

**Committee to Save the**  
**NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
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## **THE NYPL STRIKES OUT**

Two months after The Committee to Save the New York Public Library released "The Truth About the Central Library Plan," the New York Public Library has responded with a document titled "Setting the Record Straight." The NYPL distributed this statement to its Trustees at the May 8th Trustees meeting, and also handed it out during our rally outside the meeting.

Unfortunately, the NYPL's response provides no new information and simply relies on the same unsubstantiated generalizations and half-truths that the Library has previously used to defend the plan. It fails even to address any of the facts we cite in our study.

Here is the Library's response to our analysis (their complete statement can be found at <http://www.savenypl.org/the-truth-about-the-central-library-plan/nypl-strikes-out>), with our replies:

NYPL:

*"Over the last few weeks, the 'Committee to Save the NYPL' has been spreading inaccurate information about The New York Public Library's 42nd Street renovation project. The group did not accept repeated invitations to meet with the Library to discuss the plan..."*

THE FACTS:

This is simply untrue. We have reached out to the NYPL on multiple occasions during the past year and a half, and have accepted every invitation to meet.

On May 9th, Anthony Marx, the President of the NYPL, wrote to Charles Warren, one of our members, stating "I write to offer an apology. At the trustees meeting I mistakenly conflated the Committee to Save the New York Public Library, with the Citizens Defending Libraries. It's the latter organization, not the former, that had not taken us up on an invitation to meet." However, this too is incorrect, since Citizens Defending Libraries has been attempting to schedule a meeting with the NYPL since February 2013. Only on May 13th did the NYPL finally propose a date.

## NEED FOR PROJECT

NYPL:

*"The bookshelves under the Rose Main Reading Room are over 100 years old and do not meet basic modern standards for preservation. Also, the area was built preceding contemporary fire codes."*

THE FACTS:

The Library installed "advanced temperature and humidity controls" in the 42nd Street stacks in the 1980's (See Deirdre Carmody, "Fifth Ave. Library Is Poised To Move Into Computer Age," *New York Times* January 17, 1985, and Vartan Gregorian, *The Road to Home* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, p. 290). In 1991, the Library spent \$575,000 to install a dry pipe sprinkler system in the stacks (see DOB permit 100139379 dated 4/18/91).

These systems need updating but that would certainly be far cheaper than demolishing the stacks and creating an entirely new structural system to support the Rose Main Reading Room. For example, the Library of Congress recently upgraded the fire suppression and climate control systems in its massive book stacks, similar to those at 42nd Street, so that they could be preserved for continued use. We need an independent review to determine the actual cost of upgrading the stacks.

NYPL:

*"So we are moving the great majority of the volumes located to storage under Bryant Park..."*

THE FACTS:

Between 3 and 3.5 million books will be displaced by the destruction of the 42nd Street stacks. The NYPL is planning to add storage for 1.5 million additional books to their existing storage facility under Bryant Park. Therefore, between 1.5 million and 2 million books will have to be moved to remote storage in New Jersey. If in fact "the great majority" of the books in the 42nd Street stacks are moved to storage under Bryant Park, this can only be done by moving most of the 1.3 million books currently stored under Bryant Park to New Jersey. Either way, **the onsite storage capacity of the 42nd Street Library is going to be REDUCED by between 1.5 million and 2 million books.**

NYPL:

*"The remaining materials, especially those available digitally, will be stored off-site, a common practice for research libraries. (Like all major research libraries, NYPL has long used off-site storage for large portions of its permanent collections.)"*

THE FACTS:

No one disagrees that there is a need for offsite storage. The problem is that the Library's radical plan will REDUCE the number of books stored on site at 42nd Street by at least one-third, and INCREASE wait times for many books from minutes to days.

## PUBLIC INPUT

NYPL:

*"Discussion of the renovation of 42nd Street began more than five years ago. Like all large public capital projects, it has been debated and reviewed by a wide range of stakeholders, receiving scrutiny, input, and approval from the City Council, the New York City Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of the Mayor."*

THE FACTS:

**Neither the City Council, the New York City Office of Management and Budget, nor the Office of the Mayor ever held any public hearings on this plan.** So far as we have

been able to determine, the \$150 million of city funds was approved by the City Council only as part of a vote on the entire municipal budget.

NYPL:

*"Library representatives participated in a variety of public meetings while the plan was being reviewed and approved by Community Board 5 and the Landmarks Preservation Commission."*

THE FACTS:

**The plan was formulated with minimal public notification and no public input.** The plan was finalized and funding committed BEFORE the two Community Board hearings were held in June 2012 and January 2013. The Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing, in January 2013, likewise occurred after the plan had been finalized and funding committed. Furthermore, the LPC hearing was explicitly restricted to the very limited changes to the exterior of the 42nd Street building, and did not consider either the drastic interior changes or the overall Central Library Plan itself.

NYPL:

*"We also met with numerous community groups and critics and launched a public listening process, which resulted in plans to construct a second level of underground storage under Bryant Park to keep an additional 1.5 million volumes on-site."*

THE FACTS:

The Library's "public listening process" consisted of a comments page created on their website in mid-2012, after the plan was finalized. The public was invited to submit ideas, but the comments were not publicly viewable. The Library has released no information about the comments they received, nor has the Library ever responded publicly to any comments. It was a one-way process, not a dialogue, which made a mockery of public participation.

