

# **The New Northport Town Office & Community Center FAQ's**

## **The Project**

### ***1. What is the current state of the Northport Town Office & Fire Station, and why do we need a new building?***

The Town Office building, located at 16 Beech Hill Road, has served the Town of Northport since the 1930's. In the early 1990's, the one-story building was raised and a first floor was added underneath to increase space. Since then, many problems with the building have arisen. The Beech Hill Fire Station was built in 2003. While the fire station building is sound, upgrades will improve environmental & safety conditions and the capability of our volunteer fire and emergency crew.

Northport's population grew by more than half between the 1980s and 2024 and municipal mandates required by the State are increasing. The Town has outgrown the space. Storage space and space for public meetings and for conducting elections are inadequate. Two-by-four construction and poor insulation make the building inefficient and uncomfortable to heat and cool. There is an inadequate filtration system for drinking water, which has unsafe levels of arsenic. Public offices on the second floor do not meet ADA accessibility requirements for a public building because there is no elevator, and the only access to the Town's finance, code enforcement, and administrator's offices is by stairway. In 2018, and confirmed again in 2024, engineering studies found the Town Office building to be structurally compromised. As a result, the Town's insurance company limited insurance coverage on the building in the summer of 2024. It has become clear that addressing these limitations and risks can no longer be put off.

### ***2. How long has this project been in the works, and what led up to where we are now?***

As early as 2012 the Select Board began to acknowledge the likely need for a new building in Northport's future.

**2017-2022** Following the 2018 engineer's report, the Select Board began the process of exploring options for updating the town office building. The Select Board considered renovating the existing building, building a new structure elsewhere on the site, and building a new office that connected to the existing fire station. Because the estimated costs for each option were similar, and only the combined town office and fire station addressed all the shortcomings, the Board decided to pursue that plan. Preliminary plans were drafted for sharing in a town meeting in early 2020, but when Covid hit, that meeting couldn't happen. The project was put on hold during the pandemic.

**2022-2024** The Select Board revived planning for a new building in 2022 and reviewed all the earlier proposals. The Board also considered proceeding in phases, but ultimately rejected that approach as impractical. Preliminary plans were drafted for a new structure attached to the Fire Station with a room large enough to hold the annual Town Meeting. The Town applied for and

was approved for a \$2.3 million earmark from Congress, pending passage of the 2025 federal budget.

**May & June, 2024** After presentation of the preliminary plans at a public hearing in May, the plans were approved by a vote of 84% at the Annual Town Meeting in June.

**Fall, 2024** Working with Town officials, and with input from Town staff and Northport's Climate Resilience Committee, 2A Architects created final construction drawings for the proposed building. Based on construction plan details, the revised estimate for construction was \$4.2 M plus another \$900,000 for non-construction costs (design, permits, appliances, etc.) for a revised total of about \$5.2 million. By February the project was ready to put out to bid, pending passage of the federal budget.

**March, 2025** In a setback, Congress failed to pass the federal budget that included \$2.3 million earmarked for the project. This meant that funding would need to come almost entirely from a taxpayer bond. The Town reapplied for 2026 congressional funding in case Congress approves a budget next year.

**April, 2025** Northport residents gathered at the Edna Drinkwater School to hear updates on the project, review the plans & ask questions. Concerned that the revised cost would put too much burden on taxpayers, the Select Board decided to propose a municipal bond of no more than \$3.5 million, with remaining costs to be raised from grants and a capital campaign, and/or 2026 federal funding if it should become available.

**June 16, 2025** The Annual Northport Town Meeting voted 83-28 to authorize a municipal bond of \$3.5 million, and to allow the Select Board to receive grants and donations for construction of the new building, and to proceed with construction as soon as funding is secured.

**July 11, 2025** The Town learned that its request for \$2.35 million in federal funding for the project had been included in the federal appropriations bill for FY2026.

**August 1, 2025** The Town learned that its request for \$2.35 million in federal funding had been approved by the full Senate.

### ***3. What did the Town Meeting approve in June?***

At the Annual Town Meeting on Monday, June 16, voters approved six warrant articles related to the Town Office project. All six articles were voted on together and approved by a vote of 83-28.

The first of those articles (Article 18), authorizes the Select Board to borrow up to \$3.5 million to fund the project, with the expectation that the Town will raise the remaining funds through grants and donations. This \$3.5 million is close to what the projected construction costs were in May 2024 (\$3.1 million).

Article 19 authorizes the Select Board to formally establish a fundraising campaign and to allow donors to have naming rights for rooms or equipment in the new building.

Article 20 authorizes the creation of a dedicated account to receive donations and grant funds for the project.

Article 21 changes the name of the name of the account currently used for the Town Office project.

Article 22 authorizes the Select Board to raise \$230,000 for the Town Office project to cover all the expenses prior to beginning construction, including moving and storage costs, rental of temporary office space, any remaining design or permitting costs, and interest on any debt incurred during construction.

Article 23 authorizes the Select Board to enter into a lease for temporary office space.

