

LONG ISLAND / TOWNS

Montauk Playhouse transformation, in the making for decades, nearly finished



A new aquatic center and a cultural center will cap the transformation of East Hampton's historic Montauk Playhouse. Credit: Montauk Playhouse Community Cent/Barbara Lynne Photography

By **Sam Kmack**

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The transformation of East Hampton's historic Montauk Playhouse into a community hub, in the making for nearly three decades, is nearly complete.

The property at 240 Edgemere St. was built as part of a resort in the 1920s, then donated to the town in 1999. Renovations began soon after, and a new gym, basketball court and day care center opened as part of the first half of the project in 2006.

The final portion of the multimillion-dollar initiative is now set to open before the end of the year, marking the end of what East Hampton Councilman David Lys described as "the most complex and perhaps most costly project within the township ever accomplished."

That final phase includes a new aquatic center with indoor swimming pools – a rarity for East Hampton residents during the winter – and a cultural center for events like concerts, art shows and TED Talks, to help keep the community vibrant after Labor Day.

“Tumbleweed Tuesday comes and it's ... pretty quiet here,” said Jennifer Carney-Iacono, president of the nonprofit [Montauk Playhouse Community Center Foundation](#), referring to the [day after Labor Day](#). “Our teens and our seniors and all of us need a place to gather. We now have a space for the community to come together, learn, enjoy performances and even break bread.”

Specific opening dates for the new facilities have not yet been set but are expected to be determined soon, Carney-Iacono said.

Kids' swim safety in mind

The pools will be used, in part, for swimming lessons. “We don’t want to have any children getting swamped by a wave and not being able to swim,” Carney-Iacono said. “If you can swim year-round, you maintain your swimming skills and you’re just a stronger person to be able to handle the ocean.”

The new additions cost about \$16 million. The town contributed about \$5.6 million, [New York State put \\$1.75 million toward](#) the effort, and private donations totaled about \$8.25 million, according to the Playhouse Foundation. Gov. Kathy Hochul attended a ribbon-cutting for the new phase last month.

The aquatic center will open this fall after it receives permits from Suffolk County and other minor “punch-list items” are complete, Carney-Iacono told Newsday. Access will be membership-based, and residents will be able to sign up closer to opening day.



An aquatic center is soon set to open. Credit: Montauk Playhouse Community Cent/Barbara Lynne Photography

A company called Imagine Swimming will operate the center. The organization runs four other pools in the metropolitan area and offers a slew of swimming programs, including lessons for both kids and adults.

The complex will have two pools on the first floor of the building. They will be the only indoor public-use pools in East Hampton, aside from one at the [local YMCA](#).

The larger will be a 25-yard, four-lane lap pool that's certified for lifeguard training and intended "for fitness, instruction and recreation," according to the Playhouse Foundation. The other "shallow" pool is for "instruction, recreation, and therapeutic use."

A 'third space' in which to gather

The new cultural center, which will be on the second floor, still "needs final capital fundraising for AV equipment" before it can open up, according to Carney-Iacono, who said, "our plan is to get there by the end of the year."

The foundation told Newsday the cultural center will include "three large, partitionable event spaces for lectures, classes, meetings, conferences and performances."

Carney-Iacono said it serves a key role as a "third space" for East Enders to gather outside of their homes when outdoor spaces like beaches aren't available.

"We need a third space to maintain mental health, to have our children have some activities," she said. ... "I would love to see my children and their children come to Montauk and have [that]."

Montauk Playhouse remade

- **The playhouse was built** as part of a resort in the 1920s.
- **The property was donated** to East Hampton Town in 1999. Renovations began soon after.
- **The final portion of the multimillion-dollar initiative** includes a new aquatic center and a cultural center. Those features are set to open before the end of the year.



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