The current Kalkaska County Library (KCL), constructed in 1939, is more than a public library. It’s also a community center that fosters early literacy development, workforce readiness skills, and digital competence for the 18,000 residents in this rural corner of Michigan.

Though full of historic charm, KCL has long since exceeded its design capacity. Built during a period in which libraries served mainly as repositories for books, or maybe a quiet reading area, the facility’s current footprint doesn’t support the 21st century programming and technological offerings consistent with the needs of its largely economically marginalized patrons.

Current federal funding investments are improving broadband access within rural communities. However, without a modernized structure, KCL is limited in its ability to engage isolated residents with the technological literacy programs needed to mitigate the digital divide and empower residents to reach their career, health, and education goals.

The funding objectives outlined by the Treasury Department support the scope of this project. The Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund has become available to us just when the residents of Kalkaska County need it most.

“Projects to construct or improve libraries that provide public access to the internet for purposes including work, education, and health monitoring such as offering digital skills programs and support for community members engaging in virtual learning.”

TOTAL CAMPAIGN GOAL: $9,718,200

The KCL Board of Trustees and staff are proud to present this shovel-ready project for funding consideration. The time is now to invest in this small rural library that has the chance to do so much for so many within our community!
Why not just renovate the existing library?
The current KCL facility is obsolete and can no longer meet the community’s needs. It presents technical and physical limitations that prevent students, families, and residents from accessing programming consistent with other regional libraries. Furthermore, the building has electrical constraints, and recently experienced extensive flooding damage. It’s time to start new with a building intentionally designed for the 21st century.

What are the needs in Kalkaska County?
Kalkaska County is home to a largely rural population, and demographics in the region reflect some of the obstacles inherent in rural settings. The per capita income is roughly twenty percent below Michigan’s and $10,000 below the United States average. Only 11.9% of the residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 13% lack a high school diploma. Furthermore, roughly 14% of the population lives with a disability. The economic, education, and health needs within Kalkaska County only further highlight the need for a new library that is more accessible and better equipped to support residents.

How shovel-ready is this project?
Very. The Board of Trustees, and the Friends of the Kalkaska Library nonprofit group have worked for years to lay the groundwork for this proposal. Michigan-based architects and engineers have designed comprehensive plans that will provide KCL with the technology and facility infrastructure it needs to serve the community. Property has been secured adjacent to the current setting that will allow the library to continue its role as an anchor of the downtown economic corridor. This centralized location, within walking distance of an elementary, middle, and high school, will allow the library to remain an easily accessible resource for area families, students, and educators.

What is the timeline for this project?
Assuming readily available labor, construction of the library can begin as soon as funding is procured. The building itself should require 8 months of construction from beginning to end, with additional months needed to outfit the interior and furnishings.

How can I learn more?
Call or e-mail John Roberts, Library Director, today! He is ready to give tours that underscore the current needs and opportunities, as well as answer any and all questions about this project.