

Rev. Alan Taylor  
634 S. Cuyler Ave  
Oak Park, IL 60304  
708-826-0006

June 7, 2022

Dear Chicago Plan Commission,

I am writing on behalf of the upcoming proposed sale of 6435 N. California Ave to Michael and Kathleen O'Connor, the founders of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America, "FORA."

I have known the O'Connors for over ten years ever since they began attending Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation where I served as the Senior Minister. Six years ago, during the Syrian refugee crisis, Michael asked if the church might sponsor a family and that he and Kathleen would take leadership in attending to the needs of the family. To our surprise, a Rohingya family was placed with us, and it wasn't long before Michael and Kathleen were serving four Rohingya families.

Their compassion and capacity to listen to the families' needs led them to set up a tutoring program for the children and the women, a desperately needed service that was not being provided by the refugee organizations due to a lack of funding. The O'Connors have demonstrated extraordinary generosity in the creation of FORA and the ongoing expansion of this critical service for south Asian refugees.

Both I and my family have participated in tutoring. I have witnessed the extraordinary growth of several of the students. Many of these children arrived to the United States without ever having learned to read or write in their native language. It's a sharp learning curve to learn a new language—and how to read and write, all in a new culture. FORA provides a safe, supportive atmosphere that customizes the learning for each of the children.

I am also a donor to FORA. FORA is extremely well-run. I know that my donations are going directly into serving the children and their families. I am deeply inspired by the O'Connor's vision, leadership, and generosity. They have cultivated a well-staffed, capable infrastructure. They have cultivated many volunteers and donors. And they have made transformative change in the lives and families of hundreds of students and their families. The result has been the development of a relational network that brings together hundreds of people to participate meaningfully in this meaningful work.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, here many children are provided a foundation to thrive and many more people are touched and transformed by the opportunity to participate. This is a burgeoning community of compassion and inspiration.

The sale of 6435 N. California to FORA will further their critical mission of serving some of the most vulnerable children and families in Chicago. I whole-heartedly urge the City Plan Commission to endorse this sale.

If you want more information, please contact me at 708-826-0006

Sincerely,

Rev. Alan C. Taylor

## Sale of 6435 N. California/Old Northtown Library

Alison Hafner <a.hafner@live.com>

Mon 6/13/2022 5:42 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Plan Commission,

We are writing in strong support of the organization FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America) and their desire to purchase the Old Northtown Library building at 6435 N. California. This building would allow FORA to continue their incredible work for many, many years to come. FORA provides invaluable intensive tutoring and support of all kinds to refugee families in Chicago, most of whom fled genocide and arrive here without the basic skills needed to read, write, or succeed in school. FORA leaders and tutors work tirelessly to help these children and families learn English and master the foundational skills needed to thrive in school and actively contribute as members of the Chicago community. This work is critical and life-changing. We cannot think of a more fitting use of the Old Northtown Library than to become the long term home of such an important and successful organization. Currently FORA provides more than 32,000 student hours per year of developmentally appropriate, intensive tutoring. There is a waitlist of over 40 students who want to access FORA services, and the students who have been lucky enough to be served by FORA frequently gain skills at an amazing rate, often mastering material from multiple grade levels in a single year. Anything the city can do to support this organization will benefit refugees who are in great need, and the Chicago community as a whole.

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Alison & Tom Hafner  
609 S. Harvey  
Oak Park, IL 60304

Angelica Taylor-Cortes  
634 S Cuyler Ave  
Oak Park, IL 60304  
708/214-8898

June 13, 2022

Dear Chicago City Commission,

It is my honor to write on behalf Michael and Kathleen O'Connor, the founders of FORA, as they seek to purchase FORA's adjacent property at 6435 N. California Ave for the sake of expanding their services and furthering their mission of providing foundational education skills to refugee children and supporting their families.

We first met in 2012 at church and I got to know Michael and Kathleen much better when I began tutoring a Rohingya woman as part of our church's outreach to refugees. When they created FORA, I continued to tutor. I tutored two women during the pandemic. The first was a Rohingya girl who never had education until entering the United States. Thanks to FORA and all their tutoring in four years, she came up to grade level. I tutored her while she was a senior in high school. She needed to pass a Spanish class to graduate, despite this young woman knowing four Arab languages. I helped her with her Spanish and it was deeply gratifying to see her graduate and enter community college.

At Michael and Kathleen's invitation, I also tutored a 50 year old woman who had divorced her husband after he forbade her for years from learning English. This woman now has entered the work force and is independent. This is the kind of impact that Michael and Kathleen are having on all sorts of people, especially children.

When my children and I provided tutoring at FORA last summer, we worked with several Rohingya and Afghani children. We were there when President Biden pulled out the American military from Afghanistan. It was deeply moving and disturbing to witness a girl the same age as my daughter make sense of the return of the Taliban, when it was their previous rise that caused her mother to flee Afghanistan. This girl and her siblings were raised in a refugee camp. They didn't know English or know how to read a year ago. Yet now she has many of the same interests as my daughter on social media and in music, and she is very bright. But she is in desperate need for the foundations of education. At FORA she is thriving—just as her older sister has. Her older sister has learned so much the last year that she will attend college in another year.

I have enjoyed meeting the staff at FORA. As an immigrant myself, I know what it's like to learn to live in a new culture. At FORA, I so appreciate the sensitivity to the range of cultural norms that people have among the wider community. I appreciate the diversity of the staff and how well people from much different backgrounds work together. This is a testament to the kind of people that Michael and Kathleen O'Connor are.

Please grant FORA the opportunity to expand their services and provide for many of the children on their waitlist. The sale of 6435 N. California to FORA will make a tremendous impact on the north side of Chicago. They already are a great asset to the community, and they shall become an even greater one with the space to expand.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Angelica Taylor-Cortes

**Sale of property at 6435 N. California Ave. (the old Northtown Library)**

Ann McCallister &lt;acbmc55@gmail.com&gt;

Thu 6/9/2022 2:11 PM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;

[Warning: External email]

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend that the Chicago Planning Commission choose Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) to be permitted to purchase this property.

I have been a volunteer tutor at FORA for four months. Having recently retired from my career as an attorney with the Office of the State Appellate Defender in Chicago, I was looking for a volunteer opportunity that would allow me to make a meaningful contribution to the community. Becoming a tutor at FORA is exactly what I was seeking. The staff is very friendly and accessible to answer questions. There is a lesson plan for each child that is written and overseen by a staff member. I have been working with elementary grade children, focusing on reading and math. I am amazed at their skills and their eagerness to learn, especially given the stressful circumstances they came from in their home country. The atmosphere at FORA is bustling amidst the work that is being done. I have become more connected with the children as these four months have passed, and I am committed to doing my best to assist them in sharpening their skills. They are making good strides and are simply amazing!

FORA will make excellent use of the property. I highly recommend that the Planning Commission give this vital organization the opportunity to serve more refugee children.

Sincerely,

Ann McCallister  
6010 N. Glenwood Ave., Unit Two  
Chicago, IL 60660

## Sale of 6435 N California Avenue (Old Northtown Library Property)

Anne Siders <annesiders@gmail.com>

Mon 6/13/2022 10:56 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Chicago Plan Commission Members:

I am writing to express strong support and endorsement for the amazing charitable works of Micahel and Kathleen O'Connor, as well as their organization, Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA).

Forged in love and support of underserved populations, specifically, refugee children, FORA led by Michael and Kathleen is an amazing community resource that provides enhanced learning opportunities for refugee students with limited formal education. Through the provision of High Dosage Tutoring (more than 32,000 student hours annually), the small but mighty FORA team delivers both the focused academic attention and strengthened parent-teacher relations to give these children the necessary support to be well served both in and outside of school.

Beyond FORA, Michael and Kathleen are champions for the community at large and have dedicated their lives to service. Their impact goes well beyond this particular endeavor, and there could not be a more deserving owner of this space. I could not be more effusive in support of the passionate hearts and brilliant minds of the O'Connor family. We can be assured they will leave this space to an end that enhances the surrounding community.

I would be happy to answer additional questions or speak further on this matter.

Thanks for the opportunity,

**Anne Robinson**

806 N Grove Avenue

Oak Park, IL 60302

## Re: Sale of old Northtown Library

barbara apt <aptbarbara1@gmail.com>

Fri 6/10/2022 10:28 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Barbara Apt  
10 Phyllis Place  
Randolph, New Jersey 07869

On Fri, Jun 10, 2022, 11:26 PM barbara apt <[aptbarbara1@gmail.com](mailto:aptbarbara1@gmail.com)> wrote:

I have been a virtual volunteer tutor at FORA for more than one year, working with a middle school-aged girl named Moe. To help a young person learn to speak, read and write in English has been a very fulfilling experience. The one challenge I have encountered is that there is often too much background noise, as there are multiple students being taught by multiple tutors simultaneously. It is not always possible for Moe to find a quiet spot for our tutoring session. It would be extremely helpful to expand the physical space allocated for tutoring, so that FORA can more effectively do what it does so well.

## sale of old Northtown Library

Barbara Brotman <brotmanbarbara@gmail.com>

Mon 6/6/2022 11:19 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commission,

I'm writing to support the sale of the shuttered Northtown Library building to the nonprofit Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA). I've had the opportunity to visit FORA, which is currently crammed into two separate spaces near the library, and see the amazing work they do with kids who have come to America from war-torn places around the world. Some of them come here without knowing how to read in their own languages - and with FORA's intensive tutoring, they are earning As in school and heading for college!

Generations of Rogers Park and West Ridge residents grew up reading at that beloved library. How wonderful that a new generation of newcomers to America can now do the same.

Please approve this sale so that FORA can have a workable space and help even more children!

Thank you,  
Barbara Brotman  
739 N. Grove Ave.  
Oak Park, IL 60302

## Purchase of Northtown Library by FORA

Barbara Moss <regpalate@aol.com>

Thu 6/9/2022 9:31 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: michael@refugeefora.org <michael@refugeefora.org>

[Warning: External email]

I am looking forward to tutoring in the new space that FORa has purchased. I have been a tutor at FORa for almost a year. The tutors and staff are passionate about their work with the children and it shows. The children I have tutored are so hardworking it is amazing. Even at seven years old they understand why they are there and put in their best efforts even though they have already put in a full day at school. They are amazing kids and I can't wait to see what they accomplish down the road with the help of FORA. Barbara Moss 270 E. Pearson 1101 Chicago, IL 60611



## Sale of the Old Northtown Library 6435 N. California Ave.

ddc20@aol.com <ddc20@aol.com>

Fri 6/10/2022 3:10 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To: City of Chicago Plan Commission--

I am writing in support of FORA's application for the purchase of the former Northtown Library located at 6435 N. California.

By way of background I, along with my wife Terry, are tutors at FORA. I am a retired Human Resources executive with 42 years experience in both the corporate (Standard Oil, Amoco and BP) and nonprofit (McGaw YMCA in Evanston) sectors.

I know the critical importance that education plays in developing individuals, families and communities and I have witnessed the positive and transformative manner in which FORA changes student and family lives.

