



Montague Capital Improvements Committee

May 2025 Annual Town Meeting Report

Approved by the CIC 4/9/2025

I. Background

The Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) received requests and began meeting with Montague department heads and regional school district leaders beginning in December 2024 to evaluate capital needs as outlined in their Special Article Requests. The Special Article Request forms that were adopted and implemented in 2017 continue to serve as the framework for presenting the capital needs of each department.

In this report of the CIC's FY2026 recommendations, we summarize the committee's findings based on several months of meetings, research, and deliberation. The grading system, shown in Section II, is consistent with that used in past years.

This year the CIC initially received twenty (20) capital article requests. Over the course of four months, the proposers were brought in for presentation and discussion of their requests. Through these discussions and review of additional information, some requests were reformulated, combined, disaggregated, withdrawn, or otherwise modified. This report presents the final slate of seventeen (17) capital requests and the CIC's recommendations following its investigation into said requests.

Important note on CIC's process:

--The unanimous votes you will see on these Capital Articles reflect the committee's thoroughness and persistence in investigating each article. This includes pursuing information on every possible alternative to each proposed expenditure, and demanding convincing evidence regarding the needs, legal requirements, timing, and impact to the Town's residents and employees of each proposed Article.

II. Approach to Evaluation of Requested Articles

Defined Criteria/Rationale Used in Assessing Special Article Requests

Public Safety: Does the capital improvement rectify a safety concern or otherwise prevent a potential public safety issue?

Cost Avoidance: Will the capital improvement serve the Town financially?

Service Interruption: Does the capital improvement prevent an interruption in services?

Other: Any other reason identified as relevant by the CIC.

Grading System

Recommend: Given appropriate budget space, the committee believes that the capital improvement should be funded. The CIC evaluation does not formally consider the question of financial capacity, which is left to the Finance Committee and Selectboard.

Recommend with Reservations: The committee would generally recommend the capital improvement but may find that elements of the project scope are unclear or incomplete, that it lacks a convincing professional cost estimate, or doesn't address or account for some long-term needs and concerns of the town.

Does not Recommend: The committee does not recommend moving forward with the capital improvement as presented. This may be due to the nature or timing of the project, the apparent need for the project, the availability of scope or cost information, or other reasons.

III. Recommendations on Requested Articles

1. Summary Table of Fiscal Year 2026 Submissions and Recommendations

The table below offers a summary view of special article requests and CIC recommendations for FY26 capital project spending. Overall, spending associated with recommended articles equals \$4,766,370. These recommendations are further explained in section II.

Summary of Final Motions/Recommendations

Request	Amount	Approved	Vote
Clean Water Facility- Purchase Used Mini-Excavator	\$ 60,000	Yes	4-0
Clean Water Facility- Portable Emergency Generator	\$ 30,000	Yes	4-0
Clean Water Facility- Lake Pleasant Station Generator	\$ 37,800	Yes	4-0
Clean Water Facility- Thickened Sludge Pump Replacement (x2)	\$ 104,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works/Selectboard- Phase 2 – Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation	\$ 3,000,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works- Replace 2003 International 7400 10 Wheel Dump Truck	\$ 365,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works- Replace 2002 International 4900 Dump Truck	\$ 325,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works- Replace 2001 Ford E450 Camera Van	\$ 70,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works- Replace 2007 Ford F-150 Pickup	\$ 65,000	Yes	5-0
Public Works- Oakman St Slope Stabilization	\$ 60,000	Yes	5-0
Public Works- Meadow Rd Guardrail Work	\$ 200,000	Yes	5-0
Public Works- Equipment and Major Repairs (Discretionary)	\$ 36,470	Yes	5-0
Public Works- Alley and Non-Ch90 Road Paving	\$ 30,000	Yes	5-0
Millers Falls Library Storefront Renovation	\$ 39,000	Yes	5-0

Unity Park Playground Improvements	\$ 125,000	Yes	5-0
FRTA Bus Stop Improvements (Industrial Blvd/Millers Falls Rd)	\$ 60,000	Yes	5-0
Montague Center Complete Streets Design	\$ 91,200	Yes	5-0
Keith Footbridge Abatement	\$ 67,900	Yes	5-0

2. FY26 Articles Recommended for Consideration by Annual Town Meeting

Clean Water Facility Purchase Used Mini-Excavator (\$60,000)

The CWF performs many on-site and off-site routine updates and special projects requiring the use of an excavator. The facility is also responsible for managing its own groundskeeping, excavation, and lifting work when necessary. The CWF has borrowed other municipal excavators and spent over \$25,000 on the rental of a small excavator to perform site work on multiple projects for calendar year 2024, and would rather invest in owning a used excavator to use whenever needed.

