



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **STATE APPROVES TWO NEW VACANT STOREFRONT REVITALIZATION DISTRICTS FOR GARDNER**

*Program allows new avenue for grant funding to attract new businesses*

*(Map of Approved Districts Attached)*

June 30, 2022 – GARDNER, MA - Gardner is set to be the beneficiary of a recent action by the Commonwealth's Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC), when it voted to approve the City's application for two new Vacant Storefront Revitalization Districts.

Gardner was approved for two separate Vacant Storefront Districts, one of which will include the Timpany Boulevard Corridor and another which covers the majority of the city's downtown.

Speaking on Commonwealth's decision, **Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson** said, "This will certainly be a great program for the City to take advantage of. With the millions of dollars of private sector investment that we have seen come into these areas in the past six months alone, these programs just continue to make Gardner a more marketable place to do business."

Under this program, businesses which come to occupy previously vacant storefronts are given state tax reimbursements and city grant funding related to their start-up costs, with the aim of incentivizing them to occupy previously unused retail space. As part of agreeing to take part in this program, the Commonwealth provides up to \$10,000 in tax reimbursement related to start-up and fit out costs, while the City provides a matching local grant of \$10,000 to the business.

Adding to the Mayor's comments, **State Representative Jonathan Zlotnik** said "I am thrilled to see the City of Gardner has been approved for two vacant storefront revitalization districts. In addition to complementing the various ongoing economic development projects throughout the city, this program will help further revitalize two important commercial areas."

"The City of Gardner continues to put out the welcome mat to new businesses and the work to create a new revitalization district will help to fill the storefronts and encourage further economic growth," echoed **State Senator Anne Gobi**.

Gardner has seen a resurgence of interest in its commercial real estate in the last several months. **Jonathan Bombaci**, whose firm, Candor Real Estate, recently purchased two buildings in Gardner's downtown, was pleased with Gardner's successful application. "We are very excited about this program," said **Mr. Bombaci, president and CEO of Candor Realty and Millennium Holding Group**. "We have a number of businesses interested in coming into the downtown and this program will help them with the fit-out costs which are necessary for them to be successful. We're looking forward to filling these vacant spaces with great new businesses."

The development was similarly met with approval by current downtown business owners, including **Patti Bergstrom, the owner of The Velvet Goose and president of the Gardner Downtown Business Association- Gardner Square Two, Inc.** “Every couple of weeks people stop into my shop and say they want to open a business downtown, but the costs to start up can be overwhelming,” said Ms. Bergstrom. “We have a lot of old buildings in the downtown and it can be expensive to invest in them. This program should go a long way toward helping that.”

The program applies to all storefronts that have been vacant for a period of twelve (12) months or more. There are 34 eligible locations in the district approved for the Downtown area and an additional eight (8) eligible storefronts in the Timpany Boulevard Corridor.

The Timapny Crossroads development has seen large strides in the past few years with the opening of the 99 Restaurant, Starbucks, and most recently the Edward Jones Office of Ryan Laliberte. However, there are still some storefronts available at that locations that are eligible for funding under this program as well.

“The impact of the pandemic and rising cost of materials has made it difficult for tenants to invest in the storefronts at Timpany Crossroads,” said **Amy Fantoni, owner of Timpany Crossroads.** “It has been my goal to transform this corner of Gardner from a neglected, rundown area to an attractive shopping center welcoming new businesses and clientele to our area. We are excited to continue to grow with the city and any financial boost will give me and my tenants an opportunity to continue this venture.”

The State’s efforts to promote economic development are appreciated by local elected officials, including **City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas**, who said “I’m grateful to our State and Federal partners for recognizing the need for downtown revitalization aid throughout the Commonwealth, and even more grateful that Gardner’s two proposed Vacant Storefront Revitalization Districts were approved. The program both compliments and encourages growth in our city moving forward.”

At the meeting where the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council voted to approve Gardner’s two applications, Mayor Nicholson informed the Council that the City’s matching portions for the next two years would be funded through the funding the City received from the Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

“The economic development happening across Gardner is nothing short of impressive, and this avenue for investment will build on the progress the city has made in recent months,” said **Congresswoman Lori Trahan.** “I’m proud that funds from the American Rescue Plan will bolster the city’s participation in this program, and I applaud Mayor Nicholson for his commitment to making Gardner an even better place to live, work, and do business.”

City Officials are taking an active role to encourage business development within Gardner. The recent successful application marks the latest manifestation of those efforts, though likely not the last in the near future.

“This is a very competitive process, and the fact that we were able to get both applications approved is quite an accomplishment for the City,” said **Mayor Nicholson.** “The City had previously applied for this designation three times under the previous administration and was unsuccessful in our previous attempts. I would like to thank our Director of Community

Development and Planning Trevor Beauregard, City Economic Development Coordinator Jessica DeRoy and our City Engineer Rob Oliva for assisting in this application process.”

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