

# Thank

# You



## Mayor Michael Nicholson

Mayor Michael Nicholson Updates the City of Gardner every Friday on the City of Gardner YouTube page. We also carry the Audio of the updates here.

### An Interview with Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson - What's Next?

Gardner Magazine interviewed Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson on Monday, November 21, 2022. The graphic at left consists of various screenshots from the Mayor's Updates from 2020 to date. Center image is from the very first.

Since taking office in 2020, Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson has made a list of priorities to improve the Chair City and has managed to check off many boxes on that list. We had the privilege of interviewing Mayor Nicholson about **What's Next...**



*Should you wish to listen to individual questions and answers, they are provided in each section.*



*There is so much to be thankful for already in the progress made due to the Mayor and his entire City Team, the support of the City Council, the proactive efforts of the Gardner School Committee, the cooperation of the State and Federal Government, and the valuable partnerships fostered with business leaders, industry, and developers willing to invest in Gardner. Don't Miss What's Next....*

We asked the Mayor if he was committed to running again and continuing the transformative work and he said yes. We asked the Mayor about plans for the Schools, Athletics, Recreation, Buildings, Projects, Keeping Gardner Beautiful, Public Safety, Transparency and Finances, Employment, Technology, Health, Music and the Arts, the Public Schools Curriculum, Climate Change, City Charter, Faith, Bugs, Covid, Business, Industry, Technology, Infrastructure, the South Main Street Bridge, City Needs and Facilities, and the Mayor's daily priorities. **It was as a state official recently addressed the Mayor, "Very Impressive."**

## The What's Next Interview

**Jump to Questions:** [Running for Mayor](#) - [School Buildings](#) - [Athletics](#) - [Recreational and Parks](#) - [Building Blight](#) - [Projects in the City](#) - [Catching the Trashers](#) - [Public Safety](#) - [Transparency and Finances](#) - [Employment](#) - [Technology](#) - [Health](#) - [Music and the Arts](#) - [Public Schools Curriculum](#) - [Community Events](#) - [Climate Change](#) - [City Charter](#) - [Faith](#) - [Bugs and Mosquitos](#) - [Covid](#) - [Business and Industry](#) - [Technology Infrastructure](#) - [South Main Street Bridge](#) - [City Needs and Facilities](#) - [Important Priorities](#)



**Q:** Mayor Nicholson, first of all are you committed to running again for Mayor and continuing your transformative work into at least the mid 2020's?

**A:** Thank you Werner for having me again. I do plan on running again next year. I really do love the work we're doing and I think there's a lot we still have left to do.

### Mayor's Updates and Interviews

Gardner MA Mayor Michael Nicholson does a weekly Update for the City. [Video page here](#). We also have AUDIO of every update which you can listen to on any device, [CLICK HERE](#). There's also a page of prior interviews with the Mayor and other individuals. [CLICK HERE](#).

**Read Mayor Nicholson's original 2020 Inaugural Address, [CLICK HERE](#).** In it, he makes this pledge, "to make sure everyone in this city can feel happy, healthy, safe, and proud to call Gardner their home."

## School Buildings



Gardner Elementary School

**Q:** Gardner opened its new Elementary School on September 12, 2022. The Gardner High School and Gardner Middle School are older buildings. What's next on your radar as far as improvements for those buildings?

**A:** We've done a lot of improvements on those buildings just to get them up to par. We spent a ton of money at Gardner High School in fixing up the Auditorium and the gym, adding their new recreational facilities with the fields, the tennis courts, the fitness court, and over at Gardner Middle School we've started to do things. We've just replaced the lockers over there. Probably a little more we can do with the vestibule in the front area of the building there too. So, just smaller capital improvements projects for those buildings for now in the meantime. And then maybe in the next 10 to 15 years, we'll be looking at a potential new High School. .

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School Street School



Prospect Street School

**Q: Prospect Street and School Street** Schools are on the market with the goal of returning the properties to the tax rolls, **Waterford Street School** is on track to become a new **Community Center** in 2023. Elm Street School continues its educational use, housing Gardner Academy and the Boys and Girls Club and eventually District offices. What's on the horizon for the **Helen Mae Sauter School**?

**A:** We're working with a couple of different people who are interested in **Helen Mae Sauter School**. There's an idea that's been floating around to make that the City's Art Center. We are working to see how that would progress and what that would mean for the City. But for now we have to keep it under City uses until the full amount of the City offices move into Elm Street. The Special Education office for the District is still housed in that building right now.



Waterford Street School Gardner MA - future Community Center in 2023



Helen Mae Sauter School

**Q.** Any progress on getting the **Gardner Area League of Artists** to stay in Gardner?

**A.** We are working with them on looking at a couple of different places here. They've been working with Colin from my office most closely, but that is a location that we've been looking at with them.

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## Athletics



Gardner High School Athletic practices underway.

**Q:** Now, let's turn to **School Athletics**. Positive comments have already been received regarding the expenditures on the athletic fields and a new concession stand is in the works. What else would you like to see to enhance the School Athletic experience in Gardner?

**A:** You know, I think just making it so our students who are participating in our School's sports programs have those resources and venues available so that they really do make positive memories of their time here in Gardner. You look at the cheerleaders, they just came in second at States this past weekend, all of that happens, they've been progressing higher and higher, but we were able to get them new uniforms recently. And that just helps them feel a bit more proud of the work that they're doing when they go off to those competitions and things of that nature. So working with our Athletic Director Dan Forte, I'd like to see if there's ways that we can do those smaller improvements to our Sports Teams like the new uniforms, field improvements, equipment purchases to make sure they're not utilizing older equipment, so that they can just find ways to have a positive memory of their time here in Gardner and want to come back to Gardner after.

## Recreational



North Central Pathway

**Q:** As a City, Gardner also exhibits a sort of rural character with a number of recreational opportunities. What's next on the recreational front including the bike trail improvements?

**A:** Well , I'll start with the bike trail because that's – what you just mentioned at the end of that question there , we are going to be constructing the extensions of the North Central Pathway that we got the grant funding to design a couple of years ago , if you remember . so that's , one of the things that you'll see happening next spring is a lot of construction work for those projects that are there . In 2025 the state's Department of Transportation is also set to build a new pedestrian bridge over route 140 , similar to the one that they just put over Route 2 in Leominster down by the Barnes and Noble area . So we'll have that added over here , too , and that will connect the Winchendon section of the North Central Pathway to the Gardner section of the North Central Pathway. So it's really exciting to see what we'll be able to accomplish in terms of the bike trail



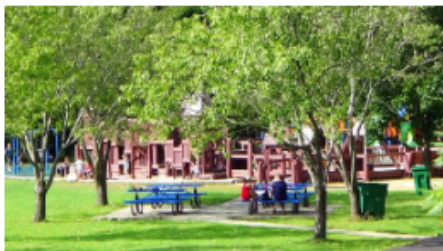
Skate Park at Jackson Playground



Pavilions at Dog Park

In terms of general recreation around the city , Bailey Brook Park , the construction of the new five years and under playground , which is gonna be the first playground that's designed in Gardner for infants through five years old . Everything else is actually rated for five and up in the city , that'll go over at the Bailey Brook Park area .That is not the soccer field that was originally planned there before ,but we're trying to find ways that there's just things there , including a potential either pickleball or bocce ball court , so that, you know ,we can have something different that we don't have somewhere else in the city.

