

**CITY OF GARDNER**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING**

*Manca Annex, 115 Pleasant Street, Room 201, Gardner, MA 01440*

*Telephone: (978) 630-4014 ♦ Fax: (978) 632-1905*



**CDBG STEERING COMMITTEE - MEETING NOTICE & AGENDA**

**DATE/ TIME:** **Tuesday, January 20, 2025 / Starting at 4:30 p.m.**

**PLACE:** 115 Pleasant Street, Gardner, MA  
*Manca Annex, Second Floor, Hubbard Conference Room 203*

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF OPEN MEETING RECORDINGS:**

Any person may make a video or audio recording of an open session of a meeting, or may transmit the meeting through any medium, subject to reasonable requirements of the Chair as to the number, placement and operation of equipment used so as not to interfere with the conduct of the meeting. Any person intending to make such recording shall notify the Chair forthwith. All Documents referenced or used during the meeting must be submitted in duplicate to the Director of Community Development & Planning pursuant to the Open Meeting and Public Records Law. All documents shall become part of the official record of the meeting.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**1. Public Hearing:**

Review of Applications for FFY2026 CDBG Funds:

The Steering Committee will review applications received in response to an RFP and develop a plan for projects to include in the City's FFY2026 CDBG Mini-Entitlement application.

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Meeting Minutes:**

**1.** Vote to Approve minutes of Regular Meeting, November 25, 2025

**2. New Business:**

**2.1** Review of FY2022-2025 Community Development Strategy

**3. Old Business:**

**3.1** Status of FY2025 CDBG Mini Entitlement Grant

**3.2** Schedule for FY2026 CDBG Mini Entitlement Application

**3.3** FY2022-23 Project Updates

3.3.1 Demolition of 205-213 Main Street

3.3.2 Greenwood Pool Demolition

3.3.3 Social Services

**3.4** FY2024 Project Updates

3.4.1 Social Services

3.4.2 Amendment Request – Cancellation of School St. School demolition and addition of new Greenwood Pavilion and Park

The conference room is handicapped accessible. Translation for the hearing impaired and into other languages is available with prior request. For further information, or to arrange for translation, contact the Department of Community Development & Planning, at 978-991-5841.

*NOTICE: The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.*

Summary of Applications Received for FFY2026 Funds				
Agency	Project Description	CDBG Request	Other Funds	Notes on Eligibility and Other Potential Issues
<b>Public Social Services*</b>				
Gardner Community Action Committee, Inc.	New full time Coordinator position to manage front-line emergency needs of Gardner residents seeking assistance	\$30,000.00	\$32,750.00	
Gardner School Department, Athletic Program	Athletic scholarship program to cover full athletic user fees for low- and moderate-income students	\$15,000.00	\$20,000.00	
North Star Family Services, Inc.	Program staff and operating costs for Bonnie's Place emergency family shelter in Leominster - portion of the case management salary and heating oil	\$25,000.00	\$374,900.00	Assistance would need to be prorate based on families from Gardner.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Laundry Love program to pay for the costs to use washers and dryers at a local laundromat with 20-30 individuals served per month	\$4,500.00	\$0.00	
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Community garden improvements including masonry wall repair, drainage improvements, tree trimming, soil improvement; 3 new beds, soil and composte; composte, fertilizer and plants for exiting 27 beds; 20 dwarf fruit trees, and signage	\$50,150.00	\$0.00	Based on feedback from EOHLIC, CDBG funds could be used for 90% of project costs (approx. 90% of CAC's beneficiaries are Gardner residents).
Voices of Truth Corporation	Domestic violence prevention and survivor support including planning and coordination/Task Force meetings, workshops, supplies and printing, community awareness, social media, staff training, one-time utility assistance and refreshments	\$15,000.00	\$0.00	EOHLIC provided guidance that the use of CDBG for refreshments and a one-time utility payment as incentives for participation in financial literacy training is allowable.
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>				
City of Gardner, Dept. of Community Development and Planning	Downtown Phase 6, City Hall Ave, between Connors and Pleasant Street, includes new crosswalks, sidewalks, curbing, street lighting, and accessibility improvements	\$824,624.00	\$0.00	
<b>Public Facility Improvements</b>				
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.	Purchase and installation of four automatic door openers at 268 Central St., new CT board and siding on dormers and new windows at the transitional shelter	\$31,900.00	\$3,750.00	
<b>Housing Development</b>				
North Star Family Services, Inc.	Prehousing development and fundraising to build a new 25-unit affordable housing complex on agency-owned land in Leominster	\$50,000.00	\$796,595.00	Predevelopment and fundraising are not eligible CDBG housing development costs.
<b>Program Administration</b>	Costs necessary for the administration of the CDBG program, including salary and fringe benefits and other items needed in support of office overhead	\$131,250.00	\$0.00	Program administration is limited to 15% of the grant.
<b>Total Amount Requested</b>		<b>\$1,177,424.00</b>	<b>\$1,227,995.00</b>	
<b>Available Funds**</b>		<b>\$974,000.00</b>		
<b>Difference</b>		<b>-\$203,424.00</b>		
* A maximum of 5 public social service activities may be included in the FY2026 application.				
** Available funds includes \$875,000 from FY2026, \$90,000 from FY2024, and \$9,000 from FY2022-23. It does not include \$50,000 in FY2025 funds for Gardner Emergency Housing Mission's homelessness prevention project. Those funds will be reallocated through a separate process.				

