

Boston/
New England

FARREN HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT

Montague, Massachusetts

Technical Assistance Panel
March 10, 2026

About

Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute. It is supported by more than 45,000 members in 84 countries representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI members are involved in all aspects of the development, land use, and urban planning process, and members have access to the global research and resources of the oldest and largest network of cross-disciplinary real estate and land use experts in the world. Local members lead ULI's efforts and engage public and private sector leaders to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and influence meaningful strategic action in the pursuit of ULI's mission.

ULI Boston/New England

The Boston/New England District Council of ULI serves the six New England states and has over 1,200 members. As a preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI Boston/New England facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local and regional leaders and policymakers dedicated to creating better places.

Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges that benefit from the pro bono recommendations provided by the TAP members.

A TAP consists of a group of diverse professionals with expertise in the issues presented in the sponsor's application. The panel spends one to two days visiting and analyzing existing conditions, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic, actionable recommendations to advance initiatives consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

An independent study by Rivera Consulting surveyed municipalities that received assistance from the TAP programs and reported a positive impact of the TAP process on communities. Eighty-two percent of participating municipalities said their behavior and approach to municipal planning and economic development strategies were affected; 67% said there were increased municipal investments related to the stated goals and recommendations of their TAP report; And 62% said at least one key developable asset addressed in their TAP report had been redeveloped, consistent with ULI Boston/New England recommendations. Learn more at: https://boston.uli.org

Cover photo: The former Farren Hospital site. (ULI)

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

ULI and the TAP Process

Provides an overview of ULI's District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) and includes a list of the panel members and stakeholders who took part in the information-gathering sessions.

Purpose of the TAP and Project Background

Chapter provides a brief synopsis of the TAP's purpose, including the questions the sponsor posed to help identify solutions. It also provides a snapshot of the Town of Montague, an overview of the study area, and the process by which the panelists arrived at their conclusions.

Stakeholder Input

This section provides insight into what stakeholders would like included in the redevelopment of the Farren site, including the creation of a village center, housing of all types, and architecture that is consistent with the existing neighborhood.

Assets & Opportunities

This section identifies factors that could contribute to a successful redevelopment of the site, including a receptive community, existing power, water, and sewer infrastructure, and a shovel-ready site.

Challenges

This section outlines potential problems with redeveloping the site, including competing goals and the economics of new construction in Franklin County.

Recommendations

Panelists answer the town's questions and present a potential redevelopment scenario for the site.

Funding Resources

Provides a list of potential funding sources that could aid in the redevelopment of the site.



The former Farren Hospital site.

ULI and the TAP Process

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Its mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, the Institute has grown to over 45,000 members, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI membership includes developers, architects, planners, lawyers, bankers, economic development professionals, and other related fields.

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The Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP)

MHP is a public nonprofit affordable housing organization that works in concert with the Governor and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to increase the supply of affordable housing in Massachusetts. Learn more at: https://www.mhp.net

Panel Members

ULI Boston/New England assembled a volunteer group of members with diverse skills and expertise to assist the Town of Montague with this TAP.



Panelists tour the hospital site and the surrounding areas.

Chair

Michael Fergus, Senior Project Manager, CBRE

Panelists

Andrew Arbaugh, Landscape Architect/ Principal, Copley Wolff Design Group

Mark Mascia, CEO, Collaborative RED

Emma McGurren, Associate Program Manager, Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP)

Ben Murphy, VP of Real Estate, MassDevelopment

David Reed, Founder/Principal, SustainMobility

ULI Staff

Michelle Landers, Executive Director

TAP Writer: Mike Hoban, Principal, Hoban Communications

Stakeholders

The TAP also benefited from the participation of multiple stakeholders, including representatives from the Town of Montague, developers, business owners, and residents.
(R) Denotes Resident

Jessica Atwood, Planning Director, Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Kristi Bodin, Farren Rezoning Working Group Member (R)

Andrew (AJ) Bresciano, VP/Commercial Loan Officer, Greenfield Savings Bank

Colleen Descavich, Farren Rezoning Working Group Member/Farren Commercial Building Owner

Ariel Elan, Chair, Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) (R)

Veaceslav Falceanu, Co-Executive Director, First Generation Companies

Gina Govoni, Executive Director, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority

Arthur Haskins, Director of Real Estate & Investment Operations, Stillwater Commercial & Residential Property Services

