The Middle Village library in

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District 30 will close next month, in November of 2019 or really soon, since this is November tomorrow, as a matter of fact, in order for the HVAC system to be replaced. In District 31, the Far Rockaway community will receive a beautiful state-of-the-art brand-new library designed by the world-renowned architectural firm Snowhetta [sp?]. Finally, in District 32, the Woodhaven library will receive an exterior and interior renovation which will make it more accessible to the public and will restore original masonry openings to reinvigorate one of our original Carnegie libraries. While there are a great deal of exciting projects either planned or taking place, we are still faced with significant challenges, as my colleagues have said, as well. The biggest challenge we face is as a system in the amount of shortfalls on our project. As many of you are well aware and painfully aware, as soon as a shortfall is identified on a project, the process stops immediately. If presented with a shortfall on a project in September, for example, chances are we would not be able to recommence that project and the the next fiscal year when hopefully the city would have provided new funding to help cover the funding

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2 gap. 47 priority projects of ours alone, we are
3 experiencing a funding gap of over 40 million
4 dollars. The highly inefficient process and to the
5 project delays and costs that deprives the
6 communities of their library is. Therefore, one of
7 the most important things the city can do to help
8 libraries is the capital process is to create a
9 dedicated pool of capital funds strictly for the use
10 of libraries to address mid fiscal year shortfalls.
11 Next, is QPL, Queens Public Library, is forced to
12 fund raise for its capital plan in a peaceful manner,
13 relying on individual Council members to fund
14 multimillion dollar projects, as the Council members
15 know, our buildings will rapidly fall out of the
16 state of good repair. Therefore, New York City's
17 three library systems must receive another
18 significant lump-sum allocations similar to fiscal
19 year 2016's 300 million dollars allocation to
20 libraries under the city's 10 year capital plan.
21 This funding is vital for libraries to plan
22 effectively and to initiate much-needed critical
23 infrastructure renovation and expansion projects.
24 Additionally, as DDC implements their comprehensive
25 plan to improve the delivery of capital projects, it

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2 is unknown what the impact will be with regard to the
3 increased fees and costs that could be passed on to
4 libraries. As is implemented, the three library
5 systems will certainly keep the council apprised of
6 any issues that may arise. Creating a dedicated pool
7 of capital funding to cover shortfalls on library
8 projects and adequately funding the three systems in
9 the 10 year capital plan are the most important
10 things that can be done now. As always, thank you
11 for your leadership and for the opportunity to
12 testify today.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
14 much, Dennis Wolcott. So, the number one thing that
15 all of you identified is the issue with the 10 year
16 capital planned and, obviously, we will talk about
17 DDC a little bit, as well. But the 10 year capital
18 plan infusion was a great success. Maybe one of our
19 greatest successes, actually, which allows for so
20 much of what is in your testimony. In fact, I think
21 that the New Lots branch which Council member Barron
22 represents and took me to a few years ago, I know, is
23 getting that 20 million dollar upgrade as part of the
24 10 year capital plan infusion that we got a few years
25 ago. No?

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LINDA JOHNSON: That's correct. And we're in the midst of serious outreach and engagement in the community, as well as looking at architects for that project.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. So, let me just say, on the part of the administration, say, complete failure to not have re-upped that funding in the 10 year capital plan for libraries. Absolute disgrace in my mind because there is so much good in this testimony. So much good. It is so different than the testimony that you have given in years past and I've been there for all of it. And it is because we did the right thing. But you can't just do the right thing once and then say it's done and over with. Mission accomplished. Right? The mission is not accomplished.

LINDA JOHNSON: And these are large systems. It's like painting a big house. When you get to no one end, you've got to start again at the beginning. And keeping the deferred maintenance under control is a relentless process that we can never take our eye off of it because, otherwise, you know, we risk emergency closings and the thing that all of us are deeply committed to is making sure that

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2 we are consistent in the offering services that we
3 provide. That when we say we are going to be there
4 until 9 o'clock at night, we are, in fact, open until
5 9 o'clock at night.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Let me quickly
7 ask all three systems and viruses going to speak
8 about your conversations with the administration
9 about being included, once again, in a meaningful way
10 in the 10 year capital plan.

11 IRIS WEINSHALL: So, before I talk to
12 that--

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yep.

14 IRIS WEINSHALL: Another reason why being
15 in my 10 year capital plan makes so much sense is
16 because you have rational planning. You are able to
17 pick out projects and do a top to bottom renovation
18 and you know, consistently, that the money will be
19 there as the project moves forward. Brooklyn
20 identified their projects that they used with their
21 100 million. We identified five Carnegie's in
22 neighborhoods of need, of high need. And it is
23 allowing us to do this rational top to bottom. We're
24 not just doing an ABA project or a boiler or an HVAC.
25 It's being done in the total fashion. As for

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2 conversations with the administration, sure, I mean,
3 they are ongoing. We always make the pitch and hope
4 that we would can include them. We are not saying no
5 to the lump sums because, I think, as my colleagues
6 pointed out, the lump sums to help us deal with those
7 emergencies and deal with those smaller projects,
8 but, nonetheless, we believe the conversation will
9 continue regarding inclusion in the 10 year plan.

10 DENNIS WOLCOTT: [inaudible 01:32:16]

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Dennis, is
12 your mic on?

13 DENNIS WOLCOTT: We've been able-- I
14 didn't know and turned it off, so my apologies.
15 We've been able to raise the importance of what
16 capital actually means. And I think that is
17 something extremely important because we don't always
18 talk about circulation. We always talk about
19 programs. But if you don't have a solid build and if
20 you can't plan, as Iris indicated, then the circs
21 [sic] and everything else is not possible. And, I
22 think, as a result of having a dedicated pool of
23 dollars, but also being included in a planned allow
24 us to plan properly, that gives structured
25 organization an opportunity to do it the right way.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, we all
3 have to redouble our efforts to make sure that this
4 happens because New Lots doesn't happen without this.
5 And for every New Lots, there are dozens of other
6 libraries in the city of New York that also could be
7 done if we do this the right way.

8 LINDA JOHNSON: I would just like to add
9 that New Lots is kind of the perfect example where we
10 had money from the 10 year plan and then has
11 significant grant from Council member Barron, the
12 largest one that the library is ever received of 6
13 million dollars allocation which means that we will
14 really be able to do something significant on that
15 site.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, as
17 demonstrated, when you have the political leadership
18 in the political will to get it done, as Council
19 member Barron and I were out there several years ago,
20 she was adamant that this get done and it got done.
21 So, if the mayor believes in making sure this
22 happens, it can be done and will be done. Let me
23 just go over DDC briefly. All of you mentioned DDC,
24 as well. Have you seen any improvement in the
25 operations of DDC and your interactions with DDC and

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2 these capital projects that all of you have ongoing
3 since there been changes made both in the personnel
4 and the hierarchy and, obviously, I have great
5 respect for Lorraine Grillo, but also in some of the
6 processes that they have also changed?

7 IRIS WEINSHALL: So, I think Lorraine is
8 a very dear and good friend of all of us here
9 testifying. She is trying very hard, but what she is
10 walked into is not a perfect process. She has
11 identified new personnel in our moving personnel
12 around to accommodate the needs of the large
13 portfolio of the libraries. They initiated front and
14 planning which I know we have all contributed
15 projects to. It's not a perfect system because that
16 system has now identified projects that have huge
17 funding gaps and a big reason why they have huge
18 funding gaps is because they have sat on the shelf so
19 long and so, as time goes on, projects don't get less
20 expensive, they get more expensive. Having said
21 that, we entered into 11 projects in the front end
22 planning. Three are now moving along. What I like
23 all 11 to move along? Yes. But having said that,
24 three of moves along and I am hopeful that, as the
25 front end planning get started with newer projects,

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2 but not older projects that have aged on the shelf,
3 that will see the success that we need. The second
4 thing is that DDC and Lorraine were very forceful
5 about getting design build when it comes to DDC
6 projects and libraries would be Hmong Mac category.
7 As we all know, and design build does have some
8 challenges, but those projects tend to move more
9 quickly and you can sometimes get it at a cheaper
10 rate. So, those particulars are being worked out. I
11 don't think projects have yet been identified. I
12 think the only projects that have been identified for
13 design build are the five new prisons that are going
14 to be built. And beyond that, we haven't heard
15 whether any of the library projects are included.
16 So, in summation, let me just say that DDC is trying.
17 We are not getting the same message that, I think,
18 many of us God over the last five years. This is the
19 way it's done. It can't be changed and we are
20 hopeful that, you know, moving along, that they will
21 get more and more successes with these innovations
22 and may be accept some other innovations, as well.

