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August 9, 2018

Board of Directors  
Lincoln Independent Business Association  
Suite 205  
620 S 48th Street  
Lincoln, NE 68504

RE: Request to LIBA Board to support a new central library on Block 63 a/k/a Pershing Block

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for permitting me to address the Board and for granting an exception to your normal procedures.

By way of introduction, I want to share with you a bit of my background. My great-grandfather arrived in Lincoln in 1884 from Poland and our family has been here since then. I was born, raised, and educated in Lincoln and received a law degree from the Nebraska College of Law in 1960. I served two years as a legal officer in the United States Army and returned to Lincoln in the fall of 1962; established Friedman Law Offices, and have been practicing since that time. Our firm specializes in tort litigation. I have also been a real estate investor since the early 1970's.

I joined LIBA several years ago. I am a small business owner and understand making a payroll and paying property taxes. I thought LIBA would be a good fit, and it has proven to be.

For the last seven years, I have been on the Lincoln Library Board of Trustees and for the past four years have served as board president. I am here today asking our organization to support the construction of a new central library on Block 63, also known as the Pershing Block. I am asking that LIBA support this project for the future of our growing city.

Libraries are an integral part of the American system of free public education, which consists of public schools and libraries, both of which have been a part of American culture since the

first of each were established in Boston in the 1850's. Public education has long been considered an "obligation" of local government, not an "option."

## History of Libraries in Lincoln

Lincoln's first library, which was private, dates to 1875. The Carnegie library –referred to as [Old Main](#) – was built by a grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation in 1902. After serving for almost 60 years, it was replaced by the current [Bennett Martin Public Library](#) (BMPL) in 1962, also built by a philanthropic contribution by then mayor, Abe Martin. There were two additions in the 1970s.

When the public library was established, the Lincoln City Council passed an ordinance establishing the Library Board of Trustees (Board) to administer the library system. The Board consists of seven members, appointed by the Council, serving seven year terms, which still governs the Lincoln library system today. The Board is charged with administering the library system, it is not an “advisory board.” As trustees, the Board has a fiduciary obligation to do what is best for the citizens of Lincoln with regard to the library system. Among the powers granted, the Board oversees all facilities, including the condition and locations of buildings.

In 1938, the Board explored the possibility of replacing Old Main with a [more modern library](#). Old Main was only 33 years old. However, the Great Depression and three wars delayed the idea of a replacement of Old Main... BMPL was constructed in 1962. There were two subsequent [additions](#) to BMPL.

The change in technology from 1962 to present is obvious and needs no discussion.

Commencing in 2001, the Board began to seriously consider replacing BMPL with a new library consistent with 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology and needs. Three studies have been commissioned by the Board to assist in the process:

- 2003 – [BMPL Space Needs and Facility Study](#); The Clark Enersen Partners
- 2012 – [Central Library Vision and Concept Study](#); Sinclair Hille Architects
- 2017 – Building Program; Godfrey's & Associates and HDR (not released)

The unanimous opinion of the Board is that BMPL should be replaced - not simply remodeled; that the current location is not sufficient for a new library; and that property currently owned by Lincoln, Block 63, Original Plat, commonly referred to as the Pershing Center (Pershing), would be the logical and most reasonable location to build a new library. The block has always been used for public purposes since first platted in 1867, first for Lincoln High School, and then Pershing Center

*As the president of the Board, and a member of this organization, I am asking LIBA to re-examine its position regarding the new library in general.*

## General Considerations

Other Cities:

Compare Lincoln with other American cities: Not just cities the same size but all cities, from small villages such as Ashland, to large metropolitan areas such as San Diego and Seattle. For example:

Libraries in [states close to Nebraska](#): Fargo, ND, Des Moines and Cedar Rapids, IA; Topeka and Wichita, KS; Columbia MO, Colorado Springs, CO and Casper, WY.

Libraries in cities that are both [state capitals](#) and home to the major state land grant university: E.g. Austin, Texas, Madison, Wisconsin, Columbus, Ohio, Columbia, SC, These cities are also major college football cities.

[Best Cities to Live](#) as reported by US News & World Report, April 2018. Of the ten best cities listed, they have all spent money on new libraries. The top of the list, Austin opened a new library last fall.

These communities, like Lincoln, want to attract young millennials to work in the growing tech industries. We hear people comment that cities are often measured by their main library which tends to give an indication as to the cultural and intellectual heart of the community.

Any way you look at the picture, Lincoln is out of step with the rest of the country. Not a good sign for a city that once referred to itself as the Athens of the Midwest.

National Studies:

Several national think tanks have studied libraries in recent years.

The Pew Research Center report, [Libraries 2016](#), stated that “Most Americans view public libraries as important parts of their communities, with a majority reporting that libraries have the resources they need and play at least some role in helping them decide what information they can trust.” “Overall, 53% of Americans age 16 or older have had some interaction with a public library in the past year...” And the study found that 2/3 of adults believed that closing their local libraries would have a major impact on their community and 69% say their local libraries contribute “a lot” to providing a safe place for people to spend time.

The Aspen Institute report, [Libraries in The Exponential Age 2016](#) stated “...libraries have the opportunity today to reposition their role in the community, becoming the top-of-mind resource for providing the tools, space and culture to anticipate and prepare for the needs that will strengthen the communities they serve. This is the defining moment for America’s libraries.”

Economic Impact of Public Libraries:

As a business association, we need to be aware that public libraries are economic engines in their communities. The January 2017 report, Texas Public Libraries: [Economic Benefits](#) and Return on Investment, contains a wealth of information detailing the “return on investment” (ROI) in investing in new libraries. The bottom line is that new public libraries invigorate the area where they are built, attracting upscale housing, retail and office use, which in turn increases the value of the real estate and results in higher property taxes. On average, the ROI for new libraries is a \$4.64. The [Cape Girardeau](#), MO library, which was designed by a Lincoln firm, showed a much higher return than that - the library would pay for itself in 9 years. (Cost-Benefit Analysis, 2006).

Cost to the Average Citizen:

The average home value in Lincoln is now about \$175,000. A bond to build a library would be in the neighborhood of \$50 million. This would translate to an annual cost of about \$40 per year for an

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owner of that home, or less than the cost for one ticket to a Husker game, or taking the family to a downtown movie and popcorn.

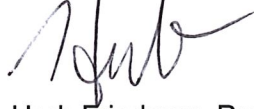
Libraries are not now and, in fact, have never been simply a warehouse for books. They are learning centers where all citizens regardless of station or income can be connected to the world of ideas. Libraries provide the public access to the marketplace of ideas, which is just as important as an access to the marketplace of business

I have visited numerous libraries including Seattle, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Boston, Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Rancho Mirage, CA. In each the local business community was supportive in campaigns to build new libraries. These communities understand the value of our educational system.

These are exciting times for our city. It is growing and continues to be one of the finest places in the nation to live. Generations of Lincoln citizens have benefited from the library system that was created by older generations. It is now time for all of us to step to the plate and continue to give to future generations.

As Bill Gates said: "In my view, investing in public libraries is an investment in the nation's future." I ask LIBA to help with this in this project. It is a win, win for us all.

Very truly yours,



Herb Friedman, President  
Library Board of Trustees

P.S. This letter and other Central Library documents are available on the library's website at [lincolnlibraries.org](http://lincolnlibraries.org).