

Reta Lewis
Candidate for Mayor



This purpose of this survey is to gather candidate thoughts about DC's central public library. Responses will be shared with library users and voters on DC-LRP contact lists.

1. Should the renovation budget and expenditures for the Martin Luther King Jr., Memorial Library be open for full public review? (Yes or No?)

Background: The planning budget for the King Memorial Library has not been available for the public to see in any detail.

Candidate response: Absolutely. This is yet another instance of the public being shut out of a process that they should be an integral part of. This gets to the heart of my campaign: the other councilmembers won't change the way the city does business; a Lewis administration will be open, transparent and accountable – be it over the content of public contracts or the budget and expenditures for the MLK Memorial Library.

2. Do you believe city-wide ANC input should be sought for the MLK renovation? (If so, would you ask DCPL to facilitate it? If not, why not?)

Background: A central library serves residents from across the city, more so than any other public building. As the elected officials closest to the electorate, ANC's have taken a oath of office to serve and advise on local concerns and those that affect citywide interests. An Advisory Panel just put together by DCPL in January 2014 consisted of participants who were almost exclusively downtown-based, including the two local ANCs (but only those ANC's). Other areas of the city were not well represented at all. This seems unfair and shortsighted as residents from outside of downtown may have different expectations for and needs from their central library.

Candidate response: Of course. The Library is used by all citizens of the District and therefore the input of all ANC's not just the ones that represent the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the Library. I agree 100 % that this decision is unfair and shortsighted – we need to have input from all our residents because the library needs to serve the needs of all.



3. Do you support the idea of selling the air rights over MLK for private development? (If so, what do you understand the financial benefit to be? If not, why not?)

Background: In a 2011 study funded by the Board of Library Trustees, the Urban Land Institute found DC to be the most growth oriented city in the US with extremely high land value “that continues to outperform the nation.”¹ Following on the recommendations in the ULI report,² DCPL paid for an financial analysis of options for MLK, and then reported to the DC Council Committee on Education (& Libraries) that the return revenue from privatizing the public air rights over MLK would total approximately \$40 million dollars. The total cost to renovate MLK has been estimated by the Board of Library Trustees at \$225 to \$250 million.³ Do you agree with the City selling the publicly owned space if it raises less than 20% of funds needed?

Sources: (1) <http://dclibrary.org/mlkfuture#Background>; <http://tinyurl.com/uli-report-on-mlk> [page 12]; (2) <http://dclibrary.org/mlkfuture#Background>; (3) <http://dclibrary.org/mlkfuture#selected>

Candidate response: No. The city is currently sitting atop a budget surplus if nearly 2 billion dollars. I don't believe in the current vogue that advocates a rush to privatization in order to provide a quick fix for municipal governments. I'm skeptical about the number of \$40 million – do we really know the provenance of that figure? Are we sure we want to privatize the air rights over the public library at this point? I would be open to holding public hearings on the issue but cannot commit to a definite position at this time.

4. Would luxury condominiums atop the central public library of the District of Columbia be an appropriate addition to a building named in memory of slain civil rights leader Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr? (Yes or No?)

Candidate response: No, and I don't think I really need to elaborate on the merits of such a tawdry idea.
