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Unwavering Support!

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Good morning all,

I am one of the BPL Trustees, Board Vice Chair and Finance & Audit Committee Chair. For the first time in years I have been able to stream the budget hearings and I want to commend your dedication and thoughtful questions to all the participants, but most important, thank you for your unwavering support to Boston Public Library. The Trustees are very proud of David and his team's strong leadership. This team has stepped out of their comfort zone, they are visionaries and really take our motto "Free to All" to heart and that is all possible with the City's unwavering support to our services. Thank you for your continued support, we look forward to continue serving our community and be a premier example to all libraries.

Have a good weekend!

Evelyn

ps Please bring the new gavel (the wooden spoon) back, it just made my day!

Evelyn Arana Ortiz

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May 7, 2020

Dear members of the Boston City Council,

People who are familiar with me know that I have been a strong advocate for the South End Library and Library Park. However, I would like to step back for a minute and request your strong support for the City of Boston to continue and even increase its investment in both capital improvements and programming support **for the entire BPL system**. In our damaged economy, more people of all ages will need the BPL for Internet access, a safe place to study and read, programming support, research and circulation. I ask you to fully back the outstanding and extraordinary commitment by Mayor Marty Walsh to renovate and upgrade the entire library system for the benefit all Bostonians.

Many who have waited for decades to see their libraries repaired and expanded are now suspended in time again with no library to go to even when the branches reopen. I am referring to library users of the Dudley branch, the Adams Street branch, and especially the Chinatown branch, both the temporary one and the permanent one being planned. I am also referring to the completion of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department at the Central Library.

Stepping forward again as the president of the Friends of the South End Library (FOSEL), I am happy to report that the South End library and Library Park had a very good year, last year. This is the result of, among other things, the unwavering commitment by Mayor Marty Walsh to renovate the Boston Public Library (BPL) system and the strong support of the BPL's president, David Leonard and his team. We thank you, our at-large and district councilors, for your decade-long efforts to promote our goal to make the South End library and Library Park the best they can be for the South End neighborhood.

Last October, with a \$50,000 check from FOSEL and \$132,000 from the BPL's capital budget, the South End library's interior was beautifully 'refreshed.' We received new flooring, fresh paint, and many new electronic outlets and charging stations. We were able to carve out a new, separate seating area reserved for teens. We have purchased new furnishings that provide a variety of seating arrangements for library users, as well as a ceiling-mounted projector and roll-down screen in the community room, and a charming new mural depicting a

range of South End landmarks. The BPL's project director, Lissa Schwab, made sure all was completed within four months, allowing the library to reopen quickly for its users. We hope it will re-open again as soon as it is safe to do so.

FOSEL also received a \$25,000 earmark in January from the State of Massachusetts for landscaping, irrigation and fence projects in Library Park, thanks to the advocacy of our South End State Reps., Jon Santiago and Aaron Michlewitz. We hope to get the work started as soon as the Covid 19 construction moratorium is lifted. We received approval for interior fencing from the South End Landmarks District Commission (SELDC). We thank the BPL and the SELDC staff for their assistance in filing the application, and the Parks Department (BDPR) for their help vetting the FOSEL-sponsored improvement projects.

While the Covid 19 pandemic has made it hard to figure out how the BPL will operate in the near future, as a library Friends group we are proceeding apace. We are looking forward to working with the BPL to help keep library users safe and connected, and we plan to continue our advocacy for future expansion and improvements at the South End library. We hope the scheduled planning for the expansion of the building, one of the smallest libraries in the BPL system, will not be delayed too long as a result of the social and economic fallout of the Covid 19 pandemic.

FOSEL has a few requests for which we seek your and the BPL's support.

- 1. Library Park Improvements:** The \$25,000 MA earmark for the Library Park improvements needs to be spent by June 30, or we lose it. We have received half, or \$12,500. The construction moratorium prevents the improvements from going forward but we are hopeful that we can request an exemption before that date, as the work take place outdoors and will take only three days and three people to complete. We may have to call on you for your support.
- 2. Programming Study:** The South End library is one of a handful of branch libraries scheduled a redesign and expansion of the building in the next few years, starting with a Programming Study, which was funded in the BPL's FY 2020 capital budget. The library is one of the smallest in the city at 8,000 sq ft, for a population of more than 30,000 South End residents. FOSEL has doubled its board size to reach out and fully engage South End residents in the new-

library planning and information process. **We would appreciate an update on where the South End library stands in this process.**

3. **Restroom Security:** There are two public restrooms in the South End library that serve the surrounding neighborhood, not just the library's patrons. The restrooms are for shared use by children, teens and adults. FOSEL heard from youth-advocacy groups and parents that **they would like to see the bathrooms locked for the safety of children and adults, with a key provided as needed from the circulation desk.**
4. **Hot Spots and WiFi in Library Park:** We would like to have as many hot spots available at the SE library as needed for those without Internet access at home. Making WiFi is available in Library Park will further expand access for all, regardless of library hours.
5. **Computer Access by Teens:** South End youth-advocacy groups have proposed that the row of adult computers currently dividing the teen seating area from the young-adult book collection be reserved for teens only. **It would have the additional benefit of creating a unified space reserved for young adults.** (Teens currently have to share computers with young children, which is not optimal.)
6. **Computer Access for Adults:** As a result of the interior renovation, adult library users can easily use portable electronic devices offered by the BPL, or their own, and take them wherever they sit down in the adult reading room: The new library furnishings have created multiple seating arrangements for adults, all of which feature tables that are wired for Internet and charging stations.
7. **WiFi filtering for Children and Teens:** United South End Settlements (USES) and other youth advocates are concerned about the lack of web filters at the branch, like Barracuda, Cisco, TitanHQ, among others, and would appreciate the BPL addressing this issue.
8. **Magazine Subscriptions:** We would like to see more subscriptions at the South End library, including for teens and children.

9. **College student/Highschool Student Mentoring Programs:** FOSEL volunteers would like to work with the BPL to develop mentoring/internship programs by college students for teens, and for teens' mentoring of children.

Thank you,

Marleen Nienhuis, on behalf of
The Friends of the South End Library.