Countless children and teenagers have endured incredible hardships and traveled to our country with their families in hopes of building better lives. Some have been so fortunate to find a safe haven with FORA.

Since February I have been tutoring a teenager who came to the US with his family only a few short months ago. This young man arrived with no English skills and FORA has been there for him and his 3 brothers. His path forward is going to be a difficult one, but one that would have been insurmountable without the intervention of an organization such as FORA.

In the past I have served on and have supported non-profit boards. FORA's board and staff are, from my vantage point, skilled, dedicated and incredibly committed to supporting new members of our refugee community. The purchase of 6435 N. California will allow FORA to expand its footprint and serve additional refugees and their families at a time where community services are stretched thin.

I urge you to approve FORA's application for purchase.

Kind Regards,

Bruce R. Carmichael  
1077 Willow Road  
Winnetka, IL 60093

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave., a.k.a Old Northtown Library - FORA

C. Quek <quekip@gmail.com>

Tue 6/7/2022 11:11 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Chicago Planning Commission,

I am writing to share my support for Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA). We are fortunate enough to know Kathleen and Michael O'Connor as neighbors and also have volunteered at FORA. FORA has the bold mission to serve refugee children in West Ridge and the acquisition of this old library building would be key to how the organization will serve the community for decades.

FORA is having a tremendous impact on the children of the community. I saw this first hand when I taught 2 robotics sessions (26 weeks) at FORA in 2021. This type of enrichment is essential to increase the student exposure with Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.). FORA is providing critical programs to students with limited formal education and these programs are essential for ensuring these young minds become positive contributors to the greater Chicago community.

Sincerely,

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Choon Aun Quek  
718 N. Grove  
Oak Park, IL 60302  
[quekip@gmail.com](mailto:quekip@gmail.com)

**Re: FORA bid application to acquire 6435 N. California Ave**

Christopher Lehane &lt;christopherslehane@gmail.com&gt;

Mon 6/13/2022 11:43 AM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;

Cc: Andrea &lt;andreacevans@gmail.com&gt;

[Warning: External email]

City of Chicago  
Planning Commission  
Chicago, IL

Re: FORA bid application to acquire 6435 N. California Ave

To the City of Chicago Planning Commission,

We are writing to support, in the strongest possible terms, the application made by the non-profit organization Forging Opportunities for Refugees (FORA) to acquire the property located at 6435 N. California Ave, Chicago, IL (the Old Northtown Library).

This recommendation is informed by both our professional experiences and personal knowledge of FORA's work.

By way of background, Andrea serves as Tipping Point Community's Chronic Homelessness Director. Tipping Point is a leading Bay Area philanthropy that has donated more than \$350 million to reduce poverty by supporting housing, early childhood education, and employment solutions. Prior to her work at Tipping Point, Andrea was the legal director of the Center for Justice and Accountability, a human rights non-profit that worked with refugees from all over the world. She also served for many years on San Francisco's Fire Department Commission. Chris, in his capacity as a member of the executive management team at Airbnb, helped direct the company's signature effort to house tens of thousands of refugees. At Airbnb, Chris was responsible for the company's engagement with more than 100,000 cities around the world, including with the City of Chicago. While at Airbnb, Chris helped forge a public-private partnership to help provide housing for victims of domestic violence in Chicago. Chris also previously served in senior level positions in the U.S. government.

Over the last several years, we have come to personally know the work of FORA. Our son tutored a FORA student who was in the first grade for one year. The tutoring was transformative for our son. He learned as much as, if not more than, he taught. We understand that the student he worked with did incredibly well academically this past school year, a fact that brings our son great joy. In fact, he spoke so highly of his experience with FORA that our younger son is going to serve as a tutor this summer. So, we know first hand the incredible impact that FORA is having, particularly for members of the Rohingya refugee community who have come to Chicago after fleeing traumatic circumstances in Myanmar.

The Rohingya have been described as the largest stateless population in the world. Given their plight, the U.S. Government has allowed cohorts of these refugees to settle in America. Chicago is one of the

leading geographical destinations for these Rohingya refugees. The Muslim Rohingya are victims of unconscionable forms of religious-based oppression and human rights violations in their native Myanmar, where they face genocide, extreme forms of discrimination and the deprivation of even the most basic rights, including the denial of access to education for their children.

Upon arriving in the United States, various organizations (federal, local, non governmental and faith based institutions) provide comfort and support, including clothes, food, housing, job training, and education to the refugees.. Each organization plays an important role in providing these refugees the support they need to adjust to life in the US and to begin building futures here. Within this community of support, FORA plays a critical role by providing Rohingya children access to educational supports that have both immediate impact and long term impacts on the children and city.

Because Rohingya children arrive with neither language competency nor basic learning skills, FORA has developed a specialized program designed for these children. In particular, FORA currently provides after-school High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to scores of refugee children who are SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education). Denied an education for decades by oppressive governments, these families are unable to read or write in their native language when they first arrive in the United States. Children are put in grades corresponding to their age instead of their academic level, and then end up isolated and despairing. What they desperately need is foundational skills. Through FORA, Rohingya children are able to participate in programs after their regular school days end, on the weekends, and over the summers. FORA provides foundational skills so that these students can, over time, catch up to grade level and thrive in school and civil society. This intensive and targeted pedagogical support is critical to ensuring that these children can overcome the extreme educational challenges they face as newcomers to, and new learners in Chicago.

Currently, FORA provides more than 32,000 student-hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring. FORA has a wait list of more than forty students and hopes to serve more and more students over time. **FORA's ability to expand depends on being able to secure a facility that allows the program to scale.**

In addition to student tutoring, FORA works with the parents of the Rohingya students to make sure that they have strong connections with their children's teachers. As recent arrivals who have been subjected to state sanctioned discrimination, many of these parents are wary of going into the schools and interacting with teachers. FORA serves as an interlocutor, bringing parents to the schools and providing translation services so parent-teacher relationships can blossom over time.

FORA was co-founded by the husband and wife team of Kathleen Jones and Michael O'Connor. Kathleen has been a highly respected educational professional for more than 30 years, including as a public school teacher, faculty member of a Chicago area community college and administrator. Michael is a retired investor who previously led initiatives for Catholic Charities and served as a lawyer in the U.S. Department of Justice. The FORA program is staffed by a core staff of professional educators and supported by a national network of volunteers and donors. FORA is backed by a world class board.

Based on the direct financial support of Kathleen and Michael, FORA was launched out of a Chicago storefront shortly after the city became a relocation destination for the Rohingya. FORA is trusted by Chicago's Rohingyas and serves as a pillar of support for families. As such, FORA plays an especially

important role in supporting Chicago's Rohingya and creating a pathway to long term success for this community that benefits all of Chicago.

We think it is especially appropriate that the facility FORA is seeking to acquire is a former public library. The very concept of a public library is based on the use of public spaces for the purpose of democratizing knowledge and expanding opportunity. Libraries are forums representing common ground that bring communities together. Libraries are those safe places children can walk into from off the streets on cold and snowy winter days and find both warmth from the weather and light from the books. Libraries have played a historic role in shaping the mosaic represented by the successive generations of immigrant communities coming to Chicago.

We cannot imagine that there could be a better use for the next chapter of this former library than to serve as a center of knowledge and a gateway to opportunity for this latest generation of immigrants to find their way to this special city of broad shoulders and big hearts.

Sincerely,

Andrea Evans (415 713-9090) and Christopher Lehane (202 549-5911)

**Old Northtown Library sale, 6435 N. California Ave.**

Chuck Berman &lt;cberman129@gmail.com&gt;

Tue 6/7/2022 4:37 PM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;; Michael O'Connor &lt;michael@refugeefora.org&gt;

[Warning: External email]

To the members of the Chicago City Plan Commission,

I am writing in support of the bid by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ( FORA) to purchase the Old Northtown Library.

I have known Michael and Kathleen O'Connor for many years, way before FORA was ever a thought. I can honestly say that I do not know a more conscientious and thoughtful couple. I am also familiar with FORA and have done volunteer work for them. I am impressed.

FORA is there to offer an outstretched hand to refugees who have come to this country after persecution in their own. FORA gives their children the educational tools they need to catch up with American schools. These youngsters thrive through the work they do at FORA.

FORA has grown and so have their needs. Please accept the proposal to purchase the Old Northtown Library.

Thank you.

Chuck Berman

739 N Grove Ave.

Oak Park, IL 60302

**June 13, 2022**

**To: Chicago Plan Commission**

**RE: Sale of Old Northtown Library**

Dear Chicago Plan Commission,

I am writing to express my utmost support of FORA's application for the purchase of the Old Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Avenue.

FORA fills an essential need in the West Ridge community (and beyond), forging deep and trusted relationships with our neighbors, many of whom have been systemically oppressed and previously denied the right to any education before coming to the United States.

As a former teacher in a refugee camp with displaced students from Burma (Myanmar), I have been inspired by the tremendous hope placed on education by parents and students who have survived the unimaginable. Yet, the reality is that transitioning from little or no formal education into the U.S. education system presents many challenges. By working with SLIFE (Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education) refugee students, FORA helps actualize this hope held by families and makes it a reality.

I can share many stories, but I will speak specifically to one. During my time as a staff member at FORA, I had the chance to work with a bright and brilliant young woman as she prepared to enter college. This young woman was the first person in her family to ever have a chance to pursue higher education. Before coming to the United States from Malaysia, where she and her family were refugees, she had been denied any type of education. This young woman walked to FORA weekly, where we were able to assist her to apply for and receive a full-ride scholarship through the Hope Chicago Scholars. She is now attending university with aspirations to become a pharmacist.

Through my involvement with FORA, first as Community Relations Coordinator, and now as Advisory Board member, I have had the absolute joy of working alongside a team of incredibly passionate, capable, and committed peers. FORA is a critical part of the community not only because of *what* they do, but because of the *way* they go about pursuing their mission. FORA's work is rooted in relationship. Parents are partners, and FORA works to empower the entire family unit to navigate the education system and develop meaningful relationships with teachers and school staff members. Such an approach that is rooted in reciprocity is needed, especially as new neighbors arrive through refugee resettlement and asylum programs from Afghanistan and elsewhere into the neighborhood. I have full faith that FORA will move forward with conviction to continue to meet the needs of the community.

Sincerely,

**Claire Holba**

1407 W Jarvis, Apartment 1RW

Chicago, IL 60626

## The sale of property 6435 N. California, Chicago

Colleen Shaughnessy <colleenms@att.net>

Sun 6/12/2022 12:45 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: Michael O'Connor <michael@refugeefora.org>

[Warning: External email]

**THE SALE OF THE PROPERTY AT 6435 N.CALIFORNIA AVE**  
**OTHERWISE KNOW AS THE OLD NORTHTOWN LIBRARY**

My name is Colleen Shaughnessy

Address

10044 Drury Lane, Westchester, IL 60154

TO: Chicago Planning Commission

It was a cold and blustery Chicago day in February of 2018, as I was driving from my suburban home to visit FORA, *Forging*

*Opportunities for Refugees in America*. I was searching for the tutoring building, which was a store front, somewhere on Devon Ave and California Ave. This area known as West Rogers Park, also known as "Little India". I am keenly aware of this diverse and colorful part of our city, since I use to work here several years before. I felt immediately drawn into the surrounding area, as I walked thru the front door of FORA. I opened the door and went inside, greeting me were Michael and Kathleen O'Connor. Together, along with others, they are responsible for igniting, and realizing a new transformative tutoring experience for this neighborhood. And, so begins there journey,

from idea to reality, and the growth of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America, FORA.

I learned about the Rohingya people, who are amongst the most recent refugees arriving in this area. This area is bustling with

newcomers, most often forced out of their own countries, due to violence, trauma, genocide, poverty; from Asia, Afghanistan, Syria, and every

corner of our world. These are families wanting a new life for themselves and their children, filled with possibilities of America.

The local elementary schools accepts and integrates these many different immigrant children from this area. Unimaginable difficulties and

challenges face these families on a daily basis, including the daunting task of learning a new language. These challenges affect the children,

who struggle to perform, and often fall behind in meeting expectations. This population needs help. Fortunately, FORA has

helped close this gap by offering High Dose Tutoring (HDT) to scores of refugee children. Well, let the data speak for itself, children have made monumental improvements in their schools, and are thriving.

You can imagine I was impressed. I was hooked, and started volunteering one day a week. The magic of watching a young child learn to conquer a book, in English, is priceless. I volunteered for the rest of 2018 and the start of 2019. I have witnessed, first hand, the growth of this organization. Eventually, securing a new location, at 6431 N California. Somewhere in all this COVID-19 hit, and hit especially hard to this vulnerable population. Yet FORA was able to pivot and meet the challenges brought on by COVID.

You must already know I am in awe of this organization. I've seen, first hand, how both Michael and Kathleen O'Connor interact with the countless children, families, and community to achieve lasting connections and visibility. Along with additional amazing staff, and volunteers, tutoring services are available for both children and adults. I often feel that FORA reminds me of a modern day Settlement House, as built on the principals of Jane Addams in the late 1880's. This is a place that improves the lives of immigrant communities. I remember walking into the center one day, observing Michael helping a family sort through conflicting paperwork. Due to language barriers, this family could not begin to understand how to navigate their bills, and he was helping them sort it all out. It's clear, this community trusts this organization to be an honorable advocate for their families. Kathleen accompanies families to the schools to help parents understand the needs and expectations for their children. This is a cohesive group, always looking for new ways to innovate, restructure and add programs. New programs have been added to challenge students; such as, a hands on Robotics program. Oh my gosh, how impressive. These are our new citizens of our world,



our country, imagine the possibilities for creativity, kindness, stewardship, and brain power. Since FORA opened in 2018, they have grown expeditiously. Thus, more children, needing more volunteers, and more staff to achieve their goals. And, this continues to be their challenge. I head north to FORA parking my car, then walking south down California Avenue, always passing the closed library to the north of FORA. Always thinking and feeling, such a shame this dismal vacant library, with covered windows, and closed doors, is absent to this community. It felt ghostly, once belonging here and now lost. A formidable public space that now had closed doors. I can now imagine a future. Families being led to public spaces, rooms with activity, smiles and joy, laughter and possibilities, and books, and more books, and more books. I can not think of a more deserving organization to inhabit this space at 6435 N. California then FORA. Please grant this organization the opportunity to utilize this space to empower and encourage this community.

With gratitude,

Colleen Shaughnessy  
Tutor at FORA

## Sale of property at 6435 N. California, Old Northtown Library

Ed Avis, Writer/Editor <edavis@restmex.com>

Fri 6/10/2022 12:15 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear City Plan Commission: I am writing in support of the application by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) to purchase the city-owned property at 6435 N. California, known as Old Northtown Library.

My wife and I had the opportunity to volunteer as reading tutors at FORA for two years, and sincerely believe this organization provides a tremendous benefit to the community. The refugee children who attend FORA improve their English skills, get help with school work, and participate in other learning activities in a safe, welcoming, supportive environment. The progress the children make -- measured by their grades in school and English abilities -- is amazing. FORA is helping them become future successful Chicago community members.

The leaders of the organization run FORA creatively and efficiently. Each student has a carefully crafted schedule and learning plan, and the efforts of all of the tutors are well coordinated to maximize the learning opportunity. In addition, FORA works with the parents of the students to ensure they have strong connections with their children's teachers and understand the role of education in U.S. society.

I am confident that if FORA had the extra space at 6435 N. California, they would be able to significantly expand their efforts and serve many more children. They currently have a wait list of 40 students, so the space would immediately be put to good use. Please approve their application for this space.

Thank you.

--

Ed Avis  
1317 W. Belden Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60614  
708-218-7755  
edavis@edaviswriter.com

Erica Taylor, Age 11  
634 S Cuyler Ave  
Oak Park IL 60304

June 8, 2022

Dear Good People of the Chicago Plan Commission,

I think that you should sell the Old Northtown Library to FORA. FORA doesn't currently have enough space to serve all the refugee kids that need their help, and the old library is right next door to their location where I tutored other children who were younger than me. And I met other refugee kids who were my age and older than me.

Last summer, my family and I went there several times to tutor. I helped very young kids learn to read. I met many kids who had a very hard life before they came to the United States. They never learned to read or write before they came to Chicago. They didn't even know how to speak English before coming here. Many of them lived in refugee camps for all of their lives before coming to the United States. Do you know what it is like to live in a refugee camp? There are graphic novels that I have read that can give you an understanding of what their lives were like. My favorite is *When Stars Are Scattered*. Please read this graphic novel. I think it's important, especially as the children at FORA really love this book. I think they love it because it shares experiences very much like to what their lives were like.

I think you should let FORA buy the building. I think that because, there are lots of refugee kids there trying to learn. They come from different places and don't speak much English. FORA helps kids of all ages read and write. So it would be better if they have more space because while they teach the kids, it sometimes gets really loud. More space will allow more learning. And if FORA can't reach more kids, it will be heartbreaking. Those kids won't be able to do good things with their lives.

Also, Covid-19 is still out there so it will be helpful to both the refugee kids and the tutors if they have more space. So the library will give them the space to tutor more kids and to do it safely.

While I was there, tutoring, I think FORA did a great job teaching them, because a lot of them were getting better, even pretty good, at English, reading, and writing. I hope all those kids can be like me and can do good in school and do good things with their lives. I think FORA is not only making these kids' lives better but also making the future better because they will be able to do good things with the education they are getting.

Please let FORA buy the old library. And then more refugee kids can learn so much and more kids like me can come during the summer and tutor there.

Thank you,

Erica Taylor, age 11

## Fora's New Space and benefits

FARAH KHAN <drvirgo2001@yahoo.com>

Wed 6/8/2022 7:48 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Respected Chicago Plan Commission,

I am a parent, who got an opportunity for my son, to volunteer online tutoring during Summer 2021. He really had a great experience by teaching. He learnt how to interact with people and teach other kids according to their educational needs. The volunteer hours which he covered, not only allowed him to get an appreciation from the team of FORA, but also, he got a letter and Bronze Medal from Washington DC, for his Volunteer service/hours. All this looked great on his College Application. My son got into a 7 Years DO program and is really happy.

During pandemic 2020, when the kids were wondering where to volunteer and expand their abilities, FORA gave this chance to many great students and kids, to teach other kids, and work together. This year, my second child, an upcoming Junior at Hinsdale High School, applied to tutor Online during Summer 2022. I am very grateful to know FORA, and avail its thoughtful services of expanding knowledge, by my kids volunteering there.

I would request the Chicago Plan Commission to kindly, look into making it easier for FORA to get and settle into their new space, 6435 N. California Ave. (also called the Old Northtown library) in Chicago. I am sure, with your help and planning, FORA will do wonders in giving not only a great experience for Volunteers to teach and plan for the Refugee kids, but also the under privileged kids to learn and grow, for a bright future.

Sending my best regards to the Chicago Plan Commission, to help FORA get a new space to grow and let grow new ideas and great individuals.

Much regards,

Mrs. Farah Khan

14 Carriage CT.

Oak Brook, IL 60523

Cell: 630-750-6886

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave (Old Northtown Library)

farah noor <farahnor786@msn.com>

Wed 6/8/2022 4:16 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To whom it may concern;

**Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA")** has been bidding to buy the old closed library, 6435 N. California Ave, and I am writing to you in support of this sale to FORA.

I have been a volunteer and Board Member of FORA for the past two years and have been serving as a President of the organization since one year.

FORA provides High Dosage Tutoring to scores of refugee children who are SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education). Children are taught one on one, one hour of Math and one hour of English everyday five days a week by volunteer tutors. Over time, these students can catch up to grade level and thrive in school and civil society. Currently we provide more than 32,000 student- hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring.

Additionally, we work with the student's parents to ensure they have strong connections with their teachers in school. This enables the parents to effectively navigate the education system and become productive members of the American society.

Currently, we have a waitlist of more than 40 students and hope to serve more and more students over time. Acquiring this property will help FORA provide services to the waitlisted students and effectively serve refugee children in the heart of West Ridge for decades to come.

Please feel free to reach out to me without hesitation with any questions you may have.

Thank you in advance for your support for FORA.

Sincerely,

Farah Noor Cheema (she/her/hers)

President of Forging Opportunities of Refugees in America

[Farahnor786@msn.com](mailto:Farahnor786@msn.com)

630-687-7855

522 Forest Mews Drive,

Oak Brook, Illinois 60523.

## Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA)

Farzeen Khan <farzeenkhan206@gmail.com>

Wed 6/8/2022 8:21 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To The Chicago Plan Commission,

Hi, my name is Farzeen Khan. Last year, I was presented with the amazing opportunity to tutor refugee children. From July to August, I probably had one of the best times being able to teach these marvelous young kids how to read fluently. It has been such an honor being able to become a role-model and a mentor to these kids. I taught 3 amazing kids and over the past couple weeks I really connected with them as if they were my own family. Every morning I would wake up and I used to think how much of a privilege it is teaching these kids and representing the opportunities our amazing country can give. As a person, FORA really gave me the opportunity to expand my horizon and become confident in terms of trying something new. I will admit, at first I was nervous about my performance as a reading tutor, but after spending weeks with these kids I saw a significant amount of improvement in their comprehension and fluency when it came to reading. I have gained patience, leadership, and communication skills which I felt were lacking before I came to tutor at FORA. Now, when people see me they always say that I am not the same person as I used to be, but more mature and confident. Teaching these kids was honestly such an amazing experience and it taught me how to be more confident, caring, helpful, and how to problem solve since I had to teach online. This is the kind of person I would like to be for as long as possible, and I want to thank everyone who gave me an opportunity to not only teach these intelligent and amazing kids, but to better myself in a way I couldn't have. I want to end off by saying that not only is F.O.R.A. tremendously assisting these children in securing an amazing future, it has made a substantial impact in my life in both social and emotional aspects. This is why I personally believe that the city should invest into such an amazing organization so they can expand towards their new location located at 6435 N. California Avenue, Chicago, IL 60645.

