

**SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF MONTAGUE
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OCTOBER 28, 2026
MOTIONS & BACKGROUND**

ARTICLE 1. Prior Year Bills (Town Accountant Request) (9/10s vote required)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$1,643.02 for the purpose of paying prior year unpaid bills of the Police and Shared Services Departments, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: There are two prior year bills currently. The cause of these prior year bills was undelivered invoices and staffing turnover.

- Shared Services has a Verizon bill for \$58.02 from 6/17/26
- Police Department has a Signet (security system) bill for \$1,585 from 2/24/25

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 6-0

ARTICLE 2. Airport FY26 Operating Deficit (Town Accountant Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$38,550.27 for the purpose of funding the Airport FY26 operating deficit, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: In FY26 the Airport Enterprise fund ran an operating deficit. The Town is legally required to fund this deficit. To prevent this deficit from hitting taxation it is recommended that we fund this through Free Cash. There are two drivers for the deficit. The first is that the Airport was unable to meet the FY26 budgeted revenues by \$18,671.57 due to loss of a lessee in January 2026 and they were unable to fill that vacancy prior to the end of the year. The second driver is that the Airport over-expended the FY26 budget by \$19,878.52. Over-expenditure was due to costs associated with repairing and preparing the vacated space to make it more attractive to potential future lessees.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

ARTICLE 3. Airport FY27 Revenue Deficit (Town Accountant Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$15,000 for the purpose of funding the operations of the Airport in Fiscal Year 2027, including the payment of wages and benefits for airport employees, maintenance of property and equipment, the purchase of supplies, debt service, and anything incidental or related thereto, with \$10,000 to be used to fund the expected Fiscal Year 2027 revenue shortfall in the Airport Enterprise Fund and \$5,000 to increase Airport Overtime, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

Background: The current revenue projections for FY27 with the changes in lease holders would leave the Airport Enterprise fund short approximately \$10,000 in the revenue

lines. The ask is that the Town fund an additional \$10,000 of the Airport Enterprise fund out of Free Cash to ensure that the tax rate setting process can be completed in the fall without delay. This request has been reviewed by the state, and they are also recommending we provide more funding to the Airport at this time. The Airport is predicting an overage in the overtime line due to predicted staffing adjustments needed to provide proper and legal coverage of the Airport services. The current request is to fund \$5,000 of additional overtime from Free Cash.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

ARTICLE 4. Grant Deficit Cleanup (Town Accountant Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$61,502.31 for the purpose of funding structural grant deficits for grants outlined below, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash.

- Airport FY23 Wildlife Management (-\$5,525)
- Airport FY23 Retrofit Approach Lighting (-\$714.30)
- Airport FY23 Approach Safety Equipment (-\$11,418.99)
- Airport ASMP 2024-OB5-38 (-\$656.55)
- Airport ASMP 2021-OB5-33 OB% VLTGEN (-\$5,013.42)
- Airport ASMP 2022-OB5-38 Beacon (-\$6,858.37)
- Airport ASMP 2022-OB5-40 Building Safety (-\$22,893.35)
- Selectboard Green Communities (-\$8,422.33)

Background: The Town Accountant has identified several closed or substantially completed grant accounts with permanent, or “structural,” deficits totaling \$61,502.31. A structural deficit means that grant expenditures have been made and the Town is not eligible to receive further grant reimbursements.

These are not accounting errors that can be corrected through a journal entry. The remaining costs still require an authorized funding source. In these cases, the town did not receive grant reimbursement for different administrative reasons such as failing to submit for a timely reimbursement or not appropriately allocating a local cost share match.

This article appropriates Free Cash to cover those historical funding gaps, eliminates the negative balances, and allows the affected grant accounts to be closed.

For context, the Town is currently administering more than \$29 million across more than 20 active grants. The deficits addressed by this article equal roughly 0.2% of that amount. As the Town’s grant portfolio grows, staff continue to work on strengthening procedures for identifying local matches, tracking reimbursements, and closing grants in a timely manner.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

ARTICLE 5. Cemetery Maintenance/Sexton Stipend (Cemetery Commission Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$12,032 for the purpose of purchasing goods and services related to the maintenance of the cemeteries and providing funds for the FY27 Cemetery Sexton stipend, with said sum to be raised from Sale of Highland Cemetery Lots.

