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GARDNER RECEIVES \$1,650,000 FROM

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT AWARDS

Funding awarded for demolition of Greenwood Pool and Rome Building, Construction of new Greenwood Pavilion, Downtown Infrastructure Improvements, and social service programming in Gardner

Gardner, MA - August 25, 2023 – On Friday, Mayor Nicholson, State Representative Jon Zlotnik, and City Council President Lizzy Kazinskas welcomed Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities Ed Augustus, and officials from around the Commonwealth to Gardner City Hall for the announcement of the latest round of Community Development Block Grant Awards from the Commonwealth and Federal Government. Gardner was awarded \$1.65 million in funds for various projects to take place throughout the City in the coming year.

“This investment will allow cities and towns across Massachusetts to strengthen and revitalize their communities,” said Governor Maura Healey. “Across the state, we are going to see cities and towns use these Community Development Block Grants to fix their roadways, expand their housing options, and improve the quality of life they offer their residents – and we’re so excited to see the impact those investments will have. We’re grateful to our federal delegation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development for their work in getting these funds to Massachusetts and for their commitment to helping us make Massachusetts the most competitive, most affordable, and most equitable state we can possibly be.”

“As a former Mayor, I know firsthand how grants like this play a critical role in giving our towns and cities the resources they need to make a real impact on the lives of Massachusetts residents,” said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. “We know how important it is to invest in our communities, and these CDBGs open doors to opportunities for growth and revitalization across the state. We’re

so excited to see all the awardees use these funds to improve their communities.”

The Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant Program is a federally funded, competitive grant program designed to help small cities and towns meet a broad range of community development needs. This program helps eligible cities and towns with a population under 50,000 who do not receive direct funding from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to meet a broad range of community development needs in housing, infrastructure, revitalization, economic development and public social services.

“The funds received from this grant program are going to make a big difference in moving Gardner forward,” said Gardner Mayor Michael J. Nicholson. “From replacing blight with promise at the Greenwood Pool and Rome Square, investing in our downtown infrastructure, helping to make programming for our students more equitable regarding of a student, and helping fight homelessness- this investment will truly have a large impact in the City.”

November of 2022, the City Council displayed unanimous endorsement and approve of the City’s application for these grant funds that was put together by the City’s CDBG Steering Committee, comprised of members of the City’s Administration, Community Activists, and City Councilor George Tyros and the City Council’s representative to the group.

“The funding will provide three of our local public social services with funds to carry out public services, these include funding to the Gardner Athletic Program, Boys & Girls Club and Gardner Emergency Housing Mission,” said Lyndsy Butler, Assistant Director of Community Development and Planning who also serves as the Chair of the City’s CDBG Steering Committee. “Additionally, the funding will help support Gardner’s Downtown Urban Renewal Plan with the installation of new sidewalks, lighting, and pedestrian crossings on Parker Street. Other projects include the creation of a recreation park and pavilion at the site of the Greenwood Memorial Pool Facility and the demolition of the former Rome Building located at 205-213 Main Street.”

Echoing her statements, Trevor Beauregard, Gardner’s Director of Community Development and Planning, Executive Director of the Gardner Redevelopment Authority, and a Member of the CDBG Steering Committee stated, “The Mini-Entitlement Block Grant Program is a key resource assisting the City, in

partnership with the Gardner Redevelopment Authority, to implement the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan through the removal of slum and blight and the creation of public and private development opportunities.”

The event held at City Hall featured all awards given through this grant program for both fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2023. Alongside Gardner were 70 other communities receiving funding for various projects. In total, \$64.9 million was given to these communities to rehabilitate 362 units of housing, the acquisition of 191 units to convert to housing, 31 infrastructure projects ranging from road repairs, park improvements, and planning, and a variety of social services to non-profit organizations.

“CDBG funds provide municipalities with an important and flexible way to fund projects and programs that wouldn’t fit into the budget,” said State Representative Jon Zlotnik. “Just look at the list for Gardner from this round to see the range of important things it is able to provide to communities.”

Of the funding Gardner received, \$921,700 is allocated for blight removal, \$446,820 for infrastructure improvements, \$33,980 for social services, and the remaining 15% of the funds for administrative costs associated with overseeing these projects.

