Downtown Seattle Groups Urge Seattle Public Schools to Consider Potential Site for a Downtown Public School

*Letter sent to Seattle Public Schools encourages the school district to consider acquiring the former Federal Reserve building to address a growing need in Downtown Seattle.*

**SEATTLE – (March 28, 2014)** – The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA), Downtown Residents Council, Downtown Seattle Families and other partner organizations have sent a letter to Seattle Public Schools (SPS) Superintendent Jose Banda, to alert district officials about the unique opportunity to acquire, at no cost, a suitable building and land Downtown which could serve as the location for a new Downtown public school.

The federal government is disposing of the former Federal Reserve building, located at 1015 2nd Avenue between Spring and Madison streets. Federal law stipulates that the U.S. government will convey a federally owned building and land for free to a public entity if this property is to be operated for public use, which includes a school district opening a school.

With the number of children living Downtown on the rise, opening a neighborhood public school is imperative. In 2001, 110 children were born to Downtown families. By 2012 that figure had grown to 265 children, more births than any other SPS attendance area. In the last six years alone the number of K-12 students living Downtown has ballooned from 482 in 2007 to 598 today, an increase of nearly 25 percent. The DSA developed a feasibility study, in partnership with the City of Seattle and SPS, to examine the need for a Downtown school, and updated the findings in late 2013.

“In the past, once children reached the age of five their families were leaving Downtown due to a lack of family amenities. We’re finding more and more families are now choosing to stay, but they want a neighborhood school,” said DSA President & CEO Kate Joncas. “Attracting and retaining families is a top priority for keeping Downtown a diverse, vibrant and healthy neighborhood. “The number of children living Downtown has increased steadily over the past 20 years, and as that population continues to grow the need for a Downtown public school is going to be even stronger.”

"For more than 20 years, the City has been encouraging people to move Downtown, and hundreds of families like mine have followed suit by making Downtown our neighborhood," said Downtown resident and father of one, Steve Gillespie. “A Downtown school will help the residents of Downtown coalesce as a neighborhood. To get there, we will need the City and the District to work together to respond to and encourage this demographic trend, rather than having to play catch-up later."

The former Federal Reserve building was constructed in 1950 and offers a four-story, 90,000 square foot
facility located just two blocks from educational resources, such as the Central Library, Soundbridge at Benaroya Hall and the Seattle Art Museum. Access to public transportation is another plus, with its close proximity to bus routes on 2nd and 3rd avenues, as well as an entrance to the transit tunnel. The building has plenty of space to develop a rooftop play area, similar to the new space atop the Northwest School’s recent expansion.

SPS recognizes the need for a Downtown public school, as $5 million was secured for the development of a school in last year’s BEX IV levy. A major hurdle in this process has been available property. The prospect of acquiring land with an assessed value of more than $15 million at no cost dramatically lowers the overall project costs when faced with the alternative of purchasing and developing privately held property Downtown.

About DSA

Established in 1958, the Downtown Seattle Association (http://www.downtownseattle.com) is a member-based non-profit organization that champions a healthy, vibrant urban core. By advocating on behalf of business, non-profit, arts and residential interests throughout Downtown Seattle, DSA ensures that Downtown is a world-class place to live, work, shop and play.

The DSA founded and operates the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID), a service district which implements neighborhood cleaning, hospitality and safety services – as well as research, events, promotions and human services outreach across 285-square-blocks in Downtown Seattle.

In partnership with city and county agencies, DSA also founded Commute Seattle, which provides transportation resources for commuters, and consulting services for Downtown businesses, property owners and managers.

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