

Subject: Library Futures

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From: eng-faculty-request@virginia.edu on behalf of Fowler, Elizabeth (ef4n)

To: eng-faculty@virginia.edu, eng-grads@virginia.edu

CC: Meyer, Katherine Smith (Kate) (ksm2g), Onega, Esther E. (eeb4n), Braganza, Vanessa Maria (vmb4ah)

Dear colleagues,

I've been listening, but I write now in response to several queries. I'm a member of the university's steering committee for the Alderman renovation project, appointed by the University Architect, but this is entirely my own view. (I concede that it's a view obstructed by lack of administrative and legislative experience.)

I am cheered by the warm response to the petition, because it shows how many people feel strongly, even devoutly about books in the renovation. I understand and share the signatories' primary concern. I understand the exasperation and unease that is legion as we near the first official encounter (June 7^h) of the Board of Visitors with the schematic designs produced by the architects. And I share Dean John's joy and confidence in the leadership and advocacy of Alice Raucher (the University Architect—who held a key role in the recent Yale Beinecke Library renovation just before she came to us), the work of the planning team, and the designs of HBRA Architects and their partners. I do not want the process to be delayed or disrupted, but I do want the planners to continue to have the strong voices of the community in mind as the plans evolve.

I believe that the discrepancy we see in numbers has its cause here: the petitioners are calculating the *total capacity* of Alderman, past and future, and the Dean of the Library is calculating the quantity of books that have been and are *in practice browsable* in Alderman, past and present, and that will be browsable in the future Alderman + Clemons according to the evolving plans. Those positions are both, in my view, very respectable positions to take on what Alderman is and should be. I am glad to have both metrics; both represent considerable research. (I credit especially Bugbee, Unsworth, Onega, Parker, Meyer, Vander Meulen, and Braganza.)

Everybody here, including the planners, wants a library that is magnificently full of books. That's a big victory that looked unreachable just a few years ago. Many spatial decisions and unpredictable discoveries are yet to come, and the numbers and schematics will keep changing. I hope and trust that the planners will continue to use their informed discretion to maximize the amount of print that can wisely be made accessible in the new building, holding other needs to a high standard. (This is not to dismiss other needs, but to applaud Dean John's promise to us within this thread.)

The Board may be, just now, more interested in the dignity and appropriateness to Grounds of the façade than in the building's internal details (and I think that *is* their task now); when they meet next week they will not be giving a final approval (that's probably September) but a nod that things are going along in a direction they like, and they will have their hands full choosing among many beautiful options for the elevations. I hope and trust that they are intelligent and far-eyed enough to hear the petition and the depth of resolve across Grounds as well as among alumni and the public, register it profoundly, but without wrongly concluding that we are rival parties advocating mutually exclusive things. I hope the Board will rightly conclude that the library renovation is an unusually, even uniquely important capital project for the University.

It may be possible to make public more information about the evolving designs after the Board reviews them; there will certainly be more time for weighing in. I commend the Dean's muscular efforts (strikingly unlike those of past deans) to make the design a public and participatory process; though he's taken a lot of bruises along the way, I hope that he'll be steady on that good course. No Dean of the Library could be as creative, as research-driven, and as unselfish and committed as ours is. I am confident that the turbulence of the process so far will be channeled into making the best library possible. I am grateful to everyone engaged here for contributing to that good goal.

Yours as ever,
Elizabeth

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