



**TOWN OF
MONTAGUE
MASSACHUSETTS**

TOWN HALL
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PLANNING BOARD
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**MONTAGUE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday, September 23, 2025 6:30pm
ZOOM. This Meeting was recorded**

Opened by the Chair. 6:40pm

ROLL CALL:

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ron Sicard (Chair), Bob Obear, Sam Guerin, George Cooke, Sage Winter, Elizabeth Irving

STAFF: Maureen Pollock, Director of Planning & Conservation; Suzanne LoManto, Assistant Planner; Emily Innes & Paula Ramos Martinez, Innes Land Strategies Group, Inc.; and members of the public

MOTION by E. Irving to APPROVE the minutes from July 22, 2025. Seconded by S. Winter. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE), Sage Winter (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE). MOTION passes 6:45pm.

PUBLIC HEARING:

6:30pm - ZC #2025-01 PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENTS & CHANGE TO OFFICIAL ZONING MAP To consider and hear public comment on the following proposed amendments to the Zoning Bylaw and proposed changes to the Official Zoning Map:

1. To consider amending Section 2 “Definitions” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding the following new definitions: Craft Workshop, Boutique Hotel, Light Assembly Workshop, Mix-Use Development, Mixed-Unit Dwelling, Open Space, Landscape Open Space, Private Open Space, Public Open Space, Permeable Surface, Rowhouse, Townhouse, and Three-Family Dwelling.
2. To consider amending Section 4.1 “Types of Districts” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding the following new districts: Village Center Mixed-Use District (MU-VC) and Design Overlay District (DOD).
3. To consider amending Section 5.2 “Use Regulations” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding use regulations for the new MU-VC District.
4. To consider amending Section 5.3 “Multiple Principal Uses” under the Zoning Bylaw, to specify provisions of this section shall not apply to the new MU-VC District but instead will be governed by the new use regulations in MU-VC District under Section 5.2, and by the new DOD regulations under Section 6.4.
5. To consider amending Section 5.5 “Dimensional Requirements” under the Zoning Bylaw, to add new dimensional requirements for MU-VC District; and to consider amending Section 5.5.3 “Dimensional Relief” to designate the Planning Board as the Special Permit Granting Authority for dimensional relief in the MU-VC District.
6. To consider amending Section 6 “Overlay Districts” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding a new overlay district – Design Overlay District (DOD), which specifies purpose, applicability, additional dimensional requirements, parking requirements, design principles, development standards, and provisions relative to possible conflict with other bylaws.

7. To consider amending Section 7.2.3 “District Parking Requirements” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding new parking requirements in the MU-VC District.
8. To consider amending Section 7.4 “Lot Access” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding new lot access requirements in the MU-VC District.
9. To consider amending Section 9.1 “Site Plan Review” under the Zoning Bylaw, by adding new language that specifies applicability of uses and activities in the MU-VC District; and appoints the Planning Board as the Site Plan Review Authority in the MU-VC District.
10. To consider amending the Official Zoning Map by adding the MU-VC District and DOD District. The two new zoning districts will encompass the following parcels in their entirety: 330-340 Montague City Rd, Parcel #12-0-044; 0 Montague City Rd, Parcel #12-0-051, 356 Montague City Rd, Parcel #12-0-044A; and 0 Montague City Rd, Parcel #12-0-050.

Ron Sicard reads the proposed zoning amendment into record.

Maureen Pollock provides an overview of the project, which includes the 2023 reenvisioning process of the former Farren site, community input meetings, workshops, working group meetings, other forms of public outreach, and discussions with the Select Board and Planning Board.

On the August 26, 2025 the Planning Board voted 5-0 to accept the proposed changes to the zoning bylaws, text and map. On September 8, 2025, The Select Board voted 3-0 to accept the petition and refer it back to the Planning Board for a public hearing.

The Town Planner reads the requirements of this hearing, public notice, and public outreach for this hearing.

Emily Innes & Paula Ramos Martinez, Innes Land Strategies Group, Inc gives an overview of the project. They will participate in the Pre- Town meeting on October 15, 2025 and the Special Town Meeting on October 22, 2025. Innes Land Strategies Group is making sure that the proposed rezoning reflects the priorities of the 2024 VBH report.

