

MONTAGUE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 3, 2025, 3:30 pm, Town Hall Annex Meeting Room and via Zoom

In Attendance:

CIC Members: Gregory Garrison (GG), Ariel Elan (AE), Chris Menegoni (CM), Lynn Reynolds (LR), Jason Burbank (JB)

Town Staff: Christopher Nolan-Zeller (CNZ) – Assistant Town Administrator; Chelsey Little (CL) – Clean Water Facility Superintendent; Samuel Stevens (SS) – Clean Water Facility Foreman/Operations Manager (arrived at 4:09PM)

Also present: Jennifer Waryas (JW) (arrived at 3:54PM)

Meeting called to order 3:31PM, GG Presiding

1. Call to Order and Approve any outstanding meeting minutes: 11/12/25

MOTION to approve the minutes of 11/12/25, by CM, LR Seconded. CM-AYE, GG-AYE, LR- AYE, AE-ABSTAIN, JB-ABSTAIN. MOTION PASSED

2. Review of Clean Water Facility (CWF) Capital Article Requests (CWF Superintendent Chelsey Little, invited)
 - a. Secondary Clarifier Mechanism Replacement (x2) (\$966,000)

CL explained that the two secondary clarifiers are original to the facility's construction in the 1960s. Lots of maintenance has been done on them, but they are due for replacement with more efficient and up-to-date technology. The clarifiers currently were of the draft-tube style, which was ideal for treating pulp generated by the Town's former paper mills, but is considered highly inefficient today compared to new designs which use less expensive spiral rake blades. Meanwhile, the clarifiers' concrete has held up well, but require sealing and crack repairs as part of this project which should extend their life another 20 years. This would be an in-house project completed by CWF staff, and would be significantly less expensive than having the same work contracted out (CL estimated a general contractor would charge approximately \$2 million).

GG asked if CL was confident her team could handle such a complex project, and commended the department for its willingness to handle large undertakings. CL noted that in-house projects allow for more local control while avoiding the costs of contractor overhead, prevailing wage rates, and less risk of communication breakdown.

JB asked if the secondary clarifiers had a role in controlling the facility's effluent quality. CL responded that they are crucial for this purpose, and without them functioning properly, the Town would be sending material into the river in violation of its permits. As is, the clarifiers have become a major challenge for staff to maintain.

CM asked what would happen with the steel material from the existing equipment to be replaced. CL responded that this would be sold as scrap metal.

GG asked for an estimated timeline for this project. CL noted that due to procurement, shop submittals, an estimated 40-week lead time, and a shortage of available vendors able to provide this equipment, the project would most likely not be completed until early 2028.

CM asked if the mechanisms would be replaced in one clarifier at a time. CL confirmed this was the case, and with at least one always functioning, no bypass would be necessary.

GG asked for an estimated lifespan of the new equipment. CL stated that it should last at least 50 years, and that stainless steel, while more expensive upfront, would have a longer lifespan, less burdensome maintenance, and improved safety.

AE asked if the photos provided by CL could be included in the Annual Town Meeting packet. CNZ stated that this could be arranged.

JW arrives.

GG asked what sub-tasks would need to be contracted out. CL responded that only electrical and coating would.

GG asked if CL planned to utilize bonding for this project. CL responded that this was the plan, and anticipated a 4% interest rate, and that the project was expected to correspond with a 3.5-5% increase in sewer rate fees. CL also noted that new rate-setting software approved by the Selectboard would improve transparency by being able to show users how much the cost of different capital projects would impact user rates, and would also help staff strategically plan the timing of projects in a way that avoids sudden drastic increases.

- b. Super Duty Work Truck with Plow and Lights (\$85,000)

CL requested to return to this item after SS arrives.

- c. Wastewater Facility Planning Study (\$125,000)

CL explained that the primary-treatment half of the CWF dates back to the 1960s, and has had minimal upgrades with outdated equipment. The operations building

is in a state of decay, with significant corrosion of equipment and unhealthy working conditions. A study was being sought to help the CWF effectively mobilize once for a large-scale overhaul of this half of the facility.