David Jensen, Retired Montague Building Commissioner/Current ZBA Member

Bill Ketchen, Building Commissioner, Town of Montague

Igor Komerzan, Co-Executive Director, First Generation Companies

Alyssa Larose, Housing Development Director, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority

Chris Nolan-Zeller, Assistant Town Administrator, Town of Montague

Bob Obear, President, Obear Construction/ Principal, Pioneer Valley Redevelopers

Sean O'Donnell, Community Development & Planning Coordinator, Westmass Area Development Corporation

Walter Ramsey, Town Administrator, Town of Montague

Ward Smith, Professional Wetland Scientist, Wendell Wetland Services

Robert J. Steinberg, Chair, Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) (R)

Adam Toci, Town Assessor, Town of Montague

Kimberly Williams, Business Owner of JaDuke Inc. & EDIC Member

Purpose of the TAP and Background

The Town of Montague engaged ULI Boston/New England to provide guidance on a redevelopment strategy for the former Farren Hospital site in the Montague City village, emphasizing a balance of economic and community goals. ULI Boston/New England previously conducted a TAP for the Town in 2010, which focused on a revitalization strategy for the 10-building Strathmore Mill Complex.

Following the demolition of the hospital buildings in 2023, the property owners donated the site to the Town. The town then worked closely with MHP's Complete Neighborhood Partnerships program to develop a vision plan for a new village center at the site. In October of 2025, the Montague Town Meeting approved the proposed zoning amendments, map changes, and declared the parcels surplus property. The Town of Montague will soon be issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for redeveloping the site and asked the panelists to consider the following questions in their analysis:

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

Town of Montague Snapshot

The Town of Montague covers 31.5 square miles (including water) in the Upper Pioneer Valley of Franklin County, featuring rolling hills, fertile farmland, historic mills, and residential villages. Situated along the eastern bank of the Connecticut River, the town is bordered by Greenfield to the west, Deerfield and Sunderland to the south, and Wendell and Erving to the east and northeast. The town comprises five historic villages –Turners Falls, Montague City, Millers Falls, Montague Center, and Lake Pleasant.

History and Background – Montague was once part of the traditional homelands of the Sokoki/Squaqheag, Pocumtuck, and Nipmuc Tribes, who inhabited the area for 10,000 years. The area was first settled by Europeans in 1715 and incorporated as a town in 1754. Montague City was settled by industrious German immigrants in 1792. Montague transformed from a rural farming community into a significant 19th-century industrial and lumbering hub, driven by waterpower from the Connecticut River, the construction of the Upper Locks and Canal in Turners Falls, and the Connecticut River Railroad. Key industries included pulp and paper, cutlery, fishing tackle (including Montague Rod & Reel in Montague City), and tool manufacturing, with the industrial center eventually shifting from Montague Center to the planned mill town of Turners Falls.

The decline of industry in the latter half of the 20th century led to increased residential and suburban growth in the town. Today, hydropower (FirstLight and Eversource) is the largest industry in the Town of Montague and generates a significant portion of the town's commercial tax revenue. The local economy is also propelled by precision manufacturing, food production, healthcare, agriculture & forestry, and government and educational services (Gill-Montague Regional School District and Franklin County Technical School), which provide substantial employment. Residents also commute to nearby towns for work, with significant employment destinations including Greenfield (16.1% of residents), Montague (13.8%), Deerfield (6.1%), and Amherst (6%). UMass Amherst is a major employer of Montague residents.

Recognized as one of New England's premier outdoor recreation spots, Montague and other towns in the Pioneer Valley offer skiing, canoeing, hiking, and biking. Turners Falls is a quintessential New England downtown with an arts focus that draws visitors from the surrounding towns and colleges, so there is very little available retail/restaurant space. (Prior to the site tour, panelists observed what appeared to be empty retail storefronts, but were informed that many of the buildings that previously served as retail spaces have been converted to residential use.) Notable destinations in Montague include the Montague Bookmill, Shea Theater Arts Center, Montague Retreat Center, DCR Great Falls



The area is known for its outdoor recreational opportunities.

Discovery, DCR Canalside Rail Trail, Robert Frost Trail, and the Franklin County Bikeway.

