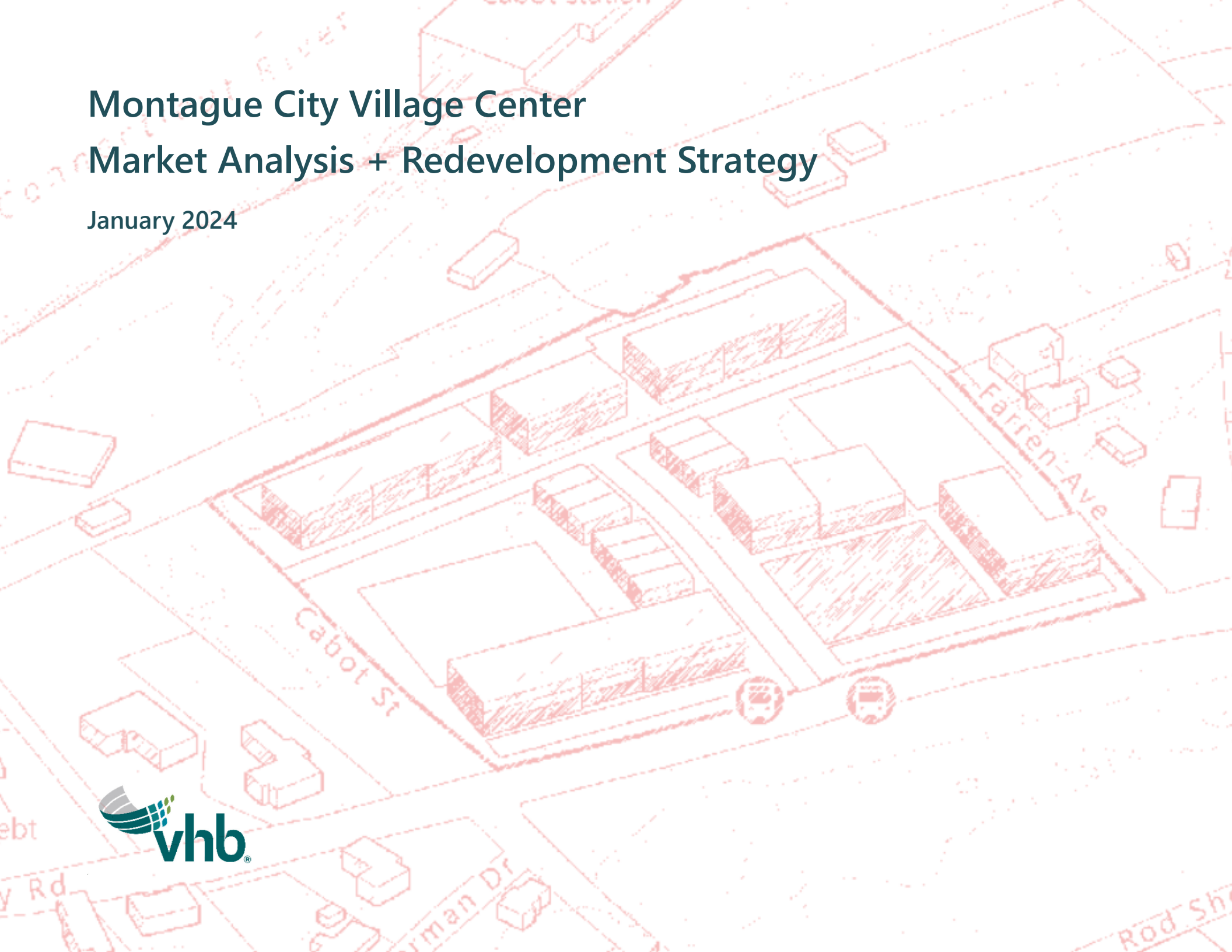


# Montague City Village Center Market Analysis + Redevelopment Strategy

January 2024



# Montague City Village Center

## Market Analysis + Redevelopment Strategy

Memorandum

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*Bricks Recovered from the Farren Care Center Site, 2023*



# 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Village of Montague City is one of the five villages located in the Town of Montague. It is approximately 1.5 miles southwest of downtown Turners Falls, and directly across the Connecticut River from the City of Greenfield.

The Town is currently working to acquire an 8-acre parcel of land located in the center of Montague City (the "Site"). This parcel, previously occupied by the Farren Care Center, has several distinct redevelopment advantages. It is large and has ample street frontage along a busy road. It is free of wetlands. It is also well-served by public utilities as well as the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) Bus 32.

The Site presents an opportunity for the Town to establish a new Village Center for Montague City, enhancing the community with a vibrant, mixed-used space that can be used by residents, neighbors, and visitors.

In April 2023, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), through its Complete Neighborhoods Program, engaged VHB to evaluate the Site and prepare a Village

Center Plan. To this end, VHB researched the Site's environmental and regulatory constraints, met with stakeholders and the broader community, identified community needs, prepared a vision, and explored physical site planning concepts. Following this assignment, the Town of Montague engaged VHB to provide a complementary

market analysis and redevelopment strategy. The analysis included a combination of primary and secondary research, focusing on local and regional market conditions.

This report summarizes VHB's process, findings and recommendations in connection with both assignments.

*Farren Care Center Site, Montague, MA*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Report Summary

**The Montague City Village Center Market Analysis and Redevelopment Strategy** is the product of a multi-layered study that included research, stakeholder engagement, community dialogue, visioning, and site planning.

This report synthesizes these layers and presents key findings and recommendations.

**1. Executive Summary**, provides an introduction, a summary of chapters, and a summary of previous studies.

**2. Planning Context**, presents background on the economic geography of Franklin County, and the Montague/Greenfield Study Area (the "Study Area"), including amenities, access and circulation, and the distribution of land uses. This chapter, informed by data from ESRI, the US Census, and CoStar, also provides a summary of trends in population and household change (including projected growth), household characteristics, age, income, and employment.

**3. Market Assessment**, examines opportunities and constraints in Montague's real estate market, with a focus on housing and retail. This chapter presents information on the characteristics of Montague's existing housing stock, including unit mix, unit size, tenancy, vacancy, age, and value. The chapter also features recent data on the cost of housing for both renters and owners, and explores the contours of the study area's significant unmet housing needs.

On the retail side, the market assessment provides information on the existing retail landscape in Montague/Greenfield and examines the potential for retail in Montague City.

**4. Village Center Plan**, presents summaries of three group stakeholder interviews and two community events that were facilitated between May and October, 2023, along with the community-informed Vision Statement for the new Village Center. This chapter also examines the Farren Care Center Site, including location, scale,

infrastructure, and underlying zoning. Finally, the chapter presents a conceptual master plan for the site, showing, at a high level, how the community's goals can be met within a dense, walkable, mixed-use village center, borrowing its urban form from nearby Turners Falls, including a community center and public open space.

**5. Development Strategy**, explores options related to the redevelopment of the Farren Care Center Site.

It is anticipated that future development within the Village Center will include a mix of residential and retail uses. This chapter explores various ways that the Town can advocate for the community's needs and influence development outcomes. The chapter highlights four precedent projects, located in Amherst, Northampton, Belchertown, and Eastham, that reflect similar conditions, and provides a description of how each project was developed.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Canal District Master Plan

#### The Canal District Master Plan

was prepared by Dietz & Company Architects, Inc, and Camoin Associates for MassDevelopment in early 2023.

This report includes a general site investigation of the Canal District neighborhood of Turners Falls, identifies development goals, and explores the feasibility of various development scenarios. Given the proximity to Montague City, and the close timing, the Canal District Master Plan is a valuable source of insight for the Montague City Village Center Plan.

The Canal District Master Plan identifies critical development challenges inherent to the site. For example, the Canal District contains many dilapidated mill buildings and corrupt infrastructure that is not suitable for reuse. Also, the Canal District is characterized by overgrown, steeply sloping topography, and has limited vehicular access.

The Canal District Master Plan touches upon the feasibility of multifamily residential development. The report rightly points out that there are no comparable projects built in recent years proximate

to either site. The report determines that residential development- either market-rate or affordable development- would be financially infeasible in the Canal District, partially due to physical site constraints.

The Farren Care Center Site, on the other hand, presents a fraction of these physical site constraints; the site is accessible, flat, clean, and cleared. The Farren Care Center Site offers much lower pre-development and site development costs, and represents a superior development opportunity.

At the same time, there are certain conditions that impact both sites - for example, the high cost of construction in Massachusetts, and, the constraining Return on Investment (ROI) prospects of Montague's real estate market.

The report identifies the following needs:

1. A need for new residential construction to replace vintage housing stock - The median year of construction is 1900 and several properties date back two centuries or more.

2. A need for affordable and accessible housing for older adults, as the total number of senior households increases by 375 units between 2023 and 2026 - approximately one-third of households in Montague are headed by a resident aged 65 or older.

3. A demonstrated demand for condominiums and multifamily housing as the median sale price for a condo exceeds \$300,000 - 1 in 4 renting households (23.4%) spend more than half their income on rent.

*Canal District Master Plan (2023)*



# 2

## PLANNING CONTEXT

## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Franklin County

#### Franklin County

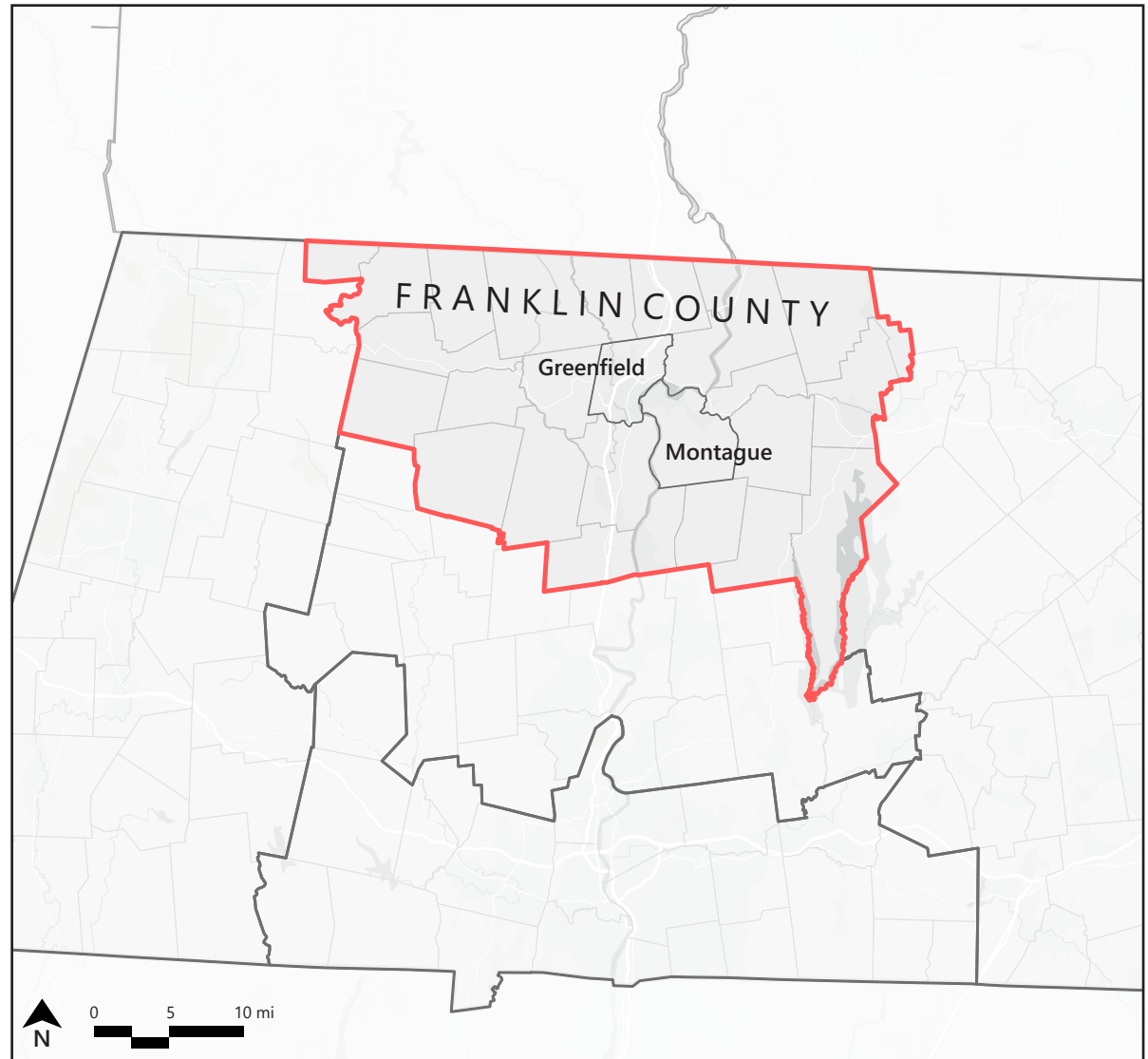
Franklin County has the lowest population density of all counties in Massachusetts, and some of the state's smallest communities. The county's population of 71,029 people (2020) (roughly 1% of the state's population) is distributed across 30,374 households in 25 municipalities.

