



2013 Turners Falls Livability Plan Community Review

Where Do We Grow From Here?



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Introduction

Why Is it Time for a Check-In?

In 2013, The Montague Select Board adopted the Turners Falls Livability Plan which set a vision in motion for how the Town intends to develop downtown Turners Falls.

Due to its robust community engagement and tailored vision, the Massachusetts Chapter of American Planning Association awarded the plan the *Outstanding Planning Project of 2013*. The community has implemented many objectives identified in the plan including creation of the skatepark, revitalization of the Shea Theater, streetscape enhancements, and improved infrastructure, however much remains to be done and new opportunities have emerged over the last 7 years.

How it Worked.

The agenda for the day-long event was designed by the Planning Department with the following goals in mind: To 1.) Recap accomplishments; 2.) Review upcoming building projects and emerging priorities; 3.) Host a forum for thought-provoking public conversation; and 4.) Brainstorm ideas for important sites in Turners Falls.

On February 1, 2020 the Planning Department and members of the 2013 Livability Plan Advisory Committee hosted “Where Do We Grow from Here?” a day-long event at the Great Falls Discovery Center. The event was open to the public and attended by Town officials and over 80 residents and downtown stakeholders. The program format was multi-faceted and included a power point presentation by the Town Planner, a facilitated panel discussion, and break-out sessions aimed to brainstorm three strategically important priorities for Turners Falls. Additionally, the Planning Department hosted a “youth voice” event at the Brick House Resource Center with downtown teenagers aged 12-17.

“Where Do We Grow From Here?” was recorded by Montague Community Television and is available through their website: <https://montaguetv.org/>

How to Use this Report.

This document is meant to supplement the 2013 Downtown Livability Plan as a reference for public policy decisions affecting downtown, and a tool for those interested in investing and improving Turners Falls.

Completed Projects

Canal St. Municipal Parking Lot (2013)
Overnight parking Pilot Project
(2018, 2019)



Constructed Skatepark (2015)
Unity Park Phase II Rehab (2013)



Downtown pedestrian plaza and lighting replacement (2014)
Expanded downtown lighting (2015)
Spinner Park Rehabilitation (2020-planned)



Route 2 Wayfinding
(2017)



Shea Theater Rehabilitation
(2017-present)

Emerging Focus Areas

Canal District



The six former mill sites sandwiched between the power canal and the Connecticut River share the same character, assets, and development challenges, and accordingly the Planning Department has been working to brand the area as the Turners Falls “Canal District.”

In 2016 the Town commissioned a Canal District Vision Plan to summarize existing planning efforts and identify strategic priorities. Then a series of bleak events in 2017, including a catastrophic arson fire at the abandoned Railroad Salvage Mill (11 Power), the bankruptcy and closure of Southworth/ PaperLogic (36 Canal), the closure of the Fifth Street pedestrian bridge, and the vacancy of FCRHA (42 Canal) forced the Town to re-prioritize planning efforts for the struggling district.

In 2019, two new retail businesses emerged at 42 Canal, breathing new life into the area. In December 2019, the Baker-Polito Administration announced \$2.3M MassWorks Infrastructure Grant for “Canal District Gateway Improvements” which includes a new pedestrian bridge at 5th Street. The project will develop pedestrian amenities, provide infrastructure to support adaptive reuse of 42 and 36 Canal, and spur redevelopment across the District. The 2013 Plan initially called for improving this gateway intersection. The Town will continue to examine other development options for the northern and southern end of the Canal District.

First and Second Streets (Riverfront)



For well over a century, the Connecticut River was a working landscape, a place for industry rather than recreational enjoyment. Over the last 20 years, the Town has worked to redevelop the riverfront for recreation and tourism-related benefits. Strategic infrastructure improvements include redevelopment of Unity Park, the completion of the Canalside Rail Trail and the long-awaited completion of Unity Skatepark. While these improvements have been tremendously successful, private investment in this area has been slow. Momentum is starting to shift.

38 Avenue A: A new mixed-use building with three floors of commercial/office space and nine residential units and is proposed for the site of the former Grand Truck Hotel. This highly visible parcel is symbolically important as a gateway, especially since the downtown core has not seen new construction for decades. Tenants will enjoy views of the river valley from the upper floors.

Town Hall Annex: The Town is in a position to re-think the annex for potential housing or commercial re-use once the DPW is consolidated at the new Turners Falls Road facility.

Second Street/ Unity Park: There is a very interesting synergy being led by business leaders that warrants special attention, as any single project will have a great impact on the neighborhood. The properties directly adjacent to Unity Park are seeing captivating reuse plans for a coffee roaster, a vintage motorcycle shop, individual workshops, a yoga studio, and a proposal for rental tiny homes.

Avenue A Southern Corridor



The Southern Corridor is primarily zoned “Industrial” however more recent businesses in the area are commercial in nature. The Cumberland Farms gas station and convenience store anchors commercial activity and is now joined by a music shop, and a micro-brewery that capitalizes on the adjacent bike path and canal as an amazing recreational resource.

With the Public Works Department scheduled to vacate their 500 Avenue A headquarters in Summer 2020, the Planning Department has begun to plan for adaptive re-use of the .75 acre property known as the Southern Corridor. Brownfields assessments are underway and the Town will solicit interest from potential buyers this summer.

The Planning Department has also been in contact with the owners of the adjacent 4 acre Montague Machine property. While the company remains active in the mill, large portions of the complex are unused and in need of immediate capital repair. The Town intends to work proactively with the owner of Montague Machine to facilitate redevelopment efforts, and avoid the creation of blight.

There is reason to be optimistic. The Montague Machine site enjoys access to full service utilities and unlike other mill properties in the Canal District, has enough land for parking. Its proximity to a well-established residential neighborhood and “The Patch” provides potential for housing components in a future re-use plan. (Current zoning prohibits residential use.)

On the other end of the district at 77 Eleventh, there remains one of the last developable lots in Turners Falls. The Town needs to think about what types of development it would like to see in this prime location.

Streetscape Improvement Program



The Turners Falls streetscape dates back to the 1980's and prominently features large garden planters and shade trees. The Turners Falls Livability Plan made a series of recommendations to compliment the historic, tree-lined street scheme. In 2014 the Planning Department incorporating these recommendations in the streetscape design of block #102- #112 Avenue A, with hope that these improvements would attract private investment. Within one year of finishing the project, two buildings on that block were sold and rehabilitated. Currently all five storefronts are occupied and 13 upper story apartments have been rehabilitated.

The #102-#112 Avenue A streetscape project proved that private investment does follow the lead of public investment. It also established a template for future projects to improve the pedestrian experience including lighting, handicapped accessible sidewalks, public art, and additional seating. Spinner Park and its beloved sculpture will be completely rehabilitated in 2020. Other sections of the downtown core streetscape will be addressed over the next decade primarily with CDBG funding.

Parking Management

Free parking is popular in Turners Falls, but pressure for parking continues to mount with the growth of housing, retail, restaurants, and entertainment. To support this economic growth, a parking management policy needs to be established that:

- * Maximizes existing parking space;
- * Has reasonable, enforceable rules and;
- * Has safe, well-maintained lots.

Recent Example: The winter parking ban (December 1–April 1) is a growing barrier to the rehabilitation of older multi-family properties that lack parking for the modern, two car household. At the urging local residents and landlords the Town initiated a limited winter on-street parking zone *by permit*. This permitting process has been in place since 2018 and helps to address the demand for on-street parking during the winter.

Parking enforcement is a challenge and lot maintenance is increasingly expected from downtown constituents. Municipalities typically raise revenue to cover these expenses through parking and permit fees. Looking forward, The Town should carefully consider a parking management policy.



Stakeholder Panel



Participants: Gina Govoni-Director of FCHRA, Mike Jackson- Editor of Montague Reporter, Peter Chilton- Proprietor of Nova Motorcycles, Lisa Davol-Shea Theater Board of Directors. Moderated by Walter Ramsey. Video available at <https://vimeo.com/391326791>

W.R.: Introduction of the panelists

Lisa Davol: Remembers the bad perception of Turners Falls is the mid-90s. Talks about the beginning of RiverCulture and an inventory about the Turners Falls brand circa 2006: working class, colorful, outdoors, revitalization, authentic, gritty, edgy, accessible, diverse, unpretentious, friendly, community, casual, and warm. This list was contrasted with neighboring communities in the “elite art world” and “precious art town.” Not about changing the image of the town, but “amplifying and highlighting what is unique.”

