



Rendering: LyonsPlain Architecture

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JANUARY 29, 2019 — The estate of Daniel E. Offutt III has offered to donate \$5 million to renovate and expand Weston's public library to include a new arts and innovation wing.

First Selectman Chris Spaulding announced the gift at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen on January 28th.

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First Selectman Chris Spaulding announced the gift at a meeting of the Board of Selectmen on January 28th. We spoke with Dr. Spaulding shortly afterwards.

“I’m ecstatic,” said the First Selectman. “This is a remarkable opportunity for Weston. It’s hard to imagine how we could do it without this amazing gift. It’s a great way to celebrate the life of Dan Offutt, who loved the library and was a valued patron.”

“For the town,” he continued, “it’s a perfect fit of our culture in the arts and where we’re heading with innovation. I am, and we all should be, incredibly grateful to Dick Orenstein.” Richard Orenstein is the executor of Mr. Offutt’s estate.

Mr. Offutt’s estate has been increasingly generous to Weston over the past several months, including a commitment to help build EMS quarters, a large donation to Friends of the Weston Public Library, two larger grants to Weston Historical Society, and funds to help EMS purchase a new ambulance.

During that time, discussions between Dr. Spaulding and Mr. Orenstein evolved to include library trustees and Karen Tatarka, Weston’s public library director.

A COMPLEMENTARY DESIGN

As envisioned, the library's new wing will have a modern design that is open, sunlit, and airy, a remarkable complement and compliment to the existing structure. It will be called the Offutt Center for Innovation and Art. A large portion of the gift will be placed in an endowment to keep the Center running well into the future.

At the meeting, Library Board chair Anne Hunt introduced Hanna Przada of Lyons Plain Architecture, who designed the new wing. Ms. Przada described how the design is meant to preserve the existing building and meet the library's desire to expand program offerings into arts, crafts, technology, and exhibitions.



Mr. Offutt, a successful investor who lived in Weston for thirty years and who, according to Mr. Orenstein, "loved this town," was a talented artist and craftsman in his own right. His metal sculptures were a striking feature of his home on Kettle Creek Road. Many are destined for even more prominent display, including at the Historical Society.

The new library wing will be situated on the north side of the main building, toward the back, connected by an atrium. The library's Community Room will be renovated, and both the existing library and the Offutt Center will be able to operate on different schedules.

As designed, the two-floor 6,500 square foot Center will have a dedicated "dry" area for "maker" programs for all ages, a "wet" area designed for messier arts, crafts, and painting, a digital lab with 3D printers, robotics, and a recording booth, and an exhibition area.

Outside, the building's footprint requires giving up only three parking spaces, as part of the hill behind the library will be excavated. Existing vehicle flow will be unaffected. The design incorporates materials used in the main library exterior, such as stone that wraps around the building. From Norfield Road, the Center will barely be visible. For those entering the town campus, "it will be a nice surprise," said Ms. Przada.

The Selectmen share Dr. Spaulding's enthusiasm about the new library feature. Selectman Samantha Nestor was pleased to hear from Ms. Przada that the building will be "green" and energy efficient.



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Selectman Stephan Grozinger thanked the Offutt estate and Mr. Orenstein for this “extraordinary gift,” adding that “the library is one of the most distinctive buildings in town.” He also praised Ms. Przada. “When you want to add to a distinctive building, there are two ways to go. One is imitation, but what you’ve done is far more appropriate for the site, and complements what is already there very effectively. It’s perfect for Weston.”

Dr. Spaulding went on to thank “the many people who put in an immense amount of volunteer work,” and particularly noted the efforts of Ms. Tatarka and Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Even after months of work, all of this is in an early stage, and timeframes are not yet identified. Because the library is governed by State statutes, the project will be driven by the Library Board of Trustees. A special steering committee will be formed, consisting of First Selectman Spaulding, Library Board members, Building Committee members, and one member of the Board of Finance.

There will be a number of opportunities for the public to have input. The plan will be taken up by the Planning and Zoning Commission, which will hold a hearing, as will the Historic District Commission. Ultimately, everything will be decided by vote at a Special Town Meeting.