23 LINDA JOHNSON: Just to briefly add, I
24 think that the word here is hopeful. It's recent,
25 the changes there. We are pleased at the changes

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below Lorraine's level. Below Lorraine's level. We think that there is a new energy and sense of commitment. And so, we are open to what is coming down the pike.

DENNIS WOLCOTT: She turned it off again before she slid it over. So, I agree with what Linda and Iris just said as far as the relationship with DDC. I think our relationship with DDC is definitely improved. And we had a somewhat solid, not that we always agreed, relationship with DDC, but I think at the levels of Lorraine, but also the deputies, we have had ongoing meetings. Our meetings now are every other week with them at various levels of communication. I think there may be some unintended consequences that we have to watch, which I alluded to in my testimony, as far as some of the changes. And, again, I think with the front end planning unit, it helps tremendously and, I think, as a result of their attention to detail, as far as the cost factors, therefore that's where the shortfalls come from. So we have to be very conscious of that and watch that, I think, extremely carefully because that has a major impact on all of our projects. But from a communication point of view, from a laying out of

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1 vision point of view, from the new energy that my
2 colleagues talked about as far as the personnel that
3 are assigned to work with us, seen tremendous
4 improvement in there, but at the same time, I think
5 we have a long way to go.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, it's
8 good to hear that you believe there is progress and
9 hope, but I think the system is still broken and in
10 many ways, because, as long as we have these kinds of
11 delays and cost overruns and issues with getting
12 projects built on time, and is interesting to know
13 that the new jails are in design build, but not new
14 libraries, wage is a problem for me. I want to make
15 sure we switch back and allow Council member Barron,
16 but I can't let you go, and Dennis Wolcott, without
17 addressing the recent issue, obviously. The leak at
18 the new hunters point library, is that a failure on
19 the part of DDC to build a library that won't leak or
20 what happened there?

21 DENNIS WOLCOTT: So, let's set the record
22 straight and thank you for the question. The leak
23 that was being referred to in the headlines in one of
24 our tabloids was really a sprinkler system and that
25 was lose that had some water come as a result of that

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2 and then also the flashing at the door at the
3 terrace. And so, that is being readjusted, as well.
4 The sprinkler head has been replaced and that was the
5 leak itself. So, the normal process of a new
6 building and the new building having some challenges,
7 but not in issue with DDC, as far as the build.
8 There is just a leak that was there between the
9 sprinkler hat and the flashing. And love flashing
10 was as a result of the driving rain one of the
11 particular days and it was blowing in that direction.
12 So, either it is been done or is being done, but
13 definitely the sprinkler head is being replaced.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. But you
15 are happy with the construction and then you believe
16 you were presented with a building nine news
17 functional and works and-- so you don't think the
18 sprinkler breaking was an issue of quality build.

19 DENNIS WOLCOTT: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It's just--

21 DENNIS WOLCOTT: But's other articles have
22 indicated, I mean, we have some challenges and we are
23 working with DDC and the architect and other agencies
24 as far as how we respond to those challenges. One of
25 those challenges we responded to right away and the

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2 moving of books away, even though we had a building
3 department approval back in 2014 as far as
4 accessibility is concerned and other parts of the
5 building. But we were sensitive to the issues that
6 people were raising, so we addressed that. We are
7 working with DDC to see if there are other ways along
8 with the architect that we can respond to some of the
9 concerns. I think one of the articles also pointed
10 out about noise level. I'm not sure about my
11 colleagues and their quiet rooms, but, you know, our
12 quiet rooms are not necessarily acoustically designed
13 a's absorption material. It's, basically, people
14 inside the quiet room should be quiet. And so, there
15 are some challenges with that, as well as some design
16 and, as you all know very well now, the atria moves
17 said and some of the noise that may be created with
18 having that type of open space. And so, we are
19 constantly addressing functionality because, you
20 know, I have divided it into three buckets in my
21 head. Aesthetics, compliance, and functionality.
22 And we are making sure we focus on the functionality
23 of the building and making sure the building is
24 serving the needs of the customer. So, for example,
25 to date you'll be pleased to now we have had 35,000

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2 people and just about a month that have come through
3 our doors at Hunters Point. And that is just
4 growing. So, Hunters Point has already jumped into
5 the top 10 category of all of our libraries in
6 Queens, at least. And so, we are pleased by that.
7 And then, like I would imagine my colleagues, with
8 their systems, we are always assessing what I call
9 the biorhythms of a library in a neighborhood. So we
10 have seen some unique biorhythms as far as the
11 computer center, for example. In our cyber center,
12 two thirds of the computers have not been even turned
13 on, which is an interesting factoid in that it shows
14 the type of community that is there. They are
15 bringing their own laptops in and they are turning on
16 their laptops. So we are going to take a look at the
17 numbers over another couple of weeks and then make
18 some adjustments as far as the use of the space where
19 the cyber center is located. And even with the one
20 third of the computers that have been turned on--
21 and I'm talking about from the beginning of the
22 library opening, even with those computers not going
23 throughout the entire day, it's only for a small part
24 of the day. So, we reimagine that and see what we
25 can do. And then, in the children's area, we're

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1 taking a look at that as far as functionality and how
2 we address, you know, some of the challenges there.
3 So, I think, that with DDC, you know, they built the
4 building and, as you well know, the building's been
5 in the planning process for close to two years. And
6 so, we are addressed saying that now that it has been
7 and making sure that DDC is a part of, since they are
8 the builders of the library.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And
11 two last questions to clear up because I know there's
12 been some political grandstanding outside the
13 library. The building is built to code and is ADA
14 compliant, no?

15 DENNIS WOLCOTT: It's built to code and
16 ADA compliant even though there are agencies looking
17 at it and so we're working with the agencies to make
18 sure that it's in total compliance and just, as you
19 well know but just to put it out there, that the
20 areas that people are questioning-- and this is not
21 from a political perspective, just in general-- our
22 tiers. They are not floors. And so, the floors are
23 accessible and the tiers are within a floor, so I've
24 been doing a number of floors where you have tiers
25 that don't necessarily require the accessibility, per

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2 se, because the floors, whether below or on top, make
3 that particular agency building income plans. But,
4 again, we are working with the Department of Design
5 and Construction, they architects, and other agencies
6 to make sure that we address it in a way that
7 satisfies all people who have raised concerns. But,
8 from the political point of view, I stay above the
9 politics. I'm not involved in that. I am dealing
10 with the functionality of making sure that we are in
11 compliance with who comes through the door.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Which is
13 35,000 people and--

14 DENNIS WOLCOTT: So far.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: during this
16 short period of time. So, people vote with their
17 feet and I certainly have had lots of folks tell me
18 how incredible they feel the library is and what a
19 great addition it is to the community and the kinks
20 well be worked out, but, at the end of the day, for
21 generations, hundreds of thousands, if not millions,
22 of people will ultimately use and benefit from--

23 DENNIS WOLCOTT: [interposing] Well,
24 you've got to even go above hundreds of thousands

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2 because already, as you said and I said, we are at
3 35,000 and that is just a month.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

5 DENNIS WOLCOTT: And so, we expect some
6 really robust numbers that hunters point and the
7 community has been waiting. I want to, at least--
8 for me, at least, wrap up from this point around
9 Hunters point a, the staff are fantastic. I mean,
10 the staff are there. The children, the librarians
11 are there. They have had to, for example, increase
12 the number of children librarians sessions, as a
13 result of the demands of their and they have found a
14 way to increase the number of sessions. And so, our
15 manager and our staff there are currently and always
16 responding to the needs of the community on how we
17 can adjust. In addition to that, as you know, we are
18 about to launch our environmental center at hunters
19 point, as well, which will expand our ability to work
20 around environmental issues and specifically
21 targeting not just that community, but other
22 libraries. And so, that is the balancing act as far
23 as the implementing of programs while at the same
24 time, balancing the capital needs and the challenges
25 of the building that is a brand-new building.

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you all
very much. I want to thank you all for coming. For
all-- Yes. But, before that, Council member bear
and has a [inaudible 01:47:25]. I was rushing to get
to Cuba, but if I could get to Cuba.

