

MAYOR NICHOLSON SPEAKS TO CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mayor Michael Nicholson speaks of the ways Gardner has utilized federal funding for infrastructure improvements

Congresswoman Lori Trahan and Mayor Michael Nicholson present on the ways Gardner has utilized Federal Infrastructure Funding on various projects in the City of Gardner to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus on June 26, 2024, at the Capitol Building

GARDNER, MA- July 17, 2024 – Earlier this month, Mayor Michael Nicholson was invited to Washington DC to participate in a roundtable hosted by **Congressional Hispanic Caucus** at the Capital Building.

The roundtable focused on the ways that federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and other pieces of federal legislation were being implemented around the United States.

Also participating in the event were representatives from the U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration, members of House Democratic leadership, Congressional Hispanic Caucus members, and community stakeholders from various parts of the country.

“It was an honor to represent Gardner at the Nation’s capital and speak of the ways that Gardner has been able to utilize federal funding to help move the City forward,” said Gardner **Mayor Michael Nicholson**. “Our infrastructure impacts the daily lives of our residents – from our roads, sidewalks, and bridges to our water system, economic development, and more – that’s why the projects these funds area available for is so important. The last time Gardner saw this big of an influx in federal funding for infrastructure improvements came with the Works Project Administration in the 1930s and 40s. It’s now our job to go after every federal dollar we can so that we can continue the progress we’ve made and bring Gardner into a stronger tomorrow. I’d like to thank Congresswoman Trahan for the invitation to join for this important discussion.”

“I’m proud of the work my team and I have done with Mayor Nicholson to identify federal infrastructure grants Gardner is eligible for, submit competitive applications, and secure significant investments for families and small businesses. That’s why the Mayor was the perfect guest to invite to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus’s roundtable on the implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” **said Congresswoman Trahan**. “Mayor Nicholson discussed the importance of the recent RAISE grant awarded to the City and the work ahead to secure additional federal funds to make our infrastructure safer, more reliable, and more efficient.”

“The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is proud to continue its work to ensure that all Americans, including Latinos, can access the benefits of the Infrastructure Law,” said **CHC Chair Nanette Barragán**. “This law made generational investments in our nation that will go on to improve the lives of millions with improved access to broadband, clean water, and improved transportation. It’s vital that historically disadvantaged communities are not left behind as the law continues being implemented.”

Mayor Nicholson has made it a top priority of his administration to ensure that Gardner makes a concerted effort to obtain any funding available to the City. In the last four years, Gardner has been quite successful in obtaining federal grant funds for several projects to improve the City.

As a result, Gardner was awarded \$1,253,000 million in federal funding from the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant. This funding will be allocated towards improving the mobility of Gardner’s downtown. With specific focus on improvements in parking, transportation and pedestrian accessibility.

The roundtable concluded with a commitment to continued collaboration and advocacy to ensure the results promised in the IJJA. The elected officials and community partners are confident that through this discussion and transparency there will be meaningful improvements for Latino communities nationwide.

“It was an important opportunity to speak with local leaders and stakeholders about what the Investing in America agenda has done to advance equity and help Americans – including those who have been historically disadvantaged – get ahead.” said **Regional Leadership Council Chair Steny Hoyer**. “Meetings like this one further demonstrate the transformational impact of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act across the country.”

Current projects underway in Gardner that are being funding in whole or in part by Federal infrastructure funding is included at the end of this release.

The following Members of Congress were present at the roundtable:

- CHC Vice Chair Darren Soto
- CHC Vice Chair of Member Engagement Tony Cárdenas
- CHC Whip Sylvia Garcia
- Democratic Caucus Vice Chair Ted Lieu
- Regional Leadership Council Chair Steny Hoyer
- Rep. Salud Carbajal
- Rep. Jim Costa
- Rep. Jesus "Chuy" García
- Rep. Robert Menendez Jr.
- Rep. Delia Ramirez

- Rep. Raul Ruiz
- Rep. Lori Trahan

The roundtable was attended by the following Biden-Harris administration officials:

- Keishaa Austin, Acting Principal Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of State and Community Energy Programs
- Coral Torres Cruz, Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary of Transportation at the U.S. Department of Transportation
- Zealan Hoover, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator
- Alejandra Nunez, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Office of Air and Radiation at the U.S. EPA
- Parul Desai, Congressional Affairs Director for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Aside from Mayor Nicholson, the roundtable was also attended by the following community stakeholders:

