

Press Release from the Skaneateles Library

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Skaneateles Library Achieves Milestone

Purchase of Fennell Street Property signals new era

The land at 75 Fennell Street officially became the future home of the Skaneateles Library Monday, October 31, when the town sold the property to the Skaneateles Library Association. The closing sale of this property marks the end of a long search for a new site and the beginning of a new era.

“The purchase of the 2.14-acre lot allows for the building of a right-sized library for our community that can be easily accessed by anyone – from the outside as well as on the inside – with flexible spaces, and plenty of parking,” said Library Board President Susanne Guske. In addition, “it is walkable from throughout the village,” she said. “This is the completion of another major milestone in our timeline.”

Town Supervisor Janet Aaron said the town is in full support of the project, which “paves the way” for the library to better meet the needs of the community. Aaron notes that “... libraries are a central component of education and community connections in a municipality... (they) anchor community life and bring people together.”

It will also be an asset and major improvement to the Fennell Street area. Development of the land (between Ace Hardware and SAVES) helps to implement the town’s Comprehensive Plan for the Fennell Street Corridor.

The site is big enough to include dedicated parking, giving access to all 9,000 Skaneateles School District residents who help to fund the library. “Some 72 percent of the school district residents live outside the village – making the availability of parking and easy access from all directions imperative,” said Guske.

In addition, it is close to downtown, neighborhoods, parks, and schools. There is room for drive-up book drops, outdoor programming and reading spaces.

“We plan to beautify the site with green space and are excited by the potential of a nature walk to the creek, a bridge to the growing Parkside neighborhood and a path to the Gateway apartments,” Guske said. “The pandemic has reinforced our plans to bring the outside in and to connect to nature.”

The goal is for the new building to “have good things happening in every nook and cranny,” Guske said. The space should also become “... as well-loved as the current building,” Guske said, quoting a former board member.

Excitement about the future of the Skaneateles Library has as much to do with the historic building on Genesee Street as it does with a new site on Fennell Street.

In a breakthrough decision in 2019, the library board decided to build a welcoming new library **and** to preserve the landmark building on Genesee Street in the center of downtown as important community space. The building will continue to house (and allow expansion of) the Barrow Art Gallery, while offering space for other non-profits like the Chamber of Commerce. The beautiful period setting will also allow for year-round used book sales. The upstairs, now accessible via an elevator, will offer desirable meeting space downtown.

Many have shared their relief and enthusiasm over the dual plan, which is described as a “win-win” by community members.

At the Fennell Street site, “the library board wants to build something that is environmentally and economically sustainable,” said former Library Board President Dave Hempson, who led the diverse and experienced board through an intensive research and decision-making period.

“We see this as an investment to meet our community needs” for many years to come, and “we plan to use this project as an example of environmentally and fiscally responsible design both inside and out,” Hempson said. A new library is expected to be completed in the next several years based on the speed of fundraising, which is currently in the silent phase. The library board anticipates initial conceptual designs will be available in the spring.

Like others, Library Director Nickie Marquis is thrilled about the purchase of the land and what it means for the future. “We are excited because now our current building can be preserved and celebrated for all it is, while the function and the spirit of the library can evolve and grow in a bigger, more accessible location,” she said.

Aaron said the town encourages people “to stay engaged while the library works to incorporate the needs of our community in their plans” and expressed hope that community members “will generously support a new library that we can all be proud of.”

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