Sincerely,

Farzeen Khan

Address: 14 Carriage Court, Oak Brook, IL 60523

## recommendation letter for FORA

Fereshteh Zakeri <fzake2@uic.edu>

Wed 6/8/2022 1:49 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: michael@refugeefora.org <michael@refugeefora.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commission,

This is Fereshteh Zakeri and I hope this email finds you well.

My brother and I were students at Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America for a few years. My brother got help when he was new in the US and I received tutoring for my college classes. My brother's grade got so much better after receiving tutoring from FORA. Also, I worked at FORA for a few months in summer. As we know this organization from 2019 until now, it is a very well run organization that has always helped us and other refugees in different ways. They know what their neighbors need and they provide that for them. All these refugees are the future of America and they are smart, they deserve and need help. As I was working there I found that they couldn't serve all the students that came to register at FORA because of their small location. My family and I would be very happy if they could get a bigger space to help more people like us. Therefore, we kindly ask you to give that space to FORA and to refugees in that neighborhood.

Best

Fereshteh Zakeri

1441 w Howard st, Chicago 60626

## Sale of property 6435 N. California Ave (old Northtown Library) - FORA letter of recommendation

Gregory Kawashima <gnkawashi@gmail.com>

Sun 6/12/2022 6:34 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

From: Gregory Kawashima  
2207 W Erie St  
Chicago, IL 60612  
773-791-8874

Date: June 12, 2022

To: Chicago Plan Commission  
[CPC@cityofchicago.org](mailto:CPC@cityofchicago.org)

To whom it may concern:

Hello. I am writing to strongly recommend the sale of the old Northtown Library (6435 N. California Ave) to Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA). FORA is a pillar in the community, providing both academic and foundational support to many children, and their parents, who have only known despair prior to their arrival in Chicago. To these parents, FORA is essential to the beginning of a well-educated life for their children in our city. As a current in-person tutor, I am proud to be associated with FORA and it is an honor to support them.

I have close to 30 years of corporate finance experience with Fortune 100 corporations including PepsiCo and McDonalds. Thus, I understand organizational structure, but more importantly I know what a strong organizational structure should resemble. FORA maintains an organizational structure and a management hierarchy. FORA conducts team meetings and a peer review process. FORA establishes milestones, and FORA holds itself accountable to these milestones. FORA is a well-run organization. I've seen this first-hand, and in action. Please approve the sale of the Northtown Library to FORA. It will be placed in capable hands, and it will be put to excellent use.

Being an in-person tutor four days a week, I find myself in awe of these children. I am in awe of their resilience and energy. I am in awe of their positive attitudes despite the long odds they knowingly face. I am in awe of their intelligence and curiosity. Many of these children are fluent in three or four languages. Unfortunately, the English language is not one of them, yet. FORA is more than just academic support to these children. FORA is encouragement to aim high and not to be afraid. I believe I am tutoring future scientists, doctors, judges, teachers, and accountants. I believe I am tutoring future fine and outstanding citizens of our city, who will not hesitate to give back exponentially. Unfortunately, there are more children than there is capacity within FORA. There are scores of children in waiting. I beg you to please help FORA help these children. These are future Chicagoans, it's a privilege to help them.

Lastly, I find it is sometimes difficult to discuss my role with FORA when speaking to family and friends. At times, it is an emotional subject for me and impossible to speak about it. I can't explain the reasons other than empathy and respect for these kids, and I know I am not alone. FORA is built on these principles of empathy and respect. I see it daily, but they need assistance. Kids on the waiting list require more tutors. More kids and more tutors require more space. It's as simple as that.

I cannot think of a more worthwhile use of a vacant library.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,  
Gregory Kawashima



## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave to FORA

Giulianna Larson <giuliannalarson17@gmail.com>

Mon 6/13/2022 4:13 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago City Plan Commission,

As an intern at Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA), I feel it is crucial for the organization to gain ownership of the Old Northtown Library. FORA fosters inclusion in the Chicago community by providing students and families with a safe space to learn. At FORA, students are able to openly express their identities in a judgment free environment. I value this immensely as I believe it is crucial for children to have an outlet to make friends and help foster their identity. During my time at FORA, as an intern, it has become evident that FORA serves this outlet for the students. After a long day of learning, students come to FORA to gain assistance with homework, study for upcoming tests as well as enhance their reading and language skills by reading, but FORA is also a place for students to create long-lasting bonds with other students as well as tutors.

Although FORA currently has two amazing buildings that enrich students, the Old Northtown Library would allow FORA to further expand. Expansion is crucial to the future of FORA in order to accept the many students on the waitlist as well as giving current students more room to enrich their minds and creatively express themselves. It is important that students engage in FORA's High Dosage Tutoring from a young age as falling behind in school often creates a trickle effect of struggle. When a student is unable to succeed in the classroom it also affects their sociability, self esteem, and development. Furthermore, FORA serves many families with multiple siblings. It would be extremely beneficial to use one large space instead of two buildings for the safety of the students. Oftentimes, students bear the responsibility of dropping off and picking up siblings at the other building. The purchase of the Old Northtown Library by FORA would eliminate students traveling as late as 9 pm to pick up their siblings at the other building. This would also surely bring ease to parents to know their children are safely studying together. Safety is a top priority at FORA in order to effectively provide foundational learning skills to students. Before coming to the United States, many refugee students have lived in environments where they did not have a safe place to learn.

These students and their families have courageously persevered through genocide and ventured to the Chicago area in hope of security; therefore, it is essential that FORA continues to provide a safe learning environment. Above all, a move to the Old Northtown Library would allow FORA to assist more children in a safe learning environment that allows each student to express their unique identity.

Aside from the students, Michael and Kathleen O' Connor truly work extremely hard each day to ensure these families have a place to seek academic care every day. Expansion to the Old Northtown Library would provide assistance to more families and further care to current students.

Sincerely,

Giulianna Larson

FORA unpaid Intern

6446 N. Wayne Avenue

Chicago, Illinois 60626



To: The Chicago Plan Commission

June 6, 2022

Subject: Sale of 6435 N. California Ave., otherwise known as the Old Northtown Library.

This letter is in support of FORA to purchase the property at 6435 N. California Ave. (Old Northtown Library) to use for their tutoring programs.

I have been involved in education for a number of years. I was a Professor in the Department of Immunology and Microbiology at Rush University Medical Center from 1989 until 2016, when I retired. While at Rush I taught students in the M.D., Ph.D. and med tech programs. Since then, I have participated in the cluster tutoring program in Oak Park, which tutors students in grades 1-12 predominantly from Chicago's Austin area. I sincerely believe that one-on-one tutoring programs such as FORA and the cluster tutoring program provide essential boosts in education that help many children that critically need it and should be supported.

I recently was able to observe FORA's program first-hand when in April I spent an afternoon tutoring two students. I was very impressed with the dedication of both the tutors and the students who took learning seriously despite observing Ramadan and also the number of students and tutors that were there. Further, it was very impressive to see how the program integrated community members and Loyola students into the tutoring environment.

While there, I noted that FORA is currently spread out in several buildings with some across the street from each other, due to space limitations. Obtaining the larger space of the library would obviously greatly facilitate staff in communication and keeping tabs on all the operations, as well as it being a safety issue by avoiding repeated street crossing.

Most of the tutoring that FORA provides is for refugee children, predominantly Rohingya, an ethnicity that the United States Department of State has recently declared has suffered from genocide. The Rohingya were deprived of an education for decades by their government.

FORA provides what they call high dosage tutoring, where a student attends multiple sessions each week. Since many of these children find it difficult to keep up with the school lessons given in English, many fall behind rapidly at the grades where they are placed. The intensive tutoring provided by FORA helps them not only to understand the material being taught and helps them learn English, but consequently helps their mental outlook and future integration into society.

In conclusion, I fully and enthusiastically support the purchase of the library building by FORA. Please contact me by email or phone if you would like to follow up on any of my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gregory T. Spear". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gregory" being the most prominent.

Gregory T. Spear, Ph.D, Professor (retired)

1015 S. Scoville Ave.,

Oak Park, IL. 60304

708-848-2474

[gsgspear@gmail.com](mailto:gsgspear@gmail.com)

June 12, 2022

**To:** Chicago Plan Commission

**Re:** Sale of 6435 N. California Ave. (Old Northtown Library)

My name is Helen Primis, and I am writing in support of the purchase application by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA"), which is currently the high bidder on the Old Northtown Library property at 6435 N. California Ave.

FORA is a non-profit organization working within the Chicago community to provide High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to refugee children. Looking to catch refugee students up to their grade level, FORA effectively implements 32,000 total hours of tutoring per year. FORA is looking to open similar opportunities for their waiting list of over 40 children, and the purchase of 6435 N. California Ave. would aid them greatly in their mission.

I am currently a rising senior at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., and I have worked as a summer intern with FORA for two summers (2021, 2022) at their current location. I have tutored students in English and math, and I have seen first-hand the work that this organization does for their students and their students' families. In my time working with FORA, one thing is abundantly clear: the community depends on FORA, and their work with the newest members of the Chicago community is crucial. The acquisition of 6435 N. California Ave would enable FORA to maximize its potential and change the lives of more people within the Chicago community.

Thank you for your consideration,

**Helen Primis**

5214 Kenwood Ave.

Chevy Chase, MD 20815

301-661-4328 (cell)

[Hprimis23@sidwell.edu](mailto:Hprimis23@sidwell.edu)



# HIGH RIDGE COMMUNITY CENTER

The High Ridge Coalition is a non-profit organization that works to bring together the various organizations that serve working families, immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities and all the great diversity of the West Ridge area for services at the local level, and to jointly develop a community center that is welcoming to all.

The High Ridge Coalition strongly supports the bid of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) for the purchase of the former Northtown Library at 6435 N. California.

We appreciate that FORA provides an intensive literacy tutoring program for refugee families conveniently located in the West Ridge neighborhood of Chicago within walking distance of the refugee families that they serve. The goal of FORA's programming is to prepare refugee families to become economically self-sufficient. They provide tutoring to refugee children, many of whom have had limited or interrupted formal education and require assistance to be successful in our neighborhood schools.

The High Ridge Coalition urges the Planning Commission to approve the ordinance authorizing the disposition of the property to FORA.

We believe that the community is well served by the sale of this property to FORA.

***Marcia Harris, President  
High Ridge Coalition***

**sale of 6435 N. California Ave.**

Jean Johnson &lt;Jean.Johnson@bakeru.edu&gt;

Thu 6/9/2022 1:18 PM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commission:

I write in support of the bid by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) to purchase the former Northtown Branch Library, 6435 N. California Ave.

FORA provides high dosage tutoring to refugee children. These students have often had little formal education and might struggle in American schools if they were not given the support that they find at FORA. In addition, FORA provides a welcoming community. Students love to be at FORA.