- Liz Hurtado, National Field Manager at Moms Clean Air Force — Eco Madres
- Shruti Vaidyanathan, Director of Federal and State Transportation Advocacy at Natural Resource Defense Council
- Ross Lieberman, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs at Hotwire Communications
- Coralette Hannon, Director of Livable Communities at AARP
- Matthew Vining, Policy Analyst at Atlas Public Policy
- JuanPablo Prieto, Director of Diversity Programs at Chicago Transit Authority
- Eric Lopez, Director of Public Works at the City of Long Beach
- Katherine Garcia, Clean Transportation for All Campaign Director at Sierra Club
- Luis D. Dávila Pernas, Executive Director at the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration
- Álvaro Zarco, Senior Legislative Affairs Advisor at UnidosUS
- Yxstian Gutierrez, County Supervisor at Riverside County
- Jairo A Rodriguez, Professional Engineer at Volkert Inc.
- Sara Chieffo, Vice President of Government Affairs at the League of Conservation Voters
- Albert De Cardenas, General Counsel at MasTec
- Kevin DeGood, Director of Infrastructure Policy at the Center for American Progress
- Toni Tinoco, Central Valley Deputy Regional Director at California High-Speed Rail Authority

Gardner Infrastructure Projects currently funded by federal grant and funding programs:

●**Solar Initiative**

- The City of Gardner is looking to put solar panels on every City owned building and building solar canopies over our municipal parking lots.
- Work on this project is currently in the design and engineering phase with construction expected to begin in Spring of 2025.

● **EV Chargers**

- The Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities awarded a grant of **\$750,000** to the City from funding it received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to install 10 new fast chargers in the Knowlton Street Parking lot to allow for access to public charging stations and help the City build capacity to electrify the City's fleet. This funding will also install a new electric transformer for City Hall to allow the building to update its electrical service to open the door for the City to get electric mini split air conditioners and electric heat pumps to transition the building off of natural gas and oil.
- The project is currently in its engineering phase with construction expected to begin in Spring of 2025.

● **Water Transmission Line Replacement**

- In 2022, The City of Gardner was awarded **\$1,000,000** through a Congressionally Directed Spending grant to replace a 100+ year old water main.
- The late 1800's water main serves as the main conveyance of water from the City's Crystal Lake Water Treatment Facility to the storage tanks. This critical pipe has represented a high risk failure point for the City's distribution system.
- Construction for the ~2000' of new water main is planned for Fall of 2024.

● **James Street Pump Station Replacement**

- In 2023, The City of Gardner was awarded **\$1,100,000** through a Congressionally Directed Spending grant to renovate the James Street Pump Station.
- The James Street Pump Station, originally constructed in the early 1980's, is of critical importance to the entire northeast portion of the City's residents. The pumps provide the necessary pressure for fire suppression and drinking water to these areas.
- Alongside the mechanical repairs and upgrades to the pump station the project also includes sampling ports for water quality testing. These new locations help the City along with MassDEP track various metrics relating to water quality at a more granular level.

● **Uptown Rotary Traffic Improvement Project**

- The Uptown Rotary project is currently under construction and will improve multimodal access, safety and operations at the intersections of Elm Street, Pearl Street, Green Street, Woodland Avenue, and Central Street.
- This rotary is a heavily trafficked thoroughfare serving local schools, Heywood Hospital, Route 2 and Route 140 traffic, and traffic to the downtown area.
- The Project construction includes the following:
 - Construction of sidewalks on all streets entering the rotary.
 - Provides accessible ADA accommodations.
 - Reconstructs traffic islands to guide the orderly flow of traffic,
 - New and improved crosswalk locations with button activated rectangular rapid flashing beacons for improved pedestrian safety.

□Enhanced stormwater management.

●Waterford Street Community Center

- In 2022, Gardner opened a new elementary school, consolidating three schools into one building. When this occurred, the City found ways to repurpose the newly vacated buildings to ensure they continued to be utilized to the best they could.
- This structure is being converted into a new community center that will house the local food pantry, senior center, adult day programming, food insecurity non-profit, the City's historical archives, and other non-profits centered around social services.
- This project is being funded with **\$550,000** of ARPA funds from the Commonwealth, **\$100,000** from the City's ARPA funds. The non-profits have also received **\$250,000** from CDBG funds to improve the spaces they will be sharing in the building.
- Senators Markey and Warren also have a pending \$1,000,000 federal earmark currently pending in the Federal FY2025 budget for this project.

