

***Federation of Friends of the DC Public Library System***  
**Candidate Survey, June 15, 2006**

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Survey completed by Chris Otten, DC Statehood Green Party

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

1) Do you have a DC Public Library Card, and if yes, for approximately how many years?

Yes I carry a DC Public Library Card and have carried a card for at least five years.

2) What branch do you consider serves as your neighborhood library?

The Mount Pleasant branch is closest to where I live, however, I tend to find myself rollerblading down to Martin Luther King often.

3) How has the DC Public Library contributed to my life as a resident of the community?

Every time I walk into our libraries, despite some of their conditions, I feel empowered by what I see. I can't quite describe the feeling I get when I see folks soaking in knowledge but I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels this. I leave our libraries always humbled by the unselfish attention that librarians give to residents seeking awareness. I also leave energized with new information that helps me continue onwards regarding my various projects. I see our libraries as community centers and look forward to each planned visit.

**SCOPE**

4) With 27 library branches, does the Library System have the right number of facilities to effectively serve the community? If no, approximately what number would you advocate and why?

I'm not sure if we'll ever come up with the 'right' number of libraries... but I would suggest that we match the number of libraries to the number of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions. There are 37 ANC's in the District with each ANC representing approximately 12,000 people. At some point the government felt this was a logical division of elected decision-making and hence could be submitted as a good number for our branch libraries. So that means we should have at least 10 more branch libraries to better fulfill the needs of our residents.

5) Do you feel there are communities that are currently underserved by the DC Public Library? If yes, which ones?

Yes. Of the eight public libraries east of the Anacostia River, two of them have been closed since December 2004. The closing of the Anacostia branch and the Benning branch mean that 25% of the libraries have been closed in the poorest areas of the city where they are needed most! The other two libraries Shaw and Tenley plus the two I mentioned in Ward 8 are still closed and although Mayor Williams promised interim library spaces, none have been established and without due reason -- just lack of political will and care for these residents. Plus the over burdened Mount Pleasant branch is the only library serving Ward 1 which is one of the most dense wards in the city.

6) What approaches would you support for reaching those currently underserved by the DC Public Library System?

I will find the resources needed to finalize the contracts to renovate the four closed libraries immediately. They must be opened as soon as possible. In the long-term, I would investigate the use of public schools that are closing down to be used as new library centers. It seems as if city leadership is fine with letting go of these so-called 'surplus' properties at fire sale prices to rich developers when they could go to helping us meet our library objectives and reaching underserved communities.

7) Does the District need a major central facility such as it now has with Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library? If yes, why?

Absolutely. Having a central DCPL library and office that helps to support and facilitate good management at the branch level is critical. It is no wonder that our branches are in such disarray when one examines the years of neglect at our central library. MLK Library will stand once again as a beacon of hope for all librarians in our DCPL system. It will be a place where librarians can come for regular trainings to further their librarian skills, a place for library management to discuss good practices that can be shared among the branches, and a place that serves as a model for our entire DCPL system.

## **FUNDING**

8) Would you support a dedicated commitment of a certain percentage of the DC Budget for literacy, libraries, and cultural programming? If yes, approximately what percentage and why?

Please allow me to demonstrate the priorities of our so-called city leadership. In FY 2007, the city plans to spend almost the same amount of money for our libraries as it plans to spend for repayment of loans and their interest. Can you imagine repaying interest on loans to build such things as a massive convention center that is more used by private corporations and their sales fairs than by the general public? As mayor, I will find the means and ways to increase the library budget line item, from 1% of the overall budget (400 million) to at least 1.5% (600 million)... this is the least we can do for our District residents trying to find the skills to move ahead in their academic and professional careers.

9) The DC Public Libraries are facing approximately \$480 million in deferred maintenance on facilities. What portion of these costs should be direct appropriation from the District Budget?

It is clear we should find as much money from the Federal government as possible to offset these costs. However, seeing that our Federal government is mired in conducting an unjust and illegal war that is draining funds to social services nationwide, I feel the city has an obligation to get in the streets and protest or to pick up the difference. An infusion of maintenance funds will energize our library system so to repair long years of neglect and bring back vitality to one of the most important social services this city can provide, knowledge.

10) The quoted estimate of \$480 million does not include the costs to furnish and equip library facilities. What approaches would you support for the additional funds necessary to appropriately equip library facilities?

