

TOWN OF MONTAGUE FY2026 ANNUAL BUDGET



FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT TO
TOWN MEETING
MONTAGUE, MASSACHUSETTS

May 7, 2025, 6:30 PM

Expected Continuation Date May 14, 2025 (if needed)

TURNERS FALLS HIGH SCHOOL THEATER



TOWN OF MONTAGUE

Finance Committee

One Avenue A

Turners Falls, Massachusetts 01376

413 863-3200 ext. 121

April 9, 2025

Dear Town Meeting Members:

One of the Finance Committee's responsibilities is to report to Town Meeting on the annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year. This booklet includes information and explanations of the major elements of the proposed budget, as well as background on each of the motions you will be asked to vote on. If you would like more details, you can find materials related to this year's budget development process on the Town's website at www.montague-ma.gov/p/374/Annual-Budget-Information, and of course if you have questions, any of us would be happy to speak with you.

The budget we are presenting to you is the result of a collaborative process that started in 2024 with a preliminary revenue forecast and solicitation from department heads and commissions of requests for anticipated budgets, when departments and committees were asked to prepare requests for anticipated capital and operating needs in their areas for Fiscal Year 2026. The Capital Improvements Committee started reviewing capital requests for FY2026 in October, and department heads who were proposing significant staffing changes presented proposals to the Selectboard (acting as the Personnel Board) in December and January.

The Finance Committee and Selectboard had all the initial operating budget and special article requests in hand by mid-December 2024. We reviewed the requests, invited public input, gathered information through written correspondence, researched and asked questions, and discussed our concerns at public meetings in February and March.

The operating budget proposed for the Town was refined by this process, and our input also helped influence decisions about the special articles that would ultimately appear on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant. When we reconvened with the Selectboard in mid-March, we received the Capital Improvements Committee's report and recommendations and then worked together to settle on a final budget to propose to you. We look forward to hearing what you think of it in May!

Respectfully, Your Finance Committee:

Dorinda Bell-Upp (Chair), Fred Bowman (Vice Chair), Christopher Menegoni (Clerk),
Francia Wisnewski, John Hanold, Leigh Rae, and Jennifer Waryas

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT TO TOWN MEETING

Fiscal Year 2026

In accordance with the bylaws of the Town, the Montague Finance Committee has investigated the cost of maintenance and expenditures of departments of the Town and here recommend in detail the amounts to be appropriated for each department for the ensuing year. We have also considered articles in Town warrants requiring the appropriation of money throughout the year. We propose a balanced budget of \$35,149,256 to provide municipal services during Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26).

Further details on the development of the FY26 budget are available on the Town's website at www.montague-ma.gov/p/374/Annual-Budget-Information. The "Annual Budget Information" section includes a glossary of the terms that are bold-faced in this report, revenue estimates for FY26, line-item budget requests for all town departments, budget narratives, our Capital Improvements Committee's annual report, and other resources.

INTRODUCTION

This budget strives to provide effective municipal programs and services to Montague's residents, while assuring a financially sustainable future. Our **Revenue** estimates reflect our expectations for tax collections, local receipts, and state aid in various forms.

As has been the case in recent years, town departments were asked to submit "level services" budgets, and for the most part they succeeded in finding ways to do so while containing costs. There were new staff positions requested this year by several departments, but only two made it through the personnel board approval process. The first is in the Council on Aging budget with the addition of a part-time Administrative Assistant to assist with the administrative work of the department to allow the Director to focus more on programming and services. The second additional position is in the Farmer's Market budget with the addition of an Assistant Manager to fill in for the Manager in their absence with the Manager position stipend reduced to offset this request.

Montague's financial situation has stabilized in recent years, with an improved bond rating (AA since 2021) and increasing levels of reserves across most accounts with many of them exceeding the limit requirements set in the Montague Financial Policies. This year we have begun discussing the option of using long-term debt for larger capital expenses, and we feel encouraged by efforts to engage in longer-term planning that will ultimately help us make more strategic financial decisions. The Town's new Five-Year Capital Plan, which is updated annually, will be critical to that strategic decision-making process. This plan has been expanded to include more assets of the Town, including guardrails, roads, culverts, etc., to be more comprehensive of future liabilities of the Town.

We are grateful to everyone who has worked with us throughout this annual budget season.

FUNDING GOALS

The Finance Committee pursued several goals while developing this budget:

1. To fund annual needs (both departmental operating budgets and recurring Special Articles) from recurring non-Reserve sources, and to avoid using **Reserves** for nonrecurring projects estimated to cost less than \$25,000. We accomplished this goal again this year, using a combination of **Taxation** and **Free Cash**. Our continued ability to fund the Town's departmental operating budget and the Education assessment using only taxation is a sign of our ongoing fiscal health.
2. To fund the assessment of the Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD) according to the method described in the [Compact for Funding Education](#), which was ratified in 2009 and reaffirmed in 2019. The agreement was based on a model where Montague allocates 48.5% of defined revenues as the "Affordable Assessment," and that percentage has been used ever since. The funding of this assessment through taxation shows the support and commitment from the Town to the school district. Through an extensive process and joint meetings with various officers from the towns of Gill and Montague, the district's FY26 request matches that figure, and we recommend funding it.
3. To follow the Town's Financial Management Policies, which provide guidelines for capital spending, debt financing, and appropriations to various stabilization accounts. Bond rating agencies encourage towns to establish and follow such guidelines, and the Town's commitment to doing so resulted in favorable interest rates on debt issued in FY2022. These policies include both identifying capital projects of more than \$25,000 that might be eligible for financing through long-term debt and having annual non-excluded debt service costs of at least 5% of the Prior Year's General Operating Revenue.

Our ratio of non-excluded debt service for FY26 is only 0.15%. To raise the percentage of non-excluded debt the Town is proposing using debt to fund a large Phase 2 Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation project for \$3,000,000. This project is to be split between the Town and Sewer Enterprise fund with a 60/40 split where 60% of the debt will belong to the Town and 40% will belong to the Sewer Enterprise fund. The estimated tax increase to the average taxpayer of Montague when this project is bonded is \$26.57 a year. Having certain levels of debt service within the operating budget is considered sound practice as it illustrates a community's ability to maintain infrastructure and capital assets within its regular revenues. The remainder of the FY2026 capital projects were recommended to be funded with

free cash with the focus on retaining the Town’s Capital Stabilization Fund for future requests, because there is no expected decrease in the need for capital purchases in coming years.

Some notable accomplishments from this year:

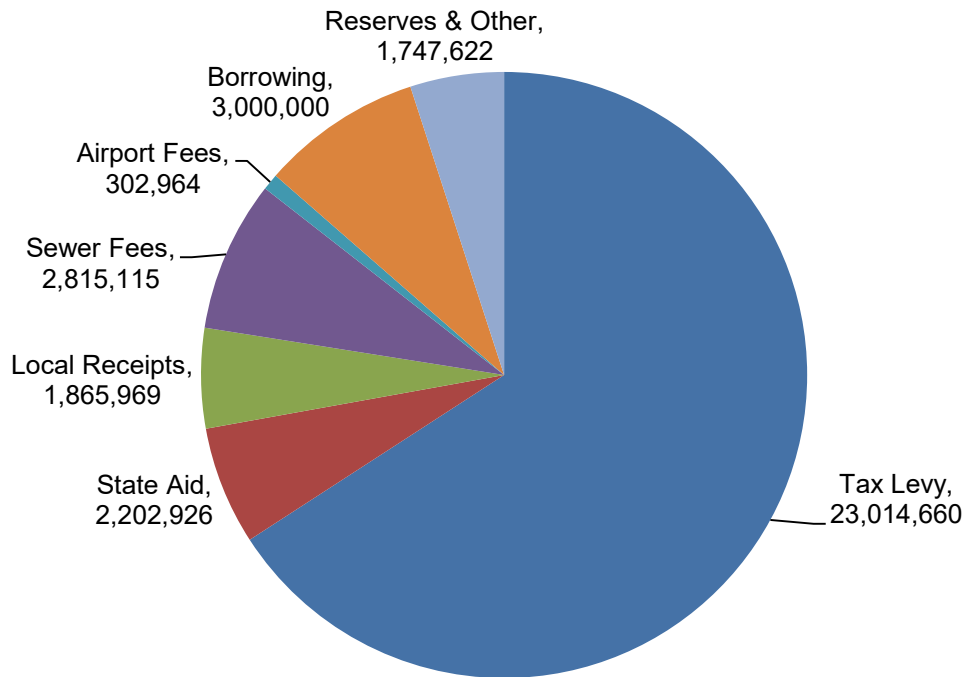
- In the summer of 2024, the Finance Committee completed a review of the Affordable Assessment with the district. The conclusion was that the Affordable Assessment is still a fair compromise, and that real advocacy would be better directed at the state to reexamine the Chapter 70 formula.
- The fall of 2024, the Finance Committee successfully transitioned to a new Town Accountant following the retirement of long-time Town Accountant, Carolyn Olsen. This has occurred at the same time as changes in many other leadership positions in other Town offices, which creates an opportunity to revisit processes from different perspectives with hopes for innovation.
- The FY25 tax rate, set in December 2024, preserved \$1.4M in **Excess Capacity** for Montague, and the **Revenue** estimate for FY26 continues to maintain excess capacity by taxing the Town \$1.1 million below the tax levy. Montague’s ability to raise revenue sufficient for its needs without taxing to the annual levy limit is an indicator of fiscal health and provides a reserve for possible future revenue reductions or capital needs.
- Contract negotiations for the bargaining units, covering 2026 to 2028, were substantially completed and they incorporated the greater part of Montague’s acceptance of the Collins Center Wage and Class study that was initiated in FY2024.