Gina Govoni: As a newcomer, her perception of Turners Falls is more positive since taking-on directorship in July 2018. Her goal is to provide safe housing for low and moderate income people and community members in recovery. Gina stated that she would like to see more integration between housing authority residents and the larger community; no (or very few) housing authority residents were present at the meeting although there was a specific effort to engage these residents.

Peter Chilton: Nova Motorcycles started in Greenfield in 2014, and moved to Renovators Supply in Millers Falls soon after. There were issues with that location because it was hard to find. The choice was to move to Turners Falls or back to Greenfield but Nova located to a garage on Third Street “because they got more feedback from the Town.” ...“let’s figure it out.”

In 2019 the Nova partners bought Williams Garage on Second Street as well as some additional parcels around their property. They are currently exploring development ideas. Peter thinks the Turners Falls brand is the River; a “big separator” between us and neighboring communities.

W.R. Notes the common theme of up-cycling in Turners Falls.

Peter: TF produces *useful art* which is different than MassMoCa, etc. (swap-meet hip)

Mike Jackson: Branding is “not a big piece of it” for Mike and he asks the question “who is selling what to whom?” While noting that branding is needed to (i.e.) attract good employers, he highlights the recent controversy with the Turners Falls mascot as an example of opposing identity/ branding viewpoints. In 11 years, Mike’s experience is that Turners Falls has moved from a cohesion place where “everyone on the street was just getting by” to residents in a two income tiers. Challenges: housing affordability and availability.

W.R. Is Turners Falls still an affordable place to live or open a business? Is it developing equitably and sustainability in a broad sense, which includes racial equity?

Gina: FCRHA has not increased rents in several years. Rents in Turners Falls are below what the State thinks FCRHA should be charging. There is a gap in funding between local and State levels. There is a need for new mixed-income units and a system to stream-line procedure between various housing authorities.

Lisa: Home ownership is relatively affordable compared to neighboring communities although stock is low. The Shea Theater Arts Center is also working toward equity and affordability by balancing in-house productions with market-rate theater rentals. The Shea is always trying to strike a balance between the bottom-line of the theater, the benefit of certain programming to the community, and the needs of presenting artists.

Peter: The reality is that renovating old buildings, like the Williams Garage, is very expensive. Peter cites example of renovating the “blacksmiths shop” into a hot yoga studio, which was triple the original projected cost due to the poor condition of the historic building.

Mike: Downtown Turners Falls is definitely a unique place, including the architecture, but renovating old housing stock while keeping it affordable is easier said than done. What are the supports including for residents, including for working-class landlords? Transportation continues to be an issue about and there is a need to talk regionally (and historically) about ways to reimagine bus service and increase ridership. Turners used to have street cars.

W.R. Having a walkable downtown, including a full service food store, is a huge plus.

Gina: Since FCRHA moved to the industrial park, the number of walk-ins to the office has dropped. She also sees transportation an obstacle and would love to see a more racial diversity.

W.R. What are our hidden vulnerabilities? What can we do better? Hopes and Dreams?

Lisa: Hopes for the future include developing studio space for artists, especially important for artists with dirty or loud equipment that does not fit into a residential neighborhood. Having studio space for artists contributes to builds a sense of community- people can work together to craft initiatives for the future. + Artist in residency program.

Peter: Agrees with the need for space. Nova is pursuing projects on their empty lot on Second Street, including artist work space. Looking for “directed and controlled” outside investment.

Mike: Hopes the town that continues to feel “welcoming, affordable, safe, healthy.”

Gina: Completed a capital needs assessment on three FCRHA buildings and hopes they are rehabilitated. + Additional mixed-income housing, more wayfinding and access to the river.

Questions:

Relicensing of the Utility? Where are we?

W.R. Relicensing is a long and complex process including simple maintenance and river access.

Hopes and Dreams? ADA walkability and more multi-generational projects, Tap into the local colleges, state of the art planetarium, senior residence center on the water, access to the river, strategic use of our natural resources.

How can we organize to support the Town in negotiations?

W.R. Having a clear vision, supported by the community, is a tool for negotiations.

Broad Summary of Themes:

Branding: Tag-sale Chic, Industrial-Funky, River, Upcycling

Affordability: Turners remains relatively more affordable compared to the region and similar communities. The housing stock is very old and in need of rehab. Construction is incredibly expensive and that is translated to property values and rents when the units are rehabbed. Our substantial stock of permanently protected deed-restricted affordable housing is an asset. Engaging people who live in downtown affordable housing is a challenge.

Community vulnerabilities: Turners Falls shares the same vulnerabilities as the larger world: climate change, civil unrest, economic resiliency.

Scenario Planning Sessions

SESSION A: *Transforming the Canal District:*

Facilitated by Walter Ramsey- Town Planner

Two mills are being rehabilitated with infrastructure support being provided by the town and state. Participants will be tasked to look beyond the gateway project toward next steps for improvements to the Canal District. 1) Housing at Railroad Salvage?, 2) a riverfront park at Indeck?, 3) a cannabis cluster at Strathmore? Each option is a multi-million dollar endeavor on its own. Citizen Planners will explore the tradeoffs and opportunity costs associated with investing in one project over another and weigh opportunities for leveraging outside funding sources.

CANAL DISTRICT SWOT ANALYSIS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Natural beauty, views, wildlife corridor, historic architecture, proximity to downtown, proximity to Route 2, bike path, geology, water features, hydro power	Perception of Contamination, lacks Lighting: Pedestrian and Vehicular, Lack of Parking, Industrial Design, No gateway or wayfinding Not accessible to people of all abilities, Liability to the Town, Sites are linear but not connected, extremely limited access on Canal Rd, Montague's financial position.
Opportunities	Threats
River access, New Construction less sustainable, leverage recent influx of public investment in Gateway project, FERC re-licensing, REWILD and RESTORE the riparian area, Small Community means BIG impact, Physical structure is being maintained, Prepare for the next wave of interest, 6 th Street Bridge – art installation hydroponics/cultivation: cannabis, Mycology, greenhouses, grow housing and employment opportunities and tax base, Link to 6th St/ The Patch, Bike Path spur West of the Canal, Future River Sports	Industrial/residential incompatibility challenges, Economic downtown/ reliance on a volatile industry like cannabis, Arson, Structural deterioration, FERC requirements/ regulation changes can affect development, non-collaborative Property owners

CANAL DISTRICT SCENARIO DISCUSSION

Scenario 1: Railroad Salvage Redevelopment

Objective: remove blight and identify a productive re-use

Presented Scenario: Property is a collapsed, blighted structure. Between 50 to 100 Units mixed-income housing are proposed, potentially with some office space. Town would partner with private developer. With a private developer on board, Grants may be obtained to remediate the site and remove the blighted structure. The Town would need to select a developer and the Town would work with the developer to address infrastructure and access challenges over the canal. What investments would be required of the Town would be, substantially leveraged by private development. Property would re-enter the tax rolls and new residents would support the economy.

Public Feedback: The site is seriously blighted and needs to be cleaned. The blight drags down the potential of

	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario A
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the whole village. This would be a good site to locate new housing. Participants expressed a demand for housing that reflects the diversity of the community: mixed income, senior housing, and family housing. Participants agreed that this has the best potential for housing compared to the other sites in the Canal District. If housing is not feasible in the market, this site could be a candidate for revegetation/riparian restoration.

Scenario 2: Strathmore Re-use: Cannabis-compatible industry:

Objective: balance preserve historic integrity with removal of blight and identify a productive reuse

Property is mothballed and will be abated as of this summer. Conditions are deteriorating significantly. Portions of structures are failing. Significant development limitations RE: access, parking, and utilities. The property is a multi-million dollar liability. \$4M to demo, \$20+M to rehab

Presented Scenario: There is an opportunity to sell property to a cultivation-compatible business. Leverage private investment to advance town's interests. A cultivation-compatible business might be additional cultivation or a research facility. The secure site makes the property attractive for this use. Due to the extremely high cost to adapt the property the town may need make some financial concession or be satisfied with long-term phased proposition whereby significant portions of the mill are mothballed or possibly demolished.

Public Feedback: The cannabis market is rapidly changing and is not a well-understood market, but it is likely the best chance of productive re-use of the Strathmore Mill in the current market. The town should explore this opportunity and any others that the market may come to bear. This property is a novel challenge for the community.

Scenario 3: Indeck: Riverfront Park

Objective: remove blight and identify a productive reuse

Located at end of District, Site has severe access limitations making virtually all commercial or residential uses unviable.

