



The
TOWN OF
MONTAGUE
MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN HALL
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PLANNING BOARD
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MEETING MINUTES PLANNING BOARD

The Montague Planning Board
Tuesday, March 25, 2025. This meeting was recorded.
ZOOM Opened by the Chair. 6:32pm

ROLL CALL:

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ron Sicard, George Cooke, Sam Guerin, Sage Winter

ABSENT: Elizabeth Irving, Bob Obear

STAFF: Maureen Pollock, Town Planner and Conservation Agent

Also in attendance: Emily Innes (Inness Associates), Chis Larabee (Greenfield Recorder), Julie Pierson (Resident)

MOTION by R. Sicard to approve the minutes from January 21, 2025. Seconded by G. Cooke. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE). MOTION PASSES (3-0) 6:34pm.

Sage Winter enters the meeting 6:35pm

PUBLIC MEETING:

MONTAGUE CITY VILLAGE CENTER REZONING PROJECT

Presentation from project consultant, Innes Associates, Ltd., outlining project overview, community engagement & public outreach strategies, and timeline

The Town Planner introduces Emily Innes of Innes Associates who are providing technical assistance for possible rezoning. This project is a recommendation from last year's phase which envisioned possible land uses and activities on the former Farren site. Considerable community input identified possible uses including commercial uses, housing, indoor/outdoor community spaces and better connection to the Canalside Rail Trail. Many of these uses will require rezoning.

Innes walks the Planning Group through their kickoff presentation which covers a timeline of deliverables. There is a working group consisting of Town staff and community. This project will take the 2024 Montague City Village Center Plan to the next step and is funded through Massachusetts Housing Partnerships. A second study of Rod Shop Road is funded through the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. These parcels are considered important as transition places and different because they contain historic buildings.

THE SLIDE DECK PRESENTATION IS ENTERED INTO THE MINUTES:

The tasks are laid out in a timeline.

Meetings are scheduled for April 17 and June 10, 2025 at the Great Falls Discovery Center. The Planning Board and Select Board will be updated regularly during the process. A "Zoning 101" workshop will be part of the April 17 meeting but largely skipped in this presentation because the Planning Board is already familiar with zoning. Innes sees zoning as a marketing device to let

developers know what the Town wants developed. Innes discusses what her firm will be examining including zoning required for more or different uses of the site. They will consider many scenarios including how to integrate Rod Shop Road, the Canalside Rail Trail, possible housing types, and additional information they need from the community.

Innes and Associates will give a modified version of this presentation to the Montague Select Board on Monday, March 31, 2025.

Ron Sicard asks about the parking lot on Montague City Road. Innes responds that the wetlands give the area limitations, but it could be a head for the rail trail.

Maureen Pollock introduces the name of the working group including Colleen and Skip Descavich, Dorinda Bell-Upp, Gregg Garrison, Janel Nockleby, Jeremy Toal, Kristi Bodin, Mary Kay Mattiace, Roberta Potter, Chris Nolan-Zeller and Planning Board member Sam Guerin.

Sam Guerin asks Emily Innes about her “first instincts” about rezoning. What’s the starting point? Emily Inness says we might want a new zone depending on how specific folks want to get for the site. The two project areas are different. Rod Shop Road may need a “tweak” of the historic district. She has no preconceived notions. Inness and Associates will wait until after the April 17 public forum to consider the options.

The Planner notes that there was very good attendance by Montague City residents in previous meeting regarding redevelopment of the Farren site.

George Cooke asks if the goal is to get the zoning hashed out for the October 2025 special Town Meeting. The Planner answers “yes.” The question is whether current zoning bylaws allow the kind of uses identified by the community and what’s the permit pathway for those uses. What do we want the community to look like? What are possible design regulations? Regarding retail, what’s marketable for that part of Montague?

The Planner has contacted property owners on Road Shop Road to invite them to the April 17 meeting at the Discovery Center.