We're also just recently finished construction of a new fitness court over at the Gardner High School campus , right next to the tennis court , and that's for the community and our students there . You can actually go up , download an app , scan a qr code . And the way I like to describe it is around Dunn Park , there's those different fitness stops along the way .What we have there is all of that on a tennis court sized area with different lanes . So if you want to work your core , there's a lane for a core workout where you can scan a qr code and it'll help walk you through those . If you're looking for , you know , different lifting techniques , it'll actually walk you through those techniques based on the app there with the equipment there to use it . So there's a lot we're doing in terms of recreation , and I'm actually really excited and then the last thing I'd say is we're going to be starting the construction of our new disc golf or frisbee golf course ,probably sometime in May of next year .



Fantasy Playground Ovila Case



Jackson Playground – Basketball Court – where portable ice skating rink will go in winter.



Future Home: Maki Park



Future Home: Park Street Park



Greenwood to be Torn Down



Crystal Lake Gardner MA



Ducks at Crystal Lake



Monument Park

**Q:** Now on the same front, the Chair City has been praised for its parks and more are on the horizon. Can you give us some details as to what's coming with Maki Park on Parker Street, the Park Street Park at the old substation, the goals of the Greenwood Demo and new Pavilion, and any other improvements coming to other Chair City Parks?

**A:** So we are just about finished the designs on both the Maki and the Park Street Park at the old substation , those you'll probably see construction begin around the June time frame next year , there , those will be different in and of themselves , but they have the same goal of taking a spot right now that's just unusable wasted space , and turning it into something that's useful . So ,for instance , the Maki lot where the old Maki building was , the grade is too steep at about fifteen degrees , thirteen to fifteen degrees , depending on where you are , and you need to be between five and ten in order to be ADA compliant because you can't get something up there without it sliding down .so that's why we're gonna be terracing that park there , adding a couple different amenities to that park , so it's a usable space . I like how Councillor Ron Cormier described it at the City Council meeting , that that's really going to be a spot that's almost like a front lawn for several of the apartments that are going to be constructed in Downtown. Park Street Park's a little different .We're gonna be doing between forty and fifty different parking spaces that we will add more parking for the Monument Park area and the Greenwood Pool ,and then a walking and sitting space overlooking Crystal Lake . The Greenwood Pool demolition and the Pavilion construction . The City Council is actually voting at their meeting this evening , november twenty first to approve the grant funding for the full demolition , and about eighty to ninety percent of the pavilion cost , if they approve that , then I'll be going to the city council requesting additional funding to finish the pavilion at one of the December meetings . and in terms of other improvements that we have going to city parks , we always try to just , you know , work to replace a couple of our playground equipment every year , we do about twenty five thousand dollars worth of upgrades to all our parks and playgrounds , every year .That's how we got the new , charcoal grills over at Ovila Case last year ,and we're still working with the DPW to see what's on the horizon.

**Q:** Now ? My understanding is that the actual city out of pocket costs on the demo and new pavilion will probably end up being like , roughly about a hundred grand.

**A:** Yeah , about a hundred grand . And that's just for the pavilion cost ,the demo's fully grant funded .

## Building Blight



42-52 Parker Street, Gardner



Inside 25 Main Street, Gardner MA

**Q:** One of your stated goals has been to eliminate building blight by finding new owners willing to renovate and revitalize. The Ryan Block at 42-52 Parker Street and 25 Main Street renovations are notable achievements of 2022. What properties are on your target list for 2023?

**A:** The old factory at the corner of Nadeau street and Stewart street . I think it's seventy seventy eight Nadeau , but i could be wrong on that one .But it's the old rundown factory that's there that is on the horizon .The city just obtained ownership of that , ownership of that building through the tax title process . The judge just foreclosed on that property .So now that the city owns it , trying to see if we can get that taken care of .And again , take another instance of taking blight and turning it into promise .

## Projects



99 Restaurant at Timpany Crossroads



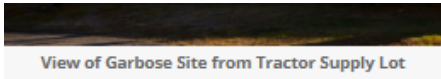
Occupants of Timpany Crossroads

**Q.** Residents and visitors see completed projects such as the Timpany Crossroads Plaza as they drive through Gardner. However, that was years in the making. What's the next big project Gardner residents will stare at fondly sometime in the next 5 years?

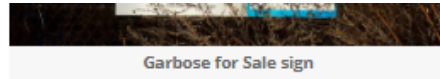
**A:** I think the new business park that we're designing up on the corner of Matthews street on Route 140 , that's probably gonna be the next five year phased out project that we have there , beginning with the grant that we just received from the Mass Development Site Readiness Grant . That's really something that's gonna take a while because of your different wetland surveys , different , advertising procedures to get businesses into those areas .



The other place I'd say, too , is the Garbose lot that's across from Walmart next to where the old Stop and Shop used to be and where it's now Tractor Supply . We were able to just get that on a new marketing platform that the state has put out through their Mass Econ office as an offshoot of the Office of Housing and Economic Development . They take a hundred properties statewide that are shovel ready and prime for strong development , and they , the state , will market those properties for us . We were able to now get that on the state's , top one hundred properties list this year . So now Mass Econ will be advertising that for us , along with our local advertising efforts .



View of Garbose Site from Tractor Supply Lot



Garbose for Sale sign

**Q:** Hey, when it's free, you gotta take it, right?

**A:** Exactly, exactly.



Rear Main Street Gardner MA

**Q.** The designs are in. Money's been approved. What's next in the \$4million Rear Main Street project?

**A.** I believe we're gonna start to see some work being done on that in the March - April time frame the, parking lot is going to be the first thing that's constructed . So you'll start to see a lot of the paving work and site work done first . Following that , you'll see the green spaces that are there . The current design has a fountain similar to what you see in some larger cities where the water spits out from under the ground , there's a small amphitheatre style seating section that's there , there's food truck parking, there's gonna be some just plaza seating out there as well . and some shade pavilions too , for people to eat out and get out of the hot sun or out of the rain during there too . So that part of the project will begin sometime , probably , like I said ,in the March to April time frame unfortunately , E A Fish , the city's original partner for the housing development , had some internal financial troubleso they are no longer associated with this project . So we are right now ,seeking different developers who are interested in submitting proposals for their part of the residential part of the site . Right now , we're looking at about a hundred to a hundred and ten , two and three bedroom apartments ,all at a market rate setting. So that tends to be what we're seeing all of our developers come in now with their proposals , and we've got about six or seven different proposals that have come in . so it's gonna be a really exciting time , but you'll at least start to see the public part of the project ,and that's the parking and the plaza improvements there done sometime in the Spring .



