

February 21, 2023

Public Comment by Rachel Rosekind, El Cerrito City Council Meeting 2/21/2023
Re: Agenda 8A, Library Study Session - El Cerrito Plaza BART TOD Project

My name is Rachel Rosekind. I am an El Cerrito resident, small business owner, educator, and activist. I am also Contra Costa's District 1 Library Commissioner and Vice Chair of our new countywide Library Foundation of Contra Costa.

I believe that no other public institution educates, enriches, engages, and resources its communities as expansively, continuously, and effusively as public libraries. And no other institution is as embedded and engaged in direct service in, with, and for community. These beliefs have been sustained over the course of my three decades' worth of partnership with libraries around the country.

Libraries are truly equity in action—spaces that champion accessibility, challenge censorship, preserve cultural memory, uphold the right to privacy, and **connect, connect, connect**. As opportunity zone multipliers, libraries transform individual lives and shape communities. But *multiplying* the library's capacity to serve and catalyze opportunities means *maximizing* and *optimizing* its physical form.

The El Cerrito Library is just a few blocks from my home. For that reason and many others, it holds a special place in my heart. Every time I visit, I am impressed by the energy and color the staff make manifest in what is in many ways a rather dark and dated space. These dedicated professionals work in a building that is in dire need of repair, renewal, and reimagination.

Greater and more frequent temperature extremes has amplified demand for spaces where people can find shelter and relief. To function as warming or cooling centers, libraries need modern HVAC systems. As public affairs, employment opportunities, and social services tilt toward increasing digitization, vulnerable and lesser-resourced individuals are being left out and behind. A library with modern computers, printers, other hardware, and robust Internet access is no longer a supplement to physical collections; it is a direct pipeline to assistance, civic participation, social welfare, and education.

Libraries are spaces of and for many things. On the civic level, which brings us here tonight, they are spaces of community pride and belonging. They are, in effect, love letters to the idea and practice of community itself. I hope that the city, the council, and all parties involved in stewarding this project will ***meaningfully, authentically, and accountably*** engage all of the diverse individuals and populations that make up our wonderful city and county—one of immigrants, caregivers, students, and educators, of young people, adults, and seniors, of fresh starts and stalwarts, of unhoused individuals and affluent homeowners, of single parents and low-income residents working two jobs. So that the library can be a beacon and bridge to a city that reflects and respects its entire community. I look forward to contributing to bringing this project to fruition. Thank you for your time and support of this project.