Skaneateles library board votes to retain ownership of current building

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The Skaneateles Library Board of Trustees voted on Sept. 10 to retain ownership of the current library building regardless of whether the library remains in the building or one day relocates.

Dave Hempson, president of the board, said at the beginning of 2019, he and the other trustees began to lay the groundwork for the future of the library.

Hempson said he, the trustees, the staff, and members of the community recognize the limitations of the current library building.

“We are not ADA compliant,” Hempson said. “I feel bad for people who come for programs, some from a far drive and they can’t climb the stairs. I feel bad for the kids who come for storytime and can’t get in. We know there are things that need to be addressed.”

To address this in a manner as possible, Hempson said the board has established goals to help guide its work through this process.

“We want to look at what the future existence of the library building is going to be,” Hempson said. “Are we going to renovate or are we going to build? We have developed a strategy to look at this and educate the board about all the options. We have done this with a lot of diligence and looking at what our needs are.”

The library board has a number of committees addressing topics like finances and planning.

The board as a whole has also taken on a needs assessment as well as an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of a SWOT analysis.

Hempson said through this work, the board was able to determine that whether the library renovates the current location or moves to a new site, it is viable to retain ownership of the current structure.

“Following the development of a long range plan as well as an assessment of the library’s financial plan, and in order to ensure preservation of the building for general community benefit, it just makes sense that the library retain ownership of the building no matter the final decision to remain in place or relocate,” he said.

“Whatever future decisions are made, the current building will be preserved and supported by Skaneateles Library, while continuing to serve the broader community.”

In 2017, the site of the former Stella Maris facility was offered as a site for a new library.

The library held a number of public meetings to discuss this possibility.

Many in the community expressed concern about what would become of the existing library building, which at the time numerous people said was at the heart of the community.

Hempson said this is a feeling he and the other trustees can relate to and that while no decision has been made at this time about relocation or renovations, he hopes the news that the existing structure will remain in the ownership of the library will help assure the community that the beloved structure will remain and be cared for no matter what decision the library board makes.

“It is near and dear to a lot of people, it is near and dear to me,” Hempson said. “It is a great building. I absolutely think this is a positive for the library and for the community.”

Hempson said it is too early in the process to discuss what uses the current structure could have if the library were to relocate, but he could say the board is doing its due diligence and has been and will be considering all possibilities.

He also said no decision has been made about relocation or renovation at this time.

This too will require more research and study including evaluation of possible sites for relocation as well as reviewing possible plans for expansion and renovation of the current library building.

Hempson said he hopes the board will be able to have a final decision about whether to relocate or renovate by the end of this year.

Hempson said the board does not yet know the exact language that will be put forth for that vote, but shared that it will only include whether the library will stay in the current building or move to a new location.

This vote will not include details such as what renovations might occur in the current building, or which specific location(s) would be considered for a move.

“This evening’s vote in favor of retaining the current structure reflects our need to provide all 9,000 community residents who help fund the library with access to services equipped for the 21st century and beyond, while also reaffirming the library’s commitment to being excellent community stewards,” Hempson said in a press release following the vote to retain ownership. “It is important to all of us that we maintain the history and what makes this area such a wonderful place to live and visit.”

Hempson said the board wants community input and suggestions are welcome and can be sent via email to feedback@skanlibrary.org.