



**MONTAGUE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, January 27, 2026 6:30pm
Town Hall Annex, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and via Zoom

Opened by the Chair. 6:32pm

ROLL CALL:

- **MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ron Sicard (Chair), George Cooke, Lizbeth Irving, Sam Guerin, Bob Obear., **ABSENT:** Sage Winters
- **STAFF PRESENT:** Maureen Pollock, Director of Planning & Conservation
- **ALSO PRESENT:** Applicant: Matthew Parody; and members of the public

MINUTES: Approval of Meeting Minutes from October 28, 2025

MOTION by R. Sicard to approve the meeting minutes of October 28, 2025. Seconded by L. Irving.

VOTE: Ron Sicard (Chair), George Cooke (AYE), Lizbeth Irving (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE), Bob Obear (AYE) MOTION PASSES 5-0. 6:34pm.

FORM A (ANR) SUBDIVISION APPLICATIONS:

- ANR 2026-01: Matthew Parody, Gunn Road (Parcels #51-0-96; 51-0-97; and 51-0-98)

George Cooke recuses himself.

Matthew Parody introduces himself and the proposal. He would like to split one lot into three separate lots.

The Planner brings up the ANR Plan to show the existing property lines and proposed property lines. Each of the three proposed lots meets the minimum lot area requirement and the minimum lot frontage requirement under the Zoning Bylaw. Additionally, each of the three lots have practical access.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to accept ANR 2026-01: Matthew Parody, Gunn Road (Parcels #51-0-96; 51-0-97; and 51-0-98). Seconded by Bob Obear. VOTE: Ron Sicard (Chair), Lizbeth Irving (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE), Bob Obear (AYE) MOTION PASSES 4-0. 6:44pm.

The Planner will sign on behalf of S. Guerin.

George Cooke rejoins the meeting 6:46pm.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Review and discuss draft Accessory Dwelling Unit regulations with possible vote to refer to the Selectboard. Draft regulations will be reviewed by KP Law before going to Town Meeting. The latest draft is based on revisions by the Planning Board, and comments by the MA Attorney General's Office. The Planner lets the Board know that the Attorney General has rejected many MA communities' ADU

zoning amendments; Montague was wise to wait and work slowly and in consideration of the AG's recommendations.

Bob Obear doesn't think it should include basement as part of the gross floor area. The Planner stated that she has heard similar comments from residents, designers, contractors, and the Town's building inspector. Based on these comments, the latest draft zoning text specifies that the area of unfinished basement space used for storage or utilities will not to be counted as the Gross Floor Area for a Local ADU. The Town has the discretion to make this exemption for a Local ADU, but doesn't have the discretion to make this exemption for Protected Use ADUs.

Bob Obear talks about a past ADU he built in different town- not in Montague, in which he finished a 1,000 square foot building for a couple to live on which they built a larger home on the property. The smaller house was considered the ADU.

The Planner goes through Montague's proposed ADU zoning text amendment. The document is laid out as 1.) Protected ADUs by right or 2.) Local ADUs by special permit through the ZBA. State definitions, zoning districts, dimensional regulations, number of units, parking, lighting, finished/unfinished space are indicated in a way that is helpful for the applicants.

Lizbeth Irving suggests creating a flow chart as a visual display going through this information to presented at the Planning Board's ADU public hearing, at Town Meeting, and for perspective applications.

George Cooke asks if the term "Local ADU" is a statewide term. The Planner answers "yes" the term is state-wide.

In the July 2025 draft ADU zoning text amendment submitted to the MA Attorney General for review, the AG's Office comments that they did not like Montague's proposed definition of gross floor area or principal dwelling. The AG's Office directed the Planner to State definitions. Bob Obear thinks it's interesting that the bylaws don't count garages and enclosed porches or similar spaces.

The Planner asks the Planning Board if the owner of the ADU has to be the same owner as the principal dwelling unit or land. Can it be condo-ized? So far, the Planning Board has been silent on that point. Bob Obear doesn't think this is the intention of the ADU bylaws which could force a split in the future into two non-conforming lots; if someone wants to share equity the property could be put into an LLC. The Planner clarifies that if a lot would be split, it would need ANR endorsement by the Planning Board. In order for the Planning Board to endorse any ANR Plan, they would need to confirm that the said lot meets all dimensional requirements under the Zoning Bylaw, among other factors.

Bob Obear asks about dimensional relief for setbacks. Is this a "backdoor" to get closer to the setbacks and to neighbors? Obear doesn't think this is right and wants the traditional intent of good neighbor buffers to be considered. "A shed is one thing, but principal use is another."