## Paving Needs of the City



Robillard Street Gardner. Paved 2022



Asphalt



Paving Pearl Street entrance

**Q:** Many roads lead to Gardner from so many places. And Gardner has 100 miles of its own roads. What does the future hold for catching up with the street paving needs in the Chair City?

**A:** I feel like we've been paving since I took my oath of office in July of 2020, .but you can never keep up with it , and that's . the thing is that , you know , we've paved more roads and Gardner in a two year period than we ever have since they started paving roads in the 1880s and Gardner , it's , we've done a ton of work , but we just can't catch up to it . So I know next year ,or at least tonight i've put up a proposal for about three hundred thousand dollars from the city's free cash to go into adding more roads to next year's paving list . We've traditionally gotten about six hundred thousand dollars in paving funds from the state through our chapter ninety allocations , every year since twenty twelve . So while the number's been consistent ,our purchasing power has decreased because you just can't buy as much asphalt for six hundred thousand dollars now as you could back in twenty twelve . But we do what we can . And then last year the state did slip in an additional three hundred thousand dollars . So we'll see what happens with the new dministration taking office in January of this year . but we know Eaton street by Park street and Green street will be paved first this year with a little extra tlc to make sure that we don't run into the issues of the roots that are there . and then , we're gonna save the area around the uptown rotary until after the state's done doing that work that they're going to be replacing the rotary , and they're slated to do that in April and May of 2023.

**Q:** Now , if those pesky tree roots fight back , what are your plans to combat them ?

**A** We're gonna be excavating a little bit down and doing a gravel layer to see if that will help it out . because though that has been paved within the past ten years and it looks like it hasn't been touched since it was first constructed . so we're trying what we can with that ? We're gonna hope the gravel approach works first.



Gardner Big Water Tank

**Q:** The big Gardner Water Tank which recently got exterior paint is visible for miles. What is planned for other work on the tank?

**A:** We actually have to paint the inside . A lot of people may not realize that the inside actually gets coated to make sure that the – the metal doesn't corrode on either the outside or the inside . So we actually , once a year , are required to send a diving team into the tank , to inspect the inside , make sure that the metal is all fully , you know , safe and structurally sound . we did one of the tank divings last year , I believe the upper , the Route 140 tank is slated to be dived next year . And then after that , the tank actually has to be drained and painted and coated on the inside to make sure that it doesn't rust or corrode on the inside.



**Q:** Just over 11 million dollars was spent most recently at the Gardner Wastewater Treatment Plant to improve facilities and water quality. What's on the horizon to assure Gardner has the best water quality possible? And how's the grant application going to replace the main water line?

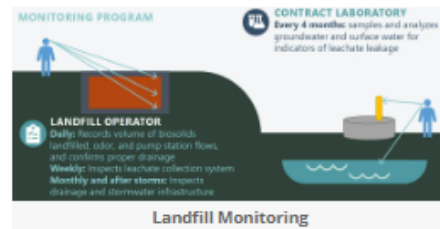
**A:** So Gardner actually just got an award from the state's Department of Environmental Protection, last year. Because of our water quality that we have, we are continuing to do everything we can to make sure that our water quality is up to the most drinking water standards that we can have. In terms of the grant that we have going on for the water main line that connects the water treatment plant at Crystal Lake up to the James Street towers, we actually working with, Senator Warren's office, we're able to get a federal earmark into the final version of the Federal budget. So now we're actually just waiting for congress to pass the Federal budget, and we should be able to get about a million dollars from that, which would be enough to complete all of that work.



Coleman and Dyer Pumps



Gardner Landfill



**Q:** The other side of the water equation is waste. Sewer enterprise fund revenue was used to completely rebuild the wet well and add or upgrade electrical service and pumps at the Coleman and Dyer Street Pump Stations. To deal with sludge, an expansion of the landfill has been proposed. What's next in the approval process for that particular project?

**A:** Next in the approval process for that project is it is actually now before MEPA, the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Environmental Protection. So those all go to the state now for a full review, to make sure that there's no contaminants that could possibly leak out, that the liner is set to be, you know, sturdy and sustainable, to make sure that everything there, is above board, there's probably at least six to eight months in that process, to make sure that all the eyes are dotted and the t's crossed. And the state really does want to make sure we are doing everything as environmentally sound as we can. At the same time, I do want to say this is a band-aid over the issue of the sludge in the City. This is not a final solution, because even if we get this expansion, it's only good for another ten to fifteen years, so we are actually at the same time looking at alternatives for a more long term solution for the project, and we've got a couple of vendors that we are soliciting information from to make sure that we can really have a long term, sustainable plan for our sewage operations in the City.

## Catching the Trashers



Catching Trash Criminals



Keep Gardner Beautiful Event



**Q:** Speaking of waste, some people have been known to dispose of it improperly. Recently a proactive effort was initiated to strategically placed cameras to catch those who dispose of large items of trash improperly. How well is that program working and what do you envision future efforts will be in keeping Gardner Beautiful?

**A:** It actually is working pretty well . We've caught a couple of people through those cameras , and we've seen a reduction in the amount of furniture that's been left on a railroad track or things like that , and we are hoping that that reduces that . At the same time , we'll be also working with the Keep Gardner Beautiful organization , like we have to really raise awareness as to why it's important to keep your city clean and do your part in really just making sure that the city looks like the healthy City that it is .

## Public Safety



K-9 Rocky



Gardner PD Headquarters

**Q:** In 2022, The Gardner Police Department added K-9 Rocky and has changed Top Management. In terms of Department improvements, what's next? What types of tools are needed?

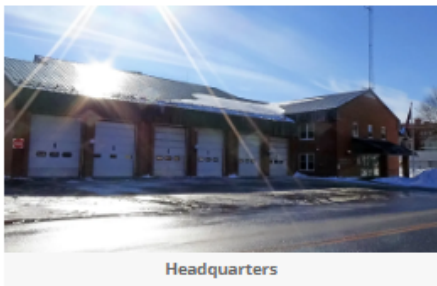
**A:** We've also recently purchased some new equipment for the Gardner Police Department when it, in terms of , radio systems , so we've gotten all new radios utilizing our American Rescue Plan funds that we've received, radios for our animal control officers so that they're able to communicate with the dispatch centers of all the different towns that we service , because we take care of the animal control operations for Gardner , Ashburnham Westminster and Hubbardston and Hubbardston's dispatches were actually out of the town of Rutland so we've gotten a dual band radio , so they've been able to communicate with them . We've gotten new equipment that they can use whenever they're conducting a drug raid , to make sure that they stay safe when they're in those situations there and then we've also begun to purchase a couple of hybrid cruisers for the department , just to be a little more sustainable there , but they're also just a better quality car , so we've used again our American Rescue Plan funding for most of that . and I'm really excited to see how that builds out in the Department.