Revenues

Massachusetts General Law requires municipalities to prepare an annual budget that balances revenues with expenditures. The revenue side of our budget is derived primarily from five sources: Property Taxes, State Aid, Local Receipts, Enterprise Fund (Clean Water Facility [CWF] and Airport) revenues, and Reserves (principally Free Cash or Stabilization Funds). A summary table with revenue and expense comparisons to FY25 and FY26 is on page 10 of this report.

The following chart illustrates the proportion of revenues expected from each source. Please note that later, in the Motions, when **“Taxation”** is named as a funding source, **it includes the combination of property taxes, state aid, and local receipts.**

REVENUE HIGHLIGHTS



Property Taxes Net levy revenue is estimated to be 4.37% higher than FY25. The proposed budget assumes that property will be taxed to a level of \$1.1M below the **Levy Limit**. The Tax Levy includes revenue from local taxes on residential, commercial, industrial, and personal property.

The Tax Levy also includes **New Growth**, which is estimated at \$200,000. Historically, Montague has only budgeted the normal levels of residential growth. This year we have budgeted new growth at a higher amount, but still at half of what the 5-year average is. While in recent years Montague has benefitted several times from unanticipated New Growth, we have been advised to estimate only the more historically normal levels of growth, since personal property new growth – attributable largely to utility companies – is both volatile and unknown until the fall.

In FY2025 the average single family home value for Montague was \$295,248, with an average tax bill of \$4,491. The FY2026 proposed budget is estimated to increase the average tax bill by \$174.20 annually. Please note that this estimate does not include any valuation increases and only an estimate of new growth, as the final numbers will not be known until the Fall of 2025 before the tax rate is set in November, so this estimate is based off current FY2025 valuations. Other factors that could shift before the final taxes are set include changes to state aid, adjustments of local receipt estimates, votes to taxation at the fall Special Town Meeting, and changes to the split tax rate.

State Aid The budget projections use the Governor’s state aid figures, which provide a 5.6% increase over FY26. State Aid comprises about 8% of our planned revenue, so Montague should be able to adapt to any changes that occur, including altered state or federal funding.

Local Receipts The local receipts estimate is a slight increase over the FY25 estimate with a notable drop in the SRO Reimbursements due to Gill Montague Regional School District voting to not fund the School Resource Officer for FY26.

	FY24 Estimated	FY25 Estimated	FY26 Estimated	% of Total
Local Receipts				
Excise/Meal Taxes	\$849,490	\$846,000	\$871,025	46.7%
Penalties & Fines	\$147,000	\$145,000	\$148,505	8.0%
Charges for Trash Disposal	\$304,000	\$275,000	\$280,500	15.0%
Rental - 50% Kearsarge	\$86,235	\$70,769	\$79,831	4.3%
SRO Reimbursements	\$142,500	\$142,500	\$77,500	4.2%
All Other	\$414,265	\$379,827	\$408,608	21.9%
	\$1,943,490	\$1,859,096	\$1,865,969	100.0%

Reserves include **Free Cash, Stabilization Funds**, and other miscellaneous funds. The proposed budget for FY26 uses \$1,255,200 of Free Cash for regular Special Articles and leaves a balance of \$51,826 to be carried over to next year.

We are recommending the use of \$325,000 from the Town Capital Stabilization Fund, \$60,000 from Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization, and \$67,900 from Canal District Improvement Stabilization for Special Articles this year. The background on the motions includes an explanation of the funding source recommendations for articles.

Airport and Sewer Revenues Unlike most Town services, the Airport and the Clean Water Facility are **Enterprise Funds**. These operations collect fees from those who use their services along with other revenues, and that income is dedicated to funding their operations.

Airport revenues did not meet their goal for FY24 because of the delay of the solar project. This resulted in Town funding in FY25 and will continue to be an issue for FY26 and will again require some Town funding. A grant funds much of the debt service, and the remaining balance of the Pioneer property debt service will be funded from Town Sale of Real Estate. While the Airport continues to pursue both this solar project and other revenue opportunities, it is likely that continued assistance from the general fund will be needed for a few more years. The Finance Committee is committed to work with the Airport to support a vision of self-sustainability.

At the CWF, sewer revenues include residential and industrial sewer bills and septage fees. The revenue proportion has moved towards residential users since the closure of the last paper mill in Montague. The Town also pays a user fee to CWF to cover the cost of treating Inflow and Infiltration (I & I) in the system.

Education Revenue

Although it does not directly affect the Town's budget, Chapter 70 and Chapter 71 State Aid to local school districts is an important element of their funding, distinct from the Town's assessment contributions. The Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD) has met the Affordable Assessment target, and the Franklin County Technical School's assessment has leveled off after the decrease in enrollment of Montague students last year.

American Rescue Plan Act (APRA)

This act provides funding for Town needs that do not appear in the budget. The provisions of this act (ARPA) provided supplemental funds in FY21 through FY23 totaling over \$2.4M. These funds were all allocated by the deadline of December 31, 2024. They are noted here because they have enabled over \$1.36 million of critical investments in capital needs in the Clean Water Facility, \$588k on general capital improvements for the Town, and \$506K for economic and community recovery efforts. Projects that are under contract but not completed include the Avenue A streetscape project, screw pump project, septage receiving station, Town Hall Annex solar, and others.

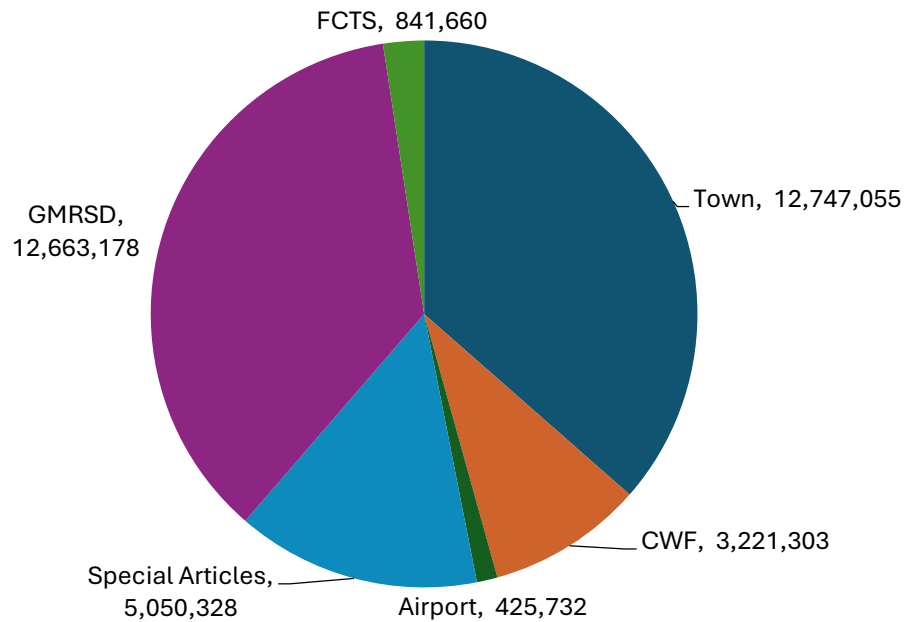
Expenditures

Expenditures are grouped into four basic categories: Town Operating, Education, Enterprise Funds, and Special Articles. Education (GMRSD + FCTS) takes the largest share, at 39%, followed by Town Operating at 37%, Enterprise Funds at 10%, and Special Articles at 14%. A summary table with revenue and expense comparisons to FY25 and FY26 is on page 10 of this report.

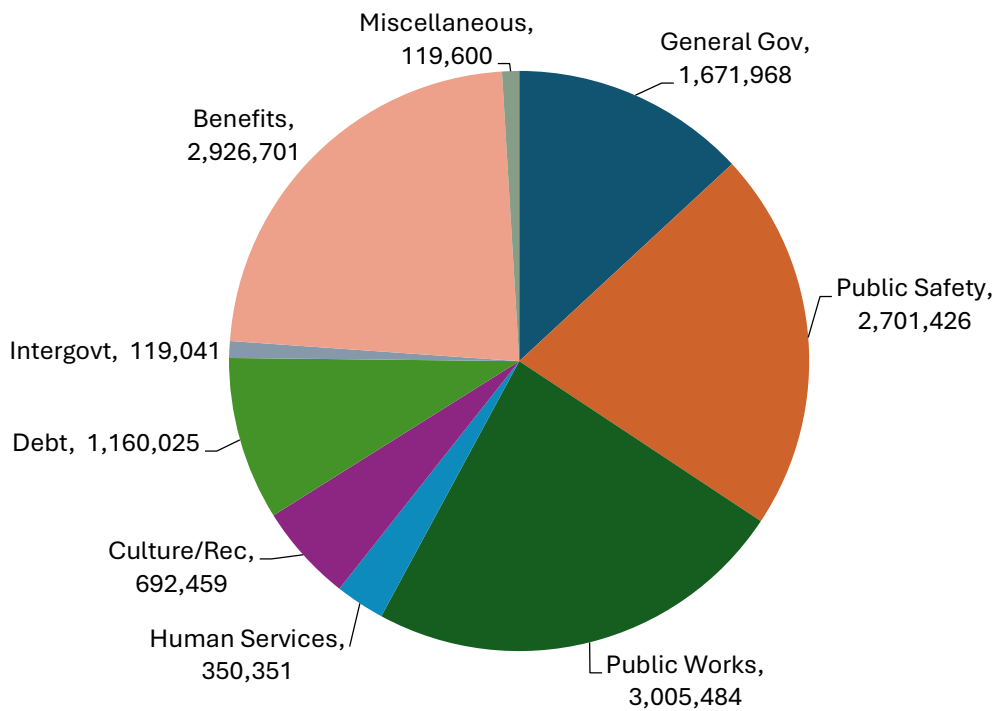
The charts on the next page show the allocations of the total appropriations being requested and the Town Operating budget.

