

**LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD REPORT**

December 10, 2020

TO: Board of Library Commissioners

FROM: John F. Szabo, City Librarian

SUBJECT: **INITIATE THE PROCESS TO CONSIDER THE DEDICATION OF THE
VERMONT SQUARE BRANCH LIBRARY IN RECOGNITION OF
RITA WALTERS**

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Library Commissioners adopt the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That the Board of Library Commissioners initiate in accordance with Board policy 1:312, the process to consider dedicating the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of former Library Commissioner, City of Los Angeles Councilperson, Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member, and long-time Los Angeles resident Rita Walters.

FINDINGS:

BACKGROUND

1. Ms. Walters was born on August 14, 1930 and came to Los Angeles in 1955. Ms. Walters was an influential champion of civil rights whose dedication to public service never wavered. Upon her passing on February 17, 2020 at the age of 89, Mayor Eric Garcetti called Ms. Walters “A model public servant.”
2. Ms. Walters, described by the Los Angeles Times as a “trail-blazing African American Leader” who was a “fierce advocate of equity”, was elected to the LAUSD Board in 1979 as the only African American member of the Board, where she served until 1991. Ms. Walters worked tirelessly towards racial integration in Los Angeles schools during her tenure through her support of busing and the magnet program. In 1991 Ms. Walters became the first African American woman elected to the Los Angeles City Council, a position she held until 2001. Ms. Walters represented the 9th Council District where the Vermont Square Branch Library is located.

3. On Saturday, May 11, 1996, the historical Vermont Square Branch Library was reopened to the public again after being closed since 1990 due to a needed seismic retrofit. At the reopening ceremony, Rita Walters, as the Councilmember for the 9th District (where the branch is located), was a featured guest speaker.
4. In 2002, Ms. Walters was appointed by Mayor James K. Hahn to the Board of Library Commissioners, the Los Angeles Public Library's governing body. She continued in that role, championing the importance and benefit of a strong public library system, until retiring in 2017. She served under Mayors James K. Hahn, Antonio Villaraigosa, and Eric Garcetti.
5. Upon her retirement from the Board of Library Commissioners, the Board presented Ms. Walters with a resolution in honor of her service, on December 7, 2017. In the resolution, the Board noted the following:

WHEREAS, RITA WALTERS was appointed to the Board of Library Commissioners on February 15, 2002, and has served nearly five terms under three mayors. She presided on the commission during the greatest period of expansion and innovation in the library's 145-year history, an unprecedented era, which included the largest library construction program in the nation; and

WHEREAS, Commissioner Walters's experience, commitment and in-depth understanding of the library and the city played a crucial role in the remarkable success of the massive expansion project, which was completed under-budget and ahead of schedule, and built or renovated 65 branch libraries; doubled the size of the library system to 1.4 million square feet; expanded the system from 62 to 73 libraries; and modernized libraries citywide;

6. At the same December 7, 2017 Board of Library Commissioners meeting, City Librarian John Szabo commented that, "he considered it an honor to serve as city librarian for a time while [Ms. Walters] has been commissioner. In addition to being an outstanding commissioner, and asking tough questions, she really knew the Library and our services— who we truly are as an institution and what we mean to the people we serve." Mr. Szabo further remarked, "To have someone like Commissioner Walters, whose name is so associated with libraries and with Los Angeles Public Libraries, is such a gift to this institution."
7. The criteria and procedure for recognition in branch facilities is stated in Board Policy 1:312.

To acknowledge citizen involvement and contributions to branch libraries, the Board of Library Commissioners may recognize individuals or organizations that have made substantial efforts or donations to enhance and improve library services in the Los Angeles Public Library:

A. *for the dedication of a branch library may be accepted and processed in accordance with the following requirements:*

1. *A written recommendation must be submitted to the Board of Library Commissioners to include a justification for the proposed dedication.*
2. *The justification shall include the person's prominent contributions to humanity, to the city, to the library, or to the community, and should demonstrate that the character and achievements of the individual set standards of excellence, served as a role model, and reflected the principles and ideals of American democracy, its diversity and plurality.*
3. *The recommendation shall be posted in the libraries and on the library Website for three months for review and the opportunity for comments by the public.*
4. *Library staff will evaluate the recommendation and community input in a report to the Board of Library Commissioners for its consideration of the request.*

B. *The Board of Library Commissioners may name a community meeting room or area of the branch in honor or in memory of an individual, and approve the design and the placement of a plaque with the individual's name. Recommendations for naming a community meeting room or area of the library may be accepted and processed in accordance with the procedures in 1:312 A above.*

8. Library staff recommends initiating the process to consider dedicating the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of Rita Walters.

Prepared by: Joyce Cooper, Interim Director of Branch Library Services
Reviewed by: Susan Broman, Assistant City Librarian

EXHIBIT B - RESOLUTION

LIBRARY RESOLUTION NO. 2020-XX (C-XX)

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WHEREAS, Ms. Walters, described by the Los Angeles Times as a “trail-blazing African American leader” who was a “fierce advocate of equity,” was elected to the LAUSD Board in 1979 as the only African American member of the Board, where she served until 1991. Ms. Walters worked tirelessly towards racial integration in Los Angeles schools during her tenure, through her support of busing and the magnet schools program. In 1991, Ms. Walters became the first African American woman elected to the Los Angeles City Council, a position she held until 2001. Ms. Walters represented the 9th Council District where the Vermont Square Branch Library is located.

WHEREAS, in 2002, Ms. Walters was appointed by Mayor James K. Hahn to the Board of Library Commissioners, the Los Angeles Public Library’s governing body. She continued in that role, championing the importance and benefit of a strong public library system, until retiring in 2017. She served under Mayors James K. Hahn, Antonio Villaraigosa, and Eric Garcetti:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Library Commissioners initiate, in accordance with Board policy 1:312, the process to consider dedicating the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of former Library Commissioner, City of Los Angeles Councilperson, Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member, and long-time Los Angeles resident Rita Walters.

This is a true copy:

Raquel M. Borden
Board Executive Assistant

Adopted by the following votes:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSENT: