

Skaneateles Library Working Toward Decision November 2019 Update

Message from the Skaneateles Library Board President

SKANEATELES, NY (November 7, 2019) – The Skaneateles Library Board of Trustees is continuing a thoughtful and deliberative process in order to make a final determination as to which option best meets the long-term needs of our community and permits the library to fully realize our mission and vision. By the end of this year, we plan to decide whether to extensively renovate and expand the existing library structure or build a new library on a new site. This update provides the latest information on our work.

As part of our decision-making process, the Board recently approved the library's Long-Range Plan for 2020-2025. Incorporating the needs assessment conducted by library staff in 2017, community feedback gathered over the last several years and taking into consideration the needs of our broader community, the Board's long-range planning committee developed a plan that will help us serve the approximately 9,000 residents of the Skaneateles School District who support library operations through an annual tax levy.

The long-range plan details five goals developed to address a number of unmet needs in our community, as well as strategies to get us there. For example, while our school libraries do a wonderful job serving our students during school hours, a public library can offer afterschool, summer and weekend programming and access to collections. Accordingly, the Skaneateles Library's long-range plan addresses the need for a hub for student-centered activities, providing a safe space for students to gather around an interactive collection, supporting kindergarten readiness and offering adequate space for summer learning activities. The same process applies to adult learners of all ages.

The long-range plan also considers increased flexibility for the library itself, evaluating how we can prepare the library to easily reconfigure as the needs of the community change over the next 50-100 years. We'd like to address the need for space to meet, work and study – fully accessible during and after hours – for community organizations, mobile workers, students and tutors. Access to the internet, computer technology and digital resources, which are especially critical for those in our community who don't have access at home, is integral to the plan.

These and other community needs cannot be met with the library's currently available space, which leads to the determination that either a significant renovation or relocation to a new site that can accommodate those needs is required. The Board's detailed plan and needs assessment can be found on the library's website at www.skanlibrary.org under the About tab.

The first goal of the long-range plan is for the Skaneateles Library's Board of Trustees to choose one of two paths: to renovate and expand on the existing site OR to relocate and build a new library designed to serve all 9,000 of our constituents. This is a big decision for the library and for the community – one that the library's board has struggled with for decades – so it must serve our current needs and the needs of future generations.

The Board has not yet decided which path is better — renovating (including almost doubling the size of the library where it now stands) or building a new structure. This decision-making process is still underway with the Board developing cost projections and space allocations, and evaluating the implications for both

possibilities.

From the beginning of the Board's consideration of this significant decision, one thing has been very clear: whether we choose to renovate or move to a new site, the fate of the existing library building would be a critical component of the process.

As reported in the Press-Observer on September 25th, the Board has decided to retain the current building regardless of which decision it ultimately makes. We love the current building and recognize it as the heart of downtown. The decision to retain the building even if the library relocates reflects the Board's deep understanding of the historical significance of the current building.

The economics of retaining the current building have been deeply considered. Leasing space to community organizations, expanding our fundraising capabilities with a used bookstore (including some comfortable reading space) and adding a few new and creative ideas can make the current building self-sustaining.

If the Board's decision is to relocate rather than renovate, retention of the existing library building accomplishes a number of significant goals:

The library building will be preserved and supported by the library, serving the broader community in a number of new and beneficial ways.

The Barrow Gallery will have the potential to expand and flourish, offering a broader array of artistic programs while remaining an integral part of downtown and providing a unique attraction for visitors and our community.

As you can imagine, the Board continues to wrestle with a number of significant decisions, but we strongly feel that doing nothing is not an option. As trustees charged with realizing the library's mission and vision for all its constituents, we see this process as integral to our fiduciary duty.

The Board is currently working on concepts for both a renovation and a new building, which will help determine the services and spaces we can provide in each scenario and estimates of construction and operating costs.

As with all construction projects, designs and costs evolve as ideas become more focused and resources are determined, but these projections are a starting point to help the Board plan for the future.

Regardless of which decision is made, our next steps will include developing building designs and drawings with community input, securing funding from various sources (such as grants and a major fundraising campaign) and continued community outreach to ensure we are communicating broadly as we navigate this process.

The library has always enjoyed tremendous community support, dating back well over 100 years. As a community resource we intend to deliver on our mission and vision and are working hard to make the best and most financially responsible decision possible for both current and future generations of Skaneateles School District residents and lifelong learners.

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