Presented Scenario: Riverfront park would cost upwards of \$2M. The project would most likely require public funding with a significant local investment. It would not generate tax revenue but it would transform the Canal District and how it is used by the public. A riverfront park might help redevelop Strathmore over the long term but would not be a silver bullet. In the meantime the park would be located next to the vacant Strathmore complex.

Public Feedback: Allow for some passive recreational use: river access for fishing and boating, walking paths. , but also let this area revegetate into a natural riparian area. This may take some expense to remediate and revegetate, but should be low cost- environmentally friendly proposition. There are no other viable uses give the access constraints of the site.

Use	Mixed-income housing	Cannabis-compatible	Riverfront Park
Site	RR Salvage (15 Power)	Strathmore (20 Canal)	Indeck (8 Canal)
proposal	50 to 100 housing units	50 jobs	-
Blight factor (current)	High	Medium	Medium
municipal liability (cost to remediate/stabilize site)	Medium	High	Medium
Municipal Revenue potential	Medium	High/ Medium	Low
Economic impact	Medium/High	Low/Medium	Low
town financial contribution	Medium	Medium	High
timeframe	Less than 5 years	Less than 3 years	5 to 10 years
Project risk/ dependencies on external market factors	High	High	High
Impact of no action over next 5-10 years	High	High	Medium

SESSION B: *Visioning the Southern Corridor of Avenue A* Facilitated by Matt Lord- Member Montague Planning Board

Public Works will vacate their 500 Avenue A facility in 2020. What could be the future of the underutilized Montague Machine Mill site? Both properties have access to the Canal and Bike path, are proximal to downtown, and have access to utilities. The area is currently zoned for industrial use. Citizen planners will be asked to consider a future vision for the area.

AVE A SOUTH CORRIDOR SWOT ANALYSIS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Strengths	Weaknesses
access to water & sewer, space and parking, a “flexible canvas”, Feels like its own area (think Eastworks in Easthampton), “Cohesiveness” ,“Best of both worlds”, 10 min. walk to downtown ,Multiple walking routes, Access to bike path , Able to avoid Montague City Road with multiple walking routes, The size of Montague Machine could be viewed as an asset, canal/waterfront, healthy mix of uses.	Current condition of Montague Machine and DPW Building, Currently no lodging in the area, Visitors can’t spend the night, Future industrial uses could cause noise pollution/ nuisances on the patch, condition of the DPW building, Montague machine and DPW rehab will be a significant expense, Montague machine property underutilized, auto-oriented/ not pedestrian friendly area, Does not feel inviting, 11 th /Avenue Intersection is not ideal
Opportunities	Threats
Possible space for art workspace, Create better connections to downtown, Possible residential development either senior housing or assisted living at Montage machine, Some desire to retain a place/space for local workers and to try and save the industrial aspect of the area, Opportunity for town directed development, Bike path/ waterfront is underutilized- better connections	The need for public investment, brownfields status of properties, real or perceived, Residential/industrial use incompatibility, Strip mall style development at 77 11th? One incompatible use can change the district, Traffic impacts

Current land uses in the Southern Avenue A study area: Woodworking shop, Machine shop, Stamp engraving, Car wash, Contractor yard –arborist, Commercial painting contractor, Music retail shop, Gas station with convenience store, Public works garage (to be re-purposed), Single family and two-family homes, brewery, Auto body

SOUTHERN CORRIDOR SCENARIO DISCUSSION

Two potential development scenarios are described. Participants will consider each

Scenario A: “Rail Trail living”

Primary focus: housing with complimentary commercial.

2-3 story condos overlooking the canal. Montague Machine site redeveloped into a mix of uses with a variety of housing types. Retail with direct connections to the bike path. Think patio bar on the bike path. Immediate access to nature along the canal, 5 minute walk to stores/library, 10 minute flat walk to downtown.

Scenario B: “Maker’s District”

Primary focus: employment and commerce

A place where people come to make things. Raw and finished commercial space for contractors, tradespeople, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Types of encouraged uses: craft workshops, precision manufacturing, professional offices, artist studio spaces, commercial activity that is complimentary to light industrial activity.

Is there a clear vision for one over the other? Are these mutually incompatible? Do people have their own vision?

Public Discussion Summary

- Many of the people in attendance of this group lived in the general area and were very vocal in both their excitement as well as concern over the future direction of the southern corridor.
- Majority of people want to see some form of a residential development aspect, particularly at the Montague machine site rather than the Avenue A properties. Town needs to carefully plan how residential and industrial/art space could co-exist
- Fiscal impacts: commercial uses are taxed at higher rate than residential, so there may be value to retaining industrial/commercial. It may be more fiscally responsible for the town to sell the old DPW rather than re-use for municipal purposes.
- A zone change will not necessarily change development in the area, it depends largely on market forces.
- Consensus that whatever the first project is in this area will seriously influence the direction of the area and future developments.
- Overall desire for the area to serve the people who live there.
- Many of the people clearly expressed that they really like this area, particularly the ones who lived there. People liked that it sort of has its own identity within downtown Turners Falls but would like to see it become better connected to the main core of downtown.
- Participants noted a demand for “loud” art and industry uses and ones that require a lot of space. These need to be carefully considered so as to not create nuisance to nearby residential areas.

SESSION C: Conceptualizing a Public Art Strategy for Turners Falls

Facilitated by Suzanne LoManto- Cultural Coordinator

Discussion of public art with multiple levels of meaning: Little Mermaid, Copenhagen used as example.

Lisa Davol reviews the 2011 (UMASS) Art Strategy Plan: Art placement has a strong focus on “gateways” and quality of life improvements for residents. The UMASS study still works, but our art strategy could expand.

Prompt- Besides gateways (strong intersections of transportation) what other locations have potential for interpretation?

Montague City: Bus stop at/around the Farren / there is room for a sculpture garden off Depot Road

Waterfront, especially at night. (Nightscapes)

In the River/ Indeck Site - where the Canal and the Connecticut River divide (Luella)

Underpass from L Street to Central (“it’s creepy at night”)

On the bikepath

General Comments:

Nightscapes-**Framing and capitalizing on views of the water from the bridge or the hill*

Scale. Not all art needs to be big. Site Specific works- interpretations of Site

Whimsy

THEMES/OUR STORY

Native American History positioned near the water.

Art/Ecology/River

Small, inclusive, community, “non-artist” participation in placemaking

PROJECTS:

Reduce Visual Clutter/ Repair- remove what is damaged

Paint “Turners Falls on the coal silo” or at least power wash it!

Positive response to a “drop spindle” call for art: An annual competition for Spinner Park

Murals AS maps (Luella)

Youth Perspective



Youth Panel Conversation, 2/26/2020

Brick House Community Resource Center

12 Young people, ages 12-17

Facilitators: W. Ramsey, S. LoManto and Jane Goodale (Youth Program Manager, Brick House)

Participants were primarily teenaged downtown residents who regularly attend the Brick House after school program. In operation since 1990, the mission of The Brick House is to support individual, family and community well-being through educational programming, economic collaboration and youth development. In 2013, a similar focus group called for building the skate park, and upgrading basketball courts at Unity Park- two aspects of the plan the Town was able to deliver. The 2020 focus group makes it clear that there is still much to be done better engage and provide for the youth of Turners Falls.

General Comments by the young people fell into about three areas: 1.) They LOVE the Brick House; 2.) They have difficulty plugging into the larger community; 3.) They are looking for more educational resources, 4.) They are looking for more recreational resources.

YOUTH PANEL COMMENTS

1.) *Teens Love the Brick House*

Teens value the Brick House because they can be themselves. It's a safe place to hang-out.

"...with a Million Dollars I would build a cross between the YMCA and the Brick House"

2.) *Youth have Difficulty plugging into the larger community*

Downtown built for adults not youth.

"We don't feel welcome in downtown shops and restaurants"

Most employment opportunities are for 18+ ; opportunities are in Greenfield

Shea Theater does not have programming that interests us

No place that features youth-oriented performances

Teens were not aware of a summer park movie series or Shea Movie Series

Transportation is difficult/participants often walk between Turners and Greenfield.

Some have tried FRTA but without desirable results:

Hard to figure out how bus system works

Trouble finding stops/ schedules/ times

Bus schedule is not favorable.

3) *It is hard to get around for those without a car*

Transportation is difficult/participants often walk between Turners and Greenfield.

Some have tried FRTA but without desirable results:

Hard to figure out how bus system works

Trouble finding stops/ schedules/ times

Bus schedule is not favorable.

3) *Looking for more educational resources.*

No common place to do homework/study, The Brick House is too loud.

