



TOWN OF
MONTAGUE
MASSACHUSETTS

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING &
CONSERVATION
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Meeting
FROM: Maureen Pollock, Director of Planning & Conservation
RE: Planning Board Report to Town Meeting – Farren Rezoning
DATE: October 2, 2025

Recommendation: On September 23, 2025 the Planning Board voted 5-0-0 in favor of recommending to change the official Zoning Map by adding a new Village Center Mixed Use District (MU-VC) and Design Overlay District (DOD) consisting of parcels of land located at 0, 330-340 and 356 Montague City Road, identified as parcel numbers 12-0-044, 12-0-051, 12-0-044A and 12-0-050; and to amend the Zoning Bylaws by amending:

- a. Section 2, Definitions, to add new terms and definitions;
- b. Section 4, Establishment of Districts, 4.1 – Types of Districts, to add the new Village Center Mixed Use District (MU-VC) and Design Overlay District (DOD);
- c. Section 5, District Regulation, to add a new section 5.2.10 – Village Center Mixed Use District identifying permitted uses, uses allowed by special permit, special regulations and standards pertaining to the MU-VC District;
- d. Section 5, District Regulation, to amend section 5.3 – Multiple Principal Uses to exempt the MU-VC District from the provisions of said section;
- e. Section 5, District Regulation, to amend section 5.5 – Dimensional Requirements to add a row to the table for dimensional requirements applicable to the MU-VC District;
- f. Section 5, District Regulation, to amend section 5.5.3 – Dimensional Relief by amending subparagraph (c) to establish the Planning Board as the Special Permit Granting Authority in the MU-VC District;
- g. Section 7, Sign Requirements, to amend 7.2.3 – District Parking Requirements to add subparagraph (c) relative to parking requirements in the MU-VC District;
- h. Section 7, Sign Requirements, to amend 7.4.2 – Access over front lot line, to exempt the MU-VC from the separate Special Permit requirement;
- i. Section 9, Site Plan Review, section 9.1.2 – Applicability, subparagraph (e) Specific Uses identified elsewhere in this bylaw to add uses requiring Site Plan Review in the MU-VC District;
- j. Section 9, Site Plan Review, section 9.1.3 – Authority, to add text designating the Planning Board as the Site Plan review Authority for the MU-VC District; and
- k. Section 6, Overlay Districts, to add a new section 6.4 – Design Overlay District,

with the full text of the above amendments and a copy of the proposed, revised Zoning Map on file with the Office of the Town Clerk and available on the Town's website at: <https://montague-ma.gov/p/1568/>, or to pass any vote or votes in relation thereto.

Background Summary: The Montague City Village Center Rezoning Project (aka Farren Rezoning Project) has been ongoing since January 2025, involving community meetings, working groups, Selectboard meetings, and Planning Board meetings.

The zoning amendments and map changes are based on last year's community engagement and visioning process, and continued community input provided throughout this year's zoning efforts. Together, a vision has been created with a goal for a vibrant, mixed-use village center emphasizing housing diversity, retail development, and strong community character. Community feedback from workshops emphasized the need for flexible development standards, balanced height limits, and integration of environmental features like open space and bike trails.

Current zoning regulations do not fully support this vision, prompting a review and proposed updates to better align zoning with community goals.

The proposed zoning introduces a new Village Center Mixed-Use District and a new Design Overlay District, which aims to encourage walkable, pedestrian-friendly development with appropriate building heights, setbacks, and design guidelines. The proposed zoning also provides an opportunity to significantly increase the number of residential units in an appropriate area, while also adding space for retail and commercial uses.

The zoning updates include specific standards for building height, setbacks, open space, parking, and design guidelines (to be adopted to by the Planning Board), with provisions for waivers if the design principles are met.

Overall, the effort seeks to foster a lively, well-designed village center that reflects community input, supports diverse housing, and enhances local retail and transportation infrastructure.

Public Hearing Process: After the Selectboard referred the above listed zoning amendments and changes to the Official Zoning Map to the Planning Board, the Board opened the public hearing within 65 days on September 23, 2025, at which time, the Board considered the proposal and accepted public comments. The Planning Board closed the public hearing on September 23 and unanimously voted 5-0-0 to recommend the Town of Montague to adopt the proposal, subject to technical adjustments based on comments from the September 23, 2025 Public Hearing, as proposed by consultants, Town staff, and KP Law, and as discussed.