Gardner Fire Headquarters



Gardner Firefighters at Work



Headquarters



South Gardner Fire Station

**Q:** The Gardner PD Headquarters were brand spankin' new in the last decade. However, the Gardner Fire Department Headquarters building has some future needs. What have you identified as priorities and what's the timeline?

**A:** The roof of the fire station , hands down , has to be number one on the list when looking at the facilities that we have there , too ,the leaks that we're seeing in the roof of that building are quite bad ,for lack of a better term . you know , the roof is original to when the building was built in the late nineteen eighties it has been patched several different times . However , when it rains outside , it rains even more in that building there . And that's not healthy in terms of the air quality that we have in the station . But it's also not good if we're trying to get a , a safe place to store all of the new fire apparatus that we just purchased , because using again ,our American Rescue Plan funding , we purchased a brand new fire engine ,a brand new rescue truck and a brand new ambulance . So for purchasing this new equipment , we should be storing it in a place that it's going to last and not in a place that we might as well just be parking it outside . So the roof is gonna be priority number one with the fire station headquarters .

### Transparency and Finances



Transparency



City of Gardner YouTube Channel

**Q:** The City of Gardner has been acclaimed for keeping its citizens in the loop through televised updates and available documents. What is the future of Gardner's transparency efforts?

**A:** You know , this is something we try to deal with every day .I've always said that our job in the City Hall is to work on behalf of the people who live here and make sure that they know what we're doing on their behalf . so any time we can increase our transparency efforts ? I know we are working on updating the project map so it's a little more up to date , because there's several projects that have to be added to it and updates that have to be given to the projects that are already there . there's just more that we're constantly looking at and bringing the different processes of City Hall onto the website as well , so that it's just bringing in the , the efforts of city hall to the comfort of your own home and utilizing that as a way to also increase our transparency efforts . we've got a couple of different plans that I think we'll be seeing sometime in the summer of next year be rolled out , but for right now , they're just still in the planning phases .



Gold Coins

**Q:** For the second year in a row, Gardner had a perfect audit. What is Gardner doing differently to achieve this status and what do you do when you can't get a score above 100? Is there such a thing as extra credit?

**A:** I wish there was the extra credit. Otherwise we'd still be doing it just to improve our procedures that we have here. You know, I am proud of the finance team that we have. You know, John Richard, our City Auditor really does a tremendous job of making sure that everything gets done and the way it's supposed to get done. You know, Josh Cormier our purchasing agent. If something gets purchased, it's gonna be purchased the exact way it needs to, and we're gonna get to the best, cost efficient product that we can get. I meet with our finance team once a month, to just go over everything to make sure that they stay in the loop as to what each other is doing, and then throughout the rest of the month, as things happen, they're constantly brought in as to this is coming up. This is a bill that needs to be paid. This is a project that we need to do. How do we fund it? What's the way to get about there and what's the plan to make sure that this is done? And I think it's just making sure that you don't have departments operating in silos but departments operating as a team that really does play a part into that.

**Q:** So you're saying that collaboration is the key here?

**A:** Absolutely a hundred percent.



Gardner MA Team

## Employment



**Q:** There are various employment opportunities available with the City of Gardner. However, in some cases, applicants have turned down employment offers due to money. What's happening in the planned study of City salaries to keep the Chair City competitive in its hiring?

**A:** So we've gotten a grant from the Commonwealth Community Compact program of about fifty thousand dollars to hire a consultant to compare Gardner's job descriptions with job descriptions of other municipalities. And then if we find job descriptions that match each other, to also then see, are we paying those employees what the going rate is for that position? So it'll be on a position by position basis for all non union employees in both the city and the school department, and we'll see how those far out it's about a six to eight month process for that whole study to be done, and we're probably going to be starting that in December and seeing some results of that in next September.

## Technology



**Q:** This year, upon guidance from the Federal Government, computer security software was upgraded proactively to avoid potential vulnerabilities. Technology and software is always changing. How often does Gardner replace its computers and /or software and what is planned in this regard?

**A:** We do a little bit every year. The my goal with our technology rotation, it's similar to how we do, several other different aspects, and that if you can do a little bit at a time, do that rather than end up with a massive expense all at once, like we're seeing right now at the landfill, so we replace, you know, some pieces of equipment every year. That way we make sure that we're continuously at least working to stay up to date, rather than having to redo everything all at once and really stall and impede our operation.

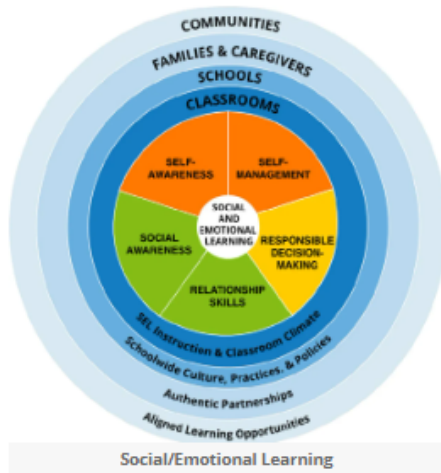
## Health



Construction at Heywood Hospital



Health Connections Site



Social/Emotional Learning



Domestic Violence



**Q:** We just talked about technology health. With respect to human health in the Chair City, there's a new Surgical Pavilion underway at Heywood Hospital and additional facilities including a new Urgent Care being built by the Community Health Connections near Walmart. What does the future hold for the Health industry in Gardner?

**A:** I think this is going to be a really big benefit to the city .If you add the surgical pavilion , which is set to increase Heywood's surgical capacity by sixty percent , we're gonna be able to have surgeries in Gardner that right now are only offered in the Boston area . You can keep people in their home community for surgeries that they need , because a lot of the times , you know , particularly with our older population , if you have the choice of driving fifty miles away and getting a procedure or just staying at the home and deal with it , a lot of people just choose to deal with it , and that's not what they need to continue to live a healthy lifestyle . So with the fact that we're able to bring that close into our community means everything . And then you add the additional urgent care over at Community Health Connections side with the doctor's offices , the dental offices and the behavioral health counseling all of those are needs that we've seen in the City , so that'll only do nothing but benefit us in the very long run .

