

LIBRARY – SITE TOUR

PROJECT: Architectural and Design Services for
the Planning and Design of the
Montague Public Libraries Main Branch

MEETING DATE: May 19, 2025

FACILITATOR: Town of Montague

LOCATION: 201 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

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Notes from Pre-Bid Meeting / Site Tour 5/19/2025

- The upper floor of the Carnegie Library has a wide variety of historical artifacts (many of which date back to 1903) and Montague-specific memorabilia. While some of this may be able to be permanently relocated, a new library space would likely need some storage space to account for these types of items.
- Montague is a high-readership community, with higher-than-average library circulation for a Town of its size.
- The upstairs of the Carnegie Library was formerly used as children’s programming space, but cannot serve this function anymore due to its lack of accessibility. There is also a lack of usable meeting space.
- The ability to have bookable meeting-room space is seen as essential to a new or improved facility.
- The Carnegie Library has asbestos tile, likely has lead paint, and the structural capacity of the upper floor is unknown.
- The Carnegie Library is located on a corner lot at the base of a ledge hill. If the Town decides to expand and renovate the current building, two adjacent properties located to the rear of the building would need to be purchased and demolished, which is unfavorable due to the area’s housing shortage. Additionally, the house immediately to the rear on 7th Street has asbestos siding, and blasting of the ledge would be required.
- Due to MA Historical Commission (MHC) requirements, any expansion of the Carnegie Library would need to “read subservient” to the current building.
- Expanding to the south in the direction of the Soldiers Memorial could also potentially be considered, but would not alleviate the accessibility or parking concerns of the current site.
- If the library moves to a new site, it is unknown what the future of the current building would be, but there has been some interest from local organizations in purchasing it. Having a sufficient plan for the current space would be a crucial part of the project’s political feasibility if the new site is selected. The Town would intend to dispose of the existing building through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process.

- The Carnegie Library has water infiltration issues, with a new roof needed, as well as infiltration through the interior well of the ADA ramp in the southeast corner of the building. A previous driveway runoff issue was alleviated in recent years by pitching the driveway on the eastern side of the building away from, rather than towards, the building. Carpets were removed from the basement after a sewer backup. If the library remains in the current building, the drains under the basement floor would need to be evaluated, which is an arduous task. There is also a possible chimney leak. A dehumidifier is usually running downstairs.
- If the 38 Avenue A site is selected, no MBLC grant funds can be spent on the current building.
- In addition to the MBLC grant, the Town has appropriated local funds for this phase of the project.
- In the early 2000s, there was an unsuccessful project to renovate and expand the Carnegie Library, which failed after MHC imposed requirements that added about \$2 million to the total project cost, which would have needed to come entirely from local sources due to the MBLC grant not being eligible for an increase. Today's LBSC members are critical of the schematic design that took place during this iteration of the project (pictured below), as it nearly created two separate libraries connected to each other by a single hallway, overall being incohesive, while still presenting accessibility and parking concerns. This design called for the taking of 62 7th Street to demolish, and an easement on 34 K Street. The Town did not seriously consider moving to a new site at the time due to political concerns stemming from local attachment to the Carnegie.



submitted image

An artist's rendering shows the proposed expansion for the Carnegie Public Library in Turners Falls.

Decision time for library expansion

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- The Carnegie Library was constructed from 1903-1905 with funds from businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The Town had already begun to outgrow the space by 1915, but was denied its request for additional funding from Carnegie that year.

