

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITY OF GARDNER AWARDED \$200,000 GRANT FOR EXPANSION OF MUNICIPAL FIBER NETWORKS

Creates Network Upgrades to benefit new Community Center at Waterford Street School and Improve School Security

Picture Below Right : Mayor Mike Nicholson and Anne Gobi, Massachusetts Director of Rural Affairs at the Grant Award Ceremony for the Commonwealth Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant Award Ceremony. Director Gobi presented the awards on behalf of the Healey-Driscoll Administration.

GARDNER, MA - August 10th, 2023 - On Thursday, the City of Gardner was awarded a \$200,000 grant as a part of the State's Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant Program. The funding will allow the city to connect its School Department, Police Department, and the new location of the Gardner Senior Center at Waterford Street School to a single fiber optic network. This will allow for a streamlining of the management of IT infrastructure by adopting a unified approach which covers network monitoring, cybersecurity, records management, and backup and recovery, achieving a long-held goal of more efficient and secure communications between city departments.



Speaking on the Grant, **Mayor Michael**

Nicholson expressed high hopes for the new project, “This funding will do a lot of good in helping us improve our public safety efforts and our work to create a new community center at the Waterford Street School location. Thank you to Director Gobi, Rep. Zlotnik, and all of our state partners for their efforts to give local governments the tools they need to be successful. I would also like to thank our City’s Director of Technology, Bob O’Keefe, for his efforts in writing and obtaining this funding for the City.”

“The immediate benefit will be the police will have access to school cameras from the Police Station. Future benefits include faster internet and greater internet connectivity.” said **Gardner Director of Information Technology Bob O’Keefe**, “The fiber connection to the former Waterford School will bring Internet Service without a monthly recurring cost. This will save our Senior Center approx. \$60,000 over the next ten years. The savings will also be available for the non-profits that will be in that building. With the fiber the City’s Tech Dept will be able to monitor and maintain its computers, phones, and security without leaving City Hall.”

The Municipal Fiber Grant Program offers competitive grants to support the closing of critical gaps that exist in municipal networks. Awards are focused on connecting municipality-owned facilities and assisting municipalities in achieving critical goals associated with their fiber networks, including protection from the growing risk of cyber security exploits targeting local government, the expansion of remote work and meeting the expectations of constituents who enjoy the convenience of interacting with government online.

State Representative Jon Zlotnik also voiced his opinion of the importance of the grant, stating, "These funds from the state are important to make sure Gardner's IT infrastructure is capable of serving its purpose to the fullest, and is secure. These systems are critical to the operations of the City and the services it provides, so these investments are equally important."



Representatives of Cities and Towns who were awarded grants from the Commonwealth Community Compact Municipal Fiber Grant Program gather with Massachusetts Rural Affairs Director Anne Gobi as awards are announced. Mayor Nicholson represented the City of Gardner at the ceremony.

The substantial funding received through the Community Municipal Fiber Grant Program will pave the way for an essential communication upgrade in the city, enabling crucial connections between the School Department, The Police Department, The Senior Center, and the connection to the Radio Repeater. With this integration, the city has taken a significant step towards streamlining its IT infrastructure management. By adopting a unified approach encompassing network monitoring, cyber security, records management, backup and recovery, this development will provide for an improved communications environment amongst crucial city departments.

“Having reliable communication is important for delivering quality emergency response to the citizens as well as providing a critical safety lifeline to first responders” said **Fire Chief Greg Lagoy**, going into detail about the importance of the connection to the radio repeater for first responders. “The City is in the process of making upgrades to the site, including the installation of a new communications equipment shelter building. This new fiber connection will provide a dedicated, reliable connection for radio, data, and security systems from the repeater site to the City’s Public Safety agencies and the Central Dispatch Center at the Police Station. This is an excellent upgrade for the City, and will provide future expansion capability for emerging technology in Public Safety communication systems.”

This project continues the progress that the City has made in connecting its municipal buildings to one fiberoptic network. Currently, Gardner City Hall, Gardner Fire Headquarters, and the Gardner Police Headquarters are all connected by fiberoptic cable.

City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas added “The installation of these services is costly and essential, and the receipt of this grant is a financial and operational win for our city. Rep. Zlotnik and our State partners continue to recognize our needs in Gardner, and in this instance have rewarded our active pursuit for assistance to improve infrastructure - many, many thanks to them.”

In this round of funding, \$4 million was given as grants to benefit 32 municipalities and school districts across Massachusetts.

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Press Release from the Commonwealth:

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