



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## Local public libraries awarded state grants: O'Mara praises local libraries for public outreach throughout COVID-19 response

THOMAS F. O'MARA October 20, 2020

| ISSUE: **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**



Throughout this COVID-19 response, our public libraries have been centers of public outreach and information.

**Elmira, N.Y., October 20**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R-C, Big Flats) today said that public libraries throughout the 58th Senate District he represents have been awarded state library construction grants.

The 58th Senate District covers Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, and Yates counties, and a part of Tompkins County.

O'Mara said the grants are awarded through the state's Library Construction Grant Program, which received \$34 million in the 2019-20 state budget to allocate this year's awards.

O'Mara, **who in 2016 received the "Outstanding Advocate for Libraries Award" from the New York Library Association (NYLA)**, 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 eight 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 \$1.7 billion. More than 51% 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users with disabilities, and cannot provide Internet, computer, and other electronic technologies to users because of outdated and inadequate electrical wiring.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 announced the following grants to area libraries:

- > Southern Tier Library System, \$176,746.00 to upgrade ten furnaces and A/C units, renovate a meeting room, construct new offices and install a phone system in new and existing office space;
- > Southeast Steuben County Library (Steuben County), \$75,152.00 to install new safety and security equipment that will eliminate hazards and improve building access and security;
- > Chemung County Library District-Steele Memorial Library (Chemung County), \$163,093.00 to purchase and install two new boilers for increased energy efficiency and backup capability;
- > Cohocton Public Library (Steuben), \$45,000.00 to renovate its Community Room for improved space accessibility and bathroom ADA compliance;
- > Pulteney Free Library (Steuben County), \$21,487.00 to purchase and install a generator;
- > Dundee Library (Yates County), \$201,727.00 for interior construction of the newly built, 1150 square foot library space, which includes renovations to the Children's section of the library;
- > Penn Yan Public Library (Yates County), \$69,000.00 to obtain an efficient Heating-Ventilation-Air Conditioning system and added electric capacity for future electrical needs;

> Watkins Glen Public Library (Schuyler County), \$18,450.00 to improve safety and accessibility with new sidewalk entrances that are ADA compliant; and

> Finger Lakes Library System (Tompkins County), \$60,437.00 to renovate the roof on the two-story and single-story parts of the building, and rehabilitate the parking lot.

In 2015, O'Mara and area assemblymen Chris Friend (R,C,I-Big Flats) and Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) 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.