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COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES AND
INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE CULTURAL AFFAIRS,
LIBRARIES AND INTERNATIONAL
INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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February 12, 2020
Start: 1:09 p.m.
Recess: 2:49 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: James G. Van Bramer,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Joseph C. Borelli
Laurie A. Cumbo
Mark Gjonaj
Francisco P. Moya

2 A P P E A R A N C E S

3 Dennis Walcott
4 President and CEO of the Queens Public Library

5 Meghan Cirrito
6 Friends of the Court Square Library

7 Frank Wu
8 Court Square Civic Association

9 Mary Jo Betta[SP?]
Resident of Long Island City

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2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: [GAVEL] Alright, we are
3 ready, great thank you. Good afternoon and welcome
4 to this hearing of the Committee on Cultural Affairs,
5 Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. My
6 name is Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer and I am the
7 Chair of this Committee and we are formerly in
8 session.

9 This afternoon, we're going to be discussing the
10 very important topic and that is the closure of the
11 Court Square Library. This coming Saturday February
12 15th, it's hard to believe will be the last day of
13 public service for the Court Square library and after
14 that, it will close with no date or even exact
15 timeframe on when it will be open. It goes without
16 saying that libraries are some of the most accessible
17 and democratic institutions in the City and it's an
18 absolute shame to see one closing particularly at a
19 time when New Yorkers need these spaces and in a
20 community that is growing by leaps and bounds and at
21 a time when seemingly this neighborhood needs the
22 library more than ever, it is closing.

23 So, we're here to address this closure and to
24 better understand how we got to this point.
25 Understanding how we got here, with this branch

1 closing in a few days, I hope would also help inform
2 the process that the City's libraries and in
3 particularly Queens Public Library undergo in the
4 face of changes to its physical plants, leases, that
5 may involve its branches and the changing
6 demographics and nature of our neighborhoods in New
7 York City.

9 The library's closure and its status should come
10 as a surprise to no one. Two years ago, in the
11 spring of 2018, the community and others including my
12 office began to engage the Queens Public Library on
13 their plans to continue service in the face of a
14 lease expiring at the current location. Because of
15 the advocacy of the friends of the Court Square
16 Library and negotiations with building owners, in the
17 spring of 2019, we all celebrated the extension of
18 the lease. But we all knew that extension would only
19 enable the public library more time to find a new
20 location.

21 Everyone there knew how much time we had and what
22 needed to be done but the question therefore is
23 simple, what happened in the intervening months? How
24 did we get here? And what did the library do to make
25 sure that this community was denied library service.

1
2 It's absolutely unacceptable that a library would
3 close in the City of New York and I believe that this
4 is a failure on the part of the Queens public
5 library. Only when it was clear that this library
6 was closing and the community rose up and expressed
7 outrage, did there seem to be an increasing effort to
8 find a space but it was too late.

9 Court Square is one of the fastest growing
10 neighborhoods in the entire country and that we are
11 reducing city services, taking them offline in this
12 neighborhood should be abhorrent and shocking. And I
13 know the Queens Public Library has talked about
14 funding and money in relation to this, and money is
15 very important but I want to cite a few different
16 statistics. With respect to funding for the Queens
17 Public Library in the last five years and what we
18 have done in the City of New York.

19 In fiscal year 2016, overall funding for the
20 Queens Public Library, this is expense funding was
21 One Hundred and One Million, Six Hundred and Ninety
22 Six thousand dollars. Of that, Ninety Five Million,
23 Five Hundred and Eighty Six Thousand was baselined
24 i.e. permanent.
25

2 The next year, funding went up to One Hundred
3 Five Million, One Hundred and Fifty Nine Thousand.
4 Virtually all of that baselined. The next year, FY
5 2018, funding went up again several million dollars.
6 One Hundred and Eight Million, Five Hundred and
7 Ninety Seven Thousand. Baselining went up again, One
8 Hundred and Seven Million, Eight Hundred and Forty
9 Four Thousand dollars.

10 Huge jump in FY'19, overall funding to the Queens
11 Public Library, One Hundred and Fifteen Million,
12 Eight Hundred and Eight Thousand. Baselining One
13 Hundred and Twelve Million, Eight Hundred and Twenty
14 Eight Thousand Five Hundred.

15 This past fiscal year, record funding for the
16 Queens Public Library, One Hundred and Twenty Two
17 Million, Twenty One Thousand dollars. Of that, One
18 Hundred and Seventeen Million, Four Hundred and Sixty
19 Five Thousand Five Hundred, baselined.

20 So, this is not a question, is the library not
21 receiving adequate resources. Certainly, any
22 nonprofit institution in the City of New York would
23 want even more funding and I want even more funding
24 for the Queens Public Library but the libraries
25 received record funding, incredible increases and

1 baselining to match that and yet, the Queens Public
2 Library didn't make sure that we had and they had
3 planned for and allocated the resources to make sure
4 we had permanent and continuous library service.
5 That to me is unacceptable.
6

7 So, the closure of the library in light of this
8 increasing resources, is even more befuddling. It is
9 true that the library had a great deal for a few
10 decades but that deal ended and Savanna did not want
11 and had no interest in maintaining this community
12 facility. Bad on them for not understanding the
13 importance of a library and how it could actually, I
14 would think increase the value of their property but
15 it was then accumbent upon the library, when it knew
16 it didn't have a willing partner to come up with a
17 solution for this community that did not include
18 closure of a public library branch.

19 So, we want to know many things and I'm anxious
20 to hear from the President and CEO of the Queens
21 Public Library. But did the library do enough to
22 prevent this from happening? Was there the sense of
23 urgency, that I think all of us who love libraries
24 and love this community understand. Did the library
25 move too late to find what we all know is needed to

1
2 happen here? And this is something I've certainly
3 heard from some folks in the community and a question
4 that I will obviously ask to, was the library okay
5 with this library closing? Did the Queens Public
6 Library accept this as something that they were okay
7 with it? Either way, we find ourselves in an
8 untenable position and I know that there are members
9 of the community who are going to speak and I know
10 that the President and CEO is here to testify as
11 well.

12 I want to recognize members of the Committee Mark
13 Gjonaj from the Bronx, and Joe Borelli from Staten
14 Island and I know other members are coming as well.
15 I want to thank my staff, including Jack Bernatovicz,
16 my Legislative Director, Matt Wallace my Chief of
17 Staff, Committee Counsel Brenda McKinney and our
18 Legislative Policy Analyst Cristy Dwyer and our
19 Principal Finance Analyst Aliya Ali.

20 With that I will ask President and CEO Walcott to
21 deliver his statement and then we'll do questions and
22 hear from the members of the community as well.

23 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you Chair and good
24 afternoon to you and to the members of the Council
25 and to the staff and to the public as well. My name

1 is Dennis Walcott as you indicated, President and CEO
2 of the Queens Public Library. Thank you for inviting
3 me to testify on the status of the Court Square
4 Library.
5

6 While the libraries scheduled last day as you
7 indicated of public service, is this coming Saturday.
8 The lease runs until the end of March but it will
9 require us to do a lot of work to close out the
10 library.

11 We want to first, to reassure the community, to
12 reassure the public as well as to the elected
13 officials. We are truly dedicated to maintaining a
14 Court Square Library, we have a commitment to do that
15 internally and I want to make sure we say that
16 publicly as well.

17 I appreciate the Committee's desire to learn
18 about Queens Public Library's response to the
19 termination of our lease, the challenges involved and
20 where we are today. And with that, I'll be glad to
21 entertain any questions or respond to some of the
22 points you raised.

23 So, since this is my first oversight hearing, I
24 will go by the way you guide me on how to proceed
25 sir. So, thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I'm shocked at how
3 short your testimony is. You have been before this
4 Committee many times.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: Not as an oversight committee
6 though. It's a little bit different.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We've had oversight
8 hearings on public libraries, nonbudgetary oversight
9 hearings but either way, I would just say, the
10 testimony is bereft of any real meaningful
11 information on what's happened and what the library
12 has done to maintain public library service in Court
13 Square. Certainly, we are going to ask lots of
14 questions but I'm surprised you didn't come to this
15 public testimony, before the public, before the
16 press, before the community and address anything. It
17 is literally a paragraph.

18 DENNIS WALCOTT: As you indicated that you plan
19 to ask a lot of questions and I am here prepared to
20 answer every and any question that you have to the
21 best of my ability and as you well know that we have
22 made a major commitment in looking for space. We've
23 seen space throughout the district and we've talked
24 to your office as well about space and you have
25 talked to us about space.

1
2 You and I have had conversations before around
3 Amazon, when Amazon was taking a look at the building
4 where Savanna is located as far as potential library
5 as well as the Falchi Building. And so, we have done
6 a lot as far as pursuing potential space for Court
7 Square.

8 I'm pretty confident that we will have space
9 hopefully identified in the very near future.
10 Currently, we have a number of sites that are very
11 interesting but I think you raised an important point
12 as far as the price per square foot. We have several
13 lease sites, as you probably know. We have LeFrak,
14 we have Fresh Meadows, we have Pomonok and the price
15 per square foot in those areas in the libraries are
16 totally different then where there is in Court
17 Square.