**Q:** On the subject of behavioral health, The Gardner School System has been focusing on the social/emotional needs of students in the District. You've been participating in addiction reduction efforts. And the part-time position at the Gardner PD focusing on domestic violence has recently been restored. What's next?

**A:** You know , we just see what the needs are in the community , the domestic violence advocate that we - you know ,the council is going to be voting on in the supplemental budget tonight ,and we've also applied for a grant for to see if we can make it a full time position . That came up because of the conversations we had with the voices of truth in the Spanish American Center that told us that there's forty three domestic violence cases from Gardner that they're currently working with .That shows the need is here in the area for something like that . The prevention coordinator came up as conversations that we had with Alyssa's place in GAAMA , because there was a need to just find ways to connect those resources to each other with the Gardner Community Action Team .so we'll see what's next on the horizon . Again , those kind of come up through conversations that we have throughout the year by talking to our community partners and seeing what's out there that we could be doing .



## Music and the Arts



Music Programs



Gardner High School Music



Inaugural Music



Gardner High School Music

**Q:** You've made no secret of your fondness of music and your support of Music programs in the Schools. What are your future plans in this regard?

**A:** I'd like to see how those new elementary school programs and how, you know, they – the new hundred thousand dollar infusion that we did last year into our music program, benefit in the long term. When I was a freshman at Gardner high school playing my trumpet in the band, there was ninety of us in the band. There's thirty five in Gardner High school's band this year, but there's over two hundred in the elementary school band. And just like we did a lot of work to build up our soccer programs before, to build up our hockey programs before, and now we're seeing a ton of people go out for those. I'd like to see how that carries forward in the next five, ten years, to really build up those programs again. But we've done a lot of focus on band, and I understand that that's really been because I'm a former bander and I, that's what I was used to, but we've also got to be working on our choral programs and making sure that they have as much interest in participation as possible. Larry Zuaro at the Middle School is fantastic when it comes to getting students out there and involved in showing how fun it is to be in chorus. Joanne Landry at the High School, tremendous, I sang for her when I was, in high school, and they needed an extra male singer for the Disney trip that they did. We've got the talent there and our teaching staff beyond what several districts have, so it's getting them, the students so that they can give them those opportunities to perform. So I think there's a lot more work that needs to be done in recruiting for our choral programs and our, you know, drama programs and, our musical, our plays and things like that could use some boosting too.



Opening Day Gardner Elementary School 9-12-2022



**Q:** The new Gardner Elementary School has been built to specifically support the Arts. What is planned in the existing Gardner Middle School and Gardner High School to support efforts with respect to the Arts?

**A:** One of the things that we're working on this year with Larry Zuaro is trying to see if we can get some work done on the stage at the Middle School .The Middle School was built back when the state did not reimburse for auditoriums which is similar to the Gardner Elementary School . So it's got a what's called a cafetorium. It's a cafeteria with a stage in it . So we're trying to see if we can get some work done there . And then at the High School ,we've spent just over about two hundred twenty five a thousand dollars in repairs there . That's an acoustic study , that's new rugs new seats , new paint , really just trying to re outfit the area there so that when our students do perform , they perform in a place that's , really meant for them . At the same time , working with the Rockwell Trust account that we have , we were able to , purchase new art display boards so that the district can have a district wide art show , every now and again , so our students can really be proud of a display their work . I think there's a lot of work that's being done in both our fine and performing arts in the district at all of our schools , to make sure that we are giving our students our opportunity to really express themselves .



Thumbs Up for Art



**Q:** Mayor Nicholson, If the Helen Mae Sauter School ends up being a sort of arts center , could you see a collaborative effort between the Gardner Public schools and that Art center to enhance arts overall in the Chair City ?

**A:** Absolutely a hundred percent . If there's a way that we can build a public ,private partnership to add more enrichment to programs like that ,I think we should always be looking at that .

## Public Schools Curriculum

**Gardner MA  
MCAS  
Score  
Improvements**



- **GES**
  - 2019 Accountability 9<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - 2022 Accountability 15<sup>th</sup> percentile (67% increase)
- **GMS**
  - 2019 Accountability 11<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - 2022 Accountability 13<sup>th</sup> percentile (18% increase)
- **GHS**
  - 2019 Accountability 25<sup>th</sup> percentile
  - 2022 Accountability 41<sup>st</sup> percentile (64% increase)

MCAS Score Improvements



**Q:** Gardner had something to celebrate recently when MCAS scores increased despite the challenges of the pandemic. What is next in terms of Gardner Public Schools Curriculum?

**A:** It's constantly being evaluated .we do have staff members , particularly Dr..Catherine Goguen , who does a phenomenal job as our chief academic officer , for the district and making sure that our students are prepared for future success and that's , you know , a couple years ago we added a financial literacy requirement to the curriculum so that students learned how to balance a checkbook not just , you know , reading , writing and arithmetic but actual real world skills , and different , trying to find new ways like that that can be added to Gardner High curriculum . We've added the manufacturing program , where students can now graduate with an OSHA certificate or other industry standards . We've added new Innovative Pathways . We've added our Early College programs . It's finding ways that our students build up a toolbox so that when they graduate , they just carry that box with them and go , rather than having to try to rebuild everything and relearn and find what they need when they graduate . They've already gotten that head start over their peers to try to set them up above the rest .

## Community Events



Simmy's Polish Express at Gardner Food Truck Festival



The Dogfather at Gardner Food Truck Festival

**Q:** Gardner has a number of community events throughout the year including various events in Downtown, concerts at Monument Park, the National Night out....What would you like to see added to the Chair City calendar?

**A:** I think we're gonna see a lot added next year just due to the fact that the city's going to be celebrating its centennial. And really seeing what sticks ,I know we've got the fireworks that happen at the PACC, there's some potential that we're going to have additional fireworks next year over at the mount , to celebrate our hundredth anniversary there's , you know , some different events planned for next Christmas that's already in the works . Now in terms of a special Christmas Gala , that ,who knows if it'll stick or not . I think next year is going to be our opportunity , utilizing our centennial celebration events to see what got the most interest in and if there's an interest in keeping that and making it an annual program . I mean ,you look , just yesterday , the Gardner Interfaith Council , made up of the different clergy from the different churches in the area , held the first ecumenical Thanksgiving service like they used to have for several years ,and it just hasn't been done in the past five , and they had another one ,last night , and it was actually pretty well attended . So we'll see what happens , not just on the City side but also on the private side .