Paula Ramos Martinez reviews the current zoning, which does not allow for uses (housing, mixed use, commercial) identified by the community in the VHB report. She provides a quick demonstration of what is possible (office, residential, commercial) with the current zoning which does not align with the “village center” vision identified by the community.

Emily Innes continues. They tested a 40R, but it was not flexible enough for this project. A New Base District and a Design Overlay District were seen as the best option. She describes the boundaries of each and cases that trigger the Design Overlay. Innes discusses which uses (by intensity or square footage) that require a permit by Site Plan Review or by Special Permit. Innes reviews the basic concepts related to dimensional standards, building height, definitions of open space, and the development/design standards of the Overlay District which contribute to the “village center” feel.

Innes continues: The proposed rezoning language has a set of Design Guidelines, which are advisory in nature. It's a standalone document that tends to be more visual. If the Planning Board and an applicant are satisfied that there is a better design solution than what is mentioned, the Planning Board can allow for this variation as long as they are consistent with the Design Principles.

DOD Development Standards are mandatory requirements and include density, open space, front setbacks, setbacks, side and rear setbacks, building and site requirements.

Paula Ramos Martinez shows a mockup of image 1: Montague City Road for the purpose of showing sidewalk widths, building heights, ground floor commercial, green infrastructure, street furniture and the bus stop. Four-story mixed-use buildings are compared with three-story mixed-use buildings. The mockup of image 2: Internal Street view is for the purpose of showing a pocket park, green infrastructure, bike parking, the bike trail, and five vs. four story buildings. These images were not a proposals.

Sam Guerin asks about linguistic changes with the August 1, 2025, draft regarding density (6.4.3a). Emily Innes responds that it is a matter of defining building type and the preciseness of the language. Guerin asks about changes to the language of the front setbacks. Why are we going to zero? Innes responds that they wanted to give maximum flexibility, which is common for village center building. Residential use is up to 10 feet for the green space in front of the sidewalk. The requirement is up to 20 feet for non-residential buildings.

Ron Sicard would like to see at least 10 feet of setbacks. Inness responds that the Planning Board might want zero setbacks for the internal street. Ramos Martinez remarks that the sidewalk is wide with trees, terraces and other green spaces. Innes continues that the most flexible way to consider these issues (sidewalk width and commercial setbacks) is through the Land Disposition Agreement.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Bob Obear asks if the Town has already established the sidewalk depth or is this a preliminary conversation? Is this up to the Town or should we establish the sidewalk depth now? Maureen Pollock responds that it will be determined by the density of the use. She continues that the sidewalk is currently 5 feet wide. The Board can entertain the idea of requiring a setback; we could put it in the zoning, but it would certainly be captured in the RFP. Obear does not see an issue with the zero setback if there is a 15' sidewalk.

Lilith Wolinsky thinks that five story buildings are visually too tall, even at the back of the parcel. She thinks the use is too dense, as well, and out of keeping with Montague City. She supports as wide of a sidewalk as possible. She wonders about the plan for the house that is still on the property. Ron Sicard responds that the Town hasn't decided but the building will probably come into the RFP. Wolinsky asks about the physical artifacts that are still on the property. She would like to see these artifacts considered. She suggests that public art be included in the RFP or in some other way.

David Jensen asks if the property line is the stone wall. The Planner confirms that the survey shows that the stone wall is the property line. Jensen continues that the responsibility for the sidewalks falls to the Town; do we need more land to make sidewalks that would handle that capacity? What about parking on Montague City Road? He thinks the road is a little too narrow to handle the public resources. He supports the argument in the RFP process that forces the sidewalk onto private property in order to get a tree belt and parking. The Planner responds that because it is a Town owned property line, the Town gets to decide where the property line exists. That will be determined before it goes to RFP. Emily Innes concurs that the additional infrastructure would come from the "land side" not the road right of way.

Alyssa Larose (Rural Development, Inc.) cautions against the developer being responsible for providing public infrastructure for cost-prohibitive standpoint.

Bob Obear concurs that street parking and bus traffic might trigger a widening of Montague City Road. Ron Sicard responds that the street was narrowed recently, and the Town already owns the parking lot.

There is some “wiggle room.”

Sam Lovejoy mentions Town Meeting rules. He advocates for a taller building limit because it will encourage developers. Town Meeting or the Planning Board can always limit the height.