By receiving these funds, Gardner is able to move on several projects that have been on the radar for quite some time for quite some time.

“I’m glad to have the Lt. Governor and Secretary back in Gardner, especially for today’s purpose,” said City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas. “I appreciate them acknowledging our use of CDBG funding in Gardner and their choice of our City as the location to announce the CDBG award for the entire Commonwealth. The City Council’s unanimous vote to endorse and approve these funds was a direct result of the positive growth that we’ve seen in the past from this same type of funding.”

ROME SQUARE REVITALIZATION

Part of this funding will be used to revitalize Rome Square. This block sits in the heart of the city and at one of the busiest intersections downtown. The buildings at 205-213 Main Street once housed one of Gardner’s furniture retailers and were included as part of the larger Urban Renewal Plan. The plan includes the demolition of the building to allow for site improvements to the intersection of Main Street and Willow Street and allow further development of the area. By revitalizing Rome Square, it will draw people to the downtown area which in turn will increase the demand for new businesses and local shopping options.

GREENWOOD POOL DEMOLITION AND PAVILION CONSTRUCTION

Since its closure in 2012 when City officials deemed the cost of repairing the extensive damage of the main pool building, too high, the structure has steadily deteriorated, eventually being condemned by City Officials in 2021. These funds will facilitate the demolition of this decaying building in order to make way for a functional pavilion, which will complement the newly installed Park Street Park and outdoor pool next door.

The new pavilion will utilize certain aspects of the current structure – such as the sign and copper cupolas – as part of its design to pay tribute to the building that it is replacing.

DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT PHASE 4

Since 2020, the City has utilized portions of the funding received from the CDBG program for infrastructure upgrades in the downtown area. This has led to the construction of new sidewalks and crossing ramps, installation of new lighting fixtures, improved pedestrian crosswalk lighting infrastructure and other improvements on Main Street, Central Street, Parker Street, Park Street, and around the perimeter of Monument Park.

A portion of the funds awarded at this event will be put toward continuing that work in the area of Lafayette Square.

ELIMINATION OF GARDNER PUBLIC SCHOOL ATHLETIC USER FEES

In continuing the City's efforts to make programming at Gardner Public Schools more equitable to students regardless of their economic backgrounds, \$15,000 of the funds received will be going toward the elimination of all athletic user fees for students at Gardner High School and Gardner Middle School.

"I know from experience and educational research that students who are involved in school activities, like athletics, are more likely to attend school regularly, pass classes and graduate on time, and have a positive overall school outlook and experience," said Dr. Mark Pellegrino, Superintendent of Gardner Public Schools. "This grant has helped Gardner Public Schools eliminate user fees, which, for many of my students, is a barrier to participating in school sports. I am thrilled that the Massachusetts administration understands the positive aspects of supporting schools to ensure every child has access to these opportunities. It is an excellent investment in our schools, but more importantly, it is an investment in our children. Thank you for helping us to make this possible."

Since 2021, following the re-opening of schools after the COVID-19 pandemic, the City Administration and Gardner Public Schools have made a concerted effort to eliminate athletic user fees to make sure no student has to worry whether or not they can afford to play a sport or not. Prior to these efforts, students were charged between \$150-200 per season per sport or \$500 to participate on the hockey team.

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF GARDNER PROGRAMMING

The Boys and Girls Club of Gardner will be receiving \$13,980 to allow them to create programming for their after school and summer programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics- commonly referred to as the "STEAM" program.

"STEAM will be at the heart of our programming efforts at the Gardner Clubhouse," said Brandon Hughey, newly appointed director of the Gardner Clubhouse of the Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg, Leominster, & Gardner. "By prioritizing Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, we are not only equipping the next generation with the vital skills needed in our rapidly evolving world, but we're also instilling a passion for lifelong learning. Our commitment reflects a deep understanding of the importance of holistic education, blending creativity with critical thinking. We are grateful to our city and state partners for the opportunities that this grant will offer to our members." The Gardner Clubhouse of the Boys and Girls Club began its work in the Chair City in 2015 with a pilot program that was housed at Gardner Middle School, since then, the club has expanded into its new location at the former Elm Street School building allowing them to greatly expand their operations and services to the city's youth population. The club currently provides after school programming for close to 100 students in Gardner until 6pm at its new location. In addition to STEAM programs, the new location also allows the clubhouse access to music classes, playgrounds, a gymnasium, theater, kitchen for healthy habit lessons and more.

