

MPLCP Talking Points for Trustees, Staff, and Friends of the Libraries

(Updated 1/25)

Timeline:

January 2025: Commissioners vote to approve immediately funded and waitlisted grant recipients; MBLC contracts executed with grant recipients

January 2025 - December 2025: Planning & Design for Standard Grant recipients

December 2025 - January 2026: Independent review of MPLCP Level of Design

February 2026: Estimates based on MPLCP Level of Design; Construction phase grant awards calculated

March 2026: Commissioners vote to approve Construction phase grant awards

March - June 2026: Certified votes for local approvals and appropriations for Construction phase local funding

June 2026 - June 2027: Design work from completion of schematic design through construction documents

July 2027: Bidding

August 2027: Construction contracts for projects (usually 16 to 24 months)

What is the MPLCP? Program information and background:

- The Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program (MPLCP) is a grant program managed by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC). It was first funded by a state bond authorization in 1987. Since then, the MPLCP has helped build 62 new library buildings and 169 addition, renovation, and conversion projects.
- Grants are awarded based on the needs of the community, the current state of the library being added to or replaced, and the local economy.

Why does Montague need a new or improved main library?

- In 1915 the Trustees of the Carnegie Library realized their new building wasn't big enough to serve the community. Since then, plans for expansion have been unsuccessful. We have been making do with a too-small, inaccessible space for over 100 years.
- Through the state's library construction program, we have the chance to improve the existing Carnegie building or construct a new library to meet the evolving needs of the patrons we serve. This opportunity will not come again for another 5 to 8 years.

Specific building issues include:

Inaccessibility:

- Though there is a wheelchair ramp, many portions of the library are not accessible to those using a wheelchair or walker, including the whole second floor, the basement where the Friends of the Library hold their book sales, the public restroom, as well as the fiction, non-fiction, DVD, audiobook, or local history collections.

Lack of adequate collection space:

- For every item that is purchased for the Carnegie Library, one must be removed.
- Though library staff take pride in purchasing a diverse and varied collection of materials to suit the many interests and needs of the community, we are regularly forced to get rid of items that are only a few years old to make room for new items.
- A lack of room also means that we do not have space for collections that the community has expressed much interest in, including more graphic novels, manga, indigenous history, etc.

Lack of quiet or comfortable study space:

- With room for only two armchairs in Carnegie's reading room, there's little space for patrons to sit and read or work.
- The reading room must also fit the libraries' public computers, fax/copy machine, non-fiction collections, magazines, and newspapers in a space under 300sq/ft.
- It is difficult, if not impossible, to navigate that space in a walker, wheelchair, or with a stroller.
- The space is so cramped that it is physically difficult and/or uncomfortable for library staff to assist patrons with computer questions.

Lack of effective staff space:

- There is no non-public staff space on the first floor, so books and other materials must be carried either up or down a flight of stairs to be processed for circulation.
- Staff work in cramped conditions behind the circulation desk, and most do not have workstations of their own.
- There's a disconnect between those working with the public on the first floor and those on the other floors. The Library Director, Library Technician, and Youth Services Librarian can't see or hear if there's a line at the desk, if a patron needs in-depth assistance, or if a patron is hassling a staff member. This could potentially lead to dangerous situations.

Inadequate children's and teen spaces:

- The children's room is very small. There is no space for adult chairs, which would allow caregivers to read to their children.
- There is no space for children's computers.
- There is also limited space for children to meet other children to foster play and healthy socialization skills nor is there space for parents to meet other parents and build community.
- The teen collection is very small and located close to the children's picture books, making for a patently uncool teen hang spot.

Inadequate programming and meeting space:

- Though the second floor of the library previously provided program space, we are no longer allowed to use it, by law, because it is inaccessible.
- There is limited space and inadequate technology to support small meetings or large programs.

Inefficient and non-resilient systems:

- While the quality of the air at the Carnegie was improved by the installation of an ERV some years ago, the building's systems are not efficient.
- The building is heated and cooled with costly oil and electric systems that leave parts of the library boiling and other parts freezing. This makes for a space that is uncomfortable to work or spend time in.
- Inefficient systems also use more energy than they should and cost extra tax-payer dollars to run.
- As the library is relied upon more and more heavily to serve as a cooling or warming center during periods of extreme weather, the ability of the building to respond to these weather extremes becomes more important.

Will you build a new library or add to the Carnegie Library?

- We aren't sure yet. The state program requires that we consider options for adding to the existing building AND for building new on a separate site. We will work with an architect during the planning and design phase to look at these two options.
- A third option is to move the Carnegie Library to a new site and build an addition to it there.

What kind of spaces will be included in a new or improved space?

