Portland Public Library (PPL) and Maine Historical Society (MHS) have undertaken an innovative and forward-looking project that is a model for non-profit collaboration and leadership. Together, we are developing a state-of-the-art collections management facility in Portland that will:

- radically improve the care and management of our collections
- transform our ability to enrich and support communities throughout Maine through expanded public programs and services
- provide the foundation for the continued transformation of PPL and MHS campuses on Congress Street and the revitalization of downtown Portland

The project described here is entrepreneurial, designed for sustainability, and will serve as a cornerstone for long-term strategic and financial planning at both organizations.

The Project

PPL and MHS have jointly purchased a 35,500 square foot facility at 1000 Riverside Street in Portland and together are developing it into a state-of-the-art center for managing and storing our collections—the foundation for the programs, services, and educational resources that we offer. For PPL, it will enable daily access to and movement of circulating collections between the new facility, Main Library, three local branches, and libraries throughout Maine. It will also serve as the base of operations for the Bookmobile which is providing expanded resources to neighborhoods throughout Portland. For MHS, the facility will provide climate-controlled storage space that ensures the long-term preservation of critical museum and library collections, and space to process collections and prepare exhibits. For both organizations, it will move critical back-end activities out of prime Congress Street real estate and provide the space and facilities to conduct those activities efficiently and cost-effectively.

Non-Profit Leadership

The decision to purchase this facility was the result of an intensive year-long study undertaken by the leadership and staff of both organizations. That included extensive investigation of PPL and MHS’s short and long-term needs, detailed study of multiple facilities, analysis of the real estate market, and consideration of alternative approaches. The Boards of PPL and MHS approved the project in October, purchase was completed in November, and renovation was completed in July 2014.

This project represents a new model for deep non-profit collaboration. In a quickly changing economic and cultural landscape, all Maine non-profits need to think deeply about their relationship to their communities, how their work relates to other organizations, and to find new ways to share resources. We are accomplishing this through:

- **Innovative collaboration**: This is a structural relationship between PPL and MHS. We are combining forces to solve a problem that neither could address effectively on its own.
  - PPL and MHS have purchased the building and designed fit-up jointly, are sharing construction costs equally, and raising all funds together.
  - PPL and MHS each own a condominium unit—a valuable asset—and maintain their own space but will manage the facility together.
Renovation and fit-up support the unique programs of each organization, make the facility efficient to operate, and address long-term capital needs (including HVAC and roofs).

- PPL and MHS will share additional resources, including transportation to the site, and are finding new opportunities for collaboration and coordination between our staffs.

- **Entrepreneurship.** This collaboration creates and fosters new opportunities and ways of working.
  
  - **Solar.** PPL and MHS are seeking solar investors. The installation of solar equipment at the facility will generate sufficient electricity to operate the Riverside facility and subsidize electricity usage at PPL and MHS’s Congress Street campuses.
  
  - **Site development.** PPL and MHS are engaged in serious discussions with non-profit and for-profit organizations with significant collections storage needs who are interested in joining us and being part of further development on the campus.

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**An Investment in Maine and on Congress Street**

Ultimately, this project is about the future, and investing in the long-term vitality of PPL and MHS’s core, mission-focused activities: innovative public programs and services that enrich the lives and work of diverse constituencies throughout Maine.

PPL and MHS are close neighbors and occupy critical locations on Congress Street. Going forward, we will play an essential role—geographically, architecturally, and culturally—in Portland’s vibrancy, continued revitalization, and economic development, supporting the goals outlined in the City’s Economic Development Vision + Plan (2011). PPL and MHS have made significant recent investments in their facilities and have ambitious plans going forward:

- PPL is preparing to continue the transformation of its Main Branch, including the addition of a grand reading room and new creative/maker spaces. In 2011, PPL completed the first phase of its renovation which has transformed the Monument Square streetscape and been central to the library’s effort to redefine the 21st Century library experience.

- MHS is planning a substantial renovation or replacement of its museum building at 489 Congress Street that focuses on visitor engagement and experience, including the exploration of development opportunities. In 2010, MHS completed a $9.5 million renovation and expansion of its Brown Research Library and the Longfellow Garden. The Wadsworth-Longfellow House underwent a complete restoration in 2002.

The Riverside facility will free up approximately 35,500 square feet of space on PPL and MHS’s campuses, creating an incredible opportunity to transform our presences on Congress Street and the landscape of the city.

For further information, please contact Steve Podgajny, Executive Director, Portland Public Library, at 871-1700, or Steve Bromage, Executive Director, Maine Historical Society, at 774-1822.