

Norway Opera House awarded engineering grant

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An undated photo of the Norway Opera House. *Supplied photo*

NORWAY — The Norway Opera House has been awarded a grant to help fund its continuing rehabilitation.

The \$50,000 grant is from the Maine Development Foundation's Maine Downtown Center. It will cover engineering plans to replace roof trusses of the building and signals the start of the fourth phase of a two-decade effort to completely restore it.

"This is one of the first steps of our final phase," said Scott Berk, vice president of Norway Opera House Corp. Inc. "It will cost about \$4 million to complete the project."

The Opera House was built in 1894, a performing arts auditorium with balcony that seated more than 500 people. After decades of private ownership it fell into disrepair. In 2003, it was named by Maine Preservation as among one of Maine's Most Endangered Historic Properties, about the time it was purchased by Barry Mazzaglia of Londonderry, New Hampshire.

Its roof has been in a precarious condition since 2007 after it partially collapsed and caused significant water damage. With Mazzaglia refusing to bring the building into compliance, the town of Norway seized the property through eminent domain in 2009.

After a lengthy court battle, a donation by former selectman Bill Damon and his wife Bea made it possible to pay Mazzaglia \$180,000 and gain control of the landmark. And then began a community supported, multi-phase project to save it.

In 2011, the town deeded the building to the Norway, Maine Opera House Corporation, Inc.. The group utilized a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant to stabilize the building. The next year, six storefronts on the first floor were completely renovated and have been occupied by specialty retailers since 2012. The project received a Maine Preservation Honor award for Commercial-Restoration/ Rehabilitation in 2013.

Over the past several years, Norway Opera House Corp. has carried out a series of fundraising and grant acquisitions from organizations, including the Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation, Davis Family Foundation and Maine Community Foundation.

Now that work can begin on rehabilitating the auditorium, Berk said the organization will begin planning a capital campaign toward the \$4 million price tag.

He said there is no timetable currently in place to start fundraising. The engineering phase covered by the grant is expected to be completed by next year.

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The balcony of the Norway Opera House. The roof is supported by a series of supports put in place in 2011.



A \$50,000 grant for the Norway Opera House will pay for a new roof system to be engineered. The total cost to rehabilitate the historic landmark is estimated at \$4 million. *Supplied photo*

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