The population of Franklin County, compared to that of the State overall, is significantly older, with a median age of 47.5. The aging population of Franklin County has a growing need for new housing, new social services, and new amenities.

The lowest average annual wages recorded in the State are in Franklin County (\$42,287 as of 2018). More than 15% of the county's population lives in poverty.

In rural communities like those found in Franklin County, infrastructure is limited, and economic development is slow, exacerbating the county's most pressing challenges over time.

*Franklin County, Massachusetts*



*Source: MassGIS*



## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Franklin County

#### Franklin County

Franklin County is served by the **Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)**.

In 2020, FRCOG published a **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2020-2025)**. This report presents a well-documented assessment of a county that faces serious economic challenges, including a stagnant population, a struggling workforce, and a limited job market. It also identifies a Vision Statement for the county, including the following elements:

- Welcome and encourage younger and ethnically diverse people to live and work in the region.
- Leverage the region's intrinsic and emerging assets to create economic opportunity.
- Holistically consider the needs of the workforce, including housing and overall health.
- Address rural investment inequity.

*2020-2025 CEDS*



## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

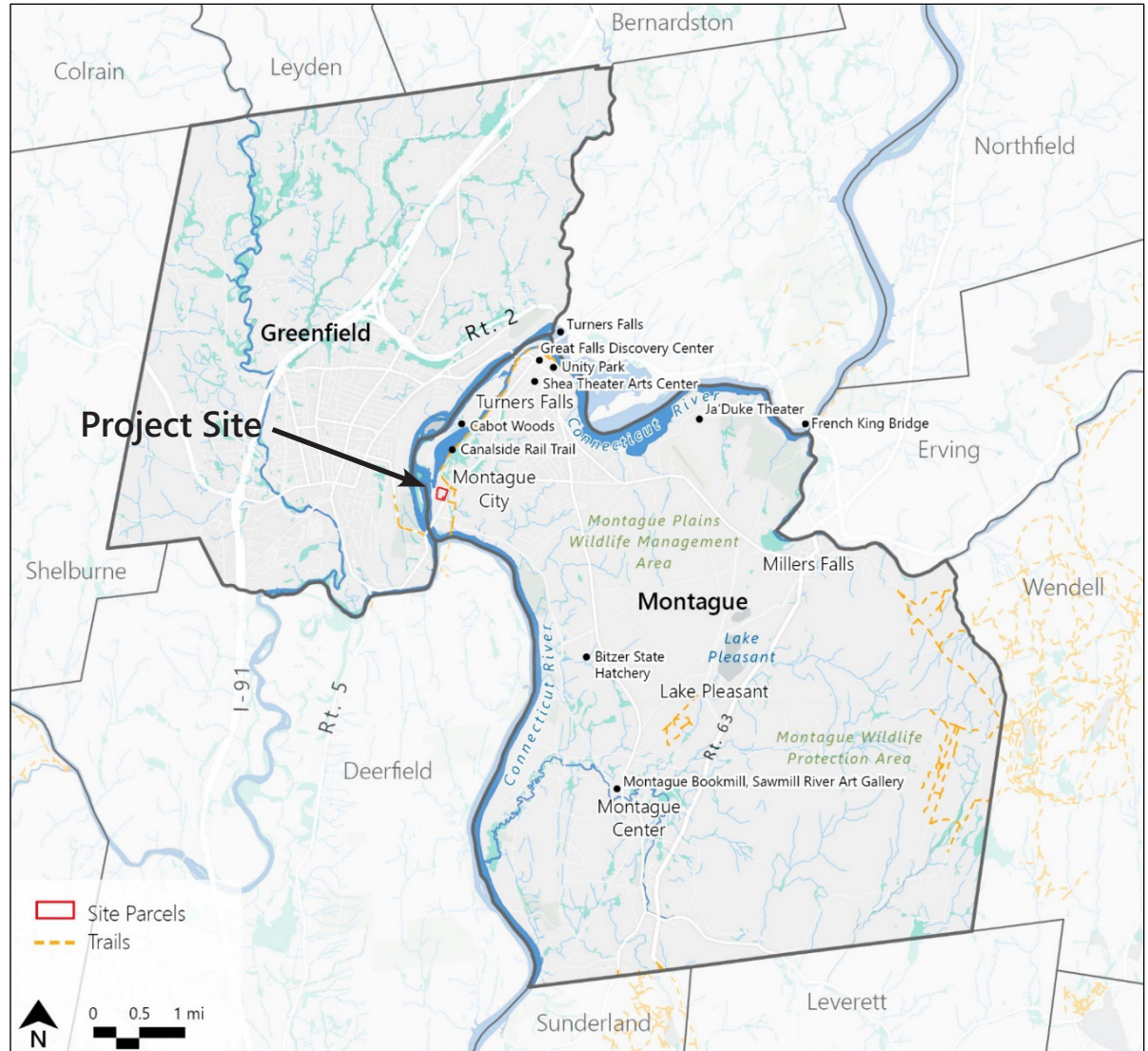
#### Study Area

The Study Area consists of the City of Greenfield, the urban center of Franklin County (population 17,674), and the adjacent Town of Montague (population 8,527). These communities are positioned along opposite banks of the wide Connecticut River. The geography of both towns is largely defined by the river's path.

The Town of Montague features Turners Falls, a historic planned mill community, developed when the canal was converted for power production.

The Town's landscape features include rolling hills, riparian spaces, forests, and wetlands.

Primary Study Area: Montague and Greenfield



Source: MassGIS

## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

#### Access and Circulation

The primary Study Area is located at the convergence of several major interstate arteries.

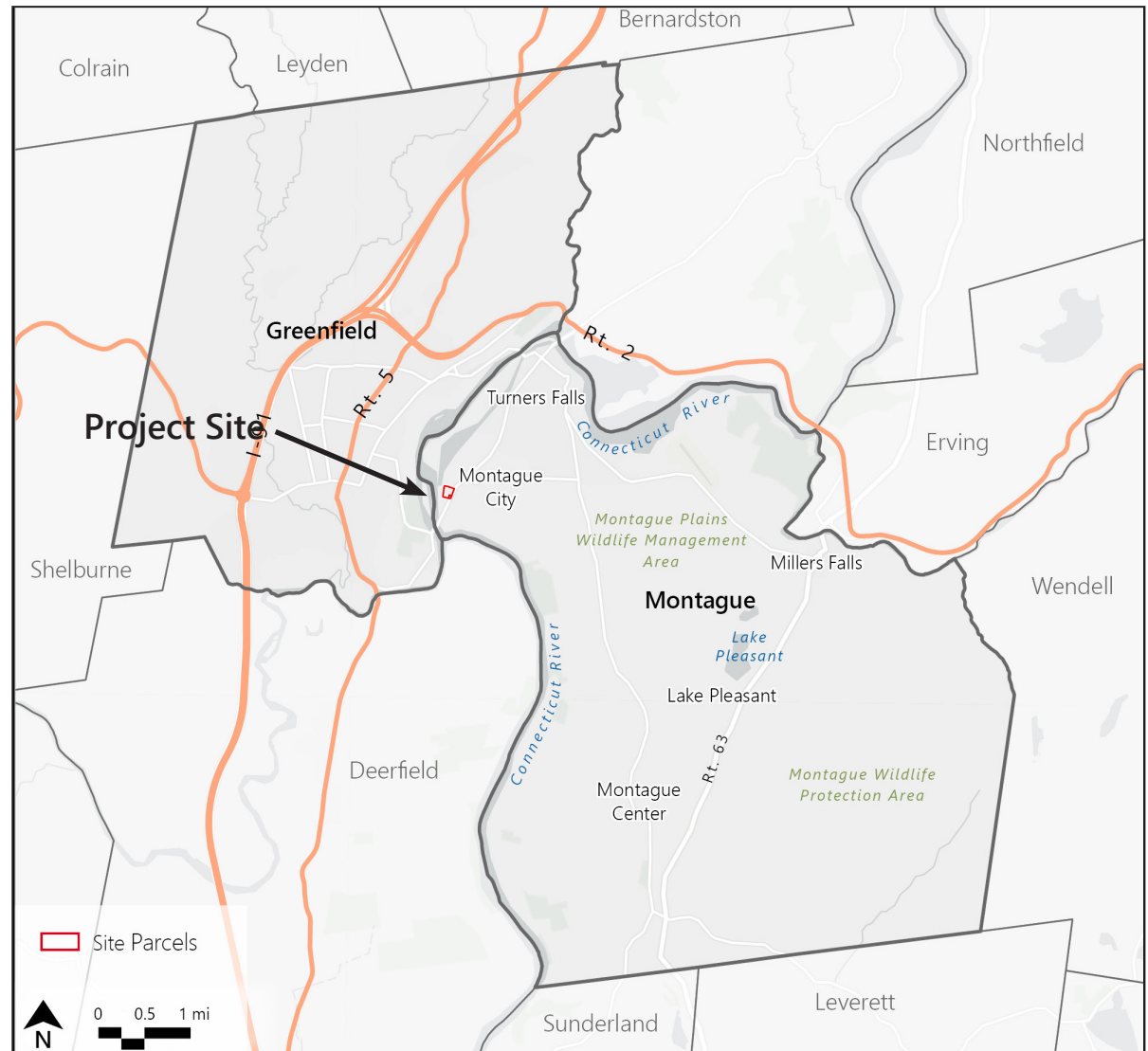
Route 2 connects the Study Area to northern Berkshire County in the west, and metropolitan Boston in the east.

Interstate highway 91 and Route 5 connect the Study Area to New Hampshire to the north, and metropolitan Springfield to the south.

#### Distance to Major Cities

- Northampton: 25 Miles
- Worcester: 70 Miles
- Boston: 90 Miles
- New York: 181 Miles

*Primary Study Area: Access and Circulation*



Source: MassGIS



## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

#### Villages and Neighborhoods

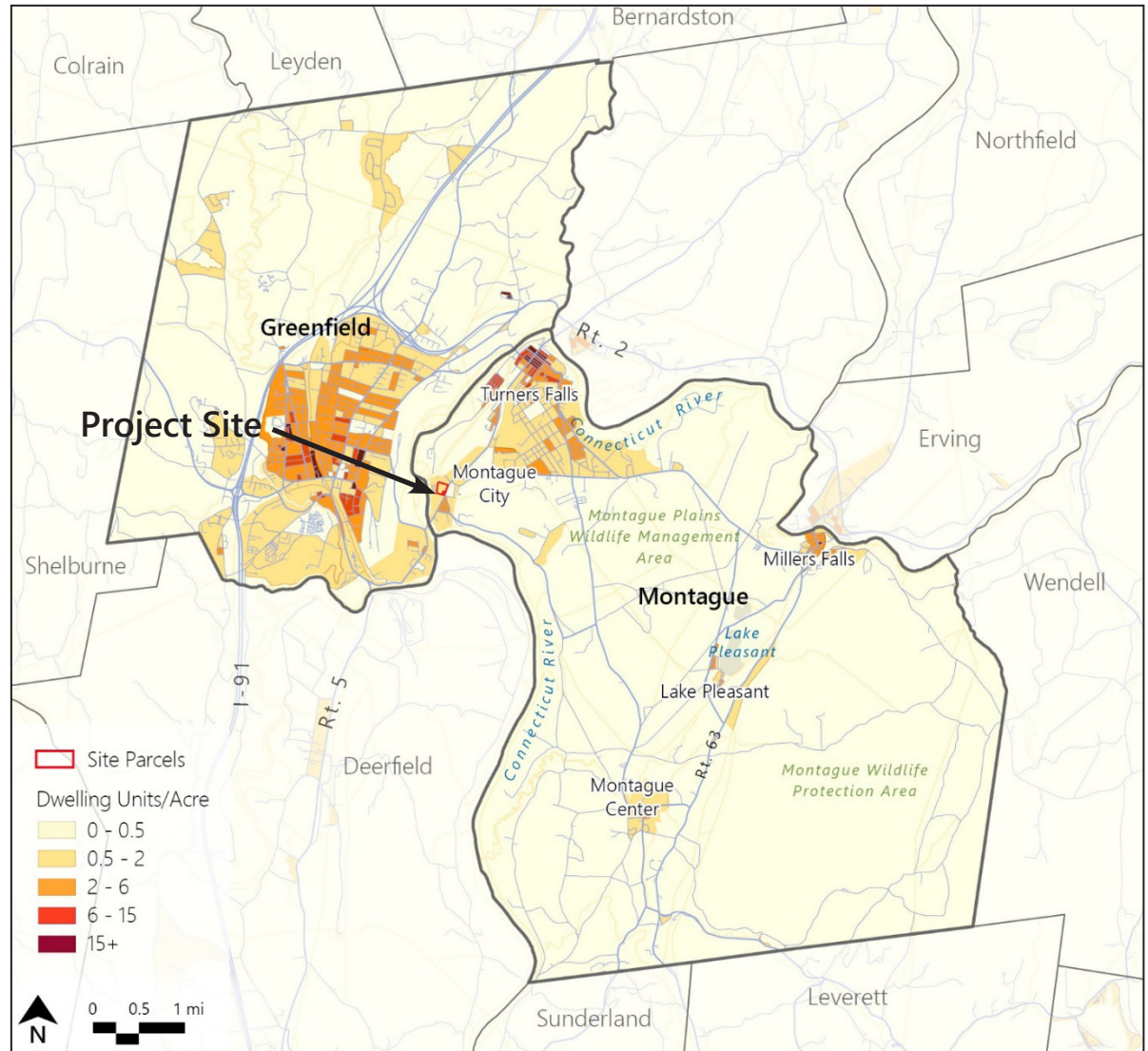
Montague and Greenfield are made up of diverse villages and neighborhoods.