[Background comments]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But, first, we
will have a library question.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you so much
to the Chair and thank you to the panel for coming in
present your testimony. And I do want to acknowledge
the fact that, when we first came into the Council,
UK and man you visited the New Lots library and saw
the state and we did have the president calm, as
well. And it has been a long time coming, but we are
finally going to see a brand-new library at New Lots
and I am excited about it. And, yes, I did put a
significant amount of money end of this. 6 million
dollars. Because I believe that libraries are, in
fact, one of the equalizing forces that we can use to
make sure that all of the people that are living in
our great city have equity in terms of literature and
media and technology in language and job development
opportunities and a collaboration with the community.

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2 And I think that that is really what we are beginning
3 to see more and more of. That these libraries are
4 collaborating with the communities that eggs asked.
5 We are excited. We had an expansive number of people
6 who came to the planning session. I don't know if
7 you got the report. It was more than what they had
8 planned for, but that is a good thing. There will be
9 more community input, talking about what they want to
10 see in the new library. And, as we move forward with
11 the planned have a building that reflects the rich
12 history of the site in which that library is located.
13 That square block is designated as African burial
14 ground square because it was the side of the cemetery
15 which, at one point, had the remains of whites and
16 one section and the remains of Blacks in another
17 section. And, when the Dutch Reformed Church built
18 their new building and established a cemetery, they
19 took the remains of the winds and reentered them at
20 the Dutch reformed church across the street and,
21 according to the Brooklyn Eagle of the time, left the
22 bones of the Blacks believe bleaching on this side of
23 the road. So, there was great desecration that was
24 perpetrated at that time and we have since moved
25 forward to make sure that, as the park which is

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2 adjacent to the library is redesigned and has been
3 renamed as San Cofer [sp?] Park-- which San Cofer
4 is a word which means you can go back and reclaim
5 your history and use that to move yourself forward
6 into the future. So, we are excited about the
7 library, name. We are excited about the involvement
8 of the community and designing the library and all of
9 the resources that it will offer and I wanted to
10 thank you and thank you to the Chair for making sure
11 that that happened. And then shall I--

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [inaudible
13 01:50:16]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: first. So--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: with that, I
18 want to thank our three library executives for being
19 here and we will continue to work to make sure in the
20 10 year capital plan and get things right with DDC.
21 So, the three of you are excused.

22 DENNIS WOLCOTT: Thank you.

23 LINDA JOHNSON: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

25 And then, as I mentioned earlier and I know so many

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2 in the audience are here to speak to the very
3 important resolution number 1092 that Council member
4 Barron has introduced, I am proud to be a co-prime
5 sponsor, along with Council member Ydanis Rodriguez
6 and Council member Barron's resolution calls upon the
7 president to live to the Cuban embargo and and the
8 Cuban travel ban once and for all. And I would ask
9 those who are leaving to depart as quietly as you can
10 so that we can afford Council member Barron her
11 opportunity to speak to the resolution. And then, we
12 are going to call a panel to speak to the resolution
13 before we go to DDC. We are going back and forth
14 here because we have so much on the agenda today of
15 the committee. But, with that, I want to thank
16 Council member Barron for her leadership and ask her
17 to say a few words on Resolution 1092.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you to the
19 Chair and I also wanted to thank you for
20 accommodating the schedule of the presentation so
21 that I could be a part of this. 1092, as has been
22 stated, calls for lifting the embargo and for ending
23 the travel ban on Cuba. And we know that this band
24 has been in place for more than 50 years and, as we
25 look at the conditions which led to the band being

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2 first imposed, those situations and those
3 circumstances have changed. So, I want to think that
4 Chair, as well as Council member Rodriguez for being
5 co-prime sponsors of this bill and bringing it
6 forward at this time. We know New York is the side
7 of international affairs. The UN is located here and
8 all of that business is conducted here. We feel that
9 this is an important time for us to make sure that we
10 make a statement. The present administration in
11 Washington is seeking to create a climate that has
12 many people fearful. Fearful of their own status as
13 immigrants here and how they might, in fact, they
14 prosecuted and persecuted in terms of that. So, we
15 are looking to make sure that those gains towards
16 normalizing, which had been established during the
17 Obama administration are maintained and that we don't
18 go back. That we don't revert to those times when we
19 had the cold war when those sanctions were in place.
20 So we are asking that the president, in fact, lifted
21 the embargo and end the travel ban. We know that it
22 is very harmful to the residents of Puerto Rico, as
23 well as those people who are living here-- residents
24 of Cuba, I'm sorry. As well as those people who are
25 living here who have relatives there who want to

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2 travel and make sure that they can have that
3 opportunity to visit. It also is impacting the
4 economy because cruise ships are being banned from
5 docking in Cuba. And so we are calling for an end of
6 that. It's impacting also a collaboration between
7 the medical research that was being conducted between
8 Cuba and the United States, particularly looking at
9 how to and lung disease. I want to, again, thank my
10 colleagues for cosponsoring this spell and I want to
11 acknowledge those persons who were involved in
12 drafting it, and that is Christine Dwyer, the
13 attorney who drafted the legislation, Council member
14 Rodriguez's office legislative director Evelyn Colado
15 [sp?], your office is Jack Bentonovich [sp?], and my
16 office, Joyce Simmons, my chief of staff, and the
17 legislative director M. Indigo Washington. Thank
18 you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
20 much, Council member. I, too, believe that this is
21 embargo hurts people and illuminates what we should
22 be doing, a which is collaborating, sharing, and
23 there is so much culture, history, health at stake
24 and this president is wrong on virtually everything.
25 And this is one of those many things. So, I know

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2 that a number of folks have signed up to testify on
3 the resolution. I'm going to call groups up in four.
4 We are going to have a strict time limit of about two
5 minutes per person, if you could summarize your
6 testimony or me the two minute deadline, that would
7 be appreciated, because we have a number of folks who
8 want to speak to this very important resolution and
9 way also to have DDC in the building, as well. So,
10 James Haskins. Is James Haskins still here?

11 [Background comments]

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: He had to
13 leave. Okay.

14 [Background comments]

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Do, you want
16 to read his testimony? Did you also sign up?

17 [Background comments]

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: What's your
19 name?

20 [Background comments]

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Nope. There
22 you are. Okay. So why don't you come up. Shepherd
23 McDaniel?

24 SHEPHERD MCDANIEL: Yes.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Great. And
3 you can also represent James. Is Anne Mitchell still
4 with us? Anne? Will you come forward? Brody Enoch?
5 Is all, please come forward.

6 [Background comments]

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I'll let
8 everyone get seated and we will start from my left,
9 your right with Mr. Vita. Would you like to begin
10 your testimony?

11 GILBERTO VILLA: Me?

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yes.

13 GILBERTO VILLA: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Pull the
15 microphone close to you. Make sure the red light is
16 on.

17 GILBERTO VILLA: It's on. Yeah. My
18 testimony might-- My name is Gilberto Villa and I'm
19 [inaudible 01:57:23] of Havana, Cuba. I'm a current
20 resident of the city of New York. I will be brief
21 and to the point because other colleagues will have
22 [inaudible 01:57:34] on this matter. Today I appear
23 before this honorary body to ask you to prove
24 proposal number 1092, call on the president to live
25 to the end embargo and restriction and travel to

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2 Cuba. The embargo and restriction restricts to my
3 homeland, Cuba, accrued a criminal measure against
4 the welfare of our people. As a Cuban born and
5 raised in Cuba, I witnessed the dire consequences of
6 this criminal measure. The monetary economy losses
7 are amends. The Cuban government has estimated that
8 the [inaudible 01:58:22] because he is 116 [inaudible
9 01:58:28] million and I think it's in the billions.
10 In the 59 years of [inaudible 01:58:34], the area had
11 been severely felt by the back of medicine intended
12 to the treatment of cancer and other diseases, long
13 and short-term. There are many reasons why it's
14 necessary to revoke the blockade of my homeland,
15 Cuba. It is our desire that this honorary body
16 approve our request on behalf of the Cuban people, my
17 family, and my own. I give you my sincere thanks for
18 the opportunity to discuss this vital issue here.
19 Thank you. And, by the way, I've lived in New York
20 [inaudible 01:59:17].

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. The
22 Chair had to step away and, in his absence, I will
23 continue. The next panelist, please present your
24 testimony.

25

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BRODY ENOCH: All right. I can't see the
mic, so you're going to have to--

[background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Sergeant-at-arms,
could you assist them, please?

BRODY ENOCH: Oh, no. No. Thank you.
Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay. Thank you.