Cost avoidance: This equipment will create cost-savings by allowing the department to avoid rental costs, which would otherwise be needed frequently for staff to handle in-house projects.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

CWF Portable Emergency Generator (\$30,000)

The current back-up portable generator is circa 1981 and is overdue for replacement. A recent inspection performed by the service technician, PowerGen Technologies LLC, has recommended replacement, as parts on the 1981 generators have become obsolete and cannot be replaced if the generators fail.

DEP/MGL also requires operable and serviceable generators at all wastewater pumping stations in order to prevent a backup and discharge of untreated sewage during power outages. The portable generator is a redundant back-up power supply to any out-of-service fixed generators located at any of the eight (8) pump stations.

Public Safety: A portable generator is needed in case of emergencies or inoperability of any of the fixed-location generators at the wastewater pumping stations. If a fixed-location generator fails, the portable unit is deployed to keep the system functioning, preventing unsanitary and costly backups and discharges of untreated sewage.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

CWF Lake Pleasant Station Generator (\$37,800)

As part of the planned continuation of the nine (9) pump station generator replacements, including stationary generators at each of the eight (8) pump stations, and one (1) portable unit, this generator serves the Lake Pleasant Road pump station in Lake Pleasant and is circa 1981. The current generator at this station was originally a portable generator that was made semi-permanent due to a previously failed stationary generator.

An inspection performed by the service technician, PowerGen Technologies LLC, has recommended replacement, as parts on the 1981 generators have become obsolete and cannot be replaced if the generators fail.

DEP/MGL also requires operable and serviceable generators at all wastewater pumping stations in order to prevent a backup and discharge of untreated sewage during power outages.

Public Safety: A replacement generator is needed to keep the system functioning in case of power outages or interruptions, preventing unsanitary and costly backups and discharges of untreated sewage.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

CWF Thickened Sludge Pumps Replacement x2 (\$104,000)

The CWF has historically utilized three (3) thickened sludge pumps to pump sludge from the gravity thickener and two (2) sludge holding tanks—to feed liquid sludge to the press for dewatering, and/or feed liquid sludge to a 9,000-gallon tanker for disposal.

Since the loss of the Turners Falls papermills, the facility no longer needs all three (3) pumps, needing only the use of two (2). (Redundancy is required as per Massachusetts law).

The old pumps are piston-style pumps circa 1981, with replacement drives from 2010. These are an outdated and extremely dangerous pump style, having exterior rotating parts which pose a serious safety risk of death or serious injury to staff. This concern was mentioned in a Dept of Labor Standards/OSHA inspection in February 2024.

The update will replace two (2) of the pumps with an appropriate pump style, replace some of the deteriorated piping on both the inlet and discharge sides of each pump with stainless steel, and will update controls. CWF staff will procure the equipment and perform the demolition and installation of the pumps in-house. The third pump will be completely removed from service and disposed of as per Town Policy/Mass. General Laws.

If the pumps are not replaced, they face imminent failure, which would prevent the facility from removing sludge/solids, which would in turn cause significant non-compliance with permitted solids removal requirements of the EPA/MA DEP.

Public Safety: The current piston-style system is outdated and no longer considered safe for CWF staff. In addition, the risk of inoperability of the facility if the pumps were to fail creates an environmental and health hazard to the Connecticut River, while also burdening the Town with liability for fines and penalties.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

Phase 2 – Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation (\$3,000,000)

As part of the Town's combined sewer overflow (CSO) Long-Term Control Plan (LTCP) update, the Town contracted with the engineering firm Wright-Pierce to develop short and long-term implementation plans for improving the maintenance, operation, and condition of its wastewater collection system. The requested funding is needed to complete the work that has been designated as either Priority 1 or Priority 2 in need of completion. Completing this work within a 10-year period is a condition of the Town's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, meaning that implementing this rehabilitation is the Town's legal obligation.