Boothill Express played at Monument Park and at Food Truck Festival in 2022



The Traveling Jones played at Monument Park in 2022

## Climate Change



Crystal Lake and Windmills

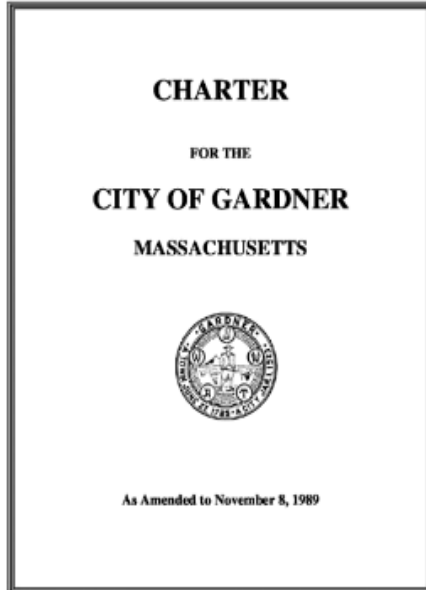


**Q:** The subject of “climate change” evokes long discussions among many people. Recently it was announced that there will be proactive studies to determine how to avoid flooding in the Downtown area from Crystal Lake in the event of a major hurricane or other water event. What’s next in terms of Gardner planning for potential disasters, however rare the possibility?

**A:** One of the things that we’ll be doing is working through a state program that was recently announced called the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program . So if you ever hear anyone on tv when you’re watching our meetings or on YouTube , say the phrase the MVP . that is what that stands for and what it is , is it’s a study that state consultant experts will do to go through the city , look at our water resources , look at all of the areas that we have , look at our , our hills , our valleys our rivers , our underground waterways that we have paved over , our infrastructure in terms of our water and sewer and it goes through in the event of a severe natural disaster ,what’s your most vulnerable pinpoints is it your bridges ? Is it your culvert is it your water sources ? Is it your flood control ? Is it your stormwater management ? So we’re actually going to be undertaking that full and complete comprehensive study within the next year or two in order to make sure that we have a way to track our progress and make sure that we plan for those events in the event that they should ever occur .

## City Charter

Read the Current City Charter, [CLICK HERE](#)



What's Next Interview

**Q:** Now, in the packet for the meeting of November 21, 2022, you had a very lengthy description of suggestions for changes in the housekeeping matters for the City Charter. If the city council goes along, and if there is a committee appointed, a charter drafting committee, will they have access to those suggestions and other suggestions?

**A:** They will, and they're actually legally also required to have a public hearing, so the public would actually be able to show their suggestions as well. The committee would then vote on what they'd like to submit to the city council. They'd submit those amendments to the city council, and the city council then has full editing authority over what the charter committee put forward. As well, the city council would have to vote to it, and I would have to then sign it. It then goes to the house and senate for their approval and the governor for their signature.

**Q:** So there's a lot of protective measures in place to make sure some nonsense doesn't get put into the city charter.

**A:** Correct, and in fact I even skipped a step one. If you'll excuse me before it goes off to the state house and senate, it actually has to be voted on by the citizens in a local election as well. In a ballot question.

**Q:** Can you explain what's next in your proposal to have the City Council consider whether revision of the City Charter should be studied and what requests for changes in City Ordinances do you anticipate making in the interests of the City as it begins its 2<sup>nd</sup> 100 years as a City?

**A:** In terms of the City Charter, I think we'll see a lot of that at this evening's city council informal meeting, and I've given a full document that the city council has some suggestions that I have, that the charter should be made, but it's something that it should be reviewed whenever a document is a hundred years old. I feel like it's worth just checking to see. Are the operations of the charter correct? And in terms of Gardner, it's not. There are about six or seven different sections of the charter that we legally can not follow because state law has superseded them, saying because the Gardner and any of our charter, our ordinances or anything like that can be more stringent than state law, but cannot be more lenient than state law, and state law has been updated over the past hundred years to become more stricter particularly in terms of our purchasing procedures or procurement procedures, our contracting efforts, all of that. So there's seven sections that we just – you can look at them and read them, but they're no good in the paper that they're printed on, because we cannot legally follow those sections, so those need to be removed. At the same time, there are certain specific dollar figures in the charter that were great benchmarks in 1923, but I think we can all agree that you can't buy a loaf of bread for a nickel right now, like you could buy a loaf of bread for a nickel in 1923, 100 years ago. So, for instance, any contract for over a thousand dollars, I need to sign as Mayor, as the chief executive officer, as well as the city auditor, the city procurement director, the city solicitor to make sure it's a legal contract and that's another thing. You need an actual, legally binding contract for anything over a thousand dollars. Now I could buy pencils for half of Gardner Elementary school and probably spend a thousand dollars. And what we run into is there's certain vendors who won't do business with the city, because state law says you only need those requirements for anything under ten thousand dollars, but for us, it's a thousand. So a lot of places are like, oh well, no, we're not going to do a full contract here for something that's just fifteen hundred dollars. So they end up walking away and we end up having to go find something. And it normally isn't at a better price. So I think it really impedes our operations, particularly with our school department in terms of that. And then there's some other just housekeeping efforts here and there that I think should be addressed. But again, when you have a hundred year old document, it just revolves it. You should be looked at every now and then.

## Faith



**Q:** In 1785, Gardner was incorporated as a Town. From its inception, faith in God and prayer has been front and center at Council meetings, even to this day. How do you feel about this tradition and what does the future hold in keeping Faith alive in Gardner?

**A:** I feel like it's a tradition that's not just specific . Here in Gardner. If you look every day at the house and senate in Boston and the House and Senate in Washington , DC. They always start the day off with a prayer and end the day with a prayer there , too . If someone would like to participate ,they're welcome to . If someone doesn't want to participate , they can either just stand there in silence and reflect , or they don't have to be present for that part of the day . It's something that really is a tradition that's not just seen here in Gardner , but throughout the United States and across Massachusetts . You know , one of the reasons how Gardner got founded was people didn't want to drive all the way to church on a horse and buggy for the towns that formed Gardner . So it is , like you said , since its inception been something that's very important here in Gardner . I know several of the different community churches , like we just talked about in one of my previous answers in this interview , have been getting together to come up with different events to bring the different church communities together . The national day of prayer is something that does still happen on the first Thursday of May every year , put on by the different churches in Gardner .I feel like there's a lot going on , to really keep faith alive in the City.



## Bugs and Mosquitos



Central Massachusetts Mosquito Control Project

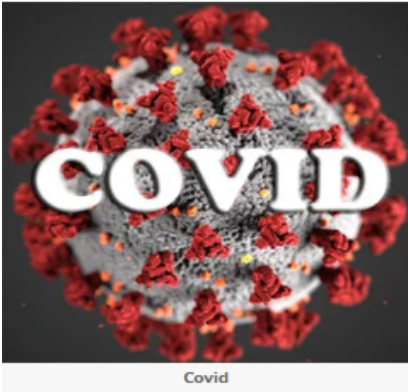


**Q:** Bugs, not too many people like them. Can you explain how citizens of Gardner can get involved this year in participating in the proactive remediation of insects through cooperation with the Central Mass Mosquito Control Project?

