



PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

for greater philadelphia

For Immediate Release

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PRESERVATION OF THE CARNEGIE LIBRARIES: A Statement by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

(December 18, 2008) -- The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia will release the following statement at a press conference at 2pm today hosted by a coalition of concerned citizens including the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Organized Labor to Back Action of the Coalition to Save Public Libraries:

“The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia urges Mayor Nutter to support the request of the Friends of the Free Library and of this coalition of concerned citizens to delay any action to close branch libraries. The recommendation of Amy Dougherty, executive director of the Friends of the Free Library in the December 14, 2008, edition of the Philadelphia Inquirer, that there be a system-wide examination of cost reductions to allow all branch libraries to remain open, is one that deserves serious consideration.

The Preservation Alliance is primarily concerned with the proposal to close four libraries funded by a grant to the City of Philadelphia by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The Holmesburg, Haddington, Kingsessing branches as well as this Logan Branch were all the result of Carnegie's grant of \$1.5 million, accepted by an ordinance of City Council in 1905. The purpose of the grant is best expressed by a plaque placed on the Haddington Branch in 1915 that reads: “This building was given to the City of Philadelphia by Andrew Carnegie to be used **forever** as the Haddington Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia.” This expresses the intention of Carnegie and of the City of Philadelphia at the time these branches were created.

The Alliance feels that the "public interest doctrine," recently articulated in the Orphans Court decision regarding the sale of portions of Burholme Park, may apply equally well to the Carnegie libraries. It is possible the City may not have the legal right to close, sell or lease these four libraries without the permission of Orphans Court. Moreover, the land for at least two of the libraries was provided by gifts to the City that may also contain legal restrictions on the use of the sites. The legal issues related to these libraries need to be fully understood and considered before any decision is made to close these historic libraries permanently.

Closing the libraries without clear legal authority to do so, or to sell or lease the buildings, could easily result in these historic buildings becoming vacant and subject to neglect and deterioration. To protect these four buildings, the Preservation Alliance will submit nominations to the Philadelphia Historical Commission on Monday to place each building on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places to insure its future projection. We

urge Mayor Nutter to support the listing of these buildings on the Register regardless of the decision about their closing. At the same time, we urge the Mayor to delay any action to close the branch libraries and allow for a further consideration of both legal and financial issues.”

The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia actively promotes the appreciation, protection and revitalization of the Philadelphia region’s historic buildings, communities and landscapes. To learn more, visit www.PreservationAlliance.com.

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