



Town of Montague
Department, Board, Committee, Commission
BUDGET NARRATIVE

FY 21

Complete this form electronically! Be clear and concise!

Department: Planning and Conservation Submitted by: Walter Ramsey

1. Please describe and provide the rationale for any substantial changes in your FY21 line item budget submission.

- A) Create Assistant Planner position, classification Grade E: This position will encompass and expand the responsibilities of the culture coordinator, including an enhanced economic/community development objective, project management responsibilities, and support for committees under the Planning and Conservation Umbrella, including facilitating regulatory processes. Roll the cultural coordinator and planning clerk positions into the expanded duties of an assistant planner position: a cost saving efficiency that sustainably and appropriately staffs the Planning and Conservation Department at 2 full time employees.

- B) Create "MEDIC Coordinator" (stipend position - \$4,000 - roughly 100 hours/year): Currently, staffing for the MEDIC is reactionary. Proactive planning and management would make it a more effective catalyst for planned growth. Changing to this proactive stance would require substantial time on Town Planner's part and is beyond the scope of the planner's role. In his role as Coordinator, the planner would provide on-call staff support to the MEDIC, manage its quarterly meetings, and maintain administrative records and compliance. More notably, the MEDIC Coordinator would update its Economic Development Plan and integrate it with other Town Economic Development initiatives, would advance existing initiatives (e.g. development of the Discovery Center parcels, Airport Industrial Park, Sandy Lane Industrial Area, and Canal District), and help craft a future-looking vision beyond what is current considered and within the MEDIC's control.

- C) Minor changes (net decrease of \$4,500) to expenses. Increases to reflect the professional needs of the Assistant Planner position (Seminars, travel). Planning intern position no longer proposed and only one Citizen Serve license is needed, which combined reflect a \$5,500 cost savings to the department.

2. Did you receive funding for any special articles in FY20? What is the status of those expenditures/investments?

ATM 5/4/19 Article 27- Signage at Airport Industrial Park (\$7,500). After initially planning to hire out the project, the Franklin County Tech School agreed to take on the project for materials-only cost to the Town. This will be completed in the 2019/2020 School year. Extra spending authority expected to be rescinded once the signs are complete.

3. Did you receive funding for a discretionary account in FY20? What have you purchased to date, at what cost? Looking forward in FY21, what do you expect to purchase at what cost?

No

4. To-date in FY20, has your department experienced any notable successes, such as improving or providing new programs or services, or implementing new technologies? If so, please describe.

The Department has undergone staffing adjustments since October. The Cultural Coordinator is now also serving the clerk function. This person is now functioning much closer with the Town Planner than ever before and is thus able to take on tasks that support the mission of the planning department and help with community engagement and administration. This has been proof-in-concept that a 2 full time person department is the appropriate level of support needed.

The Department is managing more grant funds than ever before (3.5M) for projects that advance community planning objectives. The department is currently managing 10 grants and over a dozen contracts: mostly technical consultants, engineers, or designers- some contractors.

Montague is developing a reputation as a model among small towns: Planner has recently gave talks on three topics: Small Town Housing Success at the Western MA Municipal Conference, Small Town Complete Streets success at MassDOT Move-it Together Conference, and planning for smart growth/opportunity zones in rural markets to Smart Growth Massachusetts. The Cultural Coordinator has given multiple talks about how Turners is a model for creative economy. These presentations build the profile of the community and helps attract ideas and investment.

RiverCulture itself has become streamlined. The cultural coordinator has maintained a high level of service, improved time management, and leveraged the success of partners like the Shea Theater, Great Falls Discovery Center, and Millers Falls Improvement Association to name a few. Signature events have been refined and networked into local downtown scene. Creative Economy and its companion dining and entertainment sector are alive and well: as evidence by revitalized Shea, a new theater in the Industrial Park, a surge of new businesses, and a sterling reputation as a “happening” destination. To increase accountability, RiverCulture is now overseen by a RiverCulture Steering Committee appointed by the Selectboard.

5. Are there challenges to your department’s ability to meet its goals and objectives that are due to its FY20 operating budget? If so, offer your recommendation(s) for improving the situation.

The function and expectations of the Planning Department have changed over time. Rather than simply being responsible for the regulatory processes of the Conservation Commission and Planning Board- the Town expects the Department to develop meaningful community plans and to implement those plans. Achieving this typically often involves developing and administering a study, project, or program. Green Communities, Municipal Vulnerabilities Preparedness, Complete Streets all require professional administrative support, but leverage grant funding that great exceeds the staff expense.

The role of the planning clerk position (created 2002) has remained static. The clerk, as defined in the job description, is essentially the record keeper for two Boards and the department. While record keeping and permit management remain essential roles of the Department, the digital era has brought efficiencies in managing those processes. What the department needs is an assistant who can manage departmental projects soup-to nuts, which involves developing strategic partnerships, engaging the community, sourcing and managing vendors, and being responsible for administration and follow-through.

The Bottom line is that the Department needs more than what the clerk description offers in order for the Department to sustain its current level of service. Permitting (Planning Board and ConsCom) are a large focus of the job descriptions of the Planning Department employees- but over the last 10 years- The department has streamlined much of the permitting processes and digitization has further simplified the processes. The town has prioritized that it retain a cultural coordinator (RiverCulture) function. I am proposing a solution that combines both of those elements into one full time position that meets the needs of the department: the Assistant Planner.