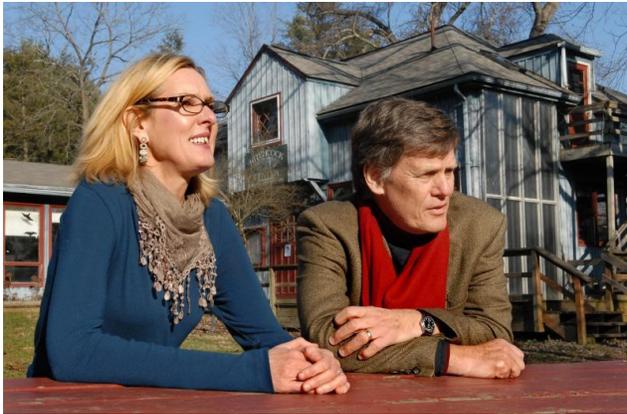


New Hitchcock Center site identified at Hampshire

By SCOTT MERZBACH Staff Writer

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AMHERST — Land on West Street between the Hampshire College Farm Center and the Red Barn will be the location for a new energy-efficient building to house the Hitchcock Center for the Environment.

“It’s a beautiful site with access to natural resources and a wonderful views,” said Julie Johnson, executive director of the Hitchcock Center.

The 7,000-square-foot building, which will operate on ecological design principles such as zero net energy and zero net water, is expected to be ready for a fall 2016 or spring 2017 opening, Johnson said. It is less than four miles from the center’s current home at Larch Hill Conservation Area on South Pleasant Street.

The site selection was recently approved by the Hampshire College Board of Trustees, which owns the land and will enter into a long-term lease with the Hitchcock Center.

With the site identified, the Hitchcock Center is hiring a design team for what is expected to be a \$4 million to \$5 million building, Johnson said.

The design process will be led by designLAB Architects of Boston, Johnson said, which will work with other architects and sustainability consultants and engineers on the plans.

The building is expected to blend into its surrounding natural landscape, Sam Batchelor, one of the lead architects for designLAB, said in a statement.

“We are excited about the creation of a new home for the center, one that represents the values we hope to live by, fosters dialogue with the natural world, and continues to live and grow with the future of the organization,” Batchelor said.

Hitchcock officials decided more than a year ago that a new building is essential to serve the community, as the center has doubled the number of programs it offers in the last 10 years and now serves nearly 6,500 children and adults each year.

The center began life as Long Plain Nature Center in Leverett before moving to a former carriage house at Larch Hill in 1976.

The design process foreshadows a capital campaign that will seek to raise around \$6 million to pay for the building and reserves to manage it, Johnson said.

Jonathan Lash, president of Hampshire College, said in a statement this signals the beginning of the creative process.

“We are looking forward to welcoming the Hitchcock Center and its remarkable program to the Hampshire campus and we foresee many wonderful partnerships that the Center’s presence will enable,” Lash said.

Colleen Kelley, the Hitchcock Center’s educational director, said staff will assist in the design process so that the center will have both indoor and outdoor spaces for programs.

“We want to create spaces where people will be inspired to explore, motivated to ask questions, and filled with possibility and hope for the future,” Kelley said.

Hitchcock is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and the hope is the new building will be instrumental in the success of the next 50 years.

“In our minds it is absolutely essential we move to maintain our educational mission and be at the forefront of environmental education in the 21st century,” Johnson said.