18 On average, we've been looking at a price per
19 square foot of roughly \$100 per square foot. We've
20 seen a couple at \$80 per square foot and while we
21 have thankfully as a result of your leadership,
22 benefited in the budget, as you also well know, last
23 year we had a PEG before the City Council came to the
24 rescue and took the PEG off the table to receive
25 additional funds as well.

2 And with that program, to eliminate gap we were
3 taking very serious looks at potential layoffs and
4 other types of service cuts to respond to that and as
5 the CEO of the Queens Public Library, it is my
6 responsibility not just to plan for this budget year
7 but also in moving out into the future budget years
8 and I think that's where we may have a little tension
9 as far as the budget figures as they exist right now
10 versus what will be in the future. And I cannot
11 position the Queens Public Library to pay roughly \$80
12 to \$100 per square foot and as well, the build out
13 costs that can average up to \$1 million.

14 So, with all of that being said, I mean I am
15 totally prepared to answer any question that you may
16 have.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, let me ask you some
18 questions.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: Please.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But I just want to say
21 that regardless of what the property values or price
22 per square footage is in any particular neighborhood
23 in Queens. You lead an organization that is called
24 upon to serve every single one of those neighborhoods
25 equally. Whether the price per square foot is very

1 low in a neighborhood or the price per square foot is
2 higher in a certain neighborhood. That's a challenge
3 I understand but you can't point to the more
4 expensive land in Long Island City as a reason not to
5 provide that community with a library.
6

7 The issue before you is to make sure that even
8 given the challenges and the disparities in a borough
9 where some neighborhoods have lower price per square
10 footage, some have higher. Your job is to figure out
11 how to provide library service for all of them
12 equally and that's what's not happening here. So, I
13 want to just talk a little bit about this library and
14 hope you can share some information which is not in
15 your testimony.

16 Can you talk to us a little bit about gate count
17 at Court Square? How many people use the Court
18 Square library? Has that number been going up? Has
19 that number been going down? Like, what does that
20 look like?

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: We've seen roughly 100,000
22 people who come through our doors at Court Square and
23 that number has gone up. As you well know, Court
24 Square is a library that's in great demand. I think
25

1
2 where we may have lost some of our customers, and
3 it's not totally reflected in the gate count.

4 Some of the people who may have been in the old
5 City Bank building and as the City Bank building has
6 been clearing out, we don't have the same traffic
7 from there. But as you well know and the public
8 knows that the population in community is growing
9 like crazy. And so, we have roughly 3,600 square
10 feet for the Court Square Library and every square
11 foot is in use and as a result of you and others as
12 well, over the last number of years, we were able to
13 expand the space there and since I took over as
14 President and CEO, we also expanded the services.
15 Because originally it was Monday through Friday and
16 now it's Monday through Saturday in meeting the six
17 day.

18 And even after the sixth day had been passed by
19 the City Council on the executive side, Court Square
20 still had not been providing that and that then
21 expanded as a result of all of us working together on
22 that.

23 So, the numbers have been going up but it's
24 roughly 100,000 people that come through the door.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, gate count is up,
3 more and more people are using the Court Square
4 Library and let me recognize Council Member Francisco
5 Moya from Queens has joined us on the Committee.

6 Circulation rising, program attendance, programs
7 rising.

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: Metrics are good. I mean, the
9 program numbers are going up at Court Square as well
10 as throughout the system. Circulation has basically
11 been somewhat even and you know, we have circulation
12 going up and down depending on the month and the year
13 but circs has been pretty good Court Square as well.

14 So, again, all the metrics, justify us
15 maintaining a Court Square Library and there is never
16 any question in my mind as far as maintaining a Court
17 Square Library. At the same time, I have a fiduciary
18 responsibility to plan for the outyears. If we're
19 going to get a good lease, we're going to have to go
20 for a ten and ten or a fifteen year lease in
21 negotiating a deal. And for me to talk about
22 negotiating a deal based on \$100 per square foot is
23 unacceptable.

24 And so, yes, my leadership is required to make
25 sure I look at a variety of spots to find the best

1 spot to deal with a new library being in Court
2 Square, but there's a lot of balancing acts going
3 along with that and so, we've seen some interesting
4 spots. I mean, we have three spots that really have
5 been peaking our interests. One spot I think I may
6 have referred to when we had a conversation before
7 that - while I didn't identify the specific spot but
8 has three contiguous spaces next to each other. One
9 1,800, one 2,100, and one 2,500 square feet and our
10 goal would be possibly taking a look at collapsing
11 the 1,800 and the 2,100 to make a 3,900 square foot
12 library.
13

14 So, we're negotiating there and taking a look at
15 that.

16 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I will get to the
17 sites you're looking at now and where we find
18 ourselves now but I do want to go back a little bit
19 because now we're in crisis mode. We're losing a
20 library and the public library is clearly talking to
21 lots of people, looking at lots of spaces, but no
22 matter what you ultimately decide on. No matter what
23 is possible, we're going to go a period of time
24 without continuous library service in Court Square.

25 DENNIS WALCOTT: That is correct.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And we don't know
3 exactly what timeframe that is because you are not
4 even close to signing a lease.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, you don't know that. I
6 mean, potentially, we maybe. You never know, we're
7 in conversations; that's why I was focusing on that
8 aspect in response to the question.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: We'll get to it, but I
10 want to actually talk about what got us to this point
11 and how I certainly believe and I know lots of people
12 in the community believe that we had time to actually
13 never get to this point. And what did the library do
14 when it knew that it was faced with this, right.

15 So, in the spring of '18 when we realized we were
16 coming up against the end of the lease, now, yes,
17 there were extensions. There were two extensions,
18 right.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: One, but maybe two, but go
20 ahead.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, since the spring of
22 2018, at a minimum we knew we were going to be
23 discontinued in terms of what the building owners
24 want to do with the building.

1
2 In the spring of 2018, what did the library do,
3 could you walk us through from the spring of 2018
4 what the library was doing to identify alternative
5 sites and secure the necessary space to continue
6 library service. Because the sense, Mr. Walcott, is
7 that the library new at a minimum of the spring of
8 2018 that it was in danger of losing this library.
9 Yes, there were a couple of extensions that were
10 granted but that in the meantime, the library didn't
11 do anything to find a suitable, alternative location.

12 So, now, here you are at City Hall and I would
13 ask you, what did the library do in the spring of
14 2018 to secure additional sites. Yes, you're looking
15 at multiple sites now.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, I can respond to the
17 question easily.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I'm not finished asking
19 the question.

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: Oh.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And what did you do
22 then. Were you actively looking at sites then and
23 for the last two years or did you just start in the
24 last several weeks in Ernest to find a location?

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, one, I totally disagree
3 with the premise and using the term the last couple
4 of weeks. I mean, we've been looking for space for a
5 good while and back then in -

6 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You said it takes a good
7 while.

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: You said the last couple of
9 weeks, now that is a total mischaracterization.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Then tell me the truth.

11 DENNIS WALCOTT: Well, I'm trying to.

12 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Okay, then give us the
13 dates then. You taking exception to several weeks.

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: You were asking about 2018 and
15 so, I'm going to respond about 2018. I think you're
16 aware that one, the shifting of the burden for the
17 libraries needed to be addressed in a different way.

18 We were basically evicted by Savanna and we all
19 agree to that. Am I correct? I mean, we all agree
20 to that but yet, we have pursued Savanna and City
21 Bank in talking to them about maintaining a library
22 there and we put significant time back in 2018 in
23 talking to Savanna and you and I have talked about
24 that. And so, Savanna at one point, didn't respond,
25 we continued to pursue, we talked to City Bank. We

1 had parallel discussions both with City Bank and
2 Savanna around maintaining the library.
3

4 Eventually, we met with Brian Weaver[SP?] at
5 Court Square library to talk about the future of the
6 library at Court Square and all of this was taking
7 place during 2018 and Savanna made some noises maybe
8 but in reality they said no, but come back to us
9 later on and we started to see the reality that we
10 were not going to have a place there.

11 So, then we retained a broker to take a look at
12 space. Part of the brokers responsibility was trying
13 to find space in a reasonable price point and once we
14 found out that that reasonable price point wasn't
15 available then we upped the price point and went to
16 another broker in 2019. And so, we were very serious
17 about that but also, parallel to that, if you
18 remember and I know you do, that part of the
19 discussion was also with Amazon, which is going to be
20 the major lease holder in the Savanna building as
21 well.

22 And we had a very productive discussion with
23 Amazon at the Long Island City Library, talking about
24 the library to move where we are and building a
25 library for the future. Unfortunately, that did not

2 materialize and then we found that another tenant
3 would be one of the major tenants that Amazon decided
4 not to relocate into Long Island City and that was
5 Synteen[SP?] and we reached out to Synteen and
6 pursued them as well as far as the potential of
7 having a sublease with them in the building.

8 Also, to put it in context, that with Savanna
9 itself, their vision was to make their building now
10 the Time Warner Center of Long Island City, so they
11 really didn't have any opportunity for us to even
12 have I think an acceptable opportunity for us to even
13 talk about having a library there.