This work includes the rehabilitation of 15 underground pipes (4,867 linear ft.) in Turners Falls, as well as 22 similar pipes (4,592 linear ft.) in Millers Falls, and the rehabilitation of 74 manholes in Millers Falls.

This Phase (2) is a continuation of the ongoing Phase 1, which is expected to be completed by Spring 2025, and includes the rehabilitation of 53 manholes. Phase 1 has been funded through a \$500,000 Rural / Small Town Development Grant from the state.

Service Interruption: The Town is obligated under its NPDES permit to implement the repairs identified in the LTCP. The work identified by the project engineer as being Priority 1 or 2 is essential to the continued functionality of the Town's wastewater collection system, of which much of the current infrastructure is 75-100 years old.

Currently, several areas of excessive inflow and infiltration of stormwater and other runoff into the sewer system lead to undue strain on operations by increasing the overall volume of water in the system. Especially during heavy rainfall events, this also increases the likelihood of CSO discharges, which are an environmental and health hazard, and can further expose the Town to liability for noncompliance with its NPDES permit.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Replace 2003 International 7400 10-Wheel Dump Truck (\$365,000)

At 22 years old, the current truck has reached the end of its useful life. Replacement of this vehicle is needed for year-round highway maintenance including clearing winter roads and hauling construction materials to and from job sites.

Service Interruption: Purchase will replace an aging 2003 International 7400 with wing plow and spreader. The truck has undergone significant repairs including replacement of the dump body in 2017. This replacement request follows the Town's Capital Improvement Plan, which recommends a 20-year replacement cycle for large dump trucks to help the Town avoid

unpredictable repair costs, service interruptions, and difficulty finding parts for outdated vehicles.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Replace 2002 International 4900 6-Wheel Dump Truck (\$325,000)

At 23 years old, the current truck has reached the end of its useful life. Replacement of this vehicle is needed for year-round highway maintenance including clearing winter roads and hauling construction materials to and from job sites.

Service Interruption: Purchase will replace an aging 2002 International 4900 with plow and spreader. This replacement request follows the Town's Capital Improvement Plan, which recommends a 20-year replacement cycle for large dump trucks to help the Town avoid unpredictable repair costs, service interruptions, and difficulty finding parts for outdated vehicles.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Replace 2001 E450 Camera Van (\$70,000)

The DPW's camera van contains special closed-circuit television (CCTV) equipment, allowing staff to monitor the Town's sewer collection system for problems as well as for regular inspection reports. The current van dates back to 2001, and was originally an ambulance prior to its acquisition by the department. This purchase will replace the current van with a new vehicle.

Service Interruption: The 2001 van is beyond the Capital Improvement Plan's recommended 12-year replacement cycle for most vehicles to help the Town avoid unpredictable repair costs, service interruptions, and difficulty finding parts for outdated vehicles.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Replace 2007 Ford F-150 pickup (\$65,000)

The DPW currently utilizes a 2007 Ford F-150 for use primarily by its custodian to travel between Town buildings while transporting cleaning supplies and equipment. The truck is also used at various times for the movement of furniture and goods between Town facilities. This purchase will replace the current truck with a new vehicle. Additionally, the department views this vehicle as an excellent opportunity for electrification, and intends to pursue grant funding to replace it with an electric vehicle.

Service Interruption: The 2007 truck is beyond the Capital Improvement Plan's recommended 12-year replacement cycle for most vehicles to help the Town avoid unpredictable repair costs, service interruptions, and difficulty finding parts for outdated vehicles.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Vehicles and Equipment Fund (\$36,470)

This fund provides accessible funding for the DPW superintendent to fund purchases of and/or major repairs to DPW vehicles and equipment that are needed unexpectedly between Town Meetings. Expenditures from this fund are governed by a longtime policy that was revised and adopted formally in 2022. This policy requires Selectboard approval for any expenditure exceeding \$25,000.

The policy also indicates that the fund should be replenished at Annual Town Meeting to an amount not to exceed \$100,000, based on the amount in the fund as of March 1. Due to the high volume of other DPW capital requests for FY26, the Selectboard voted to recommend the fund be replenished to the reduced level of \$75,000.

Based on a balance of \$38,530 in the DPW discretionary account as of March 1, this appropriation is expected to return the total DPW discretionary fund balance to approximately \$75,000 at the end of the current fiscal year.