Greenfield, located in the center of Franklin County, is the county's only city. Most of the city's population of 17,674 people are clustered in downtown Greenfield, directly across the Connecticut River from Montague.

The Town of Montague, with a population of 8,527, consists of five villages, with Turners Falls being the most populous and well-known in the region.

The village of Montague City is located roughly 1.5 miles to the southwest of Turners Falls, along Montague City Road.

Primary Study Area: Population Density



Source: MassGIS, US Census

## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

#### Turners Falls and Montague City

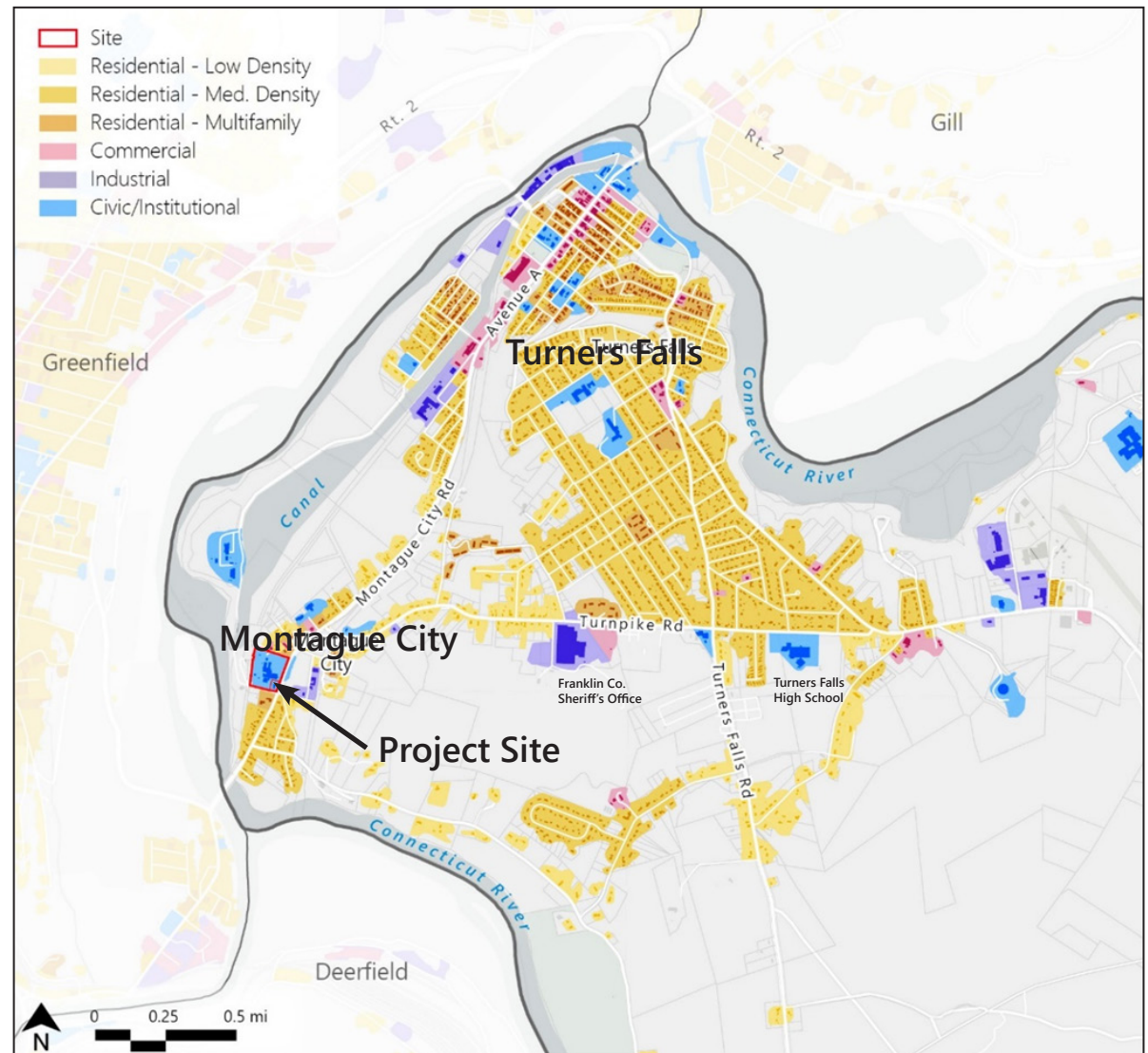
**The Village of Turners Falls** is the most dense village in Montague, and is the primary hub of public services, employment, and events for the community, with commercial uses concentrated along Avenue A.

The Avenue A corridor is characterized by a walkable, mixed-use, dense urban form, featuring a pleasant variety of masonry and wood-frame buildings.

**The Village of Montague City** is located to the south of Turners Falls along Montague City Road. This village is almost entirely residential, featuring standalone single-family residences.

The Farren Care Center Site is located centrally within Montague City, which has an estimated population of 330 people.

*Turners Falls and Montague City: Land Use*



Source: MassGIS, US Census



## PLANNING CONTEXT

Montague / Greenfield

*Local Festival on Avenue A in Turners Falls*



## PLANNING CONTEXT

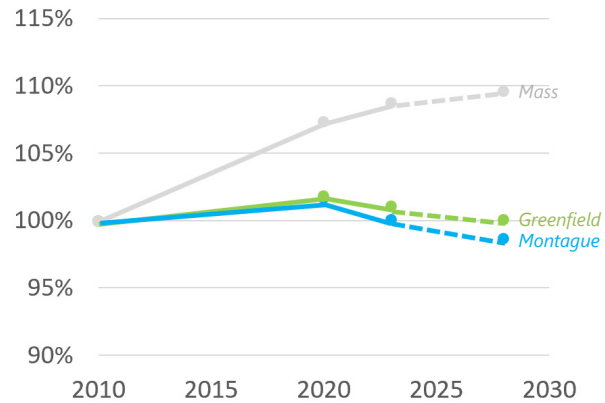
### Montague / Greenfield

#### Population Growth

The population in Montague and Greenfield remained relatively stagnant between 2010 and 2020, with less than 2% growth in either municipality- significantly slower than the statewide change in population.

The total population of both municipalities is anticipated to decline by a moderate amount over the coming years, according to ESRI's Community Analyst.

*Population as % of 2010 Totals (Actual and Projected)*



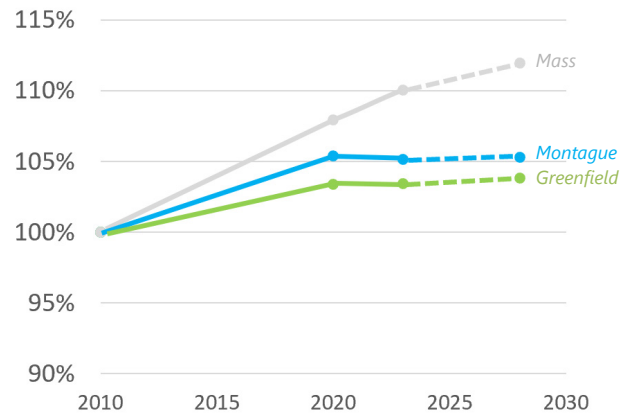
Source: ESRI Community Analyst

#### Household Growth

Growth in the number of households is currently outpacing growth in overall population, as the average household size decreases statewide, and an increasing share of households consist of a single person.

In Montague and Greenfield, the number of households is anticipated to grow a small amount over the coming years.

*Households as % of 2010 Totals (Actual and Projected)*



Source: ESRI Community Analyst

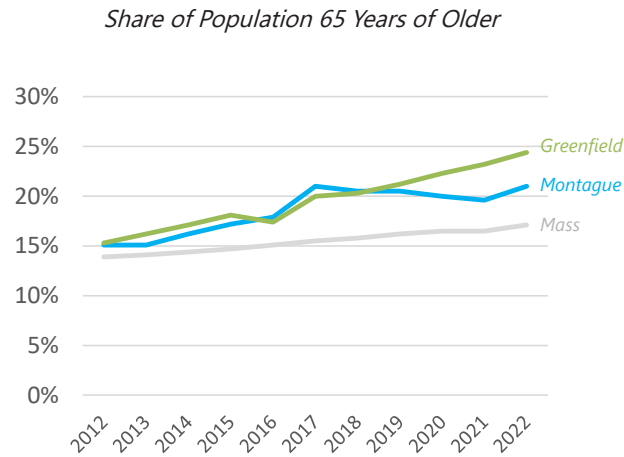
## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

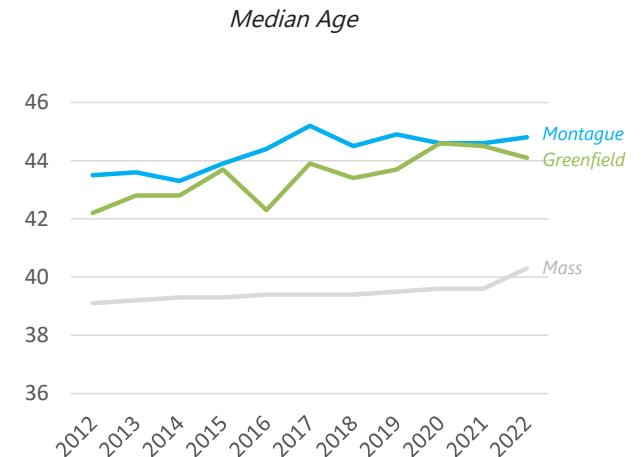
#### Graying Population

Older adults are prevalent within the communities of Montague and Greenfield. People 65 years old or older made up over one in five of the population in 2022, higher than the statewide average of 17.1%.

Underscoring the shift, the median age in both municipalities is approximately four years older than the statewide median.



Source: US Census DP05

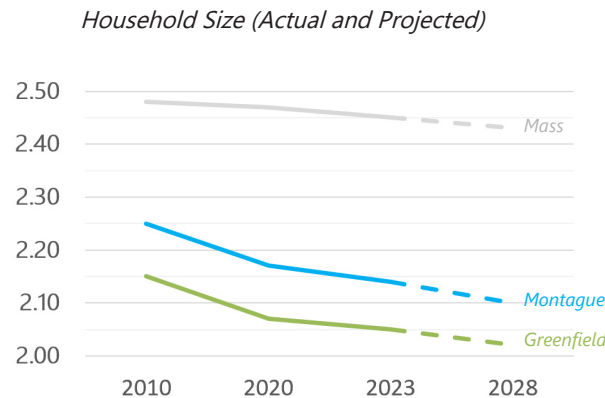


Source: US Census DP05

#### Smaller Households

The average household size in the Study Area is smaller than the statewide average, and mirroring statewide trends, continues to decrease each year.

Moreover, 35.3% of households in Montague (and 37.5% in Greenfield) are occupied by a single householder living alone, versus 29.1% statewide.



