



News Release

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Senator Welch, USDA Rural Development Gather with St. Johnsbury Partners to Cut Ribbon on New Tang Science Annex

Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium Opens First Mass Timber Building in Vermont, Will House Exhibits and Community College of Vermont Offices

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vt., Feb. 15, 2024 – U.S. Department of Agriculture ([USDA](https://www.usda.gov)) Under Secretary for Rural Development, **Farah Ahmad**, joined Vermont **Senator Peter Welch**, USDA State Director for Vermont & New Hampshire **Sarah Waring**, and other key stakeholders today at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium to officially open the new Tang Science Annex during a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Since 2017, the USDA has invested roughly \$3.7 million in the Museum, including a \$2,465,176 Community Facilities grant secured by Senator Welch in February 2023 through Congressionally Directed Spending. The Annex is named after noted **Philanthropist Oscar Tang**, who lived in St. Johnsbury as a boy after fleeing the Communist Revolution of the late 40s. He was in attendance to introduce the unique learning center to a rural community he loves.

“This new science annex and renewal of the Fairbanks Museum will not only extend the museum’s natural science education in the 21st century, but will act as a catalyst for the renewal of St. Johnsbury, a town that first welcomed me to this country 75 years ago,” said Tang. “I am so privileged to be in this public/private partnership with the USDA and Senator Welch in helping make this happen.”

The Tang Science Annex is Vermont’s first building made with Mass Timber, a promising technology that replaces conventional construction materials with panels and pillars made of laminated wood. Softwood species can be used, and for the Annex project, Eastern Hemlock was harvested in the Northeast within 100 miles of the construction site. Mass Timber buildings reduce construction time by 25 percent and use 90 percent less traffic than conventional methods. Along with new interactive exhibits on meteorology, astronomy and Mass Timber, the Annex will house office space for the Community College of Vermont.

“From the groundbreaking two years ago to today’s ribbon cutting, it’s been outstanding to watch the Fairbanks Science Museum Annex project be built from the ground up,” said Senator Welch. “Museums both reflect and shape our communities, and this project will serve as an investment not just in the future of the Fairbanks Museum, but in St. Johnsbury as a whole. This will showcase an innovative new use low-carbon timber product called mass timber—the first example of the product in Vermont and the first ever funded by the USDA—add an estimated 70 new jobs over the coming five years, and make science more accessible to all Vermonters.”

“USDA is committed to ensuring that people living in rural areas have access to opportunity and amenities right at home,” Ahmad said. “Having access to high-quality community facilities is an important part of that mission. This investment in Vermont’s Fairbanks Museum demonstrates how the Biden-Harris Administration is partnering with rural communities as well as leaders like Senator Welch, to ensure this important regional asset is available to rural families and that its expansion uses mass timber grown here in Vermont.”

Financial contributors to the project include the Museum, Northern Border Regional Commission, State of Vermont, Stockman Foundation, Vermont Capital Investment Program, National Park Service, Vermont Housing Conservation Board, Preservation Trust of Vermont, Placeholder Fund, Vermont Arts Council, Town of St. Johnsbury, and various philanthropic organizations and initiatives.

Founded in 1889 by St. Johnsbury businessman Franklin Fairbanks, the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium promotes a mission to ‘inspire wonder, curiosity, and responsibility for the natural world.’ Since 1961, the Lyman Spitzer Jr. Planetarium, Vermont’s only public planetarium, conducts daily guided tours of the cosmos for thousands of annual visitors.

Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration, Rural Development helps expand economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans in rural areas. This assistance supports infrastructure improvements; business development; housing; community facilities such as schools, public safety and health care; and high-speed internet access in high-poverty areas. For more information, visit www.rd.usda.gov. To subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit the [GovDelivery subscriber page](#).

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