

## 2024 Shea Mural Project – Community Input for Mural Theme

The Town of Montague in partnership with [Common Wealth Murals](#) and the Shea Mural Steering Group are proposing a 3,000 square foot mural on a on the Shea Theater Arts Center building, located in downtown Turners Falls. The mural will function as a gateway to Turners Falls, with the goal to further advance the village as a creative community that encourages residents and visitors, alike to visit downtown. The Shea Mural Steering Group is made up of residents, business owners, and town staff.

The mural project includes resident participatory process to help generate themes for the Shea mural that are relevant to Turners Falls and its residents. These themes will be used by the selected muralist, [Darion Fleming](#), to create draft designs for consideration and approval by the Shea Mural Steering Group.

The Town solicited resident input through an in-person community input session held on June 13<sup>th</sup> at the Shea Theater Arts Center and through an online survey.

The community input session was recorded by MCTV and can be viewed [here](#).

### COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION NOTES AND SURVEY RESPONSES:

Here, below are the compiled June 13, 2024 community input session notes and online survey responses. The online survey responses are shown in *green italic* text. Comments provided by the Montague Historical Commission are shown in *red italic* text.

#### Repeated themes identified in community input session notes and survey responses:

- Turners Falls is up and coming, with a vibrant creative community
- Friendly
- Down to earth
- People love living in Turners Falls, feel very proud of it
- Tends towards progressive
- Respectful of the land and waters
- The river, the canal, the rail trail, bald eagles
- Turners Falls is often underestimated; has the perseverance of an underdog
- Concerns about gentrification, increasing housing costs
- Acknowledgment of the Native history of the area, including the [Great Falls Massacre](#)
- Honor the strength of community over any individual person

1. Please fill in the following prompt: **If you really knew Turners Falls, you would know:**
  - a. There was a many-year situation over changing the high school mascot from the Turners Falls Indians to Turners Falls Thunder. A small but vocal population that is white resist this type of change, and also resist new housing being built and other changes
  - b. The town has a very tragic past in which native women, kids, and elderly were massacred in the night by General Turners. The survivors fled and never

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- returned. An annual day of remembrance is held around May 18th. It is not an official act
- c. That we have the best walking trails
  - d. Eagles
  - e. It is named after Colonial Turner who led a slaughter of indigenous people; the town's population is ~ 90% white.
  - f. The river and the river life, fish, birds, history is an important and impacts every part of life here
  - g. The history starting with dinosaurs, then thousands of years of indigenous inhabitants, 1800s-1900s industry to the creative arts and grassroots business economy
  - h. About our indigenous history
  - i. People moved here from well-known popular places to be a part of something unique
  - j. Unity Park, Avenue A, the river, its tight, people care, lots of dogs
  - k. It is a safe creative community. Easy to live in with old timers and new comers together; it is a yes town!
  - l. The river flowing when the damns released
  - m. We care, art community
  - n. It is small but close community with lots of unique places and people
  - o. It is a lot closer to Amherst/Springfield than people think
  - p. Its history and present are shaped by the river; It's a place of struggle, aspiration, and joy; it's historic industrial past echoes forward today; it is unpretentious but prideful
  - q. Know who Danny Monster Cruz was and the flaming dragons at middle earth
  - r. Know about the Native American history; that we also call in GREAT FALLS; that native people and non-natives mix here; celebrate that particular inter-racial aspect of the region which is tied to the natural Connecticut River
  - s. We've had cool events like dog parade and laundromat fashion show
  - t. It's full of old bridges
  - u. It is a friendly changing community; a strong sense of what it means to survive; this is an underdog town
  - v. A river runs through it and it used to be an active industrial area
  - w. It is nice and quiet; the patch is where it is at!
  - x. The river, canal, river walk, bridges
  - y. Kip Dresser, Selectboard Chair Rich Kuklewicz, and [Sam Lovejoy](#)
  - z. Know where the "falls" are
  - aa. Despite being very small (4,000 residents or so live in the village of Turners Falls), there are sharp social divisions based on class. Wealthy families don't merge with lower-income ones; Newer demographics have been moving to Turners Falls in the past 25 years it so; this has brought new ideas, businesses, energy. They tend to either home school or school choice out their kids. A new form of elitism
  - bb. That we are the underdogs!

