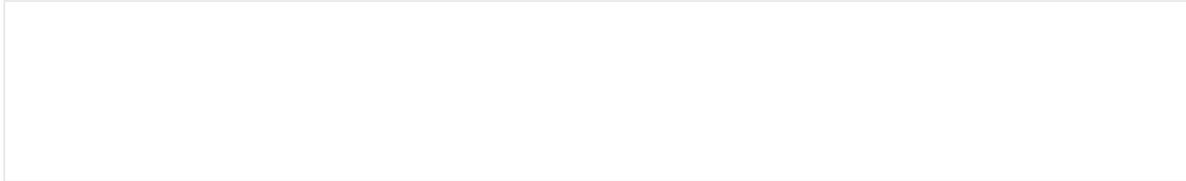



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## Hitchcock Center's \$5.8M project to create 'different breed' of building gets boost



CAROL LOLLIS

Jim McGovern, Sarah LaCour, president of the Hitchcock board of directors, Natalie Blais, district communicator for McGovern and John Olver at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst. [Purchase photo reprints »](#)



By SCOTT MERZBACH

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Staff Writer

Friday, June 13, 2014

(Published in print: Saturday, June 14, 2014)

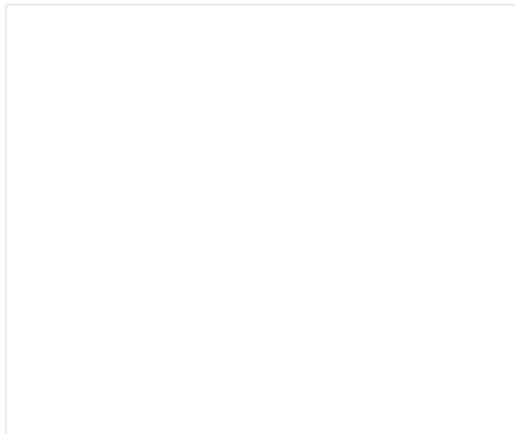
AMHERST — Generations of area schoolchildren have learned about the natural world and environmental issues through classes, field trips and camps at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment.

For U.S. Rep. James McGovern, who joined with former U.S. Rep. John Olver to tour the Hitchcock Center's South Pleasant Street site Friday afternoon, such educational places could reduce the ignorance of elected officials who serve in Washington.

"I wish some of our colleagues in Congress had more environmental education," McGovern said. "We have some colleagues who don't even believe in climate change."

McGovern's visit to the Hitchcock Center comes as the center is in the midst of a \$5.8 million capital campaign to construct a larger, more environmentally friendly building on the Hampshire College campus. It is expected to open in two years.

Julie Johnson, the center's executive director, said that the current space at Larch Hill Conservation Area, inside a renovated carriage house for the past 40 years, no longer meets the needs of the 8,000 people throughout the region it serves annually.



Groundbreaking on the new building, conceived by designLAB Architects of Boston, is expected early in 2015, with the project to be complete by summer or fall 2016. The new structure will be built in a way to meet conditions of the Living Building Challenge, which Johnson said is the best indication of just how little impact it will have on its surroundings. "It's really a completely different breed of building," Johnson said.

The center got a step closer to meeting its fundraising objectives Thursday when it was given a \$600,000 matching grant from the state's Cultural Facilities Fund. "With that, we're now at \$3.6 million of the \$5.8 million goal," Johnson said.

The building will include natural ventilation, roof-mounted solar panels and rainwater collection barrels. It will also be a net zero energy and net zero water building.

Because the building won't be tied into municipal water or sewer, it will use composting toilets that are believed to be the first of their kind in Amherst, Johnson said.

McGovern said he is familiar with composting toilets from Abby Rockefeller, who founded the Clivus Multrum composting toilet. Their presence at the center might inspire others to install them. "Hopefully it will be contagious, Everyone will want do it," McGovern said.

McGovern said it is important that Hitchcock lead the way in showing how to build both an environmental and functional building. He remembers a trip to Africa in which he observed that the famous snows of Mount Kilimanjaro have been diminished because of climate change, and there has been a chain reaction of negative effects for the people who live near the site because of the snow's disappearance.

If the Hitchcock Center is successful, it can show others that being environmentally friendly doesn't mean living without light or heat or other modern amenities. "You don't have to sacrifice your standard of living," McGovern said.

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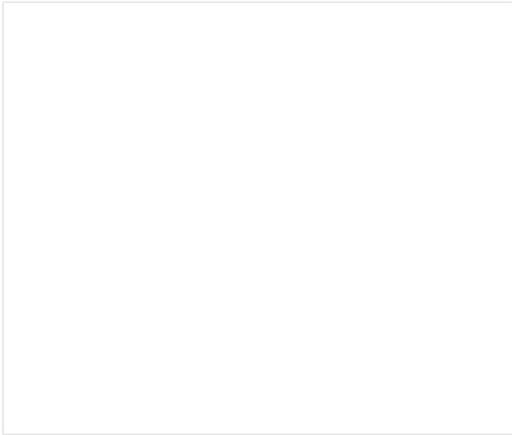
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Olver, who is working on the fundraising campaign, said that he gave one of his first seminars on climate change at a Hitchcock Center classroom in the late 1990s. The new building, Olver said, will use a lot of wood, which has less carbon footprint than steel and concrete.

McGovern said he hopes to encourage others to come to the center and help complete the fundraising, noting that federal earmarks, which Olver once used, are no longer allowed. These could include having representatives from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Interior Department visit, and possibly U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey. "My assignment is to get as many of them to come here at one time," McGovern said. "If they have good ideas, we want to hear them now."

Before departing, McGovern also got to meet two animals that live at the center, Speedy, a 55-year-old eastern box turtle, and Maisie, a corn snake.



Prior to the tour, McGovern attended a ribbon-cutting for the Olympia Oaks affordable housing project in Amherst. Some of those 42 units are opening later this month.

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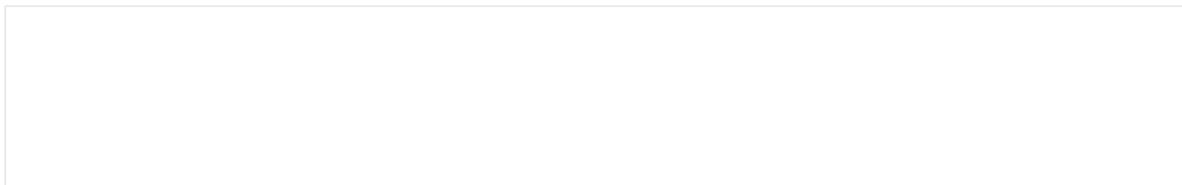
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