

“At Williams College, a \$278 million building boom fuels local economy”

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NEWS

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Chapin Hall is being renovated as part of the overall capital improvement plan for the summer at Williams College. Tuesday, Aug.4, 2015. Scott Stafford — The Berkshire Eagle

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By Scott Stafford, sstafford@berkshireeagle.com @BE_SStafford on Twitter

WILLIAMSTOWN — Over the next few years, Williams College will be spending upward of \$278 million in capital projects, including a \$200 million science center slated to open in 2020.

The projects include the renovation of Chapin Hall; the demolition of the former Sawyer Library and installation of a new grass-covered quad; and repairs to Goodrich Hall and the total renovation of The Log on Spring Street, according to Rita Coppola-Wallace, executive director of design and construction at Williams.

Also on tap is the demolition of Siskind House; the relocation of Miller House to make room for the new science center; the construction of a new 60-bed dormitory; a rehabilitation and renovation of Weston Hall; and the renovation of the Center for Development Economics.

That list doesn't include the construction of a new Williams Inn, planned for the bottom of Spring Street, which is too early in the process to have the work scheduled.

Also in the works is a \$64 million construction project for a new Williams College Museum of Art, in an as-yet-undetermined location.



The site of the former library at Williams College will soon be a grass-covered quad and gathering space. Williams is spending tens of millions of dollars on capital projects and that spending has a ripple effect on the local economy.

As a result, there are about 150 workers on campus at any given time moving the many projects forward. According to figures provided by the college, between 50 and 80 percent of the work for the larger jobs is contracted to local firms, depending on the project.

Emily Watts, executive director of the Williamstown Chamber of Commerce, said that kind of spending locally will help drive growth in Williamstown businesses, and businesses around the North County region and beyond.

“That money is going to local companies and their workers, as well as some companies that are not local, meaning they have to find housing and food locally,” Watts said. “These are people who will get to explore Williamstown, which will drive an increase in foot traffic all year long, even during the time of year when things are usually quieter.”

She noted that people working on the projects will also likely seek some entertainment, goods or services in Pittsfield and further south.

Ripple effects

According to Stephen Sheppard, economist and professor of economics at Williams College, that kind of spending and commitment to long-term projects has a significant impact on the local and regional economies.

“Any time you spend \$278 million, you’re going to have an impact,” he said. “And it’s pretty obvious when you have construction companies renting offices in town: It means they’re expecting to be here for a while.”

Spending on such projects has a ripple effect, too. Sheppard said the workers have to eat lunch and buy gas and supplies, much of which is done locally.



A crew completes final work on the demolition of the former Williams College library. The college .

In the context of a multi-year, multi-phase construction plan, that adds stability to the local economic growth, he added.

“It’s a real construction boom, and the college has tried to have large construction contracts sourced locally for years,” Sheppard said. “All that helps contribute to activity in the local economy.”

Science interest

The need for a new science center was the result of significantly more students enrolling in science programs.

“We’ve outgrown the current science facility,” Coppola-Wallace said. “As times change, students’ interests change and we want to keep up with that.”

Site work has already begun to prepare for the construction of the center, which starts next year.

Tree removal is underway on Stetson Court to make way for the relocation of Miller House, which is located behind Morley Science Lab. It will be moved this fall to a site south of Bascom House. Siskind House, which currently is located next to Miller House, will be demolished by Sept. 1. The porches and deck on the Miller House will be removed on Monday.

The college will plant new trees next spring after Miller House is moved to provide shade and a buffer with the neighbors.

Bronfman Science Center likely will be demolished and replaced. A similarly sized building housing the departments of geoscience, mathematics and statistics and psychology will be built.

New research labs for biology, chemistry and physics will be part of the new 65,000-square-foot addition south

of Morley and connect directly to teaching labs. Shared space in the science center will expand and include four flexible, interdisciplinary labs. Clark Hall will remain available for another use in the future.

Using design techniques and new conservation technologies, the new science space will have twice the square footage — 150,000 square feet — and use half the energy of the current building, Coppola-Wallace said.

During construction, modular buildings will be installed to serve as temporary classroom space.

Library, Quad

Meanwhile across campus, the demolition of Sawyer Library is just about complete, with grading of the empty lot underway. The new Stetson Library, at 176,000 square feet, opened last summer and cost \$86 million. With the old library down, Stetson is visible from across campus, and the new Quad will offer a grand view and entry path to the new structure.

Coppola-Wallace said the new Quad will include marble ledges, or rectangular blocks, in various places to offer sitting and lounging spots. There also will be sidewalks and a rain garden. The area will be seeded with grass this summer, and the rest of the work done next spring.

The cost of the library demolition and the new Quad is \$12.5 million.

Chapin upgrade

Chapin Hall, the historic building that serves as performance space and auditorium, is being renovated to replace the old seating with more comfortable chairs, and adding a moveable stage that can expand or shrink depending on the need. There also will be a piano on an elevator that will stay below stage and elevate to stage level when needed. A new acoustic canopy will also be installed.

The original teakwood floor was removed and will be returned when the other work is done. It is scheduled to re-open in October. The project cost is \$5.5 million, and is being paid for entirely by alumni and parent contributions.

Goodrich Hall is also undergoing extensive repair work, a two-year project, for \$3 million.

An extensive renovation of Weston Hall will include an 8,000-square-foot addition, in preparation for housing the admissions and financial aid departments. It will cost an estimated \$12 million.

The new dormitory is under construction at \$15.5 million, and the planned renovation of the Center for Development Economics is estimated at \$25 million.

The Log, which has served as a social gathering place on Spring Street since the 1940s, is in the midst of a \$4.5 million renovation, also paid for by alumni and parent contributions.

And while all the construction will change the look and feel of the campus during the coming years, Coppola-Wallace said the look and feel of the renovated Log will be distinctly similar to its glory days.

“When we’re finished,” she said, “The Log will look like The Log.”