Changes and items of note for specific budgets are noted under the relevant article's (4-10) background information.

Total Appropriations



Town Operating Budget Allocation:



The categories on the pie chart shown above correspond to lines on Schedule III, which is addressed in Article 4.

LOOKING FORWARD

The FY26 Budget that is being presented supports Montague's long-term goals and helps to continue to establish a sustainable path for the future. This budget was built with financial responsibility in mind by continuing to add to, or saving, our reserves and using only established revenue sources to fund continuing operations.

The age and condition of town-owned buildings and equipment continues to be a concern. While we have dedicated certain revenue sources for the Town Capital Stabilization Fund (such as the Kearsarge property lease, retail cannabis sales tax, and set percentage from Taxation) the annual appropriations will not come close to addressing the scope of our infrastructure needs.

At present the Town's fiscal condition is relatively healthy, and the Reserve funds we have funded diligently over the years are now a resource we can draw on for internal stability in the externally unpredictable financial environment of the future. Commitment and resourcefulness of our Town employees also continues to be a source of strength, and we urge you to support their efforts to ensure that the Town's operations and programs will continue to meet our needs.

As we look ahead, we acknowledge that there are future operating challenges for the Airport (revenue shortfalls) and the Clean Water Facility (increase in operating costs). We also acknowledge that there are large future capital needs on the horizon at the Clean Water Facility, library, and school.

We will continue to work in collaboration with the Selectboard and Capital Improvements Committee to formulate and follow a clear plan to manage the Town's assets in a responsible manner. As always, we invite both general comments and specific questions from residents and Town Meeting members.

Respectfully submitted:

Dorinda Bell-Upp (Chair), Fred Bowman (Vice Chair), Christopher Menegoni (Clerk),
Francia Wisnewski, John Hanold, Leigh Rae, and Jennifer Waryas

	HISTORICAL ATM BUDGET SUMMARY				% Incr
REVENUES	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	
Net Tax Levy	20,877,816	21,570,869	22,191,924	23,113,552	4.2%
State Aid	1,879,826	1,914,986	2,085,265	2,202,926	5.6%
Local Receipts	1,809,276	2,027,000	1,934,538	1,865,969	-3.5%
Other Available	593,813	764,599	254,541	708,072	178.2%
Reserved Receipts	49,950	53,250	52,737	52,250	-0.9%
Free Cash	251,242	2,180,701	314,000	1,255,200	299.8%
Borrowing	0	0	1,120,300	3,000,000	167.8%
Airport Fees	316,015	426,965	286,043	302,964	5.9%
Sewer User Fees	2,605,938	2,719,224	2,759,825	2,841,377	3.0%
Total Revenues	28,383,876	31,657,594	30,999,173	35,342,310	14.0%
EXPENSES					
General Government	1,531,370	1,680,319	1,663,222	1,671,968	0.5%
Public Safety	2,459,815	2,650,917	2,763,598	2,701,426	-2.3%
Public Works	2,501,850	2,774,507	2,940,162	3,005,484	2.2%
Human Services	295,827	310,537	305,173	350,351	14.8%
Culture & Recreation	604,366	666,139	685,159	692,459	1.1%
Debt Service	1,162,189	1,154,319	1,158,857	1,160,025	0.1%
Intergovernmental	110,647	113,924	116,874	119,041	1.9%
Employee Benefits	2,391,280	2,490,334	2,657,083	2,926,701	10.2%
General Insurance	119,600	120,600	119,600	119,600	0.0%
WPCF	2,872,377	3,006,124	3,119,324	3,221,303	3.3%
AIRPORT	316,015	426,965	419,677	425,732	1.4%
FCTS Assessment	1,029,566	1,053,018	837,356	841,660	0.5%
GMRSD Assessment	11,341,466	11,809,191	12,143,442	12,663,178	4.3%
Special Articles	1,331,498	3,398,085	2,069,646	5,443,382	163.0%
Total Expenses	28,067,866	31,654,979	30,999,173	35,342,310	14.0%

SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

#	TOPIC	AMOUNT REQUESTED	% OF TOTAL	FUNDING SOURCE
1	Annual Reports			
2	Elected Wages			
3	Appointed Wages			
4	Town Operating Budget	12,747,055	36.08%	Taxation
5	CWF Operating Budget	3,221,303	9.11%	Taxation/Sewer User Fees
6	Airport Operating Budget	425,732	1.20%	Taxation/Sale of RE/Airport Rev
7	Airport Fuel Revolving			
8	Colle Operating Budget	52,250	0.15%	Colle
9	FCTS Assessment	841,660	2.38%	Taxation
10	GMRSD Assessment	12,663,178	35.84%	Taxation
11	Smith Voc and Agr High School	59,000	0.17%	Taxation
12	NAGE and UE Wage and Class	125,154	0.35%	Taxation/Sewer User Fees
13	Library Accessibility/Upgrades	10,000	0.03%	Free Cash
14	<u>CWF Articles</u>			
	Used Mini-Excavator	60,000	0.17%	CWF Retained Earnings
	Generators	67,800	0.19%	CWF Retained Earnings
	Two Thickened Sludge Pumps	104,000	0.29%	CWF Retained Earnings
15	Phase 2-Sewer Collection Rehab	3,000,000	8.49%	CWF/Town Debt
16	DPW 10-Wheel Dump Truck	365,000	1.03%	Free Cash
17	DPW Dump Truck	325,000	0.92%	Town Capital Stabilization
18	<u>DPW Vehicles</u>			
	Camera Van	70,000	0.20%	Free Cash
	Pickup Truck	65,000	0.18%	Free Cash
19	<u>DPW Projects</u>			
	Oakman Street Slope Stabilization	60,000	0.17%	Free Cash
	Non-Chapter 90 Paving	30,000	0.08%	Free Cash
20	Meadow Rd Guardrails	200,000	0.57%	Free Cash
21	DPW Equipment	36,470	0.10%	Taxation
22	<u>Town Project Articles</u>			
	Millers Falls Library Storefront	39,000	0.11%	Free Cash
	Unity Park Upgrades	125,000	0.35%	Free Cash
	Montague Center Complete Streets	91,200	0.26%	Free Cash
23	FRTA Bus Stop	60,000	0.17%	Cannabis Impact Stabilization
24	Keith Footbridge	67,900	0.19%	Canal District Utility Impr Stabilization
25	<u>Annual Transfers to Reserves</u>			
	Conservation Fund	10,000	0.03%	Taxation
	Town Capital Stabilization	231,890	0.66%	Taxation/Free Cash
	GMRSD Stabilization	88,718	0.25%	Taxation/Free Cash
	OPEB Trust Fund	100,000	0.28%	Taxation/Free Cash
26	FirstLight Hydro PILOT			
27	Personal Property Thresholds			
28	Tax Title Payment Agreement			
29	Unclaimed Property			
30	Shea Theater Lease			
31	FRCOG Charter			
		35,342,310	100.00%	

**ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF MONTAGUE
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
MAY 7, 2025
Expected Continuation Date May 14, 2025 (if needed)**

MOTIONS

ARTICLE 1. Annual Reports (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to receive the reports of the Officers of the Town and any committees.

Background: This article appears regularly in the annual warrant and allows the receipt of reports.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 2. Wages for Elected Officials (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to fix the salaries of all elected officials as required by law for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, as set forth in Schedule I, Elected Officials.

**SCHEDULE I
Elected Officials**

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>FY25 BUDGET</u>	<u>FY26 REQUEST</u>	<u>FY26 RECOMMEND</u>
MODERATOR	500	500	500
SELECTBOARD			
Chairman	2,640	2,640	2,640
Second/Third Members	2,400	2,400	2,400
BOARD OF ASSESSOR			
Chairman	1,980	1,980	1,980
Second/Third Members	1,800	1,800	1,800
BOARD OF HEALTH			
Chairman	1,980	1,980	1,980
Second/Third Members	1,800	1,800	1,800
TREE WARDEN	1,764		

*Changed to appointed STM 2/12/25

Background: This article appears regularly in the annual warrant. All stipends were reviewed by the Finance Committee and Selectboard prior to the FY26 budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 5-0-1

ARTICLE 3. Wages for Appointed Officials (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to fix the salaries of all appointed officials as required by law for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, as set forth in Schedule II, Appointed Officials.

