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Williams plans \$128M project

By Karen Gardner, North Adams Transcript
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WILLIAMSTOWN — Williams College is gearing up for yet another major construction and renovation project that will result in new faculty offices, classrooms, library facilities and a technology center for the campus.

The four-year project is intended to transform the ways that teaching and learning take place and to encourage tutorial and small class interactions that are Williams' hallmark, according to college President Morton O. Schapiro.

"We also will be able to provide useful spaces well into the future for our main library, a technology center, archives and the Chapin Rare Book Library," Schapiro said in a prepared statement. Schapiro announced the go-ahead for the plan, which had been talked about for some years, at the faculty meeting this week, after the college's board of trustees voted unanimously to proceed with the endeavor.

In addition to \$5 million already designated to the project, the board authorized spending of up to \$123 million more. Construction could begin as early as next spring.

The undertaking, which is expected to be completed in 2011, likely will end the college's spate of major construction projects — at least for a while, said James G. Kolesar, director of public relations at Williams. "We don't have a crystal ball, but there are no other major projects beyond this project planned," Kolesar said.

Kolesar said that while the construction activity may be "a little bit above average," it is nothing unusual, compared to other colleges. "All colleges I know of are building," he said. As he visits other institutions, "You can barely hear the tour guide over the backhoe."

Stated Schapiro, "This is an exciting and historic moment for Williams. After years of thoughtful planning, the college will now be able to provide for the humanities and social sciences, the kinds of wonderfully effective teaching and learning spaces created by the new science center. The board of trustees had asked over recent months for a formal review of the planning, which includes the removal of the Sawyer Library, according to Schapiro.

The project is being designed by the firm Bohlin Cywinski Jackson of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Its first phase involves construction of two new office and classroom buildings - one to the north and the other to the south of the current Sawyer Library. The two buildings will hold a total of 160 faculty offices, along with classrooms, informal spaces and departmental offices. After faculty members move from Stetson Hall into the new buildings, the two additions to the original Stetson building will be taken down and replaced with the new Sawyer Library.

Sawyer Library, along with the technology center, archives, 20 faculty offices, and Chapin Library, will be housed in the original Stetson Hall and attached new construction.

Once Sawyer Library moves into its new facility, the current Sawyer building will be taken down to create a new open space in the middle of campus that will connect Stetson Hall and the new buildings with the Freshman Quad, Chapin Hall and the Paresky Center, which is the newly named student center.

Stetson currently is separated visually from the other two by the Sawyer building.

"Reassured that removing the Sawyer building, rather than renovating it, would result not only in more useful facilities but would be more cost effective in the long run, (the trustees) were enthusiastic to move ahead," Schapiro said.