

Fitchburg Library director details plans for upcoming building renovation

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FITCHBURG — The City of Fitchburg will open a new and renovated library in 2026, Fitchburg Library Director Deb Hinkle said. Hinkle said the goal of this renovation is to provide materials and experiences Fitchburg residents might not otherwise be able to afford.

The project encompasses two changes for the library. The Wallace Library will be renovated to include more spaces that serve the community. There will also be a children's library and learning center added, replacing the existing youth library.

“The community room is going to be a really flexible space that can be sectioned off into two spaces instead of just one,” Hinkle said. “We’re incorporating several smaller meeting rooms, a computer lab and a maker space. We’re going to have an increase in seating areas where people can study and engage with each other.”

The renovation means more gathering spaces for people in the Fitchburg community, including a lounge area and more conference rooms.

“Our mission is to provide access to information and education opportunities without a direct cost to the patron,” Hinkle said. “There are few places left in the world where you can go without being forced to make a financial transaction; this is one of those places. So this is one of the most important community hubs. It’s about accessibility.”

The existing 29,700-square-foot Wallace Library is over 50 years old. The new youth library wing adds 25,000 square feet, bringing the new facility to 55,430 square feet.

The funding for the project comes from numerous sources: \$12.4 million from a grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners Library Construction Program Grant, \$12 million from the City of Fitchburg's American Rescue Plan Act funding, \$3.5 million from the OWL (Offering a World of Learning) Capital Campaign and the remaining \$12 million from the City of Fitchburg. In total, the project will cost \$40 million. The overall project will not impact Fitchburg taxpayers.

There was a delay in construction due to a structural issue. Despite that, Hinkle said they plan to break ground at some point this year.

“We’ve identified a path forward and the project is still within the allocated budget,” Hinkle said.

While the delay may impact the construction timeline, it does not affect the temporary location open at 166 Boulder Drive.

“As a Gateway City, it’s imperative to highlight how having a modern library will better the economy for local businesses, create more inviting places and provide that access to information and educational opportunities for people who need them,” Hinkle said. “We also want to utilize this new space and reimagine and expand our programming. This is an opportunity for the library to provide services people would not be able to afford otherwise.”