14 So, with the two week timeline Chair that you
15 laid out, I totally disagree with that. We were very
16 serious in 2018, very serious in 2019. We expanded
17 the breadth of the price point that we were looking
18 at to try to find suitable space. Once we saw the
19 reality of how much per square foot space was in the
20 area itself, and then we continued to expand our
21 search as far as looking, including me going out in
22 2019 and early, middle of 2019 to look at spots as
23 well. And I want to the area, talked about that when
24 we met with some of the friends and so, we've been
25 pursuing it extremely diligently as far as the future

2 of a Court Square library, but also, whether we agree
3 or not, the balancing act that I feel is responsible
4 as far as the moving forward.

5 And then, also thanks to your leadership, we were
6 able to potentially have a deal with Tavros as well
7 and having a library in the future and that would be
8 roughly four years off, give or take depending on the
9 construction timeline and then with that, part of
10 that conversation, we were looking at different price
11 points with Tavros. If we wanted a basement, it
12 would be roughly \$10 per square foot. If we wanted
13 the main floor, it would be give or take \$55 per
14 square and then if we wanted to go above the main
15 floor, it would be roughly \$45 per square foot.

16 So, we started that discussion as well and we
17 were in discussions with Tavros Mark Webber and
18 others around the future of a Court Square library.

19 So, those are the steps that we've taken and
20 we've looked at a number of sites in the period of
21 time that you identified. We've looked at roughly
22 twenty sites plus and I personally have looked at
23 roughly ten sites of those twenty site and some sites
24 have ranged from 2,500 square feet up to 7,500 square
25 feet over the last several years.

2 So, we have been very diligent as far as the
3 process is concerned in looking for sites and
4 unfortunately so far, have not found a site that we
5 can say we're in a point of signing a lease today,
6 but hopefully, very soon, we may be in that position.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, a couple of things.
8 Number one, in 2018, when you say you were engaging
9 realtors and looking at potential sites, but it
10 sounds like, what you said is that they were just too
11 expensive and so, you weren't willing to pursue
12 those.

13 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's a fair characterization
14 but also, in 2018, I indicated we were having 2018,
15 we were having conversations with Savanna or trying
16 to have conversations with Savanna to stay there as
17 well. So, we were talking about where we are
18 currently with Court Square and even going to the
19 second floor or other floors and then, and I may
20 mispronounce the name, Savanna and others mentioned
21 the Falchi building, is that it?

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Falchi.

23 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, and then you and I, I
24 think, or Matt and I talked about that, whether that
25 was in the catchment area.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I do not believe it is.

3 DENNIS WALCOTT: Right, we did not agree that it
4 was. So, we even went to that level of talking to
5 you about that building being outside of the
6 catchment area.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, a couple of things.
8 I want to talk about the Tavros site, because if we
9 all believed that a public library was in danger of
10 closing, then in deed, there would be a full court
11 press and we would be pursuing multiple angles and
12 multiple directions at the same time, all to avoid
13 the very thing that's going to happen in a couple of
14 days, which is a library closing.

15 And, that's precisely why when Tavros approached
16 me about a building that they were building literally
17 across the street from this site and because they
18 actually wanted to lower the height of the building
19 and change the density of the building, they needed
20 approval from this Council. I said to them, while
21 the library is looking at a potential loss of its
22 lease and we are pursuing lots of other angles, it's
23 incumbent upon me at the Council Member who cares
24 very much about libraries and this particular library
25 to say to you, I want you to work with the Queens

1 Public Library and find a way to have a potential
2 permanent library directly across from where this
3 library is and because of that, they did engage you
4 and there was and is still, I would hope the
5 possibility of having a permanent and larger Court
6 Square Library in that building.
7

8 But that was never meant to stop or curtail into
9 the efforts to find a replacement for this rental.
10 Indeed, what I always expected was that while we were
11 waiting for the Tavros build out that we would have
12 another location where the library would rent until
13 we were able to move into the permanent location that
14 I had hopefully secured.

15 DENNIS WALCOTT: We're in total agreement about
16 that. I mean, if I said anything to convey that I
17 wasn't in agreement with that, and so, we were
18 looking for other space knowing that the Tavros deal
19 was sometime off in the future and when you talk
20 about permanent space, it's still permanent space
21 that we would be paying for.

22 So, I just want to be clear that we are in
23 agreement that while Tavros was a nice deal, but that
24 deal, they haven't even broken ground yet. And so,
25 we would also have to pay money in the build out.

1 So, part of the deal with Tavros, is that they
2
3 would make certain contribution to the library but we
4 would still be ponying up dollars out of the expense
5 side for the build out. And so, then, if I may, just
6 one more point with that, so that also is important
7 as you asked about context. To put in context and I
8 said this to a group I think last week, that in the
9 ideal world, I would only really like to build out
10 one time because a build out can cost up to \$1
11 million and having that type of expense money of
12 building out would Tavros, a good deal, I still with
13 a short term type of deal, especially if it's a short
14 term deal waiting for Tavros which may not become a
15 reality for four years and it's tough to negotiate a
16 reasonable lease for a four to five year period of
17 time.

18 So, those are the pieces that I was balancing as
19 far as a short term deal or lease until the Tavros
20 deal became a reality.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I understand that
22 but in hearing you even say that you only want one
23 build out and I understand why that is ideal, it
24 reminds me of something I said at the opening, which
25 is this nagging feeling and I think that some in the

2 community have that you as the President and CEO but
3 also the Queens Public Library, were okay with this
4 library closing as opposed to other more expensive
5 options. And I think there is this nagging feeling
6 that while there were some efforts to find a space
7 that you deem affordable, ultimately the library came
8 to the decision that allowing this library to close
9 and lapse was an acceptable way to go.

10 DENNIS WALCOTT: I totally disagree with it. I
11 mean, if I could find a space to have it be
12 concurrent to the closing of this particular space
13 and opening up right away, I would do that. I mean,
14 I think it's ludicrous to think that we want Court
15 Square to close. That's not true. I think the
16 reality is and I have a fiduciary responsibility and
17 I can't undersell that because I do not want my
18 future successor whenever that may be, to say, what
19 was Walcott thinking in signing off on a deal that is
20 going to strap this library in the future.

21 So, I have that responsibility. I'd rather take
22 the short-term heat then deal with a long-term fiscal
23 implication that's wrong for the library and I want
24 to do the right thing for the library.

2 But if I could find a space for Court Square and
3 that space can be signed just like that, I would do
4 that and so, my goal would be in the ideal world,
5 even with the Tavros deal out there is to find a deal
6 where I can have a ten and ten year lease with a
7 price per square that's relatively reasonable, at the
8 same time, factoring in the build out that carries
9 out because we can't use the capital money for this.

10 So, it would have to expense money and instead
11 have expense money say up to \$1 million for a five
12 year period of time while we're waiting for the
13 Tavros deal to become real, then that's something
14 that's not fiscally responsible but if I could find
15 that balancing act and I think as you well know sir,
16 that we looked at alternative spaces as well. We
17 talked to a number of sites as far as possibly co-
18 joining with them in looking and unfortunately that
19 didn't materialize either.

20 So, I think it's pretty important for me to
21 convey both to you, to the Members of the Council and
22 to the public, that if I could have the Court Square
23 lease end at X-point and then start a new lease
24 without any gap, I would love to have done that.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, but we didn't get
3 that.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: Right.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I understand you
6 have a fiduciary responsibility to the Queens Public
7 Library but you also have an obligation to the Court
8 Square. An obligation to provide continuous library
9 service to the tens of thousands of people who live
10 there, to the children and that to me, is paramount
11 particularly when you look at the funding data that I
12 talked about earlier and that is who is being failed
13 here. The people of the Court Square neighborhood.
14 The children who live in that community.

15 All of those babies that you and I have seen many
16 times who are going to story time. All of those
17 families are not going to have a public library and
18 that is unacceptable, particularly when you look at
19 the numbers that I cited. And what I fail to
20 understand and find unacceptable, is how the library
21 knowing that this deadline was starring at you,
22 didn't take some of that increase and set it aside.
23 That there wasn't already well in advance of this
24 moment, both of private and public fundraising drive
25 to make sure that we could and had to. We really had

1 to, there was no choice. See that's the thing, I
2 mean, the library accepted the choice that closing
3 was maybe an evil but a necessary evil. Whereas I
4 would say, given the resources, given the time you
5 had, you didn't even have to face that choice nor
6 should you have ever thought that was an acceptable
7 necessary evil, to close the library. Because had
8 you done all of that planning and had you said, we're
9 going to take some of this expense money, not
10 capital, we're talking about expense money and I
11 don't know if the foundation has been engaged, your
12 private fund raising arm has been engaged at all on
13 this to make sure that we had the resources. To make
14 sure that we had at least a rental, that we had at
15 least a trailer. We don't even have that. You have
16 the bus going out one day a week. One day a week,
17 that's unacceptable. That's absolutely outrageous in
18 this City in this moment with this much money in your
19 budget, that we would have Court Square having a bus
20 going one day a week when in truth, you had the time,
21 you had the resources.

22
23 And I am interested and I will ask you about what
24 the Queens Library foundation or your fundraising arm
25 did on the private side, to see if you could get some

2 funding to actually make sure that we had at a
3 minimum a trailer out there somewhere in Long Island
4 City that could provide a space that would require,
5 that would allow the community to have a library
6 space.

