

Annual Report – 2008

This report highlights the activities of the Gardner Redevelopment Authority (GRA) during calendar year 2008 (January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008).

GRA Membership

The members of the GRA are:

Edward L. Lepkowski, Chairman
Ronald F. Cormier, Vice Chairman
James D. Murphy, Treasurer
Cleo E. Monette, Clerk
G. Albert Anderson, State Appointed Member
Robert L. Hubbard, Executive Director

Economic Development Coordinator

The GRA collaborated with the Greater Gardner Industrial Foundation (GGIF) and the City of Gardner to fund the position of Economic Development Coordinator. Kevin Flynn was hired in April to fill the position. Mr. Flynn assisted the GRA with all of the activities identified in this report.

The GRA extends its thanks to Mayor Hawke for the initiative that created this position and to the GGIF and City Council for the financial partnership that made it possible to hire Mr. Flynn.

Summit Industrial Park

Susan Windham-Bannister, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Life Science Center, visited the Summit Industrial Park and met with representatives from New England Peptide, Inc. (NEP) as well as City and GRA officials in November 2008. Ms. Windham-Bannister outlined the Center's programs aimed at helping biotech firms like NEP to expand and to create jobs.

East Gardner Industrial Park

In May 2008, the GRA assigned the leases to the two cell towers located on lot 5 in the park to Unison Site Management. The GRA retains ownership of the lot. Discussions with SWS, Inc. to purchase lot 5 and to expand operations started in late 2008.

Gardner 4 Business (g4b)

The GRA renewed the contract with j4b for 2008. There is a link on the City's website - Business Assistance Website for the City of Gardner - sponsored by the GRA. The g4b link to j4b provides information about federal, state and local business assistance programs. The GRA asked the newly hired Economic Development Coordinator to evaluate the use of the j4b site and recommend improvements or alternatives for 2009 to the GRA's efforts related to supporting existing businesses and outreach.

Grow Gardner Fund (GGF)

The GGF's only outstanding loan to the Gardner Ale House is current and the restaurant continues to do well in its downtown location. The GRA is grateful to the Ale House for its ongoing contributions to downtown revitalization. GGF received two inquiries about loans in 2008. Discussions continue with a small manufacturing company looking to purchase the building that they now lease and a coffee/juice bar seeking to refinance and to create a franchising operation throughout New England.

Greater Gardner Community Development Corporation

Renovations on the old Carbone building at 246-248 Central Street are complete and the Community Development Corporation (CDC) held a ribbon cutting and open house on June 12, 2008. The GRA originally purchased the building and after the CDC received a grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the CDC purchased it from the GRA. The building is now the CDC's headquarters from which six programs are managed and/or delivered – first-time home buyer education, affordable housing, micro-business assistance, the homework center at Olde English Village, job readiness and the cyber café.

The GRA is still under obligation to settle the relocation costs of the former tenant, a bar business, which was located at 246-248 Central Street. DHCD's Bureau of Relocation prepared a settlement letter which was signed by both parties in November 2008.

Urban Renewal

Implementation of the Urban Revitalization Plan, completed in September 2007, continued on a number of fronts. The GRA committed to provide the required 20% match for two Brownfield Assessment Grants from a program administered by the Montachusett Regional Planning Agency to conduct two Phase 1 assessments on property in the Rear Main Street Corridor targeted for redevelopment.

Encouraged by the Preferred Development Plan contained in the September 2007 report, the largest property owner in the Rear Main Street Corridor demolished three long vacant, derelict mill buildings. No public funding was used. Informal discussions continued between this land owner, Heywood Hospital, the National Development Council and the GRA regarding conceptual plans and a possible redevelopment pro forma for a medical office building. An initial meeting about financing the office

building was held with Undersecretary Brooks and staff from DHCD. A follow-up meeting was held with Undersecretary Brooks and Undersecretary Bialecki. Both meetings looked at the option of using HUD's 108 Loan Guarantee program in conjunction with New Market Tax Credits.

Through the efforts of Representative Robert Rice, the Transportation Bond Bill includes funding for a parking deck in the Rear Main Street Corridor to support the medical office building, existing downtown retail and redevelopment of three long vacant buildings on Main Street that once housed the downtown's largest department store. A private developer, Benjamin Builders, purchased the former Goodnow Pearson buildings from Colonial Cooperative Bank and is completing a mixed-use project that went into bankruptcy in 2007. When completed, the project will include 28 market rate apartments and three retail storefronts.

A Request For Qualifications for consultants to help the City prepare an Urban Renewal Plan – Phase 2 was issued in November 2008. Responses were received from BSC Group and VHB on December 16, 2008. Interviews will be conducted in early 2009 so that a request for funding Phase 2 can be include in the City's FY2009 Community Development Block Grant application.

On December 30, 2008 the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council provisionally approved the designation of Downtown Gardner Urban Redevelopment Area District and the Downtown Gardner Urban Redevelopment Program pursuant to MGL 40Q, District Improvement Financing (DIF). RKG Associates, partially funded by the GRA, helped the City prepare the application approved by the City Council and Mayor in July 2008.

