

Library Trustees Report  
Article 22: Main Library Building Project

Dear Town Meeting Members,

Thank you for taking time out of your Saturday to weigh the town's budget, capital projects, and Montague's Main Library Building Project. The following is meant to inform Meeting Members about the challenges facing the Carnegie Library; the spaces that a new main library would offer the community; how the project was shaped by Montague residents; the benefits of the project for the local economy; and the timely and "once in a generation" nature of the project's award and substantial subsidy by the state.

Project background: In February 2023, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) announced that they were launching a new round of the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program. Having just completed a strategic planning process that principally demonstrated the inadequacies of the Carnegie Library, the Library Trustees and Director submitted a letter of intent to apply for the grant. The next year was dedicated to surveying the needs of the community, holding focus groups, visiting recently constructed libraries and library additions, and drafting a building program that would act as a road map for a new or improved main library for Montague. An application was submitted in May 2024 and in January 2025 Montague was one of just a handful of projects in our size group accepted into the grant program.

Shortly after, a Library Building Steering Committee (LBSC) was appointed to oversee the planning and design phase of the project. The group is comprised of Montague residents—including members of the Finance Committee and Capital Improvements Committee, people with building backgrounds, and library trustees—as well as the Assistant Town Administrator and the Library Director. The LBSC hired and worked with project managers, Downes Construction, and Schwartz/Silver Architects to solicit additional community feedback and develop a library design that meets the needs of Montague residents and fits in with the historic aesthetic of downtown Turners Falls. From the beginning, our motto has been, "everything we need and nothing that we don't."

This year, Montague's design was approved by the MBLC and the total cost of the project is estimated at \$23.7 million dollars. The state awarded the town \$11.3 million dollars in funding or 48% of total project costs. This figure includes \$328,731 for the Green Library Incentive, awarded for projects that meet certain energy and sustainability goals. Montague would need to appropriate \$12.4 million through a debt exclusion to cover the town's portion of the project.

For the project to move forward, the community would need to approve the debt exclusion by a 2/3 majority at the May 2nd town meeting and by a simple majority through a special election vote, on June 24<sup>th</sup>.

If this project doesn't pass both votes, then the \$11.3 million dollars from the MBLC will be redirected to another community. Given the competitive nature of the library construction grant program, and the fact that the program only rolls out every 8-10 years, it's unlikely that Montague would receive funding again for decades. This is a singular and rare opportunity to build a main library that fully supports the needs of Montague's families, seniors, teens, and adults and to make lasting and effective use of state funds.

The trustees have received several questions over the course of the project. On the following page is an FAQ:

## **Q. Why does Montague need a new main library?**

### *A. The current building is:*

- Not accessible-The entrance, restroom, and program space are inaccessible. Second floor use is disallowed, due to ADA, and many patrons have limited access to the main floor.
- Undersized-Limited space for collections, programs, or services. We have to host most programs offsite, which has greatly impacted children's circulation. For every book that comes in, one must be removed.
- Lacks parking-Limited/dangerous parking. There's one accessible space and it's far from the ramp.
- Has outdated building systems. A combination of old oil and electric systems are costly to operate and maintain

## **Q. How would a new main library support the local economy?**

*A. Libraries drive foot traffic to downtown areas, support the needs of the community, and would make the town a more vibrant, attractive place for people to live. A recent study found that 31% of people who visited their central library went on to visit another local business or organization after their visit, increasing spending and ultimately increasing tax revenue. If the new main library's visits double like Greenfield's did when their new library opened, that will mean we'd have 37,196 total library visits and 11,530 visits to local businesses or organizations annually.*

## **Q. What kind of spaces will be included in the new library?**

*A. This building was designed with flexibility for the future and includes spaces and technology to support residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. From a reading room and meeting space that will be used by adults and seniors, a program room where kids can learn and get creative, study rooms where entrepreneurs can work and meet, and a cool space where teens can do homework and hang out, there's something for everyone. Specific areas include:*

- A children's room, for play, reading with caregivers, collections, and computers.
- A children's program room for early literacy programming and activities of all kinds. This room will also be used for craft programs for teens and adults.
- Internet computers
- A business center for printing, copying, faxing, and scanning
- A teen area with laptops and space for studying and socializing
- Three quiet study rooms for solo or small group work with tech for video conferencing or presentations
- A large community room for library programs that community groups and individuals can book (even after hours). This space could also be rented to private groups to offset the building's operating costs
- Outdoor space that can be used for programs
- A cozy reading room with comfortable chairs, tables, and plenty of outlets
- A local history room, where Montague's artifacts would be preserved and displayed
- Centralized staff workspaces to improve service and efficiency

## **Q. What are the tax implications for the new building?**

*A. For the average single-family home (\$325,699), the cost of the project will be \$159 dollars per year or \$3 dollars per week.*

- Residential - \$49 per \$100,000 in value annually
- Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property - \$81 per \$100,000 in value annually

**Q. How did you keep building costs low?**

*A. By deciding to build new, rather than add onto the Carnegie, we saved \$5 million dollars.*

- Not including a basement, lowering the height of the building, using a steel structure instead of mass timber, and opting for a hydronic HVAC system instead of geothermal all led to millions in cost savings.