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: Sure, so let me respond to a
8 couple of things. One, I mean, we just see it a
9 little differently in that we have done a tremendous
10 amount of work of trying to find space and while you
11 think incorrectly so, that we have a lot of money,
12 you cannot guarantee me that that money will not be
13 there in the future. And I look forward and always
14 appreciate and I don't want to even make an undersell
15 at this particular point, your leadership around
16 libraries in general. Not just Queens, but libraries
17 in New York City, it's been fantastic and we truly
18 value that but at the same time, I can't guarantee
19 five years out from now, even with money that's
20 baselined because what you did not talk about is the
21 expenses that have gone up. The healthcare that's
22 gone up and other expenses that have gone up to
23 respond to that money that has been used. How we've
24 invested the money in collections. How we've
25 invested the money in more librarians and we have

1 invested that money. It's not like we have money
2 sitting idly by and therefore, I can just have that
3 money go into the Queens Public Library Court Square
4 Library.
5

6 So, I just want to make sure that the public and
7 we all understand that we've had a wise investment of
8 that money and we'll talk about it even in more
9 length when it's time for the prelim budget.

10 So, that's been utilized as well, as far as the
11 foundation is concerned, the foundation is raising
12 money but again, we're still recovering in the
13 raising of money from the past and so, we're building
14 on restrictive revenue but it's not going to be
15 solely devoted to Court Square and my goal is to make
16 sure we have Court Square in place with money coming
17 in, both whether it's from the foundation or whether
18 it's from the government to pay for us moving out in
19 the out years.

20 We've devoted a lot of the foundation and
21 resources as you well know also in Hunters Point and
22 Hunters Point got a million dollar grant and we have
23 a lot of money from the foundation that's being
24 raised and focused around Hunters Point. So, we're
25 having the foundation taking a look at a variety of

1 needs. We met with a funder yesterday and walking
2 around and talking about potential options. So,
3 we're always laying out options.
4

5 Where I may have been mistaken and I will own
6 this, is thinking of the benevolence of others, as
7 far as saying, oh, we're a library, let us come
8 forward and try to be helpful and we haven't gotten
9 that type of response per say, say from the corporate
10 sector, but we've reached out to private industry as
11 well to try to get them to understand the importance
12 of a library and you know, donating space or giving
13 some space.

14 So, we continue to pursue that and we will always
15 pursue that but again, the money that has been
16 increased that you cited has been utilized extremely
17 well and wisely for the benefit of all of our
18 libraries throughout the borough.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, but not Court
20 Square.

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: Court Square has benefited as
22 well but not necessarily Court Square moving forward
23 because I can't guarantee what's going to be in the
24 future as far as the price per square.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, you made that case a
3 couple of times.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: I have.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And I just want to say
6 and as you know, maybe other than Nick Buron, no one
7 in this room has been involved at the Queens Public
8 Library longer than me and been involved in these
9 budget cycles, right, this is 22nd year either
10 working for the Queens Public Library or being Chair
11 of this Committee. And no one knows better than me
12 that even if we baseline funding for libraries, there
13 are variations and there are dips in the economy and
14 we are subject to those realities but I would say,
15 that the library had several leased libraries
16 throughout the entire time that I am associated with
17 this institution and whether we were in good budget
18 times or bad budget times, the library didn't cancel
19 the leases or stop paying for those community
20 libraries.

21 Indeed, it kept them all open, no matter where
22 were with the budget cycle. So, your citing you
23 know, despite the fact that we've baselined now
24 almost \$120 million of the Queens Public Libraries
25 budget, well that could dip at some point and

1
2 therefore, I can't enter into a lease for Court
3 Square that I think it too expensive because we might
4 see a dip in funding at some point. But you have
5 several other existing leases at libraries and yet,
6 you continue all of those despite the fact that
7 funding could dip at some point in the future for the
8 library.

9 I'm just saying, that again, it very much seems
10 to me that you as the President and CEO of the
11 library, have made the conscious choice and or the
12 library didn't secure enough private support or take
13 some of this funding to set it aside so that we could
14 have a rainy day fund for the Court Square Library to
15 make sure that we were continuing service there.

16 Though, I asked you before if the foundation had
17 done any specific fund raising for this over the last
18 two years.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, not necessarily specifically
20 for this.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right.

22 DENNIS WALCOTT: But the foundation hasn't done
23 anything specifically for a particular library as far
24 as the lease is concerned but I mean, to answer you
25 directly -

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But it could have if you
3 would ask them to.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yes, they could.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You are the presidency
6 of the library and I believe the foundation -

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: I take all responsibility for
8 every decision that's made at the library.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Reports to you, so you
10 could have gone to the head of the foundation and
11 said, we have this lease expiring and we anticipate a
12 need for some additional funding to pay for
13 potentially leasing out a space or having a trailer
14 and could you go out there and see if we can get some
15 private foundation philanthropic support to make sure
16 that the money is there in the unfortunate event that
17 we are in fact evicted as we will be on Saturday.

18 I'm just saying, that was a possible -

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's a theoretical possibility
20 but at the same time, as you well know, having been
21 on the side of the library as well as fund raising,
22 even with private fundraising, one cannot guarantee
23 funding in out years and you know that. And so, as a
24 result of that, could we have raised some money that
25 could be specifically targeted for Court Square,

1
2 possible. Could we guarantee that money would be in
3 out years and therefore, I'm signing a lease for
4 whatever period of time based on speculation, I
5 wouldn't do that. I wouldn't do that to Queens
6 Public Library and at the same time, being committed
7 Court Square and going back to your point around the
8 other lease sites.

9 When you have a price differential of roughly \$60
10 per square foot of our most expensive lease, compared
11 to what the Court Square market is showing at this
12 particular point, that's a heck of a price
13 differential. And with those lease sites that we
14 have, it ranges roughly and don't hold me to this
15 exactly but roughly \$15 per square to roughly \$35 per
16 square and that's a realistic price for us to have.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, let me ask you, in
18 all honesty, do you believe -

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: I've been honest nonstop.

20 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Do you believe - I
21 phrase the question, let me ask you in all honesty.

22 DENNIS WALCOTT: Okay, but no, I mean, I don't
23 want it in all honesty. I mean, I've been honest in
24 every response that I give.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, let me rephrase the
3 question but say the same thing. Let me ask in all
4 honestly, that's what I said, do you believe that the
5 Queens Public Library could have and should have done
6 something sooner to avoid this moment?

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, and I'll tell you why I said
8 no. Because I think we did just about everything we
9 needed to do to try to find space. Again, it's not
10 that I made a conscious decision to say, oh, we don't
11 want to be in the Savanna building or the Court
12 Square building. Savanna made a conscious decision
13 and we pursued -

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Everyone agrees with
15 that.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, but the burden is shifting
17 like we haven't done our due diligence. We did our
18 due diligence. We look for space, we talk to
19 Savanna, we talked to Amazon, we talked to Synteen,
20 we've talked to the private industry in the area as
21 well. We've reached out to brokers. We changed
22 brokers, we became engaged with several properties,
23 especially that maybe worthwhile for us to pursue and
24 we are continuing to pursue and we are continuing to
25 pursue those properties. So, I think we did

1 everything that we had to do at the particular point
2 at where we are right now.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I fundamentally
5 disagree with that.

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: I know you do; I know.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I fundamentally disagree
8 with that because what you had to fundamentally do
9 was keep this library functioning for this community.
10 That is what you ultimately had to do and not allow a
11 library to close in Court Square. And so, therefore,
12 and I'm shocked, I mean, I really honestly thought
13 that you would say, you know, we did everything we
14 could but in hindsight, we could have started
15 earlier. We could have actually done this; we could
16 have actually done that.

17 DENNIS WALCOTT: You know, can I just one second
18 with that point, if I may. In that, you know, I
19 thought about that in preparing for our discussion
20 toady and we could have started four years ago and
21 I'm not sure that would have made a difference to be
22 where we are right now. It's just, we're caught in a
23 vise of looking for space, a price point being
24 extremely high, being conscious of a budget moving
25 forward and factoring all those things in along with

1
2 our commitment to maintaining a Court Square library
3 and I'm not going to be held, I'm not going to allow
4 the Queens Public Library to be held hostage by a
5 price per square that would potentially hurt the
6 library in the long run. I just can't do that, and
7 so, like I said to you, I will take the short-term
8 heat and I take the responsibility for it but at the
9 same time, I am fully committed to having a long-term
10 plan to making sure that we have a Court Square
11 library but we just see it differently and I
12 understand that.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Look, I've heard you say
14 that a few times, I will say it again. I would
15 prefer to hear you say that I will not disenfranchise
16 the people of Court Square as long as I'm the
17 Presidency of the Queens Library that you can both be
18 prudent and be a prudent fiscal steward of the public
19 library dollars but also say you know, not on my
20 watch. We'll find some way, we'll find a way to make
21 sure that we have continuous public library service,
22 which gets me to a trailer.

23 DENNIS WALCOTT: What did you say, I'm sorry, a
24 trailer?

25 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: A trailer.

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: Okay, I didn't hear you.

3 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I've worked at the
4 library for eleven years, when libraries were being
5 rebuilt, when a new branch was being built, when
6 significant alterations were being made that rendered
7 the library unusable for longer let's say, than six
8 months at a time. The library would often put a
9 series, one or two trailers together that would
10 actually make a small, but legitimate and functioning
11 library service for the community. We did that in
12 multiple, multiple locations.