BRODY ENOCH: All right. Very cool. Good
morning. My name is Brody Enoch. I am here
representing IFCO Pastors for Peace. I'm a graduate
student at Fordham University and part of this
graduate program-- and I know I am old and I can't
see and I don't really like people leave and to know
I am doing in MSW, but I'm doing it anyway. So, I
was fortunate enough to land that IFCO Pastors for
Peace and it is where I came in touch with this
amazing resolution. So, being new to this, I had to
actually take a step back. You are going they hear
from people such as the young man who just spoke
about his ties to his homeland and the need for him
to remain connected to his family and his people.
You are going to hear from people who are far more
learned than I am about who have been doing this for

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2 a lot longer than I have about the Cuban experience
3 and the African Diaspora. You are going they hear
4 from folks like that. But I had to sit back for a
5 second and then say, why do we even need to be here?
6 I mean, if we had Cuban blockade and we had this
7 continued antagonism towards Cuba, it must be because
8 they have some amazingly anti-American political
9 stance and that's the reason why we should not have
10 any doings with them. Well, if that's the case, we
11 should really not any connection to half the planet--
12 half the countries on this planet. So, then I said
13 to myself, long, maybe, just maybe they were involved
14 with fixing the past election and that I would have
15 no, you know, connection with them. And I said, wait
16 a minute. That would be in their favor because,
17 obviously, this administration loves countries who do
18 that. And then it hit me the hypocrisy of all of
19 this that, if I were lucky enough to go to Cuba, that
20 I couldn't stay in a hotel. I would have to stay in
21 someone's home, yet, the person that occupies 1600
22 Pennsylvania Avenue is able to build a hotel down the
23 block from where he is staying and all of the
24 dignitaries from around the world, including Cuba,
25 can come stay in his hotel, but I can't go to Cuba to

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1 stay. So, there is really only one reason that I can
2 come up with why this has been going on and why it
3 continues to go on. It's because Cuba had the
4 audacity to be an island full of brown people who
5 decided a long time ago that they, themselves would
6 decide what political system they would lead and how
7 they would roll their island. And, of course, they
8 couldn't do that. Not in this great world we live
9 in. Thank you very much.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

12 [Applause]

13 [background comments]

14 ANNE MITCHELL: Good afternoon. My name
15 is Anne Mitchell and I am a member of New York New
16 Jersey Cuba Si, a broad coalition of organizations
17 and individuals who, for decades, have worked for
18 normalization of the relationship that we the United
19 States and Cuba. I am here this morning to present a
20 summary of the testimony of Joan P. Gibbs and
21 Rosemary Meele which was submitted electronically.
22 First imposed during the Eisenhower administration,
23 the Cuban embargo is a relic of the Cold War and shed
24 have ended with it. The embargo is a failed policy.
25 It has not caused the Cuban people to rebel in 60

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1 years, despite the overwhelming hardships that it has
2 caused, as the majority of the Cuban people continue
3 to support the Cuban transition to new forms of
4 economic and social transformation. Cuba is a
5 sovereign nation and should be respected as such by
6 the United States. The Cuban embargo has long been
7 opposed by a majority of the nations of the world.
8 During the most recent though on a resolution
9 condemning the embargo in the UN General Assembly,
10 189 of the 193 member of that body voted in favor of
11 the resolution. Two countries, the United States and
12 Israel, voted against the resolution. They embargo
13 is also reportedly opposed by a majority of the
14 citizens of the United States. In November 2014, all
15 Obama and then Cuban president Raul Castro announced
16 that the two governments would restore full
17 diplomatic ties and ease them more than 50 years of
18 bilateral hostilities. The same day, Obama and
19 Castro also announced--

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We have your
22 written testimony in front of us. Is there a way for
23 you to summarize?

24 ANNE MITCHELL: Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

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2 ANNE MITCHELL: In conclusion, I urge
3 you to vote in favor of the resolution 1092 and
4 present the resolution of full city Council for
5 about. Thank you for allowing me to testify.

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
7 much. That is certainly my intention on both fronts.
8 Last, but not least on this panel?

9 SHEPHERD MCDANIEL: I am confident that
10 this committee would agree that sports and culture
11 are two fundamental keys to the mutual understanding
12 and friendship between all peoples of the world.
13 Last night, millions of us watched games that veteran
14 of the 2019 World Series. Throughout my youth,
15 teenage, and young adult lives, I played New York
16 City's sandlot, semipro, and varsity baseball in both
17 high school and college and I continue to coach both
18 Little League and senior league baseball day today.
19 The historic agreement between Cuba and Major league
20 baseball to love Cuban baseball players to finally
21 play in the United States was primarily overturned by
22 the reinstated embargo because the Trump
23 administration did not want Cuban ballplayers to be
24 paid. And newer restrictions were just implemented
25 against the Cuban mission to the United Nations,

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2 which prohibits their diplomatic staff from even
3 attending New York Yankee and New York Met games
4 because they are not allowed to travel anywhere in
5 New York City except for the island of Manhattan.
6 There are no baseball teams on the island of
7 Manhattan anymore. This is from James Haskins.
8 Tomorrow is the start of November's hip-hop culture
9 month and the 45th anniversary of the 1974 being
10 innings right here in New York City. Since that
11 time, have pop culture has spread globally at every
12 continent on earth, which includes the nation of
13 Cuba. The 2020 international hip-hop for humanity
14 tour is scheduled to kick off and Cuba next spring
15 and its primary goal of New York City and Cuban hip-
16 hop artists, being able to travel and then performed
17 together both in this city and in Cuba is severely
18 threatened by this embargo. I encourage the city
19 Council to pass a resolution 1092, to end the
20 embargo, and lift all travel restrictions against
21 Cuba. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
23 much. Thank you to this panel. Would you like to
24 say-- Okay. Thank you all for your testimony and
25 for being here today and for your passion and

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2 advocacy. We are going back and forth and I want to
3 ask Commissioner Foley to come forward. We are going
4 very quickly have some quick testimony from the
5 Department of Design and Construction and then go
6 back to testimony from the community on the Cuba
7 embargo resolution. Thank you, Councilwoman. Mr.
8 Foley, you have to sworn in. Right? Yes.

9 LEGAL COUNSEL: Please raise your right
10 hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
11 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
12 before this committee and to respond honestly that
13 Councilmember questions?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: I do.

15 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Good morning,
17 Chair Van Bramer, members of the committee. I am
18 Thomas Foley, Deputy Commissioner for public
19 buildings for the Department of Design and
20 Construction. Joining me at the table today is Phil
21 Heller, our new Executive Director for the libraries.
22 Thank you for any opportunity to testify today and
23 how our libraries and our portfolio and on the
24 improvements we are making to our libraries unit
25 under the director of Commissioner Lorraine Grillo.

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2 DDC works with all three of the library systems that
3 were here earlier today. We currently have over 153
4 act is library projects in our portfolio, valued at
5 over half a billion dollars. A significant number of
6 those projects are only now entering the schematic
7 design phase, which is an indicator that the number
8 of projects in construction and is destined to expand
9 in the near future. DDC is proud of its role in
10 shaping the next generation of libraries for all of
11 New Yorkers, from the hugely popular downtown
12 Flushing library to New York public libraries new
13 Roosevelt Island branch, which is nearing completion,
14 to the ongoing renovation of the East Flatbush branch
15 for Brooklyn Public Library to the innovative design
16 of Hamilton Fish library, which received an award
17 from the Public Design Commission last year. We
18 recognize the urgency of delivery library projects as
19 quickly and as efficiently as possible, while working
20 within the strict legal, low bid framework that
21 governs the use of our taxpayer funds. In January, a
22 launched DDC's strategic blueprint for construction
23 excellence, a 360 degree reveal of DDC's business
24 practices and the external challenges. One of the
25 most important improvement since the addition of

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2 tools that the public buildings division can use to
3 assist agencies with early capital planning before
4 these projects come to DDC. This is a comprehensive
5 program and it is important and that I share key
6 details with you today. First, as we reported to the
7 Council member Gibson at the capital budget
8 subcommittee hearing last month, every single project
9 that comes to DDC is now carefully reviewed by our
10 front and planning unit before it officially comes to
11 DDC. Front and planning was established in 2016 to
12 ensure that every project a sponsor agency proposes
13 has a reasonable scope and enough money to pay for
14 it. Front and planning gives us sponsor agency is a
15 realistic assessment of budget and schedules so that
16 they can better plan their capital program. In
17 fiscal year 19, 31 projects went through our front
18 end planning process. Nine were recommended. 20
19 were returned to the sponsors for more planning and
20 two are with us now. We are implementing many other
21 initiatives under the blueprint to tackle the
22 critical early planning phases. We are creating a
23 better cost estimating program. Reliable cost
24 estimating is essential to creating realistic budgets
25 and is a critical part of our other improvement