The public hearing notice was duly published in the Greenfield Recorder on Tuesday, September 9, 2025 & Tuesday, September 16, 2025. Additionally, a public hearing notice was published in the Montague Reporter on Thursday, September 18, 2025. The notice was also posted on the physical bulletin board at Town Hall and on the online Town Calendar, starting on September 8, 2025. Notice of the hearing was also sent to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and the planning board of each abutting community. Typically, property owners are not notified when there is a proposed zoning change and such notification is not required by the Town or State law; however, Planning staff mailed the notice to property owners within 2,000 feet of the Farren sites by regular mail. Lastly, the notice was sent via email to Town staff, Town boards/commissions, and residents.

During the public hearing, there were approximately 9 individuals who provided public comment. There was support for the zoning amendments which aims to encourage walkable, pedestrian-friendly residential and mixed-use developments. There were questions about building heights, front yard setbacks, depth of public sidewalks, and waiver requests from development standard requirements.

Much of the Planning Board's discussion during the hearing was in response to the public's questions and concerns. The Planning Board ultimately agreed to not increase the maximum building height allowed and to keep with the dimensional requirement as proposed, which is:

Maximum Building Height (linear feet):

- Any building whose principal façade is within 30 feet of the lot line contiguous with the public right-of-way for Cabot Street or Farren Avenue: three (3) stories, forty (40) feet.
- All other buildings: Up to four (4) stories, fifty (50) ft.

There was considerable discussion about front yard setbacks and sidewalk depth. Planning staff clarified that since this is a town-owned lot, the Town can determine the appropriate depth of the public-right-of-way, taking into account for sidewalk depth appropriate to the scale and intensity of potential uses at the site, tree belt, bus stop, and other streetscape amenities, as well as, possibility reconfiguring the property lines as the Town considers subdividing the lot through an Approval-Not-Required (ANR) propose, prepares a Request for Proposal(s) (RFP), and prepares Land Disposition Agreement(s). Additionally, Planning staff noted that the Planning Board may choose to adjust the front yard setback requirements as part of this zoning amendment, if they wish. The Board ultimately agreed that the Town can and will determine the approximate sidewalk depths and possible property line changes as part of the future Town steps as mentioned by Planning staff. In turn, the Planning Board agreed to not change the minimum front yard setback, and to keep with the minimum front yard setback requirement as proposed, which is: 0 feet.

Additionally, the Board ultimately agreed to not change the maximum front yard setback, and to keep with the dimensional requirement as proposed under the Design Overlay District, which is as follows:

Maximum Front Yard Setback: The maximum yard setback shall be applied in addition to the required minimum yard setback. The maximum allowable setback shall be determined based on the designated use on the ground floor as follows:

- Residential use: Up to 10 feet from the minimum street setback is allowed for the purpose of creating a green landscape.
- Non-residential uses: Up to 20 feet from the minimum street setback is allowed for the purpose of creating an active public space. The setback may include one or more of the following features: terraces, seating areas, and rain gardens.

The Planning Board agreed to revise the zoning text to explicitly state that an applicant may request a waiver of one or more development standards to enhance design flexibility and overall project quality. Such waivers would require a determination that the variation is consistent with the overall design principles outlined in Section 6.4.5, Design Principles. The previous zoning revision did not clearly specify that individual waiver requests would be necessary. The Board considered this clarification valuable and approved the revised language.

Although the updated zoning amendment recommended by the Planning Board includes numerous changes throughout the Zoning Bylaw, its core intent remains the same: to provide opportunity to significantly increase the number of residential units in an appropriate area, while also adding space for retail and commercial uses, with standards and conditions that ensures walkable, pedestrian-friendly development with suitable building heights, setbacks, and design guidelines.

Quantum of Vote: After reviewing the full text of the Zoning Amendment and changes to the Official Zoning Map, the Town's legal counsel advises that at a favorable 2/3 vote of Town Meeting is required.