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- cc. it's just the right size and the downtown has a little bit of everything*
- dd. That it is locally beloved, that we spread our dollars around as much as possible, go to all the restaurants all the time, that we take advantage of every last thing the town has to offer, and we are both excited about the amazing potential of the town unfolding while also wanting to keep it an insider secret.*
- ee. We have awesome eateries and diverse small businesses along with 2 beautiful parks and a bike/walk path along the canal and river.*
- ff. the importance of the river to native people*
- gg. It's history*
- hh. Not sure*
- ii. that dinosaur footprints are found here. There probably are some in the foundations of old houses.*
- jj. the ubiquitous shopping carts*
- kk. want to stay awhile.*
- ll. History*
- mm. the river*
- nn. where the Patch is*
- oo. The cultural history of the native tribes that lived here prior to colonization*
- pp. Unity Park*
- qq. that it should be re-named Great Falls*
- rr. The rock dam and that it should be called Great Falls*
- ss. of the fish ladder, the Montague community band, the boat parade each summer, the bike path, the multi-year girls softball champions, the dinosaur tracks in the river bed, the renaissance community that started the Shea Theater, the important history of industry in Turners Falls especially at John Russell Cutlery, the eagles who make the Connecticut River in Turners Falls their home, that many local people prefer to call the town Great Falls because of the massacre that occurred here.*
- tt. There used to be a cement pool and gazebo at Unity Park.*
- uu. About their champion women's softball teams*
- vv. the canal*

2. Please fill in the following prompt: **My favorite thing about people in Turners Falls is:**
- a. We work together
  - b. Friendly
  - c. They are very friendly and love to garden (often with native plants)
  - d. The people are grounded and eccentric; are working class and artistic/progressive; act in good faith most of the time; are suddenly gray, but also black and brown; value community
  - e. VERY community orientated; creative; intergenerational; easy to connect with others; people are down to earth; Latinos and others mix; people relate to nature
  - f. Diversity; old/young; social views; old timers; new comers; economic
  - g. They make things happen

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- h. Diversity; shared donut; town scenes; businesses
- i. Everyone is friendly and open to others
- j. Friendly, caring, proud
- k. Friendly and they love their town
- l. How down to earth and friendly most people are
- m. There is quite a diverse range of economic statues here; lots of poverty and lots of entrepreneurs
- n. fun/active; interested in a variety of things including; arts/community/nature/food
- o. It's a small town with everything you need right here; lots of quirky creative people
- p. It's diversity and creativity
- q. People here are friendly and fun; easy to become part of the life of the town
- r. Laid back and accepting
- s. A gruff love of good music
- t. Big hearted and hardworking
- u. Very diverse; they walk around; they make the most of what they have; community gardening; senior center; farmers market
- v. Friendly, curious, respectful of the land and waters
- w. Turners Falls is small enough where you get to know people, and people are regular - not fussy like the college towns
- x. Courteous (most), friendly, love the river, love to hang outside
- y. *I love that all kinds of people live here especially downtown*
- z. *The variety and diversity in all the ways - racial, social, and economic diversity. This feels absolutely key to a healthy and vibrant community*
- aa. *they tell it like it is.*
- bb. *creativity*
- cc. *Their ancestry*
- dd. *Not sure, don't have one*
- ee. *sense of humor, friendliness, imagination, mix of people*
- ff. *they contain multitudes.*
- gg. *The variety*
- hh. *Canal district*
- ii. *the population of peaceful, fun, and creatives of all kinds*
- jj. *their diversity*
- kk. *The warm, friendly, and welcoming crowd*
- ll. *Their loyalty to the town*
- mm. *This assumes that there's PEOPLE who are all the same in this town and that an overarching shared quality exists amongst them. I don't think that would be an accurate reflection of the myriad types and personalities of people who reside here.*
- nn. *Their creative ideas of living, tenacity and fortitude.*
- oo. *there are so many different vibes in Turners Falls*

