

CITY OF GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS  
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING OF FEBRUARY 25, 2026

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The Economic Committee and Community Development meeting was called to order by Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas at 8:30 AM in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall.

Economic and Development Committee Member Councillor Karen Hardern was also present. Councillor Dana Heath was absent.

Also present were Mayor Michael Nicholson, Assistant Director Amy Yuhasz, Economic Development, and City Clerk Titi Siriphan.

**I. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

There were no meeting minutes present.

**II. FIRST TIME ON THE AGENDA**

**#11773 - FY2026 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Steering Committee Recommendations.**

Assistant Director Amy Yuhasz provided a summary sheet (attached). She informed the committee that the City may apply for up to \$875,000 through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Mini-Entitlement Program for FY2026, with the application due April 21. The CDBG Steering Committee met the previous evening to review applications and recommend projects for inclusion. She noted that funds reallocated from FY2023 and FY2025 grants allow the continuation of several existing public social service programs and funding for Downtown Phase 6 – City Hall Avenue Improvements, including street lighting, curbing, sidewalks, and accessibility improvements between Connor Street and Pleasant Street.

Recommended allocations include: Gardner Community Action Committee (\$30,000), St. Paul's Episcopal Church Laundry Love Program (\$4,500), Gardner Athletic Program scholarships (approximately \$15,000 total from FY2023 and FY2025 funds), and Voices of Truth (\$15,000). She stated the total FY2026 CDBG application will be \$875,000, the maximum amount available.

Mayor Nicholson stated that these are all good projects and these are going to make a big impact on the city and is happy to see these performing.

Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas stated that she serves on the CDBG Steering Committee along with the Mayor and attended the committee meeting the previous evening. She commented that the process has been thorough and comprehensive, noting that the department and Amy Yuhasz have improved the process and ensured transparency in how funds were reallocated and communicated to applicants. Councillor Kazinskas said her questions were addressed during the committee meeting and that the reallocation of funds among projects was handled thoughtfully.

This item will remain on the agenda until the next meeting.

**III. MONTHLY WATERFORD COMMUNITY CENTER UPDATE**

Mayor Nicholson provided an update of the Waterford Community Center, attached.

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Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas stated that this is a monthly update and requested to have a written update in advance so that it can be included in the packet.

IV. **IN SUBCOMMITTEE**

**#11772 - An Ordinance to Amend the Code of the City of Gardner, Chapter 675, Thereof Entitled Zoning, to Remove Article IX, Thereof Entitled "Signs and Advertising Devices," and Move it to a New Non-Zoning Chapter to be Numbered Chapter 665.**

Mayor Nicholson informed the committee that the proposed zoning amendment to move the City's sign ordinance out of zoning and into a general ordinance to allow for greater flexibility and to be more business friendly. He noted that if the item advances from committee to the full Council, it will require a public hearing. The administration has begun speaking with business owners and other previously impacted parties to gather feedback and testimonials about issues they have experienced with the current sign regulations. Mayor Nicholson explained that the current proposal does not amend the sign ordinance itself but instead changes the process so that future amendments can be made more easily. He stated that this change would serve as the first phase, allowing for more detailed revisions in a second phase after additional input is collected.

On a motion made by Councillor Kazinskas and seconded by Councillor Karen Hardern, it was voted to recommend to the Council to adopt the ordinance, *An Ordinance to Amend the Code of the City of Gardner, Chapter 675, Thereof Entitled Zoning, to Remove Article IX, Thereof Entitled "Signs and Advertising Devices," and Move it to a New Non-Zoning Chapter to be Numbered Chapter 665.*

2 yeas, motion passes.

**#11454 - A Report on the Investigation of the Maki Park Project.**

Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas stated that Director Jason Stevens was not available due to a prior meeting he had scheduled. She noted that the status stands as it did at the last meeting.

This item will remain with the committee until project completion.

**#11746 - Upcoming Community Development Projects.**

Director Jason Stevens was not available to provide an update due to a prior meeting he had scheduled.

Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas noted that Director Stevens did provide a comprehensive overview at the last meeting.

This item will remain on the agenda.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Councillor Karen Hardern and seconded by Councillor Elizabeth Kazinskas, it was voted to adjourn at 10:00 a.m.

Summary of Applications Received for FFY2026 Funds					
Agency	Project Description	CDBG Request	FY2026 Recommendation	FY2022-23 Reallocation	FY2025 Reallocation
<b>Public Social Services - limited to 5 in the FY2026 application and 20% of the grant</b>					
Gardner Community Action Committee, Inc.	New full time Coordinator position to manage front-line emergency needs of Gardner residents seeking assistance	\$30,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$30,000.00
Gardner School Department, Athletic Program	Athletic scholarship program to cover full athletic user fees for low- and moderate-income students	\$15,000.00	\$0.00	\$9,000.00	6000
North Star Family Services, Inc.	Program staff and operating costs for Bonnie's Place emergency family shelter in Leominster - portion of the case management salary and heating oil	\$25,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Laundry Love program to pay for the costs to use washers and dryers at a local laundromat with 20-30 individuals served per month	\$4,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,500.00
Voices of Truth Corporation	Domestic violence prevention and survivor support including planning and coordination/Task Force meetings, workshops, supplies and printing, community awareness, social media, staff training, one-time utility assistance and refreshments	\$15,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$15,000.00
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>					
City of Gardner, Dept. of Community Development and Planning	Downtown Phase 6, City Hall Ave, between Connors and Pleasant Street, includes new crosswalks, sidewalks, curbing, street lighting, and accessibility improvements	\$824,624.00	\$753,764.00	\$0.00	\$70,500.00
<b>Public Facility Improvements</b>					
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Community garden improvements including masonry wall repair, drainage improvements, tree trimming, soil improvement; 3 new beds, soil and composte; composte, fertilizer and plants for exiting 27 beds; 20 dwarf fruit trees, and signage	\$50,150.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc. - <b>Application Withdrawn</b>	Purchase and installation of four automatic door openers at 268 Central St., new CT board and siding on dormers and new windows at the transitional shelter	\$31,900.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Program Administration</b>	Costs necessary for the administration of the CDBG program, including salary and fringe benefits and other items needed in support of office overhead	\$131,250.00	\$121,236.00	\$0.00	\$14,000.00
<b>Total Amount Requested - limited to five PSS projects and three other projects (admin not included)</b>		<b>\$1,127,424.00</b>	<b>\$875,000.00</b>	<b>\$9,000.00</b>	<b>\$140,000.00</b>
<b>Available Funds*</b>		<b>\$1,024,000.00</b>	<b>\$1,024,000.00</b>		
* Available funds includes \$875,000 from FY2026, \$90,000 from FY2025 School St. School pathway design, \$50,000 from Gardner Emergency Housing Mission's homelessness prevention project and \$9,000 from FY2022-23.					



**City of Gardner - *Executive Department***

**Mayor Michael J. Nicholson**

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TO: Hon. Elizabeth J. Kazinskas, Chair  
And Economic and Community Development Standing Committee  
FROM: Mayor Michael Nicholson  
DATE: February 25, 2016  
RE: February 2016 Waterford Community Center Update

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Dear Madam Chair and Councilors,

I hereby submit the following update for the work being done at the Waterford Community Center.

**LEASED/OCCUPIED SPACES:**

**Growing Places:**

As you are aware, Growing Places, LLC has an existing lease for the Kitchen area of the Community Center.

They are fully up and running in their Food Processing Center. At this location, they take produce grown by local farmers and prepare the food to be cooked later on by the various organizations they have contracts with. They also offer home delivery services for residents in the area that are SNAP/HIP eligible.

