

Andy Shallal
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.

Responses from Andy Shallal, candidate for Mayor, District of Columbia

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: Yes. The city should make the planning budget for the King Memorial Library open for full public review. There is no excuse for obstructing public access to such documents. Openness and transparency are essential for establishing trust and legitimacy for all of the city's operations.

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: Seeking city-wide ANC input for the MLK renovation would be a useful way to take advantage of the existence of this under-utilized infrastructure. I would seek someone other than the DCPL to facilitate the input from the city's ANCs. The rather narrow representation of the DCPL's own Advisory Panel suggests that the DCPL may be another example of "regulatory capture" by downtown business interests. Having a separate process involving all the ANCs would provide a second opinion with a more representative base.

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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: I am opposed to privatizing the public air rights over the MLK library. We have just heard in Mayor Gray’s State of the District speech that the city was doing very well economically, and has accumulated upwards of \$2 billion in its rainy-day funds. Given these reserves, the city could easily renovate the MLK library without the funds that could be raised by selling this air space. I would prefer that the city conduct the renovation using its own funds, so as to maintain absolute control over the development of a building that should be one of the jewels of the city’s public buildings.

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: I do not believe that Dr. King would have been pleased to find that the city had chosen to put luxury condominiums on top of any city’s public library. Given Dr. King’s focus on the needs of the poor, the proposed condominiums are at best in very bad taste, if not a direct insult to Dr. King’s increasing concerns in the last years of his life with the problem of inequality. If the city were going to add any housing atop the library consistent with Dr. King’s legacy, then we should be talking about building permanent housing for homeless families, or affordable housing for low-income families. As I mentioned in (3) above, the city is doing well economically, and has the ability to renovate the library without resorting to such dubious fundraising mechanisms.

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