Jen Hale (Rural Development, Inc.) is concerned about the sidewalks being too big and urban. It also limits open space. A five-foot tree belt next to a 15-foot sidewalk would be out of scale. Ron Sicard comments that the requirement is for “frontage” not necessarily sidewalk.

David Jensen comments on the building height; sun getting to the ground is important to neighbors. Jensen suggests the highest buildings are in the center so the sun would shade less of the development. Jensen thinks we should be cautious about the implications of going too high.

E. Erving asks if Town Hall meeting members can offer amendments to the proposed bylaws on the floor? Jensen responds “yes, if they are more liberal but not more restraint.”

The Planner thinks that the Planning Board should focus on their recommendations for Town Meeting.

Ramos Martinez clarifies that three stories are for Cabot Steet and Farren Avenue allow three story buildings. Montague City Road and the rear of the parcel allow for four story buildings. The Planner comments that existing building heights in the neighborhood range from 2.5-3 stories.

Roberta Potter points out that building high in the back of the parcel obscures the view of the power plant.

David Jensen asks about 6.4.7c waivers. Do you have to waive the whole thing or nothing? The Planner answers “individual waivers.”

Ron Sicard reads public comments:

Dorinda Bell-Upp gave a positive comment.

The EDIC unanimously approves.

Leigh Ray hopes that the focus is on higher density elder housing.

Ron Sicard asks if the Planning Board approves the 3 story-4 story split for building heights. Bob Obear comments that a 40’ height would dictate a flat roof. Innes clarifies building heights and the way they can be modified for architectural purposes by the Planning Board.

The Planner clarifies how the infrastructure would be built; after the Town picks a developer through the RFP process they will apply for State grants like MassWorks for upgrades to the site including sidewalks, sewer, etc.

Emily Innes responds to the overall conversation about sidewalks. Innes Land Strategies Group took out discussion about the width of the sidewalks because it will be part of the Land Disposition Agreement. They suggest more conversation about how close the buildings should be to the sidewalk in the dimensional standards. Ramos Martinez concurs but it is possible to give a minimum setback.

The Planner suggests 6.4.7c “individual waivers may be requested.”

The Planner discusses comments from KP Law on the draft zoning language, including that current

zoning does not define “two family” or “duplex”. Those definitions were added to the draft language in addition to the definitions of floor area vs. gross floor area in keeping with Massachusetts Building Code.

Ron Sicard closes the public session. 8:14pm

The Planner suggests the language for the MOTION: “Motion moved to recommend to the Town to adopt the below-listed amendments to the zoning by-law and changes to the official zoning map subject to technical adjustments based on comments from tonight's public hearing as proposed by consultants and staff, and KP Law, and as discussed.”

Ron Sicard reads the proposed amendments to the draft language: Amend Section 2 (definitions), Amend Section 4.1 (types of districts), Amend Section 5.2 (Uses and Regulations), Amend 5.3 (multiple principal uses), Amend section 5.5 (dimensional requirements), Amend Section 6 (overlay districts), Amend Section 7.2.3 (District Parking Requirements), Amend Section 7.4 (lot access) Amend Section 9.1 (Site Plan Review), Amend the official zoning map by adding the MUVC District and District Overlay District to the two new zoning districts, which will encompass the parcel in their entirety 330 through 340 Montague City Road, parcel 12-0-044, 0 Montague City Road, parcel number 12-0-051, 356 Montague City Road, parcel number 12-0-044A, and 0 Montague City Road, parcel number 12-0-050.

MOTION by Bob Obear to APROVE the below-listed amendments to the zoning by-law and changes to the official zoning map subject to technical adjustments based on comments from tonight's public hearing as proposed by consultants and staff, and KP Law, and as discussed. Seconded by Sam Guerin. VOTE: Ron Sicard (AYE), Bob Obear (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE), George Cooke (AYE), Elizabeth Irving (AYE). MOTION PASSES (5-0) 8:20pm

Ron Sicard thanks everyone who has helped with this project. This will be on the October 22, 2025 Special Town Meeting.

The next Planning Board meeting is October 28, 2028 Planning Board Meeting. A site visit will be scheduled related to the Special Permit.

UNANAMOUS MOTION TO ADJOURN 8:25pm.