

## GARDNER HOSTS HOUSING SECRETARY AUGUSTUS FOR DOWNTOWN TOUR

*The Visit Focused on the 222 Housing Units set to be constructed in the Downtown over the next 12-18 Months*

August 15, 2023 – GARDNER, MA – Mayor Nicholson, Representative Zlotnik, and other local officials from Gardner came together on Tuesday to welcome Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities, Edward M. Augustus Jr. to the Chair City. The Secretary's visit focused primarily on the numerous housing developments Gardner has been able to attract over the last year in its downtown, as well as plans for future development, and dialogue as to how the state can encourage similar growth in other communities within the Commonwealth.

Secretary Augustus is the inaugural head of the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, which was established in 2023 by the Healey - Driscoll Administration to create more homes and lower housing costs in Massachusetts. In January of 2023, Governor Healey filed legislation to officially separate the previous Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development into two separate cabinet branches. Before his appointment, Secretary Augustus was the long-time City Manager of Worcester and a member of the Massachusetts State Senate prior to that.

Speaking on the significance of the visit, **Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson** said "Gardner has seen unprecedented growth and development in the last three years, and it's always great to be able to show our partners at the state level what we are doing here. It also helps that as the former City Manager of Worcester, Secretary Augustus understands what dealing with these issues on a local level looks like and what tools are needed to get the job done."

The Mayor and the Secretary were joined by City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas, City Councilor and Chair of the Gardner Redevelopment Authority Ron Cormier, Ward 5 City Councilor Alek Dernalowicz, State Rep Jonathan Zlotnik, the Executive Director of the Gardner Housing Authority Krishonna Murray, and local developers Jonathan Bombaci of Candor Realty and Millenium Holding Group and Jenna Hartman and Gabrielle Surrette of Empire Management.

According to data collected during the 2020 Federal Census, Gardner's population has grown by 5.2% since 2010, now with 21,183 residents. With this has come an increased demand for housing in the area, particularly from individuals moving from the greater Boston area who have transitioned to remote working environments rather than a traditional office building. In 2020, the average single-family home sold in Gardner at \$248,000. Year-to-date, that number is \$341,000 in 2023. For condominiums, the average sale price in 2020 was \$157,000 compared to the current year-to-date value for 2023 of \$230,000. Properties also sold on average for 105% of the listing price.

Tuesday's agenda highlighted the approximately 222 housing units in the Downtown area that are set to either be newly constructed or renovated after decades of neglect and decay. The properties included 25 Main Street, 2-10 Parker Street, 280-320 Central Street, 14-24 Parker Street, 309 Central Street, and 42-52 Parker Street among others.



*Gardner Mayor Mike Nicholson and other City Officials lead Secretary Ed Augustus on a walking tour of the Downtown Housing Projects*

In addition to the properties which are to open their doors imminently in the city, there are also plans to construct a 5-story, 100-unit residential apartment building with a roof top restaurant/bar on Rear Main Street, as part of the redevelopment plans for that site. This project also includes a 160-space public parking lot, event plaza, food truck court, and other amenities.

Notably, all of the 222 proposed housing units highlighted during the Secretary's visit are 100% fully market rate units, as opposed to income restricted or deed restricted affordable units. In sum, this is the largest investment in market rate housing the City has seen in decades.

Speaking on his visit, **Secretary Edward Augustus** said "It was a pleasure to visit Gardner today and I commend Mayor Nicholson and his Administration for the hard work they've done to expand housing production. Gardner is a model for what we can accomplish when state and local government and private organizations work together to meet the housing needs of the community. Massachusetts has a shortage of housing across affordability levels, and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities is committed to fostering similar housing production across the Commonwealth."

Mayor Nicholson also shared his thoughts with Secretary Augustus and his team about the need for increased parking amenities in the downtown to meet the needs that are being forecasted based on the growth these new residential developments will create. This included preliminary investigations by the Nicholson Administration about the feasibility and potential of a parking deck over the West Street Parking Garage, and different funding opportunities that may be available for such a project.

"As our taxpayers invest in Gardner, we attract more investment and build relationships," said **City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas**. "The Secretary's visit to Gardner is a testament to the progress continuing in our community through city, state, federal, and private investment. Today he saw where we are, what we need, and where we are going."

In what amounts to a pivotal time for the availability and affordability of housing locally, state-wide, and nationally, the Nicholson Administration has renewed its commitment to take proactive and assertive steps to ensure Gardner receives a premium of the resources, attention, and market share available to communities in the Commonwealth. Secretary Augustus's visit on Tuesday coincided with the beginning of several new construction projects in Gardner- it may too have coincided with the beginning of a new chapter for the city.

"I'm very proud of the work we have been able to accomplish in Gardner, and to see everything coming together," concluded **Mayor Nicholson**. "Downtown Gardner will look a lot different at this time next year, and that's thanks to the strong partnerships we have with officials at the state and members of the private sector. We really do have a lot to look forward too, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact this will have on our City in the long term."

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Breakdown of planned housing units and developments highlighted during the tour:

- 280-320 Central Street (Central Park Building)
  - 28 Units
- 25 Main Street (Bullnose/Shawmut Bank Building)
  - 14 Residential Units
    - 9 One-Bedroom
    - 2 Two-Bedroom
    - 3 Studio Apartments
  - Brewery Tap Room on the first floor

- Members lounge and restaurant in the basement level
- 2-10 Parker Street (Garbose Building)
  - 18 Residential Units
    - 10 One-Bedroom
    - 4 Two-Bedroom
  - 3 Commercial Storefronts
    - Coffee Shop/Bakery
    - Nails 2000
    - Additional Space
- 309 Central Street (The Former Gardner News Building)
  - 12 Residential Units
    - 9 One-Bedroom
    - 3 Two- Bedroom
  - 1 Commercial Space on the ground level
- 42-52 Parker Street (Former Temptations and Ryan Block Buildings)
  - 28 Residential Units
    - 17 One-Bedroom
    - 12 Two-Bedroom
- 14-24 Parker Street (Empire Building)
  - 10 Residential Units
    - 10 One-Bedroom
  - 3 Commercial Storefronts
- 29 Parker Street (Former Gardner Savings Bank/Bank of America Building)
  - Restaurant/Steak House on the ground level
  - 8 Residential Units
    - 3 One-Bedroom
    - 4 Two-Bedroom
    - 1 Studio Apartment
- 110-114 Main Street (Former Wheelan Supply Storefront)
  - Art Studio on the first floor
  - One residential unit above
- Rear Main Street Development
  - 100 Residential Unit 5-story building with a roof top restaurant/bar
    - 20 One-Bedroom
    - 65 Two-Bedroom
    - 15 Three-Bedroom
- 75 East Broadway (Former Prospect Street School)
  - 24 Residential Units
- 94 Pleasant St
  - 3 Family House