

19 March 2024

Johannesburg Central Library Closure – JDA Continues to Drag Its Feet

On the 1st of March, the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF) met with city representatives at the central library for a site visit. This followed lengthy engagements with the city and the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), which is the implementing agency responsible for the maintenance of the library building.

Our initial findings were that the building is structurally sound and not unsafe for occupation.

More specifically, the fire-suppression system needs to be completed and commissioned (which should take no more than 3 months). Thereafter the facility can be safely reopened to the public. There are issues with leaks in the roof, but these can be safely repaired after the library has been reopened as they are not a safety risk and the water ingress is not damaging the collections. We also noted that the roof has been repaired three times over the last few years, by three different contractors (all of whom were paid), but the leaks remain. It appears that poor drainage design might be the root of the problem, and the JHF requests that no more money be wasted until we have made our recommendation.

In the interests of working together with JDA, we requested some additional information so that our experts could prepare a proper response to the city's stated intention to keep the library closed until the 2025 budget year.

It has now been three weeks since the site meeting and we have not received the material we requested, despite several follow-up emails. Most of this information should be on file, and we were assured that it would be forthcoming. We remain puzzled as to why there has been such an inordinate delay.

To confirm, these are the documents we are requesting:

- Rational Fire Design
- Mechanical Design (specifically the fire extraction and fresh air installations)
- Plans, layout diagrams or other means of indicating the roof details or layouts of essential services
- Minutes of the stakeholder's meeting held on 9th February 2024 and minutes from the site inspection with stakeholders on 1st March 2024
- Details of the company which installed the Gas fire-suppression system, including a copy of the contract and whether any agreement on maintenance.

We call on the media and all concerned citizens to apply pressure on the JDA to provide us with the requested material as a matter of urgency. We are also investigating the possibility of mounting a public protest action outside the library at a date to be determined should the material not be sent.

JOHANNESBURG



HERITAGE FOUNDATION

We remain committed to pursuing this matter in the public interest and will continue to press for the re-opening of this vital public resource as soon as possible.

To reiterate: the continued closure of the central library prejudices both the local community and researchers who no longer have access to the library's important collections, computer workstations, literacy programmes, newsroom, and other facilities. The obvious failure of the JDA to conclude the 2012 Fire Suppression contract with a functioning system has to be rectified urgently as the City's valuable records remain unprotected.

We demand that the JDA lives up to its mandate of care and expedites the re-opening of the Johannesburg Central Library.

For more information, please contact Flo Bird: flo@joburgheritage.org.za or David Fleminger: david@joburgheritage.org.za.

With thanks



David Fleminger – Chairperson, Johannesburg Heritage Foundation