JW asked what the source of the cost estimate for this request was. CL noted that a quote for the study was provided by Weston & Sampson Engineering. CL also explained that grant programs were being explored to help fund this project, but many either required the Town to appropriate the full amount needed before applying, or at least would view the Town's application as much more competitive if it did so.

GG asked what components would be included in this study. CL responded that it would be all-inclusive of both the buildings and infrastructure in the primary-treatment section of the facility.

JW asked if the price was expected to increase once an engineering consultant was brought on board. CL responded that this type of study was not expected to come with unanticipated price increases, since this phase would be design-only and the engineer would essentially be starting from scratch.

JB asked how close this study would bring the Town to having bid-ready construction documents. CL responded that engineering reports would be expected as deliverables from this phase, which would then allow for competitive grant applications to be submitted in late 2026. These reports would also help serve as a roadmap for future years of CWF capital improvements.

SS arrives.

d. Super Duty Work Truck with Plow and Lights (\$85,000)

CL commended SS for his excellent work with directing and helping to complete several successful in-house projects for the department.

SS explained that the CWF currently has nine employees, and two vehicles which seat a combined five people. This arrangement requires him to frequently use his personal vehicle to check job sites, oversee crews, pick up parts, and check on pump stations while being on-call 24/7.

JW asked if \$85k would actually cover the cost of purchasing a truck, and whether a lease option should be considered. SS expressed confidence that the requested amount would be sufficient, and noted that leases come with many usage restrictions, such as not being able to plow and needing to stay under maximum milage numbers. GG noted that using borrowing to pay for vehicles in some ways could provide some of the cost advantages of leasing without the limitations.

JW asked what happened with old vehicles once replaced. CL responded that these were treated as surplus property and auctioned off to the highest bidder.

JW asked how often CWF staff needed to respond to sudden off-site emergencies. CL noted that this was almost a daily occurrence due to aging infrastructure.

3. Discuss CWF capital needs and ongoing capital projects

- Montague Center Pump Station: 95% of exterior work was complete. Project being done entirely in-house except for electrical and generator-related work. A new wooden barrier was being constructed to provide noise insulation for nearby neighbors, although the new generator is quieter than the previous one, despite being located outdoors. Project expected to come in \$50-100k under budget.
- CWF Main Generator: Complex project completed successfully over past two years where CWF staff served as general contractor.
- Aeration Blowers and Diffusers: Transitioned from coarse-bubble to fine-bubble technology, leading to a substantial 61% reduction in the facility's overall energy consumption. Project was funded by the GAP grant program offered by the MA Dept. of Environmental Protection, and was being touted in the field as a tremendous success story.
- Pump Station Generator Replacements: G St and J St now completed, Lake Pleasant scheduled for replacement this Spring, and the new portable backup generator had been ordered. The generators at First St and Poplar St were installed in 2012 and still working fine. The Industrial Blvd generator replacement remains scheduled for FY28.
- Screw Pumps: Project mostly complete, with new pumps installed, and building and well rehab. The bypass remains active while waiting for the pump manufacturer to come on-site for startup and the two-week commissioning period, currently scheduled for just after the New Year.

GG thanked CL, SS, and the CWF team for their dedicated and high-quality work done for the community.

CL and SS left meeting.

JB left meeting.

4. Initial review and discussion of FY27 capital article requests from Gill-Montague Regional School District

CNZ noted that the Schools had withdrawn their initial request to consider replacement of the track and tennis courts at Turners Falls High School.

5. Review and discuss draft of new Vehicle/Equipment Capital Request Form

CM requested a line be added for approximate annual usage, and expressed general support for trimming the size of the Town's current fleet.

6. Topics not anticipated in the 48 hour posting requirements

None.

7. Set next meeting date and time

The next meeting would be held in hybrid format in the Town Hall Annex Meeting Room and on Zoom at 3:30PM on 12/10.

8. Adjournment

MOTION to close the meeting at 4:59PM by CM, AE Seconded. CM-AYE, GG-AYE, AE-AYE. LR-AYE. MOTION PASSED

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Nolan-Zeller