

## Onondaga County looks for new use for historic Carnegie Library building in Syracuse

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**By Rick Moriarty/The Post-Standard**



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Onondaga County is looking for a new use for the Carnegie Library building overlooking Columbus Circle in Syracuse.

Syracuse, NY -- Onondaga County is once again the owner of the historic Carnegie Library building overlooking Syracuse's Columbus Circle, and it's looking for a buyer for the 110-year-old structure that served as a library for eight decades.

Built by the city of Syracuse in 1905, the building first came into the county's possession in 1976 when the county's system took over operation of the city's libraries.

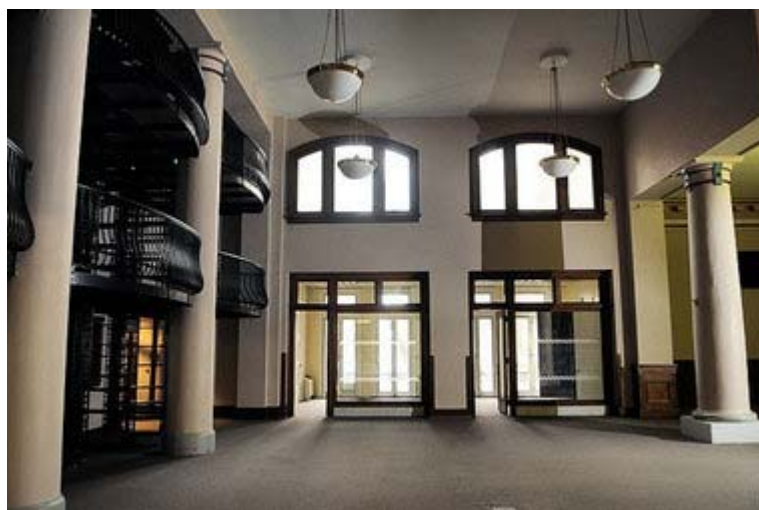
In 1996, the Carnegie Redevelopment Corp., a local development corporation, acquired the building and performed a \$3.6 million renovation for the city school district.

The school district leased the building, initially for a business education program for high school students. More recently, it housed a program for students with behavioral problems.

When its 15-year lease of the building expired recently, the school district did not exercise its option for a 10-year extension.

Tom Ferrara, director of facilities for the school district, said the building's tall ceilings and large rooms did not work well as classroom space. And the district's departure from the building will save the district about \$250,000 a year, he said.

The district had been paying \$355,000 a year to lease the building, and state aid covered all but \$50,000. But in addition to the cost of the lease,



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The interior of the Carnegie Library building has changed little since 1905.

the district spent \$46,000 a year on utilities and assigned two custodians to maintain the building, Ferrara said.



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The Carnegie Library building, opened in 1905, features a curved marble staircase.

Lease payments over the years were enough to pay off the \$3.6 million in bonds that were sold by Carnegie Redevelopment Corp. to finance the renovations, said William Fisher, Onondaga County deputy county executive. Under the terms of the district's lease, once the bonds were paid off, ownership of the building was to revert to the county, he said.

Fisher said County Executive Joanie Mahoney would like to see the building sold to a private party so that it could be added to the tax rolls for the first time. However, he said she has not ruled out other options that might provide other benefits to taxpayers, such as reducing other leased offices.

The three-story, 53,000-square-foot building was constructed at 335 Montgomery St. with a \$200,000 grant from steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie — one of nearly 1,700 libraries that he funded in the United States. It opened two years before the Onondaga County Courthouse adjacent to it on Columbus Circle.

The Carnegie housed the Syracuse Public Library, which became the central library for the county library system in 1976.

In 1988, the county opened a new, bigger central library in the Galleries of Syracuse on South Salina Street and closed the Carnegie Library. The building sat vacant and fell into disrepair until the renovation in the mid-1990s.

Designed by Syracuse architect James Randall, the building has a steel frame clad in Onondaga limestone. Its interior has the look of a museum, with lots of open spaces that remain despite the building's recent use as classroom space. Its large marble vestibule and grand curved marble staircase has changed little since 1905.



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Many of the rooms in the Carnegie Library building look much the way they did when the library opened 106 years ago.



Merike Treier, executive director of the Downtown Committee of Syracuse, said communities have found many other uses for Carnegie libraries once their uses as libraries ended. The new uses include



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Onondaga County Public Library

Carnegie Library when it opened in 1905.

retail stores, private residences, museums, municipal offices, coffee shops and cultural centers, she said.

The county Legislature would have to approve of any sale of the building.

The building is assessed by the city at \$2.6 million. However, no property taxes have ever been paid on the building because it has always had a municipal use.

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