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### 3. Please fill in the following prompt: **My favorite place in Turners Falls is:**

- a. Is near the Connecticut River and wildlife
- b. The canal; Rail Trail
- c. The falls/bridge
- d. Avenue A
- e. The river and the canal; the main drag
- f. The rail trail
- g. Unity Park, especially the community garden
- h. Riverfront; Franklin County Tech School
- i. The viewing room in the fish ladder where you can see the lampreys; the skate park
- j. Avenue A
- k. Connecticut River - we live on a peninsula, river curves around Turners Falls like the Mississippi River embraces New Orleans
- l. Unity Skate Park, the Fishway, and the Shea Theater
- m. The bike path, with factories, canal, woods, the cove on the river, Avenue A's architecture - Bricks, bricks, bricks
- n. Shea Theater
- o. Peskeompskut Park; the bike path; the river
- p. The pedestrian bridge over the canal near the Montague-Gill Bridge
- q. Great Falls Discovery Center and "The Patch"
- r. Unity Park on a warm Saturday morning
- s. Oakman Street; Gully down to the golf course; that's where my grandparents built their house in the '50s and where I spent my childhood
- t. The river
- u. Barton's Cove; the river areas; both canal and natural river bed; the area behind Discovery Center, overlooking canal
- v. "Rock, Paper, Scissors" Sculpture at corner of 3rd St and Avenue A
- w. The canal district in all its historic glory and ruin; Avenue A and its flowers and brick; the Shea and it's music; bridges everywhere; Unity Park; the Riverfront
- x. Bike path along the river/canal behind the Discovery Center
- y. Community garden on L Street
- z. *I love being by moving water, and being able to walk or bike along the river and canal, it is so lovely. I especially like the Great Falls Discovery Center; it is like a community center.*
- aa. *Warm months: bike path, Unity Park, and Harvey's Restaurant*
- bb. *Cold months: Shea Theater*
- cc. *Anytime: Upper Bend, Voo (eateries)*
- dd. *Unity Park*
- ee. *Barton's Cove*
- ff. *It's past*
- gg. *Don't have one*
- hh. *the river*
- ii. *Unity Park*

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*jj. Bike path*

*kk. The dam*

*ll. The Shea Theater and all the nice areas surrounding it*

*mm. on the bicycle bridge over the Connecticut River in Montague City*

*nn. The canal area*

*oo. Bike Path, Brick & Feather Brewery*

*pp. Rock Dam*

*qq. The fish ladder*

*rr. The Strathmore Mill buildings that are set to be demolished should be central in this mural.*

*ss. Unity Park, Shea Theater, community garden and the bike trail.*

*tt. bike path*

### 4. Please fill in the following prompt: **When people learn I live in Turners Falls, they often think... but the truth is:**

- a. They often think it is disconnected from the valley but it's very active
- b. The people probably think there's not a lot of cultural life since it is a small town but we are actually packed with it
- c. They think I am lucky
- d. On the upswing, cool place; I'm lucky
- e. It's a gritty place but it's a working-class town with mostly honest folks who take pride in what they do and have
- f. Why? Nothing happens there, but the truth is it's a vibrant happening place!
- g. A small town with nothing going on, but it's really a vibrant community with people from different backgrounds and many different events and things to offer
- h. We are poor - but we are rich in spirit
- i. They think it's a place past its prime, but it is actually a place that is finding a new identity that embraces the past indigenous population, functioning communes, etc. and also looks to the arts and creativity for its future
- j. The truth is that they live in the Town of Montague! (The Town of Montague is made up of 5 villages, including: Turners Falls, Millers Falls, Lake Pleasant, Montague Center, and Montague City)
- k. They think it is trash, poor, crime, but truth is creative, beautiful, land, interesting people
- l. People used to think it was sketchy or run down but now the reputation is that it is a cool and interesting place
- m. They think I live in the country but the truth is I live in a vibrant community that is upper - class, creative
- n. It's that nice/great but it took work to get to this point. Community involvement, town officials/staff working hard
- o. Think that where I live is more interesting than where they live; is hip, cool, funky; is too gritty for them, but cares for itself and is prospering
- p. Small town with nothing of redeeming value, but there's more here than people realize and they are amazed when they see it; it got a great feel; a sense of place