Young people feel that the Carnegie Library is adult-oriented and they are not welcomed

Brick House computers are slow and are glitchy.

4) *Looking for more recreational resources.*

Youth report extremely limited indoor recreation options, especially in the winter.

Teens have very favorable views of the Skatepark, even if they don't skate themselves

There was strong support for the night skate events- an event specifically for teens.

Downtown youth do not use bicycles for fear that that would be stolen by other youth.

Youth report strong support for Unity Park in general but would like a basketball court and other outdoor amenities closer to the Brick House. Access to swimming

YOUTH PANEL CONCLUSIONS

In order to improve the quality of life for teens, the town could support the following objectives

- Improved pedestrian connections to Greenfield
- Consider opportunities for teen employment activity when evaluating economic development proposals (traditionally, low wage/seasonable jobs). A whitewater/rafting industry could support teenage employment for example
- Support more frequent and expanded transit connections to Greenfield
- Post clearer instructions, schedules, and maps at downtown transit stops.
- There is an opportunity for better communication between RiverCulture, The Shea and the Brick House. Local youth should have access to the arts.
- Consider opportunities for winter recreational opportunities for teens
- Make downtown more bike friendly, so biking becomes normalized among teens.
- Explore if downtown business owners would participate in an apprenticeship program for local youth.
- There was strong support for a YMCA recreation center for youths; the ideal placement of a youth center would be at Unity Park, which would consolidate the two places downtown that they appreciate and utilize.
- Consider teen needs in any future planning for library system.
- Town should continue to invest in youth programming offered by the Brick House

Review of Goals and Objectives of the 2013 Livability Plan

Enhanced Connectivity for Pedestrians and Bicyclists			
ID	Project and Program	Status	Description
C1	Install downtown gateway improvements	In Progress	5th street (Canal District Gateway) to be improved in 2021 using a \$2.1M MassWorks Grant. Turners Falls Gill Bridge was rehabbed in 2014. In 2020 a Complete Streets grant will improve the gateway crosswalk at First Street
C2	Improve Connectivity to Canal District Properties	In Progress	5th street pedestrian bridge to be rehabbed in 2021.
C3	Improve handicapped accessibility for downtown buildings	Needs Attention	Still need to identify appropriate models for ADA access to buildings and incorporate into design guidelines.
C4	Enhance connections between Canalside Bike Path and downtown	In Progress	Discovery Center Improved signage to Bike path. Unity Park incorporated a direct link. The Canal District Gateway Improvement project supports objective as well.
Improved Appearance and Functionality of the Avenue A and Third Street Streetscape			
ID	Project and Program	Status	Description
A1	Enhance pedestrian safety and handicapped access	In Progress	Curb extension/ parklet added at the Avenue A and 3rd intersection in 2013 using a CDBG grant. That project implemented a model for an ADA compliant streetscape. Avenue A ADA ramps were repaired in 2017 using a MOD grant.
A2	Reduce curb cuts on Avenue A	Needs Attention	As the town improves the streetscape, each curb cut should be evaluated on case by case basis
A3	Renovate alley entrances to improve pedestrian experience	Needs Attention	As the town improves the streetscape, each curb cut should be evaluated on case by case basis
A4	Improve maintenance	In Progress	Town has recruited a volunteer planter coordinator and new sponsors, but results are mixed and management remains a challenge. In 2015 the Town did a downtown tree inventory. The Tree Committee has been working with the tree warden. Planter irrigation pump will be upgraded in 2020 as part of the Spinner Park Improvements.
A5	Update lighting	In Progress	In 2015, new LED lighting was added. In 2016 the lighting was extended from 5th to 7th including lighting Peskeompskut park. Additional lighting has been designed for 1st to 2nd and the library/War memorial.

A6	Improve public and private signage	Needs Attention	Sign regulations have not yet been developed or passed. Town Hall, Shea Theater, and Discovery Center have updated facility signage.
A7	Infill empty lots with new buildings that fit the historic context	In Progress	A new mixed use block is proposed at 38 Avenue A. The design incorporates elements of the former Farren/Grand Trunk Hotel.
A8	Adopt design guidelines for downtown Turners Falls	Needs Attention	Design guidelines have not yet been developed or adopted.
A9	Renovate and reuse historic structures	In Progress	Town continues to actively recruit and support development partners for Strathmore Mill, St. Anne's church and other priority historic properties like the RR Salvage annex
Enhanced Recreational Opportunities for Residents and Visitors of all Ages and Backgrounds			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
R1	Increase recreational facilities for youth	In Progress	Skatepark was built in 2013 using PARC and Town funds, but more can be done, especially in winter
R2	Enhance water-based recreation	In Progress	Town is working to improve recreational use if the river through FirstLight's FERC relicensing process. Town is actively exploring potential for a whitewater recreation industry and car top boat access.
R3	Explore potential for a rental bike program	Needs Attention	Town is willing to work with a potential vendor.
Expand Community Events and Activities in Downtown Turners Falls			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
A1	Support and expand the farmers market	In Progress	The market has moved to a new location at Peskeomskut Park. In 2019 the Agriculture Commission hired a paid coordinator.
A2	Expand outdoor museums and cultural venues	In Progress	Shea Theater was renovated under new management in 2017. The Rock Paper Scissors sculpture was added to the parklet in 2015. The battlefield Grant Advisory Committee is completing their archeological research phase. The Town has done some conceptual recreational use planning around the Indeck property.
A3	Explore improvements to sitting and gathering spaces along Avenue A	In Progress	The 2013 Avenue A parklet incorporated seat-wall height planters. The 2020 Spinner Park Rehabilitation will include new seat-wall height planters as well. Movable chairs are also planned
A4	Explore possibility for a food vendor court	No longer a priority	The downtown brick and mortar restaurant scene is strong, so this may not be a priority.
A5	Support and expand existing downtown events	In Progress	Many signature events continue to thrive: Great Falls Festival, Great Falls Coffee House, Fish ladder. The Soapbox Derby is being re-established

A6	Carefully consider new downtown events	In Progress	New events like Pockumtuck Homelands Festival, Franklin Co. Cider Days, Great Falls Word Fest, Summer Park Series have proven successful. Cultural Anchors like the Shea, Discovery Center, and library have expanded their offerings.
Improved Services and Quality of Life for All Downtown Residents			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
S1	Improve security for residents and businesses	Needs Attention	There is not currently a downtown patrol officer, but one was in place from 2014-2016.
S2	Enhance removal of trash and unwanted junk	In Progress	new management at the Board of Health has taken on this priority
S3	Relocate and expand community facilities	Needs Attention	New public parking at Canal Street was constructed in 2014. A senior Center study was conducted in 2014 recommending relocation, but instead the facility received improvements in 2017. Further study needs to be done about how the Town Hall site can be best used. Significant interest remains in developing a dog park.
S4	Improve public transit service	Needs Attention	Bus stops at 3rd and Food City were improved. Ridership remains limited for Turners Falls users and throughout the FRTA system.
Get Organized for Business Development			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
B1	Establish a Downtown Partnership Organization	Needs Attention	Advancements have been made, but the arrangement has not been formalized.
B2	Hire or appoint a downtown manager	Needs Attention	The Cultural Coordinator became a municipal position in 2018 and is responsible for managing the Turners Falls Cultural District
Retain Existing Businesses and Support Business Development			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
BD1	Undertake targeted business recruitment	needs attention	
BD2	Develop a merchandising program	Needs Attention	
BD3	Work with business owners to consistently maintain curb appeal	Needs Attention	
Refine Marketing and Communications Programs			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
M1	Define downtown attributes and develop marketing materials for new businesses, residents, and/or tourists	Needs Attention	

