



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara secures state funding to support future cornerstone of Ithaca's revitalized Stewart Park: New funding will assist creation of Wharton Studio Museum and Park Visitor Center

[Thomas F. O'Mara](#)

October 18, 2018

ISSUE:

- [Community Development](#)



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Ithaca, N.Y., October 18—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today joined representatives of the [Wharton Studio Museum \(WSM\)](#), [Friends of Stewart Park](#), City of Ithaca, and Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce to announce a \$450,000 state grant to assist the development and completion of the Wharton Studio Museum (WSM) and Park Visitor Center in Ithaca's Stewart Park.

O'Mara secured the funding as part of the 2018-2019 New York State budget.

Senator O'Mara said, "I am extremely grateful for opportunities to assist meaningful and vital community projects across the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes regions.

Since first meeting with Diana Riesman, Executive Director of Wharton Studio Museum, in 2015, to discuss plans to develop the historic Wharton Studio building, I have been interested in the project as a key component of Friends of Stewart Park's broader revitalization of the Ithaca's historic lakefront park. The Friends of Stewart Park and the City of Ithaca, in collaboration with Wharton Studio Museum, have done an outstanding job of fundraising, rallying widespread community support, and coordinating a dedicated corps of volunteers to revitalize and transform Stewart Park. The Wharton Studio Museum and Park Visitor Center is a cornerstone of this effort. I am glad to help support it and secure a state investment in such a worthwhile local community initiative."

Diana Riesman, WSM's Executive Director and Co-Founder, and Board Chair of Friends of Stewart Park, said, "Wharton Studio Museum is thrilled about Senator O'Mara's support for this initiative. This project will preserve and celebrate Ithaca's role in early silent film, and transform a historic building into a vibrant cultural destination in the park that every visitor -- resident or tourist -- can enjoy."

Rick Manning, Executive Director of Friends of Stewart Park, said, "I am so grateful to Senator O'Mara for supporting Friends of Stewart Park's and Wharton Studio Museum's efforts to help the City of Ithaca revitalize Stewart Park by creating the Wharton Studio Museum and Park Visitor Center in part of the former Wharton Studio Building. The new museum and park center will overlook Cayuga Lake and the Waterfront Trail, and be an engaging destination where residents and visitors can learn about the unique history of silent film production in Ithaca, and the natural and cultural history of our community's historic waterfront park."

Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick said, "The City of Ithaca is excited for this major support of the Wharton Studio Museum and Park Visitor Center which will highlight and celebrate the city's unique silent film history, and bring to life a historic building along the Cayuga Waterfront Trail in Stewart Park, for residents and visitors alike. The City has long supported Wharton Studio Museum's vision for the building and is thrilled to now be partnered with Friends of Stewart in improving and enhancing our beautiful waterfront park, with this project as a key part of broader park revitalization efforts."

From 1914 to 1920, Ithaca's Wharton, Inc. Studio produced hundreds of films and popular serials, starring some of the best-known actors of the day -- Irene Castle, Lionel Barrymore, Pearly White and Oliver Hardy. This historic studio building, one of only a handful of silent movie studios still standing across the nation, is an important artifact from a century ago when Ithaca was a bustling center of moviemaking.

The transformation of the studio building, located by scenic Cayuga Lake and the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, into the Wharton Studio Museum and Park Visitor Center is a cornerstone project in the overall revitalization of Stewart Park into a vibrant cultural and recreational center for residents of the city and Tompkins County, as well as visitors to the region.

Among numerous other uses, the new museum and visitor center will feature exhibits on silent film history on the building's exterior, interior gallery space for

additional multimedia exhibits on Wharton Studio history and park history, a public meeting room, and a terrace with seating facing the lake.

Read more from the *Ithaca Voice*, [**"\\$450K grant will support museum at Stewart Park to celebrate Ithaca's film history"**](#)