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STATE GRANT APPROVAL ALLOWS OCEAN COUNTY TO MOVE AHEAD WITH NEW LIBRARY BRANCH IN STAFFORD TOWNSHIP

TOMS RIVER – Calling it a highly competitive grant program, Ocean County Library’s application to secure funds for a new branch library in Stafford Township recently was approved providing \$4.8 million toward the building project.

“Our county library staff in concert with the administration worked tirelessly to make certain our funding application would gain the state support needed to be approved,” said Ocean County Commissioner Joseph H. Vicari, who serves as liaison to the Ocean County Library system. “We join with the Library staff and Library Commission in expressing our appreciation to the state Legislature and the Governor in signing the legislation that will provide this grant.

“This will allow us to construct a new state-of-the-art library facility in Stafford Township providing our residents with a larger facility that supports the area’s population growth,” Vicari said.

The Ocean County Library was selected to receive a \$4.8 million grant in the second round of funding for the Library Construction Bond Act which allocates \$37 million to 36 library projects from 13 counties across New Jersey.

“We all look forward to the day when we break ground on this new building,” said Henry Mancini, Library Commissioner. “This project has been a priority on our facilities plan for a number of years. This grant approval is the result of a cooperative effort – government agencies and individuals coming together to make this happen.”

The grant is part of the second and final round of funding from the state’s \$125 million Library Construction Bond Act which was approved by voters in 2017.

“This money will help our continuing efforts to make certain the very best library programs and services are available to our residents,” said Ruthanne Scaturro, Chairwoman of the Ocean County Library Commission.

The new branch will be constructed on property owned by Ocean County on Route 9 at the Ocean County Southern Service Center location.

In anticipation of building a new library branch there the County has already extended a water main to the site and drainage. Parking at the site will be reconfigured to meet the needs of all the services sharing the complex.

The new Stafford Library branch will be a 19,700 square foot standalone building which will be 65 percent larger than the current building on North Main Street.

“This new building will be located at the nexus of state roads serving as coastal evacuation routes where it will serve as the community anchor and be built with a full-building generator to provide resiliency in times of natural disasters and emergencies,” said Ocean County Library Director Susan Quinn, who acknowledged the contributions

of Assistant Library Director Sara Siegler and Stafford Township Business Administrator Matthew von der Hayden on the successful grant application.

The new building will also provide educational resources and community spaces, state of the art technologies, public computers and shelving for 40 to 50 percent more books and materials.

“There is no better investment for our future,” said Director of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners John P. Kelly. “This building was delayed due to economic downturns and other concerns.

“Now we are doing what we said we were going to do,” Kelly said.

Stafford Township Mayor Gregory E. Myhre said “This is great news for all residents of Stafford Township. The library is a tremendous resource that is available to everyone. The new and expanded library will be a first-class facility for our first-class community. We are proud to be integrated within the great Ocean County library system and excited to be a part of this project.”

Vicari said Ocean County welcomes the partnership with Stafford Township and the State to provide a new library branch in the southern part of the County. Ocean County and Stafford Township will also share in the cost of the new facility. The total cost of the new library is about \$9.6 million.

“Working in partnership allows us to better address the needs of our constituents and helps us to make the biggest impact on the communities we serve,” Vicari said.

The new branch will also include larger areas for children’s programs, an intergenerational space for senior citizens to socialize and enjoy library services, a new teen area, study rooms, maker space for STEAM educational activities, and a sensory space to provide a welcoming environment for people with autism, Alzheimer’s or other sensory processing needs.

“We would like to see construction get under way later this year,” Vicari said.

However a date has not been determined.

The architect for the project is Yezzi Associates of Toms River.

The Ocean County Library system is the largest public library in the state with 19 branches and two reading centers.