SCHEDULE II			
Appointed Officials			
<u>TITLE</u>	<u>FY25 BUDGET</u>	<u>FY26 REQUEST</u>	<u>FY26 RECOMMEND</u>
<u>ANNUAL STIPENDS</u>			
BOARD OF REGISTRARS (3)	625	625	625
BOARD OF REGISTRARS TOWN CLERK	900	900	900
EMERGENCY MGMT DIRECTOR	6,444	6,444	6,444
ANIMAL INSPECTOR	1,764	1,764	1,764
BARN INSPECTOR	1,400	1,400	1,400
IT COORDINATOR	2,352	2,352	2,352
POLICE IT ADMINISTRATOR	6,000	6,000	6,000
FOREST WARDEN	1,882	1,882	1,882
TREE WARDEN		1,764	1,764
HEARING OFFICER	2,500	2,500	2,500
FARMERS MARKET MANAGER	4,000	3,750	3,750
FARMERS MARKET ASST MANAGER		750	750
SEXTON/PER BURIAL	100.00		
SEXTON STIPEND		2,000	2,000
<u>RATES PER INSPECTION</u>			
ASST. BUILDING INSPECTOR	45.00	45.00	45.00
GAS INSPECTOR	45.00	45.00	45.00
PLUMBING INSPECTOR	45.00	45.00	45.00
ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR	45.00	45.00	45.00
<u>HOURLY RATES</u>	<u>Ranges/hr.</u>	<u>Ranges/hr.</u>	<u>Ranges/hr.</u>
EXTRA CLERICAL	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75
ELECTION WORKERS	15.00-19.75	15.00-19.75	15.00-19.75
SUMMER HIGHWAY	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75
SNOWPLOW DRIVERS	15.00-27.00	15.00-27.00	15.00-27.00
PART TIME POLICE OFFICERS	29.00-35.00	29.00-37.00	29.00-37.00
PART TIME DISPATCHERS	22.00-27.00	22.00-27.00	22.00-27.00
PARKS & RECREATION	15.00-24.25	15.00-24.25	15.00-24.25
AIRPORT INTERN	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75	15.00-18.75

SCHEDULE II
Appointed Officials

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>FY25 BUDGET</u>	<u>FY26 REQUEST</u>	<u>FY26 RECOMMEND</u>
SHIFT DIFFERENTIALS			
<u>PART TIME POLICE OFFICERS</u>			
SECOND SHIFT	1.00	1.00	1.00
THIRD SHIFT	1.25	1.25	1.25
<u>PART TIME DISPATCHERS</u>			
SECOND SHIFT	0.75	0.75	0.75
THIRD SHIFT	1.00	1.00	1.00
<u>PART TIME CLERICAL/LIBRARIES</u>	0.75	0.75	0.75

NON-UNION EMPLOYEES NOT SHOWN ABOVE (placed on FY25 NAGE Scale)

	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Range FY2025</u>		<u>Range FY2026</u>	
<u>SALARIED</u>		Start	End	Start	End
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR	J	103,470	127,339	103,470	127,339
ASSISTANT TOWN ADMIN	I	94,064	115,764	94,064	115,764
TOWN ACCOUNTANT	G	67,277	82,394	67,277	82,394
TAX COLLECTOR/TREASURER	G	67,277	82,394	67,277	82,394
TOWN CLERK	G	67,277	82,394	67,277	82,394
CHIEF OF POLICE	I	94,064	115,764	94,064	115,764
DPW SUPERINTENDENT	H	85,514	105,239	85,514	105,239
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH	G	67,277	82,394	67,277	82,394
LIBRARY DIRECTOR	G	67,277	82,394	67,277	82,394
CWF SUPERINTENDENT	H	85,514	105,239	85,514	105,239
<u>HOURLY</u>					
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT	E	25.01	30.77	25.01	30.77
POLICE LIEUTENANT	G+8.5%	40.95	45.44	40.95	45.44
POLICE CUSTODIAN	A	16.76	20.62	16.76	20.62

Informational Only: Fiscal Year 2026 budgeted wages –

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR	111,427	EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT	30.77
ASSISTANT TOWN ADMIN	96,417	DPW SUPERINTENDENT	98,687
TOWN ACCOUNTANT	82,394	DIRECTOR OF HEALTH	75,746
TAX COLLECTOR/TREAS	82,394		
TOWN CLERK	77,260	LIBRARY DIRECTOR	82,394
CHIEF OF POLICE*	138,917	CWF SUPERINTENDENT	105,239
POLICE LIEUTENANT	45.44	POLICE CUSTODIAN	20.62

*includes additional 20% educational incentive pay

Background: This article appears regularly in the annual warrant. Changes for FY26:

1. The current scales and budgeted salaries do not include COLAs and only include step increases according to the FY25 NAGE scale. The FY26 NAGE scale is currently still in negotiations.
2. The Tree Warden was moved to the appointed scale starting FY26.
3. The Cemetery Sexton was changed from a per burial payment to a yearly stipend.
4. The Farmers Market Assistant Manager position was added and the stipend for the Farmers Market Manager was reduced to offset some of this addition.

Selectboard Recommends 2-0-1
Finance Committee Recommends 5-0-1

ARTICLE 4. Town Operating Budget (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$12,747,055 for the maintenance of the several departments of the Town, said sum to be allocated in accordance with Schedule III, Budget, and for any other necessary charges, with said sum to be raised from Taxation.

Schedule III
Town Operating Budget

DEPARTMENT	BUDGET FY25	REQUEST FY26	SELECTBOARD FIN COMM RECOMMEND FY26
GENERAL GOVERNMENT			
TOWN MEETING	3,180	3,180	3,180
SELECTBOARD	326,230	324,662	324,662
FINANCE COMMITTEE	600	600	600
RESERVE FUND	50,000	50,000	50,000
TOWN ACCOUNTANT	93,000	101,374	101,374
ASSESSORS	186,059	180,122	180,122
TREASURER/COLLECTOR	206,965	208,335	208,335
TOWN COUNSEL	87,475	82,475	82,475
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	92,252	103,352	103,352
SHARED COSTS	93,499	104,930	104,930
TOWN CLERK	237,224	219,144	219,144
PLANNING	140,788	142,394	142,394
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS	700	700	700
PUBLIC BLDG UTILITIES	140,050	145,000	145,000
FARMERS MARKET	5,200	5,700	5,700
TOTAL GENERAL GOVT	1,663,222	1,671,968	1,671,968
PUBLIC SAFETY			
POLICE	2,067,608	2,069,965	2,069,965
POLICE CRUISER	60,000	-	-

Schedule III
Town Operating Budget

DEPARTMENT	BUDGET FY25	REQUEST FY26	SB/FIN COMM RECOMMEND FY26
DISPATCH	410,768	410,868	410,868
BUILDING INSPECTOR	155,082	149,926	149,926
SEALER OF WEIGHTS	7,182	7,182	7,182
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT	6,944	6,944	6,944
ANIMAL CONTROL	23,658	24,185	24,185
FOREST WARDEN	1,882	1,882	1,882
TREE WARDEN	30,474	30,474	30,474
TOTAL PUBLIC SAFETY	2,763,598	2,701,426	2,701,426
PUBLIC WORKS			
DEPT OF PUBLIC WORKS	1,772,006	1,810,284	1,810,284
SNOW & ICE	321,250	324,750	324,750
SOLID WASTE	802,776	835,300	835,300
CHARGING STATIONS	11,980	3,000	3,000
CEMETERIES	32,150	32,150	32,150
TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS	2,940,162	3,005,484	3,005,484
HUMAN SERVICES			
BOARD OF HEALTH	168,004	172,144	172,144
HUMAN SERVICES			
COUNCIL ON AGING	59,272	77,207	77,207
VETERANS' SERVICES	77,897	101,000	101,000
TOTAL HUMAN SERVICES	305,173	350,351	350,351
CULTURE & RECREATION			
LIBRARIES	518,233	521,033	521,033
PARKS & RECREATION	164,826	169,326	169,326
HISTORICAL COMMISSION	500	500	500
WAR MEMORIALS	1,600	1,600	1,600
TOTAL CULTURE/RECREATION	685,159	692,459	692,459
DEBT SERVICE	1,158,857	1,160,025	1,160,025
INTERGOVERNMENTAL	116,874	119,041	119,041
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	2,657,083	2,926,701	2,926,701
GENERAL INSURANCE	119,600	119,600	119,600
TOTAL MISCELLANEOUS	2,776,683	3,046,301	3,046,301
TOTAL TOWN BUDGET	12,409,728	12,747,055	12,747,055

Background: Schedule III includes the FY26 requests from all non-enterprise Town departments. All requests have been recommended. An original request for an Adult Services position in the library was not supported by the Selectboard for FY26 and the request was withdrawn. The Selectboard also withdrew their proposal to expand the Avenue A planter maintenance budget.

The Town Operating Budget request for FY26 is 2.72% higher than the previous year. Many of the increases are related to contractual increases and an 18% health insurance increase. The largest individual increase is in the Council on Aging and Veterans' Services budgets.

In the **General Government** category, the most notable changes are:

1. The Accounting office is planning a financial management software change with implementation starting July 1, 2025. The increase was offset by cutting book binding, office supplies, and longevity.
2. The Information Technology contract for FY26 services will increase by \$11,100. This is a planned contractual increase with the IT consultant.
3. The Town Clerk budget has decreased with next year being a one-election cycle for the department.
4. The Shared Costs budget includes a payroll software conversion starting January 1, 2026. The software will improve the payroll and human resources functions of the Town.

