

## Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program

### Success Story: Mass Timber Takes Off at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium

**\$2,465,176**

Congressionally Directed  
USDA CF Grant

**\$149,900**

USDA Community Facilities  
Grant

**\$369,800**

USDA Community Facilities  
Direct Loan

**\$197,000**

USDA Rural Business  
Development Grant

**\$3,900,000**

Funding from State of  
Vermont & Others

**7,600**

St. Johnsbury Residents  
Benefitting from Annex

#### Inspiring Wonder to **BENEFIT THE NATURAL WORLD**

Since Naturalist Franklin Fairbanks opened the doors of the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury, Vermont in 1891, it has been a popular place of learning and wonder for thousands of visitors. In 1961, the Museum built the state's first public planetarium, and in 2018 began a project that would once again create new ideas and widen educational avenues for the explorers wandering its aisles: a 21st-century science annex built with Mass Timber (MT). Using glue-laminated timber beams and cross-laminated panels instead of conventional steel and concrete, MT is a promising construction technology that could redefine the forest economy and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 60 percent.

#### Building Capital Despite **SUPPLY & COST DISRUPTIONS**

The Museum approached Philanthropist Oscar Tang—who had taken refuge in St. Johnsbury as a child after fleeing the violent Chinese Communist Revolution—and offered him a legacy namesake that he accepted with an early investment. Rural Development (RD) and the Museum also have a history, including a \$47,000 Community Facilities (CF) grant in 2020 for an exhibit about eco-smart MT tech. The partnership produced yet again with a \$197,000 USDA [Rural Business Development Grant](#) and \$519,700 CF loan & grant package. But this time it wasn't nearly enough: COVID sent costs soaring when the project was just getting underway, more than doubling its original budget.

#### Creating a Lasting **LEGACY OF COMMUNITY LEARNING**

Though construction projects were stalling throughout the country, the Museum had friends in every nook of the funding universe and wasn't about to give up. Community College of Vermont (CCV) is among them, and bought in for more office space within the Annex. Partnerships were lining up but a big funding gap remained, so Vermont Senator Peter Welch (then Representative) stepped in to bring the project home with more than \$2.4 million in congressionally directed spending. In early '24, he joined Oscar Tang and USDA RD Deputy Under Secretary Farah Ahmad to cut the ribbon on the Tang Science Annex, a place to inspire wonder and curiosity for generations to come.

**For program regulations and requirements, please go to the [USDA RD CF fact sheets](#)**



*USDA Deputy Under Secretary for RD Farah Ahmad (at podium) joined Philanthropist Oscar Tang and VT Sen. Peter Welch (seated, from left) in February '24 to cut the ribbon of the new Tang Science Annex, made with locally harvested Eastern Hemlock Mass Timber*