The DPW vehicle/equipment inventory is current and in good condition. No large unexpected expenses are predicted, but they may still occur.

Service Interruption: Should a vehicle or large piece of equipment fail (without this appropriation) it is quite possible that said equipment could remain out of service, potentially hindering snow removal or disrupting time-sensitive construction projects while the Town identifies a method to appropriate funding to repair or replace.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

DPW Alley and Non-Chapter 90 Road Paving (\$30,000)

The condition of most of our alleyways is poor to fair. Alleys have been traditionally under-maintained because they are not eligible for state Chapter 90 funds (traditionally the source for funding street and road paving repairs). The alleys are important for public safety and sanitation.

The DPW intends to conduct the paving “in-house” using DPW equipment and labor.

Public Safety: The alleys in the densely developed downtown are important for public safety and sanitation.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

Millers Falls Library Storefront Renovation (\$39,000)

Recent improvements to this Library branch have included new HVAC installation and replacement of both the windows and backdoor. A remaining obstacle to the building's energy efficiency is the glass storefront on the front of the building.

The storefront leaks cold air in the summer and hot air in the winter. The glass makes the immediate area around it quite hot from the spring through early fall, and also creates a “fishbowl” effect that is uncomfortable for some library staff and patrons. Additionally, the front door regularly lets in water during heavy rains, which has led to interior floor damage. The current door also does not meet accessibility requirements.

This project will replace the storefront with a regular building façade, incorporating large but standard-sized windows in keeping with the aesthetic of the neighborhood, and an ADA-compliant automatic front door. This project is estimated to cost \$39,000.

Cost Avoidance: This project will create cost savings in the form of reduced energy consumption for the building. It will also help prevent expensive repairs from the continued infiltration of water into the building via the entryway.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

Unity Park Playground Improvements (\$125,000)

This project will replace the rubber, pour-in-place (PIP) ground surface and the tube slide in the Unity Park playground. The current PIP surface is beyond its useful life and has been cracking and pulling up in numerous areas due to high traffic. Approximately 2,500 sq. feet of PIP surfacing must be replaced. A new tube slide will replace the current one that was purchased and installed in 2000 and is also beyond its useful life.

Unity Park is not only the most popular public park in Montague, but is also one of the most popular play areas in Franklin County. The playground receives constant patronage, which speaks to the importance of committing to routine maintenance. The life of rubber pour-in-place surfacing is approximately 10 years, and the current PIP surface was installed 13 years ago during Phase 1 of the Unity Park Improvement Project.

The replacement of this surface is not only critical to the safety of our patrons but also meets ADA regulations for public play spaces. Attempts have been made to patch torn areas, but these efforts have yielded less-than-acceptable results.

The current blue tube slide is one of the most popular and beloved items in the playground area. Unfortunately, it is also quite old, and even pre-dates the tenure of the Parks & Recreation Director. It was installed in the year 2000. The accepted life of playground equipment is approximately 15 years. The Parks & Recreation Department has been spending more time, energy and resources attempting to maintain the slide than is practical or safe, and this item should be replaced to ensure the safety of all users.

Public Safety: If not replaced, the worn PIP surface constitutes a tripping hazard, and the dated tube slide will present a possible safety risk for patrons of the park.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

FRTA Bus Stop Improvements (Industrial Blvd/Millers Falls Rd) (\$60,000)

The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) was awarded a grant from MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces program in the amount of \$178,376 to fund improvements to the two bus stops on either side of Millers Falls Road at the intersection with Industrial Boulevard. Proposed improvements included four possible alternates, consisting of either Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) or HAWK Beacons for pedestrian crossing, and of either Simme-Seats or bus shelters for the comfort and convenience of transit users.

A deficit of \$57,287 exists between the grant award and the project engineer's opinion of probable cost for the least expensive of the four alternates, which includes RRFBs and Simme-Seats. As a result, the FRTA is now approaching the Town and other stakeholder organizations, such as the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FCRHRA), to request assistance with funding this shortfall.

If the FRTA is unable to secure sufficient additional funds to support the project, there is a risk that the grant funds would need to be surrendered and the project would not move forward. Under current economic circumstances, there is no guarantee a future grant opportunity will be available.

The project as designed would improve safety for all users at a bus stop location served by two bus routes (23, 32), at an intersection which serves the Industrial Park and becomes quite busy during peak hours.