Source: ESRI Community Analyst

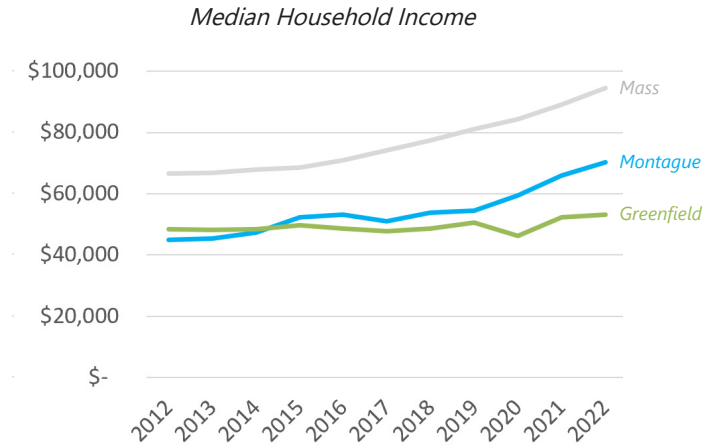
## PLANNING CONTEXT

### Montague / Greenfield

#### Income

The median household income in the Study Area is notably lower than the State. Indeed, the 2022 median household income in Massachusetts (\$94.88) was over 34% greater than the same measure in Montague.

However, the Study Area has seen notable gains in household income in recent years, with Montague showing a spike of almost 30% in just four years.

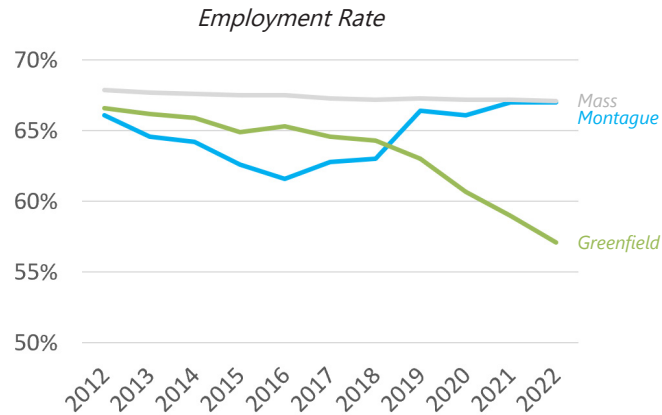


Source: US Census DP03

#### Employment Rate

There have been significant shifts in employment trends within the Study Area over the past decade. In 2012, the employment rate of Montague and Greenfield were comparable to that of the State.

Since then, Greenfield's rate has dipped below 60%, whereas Montague's dipped and then rose to meet the statewide rate of 67% in 2022.



Source: US Census DP03

# 3

## MARKET ASSESSMENT



## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Housing Stock

#### Introduction: Housing

For a small community with a population under 10,000, Montague is able to boast of a diverse mix of housing units, ranging from rural districts with detached homes, to dense, mixed-use, walkable avenues and side streets in Turners Falls. Yet the slow pace of development isn't meeting the community's changing housing needs.

This includes older adults, more of whom are living alone and struggling with an increasing sense of isolation, as indicated by Age-Friendly Mass-in-Motion during a 2023 stakeholder interview. Although there

are a handful of age-restricted multifamily buildings in Montague, some of them are in poor condition, and all of them face mounting deferred maintenance needs.

At the same time, housing costs are rising for all age categories and income levels, increasing the demand for affordable housing developments- which are in notably short supply across Franklin County, according to Allysa Larose from the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority. In Franklin County, which has the lowest median

income in the State, the waitlists for households with vouchers are increasingly long.

Construction has been slow in recent decades, and recently, construction costs have risen sharply, to the detriment of active developers in the region. Bob Obear, a residential developer and contractor based in Montague, asserts that this problem has only grown worse with new energy code requirements placed on new construction and renovation projects.

*Historic Row Houses in Turners Falls*



## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Housing Stock

#### Unit Mix

Roughly half of all units in Montague and Greenfield are single-family detached homes, and fewer than 10% are single-family attached units such as townhouses. This is similar to statewide levels.

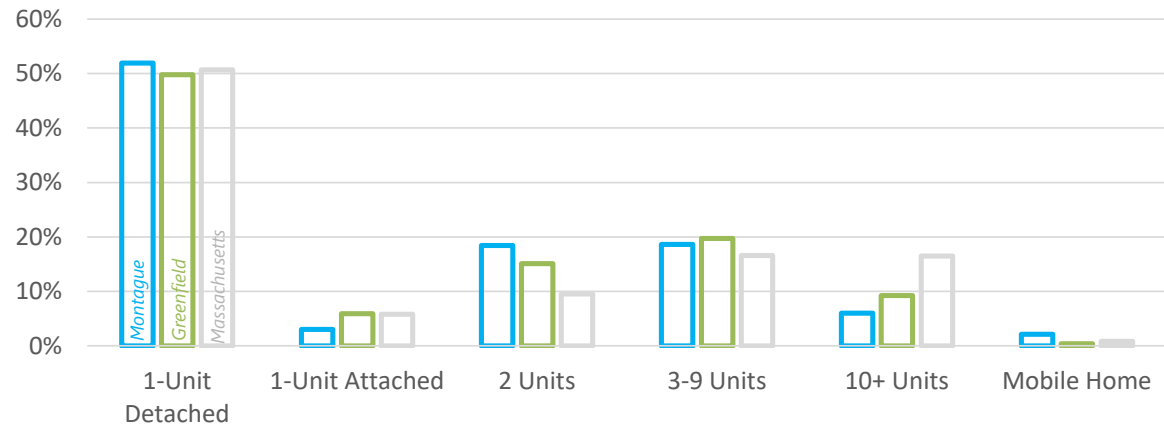
However, whereas the Study Area has a greater prevalence of duplexes than the State, the share of units in buildings with 10 or more units is notably lower - only 6.0% in Montague.

#### Bedroom Count

The mix of bedroom counts among residences in Montague and Greenfield is not incomparable to statewide measures. While Montague shows a high concentration of 2br units, it has comparatively smaller shares of 3br, 4br, and 5+br units than the State as a whole.

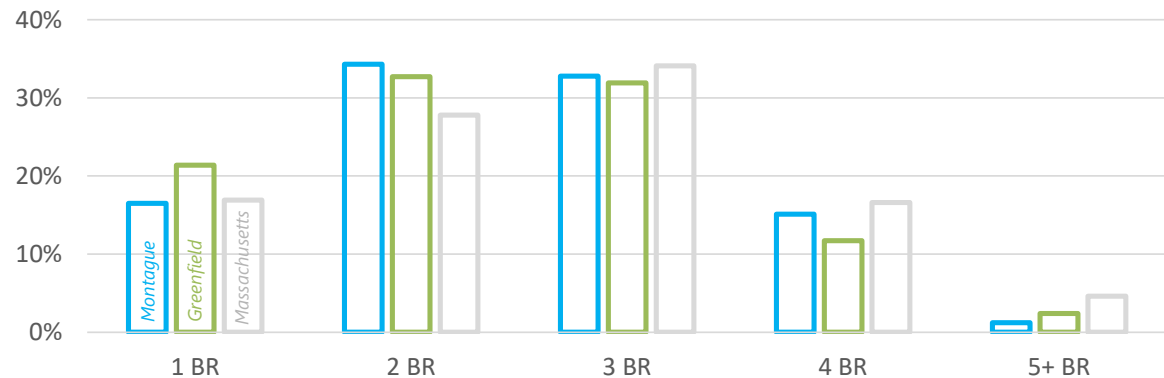
Still, in Montague, approximately one-half of all housing units are either 3br, 4br, or 5+br units.

Unit Mix (2022)



Source: US Census DP04

Bedroom Count (2022)



Source: US Census DP04

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

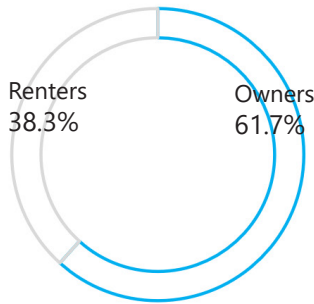
### Housing Characteristics

#### Tenancy

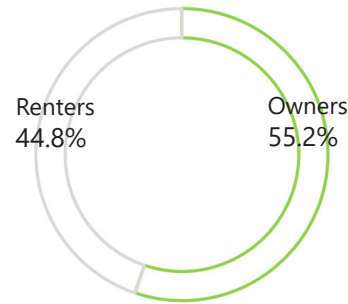
Across the State of Massachusetts, 37.8% of households rented their homes in 2022.

The Town of Montague is in line with state trends, driven in large part by the cluster of small apartment buildings in Turners Falls. Greenfield has an even higher rate of rental households, with almost 45.0% of households renting.

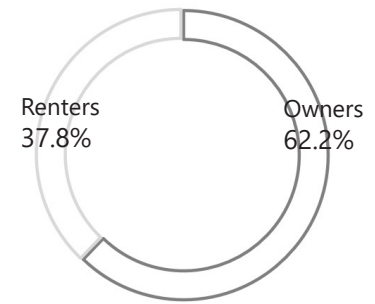
Montague Tenancy (2022)



Greenfield Tenancy (2022)



Massachusetts Tenancy (2022)

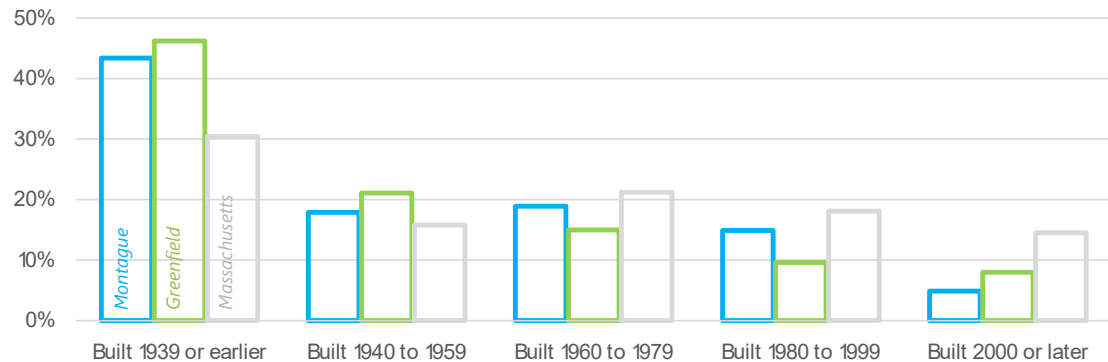


Source: US Census DP04

#### Age of Units

Montague and Greenfield's housing stock is old, and getting older. Well over 40% of the units in both municipalities are over 80 years old (versus approximately 30% statewide). Only 8.0% of the units in Greenfield, and less than 5.0% of the units in Montague, were built since the turn of this century.

Age of Residential Units (2022)



Source: US Census DP04

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

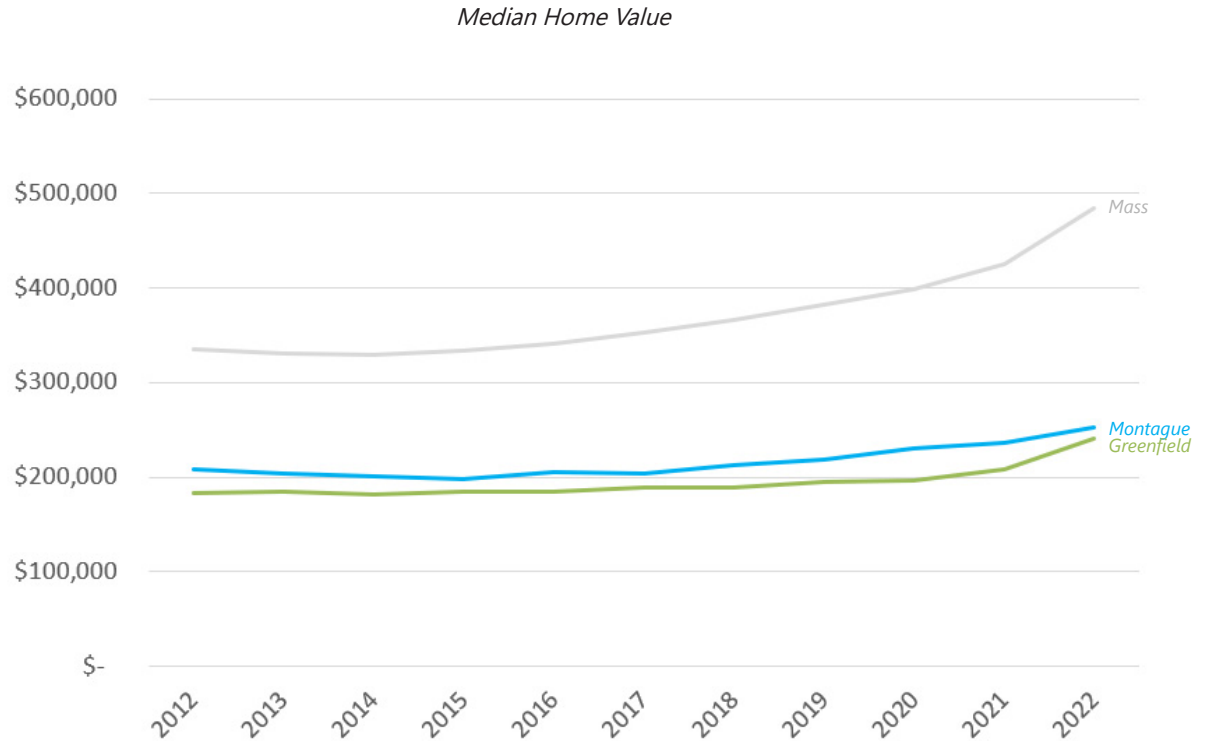
### Median Home Value

#### Home Value

Massachusetts is currently confronting a housing crisis that continues to grow worse over time. The cost of housing is increasingly out of reach for low- and moderate-income households. This is reflected in many market indicators, including median home value. In Montague and Greenfield, median home value is less than half that of the State.

Statewide, the median home value increased by almost 60% between 2012 and 2022. In Montague, growth over the same time period was 21%, just over a third of the statewide rate.

As residential vacancies decrease in higher-value markets, there is the potential for households to look for deals in lower-cost communities like Montague and Greenfield, which may boost population growth.



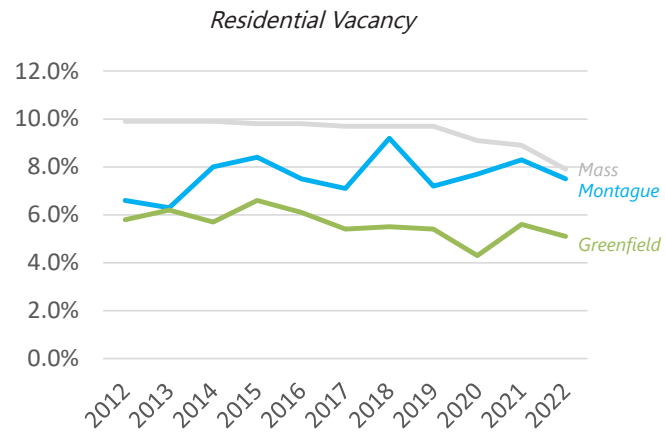
Source: US Census DP04

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Housing Characteristics

#### Vacancy

In spite of the study area's anemic growth, it is interesting to note that the level of residential vacancies has been lower than the statewide average every year for the past decade. That gap is narrowing as housing vacancies decrease statewide; however, Montague's rate was still less than 8% in 2022, and Greenfield's rate was particularly low at 5.1%, indicating a strong unmet housing demand.



Source: US Census DP04



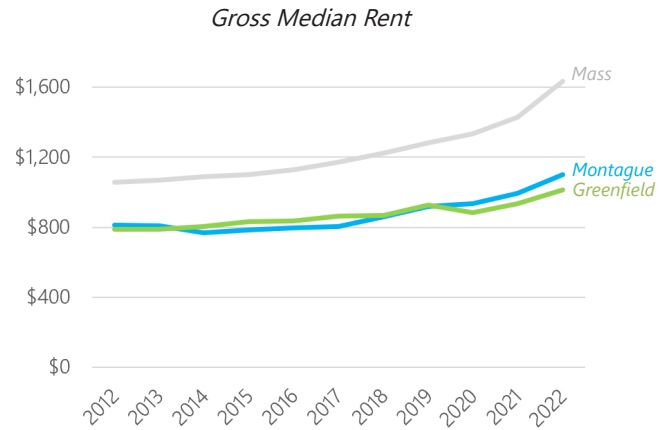
## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Housing Costs

#### Gross Rent

In 2022, median gross rent was \$1,100 in Montague and \$1,012 in Greenfield. This was significantly lower than the statewide median of \$1,634.

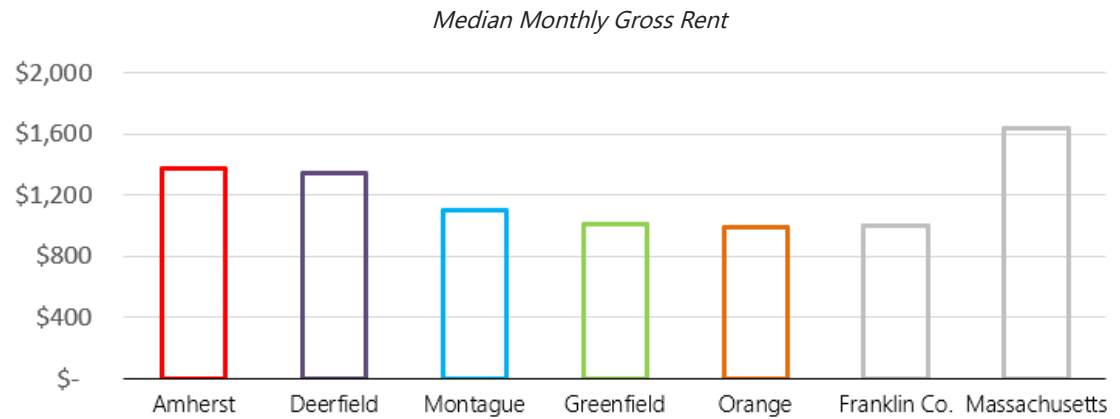
The gap is increasing over time; whereas Montague's median increased 35% from 2012 to 2022, the statewide median surged 44% over the same period.



Source:: US Census DP04

#### Median Rent Comparison (2021)

The median monthly rent in Montague and Greenfield is notably lower than the statewide median. It is also lower than the respective median monthly rents in more upscale municipalities like Amherst and Deerfield.



Source:: US Census DP04

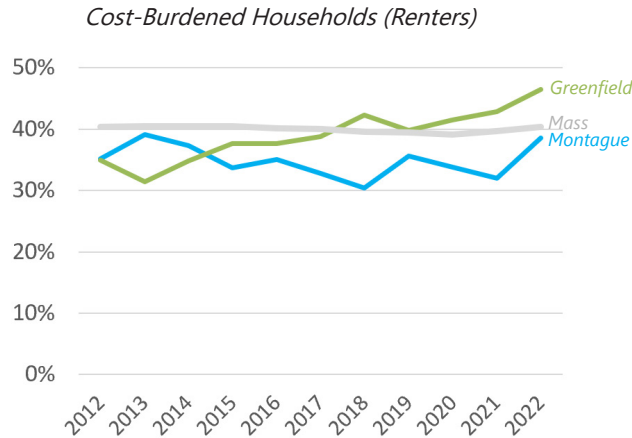
## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Cost-Burdened Households

#### Cost-Burdened Households (Renters)

Comparing housing costs with income is helpful in evaluating affordability. A common measure of affordability is the ratio of households that pay more than 35% of their monthly income on housing costs (i.e., "cost-burdened" households).

Currently, almost 40% of renter households in Montague, and over 45% of renter households in Greenfield, are cost-burdened.

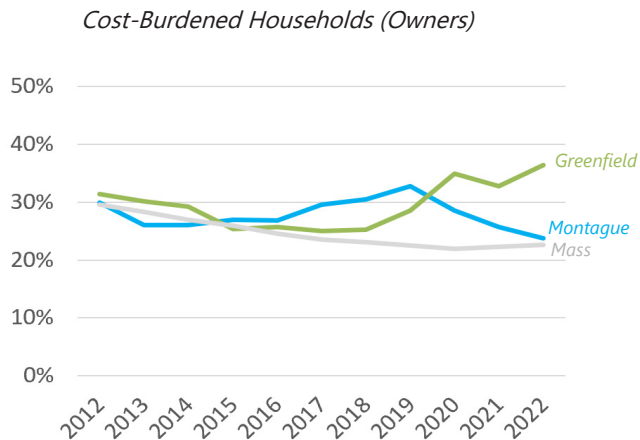


Source: US Census DP04

#### Cost-Burdened Households (Owners)

Owner households are not as cost-burdened as their renter counterparts, but many owners are still challenged by high mortgage payments and maintenance costs.

Montague is aligned with the statewide rate of 22.6%, whereas in Greenfield, almost 40% of owner households are cost-burdened.



Source: US Census DP04

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

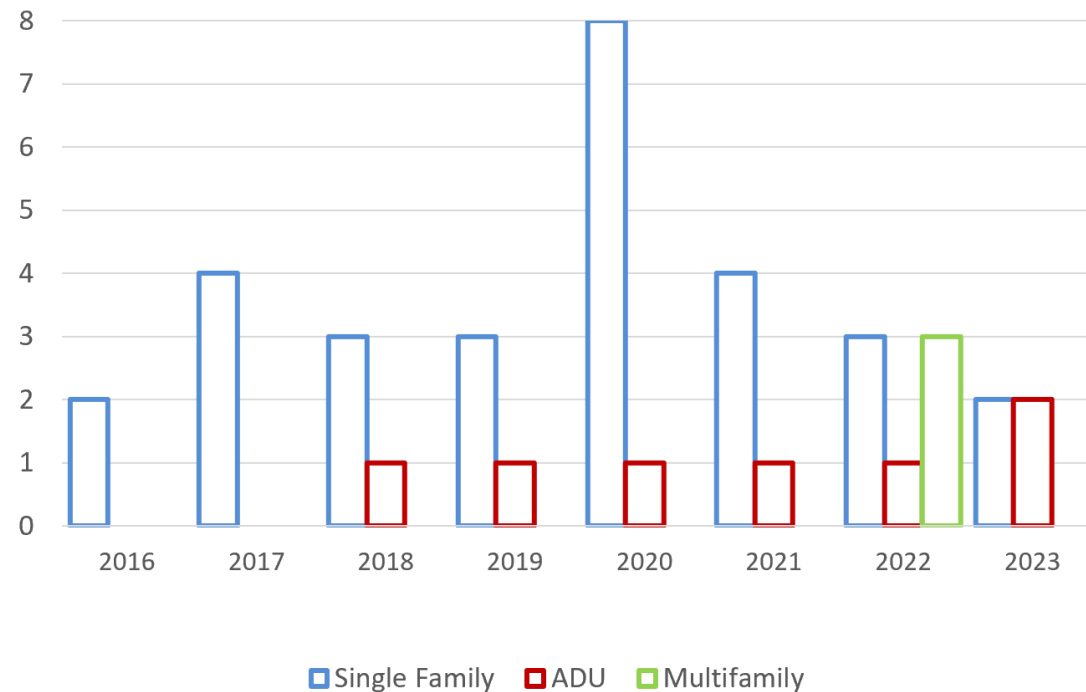
### Recent Housing Development

#### Residential Permits

Despite the strong demand for newly constructed housing units from households living in aging houses, seniors looking to downsize, and low-income households looking for more affordable housing options, there has been notably little construction in recent years.

Only 39 residential units were permitted over the past eight years, including 29 single-family residences, seven accessory dwelling units, and three units in a multifamily, mixed-use building.

*Residential Building Permits Granted*



*Source: Town of Montague*

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Commercial Properties

The Montague and Greenfield Study Area is home to many small businesses, offices, retail and dining spots.

In Montague, Avenue A in Turners Fall (shown at right) is a regional destination featuring restaurants, cafes, galleries, and shops. It is also home to many residents, living in single-family homes, duplexes, and apartment buildings. The neighborhood is rooted in a historic red brick motif that enhances its charm and popularity.

Indeed, according to Montague's Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC), the demand for commercial space in Turners Falls is very strong, resulting in minimal vacancies and driving up the cost to lease space.

Some smaller businesses have reported that the cost to lease space has become increasingly out of reach. There is significant interest in introducing new commercial space in Montague City's new Village Center to help meet demand.

*Avenue A, Turners Falls, Town of Montague*





## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### Findings

#### Market Assessment: Key Findings

Montague's housing stock is aging, the growing population of seniors is looking for alternative housing options, and home prices are increasingly out of reach for low-income households.

Based on these factors, there will be a consistently strong demand for new residential development in Montague for at least the next 10 years. This general finding was strongly corroborated by the input that we received from stakeholders and community members alike.

As the Canal District Market Analysis (2023) concluded, even modest capture rates for key markets would translate to demand for many hundreds of housing units - more than could be reasonably accommodated on the Farren Care Center Site.

