

Montague Historical Commission
Minutes/Summary of meeting on April 28, 2025

Montague Town Hall
1 Avenue A
Turners Falls, MA 01376

Commissioners Present:

Chris Clawson
Ed Gregory
Jen Viencek
Janel Nockleby, Chair

Not present:

David Brule, Vice Chair

Additional Attendees:

Caitlin Kelley, Montague Public Libraries Director, Chris Nolan-Zeller, Assistant Town Administrator, Andy Brydges, First Light Power, Melissa Coady, Tighe & Bond, Ben Young, First Light Power, Dave Schmidt, First Light Power, Tracy Adamski Tighe & Bond.

Proceedings:

1. **Minutes of March 24, 2025** – vote postponed pending corrections.
2. **Carnegie Library Update** from Caitlin Kelley, Library Director.

Of the 3 options

- 1) build new at 38 Avenue A
- 2) add on to existing library
- 3) move building to 38 Avenue A –

... Option 3 is no longer a possibility. Conservation restrictions, communicated via Mass Historical Commission, prevent this scenario. Option 2 – is seeming more and more less likely due to likely logistical hurdles and high expenses. Option 3 seems to be the path of least resistance at the moment, but that is not final. A request for an architect is going out. Hope to have one in June. A project management group has already been hired. If option 1 happens, the town has the goal to sell it very cheaply to a non-profit or cultural organization. There are ongoing issues with the Carnegie Library that the town is continuing to address regardless of the possibilities noted above. It will need a new roof, for example. It

has some water infiltration due to the handicap ramp not getting a drain for its well - the building committee has this on their list.

3. **Strathmore Footbridge demolition status.** Montague Historical Commission agreed to provide status to the Massachusetts Historical Commission on how to mitigate the loss of the Footbridge. After discussion with First Light representatives, Assistant Town Administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller, and Tighe & Bond representatives, Historical Commission members agreed to send a letter to Mass Historic explaining that mitigation should include allowing access to Montague Historical Society members to photograph and video the bridge before demolition. It was determined that the existing sign that says 'Arts & Industries' is not related to the original use of the mill and is from the 1990s so it does not need to be preserved.
4. Jen Viencek reported that getting **meeting minutes and agendas** on the <https://montague-ma.gov/g/56/Montague-Historical-Commission> website is going well and should be mostly up to date. We learned that Jen is able to put future meeting agendas on the website and on the town calendar. Separately, copies need to be sent to the town clerk's office for posting on the physical town hall bulletin board. Next for Jen – making sure physical copies of meeting minutes are filed in our historical commission filing cabinet at town hall.
5. **New commissioners:** We approved this sentence to be placed on the <https://montague-ma.gov/g/56/Montague-Historical-Commission> website: "The Montague Historical Commission welcomes those who might like to join the commission. Our suggestion is to attend a meeting or two via zoom to get better acquainted with the work of the commission, meet commissioners, and tell us about yourself. From there, the Chair may write a letter of recommendation for you to the selectboard for their consideration before voting on your appointment."
6. **Montague City Re-zoning project** – There is a committee of town staff and residents considering zoning options for the former Farren Memorial Hospital site and also Rod Shop Road. There is a consultant group working with the planning department, including public input sessions. Chris Clawson attended the April 17th session. Chris Nolan-Zeller reported that there was a wide range of opinions expressed at that session.
 - a. For the Farren site – options may include low, middle, or high-density housing and mixed uses. Janel expressed interest in a long-term vision of having Montague City become a registered national historic district, and so hopefully, whatever new that is built can take that into account, since it would be surrounded by historic structures. Chris Nolan-Zeller noted that there will be opportunities for MHC involvement later in the design phase.

Some initial visioning via VHB consultants suggested historical homages to Turners Falls architecture. There was a brief discussion of the 1937 house that is part of the property (356 Montague City Road)– the view of some commission members is that there is likely little historic significance associated with this building. It is not in the MACRIS database, so it is not currently subject to a demolition delay bylaw.

- b. The Rod Shop Road area is also being considered for rezoning changes by the town/committee. It is an historic area in at least 2 ways – 1) the wetlands there and surrounding areas are associated with the navigational canal era of Montague, 1792 – 1850's. Per Ed Gregory, there was a warehouse and gin mill in the area to serve the barge canal traffic. It was like a wharf – a place for boatmen to eat/drink and (possibly have a small room to rest – not confirmed), and to unload wares. The canal was wide there, like a pond, where boats could pass each other. And 2) the industrialization era – with Montague City Rod and Reel Company. Some of those buildings still remain. Because there is no historic district in Montague City, the demolition delay bylaw does not pertain to this area. However, Janel notes, that she believes it is worth having conversations with the building owners and town staff to consider how/if they can be preserved in some manner. Zoning, in this case, could possibly be relevant. She notes that across the street from the Rod Shop buildings, there are wetlands areas with historic significance, so zoning as greenspace/historic/recreational might work well.
 - c. Additionally, later in the 20th Century, in the 50's and 60's there was a ballfield towards the north end of the road and a playground at the south end of the road.
 - d. Janel agreed to write up notes from this meeting and send them to the Montague City zoning committee via Maureen.
- 7. We decided not to spend our \$500 this fiscal year. Instead, we will put this on the agenda much earlier in the year so that we can give it more thought.
 - 8. Battlefield grant interpretive signs – David Brule absent. No updates.
 - 9. No new news on any paleontological work in Montague.
 - 10. Topics Not anticipated
 - a. T-Mobile equipment in St. Anne's, inside the building, so it is okay.
 - b. Archeological updates regarding Eversource work – Janel to check in with David Brule.
 - 11. Next meeting date – June 30th. 11 a.m. via zoom.

Submitted by Janel Nockleby, Chair