- Some specific areas which need to be addressed at a new or improved main library branch include a better break room / staff area and storage space for the book sales run by the Friends of the Montague Public Libraries.
- The Carnegie Library is currently heated and cooled through a combination of an oil furnace and mini-splits.
- The Carnegie Library had some basement renovations completed in 2024 which included mold remediation, new lighting, HVAC improvements, and removal of a drop ceiling.
- The handicap parking space in the rear of the building was only added two years ago.
- 38 Avenue A is a vacant site. Former uses included a hotel (originally the Farren House Hotel, later the Grand Trunk Hotel) demolished in the 1960s, followed by a gas station. It is unknown whether any residual effects or contaminants are left over from the gas station, and last year's Phase I environmental assessment recommended additional investigation. The site is next to the state-owned Great Falls Discovery Center, and there is plenty of Town-owned parking in the adjacent 2nd Street lot.
- Initial community input has revealed a strong local preference that a new library not resemble Greenfield's new contemporary-style library, and to instead be harmonious with the brick architecture of downtown Turners Falls. Two stories would be preferred, but the building would need to give the appearance of three stories to blend with adjacent structures.
- Several recent and upcoming demolitions of the Town's former well-known buildings (i.e. Farren Care Center, Strathmore Mill Complex) have made recognition of the community's industrial heritage a sensitive issue locally.
- MHC rejected the Town's consideration to pick up the Carnegie Library and move it to the site at 38 Avenue A, which was initially proposed as a third option alongside renovation/expansion and new construction.
- The Town wants to be cautious in accounting for the two biggest complaints heard from local Library Directors who have moved into new facilities in recent years:
 - 1) Not enough storage space
 - 2) Overly complicated mechanical systems
- We are not committed to LEED certification, but we are a Green Community that abides by the MA Stretch Energy Code.
- The LBSC is open to both the renovation/expansion of the Carnegie Library, and the new construction at 38 Avenue A options, but currently expects new construction to be the more cost-effective and practical option.

Questions asked during site tour:

1. What level of design is needed prior to the Town making a site selection, and how will this be decided?
 - The architect will help with site observation to the extent needed for LBSC to issue a site selection recommendation to the Montague Public Libraries Trustees, who will then vote on which site to proceed. Three conceptual designs will then be developed for the chosen site, before a final concept is chosen for advancing to the MPLCP Level of Design (can be thought of as "SD-plus").
2. How much public engagement will be needed during the site selection process?
 - An open, transparent site selection process is needed, and the Town needs to make a sincere effort to consider both site options. Ultimately, approval of the project will require a two-thirds vote of Montague's Representative Town Meeting, plus a majority

vote at a Town-wide ballot. The most important phase for community engagement will be when choosing between three conceptual options at the chosen site.

3. How many employees work at the Carnegie Library, and how many are present at any given time?
 - The Montague Public Libraries employ 15 staff members across three branches. Eight of them are full-time or full-time equivalent, and at any given time during business hours, around five are usually present at the Carnegie Library.
4. Are documents available from the library's unsuccessful expansion project in the early 2000s?
 - All available documents regarding this iteration of the Library Building Program can be downloaded at the following link: [https://montague-ma.gov/RFP/82/Reference - 1999 Carnegie Library Building Program.zip](https://montague-ma.gov/RFP/82/Reference_-_1999_Carnegie_Library_Building_Program.zip). A ZIP folder containing these documents has also been added to the project webpage on the Town of Montague website.

Questions submitted in writing:

1. When preparing other submissions using the Standard Designer Application Form for Municipalities and Public Agencies not within DSB Jurisdiction (Updated July 2016) we are given a list of services (subconsultants) to include. Is there a certain list of services you are looking for or is that at our own discretion?
 - At a minimum, all required MPLCP submission items must be included. Other services may be included at the discretion of the proposer.
2. "On page 6, Minimum Qualifications #2 – 'Shall guarantee that both the Project Director and/or Project Manager are registered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an architect and have at least five (5) years of experience in the design of public buildings.' - Can you please confirm if 'both' the project director AND project manager need to be registered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an architect and have at least five (5) years of experience in the design of public buildings or just ONE of these team members?"
 - Either the Project Director or Project Manager must meet these requirements, as it is expected that at least one team member be able to certify and stamp project documents accordingly.
3. "Financial strength of organization: Documentation that the firm has the financial resources and stability to undertake a project of this scope and size in conjunction with any other current projects'.- Can you please confirm what documents to provide to prove a firm's financial strength are acceptable?"
 - Acceptable demonstration of financial strength will include a listing of current projects' values with staff allocations. The selected firm will be asked to provide a yearly financial statement.
4. Would you consider removing the requirement of the Standard Designer Application Form for Municipalities and Public Agencies Updated July 2016? Most information provided in this is duplicative of the information asked for in the technical proposal section.
 - No, completion of the Standard Designer Application Form included in the RFP materials is required.