

**MONTAGUE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION
TOWN HALL
1 AVENUE A
TURNERS FALLS, MA 01376**

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday September 18, 2025 at 3:30PM

IN PERSON MEETING

Town Hall Annex Meeting Room
One Avenue A Turners Falls, MA

Present: Rob Steinberg (RS), Kimberly Williams (KW), Linda Ackerman (LA), John Furbish (JF), Ariel Elan (AE)

Absent: Ella Ingraham (EI)

Staff: Chris Nolan-Zeller, Assistant Town Administrator (CNZ); Caitlin Kelley, Library Director (CK)

Meeting opened 3:36 PM Rob Steinberg presiding.

Approval of minutes: **MOTION BY LA to approve the minutes of 7/10/25. Seconded by KW. Motion Passed 5-0.**

Welcome newest member, Ariel Elan:

RS welcomed AE to the committee. AE spoke about her experience as an involved Town Meeting member, as well as a current or former member of the Capital Improvements Committee, Public Works Building Steering Committee, Energy Committee, and most recently the Library Building Steering Committee. Her involvement in Town affairs began with opposition to the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline project in the mid-2010s.

Discussion and vote on transfer of property located at 38 Avenue A (Parcel 04-00041) to the Town of Montague:

KW commented on the previous unsuccessful attempts by the Town to support private development of the property. RS expressed that the Town's requirements for development of the site had been too restrictive and unrealistic, leaving a fast food restaurant as the only economically conceivable buyer.

KW asked what will happen with the current Carnegie Library if a new facility is built down the street. CNZ responded that this could not yet be known for certain, but the Town would have the opportunity to sell it to a private owner. LA cautioned against allowing the building to fall into disrepair, with RS agreeing that a "white elephant" would be burdensome to the Town. CK noted that the building has been well-maintained by the Trustees, and has seen several capital

improvements in recent years. AE expressed optimism for engaging a local nonprofit organization to preserve the historic Carnegie Building.

MOTION BY RS that the Corporation find that the property located at 38 Avenue A, Turners Falls (Assessor's Parcel 04-0-0041) is no longer needed for the purpose for which it is held, and that the Corporation vote to transfer said property from the EDIC to the Town of Montague for the sum of \$1.00, contingent upon the Town's approval of the Montague Public Libraries Main Branch Project, and that the members of the Corporation are authorized to sign any and all instruments for said purpose, including, but not limited to a deed to the Town of Montague. Seconded by AE. Motion Passed 5-0.

Discuss additional support for Library project, including via op-ed:

RS expressed that a new library could help improve the community's attractiveness as a "magnet," noting that a source he consulted shows that every dollar invested into local libraries can return \$3-6 to the local economy, and asked how EDIC can better support the Library project. CK responded in agreement that the current project is designed to create a safe, engaged space for community members of all ages. AE noted that the Library Building Steering Committee had seen fairly low attendance at the community meetings held so far, and encouraged more people to get involved and review the recordings of these meetings available on the Montague Community Television website. AE also commended the project's architect for thoughtful attention to detail in matching the proposed new building with the existing building styles along Avenue A, and for fostering strong public engagement. CK added that many residents may be unaware of the services the libraries provide, and that outreach to non-users of the library was crucial.

KW asked how the project would be funded. CK estimated that the MA Board of Library Commissioners would cover 50-60% of the total project cost, with exact estimates expected to be available in January. RS recommended being upfront and transparent about project cost as soon as more information was available. CK noted that a major meeting was being planned after the New Year to help explain the financial impact of the project for Montague taxpayers. KW asked if program income opportunities could be considered, such as allowing businesses or private clients to rent meeting space in the new facility for a fee, noting that this could be a strong selling point for voters. CK added that the new facility was being designed in such a way to avoid needing to hire additional staff to oversee it.

JF expressed that a new library could be a strong centerpiece for a revitalized downtown. RS added that it would help give Montague residents a reason to spend time downtown, and also help draw in visitors to the community.

KW asked how CK would respond to project opponents asking why Montague residents needed a new library instead of simply traveling to neighboring Greenfield's new library. CK noted the importance of having the library's services available in Montague for Montague residents, noting that the libraries are a lifeline, especially for the 20% of residents who do not have reliable internet access at home.

KW asked if the Libraries had an existing partnership with the local schools. CK responded that they host popular school field trips, and that a private foundation fund allowed them to offer take-home craft kits for local youth.

CK added that Montague was one of only seven communities statewide to receive ‘Immediate’ funding for the current round of the MA Public Library Construction Program, rather than being waitlisted, and this was a rare opportunity not expected to be available in the future.

KW asked about the expected project timeline. CK explained that the state would issue its funding allocation in the Spring, along with the Town’s required share. The local share would be voted on at the May 2026 Annual Town Meeting, followed by a townwide debt exclusion ballot vote. If passed, the project would spend another year in the finalizing design phase, with construction starting sometime in 2027, and concluding around 2028-2029.

LA asked if the facility would belong entirely to the Town once completed. CK responded that it would, and the state would not maintain any ownership despite providing a majority of the funding.

AE encouraged other members to advocate for this project with their Town Meeting representatives, engage in conversations with their neighbors, and help ensure more people are properly informed.

RS offered to write another op-ed in *The Montague Reporter*, coupled with his support for high-density development at other sites.

MOTION BY RS to authorize RS to write an op-ed in support of the Library project on the EDIC’s behalf, to be released at a strategic time in relation to the project. Seconded by AE. Motion Passed 5-0.

Review and comment on proposed zoning amendments and changes to the official zoning map relative to the former Farren Care Center parcels in Montague City, including options for supporting maximum-density zoning:

RS expressed disappointment with opposition to high-density development, noting that the former Farren site and the former Griswold Mill are two of the Town’s only opportunities to support new housing. The Town sits below the state’s 10% threshold for Subsidized Housing Inventory, and RS noted that taxes would continue to increase for residents unless more ratables are added, and that high-density housing was the best opportunity to accomplish this while also addressing the housing crisis.

AE asked for clarification on what is meant by “high-density.” RS noted that 150-200 housing units at the Farren site could be considered high-density, and that this could be accomplished within the Town’s standard building height footprint, without introducing controversial high-rises.

CNZ suggested “Village Center” as a non-polarizing land-use term to be used for describing the proposed development at the Farren.

Other economic development updates:
Item tabled to future meeting.

Set next meeting date and time:
EDIC agreed to meet again at 3:30PM on 11/13 (later changed to 11/20).

Meeting adjourned 4:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Nolan-Zeller, EDIC Coordinator