I would presume the largest equipment cost would be expenses associated with Information Technology. These are your computers, software, networks, etc. To offset these costs greatly, we can rely on free open source software such as Linux. Linux, as a competitor of Microsoft, has the unique capability of reviving computers that date back a decade. Linux can be loaded onto old computers to make them useful systems even by today's standards. Corporations keeping up with the Gates' in the DC Metro region are constantly upgrading their hardware and dumping thousands of computers, modems, network cables, etc. into landfills each year. We can combine environmental and economic stewardship by removing these computers and parts from the waste stream and putting them into our libraries in a very functional way. I've done this before as the director of a non-profit in Virginia and in Florida.

11) Would you support a bond initiative for the express purpose of rebuilding the DC Public Library System's facilities?

I am hesitant about issuing bonds mainly because the City bond rating has plummeted due to the baseball stadium fiasco and hence interest rates would be quite high. Wall Street is a bit jittery right now regarding our debt being placed oh so precariously on whether a private baseball team succeeds in our public stadium. It still amazes me how the city leadership, Williams, Evans, Cropp, and Orange, could move forward on this terrible deal despite the outcries of the public. 69% of District residents were against this deal as surveyed by the Washington Post. These leaders do not listen.

12) Under what circumstances would you support the redevelopment of library properties by private developers? How would you address the concerns of many residents who feel that current stand-alone branches would be lost and overwhelmed by such redevelopment?

I don't believe I can address concerns of residents in regards to mix-used development. Empirically it has been shown that private interests win out at the expense of DC public tax dollars. I am extremely hesitant about this type of development for our libraries but would listen to potential project ideas.

## **ROLES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

13) How should the DC Public Libraries coordinate their support for the community with other District Agencies?

Libraries will once again be hubs of community development. By this, they will be working with agencies such as our Public Schools, Human Services, Transportation, and Economic Development to offer more robust services for our residents. Public Schools whose funding for libraries were cut can look to community libraries to help with interim services and after school programs can be integrated with library programs. New DC families can and should look to libraries as a way to get more information about citywide services for babies and parents. Homeless folks and seniors should be able to come to a library to get a list of citywide services for their needs too. The Department of Transportation should work with community libraries to maximize access by public transit to library services. And the Office of Economic Development can use community libraries as space to offer continuing education classes for adults, to hold budget and financial planning seminars, and offer information about participating in citywide programs helping small businesses.

14) Many DC Public Schools have either eliminated their libraries or the professional staff responsible for library services. How should DC Public Libraries coordinate their support for the community with DC Public Schools?

Until school libraries, which have been cut, redeploy their own in-school systems, DCPS should work with community libraries to provide interim service. This could mean co-locating services or providing after school services... but at the very least, communication lines should be opened up between DCPS and DCPL to discuss a band aid to cover the school budget cuts. As Mayor, I will help our elected School Board and Superintendent to turn around the dire state of our in-school library services.

15) It is estimated that nearly 37% of adult residents of the District of Columbia are functionally illiterate. What approach would you support for reaching this population to address their ability to read, write, and contribute better to our community?

There are many DC residents looking for ways to give back to their community, they just aren't finding ways to plug in. Libraries, as a central hub to our communities, would be a place where residents can find out about local volunteer programs. One such volunteer program would be literacy training right in the library. Literacy is a very important issue to me as I have been a professional literacy tutor for a large part of my career and I recognize that if one can't read, one can't effectively function in today's society.

16) What role do you see for the DC Public Library in preparing the District residents for emergency situations, such as a terrorist attack?

Again as an information hub, residents would be able to find emergency preparedness information at all DCPL libraries. This is more important than ever now that the Department of Homeland Security has cut terrorist emergency preparedness funding to the District. There has not been a very visible outcry from District leaders in this regard.

17) What role do you see for the DC Public Library in preparing residents for jobs in an information society?

Computers need constant maintenance especially if they are running Windows. This would be less of a problem if Linux were installed on our library computers but still a need. Volunteer programs can be set up to maintain our library IT systems. Professional IT hardware and software technicians can be hired to manage a volunteer training program much along the lines of DC's very own computer non-profit training center, Byte Back (<http://www.byteback.org>). Residents can participate in these volunteer IT programs to earn the skills needed to progress their IT careers while simultaneously giving back to the community and the DCPL system. This would save us bundles of cash.

18) What role do you see for the DC Public Library in working with the homeless population in the District of Columbia?

The homeless population is growing in DC. They have very unique needs and thus require special attention. I do not believe libraries can be the caretakers of the homeless as I've worked with the homeless population in DC for many years professionally and as a volunteer. I do believe that libraries can provide information to our homeless population to citywide locations where they can seek assistance or shelter.