13 DENNIS WALCOTT: Most recently, we did it at
14 Elmer's.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Right, because, and
16 because the library rightfully said, that while
17 building a new library was absolutely the right thing
18 to do and imperative, it was unacceptable to close
19 the library all together for a period that was longer
20 than several months. Right, you couldn't leave a
21 library in Queens, a community in Queens without a
22 public library.

23 So, when those extended periods happened, where a
24 building was being torn down, a new building was

25

2 being built, the library would make that investment
3 and erect a couple a of trailers and have a library.

4 Did you consider that for this location and if
5 so, what happened and if you didn't why not?

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, as you probably know Chair,
7 in that with those scenarios that you laid out, those
8 trailers are capitally eligible and there's a big
9 difference of that versus the expense money. And so,
10 again, and I'll defer to the people better at this
11 than I am, that when you are building out say
12 Elmhurst or others, you have capitally eligible money
13 to allow you to have that bridge between the tearing
14 down, a renovation of a library and then they
15 restarted that library to fill that gap.

16 And so, that is key distinction and right now,
17 with the trailer, if I had made a commitment of a
18 trailer, than that really doesn't - it will not allow
19 me to from a financial point of view, to hopefully
20 sign a lease with a potential landlord on space with
21 either to tie me into Tavros or with the goal of
22 having a long term lease to have a library in the
23 future.

24 So, the capitally eligible part for this
25 particular scenarios since it is not as a result of

2 construction, would not be available to me which is
3 available under the scenarios that you laid out.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You could have asked for
5 capital funding for this.

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: Not that I'm aware of. I don't
7 think so and we can have our folks check. I don't
8 think that something like this would be capitally
9 eligible, I don't think.

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But in those other
11 cases, it was capital dollars that paid for the
12 trailer.

13 DENNIS WALCOTT: Because we were doing renovation
14 work of an existing structure.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I understand that.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, so, I'm saying that's the
17 key difference.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: The capital dollars were
19 used in the past for trailers.

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah, I haven't disagreed with
21 that, yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, what I'm saying is
23 that the library system could have asked me or the
24 Council or the Mayor for capital funding last year
25

2 that then might have been able to be used for a
3 trailer.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: No, no, because as I understand
5 it, that it would not be capitally eligible. I'm not
6 saying that we didn't have the capital money. It
7 would not be capitally eligible, which is a big
8 difference.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Well, I think we may
10 have a disagreement and maybe a lack of clarity on
11 it.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: We can double check on that but
13 that's my interpretation and impression.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Again, I believe that if
15 the will were there.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: The will is here sir.

17 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But it wasn't because
18 you didn't seriously pursue a trailer and or the
19 funding for the trailer. Again, just leaving it in
20 this position where we don't have anything.

21 So, let me ask about and I know at least one of
22 my colleagues may have questions and we'll get to
23 that and then I'll come back but your ongoing
24 discussions about a potential site, potential rental
25 site, what's the latest on that and what kind of

1
2 timeframe can you give the people of Court Square,
3 not just in terms of when you might sign a lease
4 because you might be able to say, although I'd like
5 to hear the exact timeframe, we could sign a lease in
6 the next couple of weeks but as we all know, that
7 doesn't mean the people of Court Square will have a
8 library in a couple of weeks, right? There will be a
9 protracted period of time where there will still be
10 no library.

11 So, what's the absolute latest, real time
12 deadlines. Real time dates and expectations of when
13 this community could expect a library because I'm
14 sure you would understand the communities frustration
15 and mine that if we just keep saying we don't know.
16 You know, we can't give you a date when you might get
17 a library again. You're essentially not going to
18 have library service for an indefinite period of
19 time. That's frustrating and infuriating for lots of
20 people. So, what can you tell the community about
21 where you're at because you were close when we had
22 the meeting about a month ago with the Court Square
23 Library as well.

24 You had identified that site that you talked
25 about.

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: The one I talked about the
3 contiguous space, yeah.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: With the joining spaces.
5 It's a month later, are we closer to signing a lease
6 and then what is the timeframe or the projected
7 timeframe to actually build that space out and give
8 us library service once again in Court Square?

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, a couple of points. One, to
10 totally agree with you. I understand the frustration
11 and the anger on the part of you, members of the
12 Committee and especially the public. So, I truly
13 understand that.

14 Two, I think the devil is in the details, as far
15 as depending on the space itself. For example, we
16 have our folks going out to a space within the next
17 week or so which will involve our capital people
18 taking a look at it as far as potential build out and
19 they will get back to me as far as how long they
20 think it will take to build out the spot that we're
21 looking at. And then I will make decisions based on
22 the options available to me that both again, goes
23 back to the point of making financial sense but also
24 how much it would cost to build out.

2 So, and I think it's important for me to give
3 context as well. So, as you know, some of the spaces
4 are and not the specific spaces but some of the
5 spaces are different sizes and shapes and have
6 issues. We have a space that we liked but it does
7 not have bathrooms. So, factoring the build out,
8 we'll factor in the bathrooms.

9 We had some space that we liked but then didn't
10 meet the ADA requirements that we felt were
11 important, so we ruled that out.

12 So, to say to the public right now a definitive
13 timeline, that I cannot do. It is my hope to have a
14 Court Square library in place by the end of this
15 calendar year. A renovated, a built out library by
16 the end of this calendar year.

17 So, that factors in a required amount of time for
18 building out. It requires amount of time for going
19 through the negotiations and signing the lease and
20 that's my goal of what we're shooting for right now.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, have you made
22 progress and you recall the meeting that I'm talking
23 about at the library with the friends of Court
24 Square.

25 DENNIS WALCOTT: Uhm, hmm.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Because we had very
3 similar discussions that day at the library. Have
4 you made any progress? Are we closer to a deal with
5 any of these potential sites or are we in the exact
6 same place and have had no forward movement since
7 that day?

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: Put it like this, if this
9 hearing was held, the hearing wouldn't be necessary
10 as far as saying we're closer or not. I think by
11 next month I will have a definite idea of having a
12 deal in place and so, that's my hope to have
13 something resolved by next month, as far as a lease
14 agreement. But again, the devil is in the detail and
15 then once, if we do have a deal in place by next
16 month, then it's the amount of time of the build out
17 that will go into that.

18 So, my people are looking at a potential space
19 that I maybe referring to, to see what it would take
20 to build that space out to be a functioning library
21 and this may happen sooner than later.

22 So, again, I can't give you a definitive
23 timeline, because you never know what happens in
24 negotiations and I'm not going to negotiate through
25 us here and the press itself and the public. And

1
2 that undermines my ability to negotiate a good deal
3 for the library.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: I certainly understand
5 not negotiating in public and not negotiating against
6 yourself but obviously, there does need to be some
7 level of transparency.

8 DENNIS WALCOTT: Understood.

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And accountability to
10 the community. We've been joined my Majority Leader
11 Laurie Cumbo of the Committee and needless to say, I
12 have more questions but I think Council Member Gjonaj
13 has questions or no? Yeah, Council Member Gjonaj.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you Chairman.
15 Thank you, President Walcott. Again, I find myself
16 in a unique position based on my background to be
17 helpful during this hearing.

18 I was a broker at one point in my past life
19 before I became a public servant and having had gone
20 through this painful experience myself, whether it be
21 for a private entity or a public one, I can attest to
22 the fact that I worked on deals for years to find out
23 that they won't close or that they do close.

24 And I just want to share with you some of my
25 thoughts on the million dollar build out potential

1 for \$3,600 President Walcott. Sounds extremely low
2 based on the numbers I've heard when it comes to
3 libraries. That would be at about \$278 a square foot
4 and I've heard number of two and three times that
5 when it comes to build outs. I won't hold my breath
6 on that number and that's only through what I've seen
7 and witnessed myself.
8

9 But I do have some questions here as far as, and
10 I do understand the price per square foot concerns
11 and it's about a juggling act as well and Chairman, I
12 share this with you. Many times, a broker tries to
13 balance between the anticipated close date and the
14 anticipated opening date, so there is not a double
15 rent being paid. We have to be good stewards of
16 taxpayer dollars. I commend you on being a good
17 steward of taxpayer dollars. It's easy to be able to
18 pay for two locations simultaneously and perhaps not
19 offering the services as you wind down one to open up
20 the other, which is a complete injustice.

21 And I'm mindful that we don't look for temporary
22 places but we look for permanent and the best
23 possible options which from day to day, hour to hour
24 Chairman can actually change because you have to wait
25 for a vacancy to come up. You have to negotiate with

1 a current property owner on the availability dates
2 and the cost factors which you can't approve until
3 you get a RFP, I believe to determine the bidding
4 process of the cost for the build out, which won't be
5 known until there is a walk through and you have your
6 estimators look into the actual cost of relocation.

7
8 I'm summing all of this up and I apologize, I
9 want to get to my question because I think there's
10 also you know the manager pound gorilla in the room
11 that's not being talked about and I'm trying to read
12 between the lines.

13 Am I to understand that this was a done deal in
14 negotiations that were being done with the once was
15 the Amazon deal and was part of a footprint and a
16 play that Amazon was going to build out this library.
17 Is that what I'm understanding here?

