

**BOSTON
PUBLIC
LIBRARY**



**CENTRAL LIBRARY
700 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON, MA 02116**

BPL.ORG

May 7, 2021

The Honorable Thomas P. Koch
Mayor, City of Quincy
City Hall
1305 Hancock Street
Quincy, MA 02169

Dear Mayor Koch,

The Boston Public Library ("BPL") recently learned of your plans to take the Adams Academy Building and two adjacent parcels in Quincy by eminent domain, and your presumed intention to begin creating a library there based on the John Adams Library (the "Adams Library" or "Library"), which has been—and continues to be—cared for and curated by the BPL's Special Collections team, and made accessible and available to the public at large. While we are confident that the City of Quincy cannot claim ownership of the Adams Library and demand possession of it on that basis, that is not the focus of this letter. Instead, we underscore here our grave concerns regarding your proposal and its potential impact on the long-term preservation of the Adams Library, and express our position that the BPL is the only suitable and proper location for the Adams Library's care and custody.

As you may know, the Adams Library consists of over 3,000 books that were personally collected and used by President John Adams. The Library has been held and preserved by the BPL since 1894, when the Adams Temple and School Fund designated the BPL as the most appropriate steward to take over its care. The Adams Library is a unique public resource that is invaluable to researchers, as it contains many extraordinarily rare and important editions of texts. It has additional significance as President Adams's personal working library, and many of the volumes were personally annotated by him.

A unique resource like the Adams Library also requires uniquely specialized care and expertise. In its capacity as the Library of the Commonwealth, the BPL has maintained the Adams Library to the highest standards. For over 125 years, we have made the Adams Library openly available to the residents of Quincy, Boston and the Commonwealth, and to researchers around the world. The BPL has cataloged the collection; featured portions of it, where possible without compromising vulnerable volumes, in numerous gallery exhibitions; conserved and repaired the fragile books; and worked with generations of scholars to fulfill President Adams's wish that his library remains a benefit to the public and in constant use. Most recently, our work has included fully digitizing the collection and making it freely available online.

The infrastructure needed to support this kind of work is extremely specialized, expensive, and requires constant reinvestment. The BPL has invested and expended millions of dollars in operating and capital funds to support and promote the Adams Library specifically. We maintain a staff of specialist curators, librarians, and conservators who have deep expertise in caring for the Adams Library and collections like it. Our staff is also uniquely positioned to ensure that the Adams Library is made available to and used by diverse publics while centered in an easily accessible hub of learning, research, and public engagement.

The physical infrastructure necessary to properly house the Adams Library is also costly. A collection such as this requires a state-of-the-art reading room, sophisticated climate control, fire suppression systems, security systems, and other technologies. Currently, the BPL's Rare Books and Manuscripts Department—where the Adams Library is held—is undergoing a \$15.8M renovation that will result in major updates to the aforementioned systems and will include a new conservation lab, secure reading room, and exhibition spaces.

The BPL understands that the City of Quincy plans to vote on allocating \$9M in Community Preservation Act funds to acquire the Adams Academy Building and the adjacent parcels. We set aside for the time being the fact that the City of Quincy lacks authority to demand removal of the Library from the BPL, and focus instead on the Adams Library's extensive and ongoing curatorial, preservation, and public access demands. Your plans raise questions about whether the City of Quincy would make the additional major investments that would be needed to house and maintain the Adams Library in a manner that is consistent with state-of-the-art library standards and continues the commitment to broad public access and research. As a working research collection of historic significance both in form and content, the duties and obligations that come with such a collection are materially beyond mere shelf and storage obligations or passive display, as might have been common in museums or historical societies of bygone ages.

As you noted in your letter to me dated August 6, 2020, "the Boston Public Library has curated the collection with exceptional care, bringing the contents thereof to a far broader audience through the digitization of the collected works." We appreciate your acknowledgement of our decades of work, significant institutional investment, and expertise in stewarding this important collection for more than 125 years. The Library will be formally responding to your outstanding request regarding the Adams Library in due course, but in the meantime I look forward to holding a dialogue with you about what is in the best interests of this unique collection to ensure its proper preservation and accessibility to future generations.

Sincerely,

David Leonard

David Leonard

President

Boston Public Library

Cc: Henry C. Luthin, City of Boston Corporation Counsel