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2 efforts. We are employing more DDC-lead capital
3 project scope developments , which are known as CPSD.
4 These studies are expense-funded and give sponsors
5 more detail when developing the projects DDC will
6 likely design and deliver. We are also establishing
7 an advanced capital planning unit, which will include
8 in house staff dedicated to working with our sponsor
9 agencies, to look at their assets, and make informed
10 decisions about their short and long term capital
11 needs. We are also initiating building conditions
12 surveys that allow us to work with our sponsor agency
13 use to better track the conditions of their assets
14 and better plan the future capital needs and budgets.
15 To that end, we began surveys with Brooklyn public
16 library. We evaluated five of its branch libraries
17 from top to bottom for factors such as code
18 compliance, building defects, and reported back to
19 BPL the scope of the work and the dollar amount it
20 would take to bring each of these facilities into a
21 state of good repair. We are investigating ways to
22 fund and expand this effort to others sponsor
23 agencies and look forward to sharing additional
24 information on this effort in the near future. On
25 the project delivery side, we have reduced changed

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2 order review time by 50 percent by centralizing the
3 review process. The median number of days required
4 for DDC to procure design and construction services
5 has been cut in a third since fiscal year 17. We
6 have established standard design and construction
7 durations that will set clear expectations for future
8 performance. The design is that working with us now
9 must be on the clock when they start the design
10 process. A clear example of that is news standard is
11 Rigo Park Library. Design began in April of this
12 year and will be completed in early 2021 and shovels
13 will be in the ground that fall. We received funding
14 for additional construction management services to
15 provide on-site oversight and coordination into keep
16 our contract-- and to ensure our contractors keep to
17 the schedules. We are also read tooling vendor
18 performance evaluations so that we can improve
19 performance. We continue to implement these changes
20 highlighted in the blueprint every day and we thank
21 the Council for its support and for considering
22 legislation action that would improve the capital
23 program system. One of the most important of these
24 is the permission from Albany to use design build,
25 which has a proven track record to reduce costs and

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2 project duration. It is a key proponent of our DDC's
3 blueprint. We thank the Council for its letter to
4 support-- in support of this to the governor.
5 Finally, I am pleased to announce that, at the
6 direction of Commissioner Grillo, DDC has created a
7 new position of ADA compliance that reports to my
8 office. Mr. Jay Wood came on board in July and
9 provides expert advice in the agency's approach to
10 accessibility and reviews all of our projects for
11 compliance and to ensure they satisfy city and
12 federal accessibility requirements. DDC's capital
13 program, for the three library systems, will continue
14 to be very active while we institute comprehensive
15 reforms across the entire capital construction
16 process. We are proud of our past successes and we
17 are adapting to the challenges to ensure continual
18 improvements. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
20 much, Commissioner. And I apologize for the delay.
21 Obviously we had an unanticipated situation with
22 Commissioner Finkelparl this morning that I wanted
23 to be very sensitive to and then we are also wanting
24 to be respectful of Council member Barron's very
25 important resolution on the Cuban embargo. But very

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2 much respect your time and being here today. So, a
3 couple of things. So, the new position in terms of
4 oversight of the libraries is very exciting. Can
5 either of you talk a little bit about what that means
6 and entails and how having a point person in charge
7 of all the library construction will hopefully help
8 make this go a lot better?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Yes. So,
10 we are very excited. As I indicated, came on board
11 in July, reporting directly to my office, Jason wide
12 is the Director of accessibility. He has already
13 immersed in the various designs that are in the
14 process now. Is also working directly with the
15 libraries programs for projects in construction to
16 ensure compliance. We are very excited for this
17 recent edition.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I
19 understand the director of ADA compliance, but is
20 there not a point person on the library program?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Oh, yes. Of
22 course. I'm sorry. Mr. Phil Heller is our executive
23 director for the libraries program.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And
25 that was my question. I don't know is Mr. Heller

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2 could speak to how we envision this office changing
3 for the better, the experiences that we have had with
4 far too many libraries.

5 PHIL HELLER: Yes. So, one of the
6 important things, as Commissioner Foley discussed is
7 important planning at the beginning stages. So, as
8 the unit that actually delivers the projects, we want
9 to make sure that we have important information at
10 the beginning. So, essentially, aligning the scope
11 and budget. All of the efforts back at Commissioner
12 Foley has talked about really point to that. So, we
13 really look to it and giving the tools to be able to
14 actually deliver the project. So, as part of that, I
15 have a staff of 50 people addressing libraries that
16 split between the three library systems, about 15 for
17 Brooklyn public library and seven teenage for Queens
18 and New York Public Library. This position allows
19 the ability to sort of shift personnel as needed.
20 Right now we have a lot of projects for New York
21 Public Library that are in construction, so we are
22 heavier on there. As others shift to heavier
23 construction, we are able to move those over. So,
24 that's why I have the over side of that is to be able
25 to see you where to put the personnel as needed. And

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2 really to institute standards across the board for
3 all the library systems and make sure everybody is
4 working together collaboratively.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So you have 50
6 people just in the library unit?

7 PHIL HELLER: Correct. Yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And you report
9 to the Commissioner Foley who you obviously work
10 directly with Lorraine.

11 PHIL HELLER: That's correct.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Grillo, right?
13 And Iris Weinshall spoke a little earlier about the
14 11 projects that they had worked with you on in the
15 three were moving forward and she was happy that
16 three were moving forward, about wanted all of them
17 to move forward. What happened there? Maybe you can
18 walk us through that. Why only three out of 11 move
19 forward? What does that look like and mean?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: So, in
21 essence, 11 projects come from New York Public
22 Library. We will go out. We will do a site
23 investigation from our front end planning team.
24 Basically, a SWAT team of engineers and architects
25 that go out and evaluate that site for whatever the

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1 particular scope of the project is. We then do a
2 full review over the course of two to three months
3 for an in-depth review of what the programming needs
4 are, what the scope of the project is, whether it is
5 HVAC boiler, but also looking at other things such as
6 making sure fire alarm-- everything else that could
7 be impacted by that particular scope of work is
8 included in that particular-- is included in the
9 budget. Some of the challenges that we have had as
10 an agency over the course of numerous years has been
11 that we would accept the project from our sponsor
12 only to find out that the additional scope needed to
13 be added an additional monies would be necessary from
14 the Council. This is a way of addressing all these
15 things up front both for the project is initiated.
16 Before we hire a designer. We all, collectively, all
17 need to be on the same team and understand what the
18 needs are for that particular project. Then once we
19 are and we know that the funding is available with
20 our colleagues at OMB and at the library DNA, then we
21 proceed and we hire a designer for that particular
22 scope of work. And then they-- I'm sorry. Then the
23 designer will proceed with reduced design durations
24 that we have recently incorporated.
25

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Are 50 people
enough? Do you need more?

PHIL HELLER: We can always use more.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Well, we're
very-- you know, as far as Phil had said, so he's
coming on board. Extensive experience with capital
program in the police unit, so-- within the police
department. A great addition to DDC and he has the
ability, right, to reporting directly to me and is
able to fluctuate staff-- has that flexibility of
moving staff out. You heard earlier from Ms. Johnson
as far as the number of projects that are coming up
in Brooklyn. And that way we can use that-- those
50 within that, as well. We have attrition,
naturally, so we are always hiring engineers,
architects, planners. So we have a very robust team
now.

