

Frequently Asked Questions

about

PROJECT BOOKENDS

What is Project Bookends?

Project Bookends is the interim name for a proposal to build a new facility to serve as a community gathering space for events, music, arts and lectures for people of all ages on the site of the former Stella Maris Retreat at 130 E. Genesee Street in the village of Skaneateles, NY. This facility would be home to the Skaneateles Library and the John D. Barrow Art Gallery, as well as a new Learning Center to provide programming opportunities that are beyond the scope of the Library and Gallery.

The Library, the Gallery and the Learning Center would serve as independent organizations integrated within one facility, which would feature shared, flexible programming spaces that will also be available for community use. The facility would be open to the general public, offering a variety of free and fee-based programs and events for families, adults and seniors through partnerships with educational and cultural organizations.

What is the Learning Center?

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 community volunteers, as well as other partner organizations.

What types of expanded programming will the Learning Center offer?

The specific programming will be determined by the community through a series of workshops and outreach efforts. It is envisioned that the center will focus on arts, culture, literature and life-long learning opportunities.

How do the Library and the Barrow Gallery fit with the Learning Center?

The mission of the Library is to inspire learning, enrich lives and connect our community. The Library's vision is to be the cultural and informational hub of a vibrant, thriving community. Partnering with the Learning Center expands opportunities for our patrons and the Skaneateles community.

The mission of the Barrow Gallery is to exhibit and preserve the paintings of John D. Barrow for the benefit of the general public and the Library. The Gallery and the Library are linked by a trust established in 1905 that requires they remain together in the same building. The Gallery is an important part of Skaneateles history. The art that Mr. Barrow left behind has inspired artists for generations. It's the goal of the Barrow Gallery to ensure that his legacy is preserved for the Skaneateles community. Project Bookends' mission of being a gathering space for arts, culture, literature and life-long learning would be in line with the vision of John Barrow.

Why the Stella Maris Retreat site?

Bookends is proposed to be built on the site of the former Stella Maris Retreat, which was purchased by Peter and Elsa Soderberg in December of 2015. The Soderbergs purchased this expansive property with the intent of donating a large part of the parcel along E. Genesee Street to build a community gathering space overlooking the lake. The Stella Maris site offers the opportunity for a new, purpose-built facility with better parking, an expanded and accessible library, a highlighted Barrow Art Gallery and a new Learning Center.

What will happen to the Stella Maris Retreat building?

The large building fronting E. Genesee Street is on the parcel designated for the new facility. The size and layout of this building make it ill-suited for use by Project Bookends. The existing building will be torn down and replaced with a smaller, more energy-efficient, fully accessible facility.

What uses will be in the new building?

The Project Bookends team seeks community input to determine how the new building can be used. In addition to the Library and the Gallery, possibilities include exhibit space for local artists, classrooms for lectures, a small theater for music and movie/live broadcast events, study and group project space and a café. During the winter and spring, the Project Bookends team will assess current spaces in Skaneateles and gather community input to decide what spaces and services should be available in the facility.

How big is the new building?

The size of the building has not been determined. We will be working with the project architects to determine the appropriate size based on our population, input from the community and operating costs. In the current building, the Library inhabits 6,650 square feet and the Gallery inhabits 1,360 square feet. Butler Rowland Mays Architects, library design experts, recommend that the size of the Library be doubled to meet population and service needs. The Barrow Gallery requires some additional space for painting storage and a small office.

The goal is to design and build a building that will have costs similar to the operating costs of the existing Library building. We envision a single story building facing E. Genesee Street and two stories on the lake side (taking advantage of the slope of the land).

What will this facility be named? Bookends?

Bookends is a temporary name being used for the project, but not the facility itself. We know that the Skaneateles Library will be part of the name of the building, but the name is still to be determined.

Who will pay to build the new facility?

The first and largest single source of funding will be a generous donation from the Soderbergs. We do not anticipate that these funds will cover the entire cost of the building project. The Library and Bookends group is developing a funding and fundraising strategy. A fundraising consultant will be hired to assist with this work. Taxpayer funds will not be used to build the new facility; they are strictly reserved to support Library operations.

Will taxpayer support provided to the Library by residents of the Skaneateles Central School District be used for the Barrow Gallery or the Learning Center?

