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# FROM THE PRESIDENTS DESK

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YOUR CITY • YOUR COUNCIL

## Summer Session Continues: Clearing the Backlog and Strengthening Fiscal Rules

We are in the second month of our summer schedule, holding our single August meeting before things pick back up this fall.

If you looked at our meeting packet this month, you probably noticed a massive section: 15 different sets of minutes up for Council approval. As you may recall, starting late last year, the Council voiced serious concerns about the state and quality of our records. Knowing there were still minutes left unapproved dating as far back as 2024, I instructed our new City Clerk, Jennifer Pelavin, to conduct a full review of all Council and committee minutes.

In total, this undertaking produced 53 sets of minutes totalling more than 350 pages, alongside several operational and website record corrections. I want to give tremendous kudos to Clerk Pelavin—the sheer volume of work she tackled in just her first few weeks on the job, literally working nights and weekends to get Council records back on track, was nothing short of incredible.

Reviewing how things got this far off course made two things clear: we tolerated longer and longer gaps between when meetings occurred and when minutes appeared, and we frequently accepted them out of chronological order. That makes tracking loose ends nearly impossible, and the more time passes, the easier it is to miss critical details.

Moving forward, we are establishing a standard: taking up minutes in proper chronological order at the very next sitting, with all minutes approved and posted within 30 days of the meeting. We owe our residents a transparent, prompt, and accurate public record, and that is what we will hold to going forward.

## Progress on Keeping Tabs on Travel and Training

We took the next step on Item 11862, an ordinance proposed by Councillor Heglin to ensure clear rules and transparency around city travel and training funds.

Following the consolidation of travel and training into a single central account during the FY27 budget process, this ordinance establishes a clear baseline: employees requesting funds must outline the total cost, necessity, and direct benefit to Gardner in writing, with quarterly reporting provided to the

Council.

While questions were discussed regarding the mechanics of paying from a central line versus individual departmental transfers, the measure was successfully advanced to its first printing, allowing us to refine the administrative details before a final vote.

## More Time on Ensuring No More Budget Surprises

On Item 11870— Councillor Heglin’s ordinance for comprehensive financial transparency and budget governance proposal—the Council voted to take more time for review and collaboration.

This proposal aims to mandate earlier revenue forecasts in February, regular quarterly reporting, and an annual 5-year financial forecast. Taking extra time allows the Council and the City Auditor to test and streamline reports directly from the city's financial software (Munis), ensuring our reporting requirements are practical, automated, and provide meaningful fiscal insight throughout the entire year rather than rushing at budget season.

## August Wrapped Up

The Council took action on several key appointments, community items, and administrative business:

*Plumbing and Gas Inspector:* Confirmed the appointment of Dennis Ash as the full-time Plumbing and Gas Inspector for a three-year term, bringing 38 years of trade and inspection experience to City Hall.

*Blue Star Memorial Parking Exemption:* Advanced an ordinance to its first printing to waive municipal parking meter fees for vehicles bearing Massachusetts Blue Star plates (honoring families of fallen law enforcement officers), making Gardner the first municipality in the Commonwealth to adopt this measure.

*Community Donations Accepted:* Formally accepted generous community donations, including support for the Gardner Animal Shelter, a \$1,000 contribution for the Gardner Food Truck Festival, and over \$2,000 raised for the Police Department’s Domestic Violence Division.

*Staffing & Recruitment Rubric:* I stepped down from the chair to explain the compensation placement for our newly hired Assistant City Clerk under the city's updated salary rubric, ensuring we attract experienced talent while maintaining equitable salary structures.

When the Council took up the task last year to reform our salary system, we had two primary goals. First, we wanted to create a system that recognized experience and longevity. The step system we instituted accomplished that. The other important goal was to create a system where we could attract experienced talent. We did that by creating a system where the Council can place a new hire into a higher step if their background and experience merit. This is both important and challenging. This system covers nearly 100 positions varying from groundskeepers to the Chief of Police. The system

created a public process where the Mayor and Council review the facts on a case by case basis and set a step based on the rules of the ordinance. This allows us to have a system that can offer higher salary to those qualified, and maintain the flexibility of having an entry level salary.

*State Primary Preparations:* Approved the primary order, election officer appointments, and police detail assignments ahead of the September 1st State Primary Election.

See you all next month!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "G" and a trailing "eorge".