



Montague Capital Improvements Committee

May 2023 Annual Town Meeting Report

Approved by the CIC 3/8/2023 Rev.3/29/2023

I. Background

The Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) received requests and began meeting with Montague department heads and regional school district leaders beginning in November 2022 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 outlining and presenting the capital needs of each department.

This year's report of recommendations summarizes the committee's findings following several months of meetings, research, and deliberation and relies upon the same approach to evaluation developed last year. The grading system, explained below, is consistent with that used in past years.

This year the CIC initially received 10 (10) 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and as pertinent information became available, some of the original were reformulated, combined, disaggregated, withdrawn, or otherwise modified. This report presents the final slate of seven (7) capital requests and the CIC's recommendations following its investigation into said requests. The final slate of requests reflect ongoing modernization needs at the Clean Water Facility (CWF), bridge repairs, workspace upgrades at town hall, addressing a blighted property, in addition to routine capital needs of the Department of Public Works.

The value of capital requests on the final slate of Annual Town Meeting requests is notably less than the previous year, however several larger capital requests from the Parks and Recreation Department can be expected in the upcoming Fall Special Town Meeting.

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 save the town financially?

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

Other- Any other reason identified and 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 24 Submissions and Recommendations

The table below offers a summary view of special article requests and CIC recommendations for FY24 capital project spending. Overall, spending associated with recommended articles equals \$648,092. These recommendations are further explained in section II.

Summary of Final Motions/Recommendations

Request	Amount	Approved	Vote
Clean Water Facility- Rough Terrain Vehicle	\$ 25,000	Yes	4-0
Clean Water Facility- Septage Receiving Station Upgrade	\$ 264,000	Yes	4-0
Clean Water Facility- Operations Boiler Replacement	\$ 113,500	Yes	4-0
Public Works- Vehicles and Equipment	\$ 70,592	Yes	4-0
Town Hall Carpeting and Flooring Replacement	\$ 25,000	Yes	4-0
Economic Development and Industrial Corp- Demolish 38 Avenue A	\$ 50,000	Yes	4-0
Public Works- 11 th Street Bridge Rehabilitation	\$ 100,000	Yes	4-0

2. FY24 Articles Recommended for Consideration by Annual Town Meeting

CWF Rough Terrain Vehicle (\$25,000): The Clean Water Facility is a campus comprised of two separate buildings with various exterior facilities on the grounds. The Administrative and Operations buildings are separated by over 900 feet. A small utility vehicle is necessary to transport parts/supplies/equipment between the buildings.

The CWF currently uses a golf-cart that has reached the end of its useful life. A rough terrain utility vehicle equipped with a plow and sander would assist in plowing and maintaining the many feet of sidewalks, driveways, walkways at the facility. The CWF is responsible for clearing snow at the facility.

The new vehicle will enable enhanced productivity through greater storage, transport, and snow/ice treatment capabilities.

The CWF anticipates purchasing a John Deer Gator Work Series RTV, a Kubota Diesel RTV or similar.

Service Interruption, staff safety and productivity: The current vehicle is at the end of its useful life and must be replaced. The new vehicle will enable enhanced productivity through greater storage, transport, and snow/ice treatment capabilities.

Capital Improvements Committee grade. Recommend

CWF Septage Receiving Station Upgrade (\$264,000)

Septage is waste that is trucked into the plant from septic tank haulers. The CWF generates a large percentage of revenue from septage receiving services. The current station is approaching the end of its useful life and intermittent failures have been reported. The proposed new system is a prefabricated unit that sits over a dry pit.

The current station is not set up to monitor pH levels as required per MGL, nor does the station have an automated system for accurately tracking and monitoring haulers and their discharges. The ability to accurately monitor and sample/test haulers and their loads is important to protect the quality of sludge the facility produces and to protect the town from EPA permit violations. Emerging concerns about PFAS (forever) chemicals and its associated regulations have highlighted the importance of implementing a new station.

Cost Avoidance: Should the system fail, the plant will be unable to maintain revenue which would increase sewer user rates. The CIC understand that the current system did fail temporarily last year which fast tracked the need for the upgrades. Additionally, the modernization is needed to be able to monitor and report what septage the plant is receiving. Non-compliance with NPDES permit could result in unanticipated costs and pollution. Lastly, the new system will allow for more efficient and accurate billing.

Capital Improvements Committee grade. Recommend

CWF Operations Building Boiler Replacement (\$113,500)

The boiler from 1980s is approaching the end of its useful life. The operations building houses critical infrastructure for the plant. The burner has repeatedly failed and continues to have issues beyond normal maintenance and repair. There is legitimate cause for concern that the boiler may not make it through another winter.