Demographic Data – According to the American Community Survey, Montague's population was last recorded at 8,501 in 2023, with nearly 89% of residents identifying as white. The median household income for the Town was listed as $72,344, consistent with the rest of Franklin County but about two-thirds of Massachusetts's median household income of $101,341. The town has a poverty rate of 10.3% and is home to environmental justice populations, including many low-income residents in Turners Falls and Montague City, the neighborhood surrounding the Farren parcels.

Approximately 62% of the housing units are owner-occupied. According to Zillow, the average home value as of February 2026 is $389,072, virtually unchanged from last year but up from $283,306 in February of 2021. Apartments for rent are scarce in Montague, with only four options listed on Zillow as of April 1, 2026 (Studios $1,200-$1,600; 2-Beds $2,200-$2,400).

The Study Area

The Farren Memorial Hospital was originally constructed in 1902, with additions built in the 1950s and 1960s. Farren Memorial Hospital operated as a general care facility until 1988, and was converted to a long-term rehabilitation care facility, Farren Care Center, in 1990. When it closed in 2020, the facility employed about 135 full-time staff. The buildings were razed in 2023, and the owners donated the site to the town.

The site is bordered by Cabot St. on the left and Farren St. on the right and comprises three town-owned parcels. The largest, where the hospital buildings once stood at 330-340 Montague City Rd, is 7.3 acres; the parcel that houses the former administrative building at 356 Montague City Rd is 0.75 acres; and the asphalt parking lot across the road is 0.95 acres. The site is largely flat and considered "shovel-ready." Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments were conducted on the site, and it does not require remediation.

The TAP Process

The Farren Hospital Redevelopment TAP was held on March 10, 2026. Panelists from the ULI Boston/New England District Council were greeted at the Montague Town Hall by Maureen Pollock, the town's Planning Director, Walter Ramsey, the Town Administrator, and town resident and Chair of the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC), Ariel Elan. Pollock and Ramsey provided the panelists with background and site details before the group drove to the study area.

The panel convened at the nearly 1-acre asphalt parking lot situated across from the primary parcel on Montague City Road. The parking lot runs parallel to a perennial stream, which panelists were informed may be degraded and would not impede redevelopment options. Facing the primary

parcel, panelists observed a (snow-covered) 7.3-acre, mostly level site. The property's street-facing edge features a timeworn, approximately 3-foot stone-and-mortar wall in disrepair, with two small monuments at the entranceway. The wall and monuments are expected to be removed and possibly preserved or repurposed before construction begins on the site. There is a Franklin Regional Transit Authority bus stop at the site entrance, with buses on the 32 Route running every 2 hours from 5 AM to 5 PM.

On the far left side of the site, panelists observed a separate .75-acre parcel (also owned by the town) with an unoccupied administrative building set back from the road. The building has been unoccupied for nearly a decade and poorly maintained, so it may not be suitable for redevelopment. Also visible were several storage sheds and a pavilion that had once been used for social gatherings. The tour proceeded across the street to the larger parcel, and panelists walked the perimeter closest to Farren St. to the rear of the site. Panelists observed the Cabot Generating Station, Massachusetts' largest conventional hydropower facility (62 MW), originally built in 1915, and were informed that it is a "silent abutter" with few employees. There is also an Eversource power substation adjacent to the generating station. The Connecticut River is behind the power stations. Panelists learned that Eversource, FirstLight, and DCR are supportive of the idea of extending the bike path (Canalside Rail Trail) through the redevelopment site. Panelists also learned that the surrounding neighborhood is a mixed-density residential area, composed mostly of duplex homes with several single-family homes, and includes a group home and a historic trolley barn that is largely used for storage.

Panelists returned to their vehicles and drove down Rod Shop Road and Masonic Avenue, observing a number of historic structures dating from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries lining the road. These included portions of the original Montague Rod Shop and Reel Company (which closed in 1955), the Mechanics' Lodge (chartered in 1879), and traces of the old canal system.

Upon returning to the Center, the ULI panel interviewed the stakeholders listed in the previous subsection in four separate panel discussions. The panelists then engaged in an intensive, closed-door charrette to develop recommendations based on stakeholder input and research conducted prior to the discussions. That evening, panelists presented their observations and recommendations to Montague's Select Board in an open public forum (which drew 50-60 people) at the Shea Theater Arts Center. Montague Community Television recorded the session and it can be viewed here.



Panelists studied the site in relation to the surrounding built and natural environment.