M2	Create marketing portfolio/ development prospectus	Needs Attention	Town has begun this process by working with Smart Growth America's LOCUS program
M3	Expand the downtown social media program	In Progress	RiverCulture maintains a dedicated social media presence that boosts local businesses and activities. The Shea, Discovery Center, Town have great social uses social media as well. (Facebook)
M4	Develop a downtown brand	Needs Attention	Some of the terms discussed at the 2020 forum included "Swap meet hip"/ "upcycling"
M5	Expand multimedia joint advertising	In Progress	RiverCulture has helped facilitate joint advertising efforts with some success
Improve Gateway Treatments and Signage			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
W1	Install gateway treatment at Route 2 Entrance	In Progress	new "blue" signs were installed in 2018 using Cultural District funds
W2	Upgrade wayfinding and directional signage	Needs Attention	I-91 signage for "Great Falls Discovery Center" and "Canalside Bike Path" were added in 2014
W3	Improve downtown information kiosks	In Progress	RiverCulture updated the "brick" kiosk near the Shea Theater in 2014.
W4	Create a downtown mural program	Needs Attention	Turners Falls Cultural District/ RiverCulture/ Town priority
W5	Install new interpretive sign boards	Needs Attention	Seek funding to develop interpretive signage
W6	Expand overnight accommodations	In progress	Town has begun discussions; support well-regulated short term occupancies- supportive of developing new overnight accommodations.
Expand Economic Development Policies, Incentive, and Regulatory Programs			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
ED1	Create an incentive for ground floor storefront utilization	Needs Attention	Storefront vacancy is very low. Powertown owns 3 storefronts that have been converted to apartments.
ED2	Consider re-establishing a façade+sign program	Needs Attention	Funding not available for this program. Would require a "slum and blight" designation from the State
ED3	Consider establishing a District Improvement Financing District	Needs Attention	Town should explore this as a means to finance future improvements in the Canal District
ED4	Consider establishing a Business Improvement District	Needs Attention	Model needs to be explored further. Turners should learn from examples in Amherst and Northampton
ED5	Evaluate feasibility of a Smart Growth Overlay Zoning District	Needs Consideration	could facilitate financial incentives to the town for permitting housing in the district

ED6	Promote and facilitate additional outdoor dining	Needs continued attention	several restaurants have incorporated outdoor dining with positive success
Expand Public/Private Development Partnerships and Financing Programs			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Project and Program</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Description</i>
P1	Expand use of Commercial Homesteading Program	Needs continued attention	See below
P2	Continue to issue strategic redevelopment RFPs	Needs continued attention	This has been employed with limited success in Turners, but with great success in Millers Falls. There are several important sites to RFP on the horizon.
P3	Seek Cultural District Designation	Completed	Downtown Turners Falls received Cultural District Designation in 2017
P4	Seek CDBG funding to leverage private investment	In progress	Town has leverage over \$1.5M in CDBG funds to implement recommend Streetscape improvements and planning work for the Canal District. Private investment has been spurred from the Streetscape Work
P5	Seek MassWorks funding for infrastructure	In progress	Two Massworks Grants have been received (\$2.5M) for the Canal District gateway project and the Canal Street Public Parking Lot
P6	Evaluate the effectiveness for Tax Increment Financing program for downtown	In progress	In 2018, the Town provided a TIF for the Ja'Duke Theater- the first time a non-industrial use received a TIF. TIFs are available for qualifying projects in downtown
P7	Consider establishing a low-interest business loan pool for Turners Falls	Needs consideration	feasibility needs to be explored
P8	Employ the Montague Economic Development and Industrial Corporation	In progress	MEDIC updated their Economic Development Plan in 2015 to include the Canal District. MEDIC requires dedicated staff support in order to be fully utilized.
P9	Consider Developing an Urban Renewal District for the "island"	In progress	A Canal District Vision was completed in 2017. The Town has begun to brand the 6 mill sites at the Canal District. The Town did consult with the state to confirm that the Urban Renewal Plan is not the appropriate application for the Canal District
P10	Diversify housing opportunities in Turners Falls	In progress	Town has continued to support the Housing Rehabilitation Program and rehabilitation of blighted housing through the Attorney General's Receivership Program. Many units have been upgraded since 2013.

Supporting Materials: Power Point Slides



Turners Falls Livability Plan

*Where do we
grow from
here?*

Montague Planning and Conservation Department
February 2020

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Agenda

11am Presentation
Part 1: 2013 to Today
Part 2: Looking Forward

Noon Lunch & Networking

12:20pm Stakeholder Panel

1:30pm Interactive Sessions

2:30- 3pm Wrap-Up



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PART 1: 2013 - Today

Review of the Downtown Vision and Progress

What the Data Shows



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VISION STATEMENT

Downtown Turners Falls is a vibrant, diverse and livable community. We value the beauty of the **Connecticut River** surrounding our village and honor herlong history of providing us with food, power, transportation and recreational opportunity. We are proud of the industrial foundations that have given rise to both our **distinctive architecture** and the **hard-working, creative ethic** of our community. Our residents all have access to quality affordable housing and the ability to **walk** safely to work, school, shops, entertainment, services and recreational opportunities. A variety of centrally-located **community centers** support all our citizens - including youth, seniors, English-language learners and disadvantaged populations - through creative programming and accessible resources. A mix of **locally-owned businesses thrive** in storefronts along a **beautiful, active and pedestrian-friendly Avenue A**. Key vacant properties are re-energized with new uses that bring more people and businesses into downtown. Our unique character and lively street culture draws visitors from around the region, both on a daily basis and for special festivals and events. **Turners Falls has been a gathering spot for more than 10,000 years and today is recognized both as a welcoming live/work community as well as a recreational and cultural destination.**

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Streetscape



Streetscape

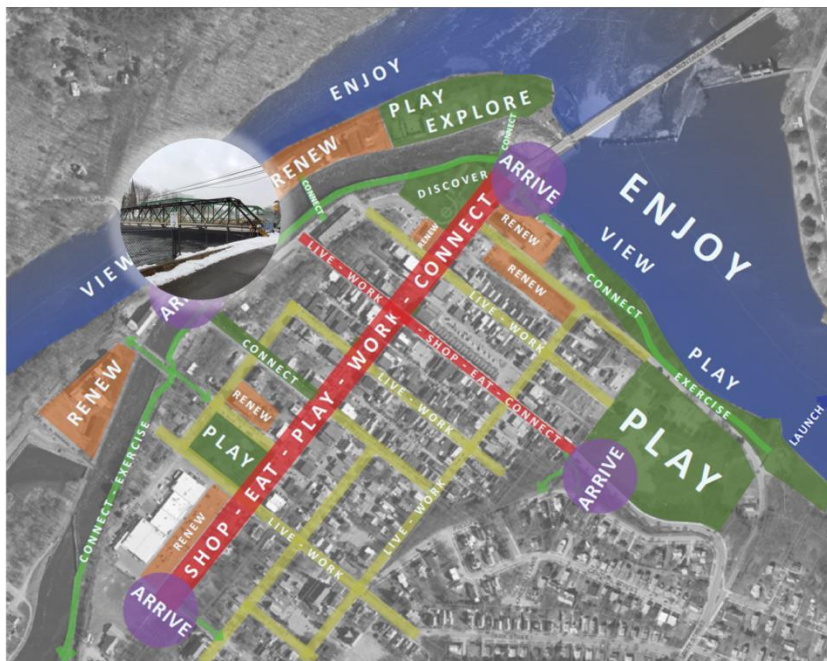
Parking



Streetscape

Parking

Signage



Streetscape

Parking

Signage

Prep for Development

- Zoning Amendments
- Opportunity Zones
- Pre-development studies
- Targeted RFP'S
- Town Hall capacity building



Streetscape

Parking

Signage

Prep for Development

Recreation



Streetscape

Parking

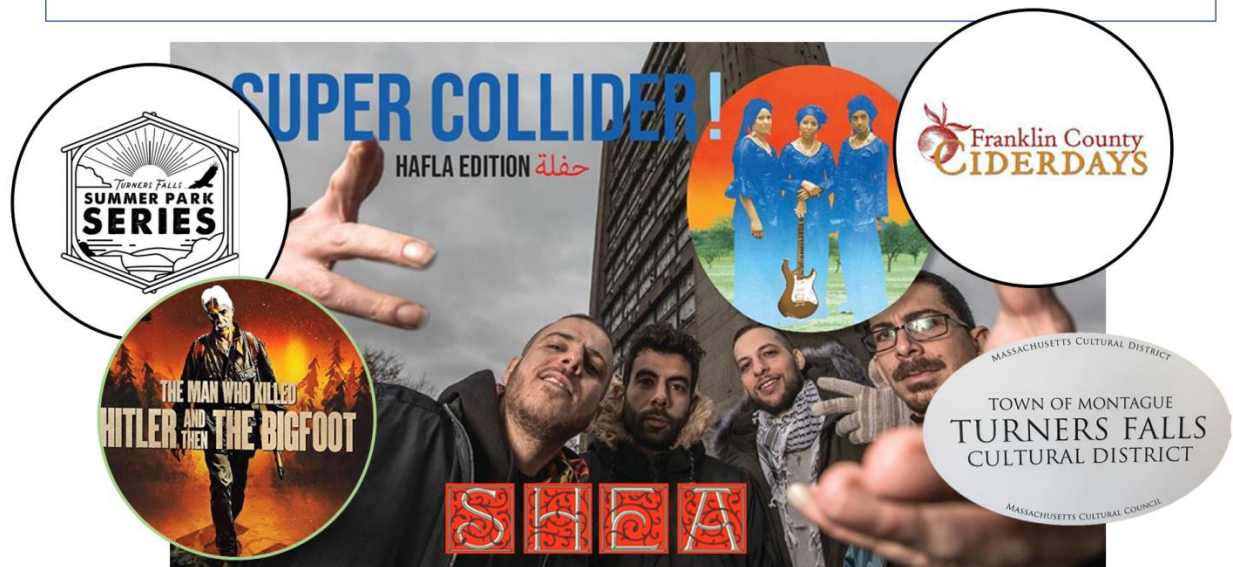
Signage

Prep for Development

Recreation

Cultural Investment

Expanded Cultural Programming



What the Data Shows

Discernable trends tell the story of a resilient village amid a relatively weak rural market area