**A:** We partner with the Central Mass Mosquito Control Project every year through our Health Department . they do put out information every year as to how you can get involved . get your area sprayed or opt out of the city wide spraying that happens too , if that's what you choose to , So if you are interested in any of that , you can contact our health department and talk to either Lauren Saunders , our director , or Angela De Prima , our assistant director , and they'll be happy to get you all of that information .



## Covid



Covid



Covid Testing

**Q:** 2023 will be the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Covid in our lives. For Gardner, what's next?

**A:** You know, I think if you look back on everything that's happened since March 12, 2020, or even since the shutdown began on March 16, 2020 we've gotten a lot done, despite everything that was thrown at us. If you look at the economic development efforts that we've seen, if you look at the infrastructure work that we've done, the businesses we've brought in, or even just the fact that, you know, we're walking around now without masks we're walking around now and going to events that you don't require social distancing and I'm not worried about trying to figure out how to sign people up for the next vaccine clinic without the system crashing we've really come a long way. I think, really, what's next for the City is just seeing what we've learned from the past four years and how we can carry the strengths that we've received going forward and learn from the mistakes that we may have made along the way and use that as a way to set the stage. I think it's really as weird as it is to say this about a pandemic Werner: I feel like it's almost poetic that we got the pandemic in the first year of a new decade, because it really let us start seeing what we were able to stand up to and how resilient we were, almost as a diving board for the next ten years, to see what we're able to accomplish and I think that that's the goal I'd like to take from everything we've learned in the pandemic.

## Business and Industry

# OPERATION: STOREFRONT

**Q:** In part due to innovative funding partnerships between the State and the City, filling vacant storefronts has been more successful of late. What's next in this effort?

**A:** Getting people to apply. One of the things that is required in order to receive that state grant funding is an application does need to be sent to the state's economic development improvement council, and there's certain aspects of that application process that we are working with new local partners on to really get that done. So, for instance, in order to qualify for an application for a vacant storefront grant, you need to submit a full written business plan. A lot of people who are starting a business don't know what an actual written business plan may be. They just know that they want to sell these goods at this price, at this location. So one of the things we're doing now is we're partnering with the Wachusett Business Incubator to get those people who want to start a business really seeing what it's like to draft a full formal business plan so that they have all of the application materials there, but that what that also does is show and really set the stage for what someone should be doing as they have that business moving forward and really be more sustainable and resilient because now they're going into it with a plan rather than just trying something here and there and hoping it sticks.

**Q:** Now, one of the recent grants that was awarded in the five grants that were in the past week or so, one of those grants was to the Wachusett Business Incubator, wasn't it?

**A:** That is correct. Yes. Seventeen thousand five hundred dollars. To improve their services, to add space for fifteen entrepreneurs who may not be able to afford a place by themselves, but could rent out a booth instead.



Storefronts available at Timpany Plaza, Gardner



City of Gardner Welcomes Business



**Q:** What's next on the effort to bring more businesses in to Gardner?

**A:** It's really just working with our partners who have purchased the buildings downtown , you know , with the Door Fund , who purchased the Central Park Building , where Witches Wardrobe, Bridal Sage LLC Glow Room in that building that's there , Gary Lorden in his, not only his apartment building at the corner of Connors Street and Parker street , but also his Goodnow Pearson building over on Main Street , working with Candor Realty at the flatiron building and the Garbose building , where Nails 2000 is, Empire Management in their building that they just bought, Molina realty at the Gardner News building in the old Bank of America building , and both of the Wheelen supply buildings , seeing what work they need to bring their buildings up to codes . For instance , we've given out , you know , the fifty thousand dollar facade grants that we have , the sign grants to businesses , because it's great for us to be able to offer these grants, Werner , but if we don't have people who are applying for them , then the money's just going to sit there . So we're really being proactive in our outreach to seeing what they need and then working with them and potential tenants because there are some new state programs , like for instance from Mass Development , you can get a hundred percent financing at a zero to low interest loan to outfit all kitchen equipment in a location , too . So if you've got a restaurant that wants to come in or a potential new bakery that we're talking to right now are coming into one of the downtown buildings , we can actually finance some of the equipment that's out there in a way that hasn't been available before to really help spread out those costs and make it more manageable.

**Q:** All right , now , Let me see if I heard you correctly. interest rates ,for example , for home mortgages are approaching seven percent or greater .So business financing is higher than that. So you're telling me that potentially a restaurant coming into downtown Gardner could get zero percent financing?

**A:** That is correct on equipment to outfit the location . Yes .

**Q:** All right.







**Q:** Considering there is very limited space for industry, what's next and what is the timeline on a potential new industrial park for Gardner? And what's next in the Mill Street corridor?

**A:** I think , you know , relating back to the answers that we've talked about earlier on the industrial park study that we're having right now over on Matthews street , I'm going to guess that's going to be a five to ten year project closer to the five , but I say ten just to be safe , because you never know what's going to happen on the way . And in terms of the Mill Street Corridor , I'm interested to see what , now that we have our project listed on the Mass One Hundred Ready List , that's , you know , through mass econ because mass econ goes out and takes that list and advertises for it nationwide and internationally as we also do our own local advertising there to see if we get any proposals for that site within the next year .



**Q:** Now ,what about the other sites , though in the Mill Street Corridor?

**A:** You know, I mean , we're working with the cannabis company that purchased the corner of mill and winter street there . There is some financing stuff that they're working through on that space there. Kymalainen Realty does own another large parcel of land across the street from the new CHC development . so it's really just working again with the advertising efforts for the area and showing that that area is there and it's available .

## Technology Infrastructure



Technology



Gardner MA Website utilizes the Internet



**Q:** There was discussion of using available funding to extend cable and internet to unserved areas of the City. What has happened in 2022 and what's next in advancing Gardner's technological infrastructure? Example, standby generator replacements at the schools and/or City Buildings.

**A:** So all of our city buildings right now, except for some of our schools, do have standby generators city hall has one, the DPW has one. The schools that are cited as emergency shelters in the event of something like the ice storm, they have them. So the middle school, the elementary school. So working with our different partners to see where we're available and how we can get, you know, a more sustainable energy plan in the event of an emergency. We do have a backup system like that is something that we're always looking at. In the meantime in terms of the internet lines, we did utilize both our CARES funding from the federal government and portions of our funding from the federal government. That right now, the only place that you don't have access to broadband internet is Camp Collier. We were able to run it down all the streets, down Raymond Stone, all that sections up in the north Gardner woods that did not have access to internet before now have broadband lines there through Comcast and again, that's something we did in partnership with Congresswoman Trahan's office and our ARPA funds that we received. So there's a couple more places, particularly at Camp Collier, that we'd like to run internet down to, and then also utilizing the data that we received from when our students were remote in the pandemic as to who had access to wi fi and who didn't to see if we can purchase new hotspot technology or potentially a public wi fi program in the downtown, to see if we can really help people have access to the internet. Because while the broadband may be there, that doesn't mean it's connecting to devices in that area. So we wanna make sure that that final connection gets made.

