



## **HAWTHORNE HILLS COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

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Seattle, WA 98105-2246**

January 23, 2020

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney  
Director, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue St NW  
Washington, DC 20503

RE: Recommendation for Closure and Sale of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Facility in Seattle, Washington

Dear Director Mulvaney:

The Hawthorne Hills Community Council (HHCC) is contacting you to express our strong concern about the Public Buildings Reform Board federal panel recommendation to close and sell the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility in Seattle located at 6125 Sandpoint Way NE. The National Archives in Seattle is the repository for records created by Federal agencies in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. If the closure goes through, the research services and historic materials currently held there are proposed to be moved to facilities in Missouri and California.

We understand that the decision is being made as part of The Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act ([Public Law 114-287](#)) (FASTA) that was passed in December 2016 which requires the Office of Management and Budget and GSA to identify opportunities for the Federal Government to reduce its inventory of civilian real property - namely through accelerated sales of approved properties, more efficiently utilize existing properties, and reduce the cost for maintaining these properties.

Among many residents of Hawthorne Hills and surrounding communities, there is a sense that this decision is being made in haste without reflection on the value of the archive materials to the local community or whether it is a wise financial transaction for the government to make at this time. We received no notification of this proposed closure and sale and we are not aware that there has been any opportunity for public comment. In fact, we only learned of this issue when we were alerted by our local city council member and read a local news report last week. We feel blindsided because we understand that the decision is to be made at the end of this week.

We wish to see and feel a greater sense of consideration for the value of the archive material to the local community. We would like an opportunity to discuss how the sale and redevelopment of the property could negatively impact the local community if it is not done in a respectful manner. This letter formally expresses our objection to the NARA Seattle building being included on the list for closure and sale. We object to the recommendation for the closure and sale for two main reasons:

- 1) We believe the national archive material should remain housed in the NARA in Seattle to benefit the local people most interested in the materials – those that live here in the Pacific NW.
- 2) We believe the value of NARA facility should be measured in historical, educational, and cultural terms – not just financial terms.

### National Archive Material Is a Treasure to the Local Community and Should Remain in Seattle

It's important to us that you understand the history of the Seattle NARA site. The Seattle NARA facility is located in the Hawthorne Hills residential neighborhood of northeast Seattle. The NARA building sits on the site of a truck farm operated by the Uyeji family and their neighbors, the Takasugi family, who lived there from about 1918 until May 1942. Hawthorne Hills was once part of a rural community called Pontiac. Located several miles outside the Seattle City limits, Pontiac was home to a significant number of Japanese immigrants and their children, including Gordon Hirabayashi, who was born there in 1918. The arrival of the Uyejis and their time in Pontiac can be traced, in part, in digitized ship passenger manifests and federal census records, available at the National Archives.<sup>2</sup> In 1942, a series of exclusion zones, or geographic areas, were established to implement the orders of General John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command to forcibly remove all Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Exclusion orders were prepared for each area and issued sequentially. The land that had been the Uyeji farm was condemned in 1944 by the U.S. Navy to build the warehouse now occupied by NARA. The warehouse served the adjacent Naval Air Station Seattle. The federal land condemnation process led to the creation of federal district court case files and associated records. Additional information about the current site history where the building now stands is provided below.

*Illustrating the sometimes-unexpected archival holdings at NARA, the court condemnation case file and Navy administrative files held in Seattle contain appraisal photographs of the former Uyeji farm house, fields, and greenhouse. The images show the impact of the family's two-year absence and provide a striking contrast to photos from the 1930s of the Uyeji family and their farm that are available at the Densho Digital Archives website, <[www.densho.org/archive/default.asp](http://www.densho.org/archive/default.asp)>. Closing the story, Tomiko Uyeji returned from the Tule Lake Relocation Center and found her family home, farm, and livelihood replaced by what she correctly called "cement and a monstrous thing for a warehouse." The warehouse became a NARA facility in 1963 and holds the following records related to Japanese "Internment."*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notes:

1. This article relies heavily on the work of Eric Bittner, Archivist at the National Archives at Denver, and his article, *Records at the National Archives-Rocky Mountain Region Relating to the Japanese American Internment Experience*, published on Discover Nikkei, May 22, 2008. The article can be found here: [www.discovernikkei.org/journal/2008/5/22/enduring-communities](http://www.discovernikkei.org/journal/2008/5/22/enduring-communities). A number of NARA field facilities hold records related to the removal and



The Uyeji family greenhouse in 1944, two years after the family was forced to abandon it. Sandpoint NAS Appraisal for Two Tracks Adjacent to NAS Seattle 20.04 Acres of Land, Box 146, Real Property Case Files, Seattle, WA, Records of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, Record Group 71, National Archives at Seattle.

The collection of history of the Japanese American community and the history of internment in the area plays a very important part of the culture in the region. We have provided a very small example of local history housed in the NARA Seattle facility. We could provide so many more examples of other important historical and cultural events to the region. In addition to the Japanese American community history, the facility and its archival holdings are also invaluable in the current location for researchers associated with the University of Washington, and with other colleges around the Puget Sound area – not to mention amateur historians, genealogists, and others whose research benefits from ready access to government archives. In addition, environmental researchers tracing past uses of the land and water in the area need to use the National Archives for a variety of reasons. For example, local environmental historians are able to trace and sometimes locate potentially liable parties (PLPs) in legal cases regarding

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incarceration of Japanese Americans. Bittner's article provides an overview of the relevant holdings at the National Archives at Denver. The National Archives at Riverside has created a draft guide to their holdings titled *Records Relating to the Japanese and Japan Americans during the Second World War* that is available on request. A summary of records at the National Archives at San Francisco can be found here: [www.archives.gov/san-francisco/finding-aids/ethnic-reference-paper.html](http://www.archives.gov/san-francisco/finding-aids/ethnic-reference-paper.html). It is best to contact each site individually to learn if they have related records.

2. Gordon K. Hirabayashi, *A Principled Stand, the Story of Hirabayashi v. United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013) 16, 25.

3. Green Lake Japanese American Community Booklet Committee, *The Green Lake Japanese American Community, 1900-1942* (Seattle, 2005). Civil Case Files, Box 186, United States District Court, Western District of Washington, Northern Division, Seattle, Records of the U.S. District Courts, Record Group 21 (hereafter RG 21), National Archives at Seattle.

4. Program Correspondence, Oregon, Office of the Regional Attorney, Office of the Solicitor, 1937-1952, Box 24, Records of the Department of Agriculture, Record Group 16, National Archives at Seattle.

contaminated soils and sediments in the area. Information can be found by to support cases looking up records including US Army Corps of Engineers dredging records. The archives are an incredible resource and asset in Seattle. It serves a range of users for land use, historical property searches, genealogical research.

As a resource, the NARA Seattle facility is a treasure and we oppose the loss of this treasure. If the material cannot be relocated in the local area, we could not support the sale of the property to the highest bidder with no regard to the value of the resources. We raise the following questions and issues related to the proposed relocation of the archive materials:

- What opportunities are there for relocation of the materials locally?
- Is there a university that could house the collection? Could the Washington State archives provide space for the materials?
- If it is not possible to keep the building at the current site, the materials should be relocated to a local location to be accessible to local residents. Great care should be taken to make sure the materials are not damaged since they have not been digitized.