In the **Public Safety** category, the only personnel increases are contractual steps based on the FY25 contracts. The police department has removed the cruiser purchase for FY26. The police department also increased the academy expense line by \$17,000 (100%), due to the new rates of the academy and the plan to put two new officers through the academy in FY26.

In **Public Works**, the largest cost increase is the contract increases for trash/recycling pickup. Those lines increased by \$32,250 (27.8%). This increase comes from year 2 of a contract with Casella who the Town changed to in FY2025 in hopes to provide better services for the citizens. The other significant increase is for street line painting which is a contractual increase from a Franklin Regional Council of Governments bid.

In **Human Services**, the largest increase is in the Council on Aging with the addition of an Administrative Assistant position, which resulted in a salary line increase of \$18,962 (40.73%). The Veterans' Services budget also had a large increase (\$23,103 or 32.36%) stemming from a request from Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services Department following changes in legislation from the HERO Act.

Wages & Benefits – Currently there are no COLAs built into the budget with all union contracts expiring the end of this fiscal year. There is also an 18-20% (depending on

which plan) increase in health insurance rates from the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust for FY26 which resulted in a budget increase of \$243,000.

Comment: The Finance Committee's abstention was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 2-0-1
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0-1

ARTICLE 5. Clean Water Facility Budget (Sewer Commissioners Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$3,221,303 for the purpose of operating the Clean Water Facility and associated pumping stations, said sum to be allocated in accordance with Schedule IV, CWF Budget, with \$406,188 to be raised from Taxation and \$2,815,115 to be raised from Sewer Revenue.

Schedule IV Clean Water Facility Budget			
DEPARTMENT	BUDGET FY25	REQUEST FY26	SELECTBOARD FIN COMM RECOMMEND FY26
CLEAN WATER FACILITY			
Wages & Expenses	2,116,590	2,209,442	2,209,442
Capital Outlay	58,500	58,500	58,500
Debt Service	478,365	485,028	485,028
Employee Benefits	380,719	383,183	383,183
SUBTOTAL CWF	3,034,174	3,136,153	3,136,153
DPW SUBSIDIARY			
Wages & Expenses	85,150	85,150	85,150
SUBTOTAL DPW SUBSIDIARY	85,150	85,150	85,150
TOTAL CWF	3,119,324	3,221,303	3,221,303

Background: The largest individual increase was \$41,561 for overage charges payable to Erving for treating Millers Falls flow. This provides the actual overage charge due in FY26 for the excess flow treated in FY24. The overage charge is primarily due to excessive inflow and infiltration. This issue is being aggressively pursued now that the DPW has a Collection System Lead Operator. Some areas of major inflow and infiltration have already been identified and corrected, and others are currently being investigated. Another increase was to the water expense line, which is due to a new meter being installed in August of 2024.

Comment: The Finance Committee's abstention was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0-1

ARTICLE 6. Airport Budget (Airport Commission Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$425,732 for the purpose of operating the Turners Falls Airport, said sum to be allocated in accordance with Schedule V, Airport Budget, with \$23,372 to be raised from Town Sale of Real Estate, \$99,396 to be raised from Taxation, and \$302,964 to be raised from Airport Revenue.

Schedule V Airport Budget			SELECTBOARD FIN COMM RECOMMEND
DEPARTMENT	BUDGET FY25	REQUEST FY26	FY26
AIRPORT			
Wages & Expenses	255,238	271,625	271,625
Capital Outlay/Local Share	-	-	-
Debt Service	102,775	99,935	99,935
Employee Benefits	61,664	54,172	54,172
TOTAL AIRPORT	419,677	425,732	425,732

Background: As has been discussed at the previous Special Town Meeting (STM) and Annual Town Meeting (ATM), there is a major revenue shortfall due to the delay in implementation of the solar project. Much like we did at the STM in FY24 and the ATM for FY25, this revenue shortfall will be funded by both Town Sale of Real Estate, which covers the Pioneer Debt Service not already funded by a FAA grant, and Taxation.

Comment: One of the Finance Committee abstentions was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 4-0-2

ARTICLE 7. Airport Fuel Revolving Fund (Airport Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to amend Article II of the Town of Montague General Bylaws, pursuant to the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44, Section 53E½, to add a new Section 7, Revolving Funds as shown below, and to establish a spending limit of \$200,000

for the Airport Fuel revolving fund for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2025, which spending limit to be applicable for each fiscal year until such time as Town Meeting votes, prior to July 1 for the ensuing fiscal year, to increase the same.

Section 7: Revolving Funds

- (a) There are hereby established in the Town of Montague, pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.44, §53E½, the following Revolving Funds:

Revolving Fund	Spending Authority	Revenue Source	Allowed Expenses
Airport Fuel	Airport Commission	Fees from sale of Airport fuel	Purchase of Airport fuel to be sold and used at the Airport

- (b) Expenditures from each revolving fund set forth herein shall be subject to the spending limits established by Town Meeting or any increase therein as may be authorized in accordance with MGL c. 44, § 53E 1/2.

Background: The cost of fuel has increased since the establishment of this revolving fund even though the usage has not increased. Therefore, this increase is just to accommodate the increase in fuel costs since FY2022 when this was established. Use of airport fuel tends to fluctuate, and the fuel tank is replenished as needed rather than on a certain schedule. Funds are deposited as aviation fuel is purchased by airport users, and tank refills are paid for directly from those revenues. This article adds no additional cost to the Town or the taxpayer.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

ARTICLE 8. Colle Budget (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$52,250 for the purpose of funding the operations and maintenance of the Colle Building, said sum to be raised from Colle Receipts Reserved for Appropriation.

Background: This budget is wholly funded by building lease fees, which are segregated to pay for all the normal building maintenance including some utilities and general repairs. The debt service from the renovation was paid off in FY23. Colle Receipts Reserved for Appropriations has a current balance of \$242,808.

Comment: The Finance Committee's abstention was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0-1

ARTICLE 9. FCTS Assessment (Franklin County Technical School Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$841,660 for the purpose of paying the Franklin County Technical School District for Montague's share of the assessment for the yearly operation of the Franklin County Technical School, said sum to be raised from Taxation.

Background: Montague is one of 19 member towns in the Franklin County Technical School District, which operates a school in the Airport Industrial Park. The FY2026 assessment increased \$4,304 (0.5%). Montague's enrollment also dropped by one student from FY2025 following the drop of 19 students in FY2024.

Comment 1: The Finance Committee has an internal policy to cushion sharp changes to the assessment. It provides additions or reductions to the FCTS Stabilization Fund to stabilize the assessment's impact on the budget. Normally the Finance Committee would recommend that \$75,990 be added to the FCTS Stabilization Fund to help smooth out future assessment increases but has chosen to forgo that this year due to the current balance of \$303,747 in that fund.

Comment 2: The Finance Committee's abstention was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0-1

ARTICLE 10. GMRSD Assessment (Gill-Montague Regional School District Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$12,663,178 for the purpose of paying the Gill-Montague Regional School District for Montague's share of the assessment for the yearly operation of the Gill-Montague Regional Schools, said sum to be raised from Taxation.

Background: The GMRSD has provided additional information in a separate document in your packet. Montague's assessment increased by \$519,736 or 4.28% and is the Affordable Assessment amount provided to them by Montague. The Affordable Assessment amount is based on an agreement (the "Compact for Funding Education") to keep the local assessment "affordable," which was forged between the district and its two sending towns over a decade ago. The Affordable Assessment is calculated as 48.5% of Montague's available operating revenues, plus excluded debt for GMRSD capital projects.

This assessment funds the operation of five schools serving students from pre-school to 12th grade, as well as tuition, special education services, and school choice payments for some of the Montague resident students who are not enrolled at GMRSD schools.

The total GMRSD budget for FY26 is \$28,822,940. The combined assessments to member towns comprise (\$14,657,730) 50.9% of the district's total operating revenue. The remainder comes from state aid and reimbursements, grants, school choice payments from sending districts, etc.

Comment 1: The GMRSD has again managed to build a budget around an "affordable" figure provided to them by Montague, but not without cuts to their services. By approving this request, Town Meeting upholds its commitment to offer the district a significant, predetermined portion of Town revenue, while reserving the rest for other uses.

Comment 2: The Finance Committee's abstention was based on the member being recently appointed to the Finance Committee, so they were not part of the beginning budget process.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0-1

ARTICLE 11. Smith Vocational and Agricultural (Town Accountant Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$59,000 for the purpose of providing tuition and transportation for a Montague resident attending Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, said sum to be raised from Taxation.

Background: A Montague resident will be attending Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School. Since the student's program is not offered at FCTS, the Town is obligated to pay the tuition and transportation costs to Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School. The current estimate of tuition for FY26 is \$23,000, with the remaining appropriation available to pay for transportation. This will cover the student's sophomore year.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

ARTICLE 12. NAGE and UE Contract (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$125,154 for the purpose of funding the implementation of a collective bargaining agreement with United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Local 274 and National Association of Government Employees for Fiscal Year 2026, with \$98,262 to be raised from Taxation and \$26,262 to be raised from Sewer Revenue.