Stakeholder Input

Former Community Hospital has Deep Ties to Montague Identity

The former Farren Hospital site holds historical and deep sentimental value for the residents of Montague. Residents would like to see any redevelopment of the site consider the creation of a village center to embrace the neighborhood's local identity. There is also a strong desire to see the village center include amenities such as a café, coffee shop, and possibly a childcare center.

Bike Path Connection

Residents want the DCR Canalside Rail Trail connections made safer, particularly at the intersections where bicyclists and pedestrians cross Montague City Road. While the bike path is an asset, stakeholders feel it is disconnected at the Farren site, and the connection between the two sides of the site lacks wayfinding and signage to ease that disconnect. Incorporating an improved bike path into the redeveloped site could boost local ridership and tourism to the bike path and the town by providing a modern, seamless connection for residents and visitors.

Need for Housing

Residents affirmed the need for housing across the spectrum – affordable, market-rate, workforce, senior, and single-family housing.

Economics

Residents and developers acknowledge that aligning redevelopment aspirations with existing economic conditions will present challenges.

Architectural Consistency

Residents expressed a strong desire for the redevelopment to be consistent with the existing architecture of the Montague City Village area. However, the zoning amendments adopted at the January town meeting will allow for increased height at the redevelopment site.



An existing building on the hospital site.

Community Engagement

Shovel-Ready Site

The site is largely level and clear and will not require extensive grading to prepare it for redevelopment. Additionally, Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments were conducted at the site, and it does not require remediation.

Community Receptive to Redevelopment

The town supports redeveloping the site and is open to economic development within the town and region. The recently passed flexible zoning allows for a range of redevelopment options. If multifamily housing is built on the site, there is an opportunity for long-time residents to age in place in the community as they outgrow their single-family homes, making those homes available to families. This would also increase the number of school-age children in the town, bolstering the school district's rolls, which have been declining in recent years.

Increasing the Commercial Tax Base

The former hospital site has generated no tax revenue since being transferred to town ownership. Redevelopment presents an opportunity to bolster the commercial tax base.

Bike Path Access

The Canalside Rail Trail is accessible from either side of the site.

Access to Turners Falls

The site is in close proximity (less than two miles) to Turners Falls, the largest of Montague's five villages, and the town's commercial center. Turners Falls is home to the Food City Supermarket and the Avenue A Market, as well as coffee shops and restaurants. It's also a popular tourist destination and home to the Great Falls Discovery Center and other attractions.

Transit Access

There is a bus stop located on Montague Road at the front of the site. The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) Route 32 bus stops every 2 hours from 5 AM to 5 PM on weekdays and 10 AM to 2 PM on weekends. Redevelopment of the site would significantly increase the number of residents and visitors, which could potentially increase ridership, necessitating an increase in bus frequency.

Existing Power, Water, and Sewer Infrastructure

The availability of existing power, water, and sewer infrastructure presents a significant advantage for both the town and potential developers. While these systems may require evaluation and targeted upgrades, their presence substantially reduces initial site preparation costs and accelerates the redevelopment timeline.

Existing Structures on Site

While it is likely that the sheds and pavilion will be demolished to make way for redevelopment, the former administrative building at 356 Montague City Rd. may be salvageable. Given the high cost of new construction, adaptive reuse could be a more cost-effective way to provide community or retail space at this location, since even a significant rehabilitation would likely be less expensive than ground-up construction. Should a structural integrity assessment conclude that rehabilitation is infeasible, the building could be razed to make way for a park or greenspace, allowing the corner to serve as an enhanced bike path connection and a safer pedestrian crossing.



A FRTA bus stop on the study site.

Additional Parcel

The Town could retain the asphalt parcel to provide public parking and enhance access to the bike path. The town could also include this additional parcel in the RFP, providing developers with greater site-planning flexibility.

Challenges

Site Disconnected From Commercial Center

The Farren site is not within easy walking distance of the commercial district, located approximately two miles from the Turners Falls commercial center (using the Shea Theater Arts Center as a landmark from the Farren bus stop).

Limited Bus Schedule

The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) Route 32 Bus schedule is limited, running every two hours from 5 AM to 5 PM on weekdays and from 10 AM to 2 PM on weekends.

Multiple Competing Goals for the Site

There is an imbalance between the community's desire for housing of all types (affordable, senior, market-rate, and single-family), as well as community and commercial space – and what can feasibly be developed. It should be noted that an overly prescriptive RFP can diminish developer interest and prolong or halt the redevelopment process. Conversely, an RFP with insufficient parameters may yield a project that fails to align with the town's long-term vision or community needs.