#### Value of the Building to the Federal Government and the Neighborhood

In a report submitted to the OMB in late December, the Public Buildings Reform Board identified the Seattle facility, known as the Federal Archives and Records Center or “FARC,” as a “High Value Asset” that should be sold to generate revenue for the federal government.<sup>2</sup> The findings for Seattle’s NARA facility stated, in part:

*According to the attached report, "In 2016, Congress, with bipartisan support, passed the Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act (“FASTA”) to address these issues, and created the Public Buildings Reform Board (“PBRB”) to manage property sales, consolidations, and redevelopment; reduce operating and maintenance costs and reliance on leased space; and maximize utilization of space across the Federal Government for a pilot period of six years. In accordance with FASTA, the PBRB’s primary mission is to identify specific Federal properties for disposal in a manner that will 'obtain the highest and best value for the taxpayer' and accomplish the goal of 'facilitating and expediting the sale or disposal of unneeded Federal civilian real properties.'"*

HHCC disagrees with the statement that the “highest and best value for the taxpayer is the sale and disposal” of this particular federal property. We pose the following questions and/or issues for the board to consider:

- Has there been an estimate of costs to remodel the California and Missouri facilities vs. the cost to upgrade the NARA Seattle building?
- Might the cost of the move actually be more expensive than keeping the Seattle facility operating?

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<sup>2</sup> By [Feliks Banel](#)

January 15, 2020 at 10:01 am, The National Archives in Seattle. (Feliks Banel, KIRO Radio)

- Is the board aware that the price of land in the local area has seen a reduction in value over the last year? If the board's main concern is to get top dollar for the property, the federal government would do better to wait until the land prices increase again.
- The player that is likely to benefit the most in the proposed sale scenario is the developer who will obtain the land at a discount rate from the government and then turn around and build high-scale homes at prices so high that it will likely triple the amount paid. It will be short-term gain of cash for the government but a long-term loss of valuable land. We suspect that only about 20 affluent families would benefit from the availability of new homes built on the property.
- Land is very precious in this area. Are you sure there are no other uses for that site for the federal government? Are there any other federal facilities that are being considered for this region that could be located at this site?
- Have you considered whether there may be an issue with the historic designation of the structure? The report indicates that the State Historic Preservation Officer has determined that the building is not eligible for state or national historic designation. However, the report does not state the determination status from the City of Seattle Landmarks Board or King County Historic Preservation. Both of those entities will need to be consulted prior to building demolition. If the building is to be sold, we request that the City of Seattle Landmarks Board, King County Historic Preservation, and neighborhood groups be consulted as part of the decision-making process. The cost of getting into legal issues with historic designation should be calculated into the overall cost of the sale.

*“The FARC does not meet NARA’s long-term storage needs. NARA may require a short-term occupancy agreement to prepare alternate space and to relocate its records ... NARA will begin its relocation project upon full Office of Management and Budget approval of this disposition and will have subsequent discussions with its employees. Records will be relocated to NARA facilities in Kansas City, Missouri; archival records will be relocated to a NARA facility in Riverside, California, within which some renovation may be required to house the archives....,Relocating FARC will make 10-acres of highly valuable land available, likely for residential housing, in the Hawthorne Hills neighborhood just to the west of Lake Washington in the Puget Sound region of Washington,”*

HHCC has grave concerns about a developer purchasing the property for residential housing without respect to what is near and dear to the heart of the community. The site is located very close to the Burke-Gilman bicycle and pedestrian trail, Lake Washington, and Magnuson Park. Development at the site should consider density, open space, green space, amenities (sidewalks, infrastructure improvements, etc.), and pay attention to nearby elementary schools, public safety and traffic issues. In addition, we expect to see increased services to provide for additional education, medical services, childcare facilities, and infrastructure needs.

In summary, we ask that the NARA Seattle facility be removed from the list for closure and sale until provisions can be made for locating the archives to a local facility and more thought can be given to the pro's and con's of selling the property at this time.

Sincerely,

Pam Xander

President, Hawthorne Hills Community Council

Cc:

David Ferriero, Archivist of the US

Public Building Reform Board Member Angela Styles

Mr. Benjamin Chaun, GSA

Senator Patty Murray

Senator Maria Cantwell

Rep. Pramila Jayapal

Ms. Nancy Bolin, Co-Chair, Northeast District Council (NEDC)

Mayor Jenny Durkan

Seattle Council Member Alex Pedersen

Feliks Banel, KIRO Radio