No market booms or decline- a slow and steady revitalization

Housing remains affordable relative to regional trends

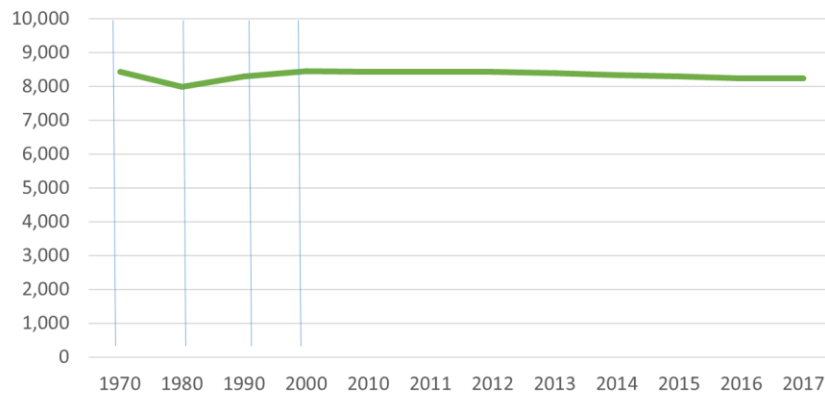
Primary Source: American Community Survey



Turners Falls Census Designated Place

Montague Population

Stable Population since 1970's. Modest decrease projected over next 20 years

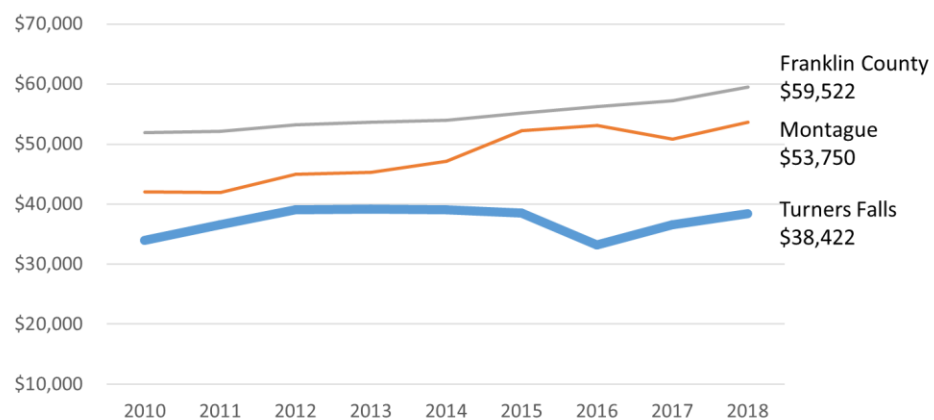


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2017)

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Economics

Median household income + median home values remain lower than Town and County.

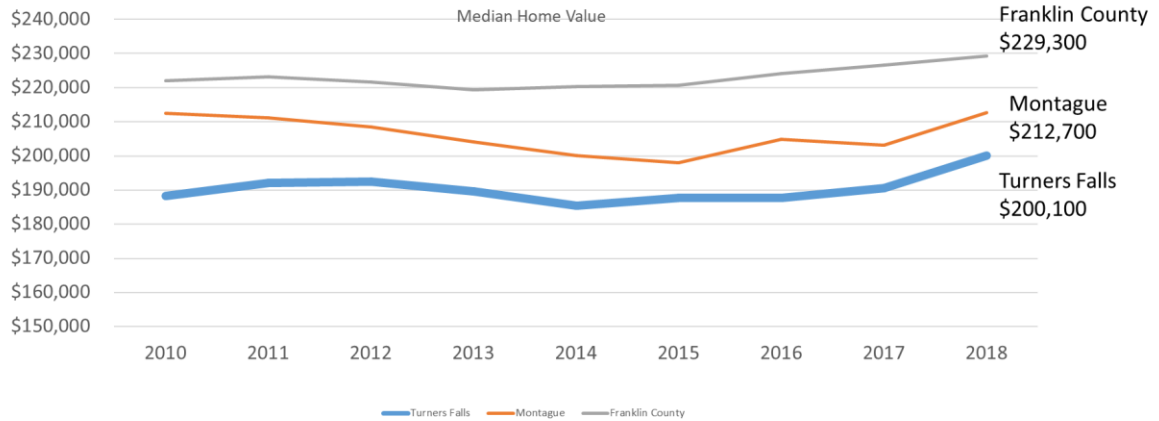


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2018)

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Economics

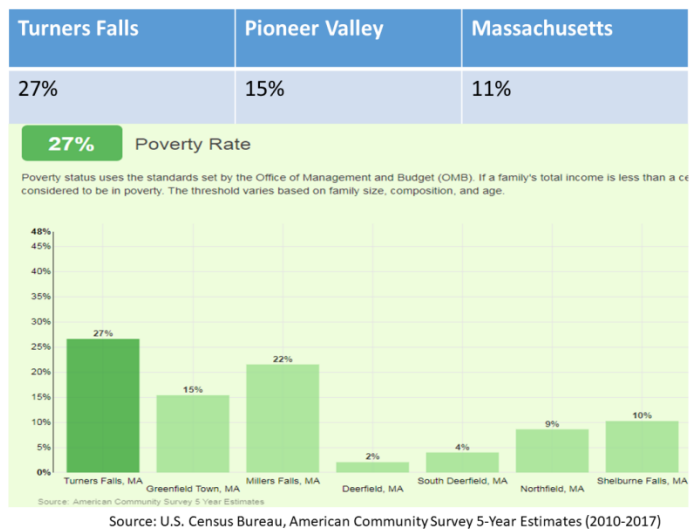
Median household income + median home values remain lower than Town and County.



Economics

Poverty Rate is consistent from 2010 to 2018

Poverty Rate is higher than Comparable Communities



Economics

10 highest employing industries for Turners Falls Residents
Compared to US average

Educational services is the largest industry in Turners Falls

Manufacturing continues to decline

1,605 total jobs in TF

201 people live and work in Turners Falls

Higher	Normal	Low
<u>Educational services</u>	Health care	<u>Manufacturing</u>
Information	Retail trade	Public Administration
Accommodation and Food Services	Wholesale Trade	Finance and Insurance
Utilities		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2017)

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Transportation

19 min. Average commute

62% less than 20 minute commute

25% less than 10 minutes

3% work from home

92% drive/ **0%** transit



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2017)

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Deed-Restricted Affordable Housing

204 Units in downtown Turners Falls

126 Units in Turners Falls Census Tract

330 Units in Turners Falls (15.2% of housing stock)

375 Units in Town of Montague (9.55% of housing stock)



Source: DHCD

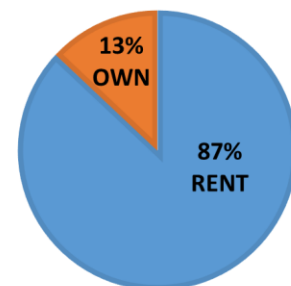
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Housing

\$920 Average Montague gross rent (2 BR w/ utilities)

\$973 Average Franklin County rent

28.7% average annual housing cost for renters as percentage of TF median household income (\$38,422)