18 DENNIS WALCOTT: I can't say it was a done deal
19 at all. I would not make that type of statement. I
20 would say that we were in conversations with Amazon
21 around the potential library and other support from
22 Amazon as well for the Queens Public Library. We had
23 a lengthy meeting with a number of the Vice
24 Presidents, as I indicated earlier in our Long Island
25

2 City library with Amazon and then we've had several
3 phone conversations as well.

4 So, to say it was a done deal I think would be
5 misrepresenting how far it was but I think there were
6 conversations with Amazon as well as with Savanna and
7 Synteen and others as things evolved over a period of
8 time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: So, there was a
10 conversation, a potential role that Amazon would
11 play.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: Possibly.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Involving this particular
14 library.

15 DENNIS WALCOTT: That is correct.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Which I understand now.
17 So, it's not about a delay with intent of, and then
18 since then, obviously the painful task of locating a
19 space to accommodate on size and location and
20 timeframe because I would imagine it's been what,
21 eight months or so now that the Amazon deal has
22 fallen apart. We no longer rely on that deal or the
23 conversation.

24 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Exactly a year Council
25 Member.

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: I was going to say it's year
3 this month, if not Valentines Day. Friday is
4 Valentines Day.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But this is, this is, to
6 be fair, there was no guarantee.

7 DENNIS WALCOTT: I said that.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: They walked away and
9 that is not in all due respect Council Member, this
10 is my district, this is my library, why we're in this
11 position. Right, that is not what happened here and
12 I'm not going to allow that to be the narrative. We
13 had this knowledge that Savanna was going to throw
14 the library out essentially a couple of years ago and
15 there were lots of different negotiations and all of
16 them fell through for one reason or another but the
17 truth is, the library should still have been a
18 priority in terms keeping it open regardless of
19 whether or not any of those things happened.

20 So, I just want to correct that record and this
21 is not an Amazon HQ2 hearing right, this is about the
22 Court Square Library and what the library was done
23 and you don't have this information Council Member
24 Gjonaj but the friends of the Court Square library
25 are going to speak right after President Walcott and

1
2 there is a timeline involved here where the library,
3 I believe, can and should have done a lot more to
4 keep this library open and continuous library service
5 happening and that simply didn't happen. And I think
6 that is incredibly important to me and to the
7 community who will be speaking shortly about what
8 happened here.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Can I -

10 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Yeah, I think we're
11 close to moving on but if you have another thing you
12 would like to say, Council Member.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I do, thank you for the
14 courtesy Chairman.

15 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Sure.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: On the Eve of the
17 anniversary of Valentines Day where my heart and the
18 hearts of many New Yorkers was broken over the Amazon
19 deal, I felt that it was appropriate to bring up and
20 I'm not making this an Amazon hearing, but knowing
21 that in my own experience, a negotiation is a
22 negotiation until it's either signed or it falls
23 apart and I wanted to point that out that this was
24 all part of it and the disservice of having a public
25

2 library or a vital city service not being provided to
3 a community that they've enjoyed is a disserve.

4 So, we're trying to get ahead of this and I'm
5 just going to ask you out straight Mr. Walcott on the
6 current lease. Are you considering holdovers, hold
7 over stay that is, that although you don't have a
8 lease and it may have expired and you're supposed to
9 close and move out, there are certain laws that
10 protect you as a tenant, in this case, the City of
11 New York, for being forced out through a hold over
12 provision which I believe is typical in City
13 contracts?

14 DENNIS WALCOTT: I'm not familiar with that
15 provision. All I know is that our lease, we are a
16 sublease of City Bank which is leasing now the space
17 in the Savanna building itself. So, our agreement
18 with City Bank was extended until March 31st of this
19 year and so, for us to meet the requirements of our
20 sublease with city, is a reason why we have to close
21 out services as of this Saturday will be the last day
22 because then we have to make sure the facility is
23 suitable for City because then City has an obligation
24 to Savanna as a tenant of Savanna.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: So, knowing a little bit
3 about this as well, there is a provision as a
4 holdover. So, although your lease expires, although
5 you intended to move out and due to enforcing
6 circumstances Chairman and this is important to know,
7 you could still remain in that property for a
8 duration of time and allow for court proceeding or
9 allow for an additional agreement, an extension of
10 time to be accommodated to both the public library
11 and the needs of the community with the landlord in
12 place. You do not have to vacate. No one is going
13 to lock you out, it's illegal. No one is going to
14 take your stuff and put it into storage or put it
15 into garbage.

16 You can legally be a holdover occupant of the
17 space until you work this out with the landlord or a
18 court order determines otherwise and I would
19 encourage that perhaps this is the path that we
20 should take to keep the library open in the interim.
21 Providing a service to the community and being good
22 steward of taxpayer dollars so we don't spend our
23 limited resources unwisely.

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: We'll have our Counsel review.
3 I'm not an expert and my counsel is no longer my
4 counsel who you are looking at.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Is that something that
6 you are familiar with or looked into at all or heard
7 of?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Chairman, I'm certain of
9 this law. It would be just like you as a tenant, if
10 you didn't pay your rent, no landlord could come in
11 and evict you, even though it's commercial, you still
12 have protections.

13 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: No, I gotcha and I
14 appreciate that. I don't know if the general counsel
15 is here from the library.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: Former General Counsel. Former
17 General Counsel of the library.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Former General Counsel.

19 DENNIS WALCOTT: Chief Operating Officer now. So,
20 what some said to me, my Chief Operating Officer,
21 that then we would get into litigation with City Bank
22 and City Bank has been four square with us as far as
23 extending the sublease and I have no desire to expend
24 library money in litigation with City Bank but we
25 will do our due diligence but we are sublease-ee of

2 City and City has its own provisions, which I'm not
3 familiar with or with Savanna as far as the major
4 lease holder in the building. But we'll double
5 check, I'm not familiar with that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: President Walcott, I
7 assure you there is a provision and protections that
8 you have that you need to explore and I know that no
9 one wants to go down the avenue of going through
10 court hearings and proceedings. You're within your
11 rights as a sublease tenant, do so.

12 DENNIS WALCOTT: We'll double check.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you. So, Dennis,
15 you guys will pursue that and let us know about that
16 potential avenue that we may have just learned about.

17 So, I want to ask again, if you don't think that
18 there was anything that you or the Queens Public
19 Library could have done differently here to maintain
20 continuous library service. You know, we've had many
21 conversations in the past and I think even at that
22 public meeting with the friends of the Court Square
23 Library, there was at least some acknowledgement that
24 things could have been done differently or maybe the
25 library could have responded more quickly or been at

2 a minimum, certainly communicating better with the
3 community.

4 DENNIS WALCOTT: Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But I'm a little
6 surprised today to hear you say no, we did everything
7 we could have and correctly and timely. I heard you
8 say other things, so I'm a little confused.

9 DENNIS WALCOTT: When you said you heard me say
10 other things, such as?

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: You know, I thought at
12 that friends at the Court Square Library, there was
13 an acknowledgement that yeah, maybe we could have
14 acted more quickly here or jumped in more quickly and
15 there was a sense that both well, you had a
16 commitment to this community. There was also the
17 acknowledgement that all was not in fact done and
18 certainly not done as quickly as it could have been
19 from jump and I think that is a different approach
20 today.

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: So, I think the difference is
22 two things. One, and I didn't say this before, I
23 could have done a lot better in communicating to the
24 community. So, that I do acknowledge now and as far
25 as the point that you're raising again, as I said a

1 little while ago, as I really did a lot of soul
2 searching and if I did something three years ago,
3 would we be in any different position. I don't think
4 so and I put a lot of thought to that.
5

6 And it's not to just move away from
7 responsibility, I accept every bit of responsibility
8 as the head of the Queens Public Library but the
9 positions that we're in, it's just based on the
10 market place and based on circumstances that I have
11 tried to respond to and so, in that context, should
12 we have been out on this three years ago? Maybe, but
13 then, I don't know if that would make any major
14 difference right now because it is what it is and I
15 have a responsibility to rectify the what is now, so
16 moving forward into the future, there's a permanent
17 Court Square Library in place.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, and we want to hear
19 from the community members who have been waiting. I
20 don't know if you'll hang around to hear them.

21 DENNIS WALCOTT: Folks will be here.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Speak but there are vast
23 differences in all of our communities in Queens, as
24 we all know and I believe you have 64 library
25 branches at this point.

2 DENNIS WALCOTT: 66 facilities and 64 of them are
3 libraries.

4 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Correct.

5 DENNIS WALCOTT: Because Queens Bridge was a
6 library that then became the Tech Center back in
7 2007.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And there are great
9 difference and you know; Long Island City is very
10 unique. Court Square is very unique even within Long
11 Island City. But my last question to you is, the
12 people in Court Square deserve a library, need a
13 library and this public library system and you as the
14 President and CEO will make sure that they have a
15 library.

16 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's a question and the answer
17 is yes. I said that from the beginning, middle and
18 the end. I am committed and I will look at the
19 people from Court Square to say it directly to them
20 to having a Court Square library and so, that is my
21 commitment here in testimony and here in conversation
22 and in our actions in pursuing various potential
23 deals as far as trying to find a situation that will
24 allow me to finalize a deal and hopefully, I'll be
25 able to have a deal in place very soon.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, I heard you talk
3 about the hopeful April announcement, if there should
4 be one and the timeline of having a newly renovated
5 space by the end of this calendar year.

