

Henry County Library System receives \$900,000 in a state grant for the renovation of the McDonough Library.

When Governor Kemp signed the state budget for Fiscal Year 2023 on May 12, it was the final step in securing a \$900,000 in state grant for the renovation of the McDonough Library.

Library Director Kathy Pillatzki began the process in 2020, with the support of the late Henry County Commissioner Gary Barham. The funds are allocated as a Capital Outlay allocation from the Legislature, via Georgia Public Library Service. To be eligible for the grant, Henry County Library System had to demonstrate that 10% in matching funds could be secured locally. Commissioner Barham was instrumental in getting \$100,000 included in the SPLOSTV project list to meet the local commitment.

“The McDonough Library serves as the Headquarters library for Henry County,” stated Pillatzki. “It was completed in 2001, and in a typical year the building sees 75,000 visitors who use library resources and services to meet their personal, professional, and civic engagement needs. Twenty years of wear and tear have taken a toll on the facility, and there are safety and security issues that need to be addressed.”

In addition, the library has underutilized space that can be repurposed to better meet community needs. While the traditional mission and values of public libraries remain unchanged – free and impartial access to information and educational and recreational resources – usage patterns and community expectations have evolved over the past 20 years. The physical library is increasingly in demand as a community gathering space for classes, public meetings, civic engagement opportunities, polling locations, job fairs, and other educational and economic development activities. The underutilized spaces will be reconfigured to serve community needs.

In November 2020, the preliminary application for state funds was submitted to Georgia Public Library Service. In 2021, the Henry County SPLOST department advised that bonds for the local match were already sold, and they were ready to begin soliciting architectural bids as soon as state funding was secured.

During the 2022 Legislative Session, library leaders advocated for state funding with members of the state House and Senate. Support from Senator Emanuel Jones was vital in bringing this project to the attention of the Senate Budget Committee. During the House budget negotiations, support came from Representatives Clint Crowe, Demetrius Douglas, El-Madhi Holly, and Dr. Karen Mathiak. The readiness of Henry County SPLOST combined with bipartisan support from the Henry legislative delegation were essential to the project’s inclusion in the final FY23 state budget.

A timeline for the project will be forthcoming.

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