Mayor Bowman and Councillors,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak today.

As a West Kildonan and Garden City resident, a lifelong user of the West Kildonan Library, a former employee of that library and as a former teacher-librarian, I would like to express my views on the proposed move of the library to the Garden City Shopping Centre.

There has been no consultation with our community on this proposal for West Kildonan Library. I am here today to implore you to listen to our community as we have not had an opportunity to have a voice in the plans for our local library.

The City of Winnipeg owns the property on Jefferson Ave., and it cannot be in the public interest to lose this civic asset in favour of moving our library into a private developer's mall. The current property will then be lost forever, when it is right now being used for the public good. The imbalance in values is glaring. It is hardly an equal trade.

The West Kildonan Library is an attractive building with historical significance, an example of society's investment in citizens 'educational and intellectual needs - a testament to the success of generations of hard work by local residents, and I will add that I am the proud daughter of Ben Zaidman, one of the people who petitioned the former city of West Kildonan to establish a library for the good of this community. To sell the library would violate the intent behind its construction and the trust those people put in us. It was purpose-built and has room for a variety of activities. It is a busy and an accessible location. It is a successful library.

Furthermore, the cost of renovating the building has not been detailed for the public to scrutinize and understand. In any case, it is far cheaper to renovate than to spend money leasing space in a shopping mall, which, at the end of the lease, will mean the City will have no asset and will endure further costs in looking for yet another space. Parking spaces at a mall are not a reason to spend millions of taxpayers dollars, since

there have never, ever been complaints about it from neighbours. In fact, they want the library to stay.

The Northwest section of the city needs more libraries. There has been no explanation as to why Winnipeg should only have 20 libraries, a policy that does not reflect the needs the exploding population in suburban developments. It's a policy that needs revisiting. To protect and invest in our northwest area of the city, the West Kildonan Library should be kept, so the area's population doesn't get hollowed out because services are moved and people move with them. Another library further north should be built to serve the expanding population there, hopefully in a spot near other city-run properties, such as a community or sports centre so people are able to make the best of one trip, especially families with children. Ample parking exists at those sites. But the City's assertion that there are no suitable spaces available is not acceptable. Look harder, please, or buy land back from developers, if necessary. That would be a positive investment of taxpayer money.

New library designs reflect a recognition of the library as one of the most important institutions - a cornerstone of a forward-looking, inclusive society. It seems strange to me that the City boasts about the beautiful new, attractive facilities in the Millennium Library, in Windsor Park, in River Heights on Grant Ave. and has redesigned the St. John's Library, but proposes to move a perfectly fine existing library collection into an airless, soulless shopping mall. What is the rationale in building some libraries that reflect current approaches to design and use, but not others? Why does our neighbourhood deserve less - and you should know that residents do feel that we are being shortchanged because of the historic economic and social imbalances in our city.

Libraries in shopping malls are an idea whose time has passed. The mall location is in some ways is a less accessible location for many in our community, from young to old. As a space, the Garden City Shopping Centre proposal will not have external access, nor will it have windows to let in natural light as do new libraries. It will also be devoid of the ambience of new library designs - designs that welcome users in to sit and read, work or play. Yes, some people would go to the library while they shop, but it's not a place where children will go by themselves,

where they will hang out, as they do now at the current location, which welcomes kids from nearby schools.

Let's not forget the important social value of a library for youth or other groups, including the disadvantaged. It's a place that gives people a feeling of acceptance and belonging. Shopping centres don’t want those people. I worked as a page at the West Kildonan Library in the late 1960s. Many kids who came there seldom took out books, but they felt safe there. Their interaction with staff and the books they did read contributed to their development, bit by bit, in a positive way. As a teacher-librarian, I saw many examples of how libraries saved non-academic children, and that wouldn't happen in a shopping centre setting.

Overall, this proposal does not reflect the vision of the community library as a destination - a cultural hub, a space for intellectual, educational and recreational advancement. The library should be a place that raises people up, with staffing and programming to support that aim. Its design and location must also reflect that approach. What is the City of Winnipeg’s vision for citizens in Northwest Winnipeg? Please listen to the voices of the residents of West Kildonan. We do not want our library moved to a mall.

Change must happen, and if it must it should be a step forward. Financially, socially and ethically, this proposal would be a step in the other direction.

Thank you.

Harriet Zaidman