A 56Kw Vacuum Pellet Boiler pellet system with an external silo for pellet storage is the most suitable heating system for the operations building. The CIC considered several fuel options for the new furnace. Natural Gas is not available. Heat Pumps are not recommended due to the hydrogen sulfide and plant safety requirements. Oil burners would carry a cost premium to re-line the chimney.

The CIC recommends replacing the oil boiler with a pellet fuel system for the following reasons:

- Pellet boiler will be cheaper than in-kind replacement of an oil boiler. (\$113,500 for pellet system vs \$130,000 for oil).
- Pellet fuel cost savings are projected to be \$12,000 per year over oil
- The pellet boiler system carries a 30 year warranty and 30 year life cycle. This equates to a 10 year payback.
- The town may be eligible for a 35% grant from USDA Forest Service Wood Innovation Grant Program (\$39,725)
- Numerous municipal facilities such as the Olver Transit Center in Greenfield use pellet fuel.

The CIC notes that there will still need to be a future ventilation system capital project in the operations building to address air quality due hydrogen sulfides. However, the CIC agrees with the CWF Superintendent that pursuing the boiler at this time as a separate project is prudent.

Service Interruption: Failure of the boiler could present a true emergency at the plant. All pipes that feed into the facility come through the operations building and must be temperature controlled. There are many pieces of delicate equipment, motor controls, etc. By planning ahead, the plant will be able to seamlessly convert to a more sustainable, cost effective fuel source without cause a service interruption.

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

DPW Vehicles and Equipment Fund - \$70,592

This fund provides accessible funding for the DPW superintendent to fund purchases of and/or major repairs to DPW vehicles and equipment. Expenditures from this fund are governed by a new Policy adopted in 2022. That 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.

Based on a balance of \$29,408 in the DPW discretionary account as of March 1, this appropriation is expected to return the total DPW discretionary fund balance to approximately \$100,000 at the end of the current fiscal year.

The DPW vehicle/equipment inventory is current and in good condition. The anticipation of large unexpected expenses is not anticipated—but may still occur. The CIC's preference is for requests for light pickup trucks be included in the normal capital improvements schedule instead of through the discretionary account. This is due to the cost of new light-duty trucks now approaching and even exceeding \$70,000.

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 project while the Town identifies a method to appropriate funding to repair or replace.

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

Town Hall Carpeting and flooring- \$25,000

The carpeting on the first floor of town hall is at the end of its useful life. It is worn and badly stained, despite many attempts to clean it. The town has tested and confirmed that asbestos containing tile is not present under the existing carpeted areas.

Any funds remaining after the carpet work is performed will be dedicated to replacement of previously abated tile floors in the first floor basement and stairwells, as well as treatment of any painted or unpainted concrete floor surfaces in the basement level building area.

Other: Staff Productivity and Customer Service: The town offices are a primary point of interface between town officials and the public. Sound flooring and tidy appearance are important for customer and employee experience. The CIC advises that the purchase should include specifications for low-VOC adhesives and carpeting so as to protect the indoor air quality for employees and customers.

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

38 Avenue A Demolition- \$50,000

The Property has been owned by the town's economic development agency the Montague Economic Development and Industrial Corporation since 1990. The Building has been vacant since 2010 and condemned since 2013. The structure is a 2,200 cinder block on slab building on Avenue A.. The rubber membrane roof has failed and the mansard roof is showing significant signs of failure. The building was gutted and abated of asbestos containing material in 2013 using a town meeting appropriation. The building is not historically significant and would not be subject to the demo delay bylaw. The budget includes removing the concrete slab and capping existing utility connections at the curb. The lot will be loamed and seeded.

The CIC understands that the community's long term goal is to redevelop the site with a new building that enhances the downtown, however, based on the current market realities, the site will enjoy an interim use as flat, grassed open space.

Public Safety: The CIC agrees with the EDIC's conclusion that the building is at the tipping point of becoming blight and a public safety hazard. The mansard structure is failing and shingles are falling off. The roof is actively leaking. This is not the impression that the town desires to portray, particularly in such a high visibility location. Absent a plan or partner to revitalize the property, the CIC feels that investing into the rehabilitation of the building would not be a wise use of town funds.

Cost Avoidance: The EDIC has tried unsuccessfully over the past 10+ years to pass the cost of demolition onto potential developers of the property. The demolition expense is considered a barrier to productive re-use of the property. Based on the recent history of attempts to redevelop the property, the CIC agrees with the EDIC's conclusion that the market can not

currently support new construction. This action will help advance the development continuum for the property.

It is noteworthy that by demolishing the structure, the town will no longer have to carry abandoned building insurance on the property which equates to cost savings of approximately \$900 per year.