Economics Of Franklin County New Construction

While construction costs are approximately 10%–20% lower than the Greater Boston market, according to developers in the stakeholder sessions, rents for new multifamily construction are approximately 30%–50% lower, making new developments more difficult to pencil. Commercial development faces the same conundrum. Construction costs are typically in the $40–$60 range for retail space, but rents may not support these costs. Published rental rates in Montague and the surrounding communities are limited, but space listings with published rates range from $12 to $18 per square foot.

Developers conveyed that most new construction, particularly larger projects, is either high-end "luxury" housing or subsidized affordable housing. Middle-market, market-rate, unsubsidized housing generally is not financially feasible under current economic conditions. However, some smaller local developers indicated that they have successfully advanced smaller-scale multifamily projects.

Slowdown in New Construction

Increased construction costs are affecting all markets and are a primary driver of the slowdown in new construction. Additionally, banks are significantly slowing construction lending due to stricter regulatory capital requirements (such as Basel III) and increased risk aversion. While interest rates have come down, they remain elevated relative to pre-inflation levels.

Developer Limitations for Large-Scale Development

While smaller local developers have extensive experience with smaller-scale, market-rate multifamily projects, a large-scale mixed-use or multifamily development will require a larger developer capable of delivering a mixed-income or affordable housing project. Securing financing for a project of this magnitude typically requires a developer with significant experience in managing complex capital stacks, particularly when accessing Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). To qualify for LIHTC in Massachusetts, projects typically need 40 or more units, and at least 20% of the units must be reserved for persons with incomes at or below 50% of the area median income (AMI), or at least 40% of the units must be made affordable for persons with incomes at or below 60% of the AMI. In addition, the projects must be retained as low-income housing for at least 30 years, which makes them difficult to pencil.

While the Farren site offers unique advantages, such as a cleared lot, utility access, and strong municipal support, developers in stakeholder sessions indicated that securing a large-scale developer for this project may be difficult under current market conditions.

Recommendations

Question 1

Planning & Feasibility: Should the site be subdivided prior to disposition? What are the benefits and disadvantages of subdivision?

The TAP panelists recommend a strategic subdivision of the site to balance the feasibility of private development with public benefit. Dividing the large parcel into smaller components allows the project to attract a diverse range of developers, mitigate financial risk, and establish a clear community identity.

The site is large (approximately nine acres if all three parcels are included in the RFP) by Franklin County standards, but not large enough to satisfy all competing ideas for its redevelopment. The panel suggests dividing the property into three development parcels (see rendering Slide 32, 33?):

1. A smaller, linear parcel suitable for townhomes.
2. A larger, flexible parcel suitable for mixed-income multifamily housing.
3. A public amenity parcel, essentially a dedicated open space that can be utilized for community gatherings, food trucks, pop-up retail, or flexible commercial opportunities.

Streetscape Design

The panel recommends establishing cohesive streetscape design guidelines to reassert the community identity without being overly prescriptive. This will ensure that open space and public amenity requirements do not render private development infeasible.

Optimal Redevelopment: Housing

Panelists determined that the highest and best use for the site is housing, with limited flexible commercial uses allocated to the public amenity space. This enables low-risk retail business trials without compromising the financial feasibility of the private residential parcels.

Housing Types

Given the need for a wide range of housing in Montague and the surrounding communities, the panel recommends a mixture of townhomes (homeownership and rental) and larger-scale apartment buildings. Dividing the site into two residential parcels, one large and one small, provides the flexibility to engage multiple developers for the larger parcel and allows smaller local developers to participate in the redevelopment of the smaller parcel.

The panel recommendation for the proposed massing supports maintaining the street edge with housing that is consistent in size and height with the surrounding neighborhood (two-story units), while also allowing the height to increase as the massing transitions toward the rear of the site, possibly to three or four stories. This is consistent with the Town's updated zoning, which requires 20 units per acre for multifamily or mixed-use new construction, and 12 units per acre for two- and three-family projects. Building heights are limited to three stories on the site edges facing Cabot and Farren streets, and up to four stories in the interior.