The meetings with community groups and critics took place in 2012 - again, long after the plan was formulated. They appear to have been for show and led to no changes, with one exception: the addition of a second level of storage space under Bryant Park, a significant improvement which we have repeatedly acknowledged.

### IMPACT ON MID-MANHATTAN LIBRARY AND SIBL PATRONS

NYPL:

*"The new circulating library space at 42nd Street will be equal to the combined public space currently available at Mid-Manhattan and the Science, Industry and Business Library. When critics measure square footage of the current buildings, they misleadingly include non-public areas, such as administrative space and storage, which will not be moving into 42nd Street but to office space elsewhere."*

THE FACTS:

**The new circulating library would be less than 1/3 the size of Mid-Manhattan and SIBL:** the Library has stated in the 2012 NYPL Branch Library Report that the Mid-Manhattan is 159,880 sq/ft (the 2003 Gwathmey Siegel plans for the renovation of the Mid-Manhattan state 139,000 sq/ft), while the 1996 *New York Times* review of SIBL's

opening stated that SIBL contained 160,000 sq/ft. The new circulating library will be 80,000 sq/ft.

If the Mid-Manhattan and SIBL only contain 80,000 sq/ft of public space, as the Library claims, then it follows that over 73 percent of the space in these libraries is for "administrative space and storage." Can this really be true? (And what exactly is in the storage space that is to be eliminated - books?)

We have provided numbers from the public record and NYPL has provided no specific figures to refute them. This is one more reason why there must be an independent analysis of the Central Library Plan.

### IMPACT ON 42nd STREET LIBRARY [SCHWARZMAN BUILDING] PATRONS

NYPL:

*"The plan will not touch any of the building's historic public areas, such as Astor Hall and the Rose Main Reading Room. It will reopen areas that were originally intended for public use and create new spaces for scholars and writers."*

THE FACTS:

We happily support the reopening of previously public areas in the 42nd Street Building; this is a completely separate issue from gutting the stacks and shoe-horning the Mid-Manhattan and SIBL into the 42nd Street building. All previously public areas should be reopened while leaving the stacks intact and rehabilitating the existing Mid-Manhattan building.

NYPL:

*"The renovation will enhance the Library's role as a great research library by better protecting its materials and generating funds that can be used to acquire more materials and hire more librarians."*

THE FACTS:

**The plan will undermine the 42nd Street Library's research mission by radically reducing the number of volumes readily available to readers.** Off site storage increases the wait for delivery of books from 20 minutes to at least 24 hours (and more likely several days). Additionally, there will be greater wear and tear on research materials because of the need to truck them back and forth from New Jersey.

Furthermore, the Library greatly overstates the funds that will be generated by this plan (see below), and the Library has failed to release any budget detailing how additional funds would actually be used.

### FINANCIAL IMPACT

NYPL:

*"The renovation will generate, not consume, funds for the entire NYPL system. The combination of savings - from operating one rather than three buildings in Midtown, from real estate sales, and from fundraising opportunities - will provide the Library with*

*an additional \$15 million each year, which will be used for librarian, books, and services."*

#### THE FACTS:

According to NYPL Chief Operating Officer David Offensend, **combining the Mid-Manhattan and SIBL into the 42nd Street building will generate only \$7 million dollars in actual operating savings.** A significant percentage of these operating savings could be gained by simply combining SIBL into a rehabilitated and enlarged Mid-Manhattan building, as we have proposed.

The additional \$8 million annual income anticipated by the Library would apparently come from enlarging its endowment through the sale of the Mid-Manhattan and SIBL properties, and from additional "fundraising opportunities". But **rehabilitating and enlarging the Mid-Manhattan building would cost \$150-200 million less than gutting the 42nd Street stacks and building a new circulating library.** These savings could be invested in the endowment to create additional income similar to what the Library claims for its plan. Obviously, "fundraising opportunities" exist regardless of whether the Library chooses to demolish the stacks or renovate the Mid-Manhattan building.

Finally, the NYPL's financial claims assume that the Central Library Plan will not go over budget. Given the technical complexity of the plan and architect Norman Foster's previous history, significant cost overruns seem likely. If cost overruns occur, where will the additional money be taken from - other library programs? Again, we need a detailed independent review that analyzes the costs of - and projected savings from - both the Central Library Plan and its alternatives.

#### OTHER OPTIONS

##### NYPL:

*"The Library evaluated multiple options, including a renovation of Mid-Manhattan, which would have closed the building for years."*

#### THE FACTS:

**No alternatives have ever been presented to the public; no actual analysis nor cost-benefit studies nor detailed budgets of any alternatives has ever been publicly released.** There are many examples of libraries remaining open during extensive rebuilding (both Columbia and Princeton maintained normal operations in their libraries during recent top-to-bottom renovations); the NYPL itself is claiming that users of the Rose Main Reading will be unaffected by the heavy construction immediately underneath their feet. And if it truly proved necessary to close the Mid-Manhattan during renovation, its holdings could be temporarily moved a few blocks south to the SIBL space; SIBL could then be sold after reconstruction of the Mid-Manhattan is complete.

**In summary, the Library has failed to provide any hard numbers to support its claims; once more, this is why there must be an independent review of both the Central Library Plan and its less destructive (and more efficient) alternatives.**