

# MONTAGUE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE

## Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 3:30 pm, Town Hall Annex Meeting Room and via Zoom**

### **In Attendance:**

CIC Members: Gregory Garrison (GG), Chris Menegoni (CM), Lynn Reynolds (LR), Jason Burbank (JB) (arrived at 3:32pm), Ariel Elan (AE) (arrived at 3:34pm)

Town Staff: Christopher Nolan-Zeller (CNZ) – Assistant Town Administrator; Linda Tardif (LT) – Managing Director of Shea Theater Arts Center

### **Meeting called to order 3:30PM, GG Presiding**

1. Call to Order and Approve any outstanding meeting minutes: 12/10/25

*MOTION to approve the minutes of 12/10/25, by GG, CM Seconded. CM-AYE, GG-AYE, LR-ABSTAIN. MOTION PASSED*

2. Review of Shea Theater Capital Article Request (Linda Tardif, Shea Theater Arts Center Director, invited)
  - a. Facility and Theatrical System Upgrades (\$100,000)

GG disclosed that his employer, Northeast Solar, is a sponsor of the Theater. CM disclosed that his business, Great Falls Harvest, is also a sponsor.

*JB arrives at meeting.*

LT provided an overview of the organization's application to the Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Facilities Grant program, which would fund improvements related to safety and audience experience, including the installation of an accessible lift to the stage, as well as lighting and electrical upgrades. If awarded, this would be the organization's third time participating in this grant program.

GG asked for clarification on the \$100,000 match. LT noted that the program required a 1:1 local match, with the overall project cost estimated at \$200,000. Awards would be announced in May 2026, with the requirement that the match be secured within 18 months.

*AE arrives at meeting.*

CM asked about the use of used vs. new audio equipment. LT noted that purchasing new equipment was the preferred option, but it would depend on whether the full amount was received.

CM asked what safety improvements were included. LT responded that while the building is already equipped with sprinklers and has a fire suppression system connected to the Fire Department, improvements would include an automatic lighting adjustment that would trigger all theater lights to turn on, in the event the building goes into alarm during a performance.

LR asked what the building's hemp fly system was. LT explained that hemp rope was used to hold up pipes above the stage. These were at the limit of their weight capacity, and some or all should be upgraded to a chain/hardwired steel model.

AE asked if the curtains were one use of the fly system. LT noted that they were, and that installing an automated system was preferable if funds were available.

AE asked if these improvements would help attract more acts. LT responded that they would, and the organization was rising to meet contemporary production needs, noting that the building has some competitive disadvantages.

CM asked how confident the organization was that the grant would be successful. LT responded they were cautiously optimistic, and that they had a 100% success rate for previous applications to this program, which funded previous renovations and new restrooms.

AE asked if the organization had successfully utilized other grant programs. LT responded that they had.

LR expressed that the Theater was a strong asset for the community. GG noted that certain Town Meeting members may show skepticism about whether this primarily helps the Theater as an organization rather than local infrastructure, but there were numerous community benefits to having an accessible theater facility with long-term viability. LT responded that this was a fair concern, but noted that these were vital steps for the Theater to continue serving as an economic driver for downtown Turners Falls.

AE asked whether any numbers were available demonstrating the economic impact of the Theater for downtown businesses. CM noted that anecdotally, his business saw noticeably heightened activity during events at the Theater. LT added that both RiverCulture and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce likely had some tourism-related figures they could share.

AE asked whether the Theater held a liquor license. LT noted that they did, and primarily sold easy-to-serve canned beverages. This was a streamlined approach

but an important source of revenue. AE expressed interest in learning how much the organization paid the Town in annual fees for its licenses.

AE expressed that a more vivid description of the Theater's benefits to the community was needed for Town Meeting, as taxpayers would prioritize seeing a return on investment.

GG asked whether recent quotes had been obtained for each of the project's components. LT responded that they had, with all quotes being obtained in the previous few months.

3. Update on Gill-Montague Regional School District's acceptance into MA School Building Authority (MSBA) eligibility phase for Sheffield Elementary School expansion, renovation, consolidation

CNZ explained that the school district's period of eligibility would begin on May 1<sup>st</sup>, with the process expected to progress rapidly after Annual Town Meeting.

GG expressed that a conversation was needed with school officials about interim needs for their facilities before construction, which was still years away. AE noted that the district has been continuing to delay capital projects in order to help improve its competitiveness for the MSBA program. CM agreed that this was a problem. GG added that the schools also had the largest amount of facility improvements needed as shown on the 5-year capital plan, but currently the Town could only watch and wait for the district to begin the next steps of its eligibility phase.

AE asked about the Town's overall strategy for old buildings slated for major renovations or replacement. CM noted that it was important for these to be kept viable for reinvestment, and it was reasonable for the Town to allocate certain funds for interim repairs, suggesting an emergency building fund be established in case of sudden repairs needed at buildings such as the Carnegie Library or the elementary schools prior to their planned major upgrades.

LR expressed disappointment that the school district administration building would not be eligible for MSBA funding, as this building was in rough condition. CNZ noted that the district still planned to improve or replace the admin building, but that this would be considered an ineligible cost by MSBA, and would be funded only by local sources.

4. Review slate of capital requests and updates

The Committee agreed to review the full slate of requests and vote its recommendations to Town Meeting at its next meeting.

5. Next Steps in the FY27 Capital Planning Cycle

After voting recommendations at its next meeting, a joint meeting will occur with Finance Committee to discuss and answer questions.

6. FY27-31 Capital Plan Update

CNZ noted that Police Chief Haskins had mentioned that some improvements may be necessary to the Public Safety Building's HVAC system in the next few years. JB offered to work with the Chief on optimizing this system, and CNZ agreed to put the two in touch.

7. Topics not anticipated in the 48 hour posting requirements

None.

8. 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 2/11.

9. Adjournment

*MOTION to close the meeting at 4:35PM by CM, AE Seconded. CM-AYE, GG-AYE, AE-AYE, LR-AYE, JB-AYE. MOTION PASSED*

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Nolan-Zeller