

Officials tout progress after Tenleytown wait

■ **Library:** City taps architect, development team for project

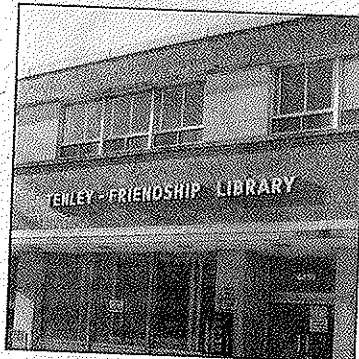
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When Tenleytown book aficionados heard back in 2001 that a pot of money was available to reconstruct their outdated Tenley-Friendship Neighborhood Library, many were thrilled, and they settled right into envisioning what could happen in the coming months of design tooling.

Whatever their dreams entailed, they certainly did not include a nine-year waiting period.

Slated for completion in March 2010, the library's plan has meandered considerably since the D.C. Council earmarked \$3 million in city funds to plan reconstruction of four branches back in 2001. Area residents have borne the brunt of those delays, with the branch at Wisconsin Avenue and Albemarle Street — like its three other counterparts across the city — shuttered since December 2004.

"It's an absurdly long time. This is what we've become used to in the District of Columbia," said Martha



Bill Petros/Current File Photo

The new Tenley library is expected in 2010 — nine years after the process started.

Saccocio, president of the Friends of the Tenley Library.

But that reputation may be shifting for the D.C. Public Library system, as change is afoot for the Tenley branch.

Head librarian Ginnie Cooper, who came on board with the library system last year, has reached a number of milestones in Tenleytown.

This winter, the library system opened a shiny new interim facility at 4200 Wisconsin Ave., near the closed branch, complete with a modern library's look and with a

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promise of even greater things to come at the permanent location.

And Thursday, Cooper announced a development team to head the work that has already begun on the four branch libraries.

The system has brought developer The Freelon Group Inc. on board for the Tenley project, along with D.C.-based architect R. McGhee & Associates.

"I think it's the first progress we've seen in a long time, and that's good," said Saccocio.

The other three branches currently slated for rebuilding are the Anacostia Neighborhood Library at 1800 Good Hope Road SE, the Benning Neighborhood Library at 3935 Benning Road NE, and the Watha T. Daniel/Shaw Neighborhood Library at 1701 8th St. NW.

The library system brought in Hess Construction and Grimm + Parker architects several years ago to remake the four branches. And in 2002, the council increased funding to \$20 million for complete renovation of the four libraries — \$5 million for each branch.

The library system spent about \$3 million in planning for work that never actually materialized, though the former development team's plans were completed, vetted, approved and ready to go. The remaining \$17 million from D.C. Council funds is still part of funds available for all four branches, according to the library system.

Cooper, who was not with the D.C. library system then, said the library Board of Trustees was undergoing great change at the time and ultimately decided that the design completed for Tenleytown would not have given the community the kind of library the city and the neighborhood wanted.

The library system also attests that the originally proposed facility was not large enough for the community.

The old Tenley library's size has been estimated at 16,500 square feet. The former contractors designed the new library to be roughly the same size, based on what they said was limited funding for the project.

The new developers have been

told to create a Tenley branch that is between 18,000 and 20,000 square feet.

The new total cost for the Tenley branch is \$16.1 million. Construction costs are \$9.6 million of the total figure, according to the library system.

The new contractors for the library system are currently obtaining final "sign-offs" on raze permits from D.C. government agencies, and at Tenley they have removed all hazardous material from the building and capped utilities at the site, a spokesperson for the library said.

As progress on the library moves forward, the Tenleytown neighborhood is vetting a possible public-private partnership development for the site.

The plan is not certain, but basic tenets of the proposal by Roadside Development would place a condominium tower on top of the library. Some of the revenue generated by the housing units would go to back to the city in exchange for land that belongs to the District.

Cooper said the library system is considering that proposal as it moves forward with its plans.

"We will move forward with our calendar and see what happens," she said, noting that the system's board of trustees has heard both support and opposition from residents. "They will pay attention to what the community says. They've heard both sides, and they'll weigh how it affects the library."

Some residents who oppose the proposal have said in community meetings this summer that they would not want to pursue anything that delays the library's progress now that it seems to be moving ahead.

If the community ultimately endorses the public-private partnership despite any delays that might arise, then and only then would the library pursue the idea, according to a spokesperson for the library system. Roadside Development has vowed in previous meetings to work on the library's timetable.

Cooper said a potential public-private partnership would not necessarily affect the design work of the library because the housing tower would be on top of the library but be completely separate.

Reconstruction is slated to begin in mid-summer 2008, according to the library system.