



# A Call for Action!

The New York Public Library is calling for a \$300-\$350 million renovation of the 42nd Street Library, a building that has already received more than \$65 million in renovations since 1997. The plan requires the removal of seven levels of stacks that support the Rose Reading Room—stacks that were hailed as marvels of engineering when they were completed in 1911—and the insertion of a modern circulating library in that space, to be designed by the British architect Norman Foster. The

Bloomberg administration allocated \$150 million in capital funds for the project; NYPL hopes to garner the remaining amount from private fund raising and the sale of two public libraries: the Mid-Manhattan Library and the Science, Industry and Business Library. NYPL's president, Tony Marx, says the renovation is necessary for the Library's future economic survival.

Many observers dispute that assertion. Since the details of NYPL's plan were revealed by *The Nation* in late 2011, a loud debate has ensued. More than 2,500 writers and scholars have signed a petition against it, arguing that the plan would cripple a great research library; half a dozen rallies have taken place at the 42nd Street Library; *The New York Times* has published more than thirty articles on the controversy and most major news organizations have covered it; and in the summer of 2013 two lawsuits were filed to halt the NYPL renovation. Under pressure, NYPL canceled the design that Foster presented on December 19, 2012, and Marx has promised an independent audit of the plan, as well as a detailed cost analysis of some alternatives to it. But NYPL is also working vigorously to finish what it started: in September Marx hired a lobbyist, Evan Stavisky of the Parkside Group, to mobilize construction unions, Teamsters, PTAs and local activists on behalf of the 42nd Street renovation.

On July 12, Bill de Blasio held a press conference in front of the 42nd Street Library assailing the scheme. "These plans seemed to have been made without any forethought to the building's historical and cultural integrity," De Blasio said. In a letter to Mayor Bloomberg, De Blasio urged him to "seriously consider alternative ways to use City funds to ensure the preservation of the NYPL's valuable collection stored at the Central Library and preserve the Mid-Manhattan branch as a functioning library." We strongly agree with this sentiment.



**We call upon Mayor De Blasio and all city officials to honor this commitment.**

## 1. Repeal the city's \$150 million for the library renovation.

—Ada Louise Huxtable's "Undertaking Its Destruction" (*Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2012)  
<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles>

“This is a plan devised out of profound ignorance of, or willful disregard for not only the library's original concept and design, but also the folly of altering its meaning and mission and compromising its historical and architectural integrity.”



## 2. Don't starve the local libraries to pay for the 42nd Street renovation.

—Michael Kimmelman's "In Renderings for a Library Landmark, Stacks of Questions," (*The New York Times*, January 29, 2013)  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/30/arts/design/norman-foster-T-public-library-will-need-structural-magic.html>

“Financial honchos who cough up big bucks to carve their name on 42nd street for the sake of posterity might recall that Andrew Carnegie made himself immortal by supporting—and building—the small local branches that now, more than ever, are anchors of their neighborhoods all over the city. They're the ones who really need the money. The library should make the case for them vigorously.”

—Brian Kenney's "Revisiting the NYPL's Renovation Plan" (*Publisher's Weekly*, November 1, 2013)  
[www.publishersweekly.com/pw/.../59824-beyond-42nd-street.html](http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/.../59824-beyond-42nd-street.html)

“Even if Foster's revised plan manages to satisfy some of the project's more strident critics, there will likely remain a glaring flaw: to commit to over \$300 million for one building, when branches in some of New York's neediest neighborhoods are failing, is a hard sell. And the NYPL cannot forget about the whole while focusing on just one part.”



### 3. Forbid the sale of the Mid-Manhattan Library until renovation or rebuilding is studied.

—Michael Kimmelman’s “In Renderings for a Library Landmark, Stacks of Questions,” (*The New York Times*, January 29, 2013)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/30/arts/design/norman-fosters-public-library-will-need-structural-magic.html>

“...The Mid-Manhattan site at present has the potential to be re-developed as a 20-story building. The library could also sell some 100,000 square feet of unused space at the site. . . . A new Mid-Manhattan branch should cost a fraction of gutting the stacks and could produce much better architecture.”



### 4. The Mayor, Comptroller and Council Speaker, as members of the library board, should insist on transparency.

—Scott Sherman’s “The Hidden History of New York City’s Central Library Plan” (*The Nation*, September 16, 2013), using ten years of NYPL trustee meeting minutes obtained under the Open Meetings Law, showed how the NYPL plan was conceived and executed in absolute secrecy, with no public input.

<http://www.thenation.com/article/164881/upheaval-new-york-public-library#>

—Nicole Gelinas’s “Real Estate Fiction” (*New York Post*, July 8, 2013) argued that the proposed renovation could be “a fiscal disaster... making the NYPL the latest institution to go broke thanks to vanity real estate.”

<http://nypost.com/2013/07/08/real-estate-fiction/>

“...City hall is the friendliest of the parties the library will have to negotiate with, compared to developers and construction contractors. . . . Yet the library didn’t negotiate risk-sharing with the city on cost overruns. . . . Indeed Marx has acknowledged that the project has no firm cost ceiling yet.”

—Stephen Eide’s “The New York Public Library’s Uncertain Future” (*City Journal*, Autumn 2013), raised the issue of cost overruns and massive overcrowding of the 42nd Street Library if the Foster plan is carried out.

[www.city-journal.org/2013/23\\_4\\_new-york-public-library.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2013/23_4_new-york-public-library.html)

“Even under the brightest scenario, the likely result would be an institution marginally more cost-effective but significantly downgraded from the research standard it has set during its illustrious history.”

### 5. Maintain the world-class research facility by saving the stacks and providing them with climate control and fire suppression technology.

When the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, after exhaustive research, grasped the full contours of the New York Public Library’s Central Library Plan, she wrote a stirring essay in *The Wall Street Journal* opposing it. It was her final published work; she died a few weeks later at the age of 91. “After extensive study of the library’s conception and construction,” Huxtable wrote, “I have become convinced that irreversible changes of this magnitude should not be made in this landmark building.”

A few weeks later Michael Kimmelman, architecture critic of *The New York Times*, published his own investigation about the NYPL’s plan. “The great building designed by Carrère and Hastings, he wrote, “will be used as a ‘guinea pig’ in an ill-conceived scheme by the NYPL trustees.” Kimmelman urged those trustees to ponder their legacy: “The last thing they’d want to be remembered for is trashing their landmark building and digging a money pit.”

Save the Stacks! **Keep the Books!** Don’t Destroy a Cultural Treasure!

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