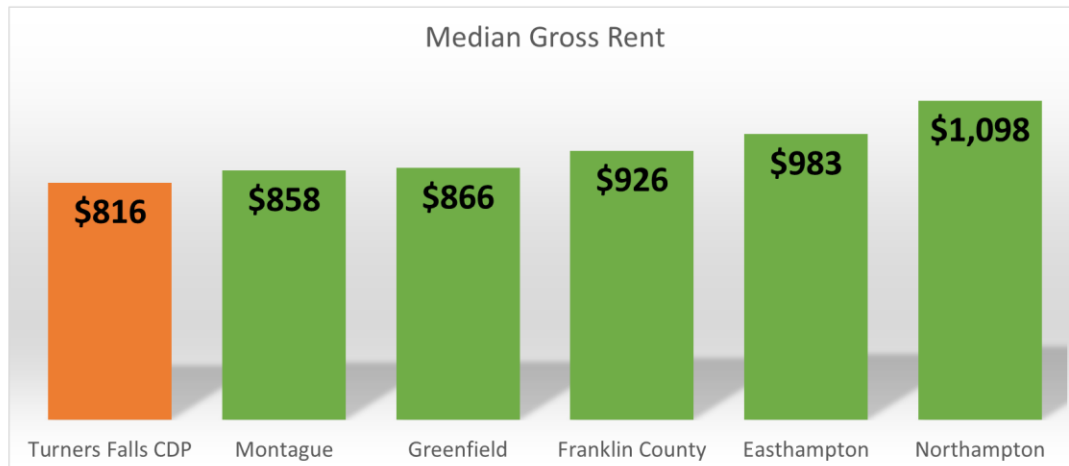


Source: FCHRA

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Housing

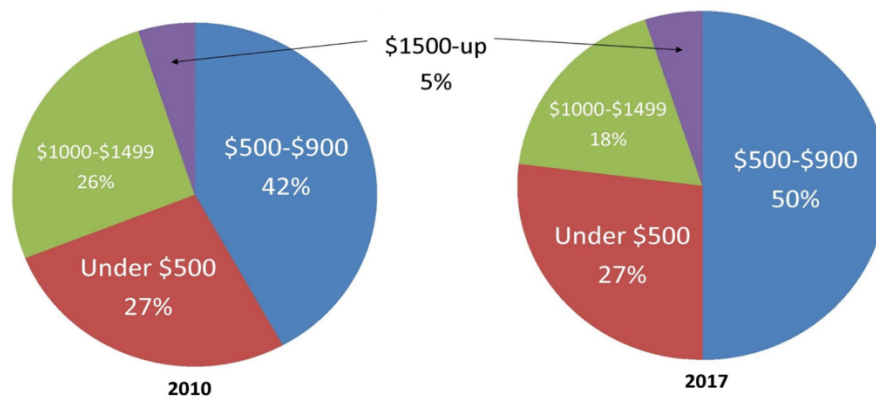
Rents remains lower than comparable communities



Housing

Rental Unit Distribution

**2,169 Housing Units*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2017)

Housing

Housing and Transportation Costs are much lower in TF than the Pioneer Valley and State

Turners Falls	Pioneer Valley	Massachusetts
49%	64%	59%

Housing and Transport Costs (as a share of 80% Area Median Income)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2010-2017)

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PART 2 - LOOKING FORWARD

2020 Implementation Projects

Emerging Priorities



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2020 Downtown Projects

EV Charging Stations (Winter 2020)



2nd Street Public Lot

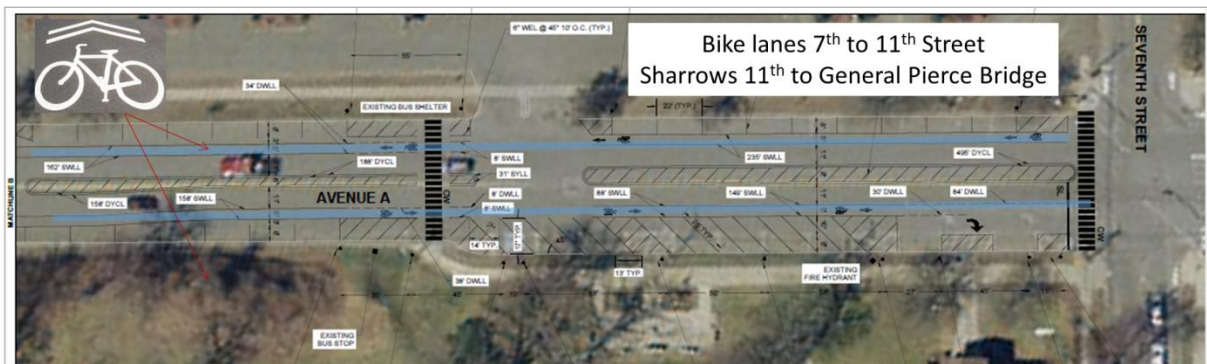
6th Street/ Peskeompskut Park

1st Street Fish Ladder/ Riverfront

Turners Falls Municipal Airport

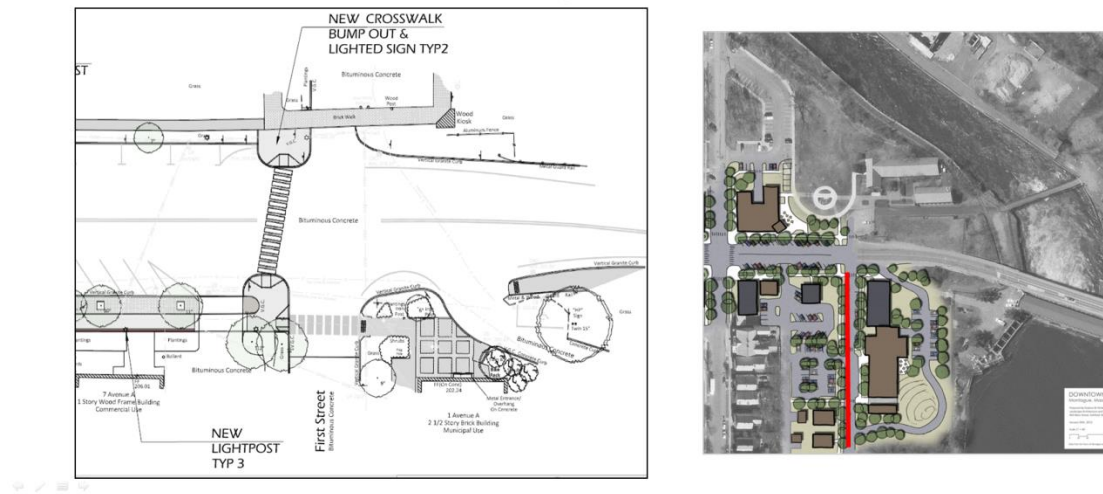
2020 Downtown Projects

Ave A/ MC Road Bicycle Accommodation (Summer 2020)



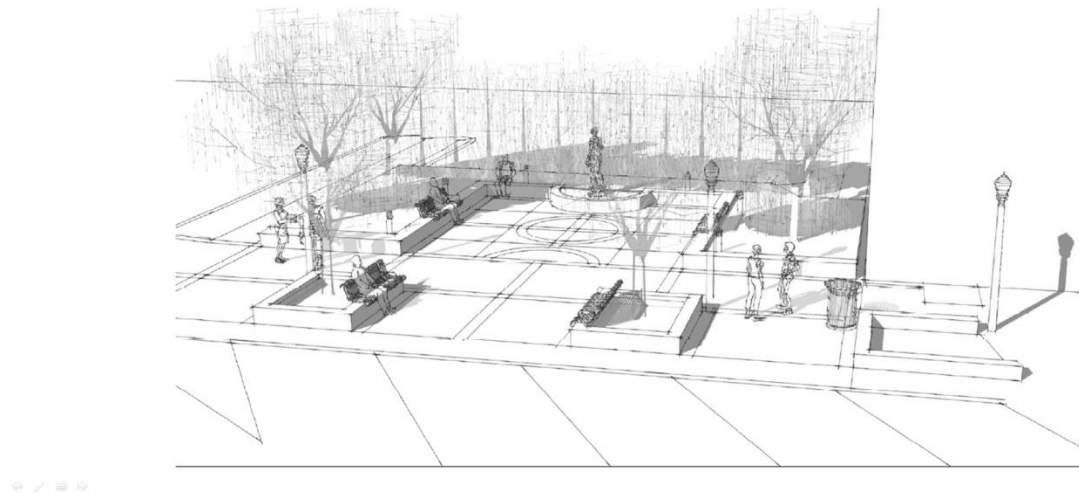
2020 Downtown Projects

First Street Ped improvements (Summer 2020)