GARDNER EMERGENCY HOUSING MISSION ASSISTANCE

The Gardner Emergency Housing Mission ("GEHM") will be receiving \$5,000 from this program to support the work they do in combatting issues of homelessness in the Gardner area.

"Gardner Emergency Housing Mission (GEHM) wishes to thank Mayor Michael Nicholson and all who were involved in distributing the Block Grant monies," said Mary Tourigny, Secretary of GEHM's Board of Directors. "GEHM relies on

the support of the community. GEHM's mission is to support and strengthen the community by providing temporary, transitional housing and support services to families that are homeless. Thanks to the City of Gardner's Block Grant money, GEHM is able to continue our mission."

Founded in 2016, the Gardner Emergency Housing Mission exists to advocate for collaborative, locally-driven solutions to end homelessness one family at a time. For a 3 to 6 month period, GEHM provides a furnished apartment for families that are homeless. This allows the families to remain together in the community where the children can stay in their schools and parents can maintain jobs. GEHM covers the cost of the apartment rent and utilities for the short term. By doing so, families can regain stability while retaining their dignity.

While living in GEHM housing, families have access to a Case Worker that meets with them twice a week. The Case Worker helps to bridge the gap between homelessness and self-sufficiency through education and advocacy. The Case Worker assists families with identifying resources and applying for available services.

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Community Development Block Grant Funds are allocated annually to the Commonwealth through the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") and administered by the new Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. These funds are designed to be flexible so that recipients can use their funds on a wide range of eligible projects. Grants from this program provide qualifying cities and towns with resources for housing, community and economic development, assistance to low-and moderate income residents through non-profit support, and the removal of slum and blight.

"The funds awarded today will improve the lives of Massachusetts residents," said Ed Augustus Jr., Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities. "From Washington D.C. to Main Street, these funds represent a partnership across all levels of government. Today we put the power of federal funding into the hands of local communities to invest these flexible grant dollars directly into the programs and services residents need most. EOHLC is proud to partner with cities and towns to ensure that these funds are spent efficiently and effectively, and I congratulate all this year's awardees."

"Congratulations to communities across the Commonwealth for receiving almost \$65 million through the 2023 Community Development Block Grants Awards, which support housing, community, and economic development projects," said

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren. “I will keep fighting hard with lawmakers and communities across the Commonwealth to secure vital federal funding that invests in making our communities more safe, resilient, and livable.”

“I applaud the EOHLC for awarding \$64 million for communities across Massachusetts to create, develop, and expand essential services – from affordable housing and childcare, to outdoor spaces,” said Senator Ed Markey. “Community Development Block Grants provide Bay Staters with the building blocks needed to stay healthy and thrive. I will keep fighting for big, bold investments in every corner of our Commonwealth.”

“Community Development Block Grants are critical for communities like Gardner that are making smart investments to improve quality of life for families,” said Congresswoman Lori Trahan. “The grants announced today by Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll are significant, and they show the Commonwealth’s commitment to ensuring communities large and small are able to succeed. I look forward to the work ahead to increase federal funding for this important program so cities and towns across Massachusetts can continue to benefit from investments like this.”

Gardner has made considerable investments in infrastructure and development projects of late, which several organizations and individuals attribute to the amount of growth the City has seen. In 2022, 33 businesses either newly opened their doors or expanded the services they offered in Gardner- to date in 2023, 15 additional businesses have followed suit. Additionally, 22 buildings in the Downtown area are under new ownership and being renovated and over 220 housing units are currently in the planning phases for the Downtown area alone.

“In the last three years, we have made unprecedented investments in our City and our infrastructure and we’ve started to see the return on that investment tenfold,” concluded Mayor Nicholson. “I can’t thank our partners at the state and federal level and in the private sector enough for their continued investments in Gardner. I’m really looking forward to seeing the positive impact these funds have on our community for generations.”

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