Background: Approval of this appropriation is needed to settle the collective bargaining agreement with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, Local 274 (which covers about 21 employees in our public works and clean water facilities) and the National Association of Government Employees (which covers 35 employees not in police or public works unions). The approved agreement would be for the period of July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2028. The new agreement includes a shift to the new wage chart as proposed by the Collins Center Wage and Class Study for FY2026 and then

COLAs for FY2027 and FY2028. Once approved, payments would be made to employees upon signature of contract retroactive to July 1, 2025, or beginning July 1, 2025, if contract is signed before beginning of fiscal year.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 13. Library Accessibility/Upgrades (Library Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$10,000 for the purpose of funding accessibility repairs and upgrades for the Montague Public Libraries, including any and all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: As part of a Libraries Transforming Communities grant, the Montague Public Libraries developed a five-year Accessibility Plan. The facilities portion of the plan calls for the implementation of most of the recommendations made by the town's 2018 ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan for the town's three libraries. These recommendations have been broken down by the fiscal year. FY26 upgrades will focus on implementing American Disability Act (ADA)-compliant indoor and outdoor signage at all three library locations, handrail repair and upgraded door handles at the Carnegie Library, a designated ADA parking space and grab bar installation at the Millers Falls Branch Library, and repair of the wheelchair ramp and various handrails at the Montague Center Branch Library.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

ARTICLE 14. CWF Mini Excavator, Generators, Thickened Sludge Pumps (Clean Water Facility Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$231,800 for the purpose of the following CWF projects and any and all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from CWF Retained Earnings.

1. \$60,000 to purchase a used mini excavator.
2. \$67,800 to replace the Lake Pleasant generator and the purchase of a portable emergency generator.
3. \$104,000 to replace two thickened sludge pumps.

Mini Excavator Background: 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, excavating, 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 that money in the future into purchasing a used excavator to have on site consistently.

NOTE: The facility is not looking to purchase a brand-new excavator, as a used/low hour machine will suffice for the required applications.

Generators Background: As part of the planned continuation of the nine (9) pump station generator replacements, this generator serves the Lake Pleasant Rd 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 to prevent a backup and discharge of untreated sewage during power outages.

Additionally, the current back-up portable generator is circa 1981 and is overdue for replacement. The portable generator is a redundant back-up power supply to any out-of-service stationary generators located at any of the eight (8) pump stations.

Thickened Sludge Pump Background: 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 local papermills, the facility no longer needs to utilize all three (3) pumps, needing only the use of two (2). (Redundancy is required as per MGL)

The old pumps are piston style pumps circa 1981 (drives from 2010) and are an outdated and extremely dangerous pump style, having exterior rotating parts which pose a safety risk to staff. This concern was mentioned in a February 2024 Dept of Labor Standards/OSHA inspection. This old-style pump also requires a higher level of maintenance compared to several other pump styles due to its worn parts. The typical life expectancy of a piston pump is 10-20 years, depending on how well it has been maintained and how many hours in operation.

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 the pump with stainless steel, and 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/MGL.

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

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0
Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 4-0

ARTICLE 15. Phase 2 Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation (DPW/Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$3,000,000 for the purpose of rehabilitating sewer manholes and sewer pipes to address structural defects and potential sources of inflow and infiltration to the Town's sewer collection system, including but not limited to engineering, bidding, and construction, as well as all other costs incidental and related thereto, and to meet this appropriation to authorize the Treasurer, with the approval of the Selectboard, to borrow said sum under General Laws Chapter 44, Sections 7 and 8, and/or Chapter 29C, or any other lawful enabling authority and to issue bonds or notes of the Town therefor; that the Treasurer with the approval of the Selectboard is authorized to borrow all or a portion of such amount from the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust established pursuant to Chapter 29C and in connection therewith to enter into a financing agreement and/or security agreement with the Trust and otherwise to contract with the Trust and the Department of Environmental Protection with respect to such loan and for any federal or state aid available for the project or for the financing thereof; and that the Selectboard, the Public Works Superintendent, or other appropriate local body or official is authorized to enter into a project regulatory agreement with the Department of Environmental Protection, to expend all funds available for the project and to take any other action necessary or convenient to carry out the project; while the entire borrowing will be issued as a general obligation of the Town payable from all sources of revenues, it is anticipated that the principal and interest due on a \$1,200,000 portion of the principal amount of such borrowing shall be repaid in the first instance through sewer user fees; and further to authorize the Selectboard to execute any other documents and/or agreements necessary to effectuate the purposes of this vote.

Background: The Town's combined sewer overflow (CSO) update to its Long-Term Control Plan (LTCP), included contracting with Wright-Pierce (an engineering firm) to develop short and long-term implementation plans for improving the maintenance, operation, and condition of its wastewater collection system. Completing the work within a 10-year period is a condition of the Town's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Implementing this rehabilitation is the Town's legal obligation.

Phase 1 was funded by a \$500,000 grant from a Rural /Small Town Development grant and will be completed in the spring of 2025. This Article will continue the Phase 1 effort, which addresses Priorities 1 and 2 of the plan, which are the most in need of completion. Phase 1 included rehabilitation of 53 manholes. Phase 2 will include rehabilitation of 37 pipes (totaling 9,459 linear feet) and 74 manholes in Turners Falls and Millers Falls. This will be funded by the issue of \$3 million of long-term non-excluded debt.

As stated in the article, this project will be funded with debt. Currently the Town debt ratio for non-excluded debt is 0.15%, which is far below the 5% goal established in the financial policies. A fiscal goal of the Town has been to increase this number to help illustrate the community's ability to maintain infrastructure and capital assets within its

regular revenues. The split is proposed to be 60%/40% between the General Fund and the Sewer Enterprise Fund because those are proportions of work that are on the combined sewer/stormwater (CSO) system compared to the separated sewer system.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 6-1

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 4-0

ARTICLE 16. DPW 10-Wheel Dump Truck (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$365,000 for the purpose of purchasing and equipping a ten-wheel dump truck, including plow, sander, and all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: 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 capital improvement plan, which recommends a 20-year replacement cycle for large dump trucks. The truck will be used year-round for highway maintenance including clearing winter roads and hauling construction materials to and from job sites.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 6-1

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 4-0

ARTICLE 17. DPW Dump Truck (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$325,000 for the purpose of purchasing and equipping a dump truck, including any and all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Town Capital Stabilization.

Background: Purchase will replace an aging 2002 International 4900 with spreader. This replacement request follows the capital improvement plan, which recommends a 20-year replacement cycle for large dump trucks. The truck will be used year-round for highway maintenance including clearing winter roads and hauling construction materials to and from job sites.

Selectboard Recommends 2-1

Finance Committee Recommends 5-0

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 4-0

ARTICLE 18. DPW: Camera Van and Pickup Truck (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$135,000 for the following Department of Public Works vehicles, including all equipment and any and all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

1. \$70,000 to purchase and equip a camera van.
2. \$65,000 to purchase and equip a pickup truck.

Camera Van Background: Purchase will replace a 2001 Ford E450 (retired ambulance). This replacement request follows the capital improvement plan, which recommends a 12-year replacement cycle for most vehicles. The Van is used for transportation to and from sewer collection infrastructure around town with CCTV equipment used to inspect the system for condition reports.

Pickup Truck Background: Purchase will replace an aging 2007 F-150 pickup. This replacement request follows the capital improvement plan, which recommends a 12-year replacement cycle for most vehicles. The truck will be used for transportation to and from town buildings with cleaning supplies and equipment. Will also assist with moving of furniture and goods. The Town also intends to apply for partial grant funding to replace this truck with an electric vehicle.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0
Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 4-0

ARTICLE 19. DPW: Oakman Street Slope, Non-Chapter 90 Paving (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$90,000 for the purpose of the following Department of Public Works projects and any and all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

1. \$60,000 to complete the Oakman Street slope stabilization.
2. \$30,000 for the paving of alleys and non-chapter 90 eligible roadways.

Oakman Street Slope Background: An area of slope below storm drainage near the intersection of Oakman Street and Highland Circle has begun to wash out significantly, with considerable downhill erosion.

The road is at risk of failure, and if delayed, the road could be forced to close. The Town intends to hire an engineer for the design phase, while DPW staff will conduct the anticipated repairs in-house during the construction phase. These efforts will stabilize the road by reducing the amount of sediment loss to downhill waterways.

Non-Chapter 90 Paving Background: Funding is needed to support in-house paving of various alleys and other rights-of-way not included in the state's Chapter 90 program. Purchases will be made and the work overseen by DPW staff.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0
Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 20. DPW Meadow Road Guardrails (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$200,000 for the purpose of replacing guardrails on Meadow Road and any and all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: Replacement or improvements are needed to several areas of guardrail along Meadow Road. Currently, several of the wooden posts supporting the guardrails are rotten, broken, or missing, and height is also inconsistent. This presents a safety risk for motorists, as the current guardrail would fail to prevent a vehicle from falling into the Connecticut River below.

This project would be contracted out to a guardrail installer through a procurement conducted by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). Project management would be conducted by DPW staff.

Selectboard Recommends 2-1

Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 21. DPW Equipment Account (Department of Public Works Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$36,470 for the purpose of purchasing, equipping, and making major repairs to DPW vehicles and equipment, including all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Taxation.