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: In terms of
general contractors that don't perform, obviously, we
just came out of an experience where a poorly
performing general contractor added to some of the
pain that we all felt and we had discussed over the
years the issues with a default and whatnot. What
more are you doing to make sure that that experience

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2 isn't replicated and that we don't get stuck in these
3 situations where defaulting contractor delays a
4 contract even further and so we are sort of stuck
5 inconveniently with someone who we really would love
6 to terminate our relationship with, but doing so is
7 even more problematic than sticking with them.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: So, there's a
9 number of things that we are doing right now under
10 the direction of Confession or Grillo. We really
11 formed the basis of the strategic blueprint, which is
12 really evaluating the contractors early on board
13 consistently throughout having the support of the
14 Commissioner's office that, if issues arise early in
15 the process, that we certainly meet and engage with
16 the bonding company and we pursue other avenues.
17 There are certainly challenges in the low bid process
18 and one of the real benefits of design build would be
19 to have the designer and the builder engaged early on
20 in the process. and just to expand on, you know, and
21 I know that Ms. Weinshall had specified earlier as
22 far as design build. So, the city does have
23 authorization for the four correctional facilities,
24 for borough base channels, not the five. And there
25 is legislation that is pending up in Albany now for

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1 the governor's signature and this would be for any
2 library or cultural project over 1.2 million, so it's
3 very broad and we're hoping and we're taking measure
4 internally that, if this does pass, we'll be ready to
5 go. We have worked with New York Public Library and
6 identified certain projects, scope of projects that
7 we could utilize. We actually brought them in last
8 week. Some people from NYPL and the library systems
9 and for training from an association in Washington,
10 Design Build Institute of America. So, we're really
11 at the forefront for when this does get signed off.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Got it. So
14 once-- Well, assuming the Governor signs, then
15 library projects will be identified to be absorbed
16 into design build?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Correct. And,
18 if I just could say one thing is that we had an open
19 house two days ago where we are really hoping to have
20 a more robust prequalified listing of firms so that
21 way we know, at the onset. We already do the
22 investigations into the firms before they bid so that
23 way there's no delay with a potential low bidder that
24 is not reasonable or that may have other issues with
25 financial and what have you. So, we're really

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2 looking to-- we had over 320 firms there and we're
3 hoping to expand our PQL, as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Of course I
5 have to ask you at least one question directly on
6 Hunters Point. The flashing issue. Obviously, we
7 know that there is still work going on on the roof.
8 When is that going to be done?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: So, there's
10 two issues. And one is, as Dennis had indicated,
11 that's being repaired now. As far as the flashing on
12 the roof, it was just that the doorway where's
13 actually the issue where there was some ponding
14 collecting, the contractor is on site there doing
15 that work now. You know, we are very, very proud of
16 the building that we had and, literally, we you were
17 going through our testimony last week, we had 30,000,
18 right? And now, Mr. Wolcott said 35,000 within--
19 you know, 5000 in the last week. So, we find this is
20 a success. There will be punch list items. We have
21 450 active projects throughout the city right now and
22 each and every one of these will have corrective
23 measures that need to be addressed at the end of the
24 job. This is the world that we live in. The world
25 that I-- and we look to reduce that during

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2 construction, but there will be corrective measures
3 that are done after the projects are open.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I respect
5 everything you said, but I didn't hear you answer the
6 question about when the work on the roof would be
7 complete.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: So, I would
9 say within a week. They started today, so in
10 approximately a week. It was just at the door jam,
11 so it wasn't significant.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: That's
13 relating to the leak for--

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: That's related
15 to the leak.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: The other one
18 is the railing is on site and as soon as the weather
19 breaks, they will be doing just an extension of the
20 railing for the rooftop. My apologies for that.
21 Right.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No worries.
23 And then the roof work and the outdoor seating area
24 will be complete? Substantially complete?

25

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2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: That will be
3 substantially complete. It won't be reviewed by DOB
4 and then it will be turned over to Queens Library.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right. And,
6 obviously, probably for public use in the fall. In
7 the spring as the weather gets nicer again. So, I
8 just wanted to say also that I, too, agree that,
9 while it was a painful process, and took a very long
10 time--

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOLEY: Uh-hm.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I have more
13 gray had today because of the library than perhaps I
14 would've normally had. But it is a remarkable
15 success, given how many people have come to use it in
16 the first month and I know that there are growing
17 pains and kinks that have to be worked out, but I
18 also believe that what we did there was important and
19 special and unique and will benefit generations of
20 folks in Long Island City and greater Queens. We
21 just need to do it more quickly and more efficiently
22 going forward, which is, of course, what you all are
23 charged with doing. So I know you waited a bit.
24 Again, I apologize for the delay. We respect you and
25 your time and I will ask no more questions so you can

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2 get on with your day and we will continue with the
3 Cuba resolution hearing. So, thank you very much,
4 Commissioner Foley, Mr. Heller, and we will,
5 obviously, continue talking about this. Thank you.
6 So we are going to continue hearing testimony on
7 Councilwoman Barron's resolution 1092. Let's see if
8 folks are still here. Dr. Damien Suarez. Is Dr.
9 Damien Suarez here? Yep. Come forward, Dr. Suarez.
10 Pat-- Is it Fru?

11 [background comments]

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Fry. Sorry
13 about that. Your Y was confusing me there. Is Emily
14 Thomas here? Emily? Mrs. Thomas? And it looks like
15 Toll Gogan? Is Toll-- Tal? Great. Okay. That's
16 the next grouping of four and then we have, it looks
17 like, two more panels. We're going to stick to the
18 four-- the two minute testimony. And, again, we
19 will start, again, with Dr. Suarez on this panel as
20 soon as Tal is ready. Great.

21 DR. DAMIEN SUAREZ: Good afternoon.

22 I'm Dr. Damien Suarez. I'm originally from the
23 Bronx. In 2007, I applied for a scholarship program
24 through the New York Interreligious Foundation for
25 Community Organization, or IFCO, which was recruiting

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2 applicants and notifying them of full scholarship
3 offers from the people of Cuba to a young women and
4 men from the United States that wanted to pursue a
5 medical career. Our only commitment was to return
6 your communities and serve. I was accepted. From
7 2008 until my graduation in 2015, I lived and studied
8 in Cuba where I earned an MD. I graduated going no
9 debt, thanks to the solidarity of the Cuban people in
10 its government. The Cuban healthcare system is a
11 model of healthcare that succeeds and reaches poor
12 places, prevailing despite an unjust embargo being
13 imposed on it. This very model is currently
14 benefiting the people of New York City who seek
15 medical care that Jacoby Medical Center, Monte Fiorre
16 Medical Center, Harlem Hospital, Lincoln Hospital,
17 Wyckoff Medical Center, Woodhull Medical Center, SUNY
18 downstate Medical Center, and Bronx Lebanon Hospital
19 where they receive treatment by my fellow graduate of
20 Cuba's Escuela Latino Americana de Medicina, the
21 Latin American School of Medicine. The embargo,
22 meant to punish the Cuban government, in reality
23 punishes Cuba's people, as well as the almost 100 US
24 citizens studying medicine in Cuba. Young US
25 citizens from diverse backgrounds, like myself, who

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2 hope to return to their communities and provide
3 quality healthcare for everyone. Restricting the
4 trade of goods, commenters, and the movement of
5 people hurts families both here in the US and in Cuba
6 and limits our freedoms as US citizens to move freely
7 beyond our borders. I call for the end of the
8 embargo and blockade against Cuba and the lifting of
9 the travel ban. I applaud Council members Barron,
10 Rodriguez, and Van Bramer for having the courage to
11 bring resolution 1092 before this committee and I
12 encourage every member of the New York City Council
13 to support this symbolic legislation, as well. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you, Dr.
16 Suarez.

17 [applause]

18 PAT FRY: Thank you. Good morning.

19 Thank you. My name is Pat Fry and I thank the
20 Council members to bringing this resolution forward.
21 I am here representing two organizations that I work
22 with, the Committees for Correspondence for Democracy
23 and Socialism and the Alliance for Global Justice. I
24 have worked in this illegal and inhumane blockade of
25 Cuba ever since I first visited the country in 1972.

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2 I went with a group of 200 Americans to express our
3 opposition to the US foreign policy that was
4 attempting to overthrow the government of Cuba. We
5 helped to build new houses for a dairy farm outside
6 of Havana. This was 13 years after the Cuban people
7 overthrew the brutal military dictatorship of
8 Batista, a regime supported by the US government and
9 the US corporations that have long profited off the
10 misery of the people. In April of this year, I went
11 to Venezuela with a small group of US and Canadian
12 citizens to save ourselves up front the dire
13 conditions of the country there caused mainly by US
14 sanctions also and the illegal seizure of that
15 country's oil and gold reserves. In the morning of
16 April 30, I awoke to gunfire surrounding our hotel.
17 A coup d'état was underway. It failed miserably and
18 was over within two hours. That coup d'état, the
19 attempted coup d'état, was organized by the Trump
20 administration and paid for by our US tax dollars.
21 The Trump administration use that failure back coup
22 d'état against the Maduro government to issue more
23 sanctions, more incredibly new type name of the
24 embargo against Cuba as an excuse saying that Cubans
25 had military personnel in Cuba. Anyway, I just

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1 wanted to just quickly say that there were no
2 military personnel in Cuba. There were only doctors
3 and agricultural workers and our tax money should go
4 to fund our libraries, our schools, our worn out
5 transportation system, a new African-American Museum,
6 as we heard earlier, and our cities struggling with
7 their budget. Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

10 [applause]