## South Main Street Bridge



South Main Street Bridge near Railroad



South Main Street

**Q:** Sometimes, there's things you can't do much about such as railroads getting in the way of doing something about the South Main Street bridge. Given the resistance, what's the future of this problem?

**A:** You know, we are looking at different things there. DPW's working on a plan now to potentially put in two cul de sacs on other side of the bridge to really have a safe way to reroute traffic in the area. Again, it's just something that's completely out of our control because the Constitution of the United States gives jurisdiction over the railroads to the Interstate Commerce Clause to the Federal Government alone. And then that has been parleyed out to the Federal Railroad Administration. So there's really nothing we can do there. So while we may try, and may continue to try and advocate that the bridge be fixed, we do have a backup plan in the works.

**Q:** Now, isn't it true that the railroads themselves are under pressure from the Federal Government to actually reduce the number of intersections, so they have no incentive to want to help Gardner fix that bridge.

**A:** That's 100 percent true, Werner. The Federal Government came out with a mandate requiring the railroad to reduce its street crossings in 2015 and then that bridge closed in 2017. It was right at the time that they were looking for places to cut and they had been asking for that to be part of the reduction for years, just because 20 feet down the road we have another crossing over on the East Broadway side. So it's really something that is a lose, lose situation for the city in that regard. So I think we're going to be stuck with that one.

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## City's Needs and Facilities



Veterans Honored at Perry Auditorium – showing windows



GES Bathroom 2022



Gardner City Hall 1940s

**Q:** As the City grows, the City has needs too, with existing buildings and to expand facilities for increased needs. What would you like to see as far as work at City Hall – bathrooms, electrical, auditorium etc. and how big of a building do you need, to have enough salt on hand for the City?

**A:** So I'm going to start with the City Hall comments there, Werner. The first and foremost, our electrical system in this building needs to be redone. Right now, there's not much growth that we can add to this building just because of the capacity limits that it has. It is original to when the building was constructed in the 1930s. So really getting a new electrical service for this building, the bathrooms need to be made more ADA compliant, in general, let alone just completely outfitted because they don't look the best. This is the heart of the City's government. We try to make it so we look OK. But, everything does take a back seat when it comes to maintenance like that because there's so many other needs in the city. In the auditorium, I'd like to get the windows replaced because they are paper thin and we lose more heat out those windows than we pump in through the heating system. So getting those so we can really retain more of our energy that way and not have to waste energy by heating something that's just gonna heat the outside, and dissipate outside. But also, getting some curtains for the Auditorium so we can make it a more useable space and really take care of the acoustic issues that are there.

In terms of our salt shed, that is something that I'd like to see reconstructed soon. We probably need about double what we have right now.



**Q:** There was a song in the 1970's by Olivia Newton John – You Light Up My Life. Is Gardner considering the addition of more street lighting and where might that be? (Route 2A and 68?)

**A:** 2A and 68 are actually some of the places that we have talked about, as well as just off of the rotaries for both of the rotaries that we have from Route 2. On Pearson Boulevard and on Route 68 at the Timpany Boulevard corridor.

I'll tell you a funny story, Werner. Back in 2020 when I was first elected, all of the lights around the rotary and on Pearson Boulevard were out and we were constantly fighting with National Grid as to why, cause the City does own most of our street lights. However, in those sections, National Grid still owns those. So we were fighting back and forth with National Grid as to why those lights weren't being lit. And the reason we were getting was because Mass DOT went through and redid the rotaries and in doing so they didn't realize they had dug up the underground conduit and they severed the wires and stuff like that. And, it was just a strange way the work would be done without having a full survey like that. So I remember I was in a conference room at the DPW with the representatives from National Grid and Mass DOT and I remember saying, "Can we change all the lightbulbs and see what happens there?" We changed all the lightbulbs and lo and behold that night, there was light. All it was is that the light bulbs had simply burnt out or cracked when the construction vehicles were driving underneath them and no one stopped to check that. So I think it's one of those things that we have to see where's working, where's not and is there actually a lot simpler resolution to the problem than we thought it was. So that's going to be our next goal for our Street Lighting.

## The Last Question of the Interview



Gardner Mayor Nicholson in the style of Vincent Van Gogh



Formal Grant Announcements

**Q: And my last question: What have you identified as your most important priorities as you arrive for work in the morning and ask yourself, what's next?**

**A:** The main priorities that I'd like Werner are with our Schools and our Downtown. There's never been this much potential that Gardner's seen all at once because of all the work that's happening. And the reason why I tie those two together is when you look at what's being constructed, yes a lot of them are ones and twos for the number of bedrooms in an apartment Downtown, but when you have over 170 apartment units being constructed, you've got potential homes being built throughout the City as well. If we get a growth in population in the City, does that come with a growth in our School population? And if it does, do we have the resources to meet that growth and make sure our students still continue to be successful, and really find who they are in the classrooms, and work to just build up a strong and stable lifestyle for them when they go forward. And that all starts with our students when they enter kindergarten and pre-school classrooms. Are they making memories? Are they learning how to be nice to each other? Are they learning how to cooperate, how to share, how to interact, how to make friends? And then older you learn more of the fine-tooth skills you need in the field that you go in to. So if we are going to be growing at a rate that we expect to be growing in terms of our population, do we have the financial plan to meet the financial needs that'll bring to our schools, and do we have the resources put in place so those students are successful and they don't fall behind.

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**Gardner City Hall**

### **Most Important Priorities**

**Q:** I know I said it was the last question, but I do want to follow up on something that you just said.

**A:** Of course.

**Q:** You had a function recently where these grants were announced and you had some officials from the state. And one of the officials made a comment that stuck with me. He said, "Mayor Nicholson, very impressive." How does it make you feel when people from the state and people from other areas look at Gardner and they say, "Very impressive"?

**A:** It means the world, Werner. Every day I come in here, and you hope you do a good job. You hope you do what's right, and you hope you have the biggest impact you can have. But sometimes, quite honestly, it's trying something different and hoping that it works. And the fact that we were able to get that type of a recognition from the work we're doing really, it validates the work that you do, day in and day out, and the long hours you're here and the weekends you're here. It makes it all worth it in the end to see that someone thinks you're doing a good job. And, but we're not there yet. There's still a lot more work we have to do, there's still a lot more that the City has available to it, and there's still a helluva lot more potential for us to be able to have. And I'm really excited to see the full impact that it's gonna bring.