

FITCHBURG

Library announces community giving campaign

\$40 million renovation and expansion underway



Fitchburg Public Library Director Deb Hinkle inside the Main Street building currently being renovated and expanded. COURTESY FITCHBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY



FITCHBURG
PUBLIC LIBRARY
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN



Rendings of the \$40 million Fitchburg Public Library renovation and expansion project slated to be completed in 2026. COURTESY TAPPÉ ARCHITECTS

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FITCHBURG >> The library recently launched a community giving campaign.

The Fitchburg Public Library, currently in the midst of a \$40 million renovation and expansion project, is inviting members of the community to write their names into the

history of this transformative effort. The Legacy of Learning community giving program will provide donors at all levels with the opportunity to be enshrined in the expanded facility when it opens its doors in 2026, according to a press release.

Through the Legacy of Learning campaign, donors will be able to support the library project and pay tribute to a loved one or their own business by ‘reserving’ a book in the READ shelf that will be featured prominently in the lobby of the new building. Two lines of up to 25 characters of personalized text will be featured on the spine of individual donor books, with the spines designed by city-based business Eagle Trophy.

The shelf itself will be built by students at Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical High School and giving levels include Gold (\$500), Silver (\$250) and Bronze (\$125), each representing the relative size of books on the shelf. Gifts are tax-deductible and donors may also give directly to the campaign by visiting the building project tab at fitchburgpubliclibrary.org. In addition, information on naming opportunities for library fixtures and spaces is also available by contacting owlcapitalcampaign@gmail.com.

The program is part of the library’s \$3.5 million Offering a World of Learning (OWL) capital campaign, an integral component in realizing the overall project.

“We are grateful for the many significant donations the OWL campaign has received from individual and corporate donors, and we are moving closer to our goal every day,” OWL Capital Campaign Co-chair Sharon Bernard stated in the release. “The Legacy of Learning campaign creates additional opportunities for supporters of this critical project to continue its impactful story.”

The library renovation project has been years in the making. City leaders applied for a competitive grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners in 2017 and after the project designs were reviewed and approved by the board, \$12.5 million in state funding was announced in 2022. The City of Fitchburg allocated a further \$12 million, the same amount of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding is also included, and a groundbreaking ceremony was held in October of 2024.

The building project encompasses two major changes — renovating the existing historic Wallace Library while preserving its structural integrity and creating an interior space that more efficiently, effectively, and safely serves the community, and creating an entirely new children’s library and learning center to replace the existing youth library. Both elements will not only improve the facility but also empower the library to continue serving as a key accessible community resource to enable people to work, learn, and expand their horizons.

Just as the public library has been a fixture on Main Street for decades, so too has community support for its evolution. When plans were announced to create the first free-standing children’s library in the U.S. in Fitchburg in the 1940s, an ambitious penny drive

was launched that raised \$10,000 — one million pennies — from local kids saving money from chores and allowances, and the rest of the community followed suit.

“The spirit of generosity is part of the fabric of Fitchburg, and we are thrilled to announce this opportunity for supporters of the library’s evolution,” said Fitchburg Public Library Board of Trustees Chair Matthew Bruun. “Generations will benefit from the expanded library, which will be a powerful symbol of our community’s commitment to learning and literacy.”

The library renovation and expansion project has been designed to serve the evolving needs of the community for decades to come and includes robust technological upgrades. There will be a makerspace to encourage entrepreneurship, a computer lab, dedicated children’s room, community room, and small meeting and conference spaces.

As a welcoming space in the heart of downtown, the library will continue to serve thousands of visitors each year and stand as a symbol of the city’s belief in literacy, learning, and community.

“The public library is one of the few resources a community member may access with no expectation of needing to pay for a valuable service,” said OWL Capital Campaign Honorary Co-chair Robert Antonucci. “The city’s investment in this public good is so appreciated, and we are grateful to the community members who will help us realize the final passages of this important chapter in Fitchburg’s story.”

The library is currently housed at 166 Boulder Dr. while the Main Street location is being revamped. For more information including details of the Legacy of Learning campaign and the progress of the library project and capital campaign visit fitchburgma.gov/1028/Building-Project and follow Fitchburg Public Library — The OWL Capital Campaign on Facebook and Instagram.