

# Montague Planning Board

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**December 22, 2020 6:30 PM**

*Meeting held remotely in accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, § 20, relating to the 2020 novel Coronavirus outbreak emergency*

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Ron Sicard (Chair), George Cook, Elizabeth Irving, Matt Lord.

**Absent:** Bob Obear, Fred Bowman

**Town of Montague:** Walter Ramsey (Planner), Suzanne LoManto

**6:30pm** *Meeting is opened by Ron Sicard, Chair. ROLL CALL*

**6:31pm** *MOTION by RS to accept the meeting minutes November 24, 2020. Seconded by GC. VOTE: GC (AYE), EI (AYE), ML(AYE), RS(AYE). MOTION PASSES.*

**6:32pm Subdivision Approval Not Required (ANR) #2020-05, filed by Town of Montague Selectboard** to subdivide 128 Turners Falls Road (site of new Public Works Facility) into two lots. Property is identified as Assessor's Map 21 Lot 5. George Cooke recused himself because his employer prepared the survey.

Planner: The final ANR subdivides the municipal lot into two lots. Lot 1 is the highway garage 8.37 acres with frontage 150 feet on Turners Falls Road. Lot Two is 15.5 acres with 288 feet of frontage on Turners Falls Road. The move lined several times because there is "multiple interests at play" The DPW would like to retain a 100 buffer of the area and potential expansion area for sheds. They were able to maximize frontage for Lot 2. There is an understanding that permission has been granted by the police chief for the DPW to build a secondary access road off of Turnpike Road on police property, if needed in the future.

All parties in agreement of the plan. Frontage retains as much potential usage as possible. Water and sewage access off of Turnpike Road. No natural heritage restrictions. EI asks if there are wetlands. (no)

*MOTION by R. Sicard to endorse Subdivision Approval Not Required (ANR) #2020-05, filed by Town of Montague Selectboard to subdivide 128 Turners Falls Road into two lots. Property is identified as Assessor's Map 21 Lot 5 with a notation that RS may sign on behalf of the Board. Seconded by M. Lord. VOTE: EI (AYE), ML (AYE), RS (AYE). MOTION PASSES.*

G. Cooke rejoins the meeting.

## **Planner Report**

- Montague's participation in the Downtown Recovery Planning Program

Planner gives an overview of the State COVID recovery program which will provide a consultant to work with community stakeholders to make a recovery plan. Emphasis is on implementable short term ideas.

Participation will set the Town up for emergency relief grants; a good way to synthesize our recovery approach, engage the public and build off of downtown recovery work we started a year ago- right before COVID. Assistant Planner: The application was easy- quick implemented with a May 31, 2021 deadline for completion. The Town asked to identify 3 short and 3 longer term plans which were: 1.) Fragmentation of partnership in the TF Cultural District, 2.) Identification of placemaking and public art

goals, 3.) District Branding, 4.) Parking Management Plan, 5.) Form-based code. Process will likely involve a convening of stakeholders from the arts, business, restaurant, nonprofit, and education sectors to brainstorm on our position, and the identity of Turners Falls, frame a set of goals, establish a 5 year action plan to develop and brand a unique sense of place.

Planner: Our businesses have been in “reaction mode” this year, and many new programs have been introduced, which we would like to utilize effectively.

EI asks for a definition of “placemaking” Assistant Planner responds that it is the creation of a “unique sense of place” – care taken to lay out public art, amenities and infrastructure.

- Review and consider guidelines for planned Signage Incentive Program for the Turners Falls Cultural District. Planner describes the Department’s efforts to improve downtown signage. It’s a good time to introduce this incentive program, as a tool to support downtown businesses. Assistant Planner describes the thinking behind the program, which works to remove obstacles for professional signs by providing guidance for building owners and tenants, and up to \$250 for a sign, graphic design or window decal. The hope is that the signs on Avenue A would be similar in scale and quality, but still maintain individual business identity. The program does not cover brackets, which are the responsibility of the building owner. Details/ guidelines about participation are consistent with zoning bylaws and listed in the program.

EI comments that she has seen even very commercial enterprises (ie. Dunkin Donuts in Haydenville) using smaller wood signs, as a trend. Assistant Planner agrees, and brings up the new Swanson’s Fabric sign which was hand painted by a new artist in the Cultural District.

Planner: An incentive program is preferred because we will see changes more quickly than regulatory (zoning) changes. The program could expand Montague -wide in the future, if proven successful. Project expected to roll out this Spring and the Department will provide a status report at 6, 12, and 18 months.

- Briefing on Firstlight’s Amended License Application filing to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The Town has a period to comment on the license application both to FRCOG and the State. The State issues a 401 water quality certificate. It’s our chance to influence on the State level. These are the concerns: Improvements to some access points, increased flows. No improvements to rock dam, modest improvements to TF dam access, Poplar Street may be undersized, and the Cabot Camp buildings will remain boarded, less than \$500,000 is proposed toward recreational improvements in Montague. The proposed improvements would happen in the first 3 years of the license, after which the boat-able flows start. The Planning Board advocated that the department draft up with a prioritized list for the negotiations. Planner was encouraged to coordinate this list with other affected municipalities to see if there is common ground. Planner reports that a stakeholder coalition is being re-assembles after a two year hiatus.

- *Items Not Anticipated:* 500 Avenue A RFP results

No proposals were received. There were multiple reasons why people didn’t submit; the Select Board will need to consider advancing a Phase II environmental assessment. The Planner is going to recommend that the Town does an assessment to figure the unknowns and recoup the money in the sale of the property.

Planner lets the Board know that the proposed improvements would happen in the first 3 years of the license, after which the boat-able flows start.

*MOTION by EI to ADJURN. SECONDED by GC VOTE: FB(AYE), GC (AYE), EI(AYE), ML(AYE), RS (AYE). Meeting is adjourned*

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_