**Q. Will it cost more to operate the new building?**

*A. Yes. While the operating cost per square foot will decrease, the overall operating costs are estimated to increase by \$27,126 to \$48,230 annually, depending on the size of the solar array that could be installed on the roof and how much energy the building would use. This range amounts to a 5% to 8% increase in the libraries' budget, a 0.01% increase in the town's FY25 budget, and would cost less than \$10 per year for the average taxpayer. Included in this range are all heating and cooling costs as well as a 12 hr/wk Library Assistant, to cover the children's desk on nights and Saturdays, and 8 additional hours of custodial work per week.*

**Q. In what ways will the building meet sustainability goals?**

*A. The new library would meet the state's Green Library Incentive by opting for specialized stretch code. Resilient and/or sustainable building practices include:*

- All-electric systems heating and cooling systems, using an air to water hydronic heat pump with an electric boiler back up.
- A solar array will be incorporated on the building's roof
- Infrastructure for a generator has been included so that the building can be used as a heating or cooling center, even when the power goes out.
- Low carbon concrete and triple pane windows will be used throughout

**Q: What will happen to the branch libraries?**

*A: **The plan is to keep the branch libraries open.** The Montague Center Branch and the Millers Falls Branch cost very little to operate--just \$12.51 annually for the average homeowner--but they make an outsized impact on their communities. In FY25 the cost to operate both branches was \$59,763, including staff wages, utilities, circulating materials, and supplies, but not custodial/DPW services. That total is 11.53% of the FY25 Libraries' Operating Budget, just 0.48% of the FY25 Town Operating Budget, and merely 0.19% of the FY25 Annual Town Meeting Appropriations.*

And community members are using these facilities. Since FY2019, the year before the pandemic, Montague Center program attendance has increased by 45% and circulation has increased by 14%. Visits to the Millers Falls Branch increased by 35% during that same period and, since the food pantry opened in May of 2023, over 33,516 pounds of food have been distributed to the community. Indeed, 159 people use the Millers Falls Branch Food Pantry, which is more than 10% of the village's population. To close these branches, which are cornerstones for their communities, would be a disservice.

**Q. How did you determine the size of the library?**

*A: The Main Library Building Project's size and scope were determined during the crafting of the libraries' building program and throughout the design process. Feedback from 174 survey respondents, three separate focus groups, and three community input meetings highlighted the collections, spaces, and services that Montague residents need to thrive. For example, the space was designed to slightly exceed ADA requirements, so that folks using motorized wheelchairs or strollers would be able to navigate between aisles of books. To support our seniors and those with mobility challenges, we decided not to shelve materials too close to the floor or too high overhead. Survey respondents emphasized the importance of cozy and comfortable spaces, so a reading room was incorporated along with several window nooks. Parents commented that they hoped for spaces where they could read to their children and meet other families, helping to build those vital support networks. The children's room was sized accordingly. Quiet study rooms, meeting/gathering spaces, and green spaces were also requested and incorporated to support the diverse activities that Montague residents want and need to partake in at their main library. At the same time, the LBSC was extremely mindful of construction costs, rejecting a costly basement and ensuring that space was used as effectively as possible.*

*For those who have compared the footprint and cost of this building to that of Erving's and Greenfield's new libraries, I would note that Montague's proposed project falls between those projects in both size and cost.*

- Greenfield's library provides 1.52 square feet per person, Erving's provides 4.89, and Montague's would provide 3.91 square feet per person for its primary service area (Turners Falls and Montague City) or 2.45 square feet per person for the town as a whole.
- Similarly, adjusting for inflation, Erving's library cost \$2,500 per person, Greenfield's cost \$900 per person, and Montague's proposed new library would cost \$1,460 per person.