A new or improved library space would be fully accessible and include:

- A large community room for programs that community groups can book
- A children's room with space for play, reading with caregivers, and collections for children of all ages
- A children's program room for early literacy programming and activities of all kinds
- A separate teen area that teens actually want to hang out in
- A quiet study rooms for solo or small group work with all the technology needed to take video calls, etc.
- A cozy reading room with comfortable chairs, worktables, and plenty of outlets
- An accessible local history room, where photos, documents and artifacts can be safely stored and displayed and that can also serve as a meeting or program space
- Staff workspaces would be centralized to improve efficiency and ease of patron access to various different kinds of services, from in-depth research help, technology assistance, reader's advisory, circulation assistance, and more!

If you build a new building, where will it be?

- If we build a new library, or move the Carnegie and add on to it, it would be located at 38 Avenue A, which is the lot across from town hall and next to the Discovery Center. A Cumberland Farms previously occupied the lot but was closed decades ago and demolished in the summer of 2023.
- 38 Avenue A is owned by the town and overseen by the town's Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC). The EDIC is charged with selecting a project to build on 38 Ave A and agreed to not sell the lot for the duration of the planning and design phase.

If you build a new building, will it be super-modern looking?

- No. The EDIC has specified that they would like a "statement building," standing 2-3 stories high, that would fit the character of surrounding buildings like the Crocker, which houses the Country Creemee.
- This means that the front façade of the building and the parts visible from the sidewalk will be made of brick and look like the buildings around it. In other words, we won't be building a contemporary-looking library like some of our neighbors, though the back of the building may feature more glass to take advantage of river views.

How will the project be approved?

- Montague has already been approved for state funding. In May of 2026, after most of the design work has been completed, town meeting members will vote whether to add the project to a ballot measure, which requires 2/3 majority vote to pass. If they vote to create a ballot measure, then some weeks/months later, the town would have to vote to approve the project, which requires a majority vote to pass. The project will only move forward to the construction phase if both votes pass.

Will there be more opportunities for public discussion and feedback?

- Yes! Once an architect is selected, there will be several opportunities for the public to weigh in on the project and potential designs.

If you build a new building, what happens to the Carnegie?

- This discussion is still years away and will be moot if we expand upon this building. That said, if we do decide to build a new building, then the Trustees would like to see the Carnegie be used as a cultural space that would be open to the public. Perhaps as a museum. The Nolumbeka Project has expressed ongoing interest in the building. That said, the decision about what happens to the Carnegie would fall to the Selectboard. There is no chance that the building

would be demolished. And because it's a preserved historic building, the façade cannot be changed.

If you build a new building, what happens to the branches?

- Nothing will change with the branches. A requirement of the MPLCP application was a "Comprehensive Service Plan," which details how a new or improved building would affect multi-branch libraries. In ours, we noted that there would be no changes to branch operations, hours, or services, which the Selectboard approved of.

How much money will the project cost?

- The total cost will be more than the DPW facility (\$9.86 million), but less than Greenfield's Library (\$20 million). The cost to Montague taxpayers will almost certainly be less than the DPW facility.
- The cost will also depend on what design option we choose. For example, adding onto the Carnegie will cost much more than building new. It's also hard to predict how the cost of building materials will fluctuate over the next few years.

How much money is the state going to pay for the library?

- We're not sure yet. The Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program will pay for 60% of the first \$5 million dollars spent, 45% of the next \$5 million dollars spent, and 35% of the next \$5 million dollars spent. That number will form our base award, then an additional 17.53% will be added on top of that, due to Montague's economic need. We estimate the state will pay for about half of the total project costs, but we won't have solid numbers until Winter 2026.

Will my taxes go up a lot?

- They shouldn't. The public safety complex and the high school will be paid off around the same time that this project would need town funding. This means that there should be little or no increase in taxes. That said, we won't have exact figures until we know how much the project is going to cost.

Will you need to hire more staff?

- Not exactly. The libraries are currently requesting an Adult Services Coordinator position, to start in FY26, to meet existing programming, technology, and local history resource needs in the community. (7/10 libraries with similar populations to Montague have this kind of staff position already.) Assuming this role is filled, then there will not be a need to hire additional staff.

- Whether we build an addition onto the Carnegie or build a new library, the space will be designed to maximize sightlines so that staff will be safer and able to oversee large spaces without needing additional staff.

How can I help support the Library?

- Talk to your friends, neighbors, community leaders, and town meeting members about the Carnegie Library, the unmet needs of the community, and the opportunity we have to fund a good portion of the project with state monies. Talk about the ways that an expanded or new library building could fill these needs. Montague deserves a library facility that fully serves the community.
- The Friends of the Libraries of the Montague Public Libraries will start fundraising for this project in the next few months. Please consider joining the Friends group and/or attending future fundraising events.