Maki Park Creation

- In 2017, the City demolished a large building that had been abandoned for several years in the heart of the Downtown. When the demolition was completed, a grass lot was put in its place. However, the lot did not meet minimum building size requirements and was too steep to meet ADA compliant grading.
 - As such, the City of Gardner utilized portions of its CDBG and ARPA funds to repurpose the site into a three-tiered park to house outdoor seating, recreational opportunities, and an outdoor stage with full electrical capabilities for performances.
 - With the large number of new housing development projected for the downtown, this project, like the Orpheum Park and Park Street Park projects, provide the residents of the new apartments with a "front and back yard" while living in the City's downtown.
- Total Cost of the Project is \$500,000. **ARPA \$315,000**

●Orpheum Park Creation

- The City and Gardner Redevelopment Authority partnered to acquire the vacant Orpheum Theatre building in 2015 through eminent domain. The building was partially destroyed by fire in 2010 and once acquired was cleared using MassDevelopment and CDBG funds. The site was transformed into a small pocket park along Parker Street, a 28-space municipal parking lot on Connors Street, and a 43-space private parking lot on Connors Street to support the 29 unit, **\$4.5 million**, residential development at 50 Parker Street.

●Park Street Park Creation

- The City of Gardner retained a design for a new public park on Park Street at the southern edge of Crystal Lake and an adjacent shared-use path that extends north to Crystal Lake Drive and south to Park Street. The project design was funded with a combination of CDBG, Complete Streets, and ARPA funding. Total cost for this project

was \$1.6 million.

● **Greenwood Pool Revitalization Project**

○The City of Gardner is utilizing CDBG funding to demolish the Greenwood indoor pool facility. The structure is located at 69 Park Street and is registered as a historical site. The structure is located adjacent to the city's outdoor pool and splash pad. The city will be demolishing the facility and constructing a 60 x 40 pavilion in its place. The city plans to utilize approximately \$560,000 in CDBG funding for this project, including design, demolition and construction phases.

● **Rear Main Street Revitalization Project**

○Project goals are to beautify the downtown district and attract more visitors to the area. The project includes a new park and water feature and will provide access behind Main Street that will allow existing businesses and property owners an opportunity for new rear basement-level access to their properties, food truck parking and an additional 95 new, unmetered public parking spaces to attract more shoppers and renters to the area. The city is utilizing a \$4.1 Million state Mass Works grant for the first phase (North) of this project. A proposed \$3.6 million Housing Works grant application was recently submitted to the state to fund the second phase (South) of this project, which includes development of 50 +/- residential units.

● **Downtown Infrastructure Improvement Project**

○Ongoing Construction and design phases focused on revitalizing and improving street conditions specifically in the Downtown area. The City has spent close to \$2 million in CDBG funds to support these improvements. The current work includes Streetscape improvements and construction on Park Street, Central Street and Cottage Street, as well as construction of crosswalks, signalized accessible crossings sidewalk and lighting upgrades. The next phase will include West, Oak, Parker, and Nichols Street Intersections.

● **Rome Square Revitalization Project**

○Consists of revitalization of Rome Square, which is located along main street, in front of the City's recently constructed Police Station. The project consists of demolition of slum and blight located at 205-213 Main Street. The City is utilizing \$600,000 of CDBG funds for clearance, which will enable the City, in partnership with the Redevelopment Authority, to market the site for development purposes.

● **Airport Revitalization Project**

○Utilizing \$5 million from the Federal Aviation Administration, the City of Gardner undertook a complete reconstruction of the Gardner Municipal Airport's runway, taxiway, and apron. Additionally, internet access was extended to the airport for the first time, the interior of the administration building was renovated, and the heating system was upgraded to a new energy efficient system. The goal is to eventually be able to rent space in the Administration building to a coffee shop restaurant for those visiting the facility, within the next ten (10) years.

○This funding also includes drafting a new master plan for the facility to guide upgrades in the future.

●**North Central Pathway Bike Trail Pedestrian Bridge**

○The project consists of the construction of a grade separated bridge for a shared-use path over Route 140 which will connect the North Central Pathway from the existing trail on the north side of Route 140 to the southern portion which is currently under design

○The bridge is the final link of the pathway project which will connect downtown Gardner to Winchendon. The 25% Design has been approved by MassDOT and the project is on the STIP list for FY 2027 and is eligible for Federal Aid highway funding. The current construction estimate is **\$7,989,503**

○The North Central Pathway project holds tremendous significance for Gardner and the surrounding area. It promises to create a safe and convenient multi-use pathway that will connect the downtown areas of both Gardner and Winchendon, various neighborhoods, parks, and recreational areas.