

NINA MOINI: The Hamline Midway neighborhood in Saint Paul will soon have a new library after three years without one. The 92-year-old building was decommissioned back in 2023. And then construction began last year, in 2025. The library is the first to be completed out of three that are slated for renovations in Saint Paul. And this Saturday, the new building will have a grand opening.

Joining me now with more is Maureen Hartman, Director of Saint Paul Public Libraries. Thanks for being here, Maureen.

**MAUREEN
HARTMAN:** Oh, thank you so much for having me.

NINA MOINI: Also happy to have Beth Burns, who's executive director of the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. Thanks for being with us, as well, Beth.

BETH BURNS: Very glad to be here.

NINA MOINI: Great to have both of your perspectives. I know this was an effort among many people. But Maureen, would you tell us first about some of the new features of the library? I know accessibility was one of the main factors that led to the initial reconstruction.

**MAUREEN
HARTMAN:** Yeah. Thank you. We are so proud to be bringing this library to our community. We heard a couple of really important things from community members. We heard that it was so important to have community and neighborhood cultures represented in our library. We heard that accessibility was key, that everybody could get through the same door.

We also heard that space for children's and-- children and family was going to be so important in this library, not just the children and families that are here in our neighborhood, but those children and family in the future. We're really proud to have five different public art pieces represented from neighborhood artists inside and outside of the building. We have a-- beautiful new Play and Learn spaces.

We also heard from community members they wanted a community room and study rooms to access. And we're really excited to have those as well as a story time garden right off the children's area.

NINA MOINI: Thanks for summarizing some of those features. It has been a process. As you both know, the project was held up for some time by litigation after some folks in the community wanted the historic library to be preserved. I understand, though, that there were some elements that were able to be preserved, Maureen. Could you tell us about those?

**MAUREEN
HARTMAN:** Yeah, I'd love to do that. We really heard from community members that they wanted a library that meets the needs of today, but that it's also really important to honor the history that's come before us. And so the entry into one of our community meeting rooms is the arch that was on the 1930 building, really prominently displayed, really proud to have that cleaned up.

We were able to salvage some bricks from the exterior that you'll see around that archway, and also in the story time garden. We were also able to reuse some of the wood that was on the old stage in the basement. And so you'll see that cleaned up and looking beautiful around the community meeting room entryway.

NINA MOINI: Now, Beth, would you tell us about the role of the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library with this new library? It's a fun name of your group. But tell folks what you all do.

BETH BURNS: Absolutely. Everybody is a friend of the library. But our role for more than 80 years has been to really be the private partner to this public entity, our beloved public library in Saint Paul. And so we show up in a number of ways. We do fundraising. And projects like this in Saint Paul are always public-private partnerships.

So we are currently in a campaign raising \$10 million to make transformations in libraries across the city. We also do advocacy and work closely with elected officials to make sure that the library remains front of mind and a priority and really understood for the role that it plays in the community.

And then we do programming. I can't wait for the Hamline Midway Library to reopen. And we can bring back a beloved program that we've done there for years called the Fireside Series.

And so we work with the library. We take our lead from the library. But really, for all the people who live in Saint Paul that truly love and value the public library, we are their conduit to getting involved and saying, how can I help make this happen?

NINA MOINI: It's hard to understate the role of libraries in communities. I feel like there are so many roles that people may not think of initially of how a library is critical to a community beyond checking out books. Would you share, Maureen, just some of the services, other services, that might be available to folks there?

MAUREEN HARTMAN: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate you recognizing that. Certainly, we have books. That's usually the first thing that people think about when they think about libraries. But we also have computers. And more and more, we are a place for people to get broadband access.

We are a place for folks to log on to their telehealth appointment and their job interview and their school-- their students' conference. We are a place for folks to get out of the heat and use the restroom. And we have quiet spaces for parents to be with their children or for community members to use those prayer spaces.

Almost anything in our community that people are seeking out, including job help and other resources, can be found in our library, either through books or through referrals to individuals or community organizations throughout the city.

NINA MOINI: Beth, do you have anything to add to that? Sometimes, it feels like it's a third space or a place for families to come. They can get different things done. Kids can enjoy. What do you think?

BETH BURNS: Well, we hear this all the time. And it is why people step forward and say, I want to be a Friend of the Library. It's really that recognition that there are so few spaces that open their doors every single day and say, you are welcome here. There's no asterisks to that.

These are free public spaces that welcome people in. And we don't have a lot of that anymore that doesn't require purchasing a cup of coffee or aligning with a particular doctrine. This is really the civic commons.

And I think we are increasingly valuing that and all of these resources that are available for free, even if we're not the ones using them ourselves. We know that maybe our neighbor takes advantage of Homework Center and we check out a book or somebody attends a music performance.

I think it's easy to overlook libraries because they are stable and have been here for so long. But right now, I think this is a moment for libraries. We are really understanding the role and power of public infrastructure that is there to meet the moment and be there for all people.

NINA MOINI: And Maureen, to build off of that, this is part of a greater initiative called Transforming Libraries. And we mentioned at the top the two other libraries that are going to be renovated. Would you tell us about this overall initiative and the process?

MAUREEN HARTMAN: Yes. Back in 2018, we continued to ask our community members what was important about libraries. And community members told us that our libraries are well loved. And they also told us that they're well used, but they're also well worn. And community members told us that they wanted to invest in libraries, and they wanted to invest in particular in all of our library locations.

And so our Transforming Libraries initiative is making technology investments in all of our library locations in the city of Saint Paul as well as Play and Learn investments. And Play and Learn is a-- more intentional spaces for children and their caregivers to interact and play and learn together alongside those books-- and also significant investments in three library locations across our city that haven't seen investments in over 30 years. And the Hamline Midway Library is the first of those.

Our Hayden Heights Library on the greater East Side is under construction. And we hope to have that opened up in 2027, and in the years beyond, looking to renovate our Riverview Library on Saint Paul's West Side.

So we are so excited and grateful to the city and the state and the federal funding that's making that a reality, and then our gratitude to their Friends, who are, just as Beth said, part of that public-private partnership that's so critical in realizing that vision.

NINA MOINI: And we only have about a minute left, Maureen. But tell us about the-- what's going on this Saturday and how people can take part.

MAUREEN HARTMAN: Everybody should come down, 1558 Minnehaha. It's on the corner of Snelling and Minnehaha. Starting at 10:30, we're going to do a story time. About 11:15, we'll do some remarks and some ribbon cutting. But as I've told everybody, we'll be partying all day.

We will have ice cream. It'll be a hot one. So we'll have water. We'll have a DJ. We'll have activities going on. The air conditioning will be working inside. So-- just want to see our library.

NINA MOINI: It'll be a great time. Folks should come out. It's going to be hot, too, like you mentioned. Thank you both so much. Take care. Thanks for stopping by.

MAUREEN HARTMAN: Thank you.

BETH BURNS: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: Maureen Hartman is director of Saint Paul Public Library. And Beth Burns is executive director of the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. I'm Nina Moini. Thanks so much for tuning in to *Minnesota Now*. Have a great rest of your day.