The Planner reviews the minimum front/side/rear setbacks for Principal Use Building per Section 5.5.1. The Planner reviews the minimum front/side/rear setbacks for Accessory Structures per Section 5.5.2

After the Planner's review of the dimensional requirements, suggests the Board to consider setbacks for pre-existing ADUs vs new ADU structure and to consider modifying the setback requirements under the Zoning Bylaw. Suggests that the setback requirements could be modified as they relate to ADUs only or

perhaps the Board could take a more comprehensive approach and explore all dimensional requirements. If the latter, advises the Board to explore this as a separate zoning amendment and should be taken up in the future and not as part of the ADU zoning amendments.

L. Irving asks how many lots in Turners Falls would be prohibited to build an ADU if current setbacks are required. Obear responds maybe a lot of properties don't have enough land to meet the setback requirements, but the homeowner could build an attached ADU or reconfigure in some way. The Planner asks the Board to consider appropriate setbacks for accessory ADU. Bob Obear thinks this is overreach by the State and reiterates that accessory vs primary use are not the same thing.

The Planner wants the Board to consider village centers, where the Town is encouraging infill development, especially housing. Being more restrictive of setbacks makes it more difficult to building housing. Bob Obear speaks to the importance of property rights, but he supports ADUs.

General conversation about the intent of the ADU regarding potential splits/ condos.

George Cooke asks about utilities for the ADU? Can you tie it into an existing water and septic/sewer? Bob thinks you can tie it into the same water, but the septic system tank capacity might need to be increased. Planner clarifies that the applicant would need to have their septic system reviewed by the Board of Health.

The Planner would like another conversation from the Planning Board, particularly around the topic of ADU setbacks, before sending this to the Selectboard.

Sam Guerin clarifies that "a zoning amendment would be completely separate from the ADU definitions." The Planner answers "correct." There are already zoning amendments for section 5.4 and section 5.5. The Board could consider an amendment to section 5.5.2. Sam Guerin comments that if you "bundle an adjustment to how we define setbacks for accessory structures generally with an amendment we are trying to get passed with an amendment that we're trying to get passed for ADUs, then the State could see that as being restrictive."

Bob Obear asks whether the Board would consider tradition setbacks for accessory buildings that are climate controlled, or have plumbing. The Planner comments that definition is not allowed by the State. Sam asks if they could add "to the extent feasible language." The Planner adds that Montague has not seen a boom in ADU construction, largely due to high construction costs and lower rents than other parts of the state. The current zoning amendment proposal brings Montague Zoning Bylaw into compliance with the state's new mandated regulations. The Building Inspector and Planner have not received any complaints from residents regarding existing ADUs in town. The Town will monitor all newly constructed ADUs. If there are areas of concerns that arise regarding the ADU bylaw, the Planning Board can tweak the ADU bylaw with a proposed zoning amendment in the future.

L. Irving reviews the difference between a Protected ADU and a local ADU.

George Cooke doesn't think you can fight the State ADU setback definitions. The Planner asks if they want to vote to move forward with the draft language or pick up conversation about setbacks at the next meeting.

MOTION by B. Obear to accept the below-listed zoning text amendments to the Zoning Bylaw, as submitted: (1) to consider amending Section 5.4 Accessory Uses by replacing Accessory Apartments with Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs); (2) to consider rescinding Section 8.5 Accessory Apartments and replacing it with a new Section 8.5 Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) that includes provisions for a local ADU, and for the protected use ADU which are permitted by right in accordance with the Affordable Homes Act; and (3) to consider amending Section 9.1.2(e) to remove Accessory Apartments within existing single family homes per §8.5, as a specific use subject to site plan review; subject to technical adjustments based on comments from tonight's discussion, and as proposed by Town Staff and Town Counsel (KP Law), and to initiate the zoning amendment petitions to the Selectboard. Seconded by R. Sicard VOTE Ron Sicard (Chair), George Cooke (AYE), Lizbeth Irving (AYE), Sam Guerin (AYE), Bob Obear (AYE) MOTION PASSES 5-0. 7:35pm.

Montague City Village Center Redevelopment Project Update

Update 1: At the Fall 2025 Town Meeting, the necessary zoning amendments for these developments were approved. Additionally, the parcels were declared surplus. Before issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for development, the Town will participate in the [Urban Land Institute's Technical Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#). This will help the Town determine the best redevelopment strategy that balances economic feasibility with community goals. A panel of senior level experts in planning, development, construction, and finance will provide the Town with candid, unbiased insights over a one-day session. Their guidance will assist the Town in answering the following questions:

- Planning & Feasibility: Should the site be subdivided prior to disposition? What are the benefits and disadvantages of subdivision?
- Implementation: If subdivision occurs, should the Town issue a single RFP for a master developer or multiple RFPs?
- Market & Financing: What are the advantages and disadvantages of selecting a master developer for a site of this size and condition in Franklin County?

