

Williams College Begins \$204 Million Project to Expand Science Facilities

By Scott Stafforrd - The Berkshire Eagle
Published June 26, 2016



Blasting has started in the first step of a four-year, 204 million science facility expansion project at Williams College (Scott Stafforrd — The Berkshire Eagle)

WILLIAMSTOWN — Hopes for a better science education, and more of it, are driving a \$204 million, 177,000-square-foot expansion of the science facilities at Williams College.

But first, workers need to blast down as deep as 20 feet through a subterranean rock ledge just south of the Morley Science Labs to allow for foundation support structures to be installed.

Blasting will be occurring on weekdays, and according to project manager Jason Miner, the blasts are set for 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day.

All those explosions are needed because so many more students are seeking science majors that the current facilities are outdated and have required creative approaches, which has wound up spreading some sections into other campus spaces, according to college officials.

Angela Schaeffer, chief communications officer at Williams, said in 2000 about 27 percent of students were science majors. Today, roughly 45 percent of students are science majors.

In that time, she noted, the nature of science learning has also changed, with new technology, more focus on research and the growth of research involving more than one educational discipline, the needs of a science facility are substantially different than they were at the turn of the century.

“Science itself has changed,” Schaeffer said. “It required more flexible lab space, which allows more interdisciplinary work to be done. With this expansion, we’ll have the technology we need and the flexibility we need for tomorrow and in the decades to come.”

The work will involve the construction of two buildings and the demolition of another.

The ledge removal is slated to last about five weeks. The placement of concrete footings and foundations is expected in late July or early August. Then concrete work is expected to last about two months, followed by structural steel placement in the fall. The first building should be completed by May 2017 — a 77,000-square-foot expansion that will house research labs for biology, chemistry and physics.

Last year, in preparation for the expansion project behind Morley Science Labs, one house was relocated and a second demolished.

Part of the process will include the construction of temporary classroom and office space on Stetson Court this summer, Miner said.

Demolition of the Bronfman Science Building is slated for 2018. Another building will be erected in its place, with about 100,000 square feet of classrooms and offices.

The entire science center project is expected to be done in 2020 at an estimated cost of \$204 million.

The buildings will be in keeping with the college’s green-building posture, and while increasing the entire science complex’s footprint by 30 percent, they will use significantly less energy than the existing Bronfman building.

The projects are expected to bring construction-related traffic to the area, especially on Walden Street, which will be the main point of entry to the Science Center work site this summer. All construction vehicles will be prohibited from traveling on Spring and Hoxsey streets, and will instead access the site from Stetson Court on the west and Latham Street on the east.

Contractor parking will be limited to a small number of signed locations. The public may continue to park in all of the currently available public lots, including the former town garage site on Water Street.

“We’re working hard with the town and with Spring Street merchants to mitigate the effects of this construction, especially regarding traffic and parking,” said Rita Coppola-Wallace, executive director of design and construction. “People who come to the street will be aware of the work going on to varying degrees depending on what’s taking place at that particular day and time. And all the businesses on Spring Street should be able to remain open their usual hours.”