I discovered FORA two years ago as the pandemic closed the world down. As a recently retired mathematics professor, I was looking for a place to use my skills to help refugees. At that time FORA, like everyone else, was transitioning to online tutoring. This was not an easy time for anyone involved with education, but FORA was well organized. Tutoring sessions were recorded, and staff was available for questions and often dropped in on lessons. Fortunately, the students have now been able to return to the building. This works much better. Unfortunately, there is limited space and therefore the number of students who can be served is limited.

In addition to tutoring, FORA helps parents navigate the school system. They helped the high school student that I worked with find an internship for the summer. I know that people they serve appreciate the help, encouragement, and the celebration of accomplishments that FORA provides.

In short, FORA is an amazing organization that provides a service that is critically needed. They provide the service with enthusiasm and joy. The additional space that they would gain at 6435 N. California would allow them to serve even more refugees and help them to become productive citizens.

Sincerely,

Jean Johnson, PhD  
Emeritus Professor of Mathematics, Baker University  
1629 Barker Ave.  
Lawrence, KS 66044

## Sale of 6435 N. California Avenue Property- Old Northtown Library

Jeffrey Glass <jeffglass@gmail.com>

Wed 6/8/2022 1:05 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Jeffrey R Glass  
25 Regent Circle  
Brookline, MA 02445  
(617) 331-4918  
[jeffglass@gmail.com](mailto:jeffglass@gmail.com)

June 7, 2022  
Chicago Planning Committee  
City of Chicago  
[CPC@cityofchicago.org](mailto:CPC@cityofchicago.org)

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jeffrey Glass, and I am writing in support of Kathleen and Michael O'Connor. I have known both of them since 1986, when we all attended a small college in Massachusetts called Amherst College. My understanding is that they are in the process of trying to acquire the Old Northtown Library in order to better support their non-profit organization, FORA. It is no surprise to me that the two of them have dedicated their lives to supporting those in need of help. Michael and Kathleen have been altruistic for as long as I have known them- now almost 36 years! They are highly responsible individuals who care about education, families, and helping others. They have been this way all of their adult lives.

As you may know, FORA provides after-school tutoring for refugee children who have experienced significant disruption to their lives and education. Most of these students have received little to no formal education before arriving in the United States. Many of the families they serve are Rohingya, an ethnicity that our State Department has declared to have suffered widespread genocide. These poor children and their families come to the US to escape brutal oppression in their homeland. They arrive here in Chicago unable to read, and write, not just in English, but also in their native language.

The Chicago Public School places these children in grades based on their age and does its best to support these kids with a couple of hours per day of English language skills. While admirable, sadly, this support is insufficient to teach the foundations of literacy and numeracy. FORA steps in to provide intense individualized instruction in a caring, joyful and supportive manner. They are literally changing the lives of these children and their families by giving them the skills to become self-sufficient. Currently, FORA provides more than 30,000 student hours of intense tutoring per year. They bring together volunteers from the community to tutor these refugees using a methodology and curriculum that FORA has adopted for this program. Over time FORA has demonstrated that these students can, in fact, catch up to their assigned grade level and thrive in the US. The work is inspiring and not only changes the lives of these children and their families but has a profound impact on the



community of tutors and volunteers. Speaking to volunteers, one is constantly told that those giving their time feel like they are getting way more than they are giving.

Additionally, FORA has built out systems and processes to connect the student's parents and teachers. As you might suspect, many of these parents are reluctant/ nervous to interact with the teachers due to language and skills barriers. FORA provides translation and other services to facilitate these relationships, all to the benefit of the children and their families. Education, of course, works best when there is a collaboration between families and educators.

I feel blessed to know the O'Connors. I have no doubt that they will continue to do their part to enhance the City of Chicago and the world. I do hope that the Committee approves the sale of the property so that FORA can continue to flourish. Michael and Kathleen will make you proud.

If I can be of any further help, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Glass

June 10, 2022

Dear Members of the Chicago Plan Commission:

**I am writing in strong support of the proposed purchase of the former Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Avenue by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA).**

I am a longtime resident of the 50<sup>th</sup> Ward, and have also been tutoring CPS elementary and high school students at FORA since early March 2022. Prior to volunteering, I investigated what FORA does, and read the biographies of the founders and staff. I could not have been more impressed, and interacting with FORA's dedicated team has only furthered my respect and admiration for the work that they do, which goes far beyond tutoring. Over the past three months, I have witnessed countless hard-workers, including both staff and the students. Frankly, I'm not sure how they all do it. The students wake up early to pray, go to school, then attend another school, then FORA, often followed by religious services, before going to bed. Many if not all of the staff have also had very long days before their time at FORA begins. Yet somehow FORA manages to pull it all together, with students working diligently to advance their learning, and staff combining high standards of education with love, expert counselling, and encouragement. Sadly, I have also witnessed an ignorant outsider hurl ethnic slurs at these students, but was truly inspired by what the students subsequently heard from FORA's leadership as well as the Chicago Police. These are great kids who need and deserve our support in so many ways, and FORA leads the way in doing so in our community.

FORA has also developed wonderful connections with Loyola University Chicago (and other college) students, both undergraduate and graduate, who can expand upon and complete their own educational goals while helping refugee families. In addition, I'm proud to say that many residents in my immediate neighborhood are highly active in community service and volunteer their time to a variety of social justice issues, and we are highly appreciative of the work that FORA and similar agencies perform. Thus, FORA is not only of great benefit to the refugee community, but the Loyola and West Ridge communities as well.

More personally, a main reason I chose to live in West Ridge was due to its remarkably diverse community. I recall not long ago hearing 6-7 different languages spoken during a short walk in a nearby park. Yet it seems a bit self-centered to value the diversity while ignoring the needs of so many neighbors, as more refugee families continue to enter this part of Chicago each week. They are welcomed here, and they need our help, and FORA's doors are open to provide that help in so many fundamental ways. Having more space is essential to assist more families, and to provide more individualized areas for learning, especially with multiple students needing to read out loud or have discussions with a tutor while working at the same desk on different projects.

As a CPS parent myself, I occasionally recognize some homework assignments when tutoring. However, my two children always have two parents just steps away to help with any assignments or to navigate the CPS system whenever needed. Plus, importantly, none of us needed to learn the language of the materials presented. FORA accomplishes what many parents in my community, given their hardships in their past and current homes, cannot do. I once thought FORA was just about tutoring, but now know it supports entire families in numerous ways.

I recognize that my volunteer efforts at FORA are easy. I visit for a couple hours at a time, meet and help kids from Myanmar, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and other countries, while also working with an impressive group of compassionate people, some of whom were also born and raised on other continents, and I then go home. My ability and opportunity to help others while expanding my own world is the direct result of the tremendous insight and tireless work of the founders of FORA, and the continued overall leadership and contributions of its staff. For the sake of so many people in and around our community who benefit from their efforts, I hope you agree that their past, present, and potential accomplishments are extraordinary, by approving the proposed purchase of the former Northtown Library by FORA.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments, and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or wish any additional input.

Sincerely,

*James M. Calcagno*

James M. Calcagno  
2641 W. Farwell Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60645  
[rcjhawk25@gmail.com](mailto:rcjhawk25@gmail.com)

## Recommendation FORA Library Purchase

John R Anderson <jraganderson@gmail.com>

Sat 6/4/2022 6:58 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: jranderson@gmail.com <jranderson@gmail.com>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commissioners, It has been my privilege for the past six months to first, observe FORA as an experienced (retired) science teacher and school counselor, and then to experience as a tutor, the need and fulfillment provided refugee children and families, and the community with the FORA program. I have seen some 60 children brought to one of two age-related sessions by parents and caring adults each day for reading and writing and indoor play. One third grader I tutored in arithmetic did not speak English two years ago. Yet today he solves word problems with comparative ease. Through the extraordinary vision, sacrifice, and execution of much needed programs for refugee families, FORA has a profound impact on our larger community. Permit two examples: one personal and one community-wide. Loyola University has offered tuition-free grants to college-age refugees who then turn around as bi-lingual tutors to help young children. And more close to home Michael asked me to tell a bit about my experience in an armored division. I thought that strange. But in the coming weeks, one by one, children came to show me their shrapnel and bullet wounds, and to tell me they now understood that our police, first responders and military are there to help, not as agents of dictators, but for everyone.

The acquisition of the Old Northtown Library at 6435 N California by FORA should be approved as a fantastic investment in the community, an unequaled adventure for all involved, and an example to all the world of America's dream. God bless.

Sincerely yours, John R Anderson, PhD

Sent from my iPad

## Sale of the Old Northtown Library located at 6435 N. California Avenue

John Spears <johnjspears@gmail.com>

Sat 6/11/2022 3:35 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commission --

I am writing regarding the sale of the Old Northtown Library located at 6435 N. California Avenue. I wholeheartedly support Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA") in their bid to purchase the building.

I have known FORA's cofounders for over 17 years, in both professional and personal capacities. I have also worked closely with other members of the FORA team and can speak firsthand to the kind of leaders they are and the quality of operation they run.

I have seen them grapple with impossible decisions with grace and wisdom, always considering the community members they serve and impact on their mission. And they have the utmost integrity in running their organization.

Though I am writing you in my personal capacity, I am the Chief Operating Officer of a large, international advocacy non-profit with more than 200 staff in 9 offices globally. I know the characteristics of a well-run organization and can attest to the organization's integrity and commitment to provide excellent services at such a critical time as this to those in the community.

The purchase of this building by FORA will allow FORA to serve refugees in the heart of West Ridge for decades to come.

You can find more information about FORA [HERE](#).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Spears  
3131 Connecticut Ave, NW  
#2613  
Washington DC, 20009

Kathleen Heneghan  
5227 N. Rutherford  
Chicago, IL 60656  
[Kheneghan5227@gmail.com](mailto:Kheneghan5227@gmail.com)

June 10, 2022

Chicago Plan Commission  
[CPC@cityofchicago.org](mailto:CPC@cityofchicago.org)

RE: Public Comments for the purchase of 6435 N. California Ave/ former Northtown Library

To whom it may concern,

It is my understanding that the non-profit organization, Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) has submitted an application for the purchase of the former Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Avenue. For the past year, I have been a volunteer literacy tutor with FORA and I am writing in support of this purchase. In my experience, FORA is an exceptional organization with solid leadership, thoughtful planning, and significant support. I have no doubt that they have the capacity to expand their programs into the former library space in a way that will continue to serve the needs of the community.

Currently, FORA utilizes spaces at 6431 N. California and at 2721 W. Devon for tutoring and offices. I have tutored at both locations and the former Northtown Library space would allow FORA to provide expanded services for students and their families. FORA provides high dosage tutoring to refugee children with limited formal education and many of these students are catching up in school with the assistance of FORA programs. Staff at FORA also work with the parents to help connect the families with their children's schools. The refugee families in the programs at FORA have experienced upheaval and trauma, and FORA provides a safe space for the students and their families to learn and grow in a stable environment. In my experience, the students are thriving with the tutoring provided at FORA and are gaining the foundational skills needed to excel at school. With additional resources, including the space at the former Northtown Library, FORA will be able to serve students who are currently on their waiting list and would be able to continue to expand their programs.