#### Recommendations for Housing

The Town should take steps to encourage dense residential development at the Farren Care Center Site, to help address the community's unmet housing needs while at the same time creating a vibrant Village Center for Montague City.

According to input from the community, the ideal housing for the Farren Care Center Site is a mix - a mix of unit sizes, a mix of building typologies, and a mix of units prices and rents.

This heterogeneity would allow development to serve the needs of several segments of the population at once (e.g., low-income families, seniors, first-time buyers, etc.)

#### Recommendations for Retail

The Town should also explore the potential for encouraging the development of retail spaces at the Farren Care Center Site, such as a small grocery store, daycare, restaurant or cafe, makerspace, or hotel.

Retail development would address several needs at once: it would support local business owners, create jobs, provide residents with services and/or entertainment, and elevate the Town's tax base. It would also promote social activity in the Village Center.

In addition to uses listed above, other ideas generated by the community included a post office, theater, music venue, and/or recreation center.

# 4

## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Community Input

#### Introduction

The residents of Montague have diverse viewpoints on the ideal future of the Farren Care Center Site. In order to explore these viewpoints, VHB met with three groups of local stakeholders, set up a table at a local concert to meet with residents, and conducted a public meeting attended by approximately 70 residents.

Through these touchpoints, the community provided constructive feedback and generated many creative ideas. The following pages contain summaries of these discussions.

*Tabling Event (August 13, 2023)*



*VHB's Jennifer Nelson Leads a Community Visioning Session (November 8, 2023)*



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Community Input

**Stakeholder Group 01:** Age-Friendly / Mass in Motion (May 30, 2023 at the Council on Aging)

The Age-Friendly / Mass in Motion group is comprised of municipal staff and volunteers focused on services for seniors (including the Council on Aging, Senior Center, Public Health Department, and Library).

VHB met with this group in May 2023. Challenges mentioned included the need for senior housing (the three existing senior housing facilities are aging and amenities are not walkable), an increased sense of isolation among older adults, and the need for affordable housing or rental units.

Popular suggestions included mixed-income, multi-generational housing; a convenience store or small grocery store to support new residents; additional public transit to connect Montague City with Turners Falls; a community garden; a health care facility; and a community space such as a post office or senior center.

Attendees also emphasized Montague's dedication to arts and culture through organizations like RiverCulture.

**Stakeholder Group 02:** Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) (June 21, 2023 via Zoom)

The EDIC group implements economic development projects identified in the Town's Economic Development Plan. EDIC understands the commercial market in Montague, so it was important for the project team to engage EDIC in the visioning process and to determine potential challenges and opportunities for economic development.

VHB met with this group in June 2023. EDIC representatives reported that commercial development (e.g., medical offices, retail, and light manufacturing) would benefit Montague City. Commercial rents in Turners Falls are becoming increasingly unaffordable (approximately \$15 per square foot) and there is little vacancy on Avenue A.

New commercial development on the project site could ease prices in Turners Falls, enhance the commercial corridor between Greenfield and Turners Falls, and generate tax revenue.

**Stakeholder Group 03:** Affordable Housing Group (July 6, 2023 via Zoom)

The Affordable Housing Group (formerly the Affordable Housing Coalition) seeks to understand and address the housing needs of Montague residents. VHB connected with this group in July 2023 to speak about residential considerations for the project site. The foremost concerns were rising housing costs and the homogeneity of Montague's existing housing stock. Most participants voiced support for medium- or high-density housing over single-family homes or duplexes.

Participants also stressed that lodging is a top need for Montague residents, who would like to host visiting family members but lack the space in their home to do so.

Other suggestions included improving wayfinding and accessibility, adding (limited) parking, building upon existing pedestrian/ bike infrastructure, and designing specific amenities for residents (a garden, recreation center, pool, library, child care, and post office were mentioned).



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Community Input

#### **Community Event 01:** Tabling in the Park (August 13, 2023)

On August 13, 2023, VHB and Town Planner Maureen Pollock set up a table at a concert series at Peskeomskut Park to publicize the study and get ideas for the project site. Attendees were invited to mark up a map of the site and write thoughts on a flip pad, to be recorded and considered by the project team.

In response to the guiding question, “What would residents like to see on the Farren Care Center site?” participants provided many ideas, including park space, venue space, office space, housing for veterans and low-income households, a community center, and recreational facilities.

Participants were generally excited for transformational development within the Farren Care Center Site.

#### **Community Event 02:** Public Meeting (November 8, 2023)

On November 8, 2023, VHB and Town Planner, Maureen Pollock, facilitated a formal public meeting at Great Falls Discover Center, attracting approximately 70 residents.

The meeting consisted first of a presentation by the Town Planner and the VHB team on site research, public engagement to date, and concept studies. The second half of the meeting was dedicated to breakout discussions hosted by the VHB team members.

The conversation reiterated comments heard from the stakeholders and residents during the first public meeting. There was general support for mixed-use development with medium- or high-density residential blocks.

The top interests for civic and commercial spaces include a community or recreation center, a park, a makerspace, a theater, a grocery store, restaurant, and a daycare. Participants also emphasized that a physical link to the Canalside Rail Trail—and perhaps the addition of bike racks near the bus stop—is desirable.

Some attendees insisted on less development and more open space that could be used for passive and active recreational purposes. Almost all participants emphasized the need for a community center, and open space.

## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Vision Statement

The community's Vision Statement serves as a guiding beacon, outlining the collective aspirations and long-term goals for that community. Here are some key purposes of the vision statement:

- **Setting Direction.** The Vision Statement provides a direction for the community and answers the question: What do we want our Village Center to become?
- **Quality of Life.** A well-crafted vision statement emphasizes aspects that enhance residents' quality of life. This includes cultural, recreational, educational, and economic opportunities.
- **Preserving Identity:** It ensures that the Village Center reflects strengths unique to the Town of Montague.

## Village Center Vision

Montague City's new **Village Center** will be a **dense, mixed-use hub** that unites the surrounding community and unlocks new **housing** and **economic opportunities** in Montague.

The **Village Center** will be focused on **inclusivity**, meeting the needs of all residents and visitors, regardless of age or income.

New development within the **Village Center** will enhance the **quality of life** and showcase Montague City's commitment to **public health, arts and culture, and natural resources.**

## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

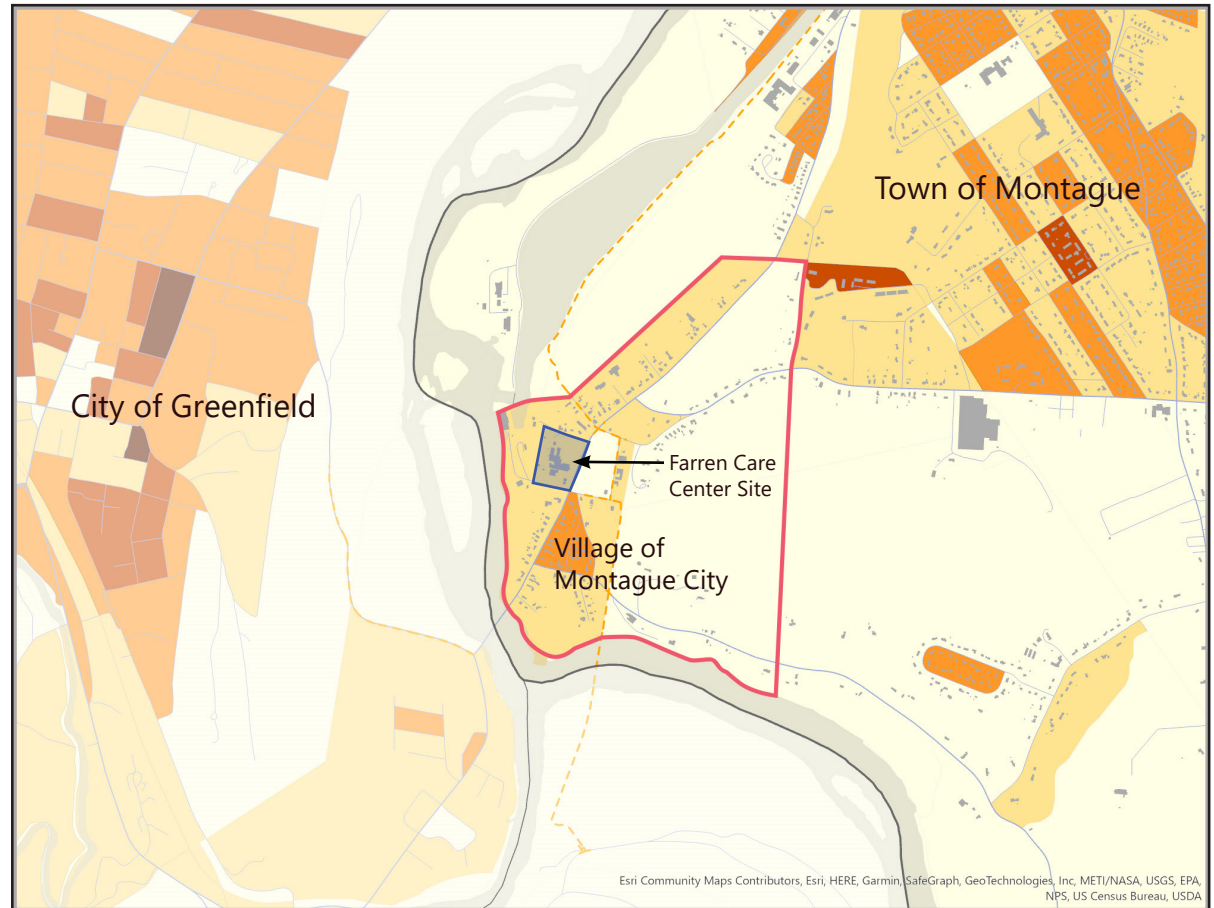
### Site Conditions

#### Village of Montague City

Montague City Village is one of Montague's five villages. Roughly 330 acres in size, Montague City includes a significant stretch of shoreline along the Connecticut River.

Montague City is home approximately 550 residents, living in 200 households. There is currently little to no commercial activity in Montague City.

*The Village of Montague City (Residential Density)*



Source: ESRI, US Census

## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Site Conditions

#### Farren Care Center Site

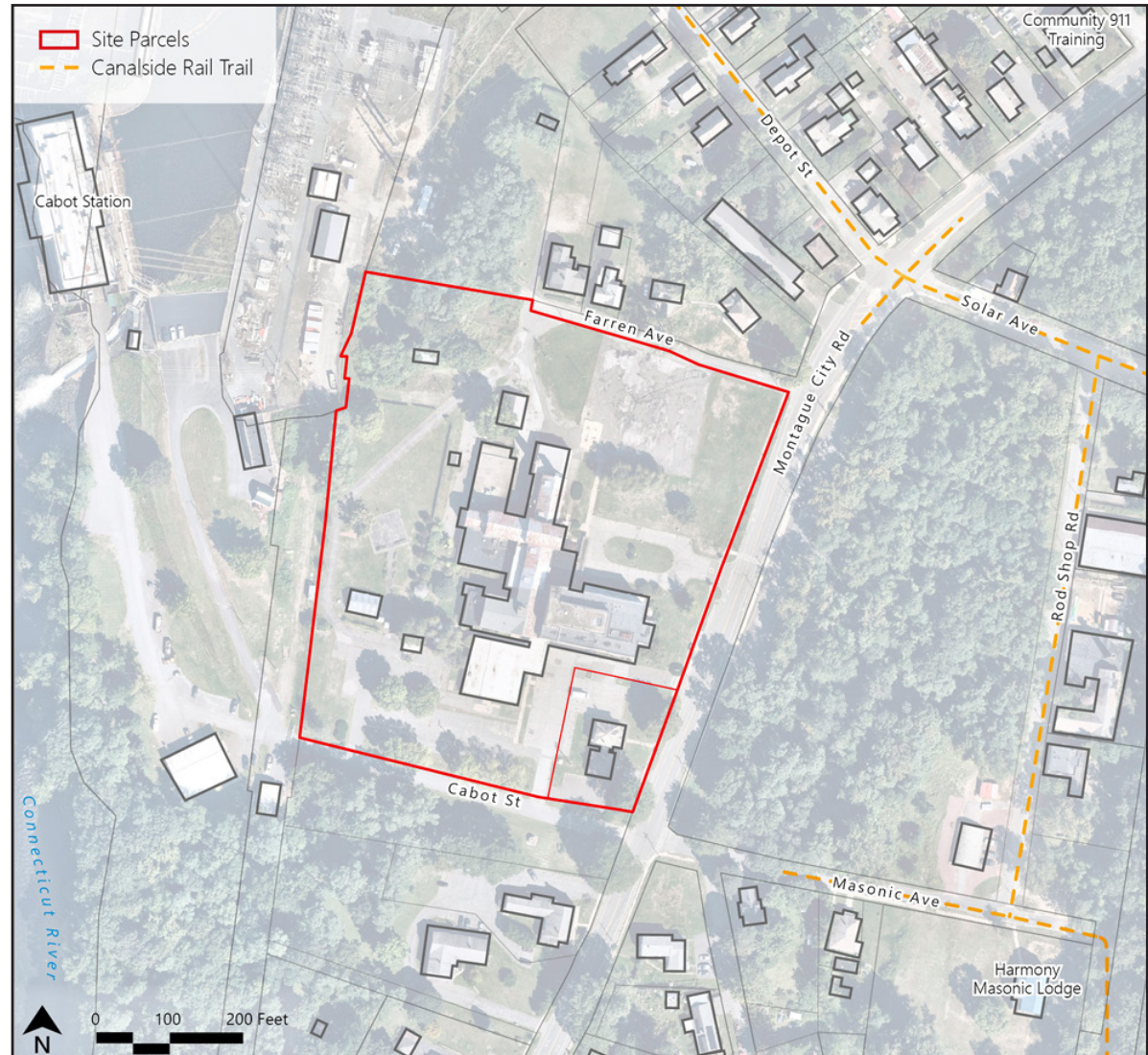
The 8-acre parcel at 340 Montague City Road is the heart of Montague City village.