11 EMILY THOMAS: My name is Emily Thomas
12 and I'm a volunteer with IFCO Pastors for Peace that
13 sent the doctors took Cuba and I also own in a family
14 apartment house in downtown Brooklyn, so I pay a lot
15 of property taxes, but that is not why I am here.
16 I'm here because I am part of the White Rose ministry
17 at the Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn Heights. And,
18 in fact, I am wearing the T-shirt that we wore
19 marching in the pride parade in Havana during the
20 national week against homophobia back in 2010. We
21 have took our name White Rose, from the poem written
22 by Jose Marti, a poem that every Cuban school child
23 knows. Marti wrote that he gives a white rose to his
24 friends, but to those who tear out the heart by which
25 he lives, to them, also, he gives a white rose. I am

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1 here today to support Bill 1092 in which we ask our
2 President to stop tearing out the heart of other
3 countries, particularly Cuba. Our church has been in
4 partnership with the Presbyterian Church into
5 ecumenical projects in Cuba for over 20 years. We
6 have learned from them. We have helped them. We
7 have grown together. I've got a lot of stories.
8 One of our ongoing projects is to fund a feeding
9 program that our sister church runs. With 3750
10 dollars that we send them every year, they are able
11 to give lunch five days a week to 14 senior citizens
12 who live in the neighborhood of the church who live
13 alone. This year, they ran out of money for food.
14 Because of the new economic pressures that the Trump
15 administration is applying to Cuba, the price of food
16 has gone up. What about the others? I'll ski about
17 the health and talk about, as Presbyterians, we
18 talked about being called. We are called by our
19 religious teachings, our moral judgment. We are
20 called to be better than this. Passing this bill is
21 a step on the path to rectifying a wrong, cleansing
22 of sin. We urge you not only pass the bill, but come
23 to Cuba. Talk to people there. See for yourself
24
25

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1 what their life is like under the sanctions. Bring
2 white roses.

3 [applause]

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

5 [background comments]

6 TOM GOGAN: Good afternoon. My name is
7 Tom Gogan and I am the interim chair of the New York
8 City Chapter of the US Labor Against the War. I am
9 also a UAW Local 1981 member. We work with labor
10 organizations here and around the country to promote
11 strong, working class unity and to and to the
12 seemingly and for is promoted by our federal
13 government and end the military industrial complex.
14 We commend to you, Council member Van Bramer. I
15 apologize for misspelling your name. And also
16 commend Council members Barron and Rodriguez for
17 sponsoring this legislation. We believe a hyper
18 militarized foreign-policy is costly and
19 counterproductive and that our country needs to stop
20 its endless wars and interventions and focus instead
21 on the true national security needs of our people.
22 In other words, our government must, instead, focus
23 on them provide for decent food, housing, healthcare,
24 education, libraries included, transportation,
25

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2 environmental protection. At most a hand in hand so
3 our basic social and cultural needs in order to
4 create a fully sustainable and equitable economy and
5 productive life for all. Our government has sought
6 to undermine the triumphs of the Cuban revolution by
7 punishing Cuban workers through a commercial,
8 economic, and financial blockade for six long
9 decades, despite 73 percent of US citizen's support
10 of lifting the blockade. Cuba is not our enemy. The
11 Cuban people are our fellow workers, friends, and
12 neighbors. The blockade prohibits US workers from
13 exercising their right to freely travel to Cuba and
14 to forge a worker to worker ties. If the blockade
15 were lifted, it would create jobs for US workers and
16 increased trade and agricultural products for
17 farmers, among other economic benefit. US Labor
18 Against the War condemns the Trump administration's
19 travel restriction policies and the prolonged brutal
20 blockade and sanctions against the Cuban people and,
21 despite the limited resources and food, medicine, and
22 trade opportunities due to the blockade, the Cuban
23 revolution remains a beacon of hope for workers
24 everywhere and has accomplished some of the highest
25 literacy rates and health conditions in the world.

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2 We support resolution 1092 wholeheartedly and call
3 for its immediate passage. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

5 [applause]

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I suppose I
7 want to say thank you to all of the folks who have
8 mentioned libraries and supportive culture knowing
9 that that is my life's work and linking the two,
10 which is very important to me. Then there is no
11 question in my mind that this is foolish embargo only
12 seeks to hurt the people of Cuba. And I have not
13 been to Cuba, but I very much want to go and will go
14 and, obviously, we shouldn't have to jump through
15 silly groups to go to Cuba. So, I want to thank all
16 of you, as well, for being here and for your
17 advocacy.

18 TOM GOGAN: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

20 We're going to--

21 [applause]

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: hear from
23 another panel. Is Sapphire Ahmed? Sapphire.
24 Stephen Millies. Is Stephen Millies? Did I say that
25 right? Okay. Is it Cathy Carlson?

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[background comments]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay. Yamir?

Yamir is here. Great. And let's call one more. Is Showana Vaughn? Showana? Okay. And then we have one more, I think. Shernice Gatewood Ali and then we have a Matthew Za-- Is still here? Okay. We're going to hear from you after, but there's-- right? Shernice, you're the last person to testify on Cuba, so why don't you join this panel and then we can close it out with Matthew which is back to libraries? All right. Can we add a fifth chair just so we can end with the last panel on the Cuba resolution?

[Background comments]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, why don't we start again from my left, your right and then we will go down-- yep. You are up first.

DR. SAPPHERE AHMED: I'm doctor--

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Is the red light on before you? If you click it.

DR. SAPPHERE AHMED: I'm Dr. Sapphire Ahmed who became a physician thinking, by now, that my country would have a health care system that delivered the human right for health care to all Americans. We don't still, but Cuba does, so it has

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2 a special place in my heart. I would like to say
3 that Cuba is a multiethnic population of
4 predominantly people of color who have done just what
5 the US American European leaders have always
6 advocated for people of color to do. They have
7 pulled themselves up with their shoestrings. So, why
8 is this gigantic empire like Goliath supported by our
9 taxes consistently aiming to starve the Cuban people
10 of medicines for treating asthma, diabetes,
11 infections, high blood pressure, etc.? Why does the
12 United States persist in implementing laws aimed at
13 stifling the social and economic development of the
14 small nation? Why is the United States, with its
15 global mind, oppressing the people of Cuba when Cuba
16 is not a terrorist nation and as are some nations
17 that our government be friends? I submit to you that
18 the US government shed that the people of Cuba
19 develop. The Cuban people, nor we Americans, want to
20 return to a situation when only or primarily the
21 European ethnic and wealthy Cubans and the Mafia is
22 secured to fall human rights and prospered in Cuba.
23 Rather, the Cuban people should be honored for
24 exceeding the US empire in terms of reduce seeing
25 racial, educational, healthcare, and economic

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2 disparity. Finally, Cuba is, in fact, so much to
3 offer the United States in the area of functioning
4 democratic community-based political structures,
5 healthcare, and education. Furthermore, if beautiful
6 beaches are the preoccupation of this current
7 president, Cuban beaches are so much closer than
8 those of Greenland for the average American to visit.
9 But if the people of the United States condemn
10 bullying, we must demand that our representatives and
11 the inhumane and unjust harassment of the Cuban
12 people. Thank you. Please pass the resolution 1092
13 and thank you for sponsoring.

14 [applause]

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

16 STEPHEN MILLIES: my name is Stephen
17 Millies. I am a retired Amtrak worker and member of
18 both the Transportation Communications International
19 Union and the American Train Dispatchers Union. 16
20 of those years on the railroad I've spent at
21 Sunnyside yard and I'm speaking in support of
22 resolution 1092. About 20 years ago, two of my
23 workers died, tragically died, of meningitis. The
24 people of Cuba have developed a vaccine against
25 meningitis. In fact, they have developed 33

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2 vaccines. Many of these are not available in the
3 United States because of the cruel blockade of Cuba
4 that has caused the Cuban people at least 140 billion
5 dollars. This is criminal and we should reinstate
6 just normal relations, state to state relations, just
7 as President Obama reestablished diplomatic relations
8 that people can travel to Cuba. That's a blockade
9 against working and poor people in the United States
10 that want to travel. That want to interact with the
11 Cuban people. So, I hope this resolution 1092 gets
12 past. Thank you.

