



The
TOWN OF
MONTAGUE
MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN HALL
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Turners Falls, MA 01376

PLANNING BOARD
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MEETING MINUTES PLANNING BOARD

The Montague Planning Board
Tuesday, January 21, 2025. This meeting was recorded.
Annex Meeting room. Opened by the Chair. 6:30pm

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Ron Sicard, George Cooke, Sage Winter, Bob Obear

ABSENT: Elizabeth Irving, Sam Guerin

Staff in attendance: Maureen Pollock, Town Planner and Conservation Agent

Also in attendance: Zach Nichita, Julie Pierson

MOTION by R. Sicard to approve the minutes from November 26, 2024. Seconded by G. Cooke. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Sage Winter (AYE). MOTION PASSES (3-0) 6:32pm.

FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS:

PUBLIC MEETING:

SPR 2025-01 - Zaharia Nichita – To review the updated site plan, pursuant to Condition 1 of the previously approved Site Plan Review Decision (SPR 2023-03) located at **Millers Falls Road (Parcel #23-0-28)**, General Business Zoning District.

Ron Sicard and George Cooke had a site visit with the applicant, Zach Nichita, who wants to include a spray paint booth to the plan approved in 2023. The proposed addition meets setback requirements. The Planner reviews the 2023 decision, which requires Nichita to receive permission from the Planning Board for any changes. The Building Inspector is aware of the project. No changes to traffic, parking, runoff or landscaping are expected. Lighting will be downcast.

Sage Winter asks about the size of the spray booth. Ron Sicard answers about 26' x 32'.

MOTION by R. Sicard to accept SPR 2025-01 - Zaharia Nichita – to update site plan pursuant to Condition 1 of the previously approved Site Plan Review Decision (SPR 2023-03) located at Millers Falls Road (Parcel #23-0-28), General Business Zoning District. Seconded by G. Cooke. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Sage Winter (AYE). MOTION PASSES (3-0) 6:40pm.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Accessory Dwelling Units– discuss possible zoning amendments to Section 8.5 under the Zoning Bylaw, to comply with the Affordable Homes Act, a new legislation signed into law on August 6, 2024

The Planner provides some updates. The State has finished their municipal public comment period. The State also held a public hearing. The new State legislation requires that the ADU cannot be larger in gross floor area than half of the gross floor area of the principal single-family dwelling, or 900 square feet, which whichever is smaller. The Planner submitted comments to the State including questions

about how the size of the ADU is calculated and the definition of “gross floor area” and “habitable space.” The definitions are relevant when considering unused basements and attics, for example. Because 900 square feet is small for a dwelling, every square foot matters. The Planner has talked with the Building Inspector at great length about these definitions. George Cooke thinks that the State definition deters the homeowner from building (by limiting the size of the ADU).

The Planning Board can put reasonable restrictions on ADUs by right; she suggests approving floor plans and that rooms are labeled including unfinished basements and attics. Changes in use, including size, could trigger review by the Planning Board.

Bob Obear thinks including unfinished basement and attic space as “odd.” He thinks that it’s a typo or someone hasn’t thought it out.

Sage Winter relays a situation in Greenfield where a homeowner finished their basement so that they could put two ADUs on the property by Special Permit.

Bob Obear thinks that regulating basements and attics is “overreaching into what makes good sense for ADU design.”

The Planner suggested to the State that “habitable space” be used instead of “gross floor area.” The planner reads the definition of both the Planning Board.

Gross Floor Area: The sum of the areas of all floors of the building, including basement cellars, mezzanine, and intermittent floor tiers and penthouses of headroom height, measured from the exterior faces of exterior walls, or from a center line of wall, suffering buildings, but excluding covered walkways, open, roofed over open, roofed over areas, porches and submersed spaces.

Habitable Space: A space in a building for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking bathrooms, toilets, closets, halls, storage, or utility spaces in similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.

The Planner also posed questions with the State about what does and does not qualify as a bus station. The Planner reached out to FRTA to ask if bus stops or bus routes in Montague meet the definition of “bus station.” FRTA replied “No” and the Planner requested the response in a memo. Currently ADUs would need a designated parking space.

Bob Obear asks about limits on very small homes, for example 500 square-foot dwellings. “So you’d have to have an 1800 square foot home to max out the 900 square foot ADU.” The Planner goes back to the importance of understanding the definitions of regarding basements and attics in the calculation. Obear wonders “what stops someone from flipping the use to make a larger ADU the primary residence and the existing home as the ADU.”

UPDATES:

Community Planning Grant Program – technical assistance for possible zoning amendments for the former Farren Care Center parcels, including: 330-340 Montague City Rd, 356 Montague City Rd, and Montague City Rd (Parcel #12-0-051), Budget Estimate/Estimated Grant Funding Request: \$62,000, Estimated Completion: Within 1-2 Years

A contract with Consultant Emily Innes Associates will be signed with the Select Board. Rezoning the Farren site includes design standards, roads, parking, community spaces and integration of the Canalside

Rail Tail, will be considered. Fit tests will be created as visuals for the community. After the zoning is approved the property will potentially be subdivided into lots for redevelopment.

Julie Pierson asks if a senior center and veterans housing can be included in the plan. The Planner responds that the zoning process does not get into the user, tenant or homeowner. The RFP will include indications, like veteran housing and collaborative partnerships between the town and the developer for community spaces.

Julie would like to see a “horseshoe” design between a new senior center, veteran and elderly housing.

TOPICS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED WITHIN 48 HOURS PRIOR TO MEETING:

Bob Obear asks about the contamination that is holding up the housing development on First Street. The Planner responds, “elevated lead.” The Town is waiting for a report from the LSP before they move into a clean-up phase. Cost estimates will be provided for the cleanup. The Planning Board members wonder why the site can’t be capped with clean soil. Additionally, the sites will be excavated as part of the building process. The contaminated soil could be trucked to the appropriate facility.

MOTION by R. Sicard to ADJOURN. Seconded by G. Cooke. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Sage Winter (AYE), Bob Obear (AYE). MOTION PASSES (4-0) 7:14pm.