

**LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY
BOARD REPORT**

April 8, 2021

TO: Board of Library Commissioners

FROM: John F. Szabo, City Librarian

SUBJECT: **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 dedicate 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. The Board of Library Commissioners received a total of 62 comments in support of the dedication of the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of Rita Walters. Of note, letters were received from several current Los Angeles City Council Members including: Nury Martinez (Council District 6), Marqueece Harris-Dawson (Council District 8), Mark Ridley-Thomas (Council District 10), Mitch O'Farrell (Council District 13), and Curren Price, Jr. (Council District 9), whose district includes the Vermont Square Branch. Current Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn also submitted a letter of support, as did former City Librarians, Fontayne Homes and Susan Kent.
2. Other letters of support were received from the Voices Neighborhood Council, that represents the Vermont Square neighborhood, and Rabbi Steven Jacobs, who wrote, "Rita joined me against many odds in supporting me in my quest to support bussing. Not easy. It was racist then and it was lonely. She supported me night and day and was a great influence in my life. The blessing of her journey and life is everlasting."
3. A letter of support was also received from Alva Stevenson, who was the Program Coordinator for the UCLA Special Collections and the Center for Oral History Research that interviewed Rita Walters for a series on African Americans in politics. Alva Stevenson graciously provided the Board with a link to the interview and mentioned in her letter, "I had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Walters both

personally and professionally. She was a colleague of my father Alfred Moore in the LAUSD and would also become a family friend. As school board member Mrs. Walters was a true, uncompromising advocate for parents, students and the entire school community. As the first African American woman to be a councilwoman in Los Angeles; her role and contributions touched the lives of many.”

4. An addendum with a summary of some of the comments received in support of the dedication is attached.
5. Ms. Walters, who died February 17, 2020 at the age of 89, was born on August 14, 1930 and came to Los Angeles in 1955. Ms. Walters was an influential African American woman who was a champion of civil rights and whose dedication to public service never wavered. Upon her passing, Mayor Eric Garcetti called Ms. Walters “A model public servant.”
6. 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. She was the only African American member of the Board at the time, and served on the board 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.
7. Ms. Walters was appointed in 2002 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, after serving under Mayors Hahn, Villaraigosa, and Garcetti.
8. 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, Commissioner Walters’ 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.
9. The Vermont Square Branch Library is located in the 9th Council District. The same Council District Rita Walters served faithfully beginning in 1991 when she became the first African American woman elected to the Los Angeles City Council, a position she held until 2001. In 2013, at the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Vermont Square Library Branch, the library was honored to welcome Rita Walters as a featured guest speaker.

10. 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.

11. Library staff recommends 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

Attachment: Addendum - Sample of Comments Received
Resolution

ADDENDUM
Sample of Comments Received

“Rita was a role model, a friend, and a loyal and passionate supporter of equal access to the services, facilities and resources of the L.A. Public Library.”

“Councilwoman Rita Walters was not only an inspirational woman but also an educator and a staunch advocate for the Los Angeles Public Library.”

“A dedicated and committed visionary”. “She was a ‘first’ of many positions, an outstanding educator and an unwavering pioneer. Los Angeles was lucky to have had Rita Walters.”

“A steadfast servant of the people.” “I saw the devotion she had for her son David. He attended many events with her. She made it seem effortless to be in politics and still have the time to give David all the tools he needed to function in society.”

“Especially, her inspiring commitment to the education of and opportunities for the youth of Los Angeles.”

“A wonderful way to remember her.” “She cared very much for the (library) staff and its patrons.”

“Dedicated public servant”

“Fantastic woman, so appropriate.”

“Acknowledging the impact women have had, and Black women in particular, has been lacking and needs to be rectified.”

“A fierce advocate for education and equity for all and has worked tirelessly toward that end.”

“Sounds like a great idea! We need to celebrate black women in politics and public service so that more will follow her. I’m all for it.”

“I was proud to live in her school district and even prouder of what she did to serve the Black students.”

“An influential champion of civil rights.”

“A life of service deserves a legacy. Please make this a reality.”

“Yes!!!!!!”

“She had an awesome spirit.”

“A true, uncompromising advocate for parents, students and the entire school community.”

“Fantastic idea and perfectly in alignment with our equity values.”

“She has championed for LAPL, LAUSD, and civil rights in the Los Angeles area and this memorialization would be very fitting for her.”

“A city icon and outstanding individual who fought for equality.”

“A great trailblazer, educator, and a library advocate.”

“A memorial is well deserved.”

“Admired her for her dedication to her work as a commissioner, for her perseverance in advocating for others, and for kindness and integrity.” “An amazing person who dedicated so much of her time to improving the lives of Angelenos.”

“A pillar in our community.”

“I just want to thank her for her bravery over the decades.”

“Rita Walters was a hero of mine and a tremendous community leader. I had the privilege of seeing her in action and benefit daily from the wonderful work she did for our community.”

“She was passionately devoted to the welfare of our public library system.” A “wonderful and appropriate tribute!”

“Her courage, integrity, intelligence and constant fight to improve the lives of all Angelenos were a template for all of us to follow.”

LIBRARY RESOLUTION NO. 2021 - XX (C-XX)

WHEREAS, Former Library Commissioner Rita Walters was an influential champion of civil rights whose dedication to public service never wavered; and

WHEREAS, Upon her passing February 17, 2020 at the age of 89, Mayor Eric Garcetti called Ms. Walters “A model public servant”; and the Angeles Times described her as a “trail-blazing African American leader” who was a “fierce advocate of equity.”

WHEREAS, Rita Walters was elected to the LAUSD Board in 1979 as the only African American member of the Board, where she served until 1991; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Walters was appointed to the Board of Library Commissioners on February 15, 2002, and 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, The Vermont Square Branch Library is located in the 9th Council District. The same Council District Rita Walters served faithfully beginning in 1991 when she became the first African American woman elected to the Los Angeles City Council, a position she held until 2001. In 2013, at the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Vermont Square Library Branch, the library was honored to welcome Rita Walters as a featured guest speaker; and

WHEREAS, On December 10, 2021 the Board of Library Commissioners initiated, in accordance with Board policy 1:312, the process to consider dedicating the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of Ms. Walters; and

WHEREAS, The Board of Library Commissioners received a total of 62 comments in support of the dedication of the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of Rita Walters. Of note, letters were received from several current Los Angeles City Council Members including: City Council President Nury Martinez (Council District 6), Marqueece Harris-Dawson (Council District 8), Mark Ridley-Thomas (Council District 10), Mitch O'Farrell (Council District 13), and Curren Price, Jr. (Council District 9) whose district includes the Vermont Square Branch. Current Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn also submitted a letter of support, as did former City Librarians Susan Kent and Fontayne Holmes.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Library Commissioners dedicate the Vermont Square Branch Library in recognition of former Library Commissioner, City of Los Angeles Councilmember, Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member and long-time Los Angeles resident Rita Walters.

This is a true copy: