

6 May 2024



The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation, in collaboration with the Johannesburg Crisis Alliance, is holding a public protest calling on the City of Johannesburg and its implementing agency, the Johannesburg Development Agency, to **“Re-open Our Library”**.

The public protest will be held outside the Johannesburg City Library on **Saturday 18 May 2024, from 10.00 to 11.00**. The library is located on Beyers Naude Square in the inner city, Cnr. Albertina Sisulu Streets & Fraser Street.

We call on all stakeholders and concerned citizens to join us and show their support for this vital educational and community resource.

The Johannesburg City Library (JCL) is a beloved and well-used public facility, funded by ratepayers. The library’s invaluable resources include: 140 computer workstations with free wifi, rare collections of books and archival material that isn’t available elsewhere, a ‘newsroom’ with current copies of many newspapers and publications (as well as an archive dating back to the 19th century), educational literacy programmes for children and adults, and a lending library of well over 1.5 million books.

As such, the authorities should not see the library as a ‘luxury’ or a ‘nice to have’. It is an essential facility that promotes learning and literacy, offering education and recreational services to a diverse community of people that including scholars, students, researchers,

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inner-city residents and Joburg citizens across the city. The JCL (indeed all libraries) thus play a very important function in a country where reading-for-meaning is becoming a scarce skill.

Furthermore, since access to information is prescribed in South Africa's Bill of Rights, every day that the JCL remains closed is an affront of the rights of Joburg's citizenry.

The Johannesburg City Library has been closed to the public since March 2020. Initially, this closure was due to lockdown restrictions brought on by the pandemic. But on the 24 May 2021, it was announced that the library would remain indefinitely closed 'for major repairs and maintenance...before the building can be deemed safe for use'. The estimated date of re-opening was said to be sometime during the 2025 financial year. The estimated cost of repairs exceeded R100 million.

This felt excessive, especially since the library had undergone a R68-million renovation in 2012, largely funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Following engagement with the authorities and a site visit held in March 2024, the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation (JHF) has determined that there are no structural flaws in the building and there is no apparent occupational risk.

The two main points of concern were as follows:

- The essential fire-suppression system, which was installed in 2012, has not yet been commissioned. This should be done as a matter of extreme urgency and should only take a few months to complete, after which the library can safely be re-opened to the public.

A section of the roof is leaking. This is despite the JDA having employed (and paid) three different contractors to repair the structure previously. Our experts noted, however, that the leaking roof is not damaging the collection and is not an immediate safety risk to library users. As such, with proper planning, it can be repaired while the library is open to the public – although it will require a complete redesign by qualified engineers to ensure it doesn't leak again.

The JHF has repeatedly expressed its desire to assist the authorities in getting the library re-opened as soon as possible. We have requested additional information so that our team of volunteer experts can help formulate an effective way forward. Some of this material has been forthcoming but communications with the city have been halting. And we are yet to see any practical actions that suggest that the City of Johannesburg and the Johannesburg Development Agency are taking their responsibility with regards to the JCL seriously.

Please join us at the City Library on Saturday the 18 May and exercise your rights! Together we can **"Re-Open the Library"**.

For more information, please visit our website: www.joburgheritage.org.za/public-protest-re-open-our-library or email: mail@joburgheritage.org.za