#### ***4. What will the new Town Office be like? How does the current design address the needs of the community?***

The [floor plan](#) addresses Town needs that the Select Board identified throughout the design process. It will have

- Ample office space for our municipal administrative staff & town operations on one floor, fully ADA compliant.
- Modern and efficient HVAC system – heat pumps for heating and cooling, with a system for heat recovery air exchange.
- Fire-proof vault storage for town records and a map room for storage and review of large maps.
- Digital access space/reading room for the public.
- A meeting room that fits up to 88 seated guests (144 standing), with an attached serving kitchen with filtered water & adequate public restrooms, to be used for Town meetings, voting, fire and emergency trainings, Select Board & committee meetings, community gatherings, and rentable space for private or other outside events.
- Ability to serve as an emergency shelter during extreme weather or other disasters.
- Public safety improvements including shower & laundry facilities, a breakroom for crew returning from emergency calls, and offices

### **The Costs**

#### ***5. What will this new building cost, and where will the funding come from?***

- The estimated cost of construction work put out to bid is \$4,260,805 (Jan 2025 estimate)
- Additional anticipated “owner” costs are about \$890,000 (moving, storage, furnishing, permitting, etc.)
- Total estimated cost: approximately \$5,200,000

The Town has re-submitted a formal request for the next round of Congressional funding (2026) for \$2.3 million (the maximum amount that Sen. Collins will support) and is applying for several grants. As of July 11, the Town’s request for funding has been included in the appropriations bill for FY2026. A Fundraising Committee is currently working on a Capital Campaign and will launch the public phase of that campaign soon. Whatever is not funded by Congress, grants, or the Capital Campaign will need to be financed by a municipal bond. The Select Board is working to minimize the size of any municipal bond needed to reduce taxpayer burden.

#### ***6. What about utility costs in this new facility? How will they compare to the old building?***

Currently, the Town Office & Fire Station use oil for heat, at a cost of about \$3,500 per year (variable), plus maintenance costs on an aging boiler. Electricity is roughly \$2,100 for each building, totaling about \$4,200 per year. Insulation in the current building is not optimal, and windows & doors are leaky. Today's cost to heat and cool the current building does not result in reliably comfortable conditions in winter or summer for those who work there day in and day out.

The new building is designed with efficient electric heat pumps (or "mini-splits") in each room; these units serve dual functions as heaters and AC units. The new structure will meet the most current energy efficiency standards adopted by the State this spring. The Systems Engineer roughly estimates that the new building, more than twice the square footage of the existing one, could use as much as \$25,000/year in electricity. However, with a nearly all-electric building, it would be possible to reduce electricity costs by investing in solar panels (either on the roof, or a solar farm elsewhere), conceivably to less than \$100/month, depending on how many panels we invested in. We would be positioned to take advantage of significant savings over time, and to reduce dependency on fossil fuel. The only fossil fuel burned would be to heat the fire station (as it is now) -- all other heating will be with heat pumps (electricity).

### ***7. What are the likely funding sources and amounts?***

The Select Board proposes capping the municipal bond at \$3.5 million. Because construction is not likely to start until 2026 (awaiting a decision on the federal budget), we're using a \$7.0 million project total to account for potential increased cost due to cost of materials, inflation, and economic uncertainties. However ultimately, the amount of the bond will depend upon the success of the combined efforts of the capital campaign, grants & federal funding. See our estimate below of the difference between the various possibilities.

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Range of Possible Funding</b>	
Congressional funding 2026	\$0	\$2.35 million
Northern Border Comm grant	\$0	\$500,000
Large Donors & Other Grants	\$500,000	\$3.5 million
Local Contributions	\$100,000	\$300,000
Municipal Bond	\$3.5 million	\$1 million

### ***8. How would my tax bill be affected by a bond, and for how long?***

Based on an interest rate of 4.8% for a 20-year bond of \$3.5 million, estimated annual payments would be \$263,500.00. To balance these payments, the tax rate would increase by a little under 5%, or, about \$86.00 for every \$100,000 of a property's taxable valuation.

### ***9. Can we delay the project?***

We can, but at a cost. Covid delayed the project in 2020, and costs will likely continue to rise with each year of inactivity. Continued delay would mean either (1) spending money now to meet insurance requirements (add temporary supporting wall in the Clerk’s office, fire escape repair, and other required fixes); (2) rent a different space until building new. Estimated cost to rent the maintenance building at Point Lookout would be around \$48,000/yr, including utilities & insurance. A one-year delay could increase the total cost by as much as 20% to approximately \$6.2 million. A volatile economy, potential tariffs and widespread uncertainty are likely to impact costs going forward. Waiting would likely add to projected overall expense.

**10. Can we repair the existing building?**

Our insurance company has asked the Town to address the deficiencies identified by the structural engineer’s reports, including repair to the fire escape and remedying the structural inadequacies. A structural engineer has given us options to reinforce the structural problems, such as adding support posts or a wall that goes down to the ground under the Clerk’s office.

	Short-term cost	Long-term cost
Minimal repair, just enough to get insurance	\$75,000	Continued limitations associated with vault and storage, meeting space, accessibility & 2nd floor offices, voting space, uncomfortable & inefficient heating & cooling.
Repair & expand existing building	~\$1.0 million in 2018 dollars	2nd floor offices, small & inflexible space to meet, storage limitations, smaller parking area

Simply repairing the structure to gain insurance would only be a temporary step – none of its other limitations – space, accessibility, efficiency -- would be addressed.