



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

Local public libraries awarded state grants: Area lawmakers praise local libraries for public outreach and information throughout COVID-19 response

THOMAS F. O'MARA September 14, 2021

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Elmira, N.Y., September 9—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) today announced that the Southern Tier Library System and individual public libraries in Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Yates counties have been awarded state library construction grants.

O'Mara and Palmesano said the grants are awarded through the state's Library Construction Grant Program, which is distributing \$14 million in capital funds from the 2020-21 state budget for this year's awards to libraries throughout New York.

In a joint statement, O'Mara and Palmesano said, "A public library is a fundamental resource for area families, seniors, and countless other community residents. That point has been driven home like never before over the past eighteen months when throughout this COVID-19 response our public libraries have been centers of public outreach and information. We are always hopeful that these grants will help local libraries better afford and address their renovation needs. Public libraries, especially in many rural, upstate communities and regions, are New York's leading digital literacy educators, just one of many vital community roles our libraries fulfill. This role is likely to expand in future years. These ongoing investments will help more and more of our public libraries stay ahead of the curve to continue meeting the increasing demand. It's an investment in education, economic growth, and quality communities."

According to the New York State Library, which administers the grants, surveys have estimated that the cost of public library construction and renovation needs statewide totals more than \$1.5 billion. More than 50% of the over 1,000 public library buildings across New York are over 60 years old. Another 33% are more than three decades old. Many of the state's local public libraries are unable to accommodate users with disabilities, and cannot provide Internet, computer, and other electronic technologies to users because of outdated and inadequate electrical wiring. They also do not have sufficient space to house the library's

collection and lack sufficient space for public access computers.

The construction grants help libraries and library systems make renovations and upgrades, update electrical wiring to accommodate computer technology, renovate facilities to provide wheelchair accessible entrances and become fully accessible to persons with disabilities, and provide community meeting rooms.

O'Mara and Palmesano announced the following grants to area libraries:

- > **Southern Tier Library System** (Painted Post, Steuben County), \$184,566.00 to install a Delivery & Library Material Sorting Area, Breakout Work Space & Conference Room installations, lighting upgrades, and an IT Office Expansion;
- > **Chemung County Library District-Steele Memorial Library** (Chemung County), \$87,000.00 to install and stripe the library's parking lot to improve safety and accessibility;
- > **Dundee Library** (Yates County), \$30,425.00 to remove and existing and install a new ADA-compliant vertical wheelchair lift to increase accessibility;
- > **Tompkins County Public Library** (Tompkins County), \$15,092.00 to replace the interior main lobby single center opening automatic door with two separate entrance and exit doors;
- > **Watkins Glen School District Free Public Library** (Schuyler County), \$17,325.00 for Phase 2 of a two-phase construction project to restore safety and accessibility to the building with new ADA-compliant sidewalk entryways.

O'Mara is a past recipient of the "Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award" from the New York Library Association (NYLA). In 2015, O'Mara and Palmesano sponsored a new law (Chapter 480 of the Laws of 2015) that, for the first time, included "installation and infrastructure of broadband services" as a specific project category eligible to receive funding

through the Library Construction Grant Program. Prior to the law's enactment, libraries were unable to access funding through the popular grant program specifically for broadband purposes including cable, wiring and modems, and network terminals and access points.