

GARDNER REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Urban Renewal Information Sheet

Here are answers to some common questions about the urban renewal process:

What is urban renewal?

The main purpose of an urban renewal plan is to help stimulate economic growth; to create a climate and opportunity for private investment; and improve and expand housing opportunities in the urban renewal area.

Urban renewal has been around for over fifty years. For many of those years, the federal government was involved. But in the early 1970's, the feds got out of the urban renewal business and replaced those funds with community development block grant monies. However, Massachusetts has kept urban renewal on its books and it is still a planning tool that many communities, such as Springfield, Worcester, Boston, and Fitchburg, just to name a few, take advantage of. The size of the urban renewal areas and their programs vary as to the needs of their particular communities.

How is the urban development area determined?

Planners identify areas that they feel are in need of help and can meet the test of substandard, decadent, or blighted criteria. The planners in Gardner have identified an area from West Gardner to Union Square, including Peabody Hill, as a possible urban renewal area.

This identification is a starting point. Until data is collected and analyzed, we will not know if this is a suitable target area for urban renewal. The boundaries are not set. In fact, only a Citizen Advisory Committee can identify the area, although others can give their input and suggestions. An urban renewal plan is a community driven, citizen participation, planning process, not a solo act. Collaboration and community organization are the key elements of a successful urban renewal process.

For this plan to be successful, it will need the vast majority of the 22,000 citizens of Gardner to demonstrate their support and enthusiasm. A comprehensive communication plan will keep residents of Gardner informed from the very beginning, and update them as milestones are achieved.

Why look at an urban renewal plan at this time?

There may be opportunities to help facilitate and direct private development. Presently, there are ongoing individual development projects that, if tied together in a comprehensive way, may add greater value and opportunities for the community.

Another compelling reason to have an urban renewal plan is that state and federal funding sources are more likely to fund a community that has a comprehensive plan with a clear vision and obtainable objectives.

An urban renewal plan tells the development and investment communities that we have a vision and a direction and have identified opportunities for private investment.

How long does the planning process take?

The undertaking of an urban renewal plan is a twelve to fifteen month process during which opportunities and constraints will present themselves.

The feedback from the community following this November 17 forum will be the catalyst for the launching of this process in January 2006.

What are the elements of an urban renewal plan?

- Maps of the project area
- Data demonstrating that the area meets the eligibility criteria
- Project objectives
- Financing plan
- Local approvals

In addition, the plan should embrace smart growth strategies and Brownfield redevelopment.

Once the plan has received local approvals (planning board, city council, mayor) it must be approved by the State Housing and Community Development Agency.

After the plan is approved by the state, the city is then eligible to submit an urban development action grant request. When the city is awarded an urban development action grant, the state will contribute up to 50% percent of the overall cost of the financing plan over a period of twenty years. The city is responsible for the remaining 50% percent.

Typically, the city bonds the entire amount of the financing plan and is later reimbursed by the state for their 50% percent share.