**Q: What will happen to the Carnegie Library if a new main library is constructed?**

*A: The Town, through the Selectboard, will issue a request for proposals for adaptive re-use of the decommissioned building. The Carnegie Building has a historic preservation restriction, which will ensure that it remains a treasured landmark building. Potential uses of the Carnegie include housing, commercial, and non-profit uses. The Town has a strong track record in facilitating adaptive re-use of decommissioned municipal properties such as the former Montague Center School into condominiums and the former Highway Garage into trades-based workshop spaces.*

**Q. Is the design final?**

*A: The schematic design has been approved by the state and the scope cannot change. That said, there are still ten months of design work to be done that will present the opportunity for value engineering, a reduction in contingencies, and will allow us to maximize the building's resilience and potential energy savings.*

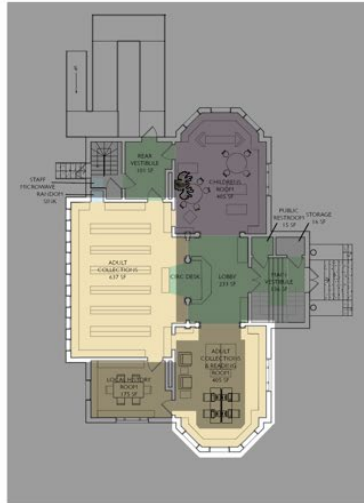
**Q What happens if the bids come in high or the project goes over budget?**

*A: Nearly a million dollars in contingencies were included in this project as well as several ad alternates, which would allow us to shift what is included in the project, depending on the overall cost.*

## Space Comparisons

### The Carnegie Library versus the New Main Library Project

#### Main Collection



30-in passages & tight corners make the stacks at Carnegie inaccessible to many patrons.

Top and bottom shelves, unreachable by many, must be fully utilized.

Collection is "one in, one out". For every new book we get, one old one has to go.

#### Main Collection



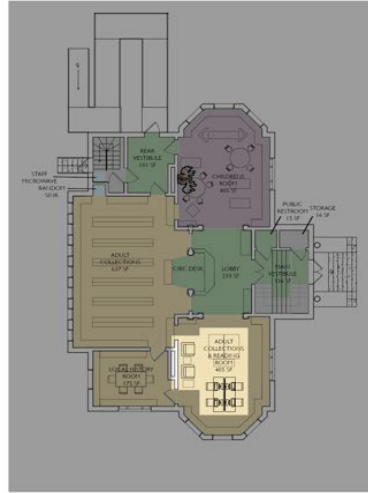
Fully-accessible stacks allow every library patron to reach every book!

No longer "one in, one out", there is space for the collection to grow each year and meet our town's needs.

Over many years, the adult fiction & non-fiction book and media collections can eventually double in size and diversify to include genres our patrons have requested.

## Reading & Working Spaces

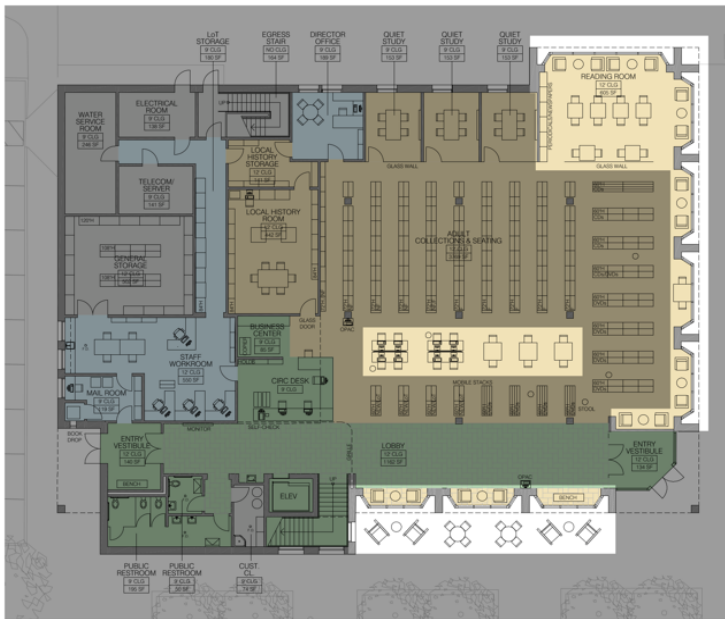
Carnegie's "reading room" has just two reading chairs, next to the copy machine.



Four computer workstations and one additional table, surrounded by biographies, see heavy use by patrons.



## Reading & Working Spaces



A 605 SqFt reading room, set off from the stacks by a glass wall, offers reading chairs and small work tables and holds newspapers and recent periodicals.