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

Public Works- 11th Street Bridge Rehabilitation- \$100,000

The 11th Street Bridge is a town-owned bridge over the Turners Falls Power Canal that connects the Patch Neighborhood to Avenue A. The bridge was last rehabilitated by the state in the 1980's. In October of 2022, MassDOT, as part of their routine inspection cycle identified a structural deficiency in the bridge relating to the bearings under the floor beams of the bridge. The report rates the finding as 'as soon as possible' urgency. In response, the town hired the engineering firm Weston and Sampson to evaluate the condition and identify a course of action for the town. The engineer recommends a schedule of short-term repairs which include the following:

- replacing damaged bolts at the connection between the floor beam and stringer connection plate
- repairs to sheared anchor bolts at the West Pier's floor beam
- concrete repair at bridge piers and sidewalk
- welding repairs to hand rail system
- replace bolts at handrail and truss systems

The Special Article request will cover the cost to engineer the repairs and secure a qualified bridge construction firm to execute the short term repairs identified in the Weston and Sampson report dated 2/24/23. The work will be fast tracked to be completed in the summer 2023 construction season. DPW has demonstrated to the CIC's satisfaction that that deploying Chapter 90 funds for this project is not advisable, as it would prevent the Town's ability to repave the entirety of Wendell Road in summer 2023.

Service Interruption: Failure to act within the budget cycle risks the imposition of weight restrictions or closure of the bridge. Approval at Annual Town Meeting is timely because certain concrete repairs need to be accomplished during the annual canal drawdown in September. The work will have to be carefully timed with that annual window. Further, MassDOT has programmed \$60M to replace 3 nearby bridges in FY26 including a replacement of the 6th Street Bridge to the Patch neighborhood. Strategically, it is important to shore up the reliability of the 11th Street Bridge prior to the reconstruction of the 6th Street Bridge by MassDOT. Closure or weight restrictions of this bridge to the Patch

Neighborhood would cause serious circulation issues as the 6th Street bridge is only wide enough for one-way traffic.

Public Safety: MassDOT has advised the town to make structural repairs to the town-owned bridge as soon as possible. The Town owns the asset and ultimately has a responsibility to maintain structurally safe bridges. This capital project will address the immediate safety concerns while the town formulates a plan with MassDOT for long term rehabilitation.

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

FY 24 NON- Capital Special Article Requests

Non-Capital requests are for purchases valued less than \$25,000 and with a lifespan of less than 25 years. These articles are not as closely vetted as capital articles, however the CIC does typically review and offer recommendations to ensure compliance with the town's capital planning objectives. The CIC offer the following recommendation on FY24 non-capital article requests, totaling \$113,500 :

Libraries	Window and door repairs at M.F. Branch Library	\$14,000	RECCOMEND
Conservation Commission	Supplement to Waidlich Conservation Fund	\$10,000	RECCOMEND
Parks and Recreation	Unity Park Community Garden Well	\$12,000	RECCOMEND
Parks and Recreation	Unity Park Parking Lot Improvements	\$12,500	RECCOMEND
Town Clerk	Fireproof Locking Storage Cabinets	\$25,000	RECCOMEND
GMRSD	Sheffield Gym/Auditorium Roof Repair	\$20,000	RECCOMEND
GMRSD	Sheffield Admin Security Door	\$20,000	RECCOMEND

FY23 Request Review

While not relevant to the development of the FY24 Annual Town Meeting warrant, the CIC wishes to provide a summary of capital article requests that were submitted as part of the FY23 Capital Requests Cycle. Each of these projects received funding as requested in the FY23 budget year, with authorization received at either the October or March Special Town Meeting.

Submitted by	Project Description	Appropriation	CIC
GMRSD	Hillcrest School Floors	\$56,000	RECCOMEND
CWF	Screw Pump Replacement	\$2,500,000	RECCOMEND

CWF	Transit Van to replace pickup	\$68,000	RECCOMEND
DPW	New Pick-up w/ plow and sander	\$80,000	RECCOMEND
DPW	One Ton Dump Truck w/ plow and Sander	\$100,000	RECCOMEND
Building/Assessors/ Health	Inspectional Services Vehicle	\$50,000	RECCOMEND
Selectboard	Colle Building Roof Replacement Project	\$225,789	RECCOMEND
Libraries	Feasibility Study for Main Library in Turners Falls	\$35,250	RECCOMEND
Total		\$3,059,039	

FY24 Preview

The CIC discussed several special article requests from the Parks and Recreation Department in great detail. These article were not ultimately ready for the CIC to recommend to Annual Town Meeting, but the CIC expects to receive updated requests for the Fall Special Town Meeting

- Montague Center Park Improvements (To leverage a potential \$500,000 PARC grant)
- Unity Park Lighting

6 Year Capital Plan

The initial 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. The plan will be developed and adopted in advance of the FY25 budget planning cycle and will prove to be a useful resource moving forward.

Respectfully,

Gregory Garrison, Chairman

Jason Burbank

Ariel Elan

Chris Menegoni