

Official Meeting Minutes: Gardner City Council – August 3, 2026

1. Call to Order and Administrative Compliance

The Gardner City Council was called to order on August 3, 2026, at the City Council Chambers. The session commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance. Pursuant to the Commonwealth's Open Meeting Law, the Chair issued formal announcements regarding the recording of the proceedings. It was mandated that any person intending to record the session via audio or video medium notify the Chair immediately, subject to reasonable requirements concerning the number, placement, and operation of equipment to ensure the orderly conduct of the meeting.

Furthermore, the Chair established a strategic directive requiring all documents and exhibits referenced during the session to be submitted in duplicate to the City Clerk for permanent inclusion in the official record. Having established these administrative benchmarks, the Council moved to a review of previous records.

2. Comprehensive Review and Approval of Outstanding Minutes

The Council conducted an extensive administrative audit of a significant backlog of minutes dating back to 2024. This audit, initiated by the Council President and executed by the City Clerk, was strategically designed to restore the integrity of the public record and ensure operational transparency. The review encompassed approximately 53 sets of minutes totaling over 350 pages.

Records Presented and Approved

The Council voted to approve the following sets of minutes:

- **2024:** August 5 (Regular Meeting)
- **2026:** January 8 (Inauguration), April 21 (Regular), May 4 (Regular), May 12 (Informal – School Budget), May 12 (Informal), May 18 (Regular), May 26 (Informal), June 1 (Regular), June 8 (Special), June 15 (Regular), June 22 (Committee of the Whole), June 22 (Special), and July 6 (Regular).

Corrective Action Plan and Procedural Standards

The Council identified two systemic failures that contributed to the backlog: the tolerance of extended intervals between meetings and the recording of minutes, and the inconsistent practice of accepting minutes out of chronological order. To mitigate future risk, the Council adopted a **30-day approval standard**, requiring all minutes to be approved and posted to the municipal website within one month of the meeting date.

Technical Amendments to the Record

The Council voted to amend the "Call to Order" sections of the following sessions to ensure legislative accuracy:

Meeting Date	Original Designation	Amended Designation
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May 12, 2026	Regular	Informal (School Budget)
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June 8, 2026	Regular	Special
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June 22, 2026	Regular	Committee of the Whole
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June 22, 2026	Regular	Special
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Executive Session Review

Following a brief recess for confidential review, the Council voted in open session to approve the Executive Session minutes of May 12, 2026, and May 26, 2026. The records were subsequently collected by the City Clerk to maintain security protocols.

3. Communications from the Mayor and Executive Oversight

The Council exercised its oversight role regarding executive compliance with City Code Article 1 Section 464-1.

Item 11902: Departmental Compliance and Auditor Oversight

The Council evaluated a response from the Mayor regarding a department head’s failure to adhere to city code during a critical process.

- **Resolution Timeline:** The issue was originally identified by the **City Auditor**. Despite being brought to the attention of the executive branch, it remained unresolved for several weeks.

- **Strategic Intervention:** Resolution was only achieved after the Council President intervened and the Council voted to submit a formal information request. The matter reached final correction roughly three months after its initial identification.
 - **Legislative Conclusion:** While the Council noted the successful resolution, members emphasized that formal legislative pressure should not be required to ensure administrative adherence to the City Charter and Code.
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4. Finance Committee: Fiscal Year 2026 Budgetary Adjustments

The Council addressed several year-end transfers necessary to reconcile salary, wage, and operating expense appropriations for the closing of the fiscal year.

Structured Summary of Financial Measures

The Council voted on the following items, including significant strategic amendments:

- **Item 11895:** Amended from 218,871.85to* * 149,548.00**. This amendment added necessary police funding but removed the Mayor's unclassified sections to ensure more granular tracking.
- **Item 11899:** Amended from 87,356.55to* * 163,178.34**. This adjustment reallocated the utilities, energy, and telephone expenses previously housed in the Mayor's unclassified budget to their respective departmental operating accounts.
- **Items 11896, 11897, & 11898:** Approved as presented to balance various departmental wage and operating accounts.

Debate on Fiscal Transparency

Councilor Brooks advocated for the implementation of "**push-button**" reporting within the Munis system to provide real-time historical context. The Council expressed a preference for frequent, Council-led adjustments throughout the fiscal year rather than large-scale, internal year-end reconciliations, ensuring the public and the Council maintain a clear picture of the city's financial trajectory.