Background: This article is to create a special article that the Cemetery Commission can use for maintenance costs beyond the Town budgeted maintenance which is primarily used for routine landscaping. This is for upkeep of the grounds beyond mowing and line trim. With the Highland Cemetery still in its early stages there are extra costs to mark graves and establish the space. \$2,032 of this article will go to funding the half of the Cemetery Sexton stipend that is paid for using burial fees, which the Town funds the other half (\$2,000) with taxation. Funds to support this purchase come from the Sale of Highland Cemetery Lot's account, which holds the balance of funds transferred to the Town when it accepted ownership of the original Highland Cemetery, and the additional sales of lots and fees from burials. The current balance of that fund is \$126,352.62.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

ARTICLE 6. Non-Capital Equipment and projects (Police/Parks and Recreation Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$16,300 for the following departmental purchases and projects, including any and all incidental and related costs, with said sum to be raised from Free Cash and to be allocated as follows:

- A. \$5,600 for the purchase of a walk-behind automatic floor scrubber
- B. \$7,700 for the purchase of an infield groomer
- C. \$3,000 for resurfacing Unity Park playground walkway and whale unit area

Background:

Walk-Behind Floor Scrubber

A walk-behind automatic floor scrubber is a commercial grade machine for washing hard floors. This would replace a failed unit that was purchased when the Police Station opened in 2009. The replacement unit would be smaller than the current unit to meet the actual needs. The unit would be housed at the police department but would be available for less frequent use across other municipal facilities.

Infield Groomer

The infield groomer is a tow-behind unit that supports maintenance of the Town's public baseball and softball fields. Over the years, Montague Park and Recreation and the Department of Public Works have tried various methods to manage grass and weed growth on ballfield infields. Such efforts proved overly time-consuming and resulted in only temporary improvement. A professional-grade infield groomer would provide greater efficiency in managing these areas and keeping the fields in optimum playing condition. The request is timely because the equipment is needed for the upcoming spring season.

Resurfacing Unity Park Playground walkway and splash pad

The work for the resurfacing of the Unity Park walkways and splash pad area will include crack filling on the asphalt walkways, in addition to two coats of sport court grade paint. Paint will also be applied to the surface of the whale spray feature. This necessary maintenance compliments other upgrades currently underway at Unity Park playground.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0
Finance Committee Recommends 7-0

ARTICLE 7. Consolidated Elementary School Feasibility Study (Gill-Montague Regional School District Request) (2/3rds vote required)

MOVED: That the Town appropriate the sum of one million seven hundred and fifty thousand (\$1,750,000) Dollars for a feasibility study and schematic design for necessary improvements at the Sheffield Elementary School, 43 Crocker Avenue, and the Hillcrest Elementary School, 30 Griswold Street, including the payment of costs incidental or related thereto, and for which the Town may be eligible for a grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (“MSBA”), said sum to be expended under the direction of the School Building Committee, and to meet said appropriation the Town will appropriate \$500,000 from Capital Stabilization and the Treasurer with the approval of the Selectboard is authorized to borrow \$1,250,000 under M.G.L. Chapter 44, or any other enabling authority; that the Town acknowledges that the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s (“MSBA”) grant program is a non-entitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and any project costs the Town incurs in excess of any grant approved by and received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the Town; and that the amount of borrowing authorized pursuant to this vote shall be reduced by any grant amount set forth in the Feasibility Study Agreement that may be executed between the Gill-Montague School District and the MSBA.

Background: This article would authorize \$1,750,000 for an MSBA-required Feasibility Study for a renovated, expanded or new elementary school to serve the Town of Montague. The study is the next major step in the Massachusetts School Building Authority process and is intended to evaluate long-term options for addressing the educational, space, accessibility, and building-system needs identified at the municipally owned Sheffield and Hillcrest Elementary Schools. MSBA matching funds will cover most of that obligation. However, the Town must authorize the full study amount for the project to remain eligible to advance in the MSBA process.