The one-day meeting will happen on Tuesday, March 10, 2025. This is an excellent opportunity for the Town; at the end of the day there will be a 6:00pm public meeting at the Shea Theater Arts Center which includes a public presentation highlighting the findings and recommendations, followed by Q&A.

There will be stakeholder interviews with developers, banks, local/state stakeholders, among others. Obear recommends an interview with affordable housing tax credit developers due to the cost of construction. You have to find smaller developers and build in phases with specific design criteria written in the RFP. General conversation about how developers leverage tax credits. One incentive to developers is to offer the property at nominal fee.

The Planner asks the Board to block off Tuesday, March 10 at 6pm for the public presentation. L. Irving recommends that one recognizable person represents Montague City at this meeting. The Planner agrees; there are folks from Montague City on the working group. Additionally, the Planner has provided mailers to Montague City residents regarding all public meetings regarding the Farren. A mailer will be provided to the Montague City residents inviting them to the March 10 public presentation.

Update 2: 2026 Farren Neighborhood Zoning & Design Guideline Project: The Town is exploring possible zoning amendments, zoning map changes, and design guidelines for parcels on Masonic Ave, Rod Shop Road, and a few parcels on Montague City Road to the north and south of the former Farren

Hospital site.

- Neighborhood Stakeholder Meeting #1: The Town is scheduled to hold its first neighborhood stakeholder meeting at 5:00pm on Tuesday, February 10 at 20 Masonic Avenue.
- Working Group Meeting #1: The Town is scheduled to hold its first working group meeting at 6:00pm on Thursday, February 26 via Zoom.
- Community-wide Workshop #1: The Town is scheduled to hold its first community-wide workshop on Tuesday, March 31 at 6:30pm via Zoom. More info forthcoming!

Turners Falls Wayfinding/Branding Project Update: The Planner will be working with VHB and Hired Hands LLC to develop a comprehensive signage and wayfinding system for the Turners Falls. Future phases will focus on other 4 villages. This plan aims to improve navigation, enhance civic identity, support local economic development, and create a welcoming and accessible environment for residents and visitors alike. Sign types include: Gateway signage (e.g., entry signs at Route 2 and other primary approaches); Municipal signage (e.g., Town Hall, library, and civic buildings) Pedestrian kiosks and interpretive displays; Intersection and street-level directional signage; Anchor location signage (e.g., parks, library, canal district, cultural assets); Wayfinding for trails, bike paths, and the canal walk; Parking signage; Historical or educational signage; and Consistent district-themed signage to reinforce identity and coherence.

Community engagement will include public forums and survey to solicit feedback on the project and to help guide this project. The Planner will also provide routine updates to the newly formed Downtown Turners Falls Working Group, who include business owners, nonprofit leaders, property owners, and local government. Turners Falls Working Group is part of the one-year pilot project in partnership with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, aimed at fostering economic growth and developing a sustainable regional model for rural downtown management.

MVP 2.0 Window Insert Community Build Project Update: Coordinators have been hired. Coordinating with the Senior Center, Montague Community Wood Bank, and Community Action Fuel Assistance Program will signing up income eligible residents for program. Need volunteers.

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update: The Hazard Mitigation Plan is being developed by the Town's Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee (HMPC) and must be approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and adopted by the Town. FEMA approval enables Montague to remain eligible for important pre- and post-disaster hazard mitigation grant funding. Public participation is a required and vital component of this planning process. By participating, community members can help shape a plan that reflects local priorities, addresses climate-related risks, and strengthens Montague's long-term resilience. January 28 Public Meeting at 6pm via Zoom to solicit Community feedback in identifying which hazards pose the greatest risks, which areas of Town are most vulnerable, and what mitigation actions residents would like the Town to pursue. While natural hazards such as winter storms, heavy rainfall, high winds, and earthquakes cannot be prevented, proactive planning can significantly reduce their impact.

Other items:

Bob Obear asks about the Strathmore demo. Chris Nolen-Zeller is the contact person for that project. The Town has been funded \$10 million for demo, which might not be enough money. The Town is in the design phase for the demo. The Town plans to release a RFP for demo in summer/fall 2026.

Habitat for Humanity with find out if they got their MassHousing grant by May or June for the First

Street development; contaminated soil is gone. Site plan approval will be needed by the Planning Board. The Unity Street RDI project was approved by ZBA in the fall 2025. RDI is also awaiting MassHousing funding.

MOTION to Adjourn. MOTION PASSES 8:10pm