<b>City of Gardner</b>	
<b>Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds</b>	
<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	Gardner Community Action Committee, Inc (Gardner CAC)
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	294 Pleasant Street, Gardner, MA 01440
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	Julie Meehan
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-632-8700 / <a href="mailto:jmeehan@gardner-cac.org">jmeehan@gardner-cac.org</a>
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	294 Pleasant Street, Gardner, MA 01440
<b>Project Description (add space as needed):</b>	
<p>Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.</p>	
<p>To maintain our standard of service and ensure no low to moderate income resident falls through the cracks, we are seeking funding for a dedicated full-time Coordinator position. This role is essential to managing the specialized, timely interventions required to resolve emergency crises while simultaneously supporting our critical food security operations. The funded staff member will serve as a crucial member in our direct-service team, who will focus on crisis intake, referrals, data management and food security support.</p> <p>The proposed staff is designed to optimize agency efficiency, allowing veteran staff to focus on long-term case management while the new coordinator manages front-line "emergency" needs with both technical precision and compassion. A primary function of this role is ensuring rigorous program compliance through accurate intake and data recording. To maintain the integrity of our emergency services—including housing and utility support—the coordinator will oversee the collection of mandatory documentation, including household-wide income and residency verifications.</p> <p>Supporting the 15,000 individuals served annually by our agency, this position provides direct, hands-on assistance to 450 people facing acute crises. The role will focus on interventions, including emergency referrals and aid for heating, evictions, and homelessness.</p> <p>All individuals seeking emergency assistance are required to maintain an active account within the Gardner CAC Client Portal (PantrySoft) and complete a comprehensive budget and questionnaire form. For those specifically utilizing food security programs, the coordinator will ensure portal accounts are fully updated and that guests have completed the required self-declaration of income. By centralizing these intake protocols under a dedicated coordinator, the Gardner CAC guarantees that reporting accuracy and demographic tracking are maintained at the highest standard, ensuring seamless service delivery for every neighbor in crisis.</p>	
<b>Unmet Need:</b>	
Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.	
<p>The Gardner CAC serves as a primary lifeline for over 15,000 individuals annually, yet a recent 32% surge in requests for heating assistance, shelter, and housing expenses has created significant operational bottlenecks. This unprecedented increase in the frequency and complexity of emergency cases has stretched our staff capacity to its limit, resulting in increased wait times that potentially jeopardize the safety and stability of families and individuals facing imminent eviction or utility shut-offs.</p> <p>The funding of this position directly addresses this urgent gap by introducing a trained professional</p>	

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

The Gardner CAC has a record of successfully managing Block grants. Our agency has consistently demonstrated the ability to complete initiatives within projected timeframes while delivering community impact. Some of our successful projects include:

- Cooking and Nutrition classes
- Youth Employment
- Emergency Fuel Assistance
- Pop-Up Pantry Coordinator

The successful implementation of this project, including all hiring processes and daily operations, will be overseen by Julie Meehan, Executive Director. This ensures that all programmatic goals align with the CAC's mission and grant requirements.