As a volunteer, I have also recently joined the Advisory Committee at FORA. I have a background in non-profit administration and community development, and I have been impressed by the growth and development at FORA. The staff is professional, dedicated, welcoming, pragmatic and joyful. Plans for expansion are thoughtful and fiscally responsible and the agency has systems in place to ensure success. I wholeheartedly support this purchase and encourage approval by the Chicago Plan Commission.

Best regards,

*Kathleen Heneghan*

**6435 N. California Ave - Old qNorthtown Library**

Kathleen McManus &lt;komlfm@gmail.com&gt;

Sun 6/12/2022 5:05 PM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;

[Warning: External email]

To: Chicago Plan Commission

Chicago has a wonderful opportunity to continue being a leader in outreach to refugee students. In a few short years, FORA - Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America - has become a nationally recognized non-profit educational service organization for their response to the educational needs of refugee children in the Chicago area. Their base foundation of doctoral level leadership, teaching style, and volunteers readily accepting the challenge of teaching children deprived of an education by oppressive governments is a paradigm for organizations wishing to help those now without a homeland. By approving the purchase of 6435 N. California Avenue by FORA, you will allow these dedicated teachers to increase their staff by adding additional accommodations to embrace those on a waiting list and those who desire the loving support of people dedicated to teaching and caring for them. These teachers have given over 32000 student hours not only helping these children with a firm foundation in academics through high school but adding to their social and civic integration into our society. Taking them out of isolation and giving them the necessary educational background helps ensure that they become future productive citizens who we can all be proud to know. Please be assured that those committed to this will follow through on all their objectives and goals promised to us. Their mission of empowering refugees by providing the educational resources to make a successful transition to the United States and treating them with patience, kindness, and the necessary skills to integrate into our culture gives these valued children the opportunity to become economically self-sufficient citizens contributing to social and civic responsibilities. Please approve this application.

Thank you,  
Kathleen McManus  
5134 Niagra Dr  
Chapel Hill, NC27517  
Sent from my iPad

## FORA Volunteering

Lan Ihsan <lihsan@s207.org>

Mon 6/6/2022 5:22 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Hello,

My name is Lan Ihsan and I am a volunteer at Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America. I began volunteering at FORA because of their goal in creating the best possible opportunities for refugees, and as a refugee myself, I would have been very successful if I was a part of this organization. I moved to the U.S. as a second grade student from the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and I struggled greatly with learning English and meeting new peers. As I entered FORA, the environment was everything I would have wished for. Students were collaborating with one another while learning, and their eyes lit up with inspiration as they learned a new concept with their tutor. The bond between the tutors and the students made the students feel comfortable and ready to learn. FORA has the greatest tight-knit community, and it shows through the students' bright faces and wide smiles. This organization is a place of comfort for the tutors and the students. This new space for FORA would mean so much to every member of the organization. It would allow for more space, more supplies, and more resources focused on the students. It would greatly impact the students' experiences, and it would be a space as greatly appreciated as our current space.

Thank you for your time,

Lan Ihsan



## Sale of 6435 N. California former Northtown Library

Lois Barr <loisbaerbarr@gmail.com>

Thu 6/9/2022 2:54 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To the Chicago Plan Commission

Dear Commissioners:

I am a volunteer tutor at FORA and am very enthusiastic about the work that is being done there. Tutors of all ages, from Loyola U students to senior citizens like myself, commit to spending at least five hours per week working with refugee children. The administration fosters an atmosphere of care that gives so much energy and warmth to the place. FORA provides a unique space where students of many different backgrounds can learn together, form friendships, and feel at home in their new country. With the addition of the former public library next door, FORA can better serve the growing number of students and parents who need their help.

In my own case, I saw a third grader from Syria with only a year in the country move up several levels in her reading and writing ability in English. Since retirement I have been a literacy tutor at other places, but I am most impressed with FORA's capacity to combine technology and old fashioned hard work to support the educational needs of one of Chicago's most diverse communities.

Sincerely,

Lois Baer Barr.  
Associate Professor Emerita of Spanish  
Lake Forest College  
Lake Forest, IL 60045

Home address:  
5 Columbine Lane  
Riverwoods, IL 60015

## Old Northtown Library

Louise Wiener <lwwiener@gmail.com>

Mon 6/6/2022 3:17 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

June 5, 2022

Att: the Chicago Plan Commission

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing in enthusiastic support of the proposal by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) to purchase the Old Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Avenue, adjacent to FORA's current location.

As a zoom-based volunteer tutor for FORA during the height of the pandemic, and now as a pro-bono consultant on enriching parent engagement programs, I can vouch first hand for the need for FORA's services and how receptive and appreciative the constituency is. I consult professionally with school and after-school programs nationally. Few can compete with the intensity or impact of FORA.

FORA is a remarkable organization, setting a high bar in the tutoring and enrichment of some of Chicago's newest and most vulnerable arrivals. The intensive tutoring and parent engagement programs allow FORA students and their families, many of whom have had limited or no experience with written language or reading, to develop essential academic and social skills toward self-sufficiency. The program provides an incredible benefit to the students and families and a significant contribution to the community in which they live.

I hope FORA is allowed to purchase the Old Northtown Library. I believe the expanded space would allow them to enrich and expand their outstanding services and enrich the surrounding community.

Sincerely,

Louise W. Wiener  
Senior Fellow  
Attendance Works

2500 Virginia Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20037

For the members of The Chicago City Plan Commission,

I am writing this with the intent of sharing my experiences at FORA to promote the sale of 6435 N. California Ave., the Old Northtown Library, to FORA.

I am writing to you through the eyes of both a volunteer tutor and intern at FORA. I have tutored with FORA for the past nine months, five days a week. As an eighteen year old, fresh out of high school, I often struggled with the concept of “finding my passion”.

First thing wrong with that statement is that I believed it was something to be found. Rather, being at FORA, I realized a passion is something to work towards. Something to create. Each day, when I sit down to tutor a nine year old boy in fourth grade math, I feel I’m creating something. Creation of the mind, ideas, beliefs, values. The online math programs provided by FORA, used on a daily basis by most tutors, has not only freshened up my mental math skills and moved my student to the top in his class, but it’s left room for conversations. I learn gratitude, I learn patience, and I learn knock-knock jokes.

Far more than that is a sense of a greater purpose.

Having been immune-compromised during the pandemic, I had been isolated for an extended time period.

FORA became my greatest creative outlet, because the one hour of online tutoring each day became 60 minutes of immersing myself into the life of another.

The expectations for all tutors and students to show up, each day, offers the students a sense of consistency. Many of the students, whose families have fled from Rohingya, come from places of uncertainty, confusion, and loss.

The commitment provided by the volunteer tutors offers these young kids the opportunity to see that they can be in control of their academic lives. They are given the choices to show up, to learn, to listen, and to ask. The safe space that FORA has created for the students can be seen as fertile soil. Each day we show up, a seed is planted. How tall the plants grow is affected by the environment, but the strength of the roots supersede the unpredictable weather that comes and goes.

After tutoring with FORA, I became an online volunteer coordinator where I spoke to other volunteers who share the same transcendent experience I do when working with these kids. My exposure to FORA from an administrative standpoint and tutor standpoint has ultimately shaped my desire to impact our Chicago communities. Right now, it starts with these kids. These families. The impact FORA’s space and team members have on the refugee students has fired a passion inside all of us to inspire, learn, and grow. Expanding FORA’s walls yields to the expanding of minds and a greater community.

It would be of great benefit for this expansion to begin by selling the Old Northtown Library to Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA").

Sincerely,

Luna Bitar  
FORA Senior Educational Intern  
19W077 Ernest St.  
Darien, IL 60561

**RE: Letter of Support for FORA purchase of the Old Northtown Library**

Maricruz Ponce de Leon &lt;mapdltt@gmail.com&gt;

Tue 6/14/2022 9:44 PM

To: CPC &lt;CPC@cityofchicago.org&gt;

[Warning: External email]

Members of the Chicago Plan Commission -

We are writing this letter to express our enthusiastic support for the sale of 6435 N. California Ave. (otherwise known as the Old Northtown Library) to the not-for-profit organization Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (also known as FORA).

FORA has established itself as an important member of the West Ridge community surrounding this property. Today, located in two storefronts on California and Devon Avenues in the heart of the neighborhood, FORA is a welcoming center, as much as it is a tutoring center, primarily for Rohingya refugees. FORA helps children and their families navigate life in Chicago and in America. On any given day, there is laughter and reading, math games and robotics with children of all ages, as well as requests to translate government documents, communicate with teachers, access health care, get advice on career and colleges etc... Their main purpose however is to give students and their families an opportunity to be heard and to feel valued while navigating the educational system and the many opportunities available to them. FORA does this by providing high dosage tutoring to students from the community, most of whom are of the Rohingya ethnicities, refugees whom the U.S. Department of State has declared have suffered from genocide. High dosage tutoring provides an opportunity for students to catch up to grade level and thrive in school and in other areas of society. FORA also works with the parents and family of the students they tutor, oftentimes providing a cultural bridge to schools and other institutions. Just last week, one of FORA's very first students, graduated from Sullivan High School and will enroll at Loyola University in the fall. This success was due in large part to the countless hours of one-on-one tutoring provided to this student as well as the support and encouragement given to him and his family as participants of FORA.

FORA also acts as an employer and coordinator of many volunteers, most of whom would not know of the Rohingya people or the community surrounding 6435 N. California without this organization. They have connected volunteers from every age group and from all parts of the world with Rohingya children through reading, literacy and a belief that education is a human right for all.

We cannot speak more highly of the staff at FORA. As past board members and friends of the organization, we have come to know the leadership well both personally and professionally. The staff at ForA are highly qualified professionals in the areas of education, psychology, social work and organizational management. Kathleen and Michael O'Connor have a long history in carrying out humanitarian work all over the world. They are compassionate people who are dedicated to working with underserved, refugee children and their families to access educational opportunities for them. It is because of their compassionate approach, that FORA has gained the trust, respect and love of many families in the community.

In summary, FORA is an important member of the West Ridge neighborhood and the Rohingya community. By purchasing 6435 N. California Ave (the Old Northtown Library) and making it their new home, FORA will only further their services to the many families on the waitlist trying to access tutoring for their children.

We support FORA and their purchase of this property fully and without reservation. The City of Chicago needs FORA to continue offering educational services to our most vulnerable Chicago residents.

Dr. Hieu Ton-That & Maricruz Ponce de Leon  
6227 N. Meredith Ave.  
Chicago, Illinois 60646

## Sale of 6435 N. California Avenue

Mel Oncu <moncu@iccsafe.org>

Sat 6/11/2022 8:41 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

My name is Mel Oncu. I am a member of the Board of Directors of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA"). I am writing to strongly support FORA's bid to purchase the property located at 6435 N. California Ave., otherwise known as the Old Northtown Library (the "Property").