6 DENNIS WALCOTT: That's the goal. Yes, sir.

7 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And obviously, we are
8 not disinterested in making sure that those things
9 happen. I think we should of never gotten to this
10 point but we have to make sure that we don't get here
11 again anywhere else in Queens or the City of New York
12 with respect to a library and stipulating the Court
13 Square deserves a library, needs a library and will
14 always have a library is absolutely essential to me
15 and to all of the folks who are about to testify I am
16 sure.

17 DENNIS WALCOTT: And to me as well sir.

18 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, with that, I want to
19 thank Mr. Walcott for being here.

20 DENNIS WALCOTT: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And call Meghan Cirrito
22 from the Friends of the Court Square Library, Frank
23 Wu from the Court Square Civic Association and Mary
24 Jo Betta, a resident of Long Island City.

2 Mary, are you going to join? We're going to do
3 one panel of community members who are going to
4 testify. Meghan will go first then Frank and then
5 Mary. I know we have a three minute clock but we
6 will be somewhat liberal in our interpretation of
7 that and Mary, do you have written testimony?

8 MARY JO BETTY: What?

9 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Do you have written
10 testimony? Are you submitting testimony? You're
11 just going to speak from the heart, okay, great.

12 So, Meghan, when you are ready and this is
13 Frank's as well.

14 MEGHAN CIRRITO: Thank you. Thank you to the New
15 York City Council and the Committee on Cultural
16 Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup
17 Relations for inviting me to testify today regarding
18 Queens Public Library at Court Square.

19 My name is Meghan Cirrito and I am the President
20 of the Friends of Court Square Library. I'm also a
21 mother, public education advocate, proud resident of
22 Queens and former public Librarian.

23 All the hats I wear will inform my testimony
24 today. As a child, the public library was both the
25 cornerstone of my education and a free and open place

2 for my mom to bring me and my sisters while my dad
3 worked 24 shifts as a firefighter.

4 Now, as a mother myself, the public library has
5 been a gathering place for my family and center of
6 early literacy for my sons. As a resident of Queens,
7 Hunters Point and Court Square in particular, the
8 public library has been a free and open gathering
9 space in a neighborhood bursting with glass
10 residential towers. Court Square Library is our
11 community center.

12 As a public librarian, I could tell you countless
13 stories of conducting story times where babies and
14 toddlers began to bridge the 30 million word gap of
15 new Americans attending English language learners
16 classes, of seniors finding fellowship along with
17 large print books and teens meeting with a social
18 worker for assistance and understanding.

19 I think we can all recall important moments in
20 our lives that took place in the public library. I
21 think we can all acknowledge that it is fundamentally
22 a bedrock of democracy. But nostalgia won't save
23 Court Square Library. I am not here today to testify
24 to the value of public libraries. I am here today to
25 testify to the value of the public library in Court

2 Square. I am here to ask this committee what went
3 wrong and how we can fix it.

4 I am here as a canary in a coalmine. If Court
5 Square Library can be closed, no branch library
6 throughout New York City is safe.

7 Today, I will address two important points to
8 which all New Yorkers should pay close attention.
9 Number one, what events and decisions led to the
10 closure of Court Square Library over the past several
11 years?

12 And, number two, how can the closure be prevented
13 now?

14 The Friends of Court Square Library have spent
15 the last two years attempting to work with Queens
16 Public Library to prevent the closure of Court Square
17 Library and I think that Queens Public Libraries
18 overall added towards the friends and other advocates
19 can be seen in Mr. Walcott's testimony this morning
20 and the paragraph that he submitted.

21 We have been rebuffed and ignored at every turn.
22 We are outraged as we have watched opportunity after
23 opportunity squander to save the library. Mr.
24 Walcott has spoken about his fiduciary duty to Queens
25

3 Public Library but he also has a duty of service to
4 Queens.

5 I contend that Mr. Walcott and his staff are
6 derelict in their duties of providing library
7 service. The city building lease is expiring, which
8 we all knew years ago. They have had plenty of time
9 to find a solution and despite our persistent
10 outreach, they have failed to do so. Queens Public
11 Library failed in evaluating the Court Square
12 community in taking note of the booming residential
13 development and robust community, they have actively
14 ignored a workforce that has been courted by the
15 Economic Development Corporation to come to Long
16 Island City each day to work, eat and use public
17 services.

18 They have failed at the very basic understanding
19 that public library service is vital to all New
20 Yorkers. I ask the Committee today to evaluate the
21 decision making that has forced us all to gather here
22 today in haste and with emotions on high. This
23 library is closing in three days and consider
24 legislation that provides greater oversight of the
25 public library systems and their ability to
unilaterally close a public library. If it can

1 happen in Court Square, it can happen in your
2 district to.

3
4 I do not give a damn about Amazon. I have seen
5 reporting and spoken to officials who claim the
6 closure of Court Square Library is the result of
7 Amazons departure from Long Island City. That claim
8 is absurd. Vital community services like public
9 libraries surely do not close because a private
10 company is no longer a tenant in the shared building.
11 Surely, there is enough political will in this room,
12 in this building to keep a public library open. I
13 reject outright that Amazon is either the cause of
14 the closure or would have been it savior. Today is
15 the day we get to save this library. I am looking at
16 all of you to be the one's to do it but you should
17 ask why Queens Public Library left it to you.

18 To that end, I want to assure you that I am
19 willing to beg today. I will cry, I will implore you
20 public library service is so deeply important to me
21 and this community that I will gladly put my ego and
22 my anger to the side and ask you to please, please
23 help our community find a solution today. Please,
24 join me in the creative problem solving and deal
25 making that should have been done years ago. Please,

1 add your voice to the chorus of encouragement to
2 Savanna and asking them to extend the libraries
3 lease. Please, ask the City Planning Commission to
4 tell David and Jerry Walcoff that their five points
5 development cannot open if the do not work with the
6 community and site a library.
7

8 Please, ask the School Construction Authority and
9 the Department of Design and Construction to consider
10 building a school with a public library on site in
11 Court Square. There are solutions, there has to be
12 the will. Please join New Yorkers in saying, we will
13 not allow public libraries to close in New York City.

14 Actions speak louder than words, so this question
15 I leave with you today is this. How can we save
16 Court Square Library from the inaction and ineptitude
17 of Queens Public Library.

18 Thank you for allowing my testimony today.

19 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Meghan for
20 your passion number one and a few people understand
21 the value of a public library more than you.

22 MEGHAN CIRRITO: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And you know, I want to
24 thank you for fighting and I think you saw, which I
25 rarely do hear in the Chamber, I have quite a bit of

1
2 anger about this as well and in deed, you know, tried
3 to get from Dennis Walcott the acknowledgement that,
4 if there was the will to keep this library open at
5 the Queens Public Library, it could have and would
6 have been done, actually fairly easily.

7 MEGHAN CIRRITO: I agree.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Because as we increased
9 the budget to the Queens Public Library alone, by \$7
10 million last year, no one at the Queens Public
11 Library asked me or anyone else for any specific or
12 dedicated funding to keep this library open.

13 And you know me, if someone had come to me and
14 said, in the face of this record funding, we need
15 \$200,000, \$400,000, \$600,00, whatever it was to keep
16 this library open, you know I would have done it.

17 MEGHAN CIRRITO: Yeah, I think every elected
18 official at this point that you know, that covers
19 Court Square Library has offered support, offered to
20 reach out to Savanna like yourself, to Tavros to make
21 those deals and also, has offered money.

22 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: But they didn't ask for
23 it.

24 MEGHAN CIRRITO: Correct.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And seemingly didn't
3 want it.

4 MEGHAN CIRRITO: One can only assume.

5 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: And it's outrageous and
6 I share your outrage and we are talking to all of
7 these people that you outlined here, looking at all
8 of these potential solutions to but we need a willing
9 partner in the Queens Public Library.

10 MEGHAN CIRRITO: Exactly.

11 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: So, thank you. Frank.

12 FRANK WU: I'm a big believer in civil discourse
13 but I feel like at times like this, there's a reason
14 why New York City in great hordes of people,
15 shouting, yelling, having signs and I think the
16 narrative of this is clearly a lack of leadership and
17 aptitude of Queens Public Library.

18 The other Council Members left but you know, I
19 pay a lot of money in taxes, a lot of people in Long
20 Island City do and they have jobs and you know, I
21 privately asked Dennis, Mr. Walcott, saying Long
22 Island City is a privileged community, we could
23 easily raise money. We've raised I think what,
24 \$30,000, \$40,000 in less than six weeks for New York
25 City Rise Up and he basically said, it's not needed.

2 Right, he privately said, we don't need the money
3 right.

4 So, the legislative body has clearly done their
5 job but you know, the Queens Public Library has not
6 and real leadership is about solving problems and the
7 fact that his testimony was so short, he is still not
8 here today, speaks volumes. Real business leadership
9 is about take on a solution and not saying whether
10 **[INAUDIBLE 2:22:05]**. It's hard, right, the Queens
11 Public Library is at the head of NYCHA. It's Queens
12 Public Library right and the answers that he gave
13 today, to be honest, were very disappointing and I
14 think it creates a lack of apathy in people and the
15 believe in public institutions and I think as an
16 oversight body the City Council should seriously take
17 a look at that.