**AIB International Audit:**

Growing Places recently underwent an extensive facilities and operations audit that is nationally required for any organization who processes food that is later distributed for commercial use. This audit is conducted by the American Institute of Banking (AIB) International, Inc. to ensure compliance with the Consolidated Standards for Inspection Prerequisites and Food Safety. A minimum score of 700 is needed to pass this audit and failure results in losing the ability to distribute food processed at the center. This audit was required in order for Growing Places to be able to distribute to companies like Sodexo or Chartwell which provide cafeteria services to many local public school districts, colleges/universities, and hospitals.

Growing places passed the audit with a score of 810, well above the score needed to pass. All facilities needs that were required as part of the audit passed and were given full scores.

Congressional Visit:

On Tuesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026, Congresswoman Lori Trahan and Congressman James McGovern visited Growing Places facility at the Community Center as part of Congressman McGovern's Tour to End Hunger initiative.

During this visit, the Congressional Delegation met with employees and clients of Growing Places to discuss issues for food insecurity and access in the region. This roundtable discussion also included various state and local officials from the North Central and North Quabbin regions as well.

Need for Additional Space:

The administration of Growing Places has informed me that they are in need of additional space at the Community Center to continue their operations and are in preliminary discussions regarding this.

The first reason for this came when the new dividing wall was installed in the cafetorium area. Original plans for this construction included an 8-foot wall with a ceiling and storage space available above this ceiling. However, at the request of the former Building Commissioner, the wall designed was changed to a full floor to ceiling space with no storage space included. As such, we are working on a plan that works to meet their storage needs.

Additionally, Growing Places is looking to fully re-locate all of their operations from their current Leominster headquarters to the Community Center to concentrate all of their operations under one roof. We have begun conversations with them about the amount of space they would need and where this could be accommodated.

**Gardner Community Action Committee (CAC):**

The Gardner CAC is moving forward with their building out plans for the portion of the building that they have a signed lease for.

Clothing Pantry:

The CAC's clothing pantry build out is completed. This location will provide clothing, personal care items, and toiletries to members of the community who need them.

This space was fitted out by Eagle Scout Ryan Saner for his Eagle Scout project.

*Kitchen Construction and Build Out:*

Last year, the City Council voted to approve the CAC converting the former principal's office into a commercial kitchen.

This work is continuing with counters being installed and the stove and oven being purchased.

Additional plumbing and electrical work needs to be done still and flooring installed. This project is expected to continue through the summer to the fall.

*Food Pantry and Office Build Out:*

The CAC is also working to convert the former library area into their new food pantry space. This will triple their food pantry space compared to their existing pantry at the Pleasant Street location.

They are converting the office spaces adjacent to the former library into training offices to offer classes on resume writing, job searching, continuing education opportunities and other programs aimed at helping those who are unemployed or under employed who are looking for new economic opportunities.

**Historical Commission Achieves:**

The Gardner Historical Commission has begun to fit out their space to house their new achieve facility.

They have relocated all of the Gardner News records dating back to the 1800s to their location and have begun to bring in other artifacts from around the City.

They are also in contact with Royal Steam to obtain quotes for climate control HVAC systems in order to protect the artifacts that are collected in this space.

**SHARED/UNOCCUPIED SPACES:**

**"Trade Week:"**

During the week of March 16-20, various contractors will be going in to wrap up any lose ends on projects that have to be completed in the building.

This work includes completing the plumbing upgrades for 6 of the bathrooms in the facility, connecting the electrical work for the new mini splits installed in the two-story wing, improvements to the boiler system, and other general items on a punch list that has been made for the building.

During this “trade week” – as it has been internally referred to due to the various trades performing work in the building, Ryan Egan, who serves as the Executive Adie in my office, will be relocating to the Community Center to be on-site full-time that week while they are there to ensure property timely responses to any questions that may arise from the various contractors while the work is being performed.

### **Bathrooms:**

Work at the shared bathroom, located at the entrance to the single-story wing near the gymnasium, and the bathrooms in the two-story wing are just about completed.