The site's location presents an opportunity for the Town to address the residential, commercial, and community needs highlighted by data and public feedback.

As noted by several area developers, the site has many innate advantages - it is flat, clear, located on a busy road, and it is large enough to accommodate multiple development opportunities. It is also located a short distance from the Canalside Rail Trail.

Immediately to the west of the site is Cabot Station, a hydroelectric station positioned between the Connecticut River and Montague's local canal. Further investigation is required to determine how Cabot Station's operations can be maintained or strengthened as the Farren Care Center Site is developed over time.

*The Village of Montague City (Residential Density)*



Source: ESRI, MassGIS



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

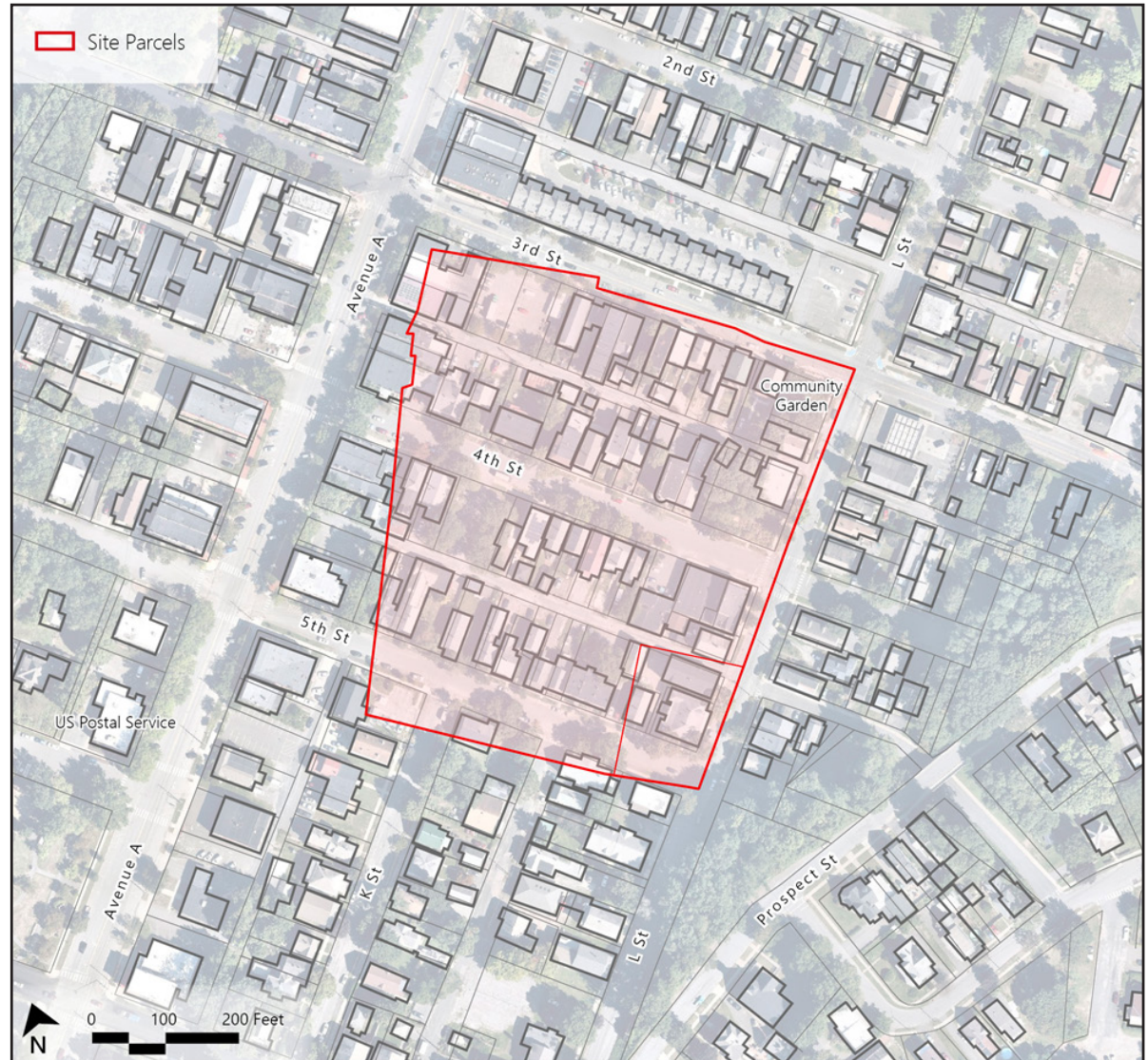
### Site Conditions

#### Site Scale

When superimposed on downtown Turners Falls, the project site is slightly smaller than two standard rectangular blocks. The attached slide deck illustrates the area of the project parcel in comparison to blocks on 3rd, 4th, and 5th Streets in Turners Falls.

This exercise yields a visual representation of a high-density build out (following local architectural patterns), for a density of 15 units/acre or greater.

*Project Site Superimposed on Downtown Turners Falls*



Source: ESRI, MassGIS



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Site Conditions

#### Turners Falls: Urban Form

Downtown Turners Falls was founded in the mid-nineteenth century as a planned industrial community, wherein mill workers could live in dense, clustered residential blocks and work in the many mills developed along the canal.

Avenue A, the main commercial district, was designed to be a wide avenue filled with retail and dining establishments.

Although the economic profile of Montague has changed, largely shifting away from industrial production, the urban character remains.

The Village Center Plan for Montague City is inspired by the blocks of Turners Falls.

*Downtown Turners Falls, Montague*



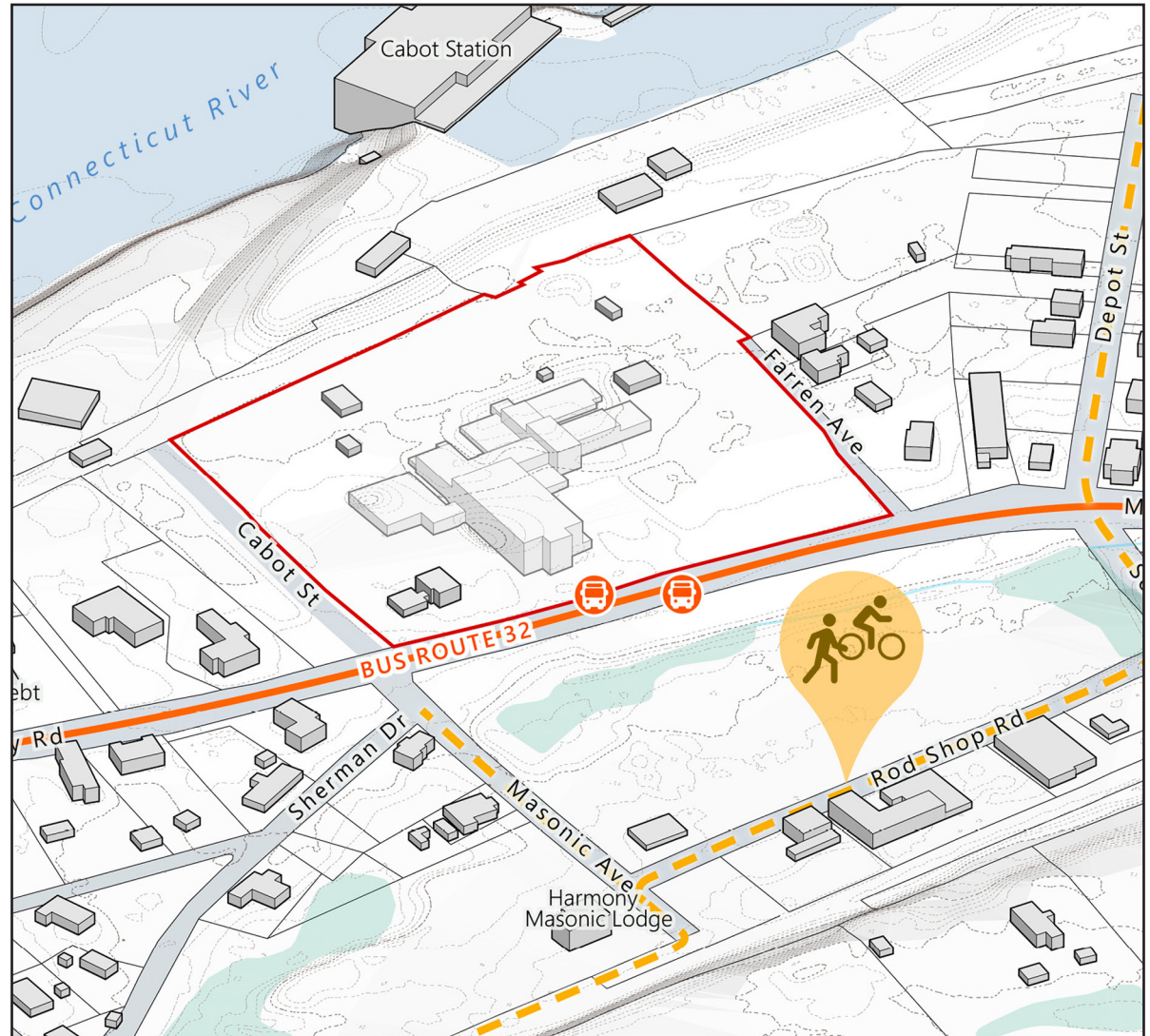
## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Site Conditions

#### Transportation

For transportation, Montague City Road is the primary corridor for vehicular traffic. There is an existing bus route (FRTA Bus 32) that stops at the front of the site. For active transportation, the Canalside Rail Trail currently traverses Rod Shop Road and Solar Avenue to Depot Street.