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- q. Looks like a nice place, but a lot of people are struggling
  - r. That it's a nice place, there is a never a but. The truth is that the old timers who talk about "but the truth is" it's now a poor place; new comers like it always
  - s. I am so lucky and they are right!
  - t. It's a vibrant community, but there is a lot more work to be done to help the local economy
  - u. Often, they don't know about it at all, but it is a town worth knowing more about
  - v. That it's an arts town, but it's a people/everyone town
  - w. It's a town by itself but it only one of 5 villages that make up Montague, each with its own identity
  - x. Often think it's a depressed place but its full of resilient strong and creative people, locals and newbies
5. Please fill in the following prompt: **In 10 years, what will be different about Turners Falls? Will this be a positive change or a troubling one?**
- a. There won't be enough affordable housing and a greater wealth divide and disparity between new comers and long-time residents. This will be negative
  - b. I hope the trend of higher housing prices doesn't continue, but if it does, not positive because less people can stay or afford
  - c. The name, would be a positive change
  - d. Very tight housing, less affordable; good if move derelict housing is rehabbed but bad for economically challenged artists, families, etc.
  - e. More expensive; this is troubling; the divide between rich and poor; solar power or hydro-power - positive
  - f. We will have new housing and library and community spaces - positive
  - g. I'm afraid that it will be more gentrified and more divided between rich and poor, and long-time residents and newcomers
  - h. A lot of population will be very old; might have a lot less people if young people are not staying or moving here
  - i. Continue with positive changes with more social resilience and more community building, more civic pride
  - j. Remembering its industrial site of its architecture
  - k. A strong retail economy will emerge more, more choices close to home - a good thing
  - l. We will still have the name, but I think we will be known as a creative oasis
  - m. Might not be affordable - not a good thing
  - n. Housing prices that will be bad; everyone will want to move here since we are great
  - o. I hope a name change to "Great Falls"; the library; the dam would be gone; the wooden loss like between 2nd and 3rd Street; would be mini parks
  - p. It will be integrated with the other 4 villages
  - q. It will have a brilliant international reputation - positive
  - r. Less affordable housing; attracting more young people and more diverse population

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- s. Paper mills will be gone, a sad loss but new possibilities
  - t. Montague will take over the 5 villages
  - u. Positive; much the same as now
  - v. We will have a new elementary school - good; we may have more out of towners buy our large houses and then not have kids or not send their kids to the local schools - bad
  - w. We will have 3 new bridges by the paper mills - good; we will have the paper mill demolished - good; we will have housing built where the Farren hospital used to be - good
  - x. Environment in better shape; more native plants
  - y. Positive, Turners has been growing since we moved here 20 years ago
6. Please fill in the following prompt: **In 10 years, what will be the same about Turners Falls? Is this a good thing?**
- a. Caring residents, the river is a constant
  - b. The 19th century brick architecture - a good thing; the town values our architectural treasures
  - c. The Montague Reporter - a great thing
  - d. The river will always embrace us - very cool
  - e. Will still be struggling with businesses open and closings but less than today
  - f. Sense of community will still be strong
  - g. The river - very positive
  - h. It'll still be very beautiful
  - i. Same great nature; some good folks
  - j. Creative population
  - k. Kids riding bikes in the street at night - both good and night
  - l. A moving and creative image of artists in all of the swan songs of life
  - m. The same beauty; walkable town; arts
  - n. The river
  - o. Small town feel; strong sense of community
  - p. Our connection to nature, wildlife, history including indigenous history
  - q. There will still be dog crap and nip bottles sadly not a good thing
  - r. The landscaped Avenue A
  - s. Main Street will look pretty much the same
  - t. People will leave and others will bring new life
7. Please fill in the following prompt: **Thinking about the kids in Turners Falls today: what part of Turners Falls past is important for them to know? What hope/dream do you have for them in the future?**
- a. Dinosaurs and mud balls, working class; immigrant mill workers; hope for a dynamic and diverse public life, feeling a part of a community that has resources that are shared