Emily Innes encourages the community to attend. This is the point where the community input really matters. It’s critical to get good results. Ron Sicard agrees about the importance of these meetings.

Sam Guerin also appreciates the outreach and does not want to relitigate this with the public in the future. He wants a lot more details like setbacks and design choices. He doesn’t want to start at square one. Emily Inness appreciates the work done so far; these meetings will balance the specificity and flexibility needed for zoning.

Sage Winter likes the “Zoning 101” with residents; maybe a case study would be a good. A zoning project that turns into an actual project. Inness likes this idea if there is a similar project. She will do some research. Ron Sicard would like to see the project start form “mix use” to give it a neighborhood feel.

The Planner will reach out to the Franklin County Chamber to help promote this meeting. She would like to get the pulse of retail, commercial, and office uses. The Montague “commercial world” will be informed of the meeting. Hotels and daycare are a missing use in Franklin County.

Ron Sicard reminded Emily Inness about the house on the property. She responds that it's a corner property and will need to be included in the overall design.

Chris Larabee (Greenfield Recorder) is willing to help advertise the April 17 event at the Discovery Center. The Planner mentions that all Planning Board meetings are uploaded to the MCTV VIMEO account. More information about this project is on the Farren Site project page within the Planning Department on the Town of Montague website.

George Cooke asks for a realistic timeline for a project of this scale, after zoning. The Planner responds "pending approval in October 2025 we could subdivide the property into parcels for smaller developments. Eventually an RFP will be released."

Emily Inness describes the RFP process including how the Town structures the RFP and Select a preferred developer. There are two levels of control. 1) Zoning, 2) Land Disposition Agreement. It takes some time to set up that criteria. Five years would be realistic for all the steps and permitting. George Cooke wants to be sure residents understand that it won't happen overnight.

The Planner iterates that this stage will not identify the tenant.

E. Inness responds that zoning is not about ownership. That criteria would be part of an RFP including the percentage breakdown of ownership and rental. Affordability could be included in an RFP, as well. Additional priorities will be memorized in the Land Disposition Agreement.

Sam Guerin asks if a 40R is a solid baseline for affordability. Inness responds it's too early to know. A 40R will be considered but flexibility is important.

Julie Pierson asks if the project can be veteran housing and 55+ housing. "We have no housing for veterans in the area." Inness responds that zoning will allow for different types of housing. During the RFP process veteran housing, elderly housing etc. could be identified. Hopefully those types of conversations will happen in a few years. The Planning Board has experience with 40R housing on Frist Street. That project is delayed and waiting for lead abatement but is moving forward slowly.

Planning Board Discussion:

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. As of March 19th, EOHLIC, in partnership with MAPC and MHP, has developed [Model ADU Zoning](#) to help Cities and towns develop and/or amend local ADU rules. This model includes a Municipal Checklist to help cities and towns evaluate their existing local rules and identify key areas where their rules need to be amended.

The Planner gives an update; it was advised from the State towns take a break from bringing draft language to Town meeting until the Executive Office of Housing and Livability Partnership and MAPC can develop model by zoning bylaw for ADUs. The Planner and Building Inspector have attended multiple webinars to understand these new bylaws and contribute to conversation on the topic.

One Stop Grant: Community Planning Grant

The Planner, Town Administrator and Assistant Town Administrator are considering applying for a

grant to provide technical assistance for updating Town's Housing Production Plan (HPP) which has not been updated since 2015. The plan would chart a path toward addressing the affordable housing needs of low- and moderate-income people in Montague. The HPP will include data about who needs housing and what options currently exist, identify goals for different housing types, and name strategies Montague might pursue to strengthen affordable housing opportunities.

We will reach out to our regional planning agency (FRCOG) for a possible project scope and cost estimate to include in our grant proposal. Grant applications are due on June 4.

MOTION by G. Cooke to ADJOURN. Seconded by R. Sicard. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Sage Winter (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE). MOTION PASSES (4-0) 7:34pm.