

For Immediate Release

Contacts:

Jessica Cogan Millman, Project Bookends Director
jessica.millman@skanlib.org
(315) 677-1170

Nickie Marquis, Skaneateles Library Director
nmarquis@skaneateleslibrary.org
(315) 685-5135

Plans Move Forward for a Gathering Center for Arts, Culture and Learning by the Lake Project Bookends Facility to House the Skaneateles Library and Barrow Art Gallery

SKANEATELES, NY - Plans continue to move forward for Project Bookends, a group of community volunteers working to build a state-of-the-art Library and Center for arts, culture and life-long learning in the Village of Skaneateles. The vision for the new facility is to create a community gathering space for events, music, arts and lectures for people of all ages, which will also be home to the Skaneateles Library and the John D. Barrow Art Gallery.

The facility is intended to be built on the site of the former Stella Maris Retreat on Genesee Street in the Village, which was purchased by neighbors Peter and Elsa Soderberg in December of 2015. The Soderbergs purchased the expansive property with the intent of donating approximately three acres along Genesee Street for a community purpose.

According to Library Director Nickie Marquis, the Soderberg offer coincided with the Library's plans to renovate and expand the existing building to better meet the needs of the community. "In surveying and talking to our community, the overwhelming feedback has been for the Library space to be more accessible, offer a better solution for parking and provide more comfortable, functional spaces for reading, meeting, studying and events," said Marquis. "The proposed location is still within walking distance of the schools and Village center, but allows us to provide a completely accessible facility with space for programming, people and parking beyond what's possible with the existing building."

Skaneateles Library Board President Scott Elia stressed that plans for operating the new Library at the 130 E. Genesee location will enable the Library to better serve the community. "We were working on plans for a significant renovation to the existing building when this opportunity was presented to the Board," said Elia. "After an extensive evaluation, we're confident that this is an exciting opportunity to design a space from the ground up that will best meet the current and future needs of the Skaneateles community," said Elia.

Elia emphasized that taxpayer dollars will only be used to support Library operations. He also noted that the Library is committed to staying within a space that is in line with its current operating budget and is suitable to the size of the Skaneateles population. The current Library building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, will likely be offered for sale. The Library Board will investigate with input from the community an acceptable new use for the existing building, with particular consideration for its historic nature and importance to the community.

The Skaneateles Library, the Barrow Gallery and the Learning Center – the working name for a new cultural and educational programming organization still in its development phase – will serve as independent organizations integrated within one facility. In order to reduce capital and operating costs, the facility will feature shared, flexible programming spaces that will also be available for community use. Library services and programming will remain free to the public. The Barrow Gallery will remain open to the public and will continue to fulfill its mission to preserve and showcase the works of John D. Barrow.

The vision for the Learning Center is to bring Skaneateles residents a wide variety of compelling educational, cultural and entertainment experiences for all ages. In support of these efforts, the Learning Center could host programming developed by professional staff and citizen volunteers, as well as other partner organizations. Costs to offer such programming could be funded by event fees, subscriptions, sponsorships and fundraising.

Project Bookends, headed by Jessica Millman, is developing plans for both the Learning Center and the new facility in partnership with the Board of Trustees of the Skaneateles Library and Barrow Gallery. A site plan and building plan are being developed with funds donated for the purpose of exploring this opportunity. Project Bookends recently went before the Village Planning Board to discuss preliminary ideas about the site and will be seeking approval to move the project forward once detailed plans are in place.

As plans progress Project Bookends, in partnership with the Library, will be reaching out to the community over the winter and spring to gain input on what community residents are interested in with respect to the space and programming. According to both Millman and Elia, Project Bookends and the Library are focused on working closely with the Village and the community to create a space that maintains the integrity of the Village while providing a place for life-long learning and cultural expression.

“Skaneateles is such a vibrant community with superb public schools and a high quality of life for residents,” said Peter Soderberg. “Our vision is to provide a space where community members of all ages can gather for the arts, literature and life-long learning and enhance the opportunities that make our community a unique and special place to live.”