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- b. The history of the town, the massacre and how the next generation need to create a world that's inclusive; that they won't need to leave to find good paying jobs
  - c. Indigenous peoples; enough work opportunities in the area so they can stay
  - d. The mills, farming; hope they want to stay
  - e. A good education
  - f. Important to know changes came about from people organizing, i.e. skate park, trash cans on the Avenue, community garden, farmers market; know that there is a place for them to be involved if they want to
  - g. Show the perseverance of an underdog
  - h. Creativity thrives here
  - i. Unity Park; hope that they grow up full of joy
  - j. They will have better schools
  - k. It's indigenous history
  - l. That we were underwater for 10,000 years; to continue to vote for welfare of all
  - m. Turners Falls past - important for kids to know about King Philip's War and the massacre on the river and the meaning it has for contemporary people
  - n. The history of the town, efforts generation before them have made to make Turners Falls what it is now; I hope there continues to be a strong sense of community; that there is opportunities for them to find their place
  - o. That we once supplied paper to the entire country, indigenous history; hope for continued growth
  - p. Industrial history; they will be able to stay; a caring community and be able to find a way to find a way to support themselves here
  - q. The indigenous history of the area, the creation of the town as an industrial center; a connection to the history but their own identity as well; also, a swimming hole in town
  - r. I want kids to know the river was flowing freely; hope that kids care for the river
  - s. Town history is important; hope they don't have to leave to find success
  - t. Who was here; unity
  - u. Love, prosperity, community
  - v. Hope they have affordable places to live in town, have a good means of employment, and fully a sense of inclusion belonging in the community
8. Please fill in the following prompt: **Is there a person in the community you would like to honor/feature on this mural? If so, who and why?**
- a. Frank Abbondanzio; the long-time Town Administrator whose vision made so much possible; his red hair and red handle bar mustache
  - b. Suzanne Lomanto; RiverCulture Program Director, she does a lot to bring vibrancy to the town
  - c. Roberta Porter; Gill Montague Council on Aging Director
  - d. Farmworkers- they are invisible but do essential work
  - e. Sam Lovejoy
  - f. Put animals on mural; mini - the cat; hank (Jack and Eileen's dog)

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- g. Danny Monster Cruz; and also, other wheelchair users who used to live in town and the history of making the sidewalks more accessible to them
- h. One of the indigenous leaders
- i. No one person; perhaps a bald eagle
- j. Its strength is its cooperative nature, its collectivity; no one person can take credit
- k. No single person comes to mind; it's really a sense of a community I think of
- l. King Philip, John Kerry
- m. Danny Monster Cruz
- n. Our George Bush - not the president
- o. Water Kostonski
- p. Frank Abbondanzio
- q. Brian (the Wizard)
- r. *there are so many people who have been important over the centuries, but let's honor those workers many of them immigrants who spent their anonymous lives in the factories. And the many Indigenous peoples who tended the land here before they came and built the factories. That being said, having something beautiful, a design that is more abstract than realistic, would be wonderful.*
- s. *A historical figure from a Native American tribe that used to live here before the massacre. Something life-affirming and beautiful and pays homage to the legacy of the land while ultimately inspiring a peaceful and unified future.*
- t. *1942 state Champs. They best represent the history and community glue*
- u. *There isn't one*
- v. *n/a*
- w. *Nipmuc people*
- x. *Brian (the Wizard) McCue is a longtime local resident who supports performing arts in a big way and is part of a group that used to own the Shea theater and Cutlery Building. He owns a business named Renaissance Painters which is worth note. His story is very interesting, and worth exploring further. There are historic photos that include him currently hanging in the Shea with various performers and groups. I think his curious moustache and whimsical stary gaze would make an excellent subject to include on the wall along with a performing arts and river theme.*
- y. *Recently retired Town Clerk, Deb Bourbeau, for years of service working at Town Hall*
- z. *George Bush for his dedication and devotion to the youth of Montague (\*not the former president)*
- aa. *I don't think this mural should include any one recognizable person or people from the local community. To be a mural \*for the community\* and to have lasting impact it might be better to have generic artwork and people. For example, let's not put an image of Monte up there.*
- bb. *Women (homemakers) the "women" behind the scenes. Native, African, Polish and Irish American and others, working in the garden, doing house repairs, feeding the family, having kids etc.*

