

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD MEETING  
1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and VIA ZOOM  
Monday, February 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM**

Meeting was opened at 6:30 PM. Present were Selectboard members Rich Kuklewicz, Matt Lord, and Chris Boutwell; Town Administrator Walter Ramsey; Assistant Town Administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller; Town Planner Maureen Pollock; DPW Superintendent Sam Urkiel; and Town Treasurer/Collector Eileen Seymour.

**Selectboard Chair opens the meeting, including announcing that the meeting is being recorded and roll call taken**

**Approve Minutes: January 13 and 27, 2025 as presented**

*Boutwell makes the motion to approve the minutes of January 13 and 27, 2025 as presented. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Public Comment Period: Individuals will be limited to two (2) minutes each and the Selectboard will strictly adhere to time allotted for public comment**

None

**Maureen Pollock, Planning Director**

**Announce receipt of FY25 Mass DOT Complete Streets Tier 3 Construction Grant of \$499,682 - Traffic Calming and Bicycle & Pedestrian Improvements in Montague Center. Next Steps**

- Pollock shares that we have just received a Mass DOT Complete Streets Tier 3 construction Grant of \$499,682 for Traffic Calming and Bicycle & Pedestrian Improvements in Montague Center.
- The next step is to finalize the designs and prepare the bid-ready construction documents.
- Nolan-Zeller will be helping with the procurement and coordinating with DPW, engineers, and contractors; and focusing on the project budget.
- Pollock will notify the public when the Selectboard will be reviewing the final designs.
- This grant is to pay for construction work. It does not pay for the design. The Planning Department will be coming back to the Selectboard to request funds. VHB is working to provide a cost estimate to finalize the design.
- Ramsey suggests that the best funding source would be Capital Stabilization.

**Montague seeks community input on Climate-Resiliency Seed Project concepts**

- Pollock states that we are working on a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Project. As part of this planning process, the Town has \$15,000 that was funded through the State to spend on a 12-month Climate-Resiliency Seed Project. After community engagement, we have narrowed down the list of projects to three finalists: Project A - Improve and expand community gardens in Town; Project B - Support the development of a community commercial kitchen located next to the Finders Collective community space in Turners Falls; and Project C - Pilot project to do a community build-out of winter window inserts
- We are looking for community input and are asking residents to take an online survey.

**Authorization request to apply for Mass Trails Grant Application - conduct a Feasibility Study that explores connectivity through the Montague Plains with connections to the surrounding 5 villages, the DCR Canalside Rail Trail, and Franklin County Bikeway**

*Boutwell makes the motion to authorize the Planning Board to apply for the Mass Trails Grant Application to conduct a Feasibility Study that explores connectivity through the Montague Plains with connections to the surrounding 5 villages, the DCR Canalside Rail Trail, and Franklin County Bikeway. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Jessica Strom, COO, Community Health Center of Franklin County**

**Request for license to place directional sign in the public right of way at corner of Burnham Street and Montague City Road**

*Boutwell makes the motion to give permission to Community Health Center of Franklin County's request for an off-premises directional sign in the public right of way at corner of Burnham Street and Montague City Road, and to recommend that they discuss this issue with Zoning. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD MEETING**  
**1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and VIA ZOOM**  
**Monday, February 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM**

**Public Works Superintendent, Sam Urkiel**

**DPW Discretionary Account authorization request - \$30,000 for tack tank trailer**

*Boutwell makes the motion to approve the request for the use of the Discretionary funds for a tack tank trailer in the amount of \$30,000. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Sewer Collection System updates**

- Urkiel reviews the Sewer Collection System overflow data from last year: Discharge totals for 7th and L Street, Avenue A, and Greenfield Road
- They have finished cutting the right of way on Greenfield Road
- Kyle Bessette has been organizing some of the CCTV inspection reports and files. They will come up with a plan to inspect before they pave.
- Ramsey adds that the DPW is also wrapping up the Asset Management Inventory that was done with Wright-Pierce.
- Ramsey also adds that the Annual CMOMs Report for DEP was completed ahead of the deadline.
- In response to a question by Lord, Ramsey states that we are currently working on a sewer use ordinance.

**Other (not on agenda)**

Urkiel states that due to the upcoming significant snowfall, DPW will put out an emergency parking ban.

**FY26 Budget Review with Town Administrator and Town Treasurer**

**Discuss Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust's plan to increase employee health insurance rates by 18-20% in FY26**

- Seymour shares that our health insurance rates are going up 18% on the HMO and 20% on the PPO.
- Other health insurance groups have also gone up.
- Seymour reviews reasons that the rates have gone up.
- The Trust is looking at different options (i.e., adding another tier of drugs, offering a higher-deductible plan, no longer going the route of 0% increases for health insurance)
- Ramsey reminds us that Montague does an 80/20 split with its employees.
- The 18-20% increase is going to cost an additional \$243,000 next year on the budget, which would take away some of the flexibility we were hoping to build in for implementing the Wage and Classification Study.

