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Farren demolition in Montague to finish by November



Montague Town Planner Maureen Pollock (left) speaks with community members at the Farren Care Center site redevelopment tabling session held Sunday at Peskeomskut Park in Turners Falls. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



What is left standing of the former Farren Care Center
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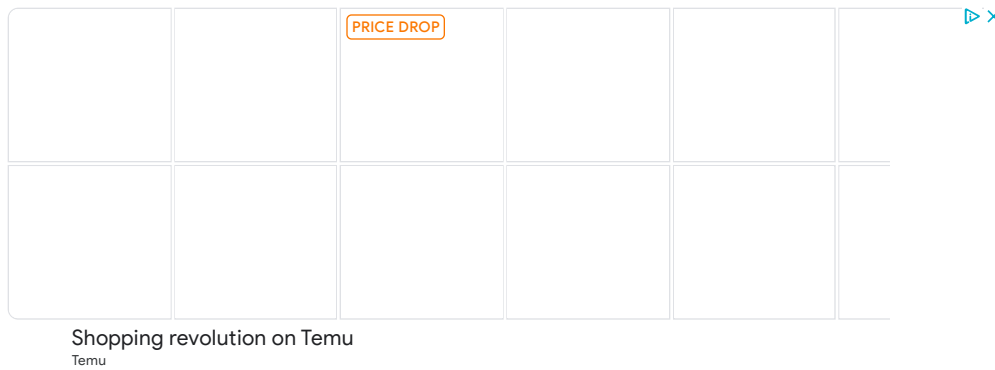
By [JULIAN MENDOZA](#) (/byline?byline=By:JULIAN MENDOZA)

Staff Writer

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MONTAGUE — Demolition of the former Farren Care Center is on schedule and set to be completed by November, according to Assistant Town Administrator Walter Ramsey.

The former long-term care facility on Montague City Road, which closed in April 2021, received a demolition recommendation in November of that year, with parent company Trinity Health of New England getting the go-ahead to proceed on Dec. 6, 2022, when the Historical Commission opted not to invoke the town's demolition delay bylaw (<https://www.recorder.com/With-tie-vote-Montague-Historical-Commission-does-not-delay-Farren-demolition-49103600>) that seeks to preserve and protect historically significant buildings.



Once demolition is complete, the plot of land will be loamed, seeded and given to the town. Either the Selectboard or the Montague Economic Development and Industrial Corporation — a semi-public town organization that can buy and sell property — could take possession.

Town Planner Maureen Pollock noted the town was awarded a Community Planning Grant of \$35,000 from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to perform market analysis in connection with development opportunities at the site. This work will complement and support the ongoing Montague City Mixed-Use Village Center Study, she said. Work, assisted by planning firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB), will include “a combination of primary and secondary research, including interviews with key stakeholders in the real estate industry, potentially including developers, brokers and investors,” Pollock explained in an email.

“VHB will evaluate local and regional market conditions to gauge the feasibility of creating a vibrant, mixed-use development in Montague City that imbues the district with a more walkable, livable, mixed-use character,” she continued. “This real estate market study will provide insights into the current state of the market, as well as potential opportunities for growth and development.”



Pollock and VHB co-hosted a tabling session on Sunday during an event at Peskeomskut Park to field public input regarding preferable redevelopment strategies at the site. The session yielded “a lot of good feedback,” Ramsey said.

“This event was a really great opportunity to reach out to folks in the community who may not attend public forums,” Pollock explained. “We got a really great cross-section of people who were younger and older.”

Through public feedback, the town received about 30 different reuse ideas. Residents’ suggestions ranged from mixed-use space, office space and a variety of housing types to entertainment uses such as a live music venue, swimming pool or arcade.

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“There has been a real desire for exploring how [the site’s redevelopment] could really emphasize the creation of a village center,” Pollock said.

A follow-up forum will be held in mid-October, according to Pollock. This forum will facilitate discussion surrounding the redevelopment project’s potential outcomes and preliminary site planning concepts. There will be a presentation followed by breakout discussions for residents to voice observations, concerns and ideas.



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Additionally, Montague officials have engaged in meetings with three stakeholder groups between late May and early July to discuss the property’s reuse potential. During the first meeting, held with age-friendly policy advocacy group Mass in Motion on May 30, the organization idealized 35 to 40 multi-income, multi-generational apartments in a mixed-use complex.

The second meeting, held on June 21 with the Montague Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, saw conflicting viewpoints regarding the demand for senior housing. “[The] question is whether the supply actually meets the demand or if people just don’t like the existing senior housing options in Montague,” reads a document of meeting notes relayed by Pollock.

Attendees of the third meeting, held on July 6 with the Montague Housing Authority, stressed demand for housing, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, a recreation center, parking, office space and more.

“The [Great Falls] Discovery Center is a big draw in Turners Falls. We need to create something like that on the Farren site,” notes from the meeting read. “A community garden could provide food to food-insecure people and it draws in people of all ages for social activities.”

Reach Julian Mendoza at 413-930-4231 or jmendoza@recorder.com.



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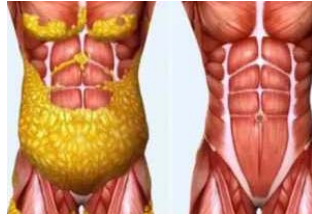
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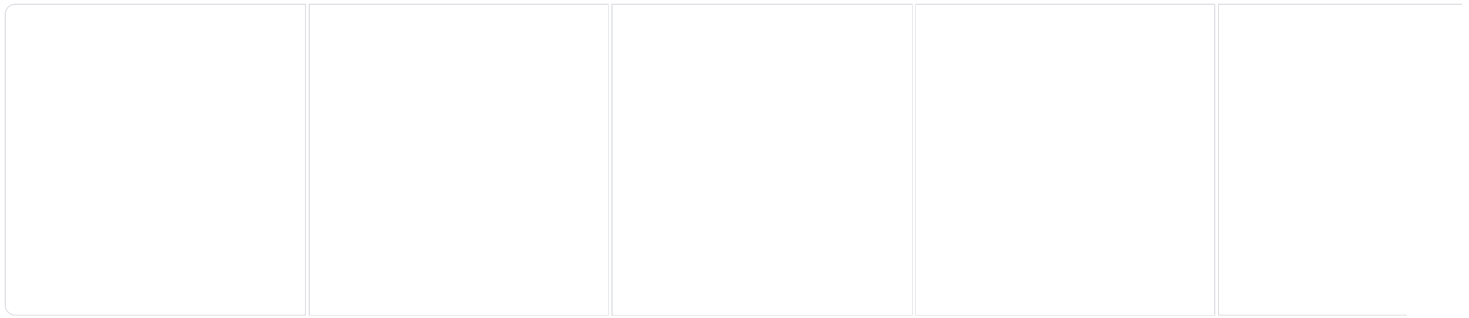
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