Background: This fund provides available year-round funding for the Department of Public Works (DPW) superintendent to purchase and/or make major repairs to DPW vehicles and equipment. Expenditures from this fund are governed by a 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 the Annual Town Meeting to a total of \$100,000 for the coming fiscal year, based on the amount in the fund as of March 1. This year the Selectboard cut this policy to \$75,000 for the coming fiscal year.

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.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 6-1

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 22. Millers Falls Library Storefront, Unity Park Upgrades, Montague Center Complete Streets Design (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$255,200 for the purpose of the following Town projects, including all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

1. \$39,000 for repairs/renovation to Millers Falls library storefront.
2. \$125,000 for upgrades to Unity Park.
3. \$91,200 for design costs for Montague Center Complete Streets project.

Millers Falls Library Background: Though new HVAC was installed, and both the windows and back door of the Millers Falls Branch Library were replaced, one item reducing 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 creates an uncomfortable "fishbowl" effect for 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 is not ADA accessible.

It is the intention of this project to 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.

Unity Park Upgrades Background: This project will include the replacement of the rubber, poured-in-place (PIP) surfacing as well as 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. There is approximately 2,500 sq. feet of PIP surfacing that 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 one of the most popular recreational 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 ten years, and the current PIP surface is original to Phase 1 of the Unity Park Improvement Project from 2012, so it is slightly beyond its useful life. The replacement of this surface is not only critical to the safety of park patrons but also maintains ADA regulations relative to public play spaces. Attempts have been made in recent years to patch torn areas, but these efforts have resulted in less than acceptable results.

The current blue tube slide is one of the most popular items in the playground area and was installed in 2000. The useful life of playground equipment is approximately fifteen years. The Parks & Recreation Department has started to invest more time, energy and resources into maintaining the slide in recent years and recommends the replacement of this item to ensure safety.

Montague Center Complete Streets Background: 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 North Street/Main Street/Town Common improvements, bicycle accommodation 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 a quote 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 several discussions related to local traffic safety in recent years, with community input identifying traffic calming and bike/pedestrian safety improvements in this neighborhood as top priorities.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 23. FRTA Bus Stop Improvements (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$60,000 for the purpose of Franklin Regional Transportation Authority (FRTA) bus stop improvements at Industrial Boulevard and Millers Falls Road, including all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization.

Background: This article would allow the town to partner with the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) to improve pedestrian, transit, and traffic safety at the intersection of Industrial Blvd and Millers Falls Road. 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 with a safe pedestrian crossing.

The FRTA has approached the Town and other stakeholder organizations, such as the Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FCRHRA), to request assistance with funding a shortfall between the project budget and the expected construction cost. 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. 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 becomes quite busy during peak hours.

The work is to be funded from Cannabis Impact Fees which are limited to expenses directly connected to the impacts of the cannabis industry on Montague. This is an eligible expense because of the project's proximity and relation to the town's only cannabis retail facility. The current balance of that account is \$235,307.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 24. Keith Footbridge (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$67,900 for the purpose of abating and removing utilities from the Keith footbridge over canal, including all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Canal District Utility Improvement Stabilization.

Background: As part of the planned demolition project of the former Strathmore Mill site at 20 Canal Road, the Keith footbridge will need to be removed. This is the bridge that spans the power canal over the bike path near Keith Apartments. Removal is planned for Summer 2025.

The footbridge is owned by FirstLight Hydro Generating Co., who have 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 engineering and abatement associated with removing 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. The work is to be funded from the Canal District Stabilization Fund (Current balance \$260,316) which was set up by Town meeting as part of a settlement agreement with FirstLight surrounding the terms of the removal of this footbridge. The use of the funds is limited to work associated with improving infrastructure and access to the Canal District.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

Capital Improvements Committee Recommends 5-0

ARTICLE 25. Transfers to Reserves (Finance Committee Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the following sums for the purpose of increasing the special purpose funds set forth below, said sums to be raised from Taxation and Free Cash.

Fund	Amount (\$)	Funding Source
Henry Waidlich Conservation Trust Fund	\$10,000	Taxation
Town Capital Stabilization Fund	\$231,890	Taxation, \$131,890 Free Cash, \$100,000
GMRS D Stabilization Fund	\$88,718	Taxation, \$38,718 Free Cash, \$50,000
OPEB Trust Fund	\$100,000	Taxation, \$50,000 Free Cash, \$50,000
Total:	\$430,608	

Background: These are annual transfers to reserves from taxation per our financial policies. This year we added the transfer to the Henry Waidlich Conservation Trust Fund to streamline the warrant.

- The Conservation Commission is requesting to supplement the existing balance of \$37,788 in the Henry Waidlich Conservation Fund with an additional \$10,000. The fund is used to leverage the protection of priority farmland and other open space as identified in the current Open Space and Recreation Plan.
 - Town Meeting has supported the Henry Waidlich Conservation Trust Fund for over 40 years. The fund is dedicated to the purpose of protecting important land and resources in Montague. It is stewarded by the Conservation Commission. Expenditures from this fund have helped protect over 500 acres of the Town's most important agricultural properties from development since 1989. Since 2000, the Town has leveraged \$16 of funding from outside sources for every dollar contributed by the Henry Waidlich Conservation Fund.
 - The fund was last used in 2020 to purchase an Agriculture Preservation Restriction on 36 acres of prime farmland off Old Greenfield Road. In that instance the fund's investment of \$32,500 leveraged \$392,500 from the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture and Franklin Land Trust to protect high priority farmland with an iconic tobacco barn.
 - The availability of these funds allows the Conservation Commission to be nimble and responsive to sometime rapidly moving real-estate opportunities. The fund accepts donations and bequests.
- The **Town General Stabilization Fund** is intended to be used only in times of drastic revenue shortfalls. The policy is to have an annual appropriation of 0.3% of the prior year's general operating revenue (PYGOR), but also to keep a minimum balance of 5% of PYGOR. While .03% of PYGOR is \$74,496, the current

balance is above the minimum, so no appropriation is required this year. The current balance as of March 31st was \$1,337,433.

- The **Town Capital Stabilization Fund**, while still funded from taxation, has a slightly more complicated calculation. We start with 0.2% of PYGOR (\$49,664) as the base amount. Then we add part of the Kearsarge lease payment. The total lease payment is first evenly split between capital and operating. The operating half is included in the available revenues for the Affordable Assessment, but the Town percentage of that (51.5% or \$41,113) is allocated to the Town Capital Stabilization Fund. The capital half is split by the same allocation, with 51.5% (\$41,113) going to the Town Capital Stabilization Fund and 48.5% (\$38,718) going to the GMRSD Stabilization Fund. The total appropriation to the Town Capital Stabilization Fund is therefore $\$49,664 + \$41,113 + \$41,113 = \$131,890$. This fund is used for capital projects. The balance as of March 31st was \$2,586,368.
- The **GMRSD Stabilization Fund** is funded by a portion of the annual Kearsarge Lease payment as described above. This fund is used for capital items for the GMRSD, and the balance as of March 31st was \$169,655.
- The **FCTS Stabilization Fund** is used to smooth out large fluctuations in the annual assessment due to large changes in enrollment. An expected assessment is calculated based on a three-year (FY23-FY25) average student enrollment multiplied by the current year (FY25) per-pupil cost. If the actual assessment is larger than that by more than \$10,000, the difference is funded from this fund. If the actual assessment is lower than the estimated assessment by more than \$10,000, the “savings” is put here to fund future increases. This was not done this year due to the current balance of \$303,747.
- The practice in recent years has been to add \$50,000 of taxation to the Other Post Employment Benefits (**OPEB**) **Trust Fund**. This fund was established to begin funding for the future health insurance cost of current employees after they retire. Funding this liability is not currently required, but it is a prudent thing to do. This appropriation of funds into the OPEB Trust is viewed both as mostly symbolic gestures showing that Montague recognizes its obligation (appreciated by bond rating agencies) and is beginning to address it, although the amount is well below what would be needed if we were actively funding the liability.

The Town’s long-term plan is to address the OPEB unfunded liability more aggressively after the Town’s unfunded pension liability has been “fully funded” (currently expected to occur in FY33). At that time the money currently appropriated to fund the unfunded pension liability will be available for use, on an annual basis, to more rigorously fund the unfunded OPEB liability, although there may not be a formal funding schedule in place. However, even that will probably not be enough to meet the annual OPEB funding needs.

The balance in this as of March 31st was \$2,361,339. The current unfunded liability is \$9,417,000.

- Montague's financial policies (A-5 Reserves) suggest that amounts of Free Cash above a certain threshold should be put into town stabilization funds or the OPEB Trust Fund. The Finance Committee discussed options of what to do with the remaining free cash from this fiscal year. The result was to mirror how the Kearsarge lease payments are handled with a percentage going to the Gill Montague Regional Stabilization Fund and a larger percentage going to the Town Capital Stabilization Fund. The Finance Committee also wanted to put some money towards the OPEB Trust Fund but knowing that this liability is longer term than the pressing short-term capital needs the Town and School will be facing.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

ARTICLE 26. FirstLight Hydro Generating Co. PILOT (Selectboard + Assessors Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to authorize the Selectboard and the Board of Assessors to negotiate, enter into and approve a Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement known as a "PILOT" or "Tax Agreement" pursuant to the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59 Section 38H(b), or any other enabling authority, between the Town of Montague and FirstLight Hydro Generating Co., its successors, assignees or affiliates, on such terms and conditions and for such period of time as negotiated by the Selectboard and the Board of Assessors, for payment in lieu of taxes related to personal and/or real property associated with an electric generation facility, all as set forth in said PILOT; and further to authorize the Selectboard and the Board of Assessors to take such action as may be necessary to carry out the vote taken hereunder.

