

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE- April 29, 2022

## **CITY INVESTS OVER \$600,000 TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATHLETIC FIELDS**

*Funding Will be Used to Renovate Fields Located Between Gardner High School and Gardner Middle School*

*Attached Photo by Director of Operations and Finance Mark Hawke. Representative Zlotnik, Athletic Director Dan Fort, Gardner High School Principal Paula Bolger, GHS Varsity Baseball Coach Mike Bartkus, City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas, and Mayor Mike Nicholson stand with student athletes who will be competing on the new fields once the renovations have been completed.*

GARDNER – April 28, 2022 - In its regular meeting on March 7<sup>th</sup>, the Gardner City Council approved the last portion of funding necessary to move forward with long-proposed athletic field renovations. The \$121,905 appropriation was the last of over \$630,000 the city has earmarked for use in athletic field renovations.

Expressing his support for the project, Gardner **Mayor Michael Nicholson** stated “we’ve done a lot to invest in our schools to make sure our students have the best experiences possible. This work will benefit students in all of our schools, our recreation department, and more for a long time and I can’t wait to see our students utilizing these new improvements this fall.”

The renovations will focus on the grass playing fields located between Gardner High School and Gardner Middle School, including Stedman Softball Field. As it stands, Stedman Field is largely out of compliance with MIAA standards. Should the field continue in its current state, the status of the Gardner High Softball Program, as well as other athletic programs, would be in jeopardy.

Writing in support of the upgrades, Gardner High **Athletic Director Daniel Forte** noted “The current layout and condition of the grass fields no longer properly serve our needs in a safe or efficient manner... Our students deserve a place to play and grow that is not only safe, but also something to be proud of.”

Upon hearing the news, **Hannah Gross, a Gardner High Softball player**, stated “After missing most of my high school softball years due to Covid and an injury,

I'm so excited to be able to come back to a brand new field with dugouts and a scoreboard."

In addition to the work on the softball field, the overall project will involve re-seeding, grading, and brining the existing fields back up to regulation standards, while also adding an MIAA-compliant baseball diamond, batting cages, and practice fields for soccer, football, and marching band. Additionally, the irrigation system serving the fields, which is currently inoperable, will be repaired.

**Ayden Sparrow, a football and basketball athlete**, reflected "I am excited about the new practice field because it will help us be able to practice better without getting hurt or having to worry about the holes in the dirt. I am also excited about the new practice field because it's all full of dirt and when it gets all hot and windy it gets all in your face, so with the new one coming, in I'll be happy that we don't really have to worry about that anymore."

In a reflection of the project's broad support, the City Council voted unanimously to approve the funds.

"The ultimate return on this investment will com with the many lessons learned and memories made by our students as they utilize the athletic fields," said **City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas**. "Improving the fields will improve our students' experience, and that is a benefit to us all. I am very proud of the attention and investment that our City has given to this project."

"Extra circular activities, including sports, are an important part of the whole education experience," said **State Representative Jon Zlotnik**. "The Commonwealth in recent years has prioritized increasing investments in k-12 public schools as well as making sure the funds get to where they are most needed. I'm very pleased to see Gardner maximizing the impact of these increased funds by throwing in their own money as well to deliver the most impact."

Aside from Free Cash appropriated by the City Council, the additional funding was provided from funding received from the Commonwealth that was saved up by the Gardner Public School District over the past three years. Utilizing the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds, the District was able to build a reserve of funds received from the Commonwealth through funding received from the Student Opportunity Act and School Choice Funds.

“Without the opportunity to play sports in middle and high school, I wouldn’t be where I am today,” said **Congresswoman Lori Trahan**. “I couldn’t be happier to see the City of Gardner allocate federal funds to ensure students will have that same opportunity, and they’ll do so with the upgraded facilities they need to succeed. I’m grateful to Mayor Nicholson for investing in students’ futures and look forward to continuing our work to bring home additional investments to Gardner.”

Work on the project began in the middle of April and is expected to be completed this summer.

### **Additional Statements of Support**

I am happy for the new field because it will help us practice better and more smoothly without the bumps in the ground. There will also be less injuries from rocks and dirt because half of our field is dirt and hardly any grass. - **Cookie Leger** (Football, Basketball)

I am so excited to see the fields renovated. I have been playing soccer on them since I was in elementary school, and I am happy to see them rejuvenated for current and future Gardner athletes. -**Andy Lucier** (Soccer, Indoor Track, Outdoor Track)

Watching our facilities team take the field to where it is now has been nothing short of amazing. I am extremely excited to see the work continue and for the field turn into a true complex for our student-athletes. -**Mike Bartkus** (HS Baseball Coach)

### **Michael J. Nicholson, J.D.**

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