

Montague Planning Board

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MEETING MINUTES

October 26, 2021 6:30 PM

Meeting held at Montague Town Hall One Avenue A with a remote participation option.

Members: Fred Bowman, acting chair (ZOOM), Elizabeth Irving, Matt Lord, George Cooke, Bob Obear (ZOOM). **Absent:** Ron Sicard **Staff:** Walter Ramsey, Town Planner

6:30PM MOTION by M. Lord to approve minutes of September 28, 2021. Seconded by E. Irving **VOTE:** M. Lord (AYE) E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (Abstain). **MOTION PASSES.**

6:31PM *Zoning Workshop:*

MGL 40R zoning to encourage infill housing development in downtown

Town Planner shared the proposed text of the 40R bylaw. It uses the state template with amendments shown. This overlay is intended to be standalone section of the bylaw and does not allow for cross-references to other sections of Montague bylaws. The town must pretty much stick to the State language for the bylaw. Planner observes that this equates to more specific language than the current zoning language. Matt Lord states that he does not view the State's prescribed language as onerous. The Planner continues that from a state level, the consistency of language across municipalities is beneficial to facilitate private sector interest.

The Planner's proposed Turners Falls Smart Growth Overlay District includes the Griswold Mill Site (Map 3 Lot 27 and 89 lots) and the First Street Area (Map 4 Lots 41, 31, 24) The sub districts are required due to the different dimensional regulations (like building height) between sites.

38 Ave A

The Board feels that this site is fundamentally different from the first street properties in sub district B. The Zoning is different and the building height and development density would be different. The Board directed the Planner to remove 38 Avenue A from sub district B.

First Street

Board directed the Planner to investigate how row-housing would be considered under 40R. I.e. what if row houses are built on individual lots. The Board indicated that the building height should be limited to 3 stories for the First Street parcels.

Affordability

General conversation about mixed-income housing. B. Obear comments that the term "affordable" is very broad in scope and "low income" (30% of the median household income) is part of "affordable." He states clearly that he is not against affordable housing, but cautions about creating a large block of housing that cannot contribute to the economics of downtown. E. Irving reviews the mixed income housing levels (affordable, low income, subsidized) created by the State. M. Lord confirms "affordable" is 80% of the median household income by definition. F. Bowman agrees that the mix of housing needs to be right, including market-rate housing. B. Obear thinks we can build the question of affordable housing into a percentage of units. E. Irving states the desire to keep aging residents as well as new Tech

School graduates through affordable housing. The Planner remarks that a cap can be put on the amount of affordable housing in the district. The State doesn't encourage these caps, but other communities have done it. The planner will inquire the following question to state officials:

Can the town institute a 50% affordability cap across the greater district. (The Boards concern is that they want to encourage mixed income housing but protect the town from a 100% affordable housing project that will further concentrate units in downtown. There is already a disproportionate amount of affordable rental units in downtown Turners Falls. For example a 70 unit 100% affordable rental unit at Griswold would be counter to the community's goals. Is there a way to word the bylaw to protect the community from that outcome while enabling by-right mixed-income.?

Farren

The Planner lets the Board know that they should "keep the door open" for 40R housing at the Farren Care site. The Town is expecting news soon.

The Planner reviews the process. There must be a public hearing before filing the 40R housing application with the State. The Planning Board will get a letter of acceptance, including necessary permission and the incentive payment, which will be presented to Town meeting.

Planner will make the changes, reach out to state officials, and approach the Select Board about a presentation.

7:29PM Regulation of standalone energy (battery) storage facilities

The question was brought up by residents of Montague City who ask how this is regulated under Montague zoning. The Planner believes this is regulated under "Public Utility Use" just as solar once was before we had stand-alone regulations. Planner reads the definition. A standalone battery facility would be allowed by special permit in all districts except residential districts.

B. Obear suspects that decommissioning costs would be significantly higher than solar because of the potential hazards.

M. Lord is very concerned because of the complications associated with the wide variety of batteries that could be stored. "Has the state provided guidance or model bylaw?" Planner: NO

E. Irving agrees, particularly considering extreme weather and increasing pressure from Eastern Mass in the future.

Planner noted that The Town of Montague does have battery storage as an accessory to the solar array on Sandy Lane. It is built, but will not be operable until December.

M. Lord is interested in how other towns that have adopted battery storage, and how they accessed risk.

The Board directed the Planner to do more research on the subject and continue the discussion at the next meeting in November.

7:40PM Overview of MEDIC Economic Development Plan 2022 Update

The Planner (also MEDIC Coordinator) presented a PowerPoint overview of the 2022 ED plan

The EDIC have been around since 1984, Their powers are defined by the State, and scope is defined by the plan as presented. (Exhibit 1.) The Town Planner reviews EDIC projects, powers, organization structure, and the approval process of the 5 year plan, which includes a presentation to the Select Board and approved by Town Meeting. The plan will be filed with the Mass Department of Housing and Community Development. The EDIC plan defines the boundaries of uses, and Montague's definition of "Industry" including agriculture, renewable energy, makers-spaces, people working from home, and traditional production and manufacturing. Other statements by the EDIC include need, municipal economic capacity, Montague's advantage, setbacks and accomplishments, and the potential growth from the airport, industrial park, Sandy Lane, Canal, and Great Falls Discovery Center area.

F. Bowman asks about the RFP for 38 Avenue A, which was already extended. The Planner reports that the developer is getting the project financed and the revised construction costs are in his favor.

M. Lord states his support for the potential compost facility at Sandy Lane and encourages EDIC to work with the organizing agencies.

Next step: Joint Public Hearing on MEDIC plan with MEDIC, tentatively to be held at next monthly meeting,

MOTION by E. Irving to ADJURN. Seconded by M. LORD. VOTE: VOTE: M. Lord (AYE) E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (AYE), B. Obear (AYE)). MOTION PASSES. 8:06pm

Exhibits:

Proposed 40R District text

PowerPoint overview of MEDIC 2022 Economic Development Plan