18 You know, from in terms of again, his response
19 today in terms of where we are. You know, I think
20 the solutions that he offered were good but the
21 interim solution is still not acceptable, the once a
22 week and again, this is not a political issue. You
23 know, all individuals of political spectrum, rich,
24 poor, young, old, public libraries are a good thing
25 and the fact that the leadership of the Queens Public

2 Library cannot seem to get that and he comes off as
3 more of a CEO and talk about financial management as
4 opposed to their formal goal. Which is to create
5 inclusive space for all people, I think there is a
6 large disconnect.

7 So, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Frank and I
9 think you saw; I mean, I have been the Chair of the
10 Committee for ten years and two months. Before that,
11 I worked for the Queens Public Library for eleven
12 years and I wrote these things. Right, I was the one
13 who drafted the testimony for whoever was the
14 President and CEO of the library for eleven years. I
15 drafted every single testimony. I have never seen
16 anything like this, never and I'm shocked and I have
17 worked with Mr. Walcott in many different ways but
18 this is unacceptable because we all know what an
19 oversight hearing is and we all know what's expected
20 of folks who testify and that is to share all of the
21 relevant information that you have with respect to
22 the closure of the Court Square Library. This is
23 clearly not all of the relevant information relative
24 to what has happened here.

1
2 So, I am equally outraged and we did talk about
3 the foundation and what, if any work had been done to
4 try and enlist any philanthropies or foundations or
5 any kind of support and Dennis said that none of that
6 happened. Right, there was no outreach. There was
7 no attempt to fundraise on the private side at all to
8 keep this going, which again, leads one to believe
9 that there wasn't exactly a full court press here on
10 the part of the Queens Public Library to keep this
11 library open and that is the bottom line and we won't
12 stop fighting because again, even if, and it's a big
13 if, they announce a lease signing next month, who
14 knows. Right, it is just too much to be left and I
15 will also say this.

16 In all these 21 years that I've been doing public
17 libraries in Queens, we never let a library close.
18 We never let a community go without library service
19 which is why I mentioned the trailers because we have
20 renovated and built new libraries in many different
21 locations but it was always the ethos of the public
22 library system in Queens that we would never strand a
23 library without library service.

24 We would never force a community to go longer
25 than a few months and in fact, that was sort of the

1 discussions. How long would a closure take place?
2
3 And if it was going to be of a certain duration, for
4 sure, we would put the trailers out there, because
5 then the community would have continuous library
6 service. Because, and Meghan knows this, the tenants
7 of public libraries and participation in public
8 library programs and even the loaning of materials,
9 is habit forming. Right, people get into a routine,
10 they go to the library on Monday or Wednesday right.
11 The children go to that particular program on a
12 Tuesday afternoon or a Friday afternoon and if you
13 terminate library service all together, all of those
14 rhythms are stopped. Right, all of those rituals end
15 and then you risk losing those dedicated patrons.
16 You risk losing readers. Children who are used to
17 going to that library and getting the books. That's
18 why you kept a trailer, so that that child, even
19 though it was a different space. Even though it was
20 a smaller space, could still go to that library on
21 the Tuesday afternoon if they were used to going to
22 the library, to continue their beginnings of what we
23 like to call lifelong learning. And that's what is
24 lost when you terminate a library and allow library
25 service to stop.

2 So, thank you Frank. Mary.

3 MARY JO BETTA: Good afternoon. Thank you so
4 much for holding this hearing and giving me this
5 opportunity to speak. My name is Mary Jo Betta; I
6 live next to the Court Square Library and I have been
7 living there for over 18 years. And I will speak to
8 what the library means to the local community.

9 I came here in 2001 as a visitor, Jenny
10 McGrant[SP?] who had **[INAUDIBLE 2:31:09]** medication
11 in Bangladesh and the library opened the door for me.
12 It just gave me an empty envelop, told me to write my
13 address and sent it to my address and I brought it
14 back and I became a member.

15 Since then, it has been part of my growing every
16 single year. I was a low income household member
17 married and when I became a mother, without finding
18 any jobs, I went to college and you know, the low
19 income student who is already a mother. I would
20 always borrow the books from the library because I
21 didn't have enough money to buy the books and that
22 library is Court Square Library.

23 When I became a mother of two, I was at NYU. My
24 senior years, I'm in my final days to submit papers,
25 I was the only member of my eleven siblings and my

2 parents all who lived in Bangladesh still now. I'm
3 the only one here. I could not afford any
4 babysitting or anything. I used the library as ever
5 place. I would keep my children busy with the
6 children's material and I would study for my college,
7 write my papers, using the library books, materials
8 and computers.

9 I never expected that this thing would happen to
10 my library, that as my family, my babysitting place,
11 my other resources that develop me from that unknown
12 immigrant young woman to this Mary sitting in front
13 of you.

14 The other day I was coming from the school
15 picking up my daughter. It was last Friday and all
16 of a sudden, my daughter asked me, mom, when does the
17 library close. I thought actually meant when today
18 the library was closing. So, I told her it's closing
19 at six o'clock and my daughter said, no, I didn't
20 mean that and she started crying.

21 The library means, you know, we do not have any
22 senior centers in Court Square. We do not have any
23 youth programs. This is the library that serves the
24 Senior Center to. Our seniors go there and use the
25

1 computer, books, magazines and they build the
2 community and they spend time together there.
3

4 Our students go there to study, borrow books to
5 prepare their tests and if you go any given time to
6 Court Square Library, you can see how many students
7 are sitting outside. That shows how many children
8 are using that library.

9 It is totally - I feel like we all failed here.
10 We all failed. As the resident I am to all the
11 community organizations, you all failed. At this
12 time, is there really anyway to keep the library
13 going beside our differences and our opinions and our
14 political identities or anything. We all should come
15 together to save our library, that made huge changes
16 in the community. People of color, the immigrants
17 and people who do not have families, people who
18 aspire to grow. This library is home for all of them
19 and I - you Mr. Council Member, I wish this hearing
20 would have happened six months earlier, so we would
21 have enough time to push more but even though at this
22 death bed, is there anyway? Is there any magic
23 bullet is there any, any way that we can come
24 together to save this library?

25 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON VAN BRAMER: Thank you Mary, for your
3 story and your personal experience with the library
4 and obviously anyone who spent more than 30 minutes
5 in Queens knows how immigrant rich we are and how our
6 public library system is the first place where
7 virtually every new immigrant goes to because all of
8 the services are free. No questions asked. It is
9 the most democratic institution, no one asks if you
10 are documented or undocumented, if you are rich or
11 you are poor, everyone comes equally and that's why
12 it's so important to keep libraries open.

13 So, I assure you Mary, that there has been a full
14 court press on from this Committee and from my office
15 and the other elected officials for a couple of years
16 but again, if the Queens Public Library isn't as
17 committed to this as they should be, we have a
18 problem because while we will look at the proposed
19 legislation that Meghan mentioned and other ways to
20 increase oversight of this, at this particular moment
21 and time, it is incumbent upon the President and the
22 CEO of the Queens Public Library to sign a lease to
23 enter into negotiation and to guarantee this
24 community continuous public library service. That

1 did not happen. That has not happened but we will
2 continue to press them to do just that.
3

4 What we heard today was unacceptable on so many
5 levels and I would expect more anguish from the
6 public library itself that something like this was
7 going to happen but we didn't get that at all. And
8 you talk about the human story, all of you share the
9 human story and while everyone here appreciates the
10 fiduciary responsibilities of the public library,
11 everyone here wants taxpayer dollars to be spent
12 wisely.

13 But there are few better ways to spend taxpayer
14 dollars than on public libraries and then on public
15 library service and the fundamental obligation of
16 this public library system to keep this public
17 library open is paramount and it wasn't here. Right,
18 a lack of willingness to do what it took is what made
19 this moment happen and that could have and should
20 have been avoided. It wasn't and I heard Mr. Walcott
21 talk about leaving his successors with you know, a
22 budget question that he didn't want to leave them
23 with.

24 But if I were President and CEO of the Queens
25 Public Library, I wouldn't want to have on my record

1 that a public library closed on my watch. Right,
2 that to me is quite damning. So, I appreciate your
3 passion and all of you and I know all of us will
4 continue to work together to make sure that Court
5 Square gets what it deserves and needs and that we
6 compel the Queens Public Library to do the right
7 thing here.
8

9 No one loves the Queens Public Library more than
10 me. So, everyone in this room, including the people
11 who work for the Queens Public Library, know how
12 difficult this is but I am enormously disappointed in
13 this organization and this institution and I really
14 believe in and that I really love and that I've
15 dedicated 21 years of my life to, that they would
16 allow this to happen is absolutely outrageous and
17 disgraceful.

18 So, I want to thank all of you, recommit to
19 working together with you on this issue but I
20 appreciate you taking the time out of your day to
21 come here. Thank you.

22 And with that, we have no further witnesses. I
23 believe I have made very clear what I believe has
24 happened here and what needs to happen. So, with
25

1
2 that, I want to thank everyone for coming today and
3 this hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 1, 2018