FORA currently provides after-school High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to scores of refugee children who are SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education). Most of the families are Rohingya, an ethnicity that the United States Department of State has recently declared has suffered from genocide. Denied an education for decades by oppressive governments, these families are unable to read or write in their native language when they first arrive in the United States. Children are put in grades corresponding to their age instead of their academic level, and then end up isolated and despairing. What they desperately need is foundational skills. FORA provides these foundational skills to these students through a pedagogically appropriate strategy called High Dosage Tutoring (HDT), so that these students can, over time, catch up to grade level and thrive in school and civil society. Currently, we provide more than 32,000 student-hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring. We have a wait list of more than 40 students and hope to serve more and more students over time.

In addition to student tutoring, we work with the student's parents to make sure that they have strong connections with their children's teachers. As recent arrivals, many of these parents are afraid to go into the schools and interact with teachers. Of course, it is important for parents to understand what the teachers expect of their children, but it is also important for teachers to get feedback from parents regarding their own children's strengths and challenges. FORA serves the role of an interlocutor, bringing parents to the schools and providing translation services so parent-teacher relationships can blossom over time.

Again, I strongly support FORA's bid to purchase the Property. This additional space will allow FORA to expand its extremely impactful work to support refugees and make Chicago a better city for everyone. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Melike S. Oncu  
21 Hesketh Street  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815

Registration is Open! Code Council Annual Conference, Expo, and Hearings (September 11-20) [Learn More](#)

## 6435 N California

Merritt Kanan <merrittkanan@gmail.com>

Mon 6/6/2022 10:45 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: Alex Neuman <alexmn22@gmail.com>

[Warning: External email]

To Whom It May Concern at the Chicago Plan Commission,

As supporters of the excellent work undertaken by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA), we are writing to support their bid for the Old Northtown Library building at 6435 N California Avenue.

FORA is providing essential literacy education for refugee children in Chicago and so much more. Community support and educational opportunities for any one person undoubtedly has a ripple effect which benefits all of us. What FORA has accomplished already and envisions for the future is truly inspiring!

The property for sale appears to be ideal for FORA to continue to provide services to a large number of children and their families for many years to come.

Thanks for your consideration,

Merritt Kanan and Alex Neuman

740 North Grove  
Oak Park, IL 60302

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave.

natasha shea <sheanatasha@gmail.com>

Sun 6/12/2022 10:34 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago City Planning Commission,

As one of FORA's standing board members, I can say with absolute confidence that, if granted the sale of the property located at 6435 N. California Ave., FORA would utilize the space with the utmost of integrity and with a strong conviction of purpose deemed for the beautiful space that was once the Old Northtown Library.

Currently located next door at, 6431 N. California Ave., FORA provides educational services and unapparelled support to refugee minors and their parents. Most of the families that FORA serves are Rohingya, an ethnicity suffering from genocide and denied the most basic human rights. Unable to read and write in their native tongue, they come to the United States with not even that of a basic education. FORA changes the trajectory of each individual who walks through their doors by giving them the gift of knowledge.

Annually, FORA provides more than 32,000 student-hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring to children who are Students with Limited Formal Education (SLIFE). Through tutoring, the children work toward catching up to grade level, thus helping them to be active and engaged students in their classroom, as well as thriving members of society. FORA also works alongside the parents, helping them to navigate the important parent-teacher relationship that is so important for the success of the child. Through education, support and advocacy, FORA is there for those who find themselves in this country as an uneducated refugee.

Year after year FORA has a waiting list for those who are hungry to learn but sadly have to turn away due in part to space restrictions. At this time, there are over 40 students on the waitlist. The new space in question would allow for FORA to expand in ways once only dreamt of. Granting FORA the Old Northtown Library would honor the space through continuing to provide a space for education to thrive. It would provide FORA the opportunity to help change the lives of additional refugees desperately in need of FORA's services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Natasha Yaqub  
618 S. Park Ave.  
Hinsdale, IL 60521



## Recommendation in Support of bid for 6435 N. California Ave by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America

Naureckas, Ted [MED] <tnaureka@medicine.bsd.uchicago.edu>

Sun 6/5/2022 11:53 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Edward T. Naureckas, MD and Sara M. Naureckas, MD  
710 North Grove Avenue  
Oak Park, IL 60302

Dear Members of the Chicago City Plan Committee:

We are sending this email in support of the bid submitted by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) for the property up for sale at 6435 N. California Ave., otherwise known as the Old Northtown Library.

We are both physicians practicing in the City of Chicago and have an intense interest in the wellbeing of the city and its residents, our patients. Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America provides after-school High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to 67 refugee children who are SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education). They also work with their parents to ensure strong parent-teacher relations so that their children are well served both in school and out. Currently, they provide more than 32,000 student-hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring.

The former library space is exactly what FORA needs to ensure its future and the children we all serve. It will allow them to serve refugee children in the heart of West Ridge for decades to come.

We believe that the success of FORA will have a substantial and lasting input in the quality of life for the City of Chicago and strongly support their bid for this property.

Edward T. Naureckas, MD  
Professor of Medicine  
University of Chicago

Sara M. Naureckas, MD  
Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics  
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

## Sale of the old Northtown Library at 6435 N California Ave.

PAUL W BAUMANN <paulbaumann@comcast.net>

Thu 6/9/2022 8:53 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

My name is Paul Baumann and my address is  
6913 W. Madison St  
Niles, IL. 60714

I am writing this letter on behalf of FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugee in America). They are very interested in purchasing the old Northtown Library at 6435 N California Ave.

I am a retired CPA who has been a volunteer tutor at FORA since last October. It has been a rewarding experience for both myself and the kids that I have had the privilege to tutor.

FORA currently provides after-school High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to scores of refugee children who are SLIFE (Students with Limited Formal Education). Most of the families are Rohingya, an ethnicity that the United States Department of State has recently declared has suffered from genocide. Denied an education for decades by oppressive governments, these families are unable to read or write in their native language when they first arrive in the United States. Children are put in grades corresponding to their age instead of their academic level, and then end up isolated and despairing. What they desperately need is foundational skills. FORA provides these foundational skills to these students through a pedagogically appropriate strategy called High Dosage Tutoring (HDT), so that these students can, over time, catch up to grade level and thrive in school and civil society. Currently, FORA provides more than 32,000 student-hours per year of High Dosage Tutoring. FORA has a wait list of more than 40 students and hope to serve more and more students over time.

In addition to student tutoring, FORA works with the student's parents to make sure that they have strong connections with their children's teachers. As recent arrivals, many of these parents are afraid to go into the schools and interact with teachers. Of course, it is important for parents to understand what the teachers expect of their children, but it is also important for teachers to get feedback from parents regarding their own children's strengths and challenges. FORA serves the role of an interlocutor, bringing parents to the schools and providing translation services so parent-teacher relationships can blossom over time.

I believe that FORA is a very well run organization. As described above, they serve a critical need in the community. They will use the new space to help additional refugees.

I hope that you give FORA's application serious consideration at the hearing on June 16th held by the the Chicago City Plan Commission.

Sincerely

Paul Baumann  
6913 W Madison St  
Niles, IL 60714

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave.

Rida Rashid <rashid.rida@yahoo.com>

Mon 6/13/2022 8:45 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

Cc: michael@refugeefora.org <michael@refugeefora.org>

[Warning: External email]

Dear Chicago Plan Commission,

I am writing in support of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) in the sale of Old Northtown Library. I began working at FORA last summer as the Social Work Coordinator after I graduated with my Master of Social Work and instantly saw the amazing work that FORA was conducting. FORA is run by very well educated and passionate individuals, and they have big goals to continue advancing their mission.

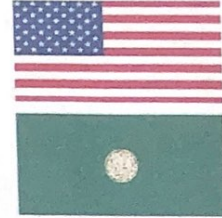
FORA currently provides after-school High Dosage Tutoring (HDT) to refugee children, and the number of children and adolescents they are providing these services to keeps growing and growing. They have a wait list of more than 40 students and hope to serve more and more students over time. In addition to student tutoring, they work with the student's parents to make sure that they have strong connections with their children's teachers. FORA is supporting and serving such an important community in Chicago, a community that often gets overlooked and under-resourced. To have additional space would make an immense impact on the mission of FORA and would allow for more children and families to be supported.

Thank you for your consideration!

Warmly,  
Rida Rashid  
550 W Briar Pl.,  
Chicago, IL 60657



**ROHINGYA CULTURE CENTER  
OF  
CHICAGO**



To whom this may concern,

7 June 2022

**RE: 6435 N California Ave. Chicago, IL 60659**

The Rohingya Culture Center (RCC) is excited for FORA's purchase of the old Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Ave. RCC believes FORA is a good organization for this space because of all the hard and dedicated work they do with the youth in West Ridge. We believe they will use this space well and to better the future of youth in our community.

Sincerely,

Nasir Zakaria

Founder & Executive Director

Rohingya Culture Center

(872) 203-4921

[nasir@rccchicago.org](mailto:nasir@rccchicago.org)

June 8, 2022

To: Chicago Plan Commission

RE: 6435 N. California Ave. (Old Northtown Library)

My name is Tara Primis, and I am writing in support of the purchase application by Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America ("FORA"), which is currently the high bidder on the Old Northtown Library property at 6435 N. California Ave.

I currently serve on the Advisory Committee at FORA. FORA is a nonprofit that works in the Chicago community to provide after-school tutoring to scores of refugee children, all of whom have had limited or no formal education prior to their settlement in Chicago. Most of the families are Rohingya, an ethnicity that the United States recently declared to have suffered from genocide. Denied any education by oppressive governments, these families are unable to read or write in their native language when they first arrive in the United States. In the Chicago school system, these children are put in grades corresponding to their age instead of their academic level, which often results in the students feeling isolated and hopeless.

FORA provides foundational skills to these students through a proven strategy called High Dosage Tutoring, so that these students can, over time, catch up to grade level and thrive in school and become positive, productive members of the community. Currently, FORA provides more than 32,000 student-hours per year of tutoring. In addition to Rohingya students, FORA works with students from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria and Bhutan, and has also taken in nine Afghan children in the past year. FORA has a wait list of more than 40 students, and its goal is to serve more and more students over time.

As the refugee community grows, and more students enter the Chicago school system, the demand for the services FORA provides has grown tremendously. The leadership at FORA has been searching for a larger space that is more conducive to the type of tutoring and support services that FORA provides for its students and their families. That the Old Northtown Library site has become available for purchase is a wonderful development for FORA. The Library space

is a recognizable fixture in the same community in which the FORA team is providing these truly life changing services. The community depends on FORA, which is doing wonderful work with these newest members of the Chicago community, and acquisition of the Old Northtown Library would greatly enhance its mission. I have known FORA's co-founder, Michael O'Connor since 1992, and I know the dedication and steadfast commitment he has brought throughout his adult life to working with underserved communities around the world and in his own backyard in Chicago. The community could not ask for a better neighbor than FORA to move into and revitalize that space.