Public Safety: The current configuration of this intersection lacks any pedestrian facilities, despite the fact that the bus stops on both sides of the street are utilized by passengers of two bus routes which experienced a combined ridership of over 28,000 during FY24. At present, these two bus stops on a 40-mph road do not even have a crosswalk painted on the pavement where passengers get onto and off the buses. Riders looking to access the Airport Industrial Park, Franklin County Technical School, or the Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority from the eastbound stop must cross Millers Falls Road, which is not safe to do under present conditions.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

Montague Center Complete Streets Design (\$91,200)

The Town applied for and was awarded the sum of \$499,682.80 from MassDOT's Complete Streets program to support three improvements in Montague Center. These include safety improvements alongside North Street, Main Street, and the Town Common; bicycle accommodations on Main Street; and improvements at the FRTA bus stop on Main Street in Montague Center. While the grant is eligible to fund construction-phase services, including administration and oversight, other necessary expenses must come from other sources.

The Town has received quotes to provide the additional services that are necessary for the projects to move forward. Items that require funding include Final Design (\$74,400), Project Specifications (\$6,400), and Bid Documents and Bid Tabs (\$10,400), totaling \$91,200.

The substantial award from MassDOT for these three projects in Montague Center presents a rare opportunity to leverage outside resources for improving vehicular, pedestrian, and bicyclist safety in the village center. Allowing these projects to advance presents significant cost savings as compared to the Town relying on its own capital funds to cover nearly \$500,000 worth of construction costs on these essential improvements.

This area has been the subject of intensive concern and discussions for several years by neighborhood residents with the Planning Board and Selectboard, related to local traffic safety. Community input has identified traffic calming and bike/pedestrian safety improvements as top priorities.

Public Safety: The high speed of motorists travelling through the Montague Center village has been a topic of concern among local residents for several years. The primary motivation behind the Town's successful grant application was to implement traffic-calming measures that will improve the safety of the road for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and bicyclists, reducing the risk of serious and fatal collisions.

*Capital Improvements Committee grade: **Recommend***

Keith Footbridge Abatement (\$67,900)

As part of the proposed demolition project of the former Strathmore Mill site at 20 Canal Road, the Keith footbridge, spanning the Power Canal and connecting the complex to Canal Street, will need to be removed.

The footbridge is owned by FirstLight Hydro Generating Co., which has agreed to fund and procure construction services for its removal. However, the Town is responsible for mitigating hazardous materials on the Town-owned utility lines which are located on this bridge. The requested funds are necessary for the engineering and abatement to remove asbestos-containing materials from the Town's utility lines on the footbridge.

After the removal of hazardous materials, DPW staff will cut and cap the utility lines, after which the bridge will be ready for removal by FirstLight's contractors.

Public Safety: The demolition project for the former Strathmore Mill complex in the Canal District of Turners Falls is based on the threat posed to the community by the presence of these unsafe and decaying structures. The buildings on the site are in the initial stages of collapse, and must be addressed in a timely fashion to prevent immense harm to the health and safety of residents, as well as to the ecology of the Connecticut River, should an unplanned collapse occur. Abatement of hazardous materials on the Town-owned utility lines of the Keith footbridge is a necessary prerequisite to further work.

FY27 Preview

The CIC discussed several projects in great detail that are not included in the FY26 slate of capital requests. These articles were not ready for the CIC to recommend to tonight's Annual Town Meeting, but the CIC expects to receive and review updated requests for upcoming Town Meetings.

- GMRSD Sheffield Admin repointing/exterior work
- GMRSD Sheffield Admin window replacements
- GMRSD Sheffield Admin ADA restrooms
- GMRSD New Elementary School Feasibility Study (match for leveraging MSBA grant)
- CWF Secondary and primary clarifiers upgrade
- Off-road sewer lines relining
- Swamp Road bridge rehab match (for leveraging MassDOT Small Bridge grant)
- Avenue A traffic signal replacements (2)

6 Year Capital Plan

The updated 6-Year Capital Plan is in the process of being developed. The CIC is currently taking inventory from all existing studies of capital assets (facilities, utilities, roads, vehicles, etc.) to develop a central, prioritized capital plan with a 6-year planning horizon.

Respectfully,

Gregory Garrison, Chair

Jason Burbank

Ariel Elan

Chris Menegoni

Lynn Reynolds