

**STARK COUNTY**

# Stark Library unveils \$54 million plan for new Main Library, Operations Center

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The Repository

Published 1:02 p.m. ET Jan. 26, 2023 | Updated 2:38 p.m. ET Jan. 26, 2023

CANTON – Plans are in the works for a new library building in downtown Canton.

Stark Library is looking to construct a 70,000-square-foot Main Library on the grounds of the existing building, along with a 15,000-square-foot Operations Center across the street. Officials plan to work on designs for both buildings this year, with a goal of breaking ground on the new Operations Center in 2024 and the Main Library in 2026.

"The building of a new library is really all about how we are committing our institution to serving our community and being good stewards of public dollars and providing valuable resources to our residents," Stark Library CEO and Executive Director Mary Ellen Icaza said.

The existing Main Library at 715 Market Ave. N was built in 1978. The 114,000-square-foot facility has not been updated since 2001.

The cost for both buildings is expected to be \$54 million. Stark Library Fiscal Officer Chris Butler said the agency plans to fund the Operations Center using money from the capital projects fund. The Main Library will be paid for through a combination of the capital projects fund and the state's Public Library Fund.

"(Ohio's Public Library Fund) allows us to secure financing separate from levy and bond issues and all that. So our intent out of this is to be able to finance both buildings and anything else that comes out of this master planning process without increasing our levy," Butler said.

Stark voters passed a 2-mill, eight-year levy for the library district in 2019.

## **New Main Library part of district's Re | imagine project**

The new Main Library will serve as the second phase of the library district's Re | imagine project, a multi-year renovation plan that included substantial technology and space upgrades at the North, East Canton, Madge Youtz, Perry Sippo, DeHoff Memorial and Lake Community branches.

The Lake Community branch is the final building to undergo construction as part of the first phase of Re | imagine. It is slated to reopen on March 4.

## **Why is Stark Library building a new Main Library?**

Last fall, Stark Library contracted consultants from the Kent State University Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative to develop a master plan for the library. Through research, branch visits and focus groups with staff and community members, they determined that the Main Library should be the primary focus of the next stage of the Re | imagine project.

"I think one of the things we heard over and over again from focus groups is that people view the library as a place to meet and collaborate," said Stephanie Cargill, communications director at Stark Library. "So having more spaces where they can collaborate and meet their needs, not adjust their needs based on the space."

Suggestions included adding more meeting spaces and study rooms and enhancing the library's maker studio with more technology and equipment. But the current library building does not offer the flexibility needed to make some of these adjustments.

"We could stay in this building and try to retrofit services to the peculiarities of this building, but I believe that's doing a disservice to our residents," Icaza said. "So a new building will allow us to have a more sustainable building with a smaller footprint and will allow us to offer even more services. ... I really believe that we have the potential to be a resource to even more people."

An analysis study conducted by HBM Architects showed that renovating the existing library using the same standards applied to the other branches under the Re | imagine plan would cost nearly \$62 million, which is \$8 million more than it will cost to build a new Main Library and Operations Center.

The new building will be smaller than the existing one, but Cargill said a significant portion of the current library is used for storage and maintenance and a dated heating, ventilation

and air conditioning system. The library district owns a building across the street from the Main Library that is used for storage. That facility will be rebuilt and become the Operations Center, housing systemwide services.

The Stark Library Board of Trustees on Tuesday approved a resolution to allow Butler to proceed in securing a construction manager and architect for the project.

Icaza said the library will look for input from the community as officials start working on the design phase. One of her hopes for the new building, she said, is to create an interactive learning and play space for children.

"This really belongs to the community," she said. "Really, we want to make it a place where everyone feels comfortable and welcome and that we have something to offer."

The district will continue the Re | imagine plan this year by working with the Kent State University Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative to assess how the library reaches residents of South Central Stark County, as well as reach individuals who are not already patrons.

Stark Library also plans to add new carpet and furnishings to the Plain Community Branch in 2023.

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