



Maine Redevelopment's Lightning Stabilization Grant Helps Municipalities Address the Challenge of Vacant Schools

Augusta, ME – August 14, 2026 – Maine Redevelopment is pleased to announce that it has awarded Lightning Stabilization Grants to the Town of Union and Town of Westfield. In Union, \$8,827 was awarded to repair the roof and siding on their Thompson Community Center, the former Thompson School. In Westfield, \$25,000 will be used toward replacing the roof of the former Westfield Elementary School ahead of the winter season.

The Westfield Elementary School served area students from 1955 to 1999. After years of vacancy, the Town officially took ownership in 2023 and is working to redevelop the property. With a new roof, the Town can continue transforming the former school into a space that will benefit the community. The Union School, which had previously transitioned from an active school to the Thompson Community Center, has been vacant since 2021. This stabilization work will keep the building from deteriorating further as the town and Maine Redevelopment work to determine its future reuse as community, commercial, housing, or for mixed-use.

The Lightning Stabilization Grant Program helps municipalities address distressed properties they own that are at risk of further deterioration, potentially beyond the point of being viable for reuse. The intent of the up-to-\$25,000 grant is to “pause” decline and create time for community visioning and planning efforts to begin or continue.

“We truly appreciate Maine Redevelopment’s generosity and support for this project. We look forward to the school once again being a cornerstone and gathering space for the community,” said Holly Wood of the Westfield Select Board. “I’m grateful for Maine Redevelopment’s assistance, both financially and with their expertise. They have been a steadfast partner to the town,” shared Todd Souza, Union’s Town Manager.

Maine faces a growing challenge as school closures leave municipalities with costly, aging buildings and no clear reuse plans. Closures are increasing due to demographic shifts, declining enrollment, and rising costs, with more than 30 vacant schools identified statewide, including 15 since 2024. To address this, Maine Redevelopment is developing a scalable School Reuse Toolkit, which will offer step-by-step guidance on assessment, planning, community engagement, financing, and programming. Designed for adaptability, the toolkit will help communities transform vacant schools into productive assets and ensure they do not face these challenges alone.

Scott LaFlamme, Executive Director of Maine Redevelopment, emphasized the broader impact of preserving and repurposing former schools: “We’re excited to help communities like Westfield and Union find the next chapter for their former schools. These are more than just properties; they are cherished community assets. Their revitalization is a signal that the community is moving forward and new opportunities are emerging.”

If your community is interested in applying for the fall round of the Lightning Stabilization Grant (deadline August 31, 2026), or you want more information to support your community’s school reuse, please contact Rose Nelson at rnelson@maineredevelopment.org.

For more information or to learn how you can support the projects in Westfield and Union, please contact or visit the town offices. To learn more about how Maine Redevelopment can assist your community, please visit www.maineredevelopment.org or email info@maineredevelopment.org.