Background: This article would allow the Town to lock in a mutually agreed upon valuation of Firstlight personal and real property assets for a fixed period of time of instead of assessing the company annually. Firstlight owns the Cabot generating plant, power canal, and dam and is one of the largest taxpayers in Town. The Town and Firstlight are currently attempting to settle contested personal and real property valuations from FY 22, 23, and 24. In FY22, the difference between the Town and FirstLight's expert valuations of the assets is \$129M and \$45M, respectively. This represents up to \$9M in potential liability exposure, which dwarfs the \$1M currently held in overlay. The Town was successful in court against Firstlight in 2019, however that same result should not be expected this time around. The Assessors and Selectboard feel that a PILOT agreement as a component of settling the contested valuations would be a more advantageous option to the town instead of the current pattern perpetual litigation over past valuations. Ultimately a PILOT would put the Town in control of FirstLight's assessment- not the Appellate Tax Board. In uncertain times, a PILOT would provide the benefit of predictability and consistency for a core revenue source for the Town. Failure to pass this article will effectively direct the town to

continue to litigate the FY22-24 abatements through the Appellate Tax Board where FirstLight is seeking over \$9M.

Pros of Authorizing a PILOT

- Avoids over \$9M in exposure for FY22-24 abatements including an 8% interest charge for abatements granted by Appellate Tax Board
- Finds a middle ground valuation that is closer to the Town's value than to FirstLight's opinion of valuation
- Avoided need for revaluation appraisals every 5 years in FY27 and FY32 (\$35K each)
- Avoided cost of litigating contested valuations at Appellate Tax Board (\$300K)
- Carrying less overlay will reduce the tax rate. Overlay is currently held at \$1M, but can be held around \$120K with a PILOT
- Town revenues would have predictability and control and less exposure to volatility of the energy markets and decisions by the quasi-judicial Appellate Tax Board.
- Will allow Town and FirstLight to build a solid partnership by not being in constant state of litigation over valuation.

Cons of authorizing a PILOT

- A reduced valuation will affect the tax rates for the length of the PILOT. For example, a PILOT assessment that is 25% of the town's valuation would reduce town revenues by approximately \$900,000 per year.
- PILOTS may have an escalator for the assessment that incrementally increases revenues, however they are fairly rigid:
 - Foregone opportunity to assess new improvements to FirstLight assets during the length of the PILOT
 - Increases in taxation (ex. new building projects or overrides) will not impact PILOT rates.

Selectboard Recommends 2-1

Assessors Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 27. Property Tax Threshold (Board of Assessors Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 59, Section 5, Clause 54 to modify and increase the threshold from \$1,000 to \$10,000 for personal property accounts subject to taxation for any fiscal year beginning on or after July 1, 2025.

Background: Approval of this article would increase the threshold that had been established at Town Meeting in 2007. Increasing the threshold to \$10,000 is the maximum amount allowed by the statute and would affect approximately 80 personal property accounts. If passed, these accounts would no longer receive a tax bill for taxable items. The estimated loss of taxes is \$2,533.00, accounting for the cost associated with valuing each account. Increasing the threshold would benefit small businesses who would not receive a tax bill unless they have taxable items with a value over \$10,000.00.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 28. Tax Title Payment Agreements (Treasurer Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to amend the Town's General Bylaws to add a new Section 14B to Article III under Treasurer/Collector, as set forth below entitled "Tax Title Payment Plans", to authorize the Treasurer-Collector to pursue and establish payment agreements for parcels of land in tax title so as to allow delinquent taxpayers to pay off their tax liens over time, as authorized by M.G.L. c. 60 § 62A, as amended by sections 89-91 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2024:

Section 14B: Tax Title Payment Plans

- A. Pursuant to the provisions of M.G.L. c. 60, § 62A, the Town Treasurer-Collector shall have the authority to enter into written payment agreements with any person entitled to redeem ownership of parcels in tax title which have been taken by the Town as a result of nonpayment of real estate taxes. The payment agreement shall be executed on such terms and conditions for payment of the delinquent taxes, interest and any other costs, fees or charges associated with same, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 60, § 62A and this bylaw. The Treasurer-Collector shall not refuse to enter into agreements with eligible taxpayers.
- B. This bylaw shall apply to all taxpayers with parcels in the following assessment categories of tax title in the Town:
 - 1. Commercial property;
 - 2. Residential property;
 - 3. Industrial; and
 - 4. Open space.
- C. The following conditions must be met prior to the Town entering into a payment agreement:
 - 1. The Town has not filed a petition to foreclose the rights of redemption with the Land Court, and the recording date of the Instrument of Taking recorded in the Franklin County Registry of Deeds must be no more than ten (10) years from the date of the proposed agreement; and
 - 2. All real estate taxes and water/sewer user fees due for the current fiscal year assessed against the parcel must be paid to date.
- D. All payment agreements shall comply with the following minimum requirements:
 - 1. The payment agreement shall be for a term of five (5) years; provided, however, that nothing herein shall preclude the taxpayer from completing payments of the amount owed within a shorter period of time;

2. The payment agreement shall include a waiver of fifty percent (50%) of the interest that has accrued in the tax title account, but only if the taxpayer fully complies with the terms of the agreement (no taxes or collection costs may be waived); and
 3. The payment agreement shall state the amount of the payment due from the taxpayer at the time of execution of the agreement, which shall be ten percent (10%) of the amount needed to redeem the parcel at the inception of the agreement. The taxpayer must then agree to pay the remaining balance due to the Town in equal monthly installments.
- E. During the term of the agreement, the Treasurer-Collector may not bring an action to foreclose the tax title unless payments are not made in accordance with the schedule set out in the payment agreement or timely payments are not made on other amounts due to the Town that constitutes a lien on the same parcel.
- F. Nothing in this bylaw shall preempt or preclude the authority of the Treasurer-Collector to accept partial payments or to negotiate and enter into payment agreements authorized by M.G.L. c. 60, §§ 22 and § 22A, or any other statutory authority.

Background: This article will provide the Treasurer/ Tax Collector with important and lawful guideposts when negotiating tax title agreements, based on new laws effective November 2024. Massachusetts law governs tax title procedures for cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. A tax title is a lien placed on property to enforce the collection of property taxes, and is removed when the property tax account is paid in full. In November of 2024 a legislative fix was passed to amend Chapter 60 § 62A of Massachusetts General Laws to allow delinquent taxpayers that have been placed in tax title more options to redeem the tax title account. These new laws will benefit the taxpayers in the respect that they will have greater flexibility in repaying their delinquent taxes while still maintaining the integrity of the process of collecting taxes. This law also addresses the “home equity” issue that states that the homeowner will receive back any equity in excess of any taxes and fees from the sale of a town foreclosure property in response to a recent Supreme Court case, *Tyler v. Hennepin County, Minnesota*, in which the Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for a municipality to retain the excess equity.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 29. Unclaimed Property (Treasurer Request)

MOVED: That the town vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 200A §9A, which establishes a procedure for the disposition of abandoned funds, i.e. funds not claimed within one (1) year from the date of delivery, including provisions for notice, claims, appeals and disbursements.

Background: This article will allow the Treasurer to have a more streamlined and efficient process for managing funds that are unclaimed. Specifically, it will allow the Treasurer to consider any funds held in the custody of the town to be presumed abandoned unless claimed by the corporation, organization, beneficiary, or person entitled thereto within 1 (one) year after date prescribed. After completing the process requirements spelled out in Mass General Laws, which include a detailed process to attempt to notify the owner of the funds, the funds can be turned back over to the town's general fund if they remain unclaimed.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 30. Shea Theater Lease (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote, in accordance with MGL c. 30B section 12(b), to authorize the Selectboard to enter into a lease not to exceed ten (10) years for the purpose of permitting use of the property known as the Shea Theater, located at 71 Avenue A, on such terms and conditions and for such consideration as the Selectboard deems in the best interests of the Town.

Background: The current ten-year lease agreement between the Town and Shea Theater Arts Center, Inc. expires on December 31, 2025. The Selectboard intends to issue a competitive solicitation in 2025 for the next 10-year lease of the community theater. Town Meeting authorization is required for lease terms that exceed 3 years.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 31. Franklin Regional Council of Governments Charter Change (FRCOG Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to adopt and enact the amendments to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) Charter, said amendment(s) having been proposed by a two-thirds majority of the weighted vote of the full membership of the FRCOG Council and a majority vote of the FRCOG Executive Committee, with said amendment(s) taking full effect immediately upon adoption by two-thirds of the member towns unless a later effective date is otherwise specified; a copy of the proposed amendments is attached in Schedule, FRCOG Charter Amendment.

Background: This is the first amendment in the charter's 25+ year history. A 2/3 majority vote is required from 2/3 of member towns. The proposed changes update the Charter to remove references to the original formation of the FRCOG, align grammar, provide greater clarity, and create greater flexibility when impacting state and federal law changes. This will not change Montague's representation, or the services received by Montague from the FRCOG. More information is available here.

<https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Town-Meeting-Charter-Change-Fact-Sheet-Outline.pdf>

Selectboard Recommends 3-0