The Gill-Montague School District’s 2025 Statement of Interest (SOI) identifies significant space constraints at both schools. At Sheffield, instructional and support spaces have been subdivided or converted for music, special education, English learner services, counseling, intervention, and other required programs; with some services provided in shared or non-traditional spaces. At Hillcrest, the SOI similarly identifies shortages of dedicated space for physical education, library, music, special education, related services, and preschool programming. The SOI also identifies substantial building-system needs, including aging roofs, windows, heating systems, accessibility limitations, and other deferred capital needs. These capital needs will present

substantial costs to the town in the coming decade, but those investments will not ease the space constraints that have resulted from modern educational requirements.

The MSBA has invited Sheffield Elementary into its Eligibility Period and has specifically authorized the feasibility process to examine the potential consolidation of Sheffield, currently serving grades 2–5, with Hillcrest, currently serving PreK–1, into a single PreK–5 elementary school. The Feasibility Study will not commit the Town to a particular construction project. Rather, it will evaluate and present alternative approaches that the Town will consider. These may include renovation, addition, new construction, and/or consolidation, and the Town will ultimately advance its preferred option for further MSBA review.

The budget for the study was developed by the Elementary School Building Committee based on a review of other recent MSBA feasibility studies that are similar in scope and scale. The budget includes the hiring of an Owner's Project Manager to oversee the study, which is a requirement of the process. The Town anticipates that eligible study costs will be partially reimbursed by the MSBA. Earlier project planning materials used an estimated 76% reimbursement rate for planning purposes, although the final reimbursement rate and eligible costs will be determined by the MSBA. The Town expects to finance the “local share” of the project using Capital Stabilization and/or Sale of Real Estate funds, while the warrant article authorizes the full amount required for the feasibility phase.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

Finance Committee Recommends 5-2

Capital Improvement Committee 3-0-1

Comment 1: Capital Improvement had one absent member who did not vote.

Comment 2: Capital Improvement had one abstention.

ARTICLE 8. Authorize Senior Tax Work Off Program (Selectboard Request)

MOVED: That the Town vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59, Section 5K, authorizing the Selectboard to establish a program whereby persons over the age of sixty may volunteer to provide services to the Town in exchange for a reduction in their real property tax obligations, beginning in Fiscal Year 2028.

Background: This article would accept G.L. c. 59, § 5K, which allows the Town to establish a Senior Property Tax Work-Off Program for eligible residents over the age of 60. Under such a program, participating seniors could perform approved volunteer service for the Town in exchange for a reduction in their property tax bill. Acceptance of the statute would not itself establish the final program rules; those details, including eligibility preferences, the number of participants, the amount of the credit, work assignments, and administrative procedures, would be developed and approved by the Selectboard following Town Meeting. The program would provide modest property tax relief to seniors while also creating opportunities for residents to contribute useful volunteer services to municipal departments. Many neighboring communities have a

Senior Tax Work-off Program. Montague's program would be administered by the Council on Aging Director with support from Town Hall. The total value of the tax write-off is expected to be approximately up to \$15,000 across 10 participating residents in the first year. For the first year of the program, the town is anticipating job assignments for the Senior Center and Libraries with potential to expand in future years.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0

ARTICLE 9. 34 Central Street Lease (Selectboard Request) (2/3rds vote required)

MOVED: that the Town vote to transfer the care, custody, management and control of Town-owned property, being the former Central Street School, located at 34 Central Street in Turners Falls, from the board or officer having custody thereof for the purposes for which said property is currently held to the Selectboard for general municipal purposes and for the purposes of the lease thereof for a term not to exceed thirty (30) years, for educational, child development, community service, or other related purposes determined by the Selectboard to serve the public interest, and on such other terms and conditions and for such consideration as the Selectboard deems to be in the best interests of the Town, and to enter into and execute any documents and agreements and take any other actions necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of this vote

Background: The Town owns the former Central Street School building. The property is currently leased by the Franklin Community Action Corporation as an "Early Head Start" serving youths aged between 6 weeks and 3 years. The current 30 year lease expires August 1, 2027. FCAC have been excellent tenants and they have informed the Town that they intend to seek renewal. FCAC desires to have the new lease in place in order to obtain grant funds for programming and capital improvements. This article authorizes the Selectboard to conduct the required competitive procurement process and to execute a new long-term lease for the property. Consistent with past and current use of the property, the authorization limits the future use to "educational, child development, or community service" uses.

Selectboard Recommends 3-0