



"A thriving and sustainable library system for all"

26 February 2021

City of San Diego Planning Commission
1222 First Avenue, Fifth Floor
San Diego, CA 92101

Subject: Opposition to the Montezuma CPA Initiation

On behalf of the Friends of the San Diego Public Library, I would like to register our concern about a requested community plan amendment about to be considered by the City of San Diego Planning Commission that, if approved, would have dire consequences for the College-Rolando Branch Library and the residents of the communities it serves.

The Friends of the San Diego Public Library tries to look at the bigger picture for our libraries here in San Diego, and we are especially interested in doing all we can to promote equity in access to library services and programs in all of the communities that our libraries serve. We know that library users of all ages and walks of life depend on the library for educational resources, employment assistance, enrichment programs, access to computers and the internet, as a safe haven, a community gathering place, and more.

By way of historical background, the "new" College/Rolando Branch Library was identified in the 2002 City Manager's report on Library Facilities as a priority project; it was the third of the libraries constructed as part of the City's program to build "libraries for the 21st century." Ground was broken for the new branch library in February 2004 (with a total price tag of \$6.1 million reported at that time—over \$8 million in today's dollars). The library opened to the public in September 2005 as a beautiful, new 15,000 sq. ft. library (over 3 times the size of the old College Heights Branch Library that it replaced), with a multi-purpose community room, computer lab, patio plus additional space to accommodate the collection and ample seating for library patrons. The Friends of the College-Rolando Branch Library, an affiliate chapter of the Friends of the San Diego Public Library, has been very involved over the years in raising funds to support acquisition of new books and materials as well as programs to meet community needs.

In 2016, nine years following its opening, the College-Rolando Library was living up to its promise as a busy branch library with typical monthly statistics of circulation of almost 17,000 items checked out, 15,750 patrons visiting, and 24 children's programs serving over 630.

Following the abrupt closure of the parking lot in mid-December 2016 (after the sale of the adjacent property and the voiding of the original joint use agreement), which eliminated access to the library and to parking from Montezuma Road, library use, programs and circulation all declined such that 7 months later circulation had decreased by 67%, patron visits by 30%, and children's programs by 46% with only 1/3 as many attendees. In contrast, during the same period of time service levels were maintained at similar branch libraries.

Following a year of parking lot closure, an interim joint use agreement finally allowed re-access to the parking lot (with funding for this provided by the City and the College-Rolando Friends chapter); this allowed community members to once again take better advantage of the library's resources—just as people in other neighborhoods across the City are able to access their local branch libraries. And, currently, during the library pandemic closures, College-Rolando is one of only 12 libraries that has reopened to the public with limited in-person services, which has been a very positive thing for this diverse, multi-ethnic community.

However, it important to recognize that the current or a similar joint use agreement is not a tenable solution to this problem. If the adjacent property is allowed to be developed as the owner is requesting, there will be drastic repercussions in terms of community members' access to and benefit from the library. College and Rolando area residents—from children and families to seniors--who depend on the library will be denied equitable library services in their community. To allow development of the number of units of high-density housing planned, which the owner's representative has stated would most likely attract undergraduate and graduate students (meeting of Project Review Committee of CACPB, 2/2/21) without providing dedicated parking for library patrons during library hours, would have major deleterious impact on the ability of community members to use their library. This important issue was not adequately addressed in the staff report (PC-21-008).

The beautiful only 15 year-old library will be wasted, its \$8 million price (in today's dollars) wasted. If a new library were built to replace it, if an appropriate site could be identified, and if funding could be found (and the cost of to build a comparable size library today is much heftier than when the existing library was built—our understanding is that this would be approximately 2½ to 3 times that amount, not including the cost of land), and if approval from the City could be obtained A lot of ifs—and only for want of appropriate parking for the current very serviceable library which is well-loved by the community.

We respectfully request that the request for initiation of the Montezuma CPA be denied at least until a solution is worked out that will guarantee community members unfettered access to their library and preserve this important City asset.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan M. Reese". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joan" being more prominent.

Joan M. Reese
President