From the Presidents Desk

Your City • Your Council

Good Oversight Doesn't Have to be Scary

Throughout the past few months, the City Council has engaged in a historic level of legislative activity—advancing, amending, and enacting major ordinances designed to fundamentally reform Gardner's financial oversight and capital planning.

Perhaps the most structurally significant reform enacted this month was An Ordinance to Increase Financial Transparency, Financial Governance, and Budget Preparedness, drafted by Councillor Heglin, which passed and was sent to second and final printing on October 5.

For years, municipal budgeting in Gardner mostly operated within a 12-month vacuum and relied on "Free Cash" band-aids to fix issues that should have been planned for in advance. In today's fiscal environment—with skyrocketing health insurance rates, double-digit inflation on materials like asphalt and road salt, and Proposition 2 ½ constraints—that reactive model doesn't work. The Council has been raising concerns and red flags about these issues for years and now have taken concrete steps to get us on the right track.

This ordinance fundamentally changes how Gardner manages taxpayer funds by requiring mandatory 5-year multi-budget forecasting for the long term, and monthly expenditure tracking reports assembled by the Auditor for the

short term and continuous oversight.

This month also saw the enactment of legislation to ensure the sound management of major city projects. The ordinance which passed at our second October meeting, reforms the Capital Improvement Committee to restore elected representation—including dedicated seat allocation for the School Committee for the first time. And it requires mandatory communication and reporting, establishes advisory committees for major projects, and closes loopholes by mandating formal project plans and cost estimates *prior* to procurement.

Multi-year forecasting, regular reporting and better communication and organization around City projects will give the Council and administration the analytical runway needed to budget realistically and keep track of municipal expenditures effectively.

<u>Rooted in Experience and Community: This Month's Appointments</u>

Our Appointments Committee had an active month, vetting and bringing forward top-tier candidates who bring institutional stability, technical excellence, and deep community roots to Gardner's municipal operations:

- **Department Leadership:** Dane Arnold was confirmed to a new term as Public Works Director, celebrating 25 years of exceptional leadership managing our city roads, water mains, and wastewater infrastructure; and confirmed Roland Jean Jr. as Building Commissioner, ensuring dependable code enforcement and accountability for local development.
- **First Responders:** The Council confirmed two outstanding local academy graduates to the Gardner Police Department—Officer Dana Dumas and Officer Justin Johnson.
- **Boards & Technical Inspectors:** The Council confirmed MWCC Dean of Nursing Dr. Kimberly Shea, DNP, RN to the Board of Health; aviation manager and pilot Peter Kettle to the Airport Commission; and

experienced inspectors Daryl Sweeney (Inspector of Wires) alongside alternates Alan Speck and Shaughnessy Dame.

Working Together: Bridging Boards, Comissions & City Leadership

This month was defined by strong intergovernmental teamwork between the Council, the Mayor, and our dedicated local boards and commissions.

A Joint Honor at Walsh Square: Mayor Nicholson and I partnered to introduce an order dedicating the intersection of City Hall Avenue and Pleasant Street as Walsh Square, honoring Martin Walsh and his son, Attorney James Walsh, for over 75 combined years of dedicated civic leadership in Gardner.

Traffic Commission Collaboration on Winter Parking: Following our vote against returning to a blanket parking ban, I met directly with the Traffic Commission to share the Council's feedback. Thanks to quick action by Deputy Chief Moroni, Line & Signs, and IT, the City installed clear informational signs across municipal lots and launched a 24/7 automated hotline at **(978) 991-1515** for real-time storm parking ban updates.

Direct Dialogue with the Conservation Commission: On October 26, I attended the Conservation Commission meeting to speak candidly about our budget landscape, the FY26 roll-over deficit, and the budget games that were being played to pay that affected the Conservation Agent position dating back to 2018. Righting the ship for FY27 will require that the Council, the administration, and our boards stay aligned to protect critical community operations.

October Wrapped Up

This month was full of conversation around one common core: working towards the best for Gardner. Whether we are strengthening financial

transparency, improving capital planning, or building bridges between our boards and leadership, real progress requires that we stay curious rather than judgmental when new ideas are brought to the table. By keeping an open mind, staying transparent, and continuing to collaborate across departments, we can foster meaningful dialogue and deliver lasting results for our community.

I hope you had a happy Halloween and thank you for staying engaged!

