

Space near library is full of freedom and beauty



BARB GUY

Camila from Brazil snapped photos like crazy when I took her to my favorite place for enjoying vistas of Salt Lake City. With her accented English, she asked a startled passerby to take a picture of the two of us. We stood, smiling and blinking in the bright sun, while he obliged.

This kind of thing happens all the time on the roof of our main Salt Lake library. I always take visitors there; many other Salt Lakers do, too. We're proud of our library. We love our library.

From the library's wonderful open-air rooftop space, you can conduct quite a tour: That's our State Capitol building there, and that gorgeous church down there is the Cathedral of the Madeleine. It's more than 100 years old; it's on our National Register of Historic Places. Over there, my school, the University of Utah. You can see Rice-

Eccles Stadium where we hosted the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Yes, the Olympic flame burned from right there. To the right, those breathtaking snowy peaks and canyons house our ski resorts.

Today I try to imagine us up there, on the roof of that gorgeous five-story building, looking directly into the windows of another five-story building. I try to imagine tourists coming to look at that.

The proposal, as I understand it, is to put two buildings, one five stories and the other three stories, on the grounds of Library Square. They would go on the grassy east side of the library, mucking up one of the Things Done Right in our city.

The buildings, badly needed by the city's police and fire departments, need to go somewhere, that's for sure. No one seems to dispute that new buildings are needed. The folks who work to keep us safe deserve to have nice buildings to work in. But they don't need to be on Library Commons, as the east end of Library Square is called.

This week, a lot of people have become upset with the proposal, while a few others have said that Library Commons isn't "doing anything," isn't living up to its

potential. But what it's supposed to be doing is being open and green and it does that really well. Like a musical rest, like a break between chapters, like a Sunday nap, Library Commons is meant to give you a little space before the next thing.

I even bring guests a certain way when I bring them there. I like to approach on 500 South. When you get close to 300 East, the view of the library block opens up and you can see our Moshe Safdie building with its magnificent curving tail descending gracefully, gradually, to the plaza floor, grassy spaces in the foreground, gardens along the edge in little sections that echo the building's design.

After hearing about the proposal, I walked the grassy spaces threatened with obliteration. I trod the wood-planked bridge over a cement path while cyclists whizzed past underneath.

I sat near the fountain on the southeast corner, sharing a bench with a mother raising her toddler daughter high into the air, the girl's ponytail weightless behind her. The mother and daughter are made of bronze; together they're one of several statues near the fountain, depicting children at play. This is sacred space, a tribute to organ donors. For some, it's a way to visit a lost loved one, as hallowed as a church or cemetery.

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I think our library and the spaces
around it are sacred. They are
not empty but full. Full of
freedom, contemplation and
beauty.

Let's put the buildings
somewhere else.

*BARB GUY is a regular contributor to
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