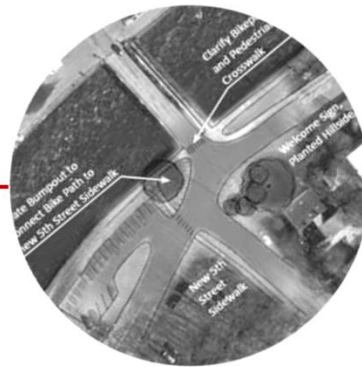
2020 Downtown Projects

Spinner Park Reconstruction (April-November 2020)



2020 Downtown Projects

Canal District Gateway Improvement Project (Fall 2020)



2013 Vision



2020 Downtown Projects

38 Avenue A- 2021 projected completion

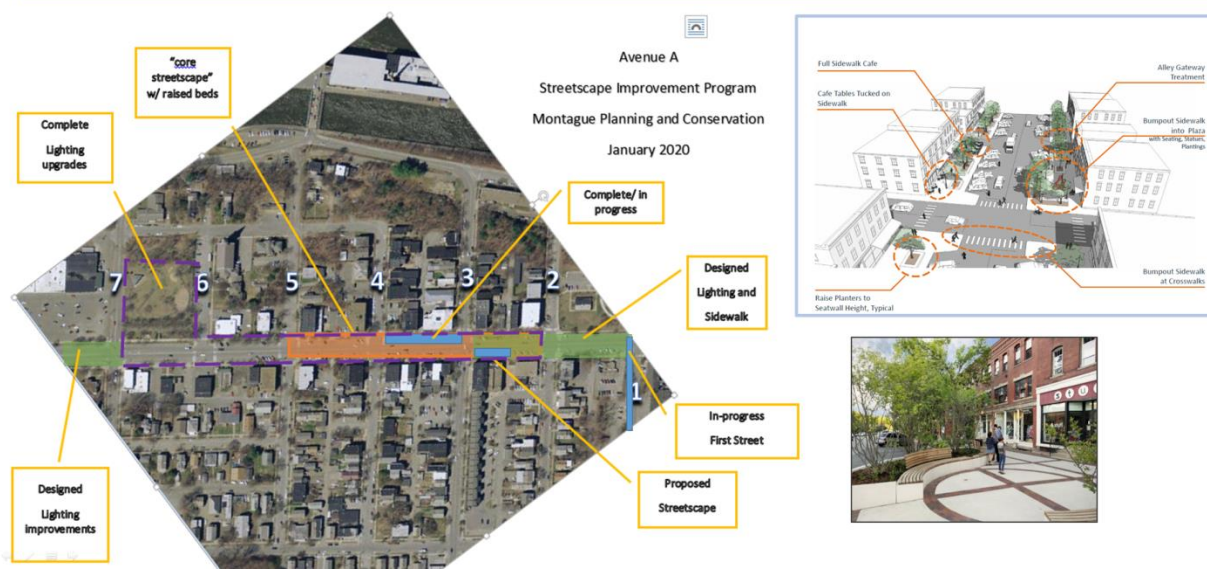


Emerging Priorities

- Planned Streetscape Improvements
- Parking management
- Canal District
- Emerging Focus area: First and Second Street
- Emerging Focus area: Ave A Southern Corridor
- Your ideas

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Streetscape Program



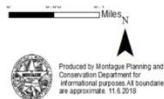
Parking Management

Free parking is a substantial economic development tool subsidized by the Town

Enforcement is a challenge and lot maintenance is limited

Winter parking ban is a growing challenge to residents/landlords.

Parking issue needs to be explored further.



**Downtown Turners Falls
Overnight Parking Map
During Winter Parking Ban**

05/20/2017

Canal District



05/20/2017

First and Second Streets (Riverfront)



Avenue A Southern Corridor





MONTAGUE PLANNING & CONSERVATION

One Avenue A · Turners Falls, MA 01376 ·
Phone: 413-863-3200 Ext 207 - Fax: 413-863-3222

Downtown Turners Falls Livability Plan 2020 Check-in
Where do we Grow from Here?
Saturday, February 1, 2020, Great Falls Discovery Center
AGENDA

11:00 AM PRESENTATION: Livability Plan 2013 to today

Presented by Walter Ramsey, Suzanne LoManto, Jack Carolan

- Review of 2013 Plan
- Recap what has been accomplished and how it can be measured
- Overview of upcoming projects in 2020: Everything you want to know about new infrastructure and old buildings and everything in between
- Questions and Answers for the Planning Department

12:00 PM- LUNCH and opportunity to view Exploded View “You are here” exhibit

12:20 PM- STAKEHOLDER PANEL: Where do we grow from here? Invited: Gina Govoni-Director of FCHRA, Mike Jackson- Editor of Montague Reporter, Peter Chilton- Proprietor of Nova Motorcycles, Lisa Davol-Shea Theater Board of Directors

Panelist will discuss topics such as branding, affordability, community vulnerabilities, and their hopes and dreams for 2030.

1:30PM- CITIZEN PLANNER INTERACTIVE SESSIONS- Emerging Opportunities

Attendees will get to be planners for an hour and envision development of 3 strategically important priorities for Turners Falls and make a recommendation to the town. Choose one concurrent session.

- A) Transforming the Canal District: Two mills are being rehabilitated with infrastructure support being provided by the town and state. Participants will be tasked to look beyond the gateway project toward next steps for improvements to the Canal District. 1) Housing at Railroad Salvage?, 2) a riverfront park at Indeck?, 3) decommissioning plan for Strathmore? Each option is a multi-million dollar endeavor on its own. Citizen Planners will explore the tradeoffs and opportunity costs associated with investing in one project over another and weigh opportunities for leveraging outside funding sources. Facilitator: Walter Ramsey- Town Planner

- B) Visioning the Southern Corridor of Avenue A: Public Works will vacate their 500 Avenue A facility in 2020. What could be the future of the underutilized Montague Machine Mill site? Both properties have access to the Canal and Bike path, are proximal to downtown, and have access to utilities. The area is currently zoned for industrial use. Citizen planners will be tasked to assess whether the area should be rezoned to permit commercial and housing use. Facilitator: Matt Lord- Planning Board member
- C) Conceptualizing a Public Art Strategy: Participants will develop consensus on the framework for an integrated public art strategy for Turners Falls. Locations and projects will be identified and prioritized. What spaces/areas might we want to activate? What stories do we want to tell? Who should be responsible for implementation? Should the municipality regulate private murals? Facilitator: Suzanne LoManto- Cultural Coordinator

2:30-3:00 PM WRAP- UP and CONCLUSION

Resource List: Montague Planning and Conservation Department

The Montague Planning and Conservation Department is responsible for land use planning, natural resource protection and, economic/community development activities identified in Town Plans. The primary function of the Planning Department is to manage regulatory process for development proposals submitted to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission. As part of that process the Planning Department evaluates development proposals for their contribution toward community planning goals as documented in Montague Comprehensive Plan and other local strategic plans. The Department is also actively engaged in programs and projects that help the community achieve its planning goals.

The Planning Department oversees RiverCulture- a program to develop the creative economy in Montague. The Department also provides technical support to the Board of Selectmen, and the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC). The Department represents the Town and its interests at both the regional and state level through a variety of projects and planning initiatives.

Planning documents prepared for the community and intended to be a resource for the public and to guide decision making by officials. You can view the following documents at this link:

<https://www.montague-ma.gov/p/27/Planning-and-Conservation-Department>

Town Plans

Community Development Strategy 2018
Downtown Turners Falls Livability Plan 2013
Downtown Turners Falls Tree Inventory 2015
Millers on the Move
Montague Census Demographic Summary 2010
Montague Community Needs Survey 2010
Montague Comprehensive Plan 1999
Montague EDIC Economic Development Plan 2014
Montague Energy Reduction Plan 2010
Montague Housing Plan Final 2015
Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan 2014
Powering Forward - Canal District Vision Plan 2017
Powering Forward - Canal District Vision Poster
Wildfire Protection Plan 2015

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2018

ActionPlan Map
Farmland Soils Map
Montague Open Space and Recreation Plan
Open Space Survey Results 2017
Open Space Map

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2018 (cont.)

Plant Wildlife Map
Recreation Map
Scenic Map
Water Resources Map

Canal District Redevelopment

Canal District Enhancement Area 4119
Canal District Slum and Blight Designation 2014
MASSWORKS Grant letter
Powering Forward Canal District Vision Poster 2017
Powering Forward Canal District Vision Report 2017
Riverfront Park Concept Poster 2019
Strathmore Mill Feasibility Study 062005
Strathmore Mill Site Development Asses.081208
Strathmore Mill ULI Report
Turners Falls Opportunity Zone Approved 2018

