



City of Gardner - *Executive Department*  
Mayor Michael J. Nicholson

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March 15, 2023

Hon. Elizabeth J. Kazinskas, Council President  
And City Councilors  
Gardner City Hall, Rm 121  
95 Pleasant St  
Gardner, MA 01440

Mr. Mark Schafron, Chair  
And Planning Board Members  
Gardner City Hall, Manca Annex, Rm 201  
115 Pleasant St  
Gardner, MA 01440

RE: Joint Public Hearing Written Testimony – Item #10892: An Ordinance to Amend the Code of the City of Gardner, Chapter 675, thereof entitled “Zoning,” to add “Sports Betting” to the Zoning Table of Uses

Dear Madam President and Councilors,

I am writing in favor of the Administration’s proposed Zoning Amendment to add the term “Sports Betting,” to line items 54 and 56 the Zoning Table of Uses.

In May of 2018, the United States Supreme Court struck down the federal Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (“PASPA”)<sup>1</sup>, also known as the Bradley Act, as unconstitutional in their ruling of *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*<sup>2</sup>. This federal statute had effectively outlawed sports betting nationwide, except for a few excluded states. The Supreme Court had ruled this act as unconstitutional, thus paving the way for several states to legalize sports betting.

In August of 2023, former Governor Charlie Baker signed House Bill 5164 into law, legalizing online, retail, and kiosk sports betting in the Commonwealth for residents ages 21 and older. Retail sports betting went live on January 31, 2023, and online sports betting launched on March 10, 2023. Kiosk sports betting will go live later this year.

There are currently three (3) approved retail sites and ten (10) approved mobile betting applications. When kiosk sports betting goes live later this year, they will be allowed across the Commonwealth in locations that follow a specific procedure as outlined by the new law.

The Supreme Court of the United States has ruled on several occasions, that under the First Amendment of the Constitution, a municipality cannot outright ban a particular industry or business from opening within its borders, but can limit where these businesses are located.

Since the City cannot bar this type of business from opening in Gardner, and since this type of activity is not currently listed in the City’s Zoning Table of Uses, it leaves the City open to

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<sup>1</sup> 28 U.S.C. ch.178 §3701 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Murphy v. NCAA*, 138 S.Ct. 1461 (2018).

liability of not being able to control whether these types of facility are located in largely residential neighborhoods or in areas in the City that may not be suited for this type of activity.

As such, it is the request of my Administration that this use be added to the City Code's Zoning table of uses under Line 54: Indoor Amusement, and Line 56: Outdoor Amusement, as these items fit the closest to the realm of sports betting.

This amendment to the Zoning Table of Uses, does not waive the other requirements these locations would have to go through should any sports betting facility open in Gardner in the future.

Per the requirements of the sports betting enabling legislation, any sports betting facility would have to enter into a Host Community Agreement ("HCA") similar to cannabis facilities in the Commonwealth. The Expanded Gaming Act requires that all applicants for sports betting licenses must first submit to the Massachusetts Gaming commission:

"a signed agreement between the host community and the applicant setting forth the conditions to have a gaming establishment located within the host community; provided, however, that the agreement shall include a community impact fee for the host community and all stipulations of responsibilities between the host community and the applicant, including stipulations of known impacts from the development and operation of a gaming establishment."

Additionally, after the HCA is approved by the City Council and signed by the Mayor, the City Council must then annually vote to allow the proposed establishment to operate a sports betting facility within the City at its location.

Lastly, before any facility should open, they must also go through the regular requirements for site plan approval and Development Review Committee vetting, both listed in Chapter §675-1010 of the City Code.

As such, this action to add this type of use to the Zoning Ordinances still requires this type of industry to be heavily regulated and vetted by the City by both branches of its government and its boards and commissions.

This action is simply being put forward to protect the City in the long run and pre-plan should one of these facilities come to Gardner rather than waiting and reacting if this should ever come up.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael J. Nicholson  
Mayor, City of Gardner