The RFP Process

The panel recommends that the RFP process be flexible enough to allow developers to consider what is "market-feasible" by utilizing a scoring-based evaluation rather than strict mandates. This allows the Town to "elevate" preferred uses while giving developers the flexibility to propose creative, financially sound solutions.

Funding Support

Technical assistance funds from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) through the Complete Neighborhoods Partnership program are available to help Montague staff manage the complex paperwork and subdivision process.

Question 2

Implementation: If subdivision occurs, should the Town issue a single RFP for a master developer, or multiple RFPs?

The panel recommends multiple RFPs. This would allow for different scales of development and a phased approach, reducing the risk associated with a single master developer and diversifying the pool of potential respondents. This approach may also provide opportunities for local small-scale developers to participate in the redevelopment.

Potential Development Scenario

In this hypothetical model, the top edge of the smaller, linear parcel could accommodate townhouses and smaller development that would allow the town to engage local developers; the left-most parcel facing Montague City Rd. would be reserved for a park or open space; and the large parcel, constituting the majority of the site, would be dedicated to mixed-income multifamily housing to be constructed by a larger developer or developers, ensuring the feasibility of the redevelopment and provide Montague with much-needed housing; the bottom of the rendering represents public amenity space.



The panel envisioned the site as a location for new housing and public open space.

This model also creates the opportunity for the bike path (the orange line visible at the top and left-hand side of the rendering) to connect not only with the open space but to the larger town network. This also ensures that the open space will require less total acreage while providing greater community value.

The smaller thin parcel (at the top of the rendering) incorporates the bike path while allowing for smaller development and townhomes, potentially by local developers. The larger, flexible parcel accommodates a wide range of housing options and can be further subdivided to align with specific site uses or to meet prevailing economic conditions (see the chart below for an analysis of these options). At the bottom of the rendering is the public amenity space, which offers high visibility and accessibility to the bike path and Montague City Rd. This area can serve as a community gathering area, a venue for a pop-up coffee shop or beer garden and food trucks, possibly leveraging the new commercial kitchen at the nearby Masonic Temple. The area may also serve as a proving ground for small businesses if the pop-ups gain traction.

The development model below demonstrates the range of densities that could potentially deliver between 72 and 122 total housing units across the site. The varied building scales, including townhouses and multifamily apartments, achieve a density of 16 to 27 units per acre.

Potential Development Scenarios

	Measurements	GSF/ Floor	Building Count	Low				High			
				Floors	GSF	NSF	# Apts	Floors	GSF	NSF	# Apts
Apartments	60x100	6,000	2	2	24,000	19,200	13	3	36,000	28,800	20
Apartments (Bend)	60x160	9,600	2	2	38,400	30,720	21	4	76,800	61,440	41
Apartments	60x160	9,600	1	2	19,200	15,360	11	4	38,400	30,720	21
				Subtotal	81,600	65,280	45		151,200	120,960	82
				Low				High			
Townhouse	35x140	4,900	4	2	39,200	31,360	18	3	58,800	47,040	27
Townhouse	35x100	3,500	2	2	14,000	11,200	7	3	21,000	16,800	10
Townhouse	35x60	2,100	1	2	4,200	3,360	2	3	6,300	5,040	3
				Subtotal	57,400	45,920	27		86,100	68,880	40
Overall Total					**139,000 GSF**	**111,200 NSF**	**72**		**237,300 GSF**	**189,840 NSF**	**122**
Whole Site	500x390	4.5 acres			16	Units/Acre			27	Units/Acre	

Question 3

Market & Financing: What are the benefits and disadvantages of selecting a master developer for a site of this size and condition in Franklin County?

Advantages

A Streamlined Process

Working with a single entity simplifies the administrative process.

Design Consistency

A master developer can implement a single set of design guidelines, eliminating potential design conflicts with other parties.

Consistency Throughout Development Phases

A master developer would provide a cohesive vision for the entire site, ensuring that both infrastructure needs and development goals are integrated into a single, unified plan. However, this consistency can also be a disadvantage. Relying on the single point of view of a master planner may result in a project that looks and feels homogeneous

and is inconsistent with the architectural character of the Town of Montague.

A cohesive vision is also achievable with separate RFPs, but would require careful planning and heightened oversight by the Town. However, this path would also be augmented by MHP's technical assistance, staff expertise, and grant funding, providing external support without a master developer.

Capital and Expertise

A larger developer typically brings established consulting teams, broader experience with complex, phased projects, and deeper access to the capital required for a site of this scale.