No. The \$350,000 in community-based funding approved by voters in May 2016 is designated for Library operating costs only. The Library asked the community for this support because our tradition of relying on private donations and investment income to keep the doors open was no longer sustainable. It had become necessary to use the endowment's principal just to pay the bills; continuing on that path would've put the Library's future in jeopardy.

It is important to understand that the sustainable public support provided to the Library is about funding the Library's ongoing operations: staff, collections, programs, utilities, etc. Community-based funding is a critical part of supporting Library services, whether or not we ever make any changes to the Library facility.

Will the Library be responsible for all the operating costs of this new building?

No, the operating costs will be shared between the Library, Barrow Gallery and the new Learning Center. The Library has committed to staying within an operations budget that is in line with a library size suitable to the Skaneateles population and current operating costs. Additional costs associated with operating the Learning Center will be generated through program fees, sponsorships and donations.

Is the Library paying for the consultants and architects needed for the initial phase of the project?

No. The funds needed to support this phase of the project were donated to the Library specifically for this purpose. Neither taxpayer funds nor Library investment funds are being used.

Why is the Library considering a relocation?

The Library Board has considered relocation or expansion at various times over the years, most recently in early 2015. Community meetings were conducted by Butler Rowland Mays Architects, experts in library design and historic buildings, to find out what was important to patrons; concurrently, an extensive site and building assessment was completed to explore how our building could be improved to try to meet those needs.

In addition to making the building fully accessible for those with mobility issues and providing dedicated parking, the community asked for larger, more comfortable spaces for children and teens; spaces that support group work, study and tutoring; up-to-date computer technology and support for mobile/personal technologies; and both small and large community meeting spaces.

An expansion in the current location could provide significant improvements in some areas, but it would not serve all the needs expressed by our patrons and community members. A new building could provide more of what our patrons want now and in the future, as well as a more efficient layout with energy-efficient design features. The proposed location would allow the Library to stay in the village and to be accessible to all patrons.

What will happen to the existing library building?

The existing building housing the Library and the Barrow Gallery will be available for another use. The building is a “contributing building” in the Village of Skaneateles Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places, and it is our intention that the exterior will remain in its current state. The Library Board recognizes how important the building is to the community and is in the process of forming a committee that will establish a process for identifying the future use of the building. Community input will be an important part of this process.

What is the timeline for the project?

Project Bookends is just starting up. Work began in earnest after the Library Board voted in September 2016 in favor of pursuing a relocation and new building with Project Bookends. The community engagement process will begin this winter. It is hoped that the project will be completed in 2019.

Where are you in the current process?

We have engaged the services of Environmental Design & Research (EDR) as site planning consultant, to determine what building could be sustained on the site. EDR made an initial presentation to the Village of Skaneateles Planning Board on Thursday, January 5, 2017. The process of securing zoning and site plan approvals has only just begun.

Paul Mays of Butler Rowland Mays Architects will work on the project as the designer for the Library and Gallery spaces, because of his prior work with the Library and Gallery and his expertise in the field of library design.

On December 19, 2016, six architectural firms were invited to a one-day design competition to determine who communicated with the team most effectively and offered a draft design compatible with the vision of the Bookends team. Contract negotiations with Holmes King Kallquist Architects (HKK) are now underway. Once the contract has been signed, we will officially announce HKK as the selected architecture firm via the Skaneateles Library website.

The draft building designs HKK provided at the competition is not the final design. They are visionary only. The building program will be informed by forthcoming community outreach and feedback over the next few months. It is the goal of the team to provide preliminary designs for public viewing by early Summer 2017.

Will a zoning change at the former Stella Maris site be necessary?

The site is presently zoned A-1 Residential. The A-1 Residential district does not permit a cultural facility (described in the Village Zoning Code to include a museum, library, art gallery or lecture hall). We will apply to the Village to designate the project under Public Lands. The purpose of a Public Lands district is to provide for the continuation of public uses and community benefit activities for a cultural facility or other public service not provided by the Village.

Has Project Bookends received endorsements or approvals from any organizations?

No such endorsements have been sought at this stage and none have been given.

Who is on the Project Bookends team?

Currently, the Project Bookends team is comprised of members of the Library Board, Peter and Elsa Soderberg, numerous additional community volunteers and Project Director, Jessica Millman. The team will expand as the community engagement process begins.

Who can I talk to if I have questions or if I want to participate?

Jessica Millman, Project Director, is the first point of contact and can be reached by email at jessica.millman@skanlib.org or at 315-677-1170.

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