Sincerely,  
Tara Brennan Primis

5214 Kenwood Ave.  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815  
301-442-5335 (mobile)  
tbprimis@mac.com

## Sale of Old Northtown Library

Sarah Hart <sarahh@refugeefora.org>

Wed 6/8/2022 6:59 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

The Chicago Planning Commission,

As we all apprehensively watch the news it is hard, at times, to feel hopeful. My time as a tutor at FORA has helped me to see that change can happen when a group of dedicated individuals takes on a challenge.

I have been a high school teacher in California for 27 years. During that time I spent several years teaching ESL science. I wish the students in my classes could have had the support of an organization such as FORA. FORA not only seriously addresses the academic needs of the primarily Rohingya students through high intensity tutoring but also helps the families adjust to life in a new country. The students come to FORA with limited education (due to oppressive governments) and limited English language skills. Thankfully they are able to find a home with tutors and mentors who care about their educational and emotional needs. The program at FORA is unique because it provides tutoring 5 days a week. This type of consistent tutoring is more effective at helping students get to the level needed for their specific grade in school. During the last 2 years of online tutoring I have been very impressed with the dedication of both the staff, the students and the numerous volunteers.

The Old Northtown Library will help provide the space for the current students and for the others who are on the waiting list. Every community in this country should welcome refugees in the way that FORA has, which is why I am writing in support of the acquisition of this building.

Sincerely,

Sarah Hart  
1710 Austin Way  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404



## Recommendation in support of FORA for the purchase of 6435 N. California Ave building (Old Northtown Library)

Seth Rigoletti <seth@sethrigoletti.com>

Sun 6/12/2022 12:12 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

Chicago Plan Commission

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing this letter on behalf of the non-profit organization known as FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America) to recommend them as an upstanding organization that offers an important service to the community. I've been an active member on the board since the fall of 2020, and my son was a tutor at the school for several months during the lockdowns of the pandemic.

FORA offers high dosage tutoring for refugee students with a history of interrupted or non-existent schooling. High dosage tutoring is the most effective way to support students who need to build up their foundational building blocks for learning a language and math. Most schools are incapable of offering high dosage tutoring to their refugee students who've had interrupted schooling, and FORA is able to be an important and necessary addition to the student's programs. Without FORA, many of the refugee students with little to no reading and writing skills in any language tend to dropout, regardless of their intelligence or desire to learn. FORA is attempting to reverse that trend.

The purchase of the 6435 N. California Ave building will allow FORA to expand their scope and activities and serve a larger part of the community. The goal is to serve more students over time, and to expand their programming to serve more of the learning needs in the refugee population.

I hope that you will consider supporting their purchase of this building and that you will one day stop by and see the joyful faces of the students as they spend hours learning to read, write, and do math. It's an amazing experience.

Sincerely,

Seth Rigoletti  
FORA Board member

Sign up for my biweekly newsletter [here](#), and get tips, observations, and insights into what you can do to communicate with clarity and presence.



# Seth Rigoletti

Valico Group, LLC

**Seth Rigoletti** / President

100 Commercial Street, Suite 405, Portland, Maine 04101

207.831.4842 / [seth@sethrigoletti.com](mailto:seth@sethrigoletti.com)

June 8, 2022

To: The Chicago Plan Commission  
[cpc@cityofchicago.org](mailto:cpc@cityofchicago.org)

RE: Property located at 6435 N. California Ave. (a/k/a Old Northtown Library)

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my understanding that the organization known as “FORA” or Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America has submitted a bid to purchase the property noted above.

I am very familiar with FORA as a volunteer, as a leader of their robotics program, and someone who has known Michael O’Connor and Kathleen O’Connor personally for 15 years.

FORA is a wonderful organization that provides High Dosage Tutoring to 67 refugee children who came to this country with limited formal education. They also work with the parents to help develop strong parent-teacher relationships.

Chicago is a city that has a history of welcoming refugees and immigrants. West Rogers Park has for decades served as a place to make a soft landing into our city. I can’t imagine an organization more important, or more perfect, to serve this under-served community.

The leadership of FORA, along with their volunteers, are good people who are helping people that will one day become an essential party of the fabric of this city much like the Irish, Polish, Mexican and Italian people that came before them.

Please help FORA expand into to this location. It is the right thing for the city, for the neighborhood and the right thing for humanity.

Submitted respectfully,

*Steve Bankes*

Steven B. Bankes  
742 North Grove Ave.  
Oak Park, Illinois 60302  
[sbbankes@gmail.com](mailto:sbbankes@gmail.com)  
312-805-3835

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave., formerly Northtown Library

Terry Carmichael <terrycarmichael55@gmail.com>

Fri 6/10/2022 5:47 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To the City of Chicago Plan Commission,

I urge you to approve the sale of the old Northtown Library, 6435 N. California Ave., to FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America).

The mission of FORA could be more fully carried out with having more space than currently available in the three storefronts now used for High Dosage Tutoring (HDT). So many more students could be tutored for 10+ hours/week to help them succeed in school. So many more children could be given attention and affirmation to give them hope in their new country. So many more families could experience practical, personal assistance in navigating the CPS educational system. Allowing FORA to purchase the old library would have only positive results for the community.

I'd like to share two personal experiences I've had since I began tutoring at FORA. First, the impact I was making on individual students' progress through HDT was great. I observed children's skills improve each week. I could not stop talking to friends and family about the improvement I saw. My enthusiasm for FORA led to my husband joining me as a tutor. He also had the desire to make a difference in the lives of refugee children.

Second, a fourth grade student started at FORA knowing little to no English. He was eager and quick to learn. One afternoon, he was reading aloud to another tutor. The tutor complimented him on his reading ability. He turned to me and said, "You taught me." The large, former library space would allow more children to learn to read. I know of no better way to improve their lives.

In closing, FORA's impact on the community would be increased immensely by owning this property. Please approve the purchase by FORA of 6435 N. California Ave.

Sincerely,

Terry Carmichael  
1077 Willow Rd.  
Winnetka, IL 60093

## Sale of 6435 N. California Avenue/Old Northtown Library

Wendy Miller <wendykaplanmiller@att.net>

Mon 6/13/2022 2:05 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing as a Board Member of Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA) to wholeheartedly support their purchase of the Old Northtown Library at 6435 N. California Avenue.

I am an Amherst College classmate of Michael and Kathleen O'Connor, FORA's incredible founders. As undergraduates there, Kathleen and I tutored Cambodian refugees. Michael and I went to Harvard Law School together, where I studied Asylum & Refugee Law. I was an attorney at Western Mass Legal Services and Greater Boston Legal Services, with many immigrant clients. Relocated to California, I have been involved in volunteer advocacy and philanthropic efforts in the refugee community. It is a privilege to be part of FORA's transformational work.

In its short period of existence, FORA has produced phenomenal results. The evaluation data speaks for itself. In my opinion, however, the benefit to whole families and the community is beyond quantifiable. The program vastly improves and enriches the lives of both tutors and tutees. I am genuinely giddy about the possibility of its expansion into the library space. So many refugees in need await its essential services. The oppression these families have suffered is incomprehensible. To change the narrative and be able to provide true welcome, including the right of literacy, is something the Planning Commission should be thrilled to approve.

As an outsider to Chicago, I have been very impressed by the extremely diverse neighborhood in West Ridge and its thriving harmony. There is much hate and tribalism elsewhere in America and the world. An expanded and enhanced FORA, with its message of belonging and care for one another, is a perfect use of the 11,400 square feet closed library in the heart of it all. FORA is certainly an asset to the community; FORA *is* community.

As a Board Member charged with adhering to the rules of good governance, I can assure you that FORA is properly run. I am honored to work alongside my talented fellow board members, all smart, hardworking, honest folk. FORA's staff are also highly skilled, committed, and culturally competent. There are obviously many wonderful non-profits in Chicago; it is not hyperbole to claim that you will not find more dedicated and passionate public servants than Kathleen and Michael O'Connor. They have devoted their lives to this project; you will be proven proud, wise, and visionary to award their organization the physical space to flourish.

Please let me know if you need any further information. Thank you for your consideration of this recommendation.

Best,  
Wendy Kaplan Miller  
425 Seale Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94301

617-877-0963

## FORA Bid for Old Northtown Library

Evelyn Miks <ejmiks@sbcglobal.net>

Sat 6/11/2022 3:57 PM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

WRCO  
West Ridge Community Organization  
6445 N Western Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60645

June 11, 2022

WRCO (the West Ridge Community Organization) strongly supports the bid of FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America) for the old Northtown Library at 6435 N. California.

FORA works with immigrants in our community enabling them to become economically self-sufficient and to transition to life in the US. They provide individually customized tutoring to refugee children, many who have limited or interrupted formal education.

FORA is currently located in three storefronts making it difficult to coordinate their work. The old Northtown Library Building would allow them to consolidate into one place thus being more effective.

WRCO urges the Plan Commission to approve the ordinance authorizing disposition of the property to FORA.

WRCO Board

Evelyn Miks, Chair  
Andrew Rowlas, Vice-Chair  
Hillorie Morrison, Secretary  
Irv Loundy, Treasurer  
Mirko Popadich  
Ashish Sen  
Shikha Sharma

**Evelyn Miks, Chair**  
**West Ridge Community Organization**  
**(773) 910-9021**

## Sale of 6435 N. California Ave

BZBee TOO <zainababaig@gmail.com>

Wed 6/8/2022 1:01 AM

To: CPC <CPC@cityofchicago.org>

[Warning: External email]

To whom it may concern;

**Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America** ("FORA") has been bidding to buy the old closed library, 6435 N. California Ave, and I am writing to you in support of this sale to FORA. I have personally known the co-founders Michael and Kathleen O'Connor for over five years and have had the pleasure of working with their organization.

I am board certified in Internal medicine with over 25 years of work experience and serve on boards of several organizations involved in education and health care. I currently chair the board at AMPI, American Muslims of Indian Origin, a non for profit working to provide health care needs to immigrants and the underprivileged populations locally and abroad; Board member, Avery Coonley School a K-8 private school. Board member and teacher at Bait ul Ilm Academy, Mosque with an active membership of over 10,000 people. For the past 20 years I have run physical and mental health programming. Most recently I joint the Parent Fund of the Yale University Office of Development. FORA provides tutoring to refugee children with little or no formal education. Children are put in grades corresponding to their academic level, and taught with a goal of bringing their academic level up to their public school peers.

In addition to student, FORA work with parents to make sure that they are involved in the children's education. This not only helps the parents develop skills needed to navigate the education system it also helps them become active participants in American society. The service that FORA provides is so much in demand amongst the refugee communities that they have a waitlist of about 50 students.

Acquiring this property will help FORA will help them provide services to the waitlisted students and expand their educational services by collaborating with other refugee resettlement agencies and mental health providers.

I recommend the City of Chicago expedite the sale of this property to FORA. Ever day of delay can translate to an educational set back of a week or more for each of the students on the waitlist, not to mention the toll isolation takes on the mental and physical of the students entire family.

Please feel free to reach out to me without hesitation with any questions or clarifications you may have.

Thank you in advance for your support of FORA.

Zainab Baig, MD  
Director of Clinical Medicine  
AIM specialty health  
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