Potential Disadvantages

Exclusion of Local Talent

A single master developer may exclude smaller, local developers from participating in the project. Local developers expressed interest in bidding on smaller-scale projects on the site, but acknowledged that the role of master developer would need to be filled by a developer with greater capacity.

Limited Developer Pool

There are few large-scale firms in the region capable of taking on a project of this magnitude, which may reduce the number of competitive bids.

Lack of Developer Interest

If larger developers are not attracted to the site, the redevelopment timeline may be extended significantly beyond what the town and its constituents are hoping for. A larger developer may also choose to delay development until economic conditions are more advantageous, potentially leaving the site vacant longer than anticipated.

Longer Timeline Equals Delayed Tax Revenue

Because the site currently generates no tax revenue, a prolonged delay in the commencement of the project represents a significant loss of potential tax revenue for the Town of Montague.

Phased Master Plan Approach

A combination of a master plan with strategic phasing can lead to the optimal long-term outcome for the Town of Montague. Using this model, the initial RFP would focus on a "Phase 1 block" while requiring a master plan for the remainder of the site. This ensures that the essential infrastructure and design standards are established early by an experienced lead entity. Once this framework is in place, subsequent, smaller RFPs can be released for the remaining parcels.



Funding Sources

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Community One Stop for Growth

The Community One Stop for Growth combines 12 of the Commonwealth's most popular community-focused economic development and housing grant programs into a single application portal and collaborative review process.

HousingWorks Infrastructure Program

The HousingWorks Infrastructure Program (HWIP) is a competitive grant open to municipalities for a variety of infrastructure projects associated with housing development. This grant program awards funds based on the project's nexus with housing, transportation, infrastructure, and community development needs.

MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program

Funds predevelopment, planning, and site preparation activities and helps municipalities and nonprofits accelerate private-sector investment through grants for studies, permitting, and infrastructure, with grants typically ranging from $50,000 to $500,000.



The panel presented its recommendations to community leaders and stakeholders.

Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP)

Complete Neighborhoods Partnership – A multi-year initiative offering technical assistance and resources to help Massachusetts communities create walkable, mixed-income, and dense neighborhoods. The Town of Montague has been working with MHP and this program since 2023.

Conclusion

The most pressing need for the Town of Montague is to increase the supply of housing across all types and price points. While the panel recognizes the importance of community gathering spaces and the strong appeal of adding a community center, coffee shop, or other retail businesses to the multifamily redevelopment, the high cost of constructing new retail space relative to achievable market rents does not currently "pencil." This means the projected rental income from these commercial uses would likely be insufficient to cover the associated debt service and construction costs.

Developers in the stakeholder sessions emphasized that margins are exceptionally thin in the current economic climate, due in part to escalating construction and elevated borrowing costs. This is true not only in Franklin County but nationwide. Prospective developers are encouraged to explore all construction methodologies, including modular construction and prefabrication, to manage costs, streamline delivery, and mitigate project risk.

Mandating first-floor retail in the multifamily housing on this site would likely make the residential units less affordable. Various housing typologies, such as townhouses, flats, senior housing, and workforce housing, combined and situated to create a community setting, ensure that the town's vision for retaining existing residents and attracting new ones is realized. By expanding the residential base and meeting the need for housing, the town increases opportunities for future retail needs. Because the projected commercial rents are currently insufficient to cover costs, the resulting financial loss would need to be amortized over the entire project, which would require increasing residential rents, making the units less affordable. The fact the retail spaces in the main commercial center of Turner's Falls were converted to residential demonstrates the limits of the retail market.

To ensure the overall project remains viable and attractive to private investment, the panel recommends focusing on residential units while maintaining the flexibility of the public amenity parcel, which can be used for "pop-ups" such as a coffee shop or beer garden to test a concept's viability. If the concept succeeds, the pop-up can explore the feasibility of transitioning to brick-and-mortar in the open space in later phases of the redevelopment. The panel further recommends connecting the bike path to the surrounding community to encourage foot traffic, allowing low-risk retail options to organically expand and help forge a new identity for the town along this parcel.

Finally, the redevelopment of the Farren site must include dedicated open space in the RFP. This ensures that the community will have a permanent gathering space (possibly with a pavilion) that can accommodate both public events and private pop-ups in later phases of the redevelopment.

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