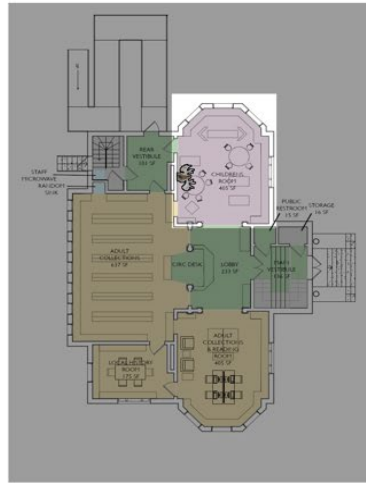
More reading chairs fill bay windows along Ave A and Second St, answering popular demand for cozy spaces.

Eight computer workstations and additional small tables are centrally located and available to all.





## Children's Areas

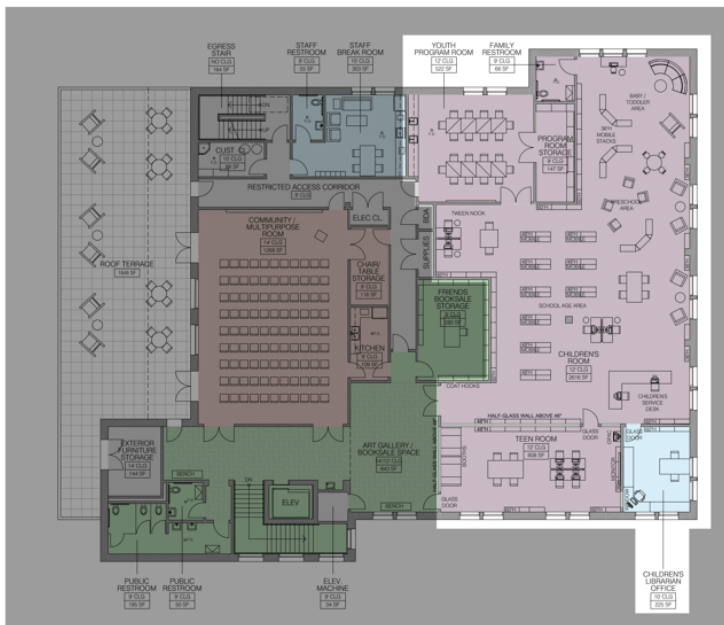


The 405 SqFt Children's Room in Carnegie fills up quickly!

Using the floor for small programs prevents anyone from browsing or reading. Large programs are impossible.

And there are no chairs where parents can read to their children.

## Children's Areas



The new library would have a 2,616 SqFt Children's Area (about the size of a floor of the Carnegie).

Different zones offer spaces babies and toddlers, pre-schoolers, school-age kids, and tweens, plus their parents. More shelf space will allow the juvenile book collection to eventually double in size.

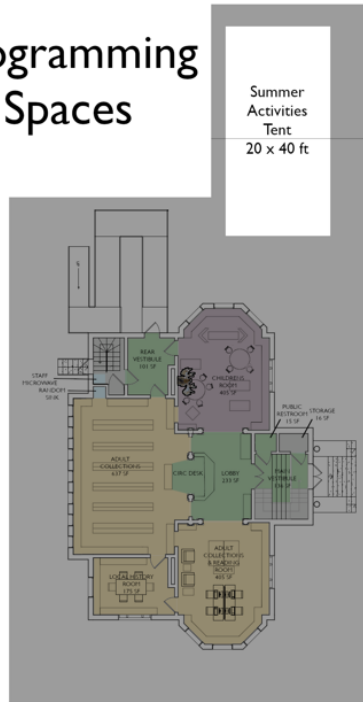
The Youth Program Room is designed for messy projects and crafts of all kinds. (It can also be used for messier adult programs, like bicycle repair workshops!)

## Programming Spaces

The Carnegie has no space for library programs!

The Montague Center and Millers Falls branch libraries host author readings, book clubs, craft programs, film viewings and discussions, history presentations, play performances, and more!

But little of that is possible in the Carnegie.



We used to be able to hold programs upstairs, but in 2022 that space was declared off-limits to the public due to its inaccessibility.

For June through August, we rent an outdoor tent which provides space for some summer programs.

Most children's programming is now off-site, and our children's circulation has dropped 10%!

## Programming Spaces

A 1,265 SqFt Main Program Room allows the library's main branch to host popular library programs!



Moveable tables and chairs can be set up in any configuration (or be entirely stowed away); installed technology allows presentations and film showings.

Plus, this space -- larger than the Senior Center or Annex -- can be booked for evening meetings and weekend events.

Free for public events, or rentable for private ones.