5. Legislative Action: Professional Development and Financial Transparency

The Council considered two ordinances designed to codify fiscal discipline and oversight.

Ordinance 11862: Professional Development Oversight

This ordinance establishes a foundation for the utilization of travel and professional development funds.

- **Mandates:** Written applications detailing costs and benefits to the city, with quarterly Auditor reports submitted to the Council.
- **Legislative Status:** The Council voted to send the ordinance to its **First Printing**.
- **Deliberation:** Councilor Heglin argued the ordinance sets a necessary minimum threshold for accountability. Councilors Brooks and Mack expressed concerns that the process could become "cumbersome," potentially delaying essential certifications and licenses for staff due to the timing of Council meetings.

Ordinance 11870: Financial Transparency and Governance

This measure proposes a 5-year financial forecast and early revenue reporting.

- **Action:** The Council granted a **motion for more time**. This delay allows the City Auditor to ensure that the required reports can be generated directly from the financial software without "manual massaging" of data, ensuring the reports remain objective and accurate.

6. Capital Improvement Projects and Bond Reappropriations

The Council authorized the strategic reallocation of bond proceeds to address emergent infrastructure requirements.

Item#	Source Project	Destination Project	Amount	Strategic Reason
11880	Greenwood Pool Roof	Perry Auditorium	\$65,000	Discovery of asbestos and wood rot in window frames.
11881	Comm. Center	General Capital	(Rescinded)	Reallocating funds to more

	Ramps			pressing safety needs.
11892	Unexpended Bonds	Waterford St. Center	Reapprop.	Asbestos abatement and water line installation.

Project Oversight: Councilor Brooks emphasized that the inclusion of an **Owners Project Manager (OPM)** for these works was "money well spent," providing the city with an "honest appraisal" and protecting the municipal investment during construction.

7. Appointments and Job Description Modifications

The Council fulfilled its confirmation duties to ensure technical expertise within city departments and compliance with state safety standards.

Personnel Confirmation: Dennis Ash (Item 11756)

The Council unanimously confirmed Dennis Ash as Plumbing and Gas Inspector through 2028. Mr. Ash brings 38 years of trade experience and was commended for his "educator" approach to code enforcement. It was noted for the record that Mr. Ash intends to finish his career with the City of Gardner, aiding in the city's long-term retention goals.

Administrative and Safety Updates

- **Job Descriptions:** Updated descriptions for the Human Resources Director and Youth Services Director were approved to reflect modern administrative needs.
- **Item 11839:** Established the **Transfer Station Safety Program Development and Compliance Coordinator**. This role ensures compliance with OSHA and Department of Labor Standards and is **cost-neutral**, achieved by reducing the hours of a vacant monitor position.

8. Economic and Community Development Quarterly Update

Director Stevens provided a status report on major infrastructure and planning initiatives:

- **Rear Main Street:** Property acquisition is underway for the \$3.5 million MassWorks project to prepare for future private development.

- **CDBG Funding:** Grants were authorized for youth scholarships, domestic violence prevention, and a new food transport van for the Gardner CAC.
- **North Side Pavilion:** Construction is nearing completion, pending final utility work by National Grid and Verizon.
- **Greenwood Memorial Pavilion:** The Council clarified that all historical pieces from the original structure were **inventoried and saved**. A phased approach will be utilized to reintegrate these elements and lighting as funding permits.

9. New Business and Council Observations

Administrative and Election Orders

- **Licensing:** Approved a Class 2 Motor Vehicle Dealers License for J&T Trailer Sales.
- **Item 11900:** Approved a pay measure for the Assistant City Clerk. The Council President addressed "water cooler talk" regarding the hire, emphasizing that the process was fair, followed ordinance-allowed credits for prior professional experience, and was vital for recruitment and retention.
- **Election Prep:** Adopted Items 11904, 11905, and 11906 for the September state primary, including the appointment of workers and police details.

Councilor Remarks

- **Election Security:** Councilor Brooks assured the public of the security of the Massachusetts election system, citing rigorous machine testing and state-mandated audits that make fraud "virtually impossible."
- **Community Announcement:** Councilor Cormier recommended the community attend the production of "Footloose" at Theater at the Mount.
- **Revolution 250:** The Council President presented a high-quality replica of the **Declaration of Independence**, secured by Representative Zlotnik via the Revolution 250 initiative. The replica, commemorating the 250th anniversary of the

nation and Massachusetts' role in printing the original 1776 documents, will be prominently displayed in the city.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned following a closing prayer.