



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Seward: Showcasing Oneonta's History Will Lead to Prosperous Future

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ONEONTA, 09/21/17 – State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I-Oneonta) today joined officials from the Greater Oneonta Historical Society to announce a \$250,000 state grant to fund renovation and restoration work at the Oneonta History Center.

“The Oneonta History Center is a showcase for the city’s past and a key component of the downtown revitalization taking place in Oneonta,” said Senator Seward. **“I am extremely pleased to partner with the Greater Oneonta Historical Society to further enhance the work which is taking**

place to breathe new life into one of the city's oldest and most storied buildings. This \$250,000 state grant is an investment that will help the history center grow and in turn strengthen the city's downtown economy."

Greater Oneonta Historical Society Board Chairman Corinne Bresee Smith said, "All of us at the Greater Oneonta Historical Society are so grateful to Senator Seward for his steadfast support of our work over the years. As a native son of Oneonta, he knows the value of our past and he is invested in the vitality of our future. We appreciate his longstanding interest in our efforts to make history accessible to all."

Greater Oneonta Historical Society Executive Director Bob Brzozowski said, "Nearly complete renovations to the second floor of the Oneonta History Center are already facilitating archival research and improved storage for the collections. As fundraising continues, our sights are set on the third floor of 183 Main Street with its once vibrant ballroom. We look forward to the day when GOHS can not only hold its own events there, but can welcome other community groups to enjoy this centrally located and historically significant building."

The Greater Oneonta Historical Society purchased the Bissell Block, the oldest brick building on Main Street, in 2001 and it became a cornerstone of the new Oneonta Downtown Historic District in 2002. Extensive renovations were needed, both structurally and cosmetically, before this space could become a suitable center for local history exhibitions and programs and for the society's extensive collections.

Ambitious fundraising led to important renovations, and the first floor of the Oneonta History Center opened in 2005. More recent improvements addressed structural needs such as a new roof, columns in the basement and first floor to increase load-bearing capacity above, an elevator, a second set of stairs to the third floor, and significant progress on the second floor, which is devoted to the GOHS collections.

The next phase includes completing renovations to the second floor and stairwells, restoring the third floor ballroom and gallery space, creating an ADA-compliant restroom, and constructing a kitchenette on the third floor that will facilitate gatherings. Structural safety measures will be completed, including a firewall in the crawl spaces above the third floor ceiling of the Oneonta History Center to separate it from the adjoining building and installation of a code-compliant door at the west entry to the building. Exterior improvements will include restoring brickwork, refurbishing the ceramic tile entryway, and painting the cornice and other non-brick areas. The total cost of this final phase is estimated to be \$330,000.

“Thanks to an ambitious renovation plan and the gifts of generous supporters, we are well on our way to creating a History Center that is the city landmark and community magnet that past president Sally Mullen and other early advocates imagined. To honor their impact, renovated spaces are being named for key individuals, including Sally Mullen, Marc Bresee, Jack Bresee, and John Curley, and more naming opportunities remain available,” added GOHS Board Chairman Smith.

“It has been amazing to witness the rebirth of the Bissell Block and I commend the Greater Oneonta Historical Society and the group’s dedicated volunteers on their hard work. I am eagerly anticipating completion of additional improvements that will fully restore the building to its former glory, expand the center’s programming, and give people one more reason to visit downtown Oneonta,” Seward concluded.

The \$250,000 grant is under the state’s 2002 Strategic Investment Program and is administered by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY).