

Montague Planning Board

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MEETING MINUTES December 21, 2021 6:30 PM *This meeting was held via ZOOM*

Members: Ron Sicard, Fred Bowman, Elizabeth Irving, George Cooke.

Absent: Bob Obear. Matt Lord. **Staff:** Walter Ramsey, Town Planner.

Meeting was recorded

6:30PM Approval of 11/23/21 Minutes: *MOTION by G. Cooke to approve minutes of November 23, 2021. Seconded by E. Irving VOTE: R. Sicard, E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (AYE). MOTION PASSES.*

6:31: PUBLIC HEARING: Proposed Zoning Bylaw Amendment- Battery Energy Storage Facilities

The Montague Planning Board will hold a hearing to consider a petition by the Planning Board to amend the Montague Zoning Bylaws pertaining to the regulation of battery energy storage facilities. Specifically to define such use and allow it subject to Special Permit and Site Plan Approval in the Industrial and Historic-Industrial Districts in accordance with the revised submittals and special permit standards of Section 8.9.5. Full text of the proposed amendment is available for review at www.montague-ma.gov.

Presentation:

Chair Ron Sicard opened the hearing and asked the Town Planner to present an overview of the proposed zoning amendment. The Town Planner shared a PowerPoint that summarizes battery energy storage systems (BES). Some of the legitimate planning concerns include emergency response, groundwater contamination, noise, decommissioning, and site considerations. Current zoning allows BES as a “public utility” by special permit in most districts without site-plan review. The proposed bylaws limit BES facilities to Historic Industrial and Industrial districts by special permit and with site plan reviews. Stand-alone facilities will generally be discouraged. Pollinator –friendly plantings are an additional requirement for both BES and solar arrays. Accessory small scale systems under 80KW is capacity are allowed in all districts. Small Scale storage facilities must comply with State emergency and fire code. Language in the existing bylaws reserves the Town’s rights to install BES facilities for governmental usage, like schools or wastewater. Other Special Permit standards include screening, fencing, set-backs, storm water, lighting, herbicide use, 24 hour emergency contact, decommissioning and/or abandonment.

Planner presented a map of the existing HI and ID districts: This includes Airport Industrial, Sandy Lane, Rod Shop Road, Cabot Woods and the Canal District. Proposed residential Set-back regulations would effectively prohibit BES permits in Rod Shop district. Most of the co-location potential is located within these districts. These districts are not located on or near Zone II drinking water aquifers.

The Town Planner drafted the proposed bylaw consultation with the following stakeholders/resources including FRCOG, MassPlanners ListServe, local BES installers, the Montague City Improvement Association, Select Board, WPCF, TF Fire Chief, Energy Committee, zoning enforcement officer and Town Counsel. WR presented the bylaw to the Selectboard last month.

Board Comments:

G. Cooke asks about the potential for batter storage at the solar array that is already developed at Park Villa which is zoned GB. According to the Planner, BES would not be allowed under the proposed bylaw. He notes this is the only such array in the GB district. Further, the array owner (Kearsarge Solar) indicated to the planner that they have no such plans to develop BES at that location. Given the proximity to high density senior housing, it was agreed that the proposed zoning is adequate.

Public Comments:

Bob Rueter, speaking as an individual member of the Montague Energy Committee, inquired if the bylaws establish a maximum size of these facilities. Planner responded that the proposed bylaws do not have a maximum size. The Special Permit Criteria allows for the town to control the scale of BES to ensure it is context appropriate.

Lilith Wolinsky, speaking as a member of the Montague City Village Association asks about screening and noise requirements, particularly in Montague City/Cabot Station. Wolinsky would like to increase the set-back requirement in Montague City/ Cabot Station. Planner expands conversation on buffering requirements, noting the closest home to Cabot Station is 680 feet away. The Board acknowledged her request but remained satisfied that the proposed special permit process would provide solutions on a case-by-case basis regarding visual and noise mitigation and that the Industrially Zoned Cabot Station area has substantial separation from nearby residences.

L. Wolinsky is concerned about locating BES facilities near wetlands, the canal and/or river citing concerns of an emergency failure situation, especially fire and/or an explosion. The Planner responds that a BES facility near a resource area would likely be on a previously developed area, rather than a new (undeveloped) piece of land. Approval by the Conservation Commission and MassDEP would be triggered in order to make an alteration to one of those sites. Regardless of whether a BES facility is located inside a building or not, Wolinsky sees a danger in the event of fire and/or explosion. The Board acknowledged her concern but remained confident that any proposed BES in a previously developed area in the riverfront can be designed for that contingency. BES presents a novel opportunity to enable productive reuse of Canal District sites.

R. Sicard makes a MOTION to close the public comment section of the hearing. Seconded by F. Bowman. VOTE: R. Sicard, E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (AYE).MOTION PASSES 7:25pm

The Planning Board reviewed the proposed text and did not have any recommended changes regarding the language of the bylaw proposal.

MOTION by E. Irving to accept the language of the Zoning Bylaw Amendment- Battery Energy Storage Facilities. Seconded by F. Bowman. VOTE: R. Sicard, E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (AYE).MOTION PASSES 7:28pm

Planning Workshop

Next steps on 40R Zoning to promote new housing production in downtown Turners Falls

The Planner Received feedback from the State (DHCD) which denied Montague’s request for a 50% affordability cap across both sites. This is unfortunate, but not surprising since it would be a major exception to a statewide program. Planner reminds the Board that the Town retains development control through the RFP process. Planner feels that the Town is adequately protected through site control (rather than through zoning). The RFP can establish limits on the affordability mix.

E. Irving comments that because of the number of units the Town is considering, a cap won’t make a difference.

G. Cooke asks for a clarification of the Town’s control of housing percentages. The Planner responds that the Town can name the terms/requirements through the RFP process including affordability percentages. There would be a public process on the SelectBoard level with consultation with the Planning Board.

E. Irving asks if there is a study about town vibrancy regarding affordability percentages. Planner responds that percentages will likely be a matter of financing through tax credits. A First Street RFP could be issued in the fall of 2022. The Railroad Salvage RFP hinges upon the completion of 6th Street Bridge.

The Planner to draft a “Determination of Eligibility Form” and the Select Board will hold a pre-application public meeting. (January 2022) Once the State gives approval, the Town can hold a public hearing for the zone change.

Comprehensive Plan update: Strategizing for Phase I Community Visioning and Goal Setting

Several contracts for the Montague Comprehensive Plan will be phased-in over 2-3 years. Recent funding will be used

to pay FRCOG to conduct community input sessions. This community vision will inform inter-related issues of the Comprehensive Plan like transportation, housing, space and land-use. A core community group will be assembled to conduct oversight. The Planner will bring this to the Select Board in January. Money must be spent by the end of June 2022. Pros and cons of remote meetings is discussed.

Planner Report: *Status updates of permitted projects*

- Project manager has been hired for the 38 Avenue A.
- FlowerPower is under construction in the Industrial Park.
- FRTA garage will break-ground in the next two weeks.
- The Burn-Dump will go live within a month.
- Ron Sicard raised concerns about the number of tractor trailers parked at Hillside Plastics , a previous site plan approval. Planner will review the file.

MOTION to Adjourn by E. Irving. Seconded by F. Cooke. VOTE: R. Sicard, E. Irving (AYE) F. Bowman (AYE) G. Cooke (AYE). MOTION PASSES. MEETIN ADJOURN 8:01pm

Exhibits:

Battery Energy Storage Facilities powerpoint