Transportation Infrastructure, Farren Care Center Site



Source: ESRI, MassGIS



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Site Conditions

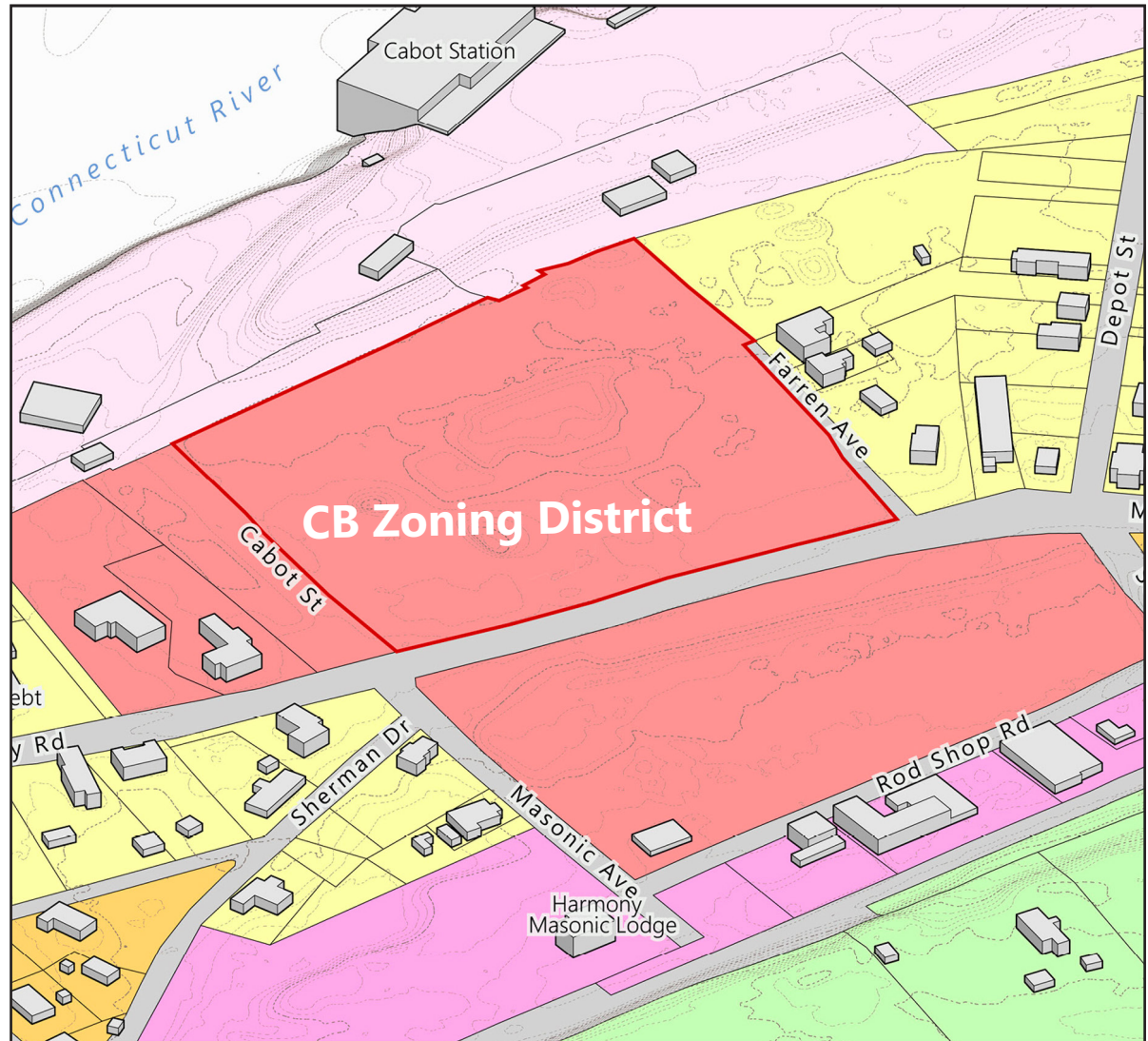
#### Zoning

The project site is fully within the Central Business District. Land uses permitted by right in the CB Zoning District include mixed-use with first floor commercial and up to four dwelling units on upper floors, small-scale retail (5,000 sf or less), business/professional/medical offices, and social clubs or lodges.

Uses allowed by Special Permit from the Board of Appeals include mixed-use with first floor commercial and more than four dwelling units on upper floors, medium- to large-scale residential (5,000 square feet or more), craft workshops, hotels, parking lots or garages, public utilities, and marijuana retailers.

Dimensional requirements include 15-foot rear yard setback and a maximum building height of 36 feet. The CB District has no minimum lot size, lot frontage, or front yard setback requirements.

Current Zoning, Farren Care Center Site



Source: ESRI, Town of Montague



## VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

### Site Master Plan

#### Master Plan Basis of Design

As an eight-acre site with ample street frontage and no major environmental constraints, the site is ideal for a master development approach.

The Master Plan features a block structure that is inspired by typical blocks that can be found in downtown Turners Falls. The primary function of the Village Center will be to address the great need for housing across all of the region's income and age levels. In both public meetings, and in meetings with stakeholders, it was clearly expressed that the Village Center should have a mix of multigenerational housing, distributed across a mix of unit types. This inter-block mix of single-family, duplex, and small apartment buildings is a condition that can be observed throughout Turners Falls – achieved organically as the city developed incrementally across its patchwork of smaller, historic lots. The Village Center will embrace this housing diversity, introducing density without dominating the neighborhood.

New housing in the Village Center will include market-rate housing, and affordable housing. Developers of the affordable housing may need to build larger buildings in order to make financially feasible projects. This can be accomplished within a single block, or less.

The Village Center will also accommodate a limited amount of café, dining, and/or retail uses. Introducing these spaces, according to the Montague EDIC, will help to ease high leasing rates in Turners Falls, enhance the commuter corridor between Turners Falls and Greenfield, and bring new tax revenue to town. Residents and stakeholders alike had many ideas for businesses that could potentially prosper within the mixed-use Village Center, including, cafes, convenience stores, grocery, health care, day care, or even light manufacturing. There is also a common sentiment that a hotel would be ideal in this location.

Many community members expressed a strong interest in creating a community center within in the Village Center, accommodating various uses such as senior amenities, recreation facilities, pool, library, makerspace, theatre, and/or a post office. The community also indicated a strong need for open space in the Village Center, providing passive and active recreation, and creating a shared space to tie the community together. This space will be positioned along the Canalside Rail Trail, which will run directly along the frontage of the Village Center. Bike racks positioned near the bus stop will help to emphasize a commitment to multimodal living.

Lastly, Age Friendly Mass in Motion also highlighted the need to represent Montague's dedication to arts and culture. Local events and organizations like RiverCulture can be leveraged in this regard.

# VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

## Site Master Plan

Scheme A: **Low Density** (approximately 6 units per acre)



\*\*\*Note: This image represents a **conceptual vision** for land use and density in the Village Center, **NOT** a final site plan\*\*\*



# VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

## Site Master Plan

Scheme B: **Medium Density** (approximately 9 units per acre)



\*\*\*Note: This image represents a **conceptual vision** for land use and density in the Village Center, **NOT** a final site plan\*\*\*

# VILLAGE CENTER PLAN

## Site Master Plan

Scheme C: **High Density** (approximately 17 units per acre)



\*\*\*Note: This image represents a **conceptual vision** for land use and density in the Village Center, **NOT** a final site plan\*\*\*



# 5

## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## PRECEDENT PROJECT 01: MILL DISTRICT, AMHERST, MA

The Mill District is a mixed-use development located in North Amherst, Massachusetts. This development includes multifamily apartment buildings and single-family homes, and features a range of affordable to market-rate units. It also features a wide variety of stores, dining establishments, businesses, and experiential destinations like bars and art galleries, although some retail space remains vacant.

The two largest residential properties within the Mill District, known as North Square, were built by Beacon Communities on land leased from master developer WD Cows. These two buildings contain approximately 130 units of housing between them. This project benefited from a mix of public subsidies, including Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and project-based vouchers. When North Square was first proposed,

the development team faced some level of community resistance. To address this, they proactively established a “community stakeholder partnership,” including both supporters and opponents. This “team of rivals” enabled the development to move forward and break ground.

*Mill District, Amherst, MA*





## PRECEDENT PROJECT 02: VILLAGE HILL, NORTHAMPTON, MA

Village Hill is an example of planning for phased growth influenced by a team of agencies and developers. Like the Farren site, it was previously occupied by a hospital – the Northampton State Hospital. The first step was to establish a 16-acre Sustainable Growth Overlay District through DHCD’s 40R program, in 2007. This allowed for a walkable mix of uses, and it also created a mechanism for

financial support from the State, beginning with \$200,000 in 40R zoning incentive funds, and \$120,000 in 40R implementation funds when the first multifamily residential project broke ground. Since then, growth has taken place incrementally throughout Village Hill, culminating in the final phase of redevelopment in 2022, when The Community Builders completed the 53-unit North Commons residential project. This

affordable housing project includes a mix of subsidized units, providing much-needed housing for workforce households, low-income households, and extremely low-income households. Financing for affordable housing in Village Hill came from sources like MassHousing, Dept of Housing and Community Development, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and Mass Clean Energy Commission.

*Village Hill, Northampton, MA*





### PRECEDENT PROJECT 03: NORTH EASTHAM VILLAGE CENTER, EASTHAM, MA

North Eastham is planning to support the development of a new 10-acre Village Center. The land on which it will be constructed is highly similar to the Farren Care Center Site - in terms of its scale, surrounding neighborhood context, and the fact that it is owned by the Town. The Vision for North Eastham's Village Center is to become a "community-oriented, multigenerational walkable neighborhood

with plenty of green and natural space for gathering, events, and recreation, and year-round attainable housing" - similar, again, to Montague City's vision for the Farren Care Center Site. In order to realize this vision, the Town conducted an extensive round of outreach to stakeholders and community groups, before working with a designer to prepare alternative Master Plan schemes. Their next steps will be to perform a site-

wide rezoning, prepare a form-based code, and possibly establish a 40R district.

Once these layers of site control have been established, the Town will release a developer RFP, select a developer, and work with the selected developer to create the Village Center in line with the community's goals.

*North Eastham Village Center Master Plan, Eastham, MA*





## PRECEDENT PROJECT 04: CARRIAGE GROVE, BELCHERTOWN, MA

The Carriage Grove mixed-use development project in Belchertown is an example of a town forming a partnership with MassDevelopment, leveraging funding from MassWorks to build out access roads, and then selling or leasing the resulting opportunity parcels to a master developer, to be built out over successive phases of growth. The 24-acre site is served by a main trunk road called Carriage Drive, built

with MassWorks funding for approximately \$3,000,000, which opens up the entire site for development. The full master plan calls for over 500,000 sf of mixed-use development, much of which has already been constructed.

Density is mixed within the site, allowing for a heterogenous “look and feel” for this expansive development. The

residential offerings in Carriage Grove include approximately 300 units of senior independent, multifamily, townhome, and live-work housing.

Carriage Grove’s amenities include Belchertown Day School, and early childhood education center. The site is close to a growing village center, and offers public realm amenities to residents and visitors.

*Carriage Grove, Belchertown, MA*



## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

### Alternatives Approaches

The Town of Montague desires to create a mixed-use Village Center in Montague City. This development could ultimately accommodate well over 100 units of multigenerational, mixed-income housing. It could also accommodate space for office or retail tenants, along with community assets like a recreation center and open space.

The scale of this undertaking would have no precedent in either Montague or Greenfield, at least since the turn of the century.

Fortunately, the Town can look further afield for precedents from around the State, including the four projects described earlier in this chapter.

Yet there is no single playbook for catalyzing the development of a mixed-use village center. The Town can draw inspiration from other projects, but will ultimately need to be creative and aggressive in implementing the vision.

The following page features three alternative approaches that the Town can consider for this site redevelopment.

*Farren Care Center Site, 2023*



## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

### Alternatives Approaches

#### Approach 01: Development Agreement

The Town could consider disposing of the property conditionally via a development agreement, requiring certain actions on the part of the purchasing developer. Such an agreement can be a powerful mechanism for influencing project outcomes.

The Town of Montague could release a developer RFP for the entire Farren Care Center Site, featuring an attached draft Development Agreement. The Development Agreement could specify, for instance, the Town's preferred site layout, and could establish that the Town will pay for Right-of-Way (ROW) improvements if and when public dollars become available (as Quincy did in their Quincy Center Development Agreement). Upon selecting a development partner, the Town could execute the Development Agreement and begin to pursue state grant money - which would be considerably more accessible given the presence of a private partner.

Additionally, the Town could establish a TIF or DIF district so that future tax revenues can be cycled back into the site development – utilities, amenities, etc.

#### Approach 02: Zoning Overlay

The Town could also consider establishing a Village Center Zoning Overlay District to set the ground rules for future site development. Through a new zoning overlay, the Town could influence the site layout, in addition to the bulk and density of buildings.

Such an overlay could shape, for instance, the standard shape and dimensions of a block, the placement of buildings within blocks, and requirements for open space. The overlay could also feature zoning incentives, allowing greater height or residential density in exchange for ground-floor retail, public parks or plazas, artwork or other amenities. The overlay could also be written to promote on-street parking, and create a mechanism for shared parking within or across separate parcels. The Mansfield Station Redevelopment Overlay District, passed in 2023 by the Town of Mansfield, provides a useful reference.

Upon voter approval of the zoning, the Town could put out a developer RFP.

#### Approach 03: Town as Master Developer

The Town could consider a third alternative, wherein, rather than selling the entirety of the property to a single developer, the Town establishes new streets within the parcel to define the preferred block structure, and then subdivides the remaining land into smaller opportunity parcels.

To build out the streets and utilities, the Town would need to find financing, either locally or via grant funding from the State, although this could be more difficult to access without private partners on board.

If the Town is able to build out the streets and utilities, the Town could then dispose of the subdivided opportunity parcels incrementally over time, responding to evolving market conditions.

It should be noted that although this approach would afford the Town the greatest level of control over project outcomes, it also carries the greatest level of effort, and the greatest financing risk.