13 [applause]

14 YAMIR CHABUR: Hello. My name is Yamir
15 Chabur. I'm a Colombian-American, first generation
16 born. I am from Queens. I am from Queens, as well.
17 Yeah. So this year was my first year going to the
18 Cuba. I went with the Venceremos Brigade which is a
19 brigade that, for 50 years, have sent US citizens to
20 Cuba to do agricultural work in solidarity with the
21 Cuban people and as in protest against the criminal
22 Cuban blockade which impedes Cuba of trading with
23 other nations around the world over, as well as Latin
24 American nations. I remember speaking with Cubans
25 and them explaining to me the fact that like they

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2 would like to trade with the company in Mexico, but
3 if the company has one percent US ownership, then
4 they cannot trade with that company for medical
5 supplies that I feel like this is criminal in a way
6 that Cuba is a sovereign nation and they fought for
7 that sovereignty in us in the United States who are
8 the pronouncdecators [sic] of democracy are impeding
9 on somebody else's sovereignty just because we
10 couldn't build casinos because the grand legacy of
11 the Cuban revolution is the fact that Cuba will never
12 be nobodies casinos because Cuba belongs to its
13 artists, to its musicians, to its doctors, to its
14 teachers, and to its children. And we, here in the
15 United States, need to respect that. Also, the fact,
16 too, that me being also into hip-hop, I also got to
17 like-- I got to connect with a lot of hip-hop
18 artists out there, so that was dope as well knowing
19 the fact that New York City is the birthplace of hip-
20 hop and with me, as a New Yorker, I was able to
21 connect with the Cuban people. So, I support
22 resolution 1092.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

24 [applause]

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And as a
3 Queens came, I just wanted to say thank you. You are
4 the first person to mention that you are from Queens,
5 which makes your testimony just a little bit better
6 than everybody else's. Just joking. But now I know
7 the next two, I'm just told right, Shernice and
8 Showana to talk about the introduction and so I just
9 want to be clear that you are about to go to be
10 talking about introduction number 1451 and that is
11 Council member Cabrera has introduced on the
12 creation of a task force to review the feasibility of
13 creating the New York City Museum of African-American
14 History. So, whoever wants to go first.

15 SHERNICE GATEWOOD ALI: Hi. My name is
16 Shernice Gatewood Ali. I am the CEO of We Are
17 Phenomena Woman, which is the nonprofit organization
18 for women who have gone through domestic violence.
19 So I am wearing my purple. Today is the last day.
20 Happy Halloween to those who celebrate it. But I
21 would like to express my concerns-- well, actually
22 it's something good because I went to Washington DC
23 and I visited the museum and, actually, I brought a
24 bus and I think it was-- I was happy and that I was
25 sad at the same time, so I had mixed feelings, but I

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2 was happy to see what my ancestors have brought and
3 contributed to this country. Now, if we bring it
4 over here to Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, wherever
5 they want to build it, I think it would be a very
6 good thing for our youth to visit me because our
7 education do not really express what we did, what our
8 ancestors did. They, more or less, highlight the
9 European-style and I think, as African-Americans,
10 Latinos, and so on, need to see what we did for this
11 country. So, at the end of the day, I did write a
12 couple things, but I think I went off because I know
13 we of-- we are pressed for time. We need to know
14 who made the baby buggy. W. H. Richardson. Henry T.
15 Simpson, he made the cell phone. John L. Love made
16 the pencil sharpener. J. Standard made the
17 refrigerator. J. B. Winter made the fire escape, the
18 ladder. Did anybody know that? This is what I'm
19 saying. We need to bring this museum into our
20 country. We need to have it here. Have it here for
21 us. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

23 [applause]

24 SHOWANA VAUGHN: Hi. My name is Showana
25 Vaughn. I am the director of Silent Cry and I to

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1 mass incarceration and gun violence prevention. And
2 so, first of all, I would like to say thank you to
3 the Council men Cabrera for this wonderful vision and
4 this museum is vital and it is not a dream of
5 something that is going to happen far from now. And
6 so I think that we have watched-- in this country
7 right now, we have approximately 138 African-American
8 museums in 37 states. But New York is the epicenter
9 of the United States and if we are multicultural and
10 we lead in sanctuaries and we lead in being a model
11 of people to follow, then we need a museum that looks
12 like what we say. And so, I believe that, not only
13 do we need this museum, we are going to have this
14 museum because our school system is disenfranchising
15 young people of education that is other than Europe
16 descent. And so, because we are disenfranchising my
17 children and my children's children, then we need to
18 create something and create space where they have
19 these learning opportunities not just for a day. We
20 shouldn't have to go to Washington DC. We are the
21 epicenter and this museum has to be in the epicenter
22 of the world which is New York City. And so we're
23 going to stand on what we say and we're going to put
24 an African-American museum in this great city so this
25

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2 great nation can receive what it deserves. And we
3 are talking about the 5 million people that have been
4 in Washington DC and we have talked about the current
5 see that that brings. Let's talk about the whole
6 mess that that brings because, yes, there is a volume
7 of dollars and, yes, we need a task force to see what
8 that is, but as a mother, as somebody who believes in
9 community, we had to stand on the shoulders of
10 Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner and the Cubans and
11 everybody else. And that means that you assign this
12 task force to see how much this costs and to see how
13 fast we can get it built. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

15 [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I want to
17 thank all of you. That concludes all the testimony
18 on the two pieces of legislation that were heard
19 today. I support wholeheartedly both of them. I
20 look forward to working to move both of them and both
21 of them should happen. So I want to thank all of you
22 for coming forward today.

23 [background comments]

24 [applause]

25

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CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
much.

[applause]

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We do have one
last person, though, who would like to talk about
libraries and that is Matthew Zadrozny who will talk
about libraries if you would like to stay for that.
Matthew?

MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Is this working?

CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: It is.

MATTHEW ZADROZNY: All right. Good
afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Council.
My name is Matthew Zadrozny. I am the president of
saveNYPL.org, an all-volunteer group. We saved the
Mid-Manhattan branch which Iris Weinshall was
showcasing from being sold. We saved to the historic
book stacks at the Central Library, which hold up the
main reading room, from being guided. We prevented
the NYPL from wasting millions of dollars and digging
a money pit like the one Cooper Union's trustees
buried their students in. Now, NYPL wants to spend
millions smashing a landmarked window in the south
court and carving up the marble walls of the north-
south gallery at the Central Library. These changes

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2 are intended to allow tourists to exit through a
3 supersized gift shop and caterers to swiftly serve as
4 private parties and weddings. They have nothing to
5 do with the NYPL's mission. Nowhere in the NYPL's
6 charter is there a provision for a bar service. The
7 Central Library, on 42nd and Fifth, was built on city
8 land with taxpayer money and is owned by the city of
9 New York. NYPL's contract with the city requires it
10 to keep the Central Library open at least 80 hours
11 per week. For the first six decades of its existence
12 after it opened, the Central Library was open to the
13 public an average of 87 hours per week. Now, NYPL
14 Central Library is open less than 55 hours each week.
15 Three nights a week, Monday through Friday, it closes
16 before 6 p.m. when most students are getting off
17 school and most working New Yorkers are leaving work.
18 On Sundays, the day most New Yorkers are free, it's
19 open only 3.75 hours and, in summers, it is closed.
20 Mr. Chairman, such stingy hours are all the more
21 unfortunate given that NYPL's cash-strapped peer, the
22 Queens Public Library, only opens three of 66
23 branches on Sundays and the Brooklyn Public Library
24 only opens six of 60 branches. Longer hours aren't
25 sexy. Longer hours don't provide ribbons to cut or

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1 trophies to parade. Longer hours provide a quiet,
2 safe space for students to study, researchers to
3 write books, freelancers to work, and inventors to
4 create. By contrast, short hours cut into education
5 and earnings. That is why several thousand New
6 Yorkers have signed our petition demanding longer
7 hours at the Central Library. As NYPL--

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

10 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: told the Council in
11 March, libraries open doors, but not if they're
12 closed. So--

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Matthew, can
14 you wrap up?

15 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: don't let the NYPL spend
16 millions desecrating the people's palace. Instead,
17 compel the NYPL to honor its contract with the city
18 and keep the Central Library open at least 80 hours
19 per week. Tell the NYPL serve readers, not
20 cocktails.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you very
22 much, Matthew.

23 [applause]

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I know you've
25 been before the committee before. I, as someone who

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1 has dedicated my life to libraries, appreciate and
2 respect your advocacy and I agree with you that there
3 are few things more important than expanding library
4 hours and days of service. Something we have worked
5 very hard to do. When I first became the Chair, we
6 were down to five, so we have expanded them, but we
7 need to expand them more. I agree with them. Thank
8 you.

9
10 MATTHEW ZADROZNY: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: With that,
12 this hearing is adjourned.

13 [gavel]

14 [background comments]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 6, 2019