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After years of setbacks, Northport's vision for a new Town Office and Community Center is finally becoming reality.

By Jim Leonard Jul 6, 2026



A decade-long effort to replace Northport's century-old town office appears to be coming to fruition.

Photo by Jim Leonard

NORTHPORT — For nearly a decade, Northport has refused to let one setback define the future of its most ambitious municipal project.

The town has weathered a pandemic, skyrocketing construction costs, inflation, supply chain disruptions, the loss of millions of dollars in anticipated federal funding and an uncertain economy. Yet each obstacle has been met with another round of planning, public discussion and determination.

Today, that persistence appears to be paying off.

After years of uncertainty, Northport's proposed Town Office and Community Center project is closer than ever to becoming reality. If current timelines hold, construction could begin in the spring of 2027, transforming what began as an aging-building replacement into one of the largest and most consequential civic investments in the town's history.

The project began in 2017, when town officials concluded that Northport's nearly 100-year-old municipal building could no longer adequately serve a growing community of more than 1,500 residents. The building suffers from accessibility limitations, cramped office space, inadequate records storage and lacks sufficient room for public meetings. Some municipal offices remain inaccessible to residents with mobility challenges, and the building simply no longer reflects the needs of modern local government.

Rather than settle for a replacement office, town leaders envisioned something much larger.

Plans evolved into a combined Town Office, Community Center and Public Safety facility connected to the existing fire station. The proposal would create a permanent home for municipal government while adding a large community meeting room capable of hosting annual town meetings, a community kitchen, improved public safety facilities and flexible gathering space for residents.

Perhaps most significantly, it would give Northport something it has never truly had, a civic center where residents could gather for meetings, celebrations and community life.

Progress, however, proved anything but straightforward.

Like countless public projects across the country, Northport's plans slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic. When James Kossuth became town manager in August 2021, the proposal had largely stalled. Reviving the project quickly became one of his first major priorities.

Five years into his tenure, Kossuth says shepherding the project has become one of the defining challenges of his career.

"It's fun, but it's a challenge," Kossuth said. "The only consistent thing is that, once you solve one problem, three others seem to pop up. There are a lot of steps along the way, but we're getting there."

Just as momentum returned, new challenges emerged.

Construction estimates climbed approximately 37 percent as inflation and supply chain disruptions reshaped the building industry. At the same time, Northport learned that its aging town office had lost part of its insurance coverage, making replacement even more urgent.

Then came what many considered the project's biggest test.

In March 2025, Northport lost an anticipated \$2.35 million congressional earmark after Congress failed to approve the federal budget containing the funding. A project that was ready to move toward bidding suddenly faced a massive financial gap.

For many communities, that might have marked the end.

Instead, Northport regrouped.

Town officials immediately reapplied for congressional funding while continuing to refine the building's design. Even as national tariff discussions and uncertainty surrounding municipal borrowing created additional financial questions, the town refused to put the project on hold.

Recognizing that taxpayers would ultimately decide the project's future, officials placed an unprecedented emphasis on public engagement.

Working alongside architects, engineers, the Select Board and the Climate Resilience Committee, Kossuth helped refine the building while improving its long-term energy efficiency. A volunteer capital campaign committee was established to pursue grants and private donations.

Public information meetings invited residents into the planning process rather than asking them simply to approve the finished product.

One of the most significant came in April 2025, when more than 60 residents attended an informational session outlining project costs, financing options and the challenges still ahead.

Rather than requesting authority to borrow the project's full projected cost, town leaders proposed limiting municipal borrowing to \$3.5 million while pursuing grants, federal assistance and private fundraising to reduce the burden on taxpayers.

Residents responded with remarkable support.

At the June 2025 annual town meeting, voters approved the financing plan by an 83-28 margin. Attendance was roughly double what Northport typically experiences, demonstrating both the community's interest and its willingness to invest in the project's future.

The town's perseverance was rewarded six months later.

After an 18-month application process, Northport learned in December 2025 that it had secured \$2.325 million in federal funding through Maine's congressional delegation, effectively restoring the financial foundation needed to move the project forward.

Community members continued doing their part as well.

As of June 2026, local fundraising efforts had generated nearly \$300,000, reducing the amount taxpayers may ultimately need to borrow while reinforcing the widespread community commitment behind the project.

Success also created new opportunities.

Residents approved the purchase of an adjoining 2.8-acre parcel that will provide additional flexibility for construction and future expansion. The town has since purchased the land and buildings adjacent to the current Town Office at 16 Beech Hill Road, where municipal operations will temporarily relocate while the existing building is demolished and the new facility is constructed on its current site.

"We bought the property next door and that will serve as our temporary town office while the new one is built," Kossuth said.

Residents also unanimously authorized construction of a 43-kilowatt solar array designed to lower long-term operating costs while advancing Northport's climate resilience goals.

Throughout the project, transparency has remained a central priority.

Kossuth launched the monthly Northport News newsletter in 2023, now reaching more than 630 residents, over three-quarters of Northport households. The town has also developed an extensive online project page with design plans, frequently asked questions, project updates and supporting documents, while annual workshops have allowed residents to follow the project's progress firsthand.

Today, Northport stands on the verge of turning nearly ten years of planning into construction.

Federal funding has been secured. Bonding authority has been approved by voters. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised privately. Additional land has been acquired. A solar array has been approved. Design revisions and permitting continue this summer before

temporary municipal offices relocate to the adjacent property and construction bids are sought during the winter of 2026-27.

If work begins next spring as anticipated, the finished building will provide Northport with far more than modern municipal offices.

It will create the town's first true civic gathering place, expand public safety facilities, improve accessibility for residents and establish a permanent home for local government that can serve the community for decades.

Kossuth intentionally refers to the effort as the "Community Center Town Office Project," believing that description better captures its long-term purpose.

"What excites me is that everyone in town will be able to help participate in something that will change the fabric of this community," he said. "This will give us a place to build community together."

Perhaps that best explains why the project has survived nearly a decade of unexpected obstacles.

Northport repeatedly encountered reasons to scale back its ambitions or walk away altogether. Instead, town officials and residents chose to adapt, revise, regroup and continue moving forward.

The result is more than a building nearing construction. It is a testament to a community whose resilience proved every bit as important as the concrete and steel that will soon rise from the ground, and whose greatest legacy may be creating a place where future generations of Northport residents can gather, connect and build community together.



Jim Leonard
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