New partitions were installed to ensure ADA compliance and new sinks, urinal, and toilet fixtures were installed. These fixtures still need to be fully connected to the building’s plumbing.

### **Two-Story Wing – Future Senior Center:**

The majority of the HVAC work that is planned for “trade week,” is taking place in the two-story wing in preparation for the Gardner Senior Center’s eventual re-location to the site.

Additionally, a new ramp for the door to this area of the building was installed in October of 2025 with the ramps scheduled to be installed this spring. A new “grocery store” style sliding door will be installed at this ramp in the spring, with preliminary work on this door beginning last week.

I have also asked Director Ellis to begin coordinating what colors the rooms in the senior center should be painted in order to meet State Age and Dementia Friendly requirements- warm colors (brown, red, green) vs. cold colors (white, gray, blue).

Additionally, the Senior Center coordinated a group of volunteers to move some furniture that had been collected to various portions of the location to assist in visioning out the space of the new Center.

There is no set date yet for an official move of the Senior Center.

### **Loading Dock:**

Both Growing Places and the Gardner CAC have had conversations with the Administration regarding the need for a loading dock at the facility. This would be to assist with the regular deliveries they receive from various farms and food pantries for the work they do.

While still very early on, we are in preliminary conversations with the tenants about possible locations to locate this if this project were to move forward.

**PROJECTS STILL IN CUE:**

There are a few projects for which funding has been secured but are either in their early stages or not yet begun.

**Fire Alarm System:**

The City will be utilizing \$122,000.00 from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to install a new fire alarm system at the community center.

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) first required that an air quality radon test be done of the building in order for these funds to be used and this project move forward.

The air quality test was completed and the tests came back clear with detections coming in FAR under benchmarks that are set by the Commonwealth for radon.

With this test completed, the projects is being scheduled to move forward this spring.

**Front Door Electrical Connection:**

Last year, a “grocery store” style double siding door was installed at the front entrance of the building. This door has not been connected to the building’s electrical system yet.

This work is anticipated to be done at the same time the new door of the same style is installed at the entrance to the 2-story wing.

**Other Projects Not Yet Started:**

- Electrical Service Upgrade
  - New Transformer Installation intended to double electrical capacity
    - The City is working with National Grid in ordering a transformer for the site. This is expected to have a 18-24 month lead time from ordering to delivery due to supply chain issues.
- Roof Repair
  - The City set aside \$6,000.00 from the unused bond proceeds from the construction of the new elementary school. This has been used to patch areas of the roof that have leaks as they arise.
- Floor upgrades:
  - Funding has been set aside to improve areas of the flooring in the building that are either broken or need to be filled in by the entrance areas. This project is on hold until the door replacement work is completed so that it can run in conjunction with that work.

- Front Ramp Replacement
  - The City had applied for a grant from the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) to replace the concrete ramp at the front entrance of the building. This was not awarded. The administration is looking for new ways to fund this project. The quote for this work was \$145,000.
- Solar Installation on the Roof
  - In 2022, the City Council approved the roof as surplus for the purpose of installing a solar array on the roof. Due to capacity issues, National Grid put all solar projects on hold while they work to construct and install new transmission infrastructure from Central and Western Mass to the eastern part of the state.
  - National Grid recently approved a new pilot program for “behind the meter” projects that first power a building before sending surplus electricity back into the grid. The Waterford solar array was approved for this pilot program.
  - The administration is currently working with Solect Energy to move this project forward with construction of the array expected to begin by the end of calendar year 2026.

### **BUILDING BUDGET:**

The Energy and Utilities line item for the building is currently over by (\$26,000.00). During the extreme cold period at the beginning of February, the City so heating and electrical bills exponentially higher than usual. The line had an original budget appropriation of \$80,000.00.

We will be monitoring that account to get a better idea for budgeting for next fiscal year.

There is a total of \$69,462.00 remaining in the full building budget so we should be stable for the remainder of the year. However, we will continue to monitor this moving forward.