**Review budget and identify information gaps**

- Ramsey reviews a PowerPoint presentation of the FY26 budget: (FY26 Considerations, Budget request, Schedule III Town Operating Budget).
- Ramsey goes into detail on highlighted lines on the Schedule III Town Operating Budget.
- Lord suggests that we can make some short-term strategic cuts.
- Accounting issues are discussed.
- Overall, the total Town Budget has increased \$382,000, a 3.1% increase over last year.

**Next steps in budget development process**

- Ramsey reviews Budget Alternatives.
- The Board members would like to fund the Council on Aging changes.
- Kuklewicz would like to hold off on the library changes and ask the Library Director to look at the staffing and see if there are any other ways she can work with that.
- Lord states that if we are going to be having a new library, we would need more staff, but we are not at that point.
- Lord would like to not have to change Excess Capacity as we are looking at increased operating costs based on Capital improvements in the future. He states that we need to keep the Town in a position where we don't end up cutting services immediately in an event of an economic downturn.

**Vote recommendations on draft FY26 budget**

Will be taken up at a future meeting

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD MEETING  
1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and VIA ZOOM  
Monday, February 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM**

**Assistant Town Administrator's Business**

**Budget review for charging stations (electricity, network fees)**

- Nolan-Zeller states that the Town asked Eversource for a change to a non-demand billing rate. However, Eversource never applied it to their bills due to a clerical error. They are applying credits retroactively. We don't expect to have to pay another electrical bill for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- We still have the \$1,380 that gets allocated every year for yearly renewals for network fees.
- The Board agrees to go into a three-year contract with Voltrek.

**Request for authorization to apply for no-cost EV charging planning support and feasibility studies from Massachusetts Clean Energy Center**

*Boutwell makes the motion to authorize the Assistant Town Administrator to look into the EV Planning Feasibility Study at no cost. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Discussion on Colle Building strategy for proposals**

- The lease with the Center for Responsive Schools is up at the end of March.
- We are required to competitively solicit proposals under Massachusetts procurement laws.
- CRS have indicated their intent to respond to the RFP that we are going to be issuing.
- Nolan-Zeller will release the RFP this week, with a deadline of March 10th for responses.

**Authorize Notice to Proceed with National Water Main Cleaning Co. for Turners Falls Sewer Manhole Rehabilitation**

*Boutwell makes the motion to authorize the Notice to Proceed with National Water Main Cleaning Co. for the Turners Falls Sewer Manhole Rehabilitation, and authorize the Chair to sign the appropriate documents. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Preliminary discussion on regional Emergency Medical Services (EMS)**

- A conversation on Regional Emergency Medical Services between the Town, the two fire districts, FRCOG, and other regional partners will happen within the coming months.
- Lord asks to have a meeting with FRCOG as soon as possible if they are going to be providing assistance for us. He asks Nolan-Zeller to keep an eye on FRCOG'S agenda.

**Other project updates**

- The sources of federal funding that are potentially in question for us are the earmark for the Avenue A Streetscape Improvements, our CDBG projects, the USDA Rural Development Loan and Grant, and the EPA Brownfields Grant.
- The Community One-Stop Portal from the State opened this week. The coming round is going to have an application that opens in May and closes June 4th. We are going to be working with department heads to identify competitive project proposals.
- We were able to get an issue resolved with the Mass Cultural Council where we hadn't received the necessary paperwork.

**Town Administrator's Business**

● **Opioid Settlement funding spending strategy update**

*Boutwell makes the motion to authorize the Board of Health to disperse the opioid funding in the best possible manner. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

● **Topics not anticipated within 48-hour posting requirements**

None

**Executive Sessions:**

**Executive Session with Board of Assessors in accordance with G.L. c. 30A, §21(3) To discuss strategy with respect to litigation with FirstLight Power, Inc. if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body and the Chair so declares**

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD MEETING  
1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and VIA ZOOM  
Monday, February 3, 2025 at 6:30 PM**

**Executive Session in accordance with G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining relating to National Association of Government Employees (NAGE), United Electrical Workers (UEW), and New England Benevolent Association (NEPBA) locals if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body and the Chair so declares**

The Chair deems that holding these discussions in open session would be detrimental to the Town's position.

*Boutwell makes the motion to go into the Executive Sessions. Seconded by Lord, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Lord - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*

**Next Meetings:**

- **Selectboard and Finance Committee GMRSD Budget Hearing, Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 5:30 PM, Montague Town Hall, Second Floor Conference Room**
- **Selectboard, Monday, February 10, 2025 at 6:00 PM via ZOOM**
- **Winter Town Meeting is on Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 6:30 PM**