S. Bent Property

In early 2007, the City acquired in a tax taking the former S. Bent furniture factory complex located at 60 Mill Street and 80 Winter Street. Mayor Hawke asked the GRA for financial assistance to plan the redevelopment and disposal of the facility. Totalling approximately 27 acres, the property contains four large buildings and numerous out-buildings totaling over 200,000 SF. One of the large buildings was destroyed by fire in 2008. The cause of the fire appears to be arson. The remaining buildings are all vacant and derelict. The City Council declared the property surplus in April 2008. Transfer of the property to the GRA is one option being considered.

Using a \$7,000 grant from the North Central Massachusetts Business Development Corporation and a requisite match of \$1,500 from the GRA, the City hired Tighe & Bond to adapt an RFP prepared for the Town of Raynham that seeks qualified companies to design, permit, build, operate and manage a large scale commercial food waste composting facility. The Raynham RFP was prepared in conjunction with MassDEP's Waste Reduction Grant Program. Five (5) prerequisite actions prior to advertising the RFP were identified: 1) compliance with MGL 21E; 2) completing a survey of the property boundaries; 3) assuring rail access; 4) estimating the cost of demolition and 5) amending the zoning to allow for the production of organic fertilizer.

Working together, the City and GRA received grants totaling \$270,000 from MassDEP and EPA to access and mitigate 21E issues. All mitigation work will be complete in the first quarter of 2009. The GRA hired a land survey company to complete the survey of the property's boundaries. The GRA signed a Purchase and Sale Agreement with the Boston & Maine Corporation to acquire the rail spur in October 2008. Ownership of the rail spur will allow the GRA to pursue a grant from the Executive Office of Transportation to repair and upgrade the rail spur. The City entered a deferred payment loan agreement with MassDevelopment in November 2008 for \$30,000 to pay for a Hazardous Materials Survey. This survey will allow the City to solicit bids to demolish some or all of the remaining buildings. An appropriate zoning amendment was approved by the Planning Board in December 2008. City Council action is expected in February 2009.

An overall redevelopment plan prepared by the GRA outlining the above actions and additional steps needed to redevelop and dispose of the S. Bent facility was approved by the City Council Finance Committee in October 2008.

Expedited Local Permitting – MGL Chapter 43D

The Massachusetts Interagency Permitting Board approved the designations of the Summit Industrial Park, S. Bent Mill/Garbose sites and the Rear Main Street Corridor as Priority Development Sites at its meeting in September 2008. The introduction of expedited local permitting will assist the City and GRA to attract new businesses and help local businesses expand. As part of the approval, the Massachusetts Permit Regulatory office awarded the City a \$60,000 technical assistance grant that will support an evaluation of parking and traffic flows in Gardner's downtown as well as conceptual designs for parking and street improvements in the downtown priority development district.

Mount Wachusett Community College 2008 Business Plan Competition

The GRA supported the MWCC 4th Annual Business Plan Competition. The GRA pledged \$1,500 in the Incubating Sponsor Level to award a Gardner business or a business looking to locate in Gardner for preparing a quality business plan.

Billboard Maintenance

The GRA has a five-year agreement with the Greater Gardner Furniture Outlets to cover routine maintenance for the advertising billboard facing Rte. 2 and located in the East Gardner Industrial Park. In 2008 electrical repairs were needed and handled by Raborne Electric.

Memberships

Massachusetts Economic Development Council	(MEDC)
Northeastern Economic Developers Association	(NEDA)

International Economic Development Council	(IEDC)
Massachusetts Association of Planning Directors	(MAPD)
American Planning Association	(APA)
Greater Gardner Community Development Corporation	(CDC)
Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce	
Gardner Square Two, Inc.	

R. Hubbard served as Treasurer of the MEDC in 2008. The MEDC is a professional association of economic development professionals in Massachusetts.

Other

R. Hubbard, Executive Director, attended and reported on the following meetings:

- APA Annual Conference, Las Vegas
- IEDC Annual Meeting, Washington, DC
- MEDC Meetings
 - Brockton and Lawrence
- NEDA Annual Conference, Buffalo
- Mass Alliance for Economic Development Awards Ceremony, Boston
- Urban Renewal Planning Committee Meetings, Gardner
- Department of Housing and Community Development, Boston

GRA members attended civic events hosted by the Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce, Community Development Corporation, Gardner Square Two, and Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School. The GRA supported Professional Development for staff members at several of the above conferences, and also supported Professional Development for members of the City of Gardner Planning Board and the Department of Community Development and Planning.

The GRA's efforts on behalf of the City of Gardner would not have been possible without support from Mayor Hawke; Representative Bob Rice; Bob Hankinson, City Engineer; Jennifer Dymek, Grants Administrator; Terri Hillman, Administrative Assistant; Judy Seppala, GIS Coordinator; Dick Reynolds, Building Commissioner; Richard Turcotte, Conservation Agent; Bernie Sullivan, Health Director; James Garrison and Henri Sans, Greater Gardner Industrial Foundation; Jim Cruikshank, Executive Director, CDC; and Michael Cucchiara, National Development Council.

GARDNER REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Edward L. Lepkowski, Chairman

Robert L. Hubbard, Executive Director