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- cc. *Turners falls high school girls' softball. They have repeatedly won championships over many years. Let's honor our young women for a change.*
- dd. *None*

### *Other comments from online survey*

- a. *I'd love to see botanical elements - native plants and animals - connection to Indigenous people - the words Great Falls*
- b. *A mural depicting the power canal in its heyday, complete with all the mills.*
- c. *please consider that this is civic space to celebrate mainly performing arts*
- d. *The mural should include the history of Montague including the factories and their workers, Farren Hospital,*
- e. *I would love to see a mural that reflects local heritage (the soon to be demolished mill complex) or local nature, like the many distinctive fish and eels that swim through the fish ladder, rather than portraits of specific individuals*
- f. *Women have had a powerful influence in the evolution of Turners Falls and are often underrepresented in history, it would be amazing to see a lasting impression of their work, struggle and play. A Mural that gives a strong message of inclusion. Growing up in the 80's & 90's Turners was a rough place, women died, so it would be great to see the evolution of place and attitudes towards minorities in a mural.*
- g. *make it cool*

### *Comments from the Montague Historical Commission:*

*The Montague Historical Commission wishes to express our support for the mural project slated for the currently bare wall of the Shea Theater. We strongly urge the Mural Planning Committee to ensure that the image(s) depicted respect the character and historic importance of downtown Turners Falls.*

**Community Poem About Turners Falls** (Community Input Session attendees were asked to write a few lines of their own on provided post-its, describing Turners Falls with sounds, sights, smells, tastes, activities. The post-its were collected to create the following poem. The poem was read aloud by Shea Mural Steering Group member Richie Richardson at the end of the input session):

I am from walking the river every single day in all seasons, I am from crumbling factories and gushing water

I am from where indigenous people walked for 10,000 years

I am from just above the river, from friendly neighborhood where people share pants more often than cookies

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Trash into treasures; bugs, rocks and grasses along the shore line

Mowed grass and park sounds; kids splashing in the fountain, swings squeaking at a constant pace

Where I am, in my youth, I saw dioramas of Indians in the prairie and I said I must go there. I sought out the company of students, who came to my home town from foreign lands to study; dreamed of going to these places because they feel so familiar

Brick and flowers, mulberry and apples trees; water, water, water; eagles, fish and fowl

I am from morning birds chirping and coffee brewing from the sound of my alarm clock and car engines running. Time to go to work/school! Get up and get out

Bald eagles and vultures flying in the opposing circles on river falls up drafts of misty air

I am from a place that is brave and honest

Apartment building full of neighbors, family, New England crazy

The opening and closing streams of restaurants on the avenue

I am from downtown; I am from Father Fitchburg; I am from the brick buildings; I am from the half hill

Bike my troubles gone, river takes care of it all, more pizza party

The ancient paths that traverse; great fall fold millennia of stones of hope and sorrow

Wake me with thy sounds mixed with rumbling river cold eagle stream

Motorcycle gas and oil smells drifting over the skateboarders resting watching kids with scooters taking turns

I'm from the bend in the river nestled in the hills, before the water tumbles over the edge. I'm from walking the streets and seeing familiar faces. I'm from sitting still, feeling the breeze and seeing the life blossom around me

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I am from the sand paths the river caves under forgotten cellars the dog chasing sticks, local peaches, wild blueberries, the long bicycle ride, music heard from a distance, an old decaying diner the lost shopping cart

I'm from night time walks to watch the water flow over the dam; shopping carts congregating like cows

I'm from a long line of mistakes and corrections

Long travels over many years, the road continued to call, found a home and happy tears; right here in Turners Falls

There is a river – hugged place, where long ago folks gather to clear debris from a hurricane