Supporting this leadership, the Board of Directors provides vital institutional oversight. The Board is responsible for the agency's strategic direction and fiscal accountability, ensuring that all grant-funded activities are conducted with transparency and meet the highest standards of community service.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

Line Item (add lines as need)	CDBG Funds Requested
1 - FT Salaried Position -- 51 weeks per year, 37.5 hours per week	\$50,000.00
Fringe -- Health Insurance	\$12,750.00
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	<b>\$30,000.00</b>
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	<b>\$32,750.00</b>
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	<b>\$62,750.00</b>

**Source(s) of Other Funds:** Gardner CAC Operating Budget

## City of Gardner

### Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds

<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	Gardner Public Schools; Athletic Dept
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	200 Catherine Street, Gardner MA
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	Daniel Forte
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-660-5106 - <a href="mailto:forted@gardnerk12.org">forted@gardnerk12.org</a>
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	200 Catherine Street, Gardner MA

**Project Description (add space as needed):**

Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

The Gardner Athletics Program proposes to overcome the financial obstacle of student athlete user fees faced by LMI families and encourage more students to participate in athletics. The Gardner Athletic Program will fund athletic user fees for 325-350 student athletes who receive free or reduced lunch and, hence, are considered to be LMI Gardner residents.

This program will continue to use an intake form, referred to as the Athletic Fee Invoice, to evaluate students for LMI qualifications and then waive the family fee allowing all students the opportunity to participate, regardless of income. The program has a goal to assist 325-350 student athletes and aims to encourage increased levels of participation as a result of this service.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

According to a recent Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletics Association (MIAA) evaluation (2014 – 2015), it was reported that the state’s wealthiest communities have a higher student athlete participation rate, with some communities, such as Weston (115%), experiencing greater than 100% participation. (For purposes of reporting, that number may exceed 100% as students participating in two sports are counted as two athletes.) In the state’s more economically challenged areas, such as Gardner, participation was significantly lower with the ten poorest communities averaging only 44% participation. Given Gardner’s participation rate of 31% (47% below the statewide average and 13% below the average rate of the 10 poorest communities), there is a clear disparity among Gardner student athletes and a significant opportunity to promote increased involvement through funding assistance.

During the 2024 year, the Gardner School System had over 500 student athletes participate in interscholastic athletics. With 1286 students in Gardner High School, Gardner Middle School, and the Gardner Alternative Learning and Technology School, the amount of students participating in an interscholastic sport is 43%, which is up from 31% when we began this program. According to the MIAA, the 2014-2015 school year witnessed a 78% participation in such activities; more than twice that of the Gardner School System. The reason for such a low participation can be found in the economic characteristics that make up the City of Gardner and, overall, the school system.

Historically, students that qualified for income-based Free or Reduced lunch eligibility were eligible for a reduced Athletic User Fee, however, that model shifted the cost to the School Department and distributed the financial burden to the overall budget which may have resulted in reduced or lower

City Hall Annex, 115 Pleasant Street, Room 201, Gardner, Massachusetts 01440  
Telephone: (978) 630-4011 ♦ Facsimile: (978) 632-1905 ♦ CDBG (978) 632-3800

quality services in other important areas such as clubs or activities. The proposed program provides LMI students with an opportunity to participate in athletics without creating a financial burden on the families of individual students and without causing any negative impacts to the overall student body and School Department.

Below is a summary of the income-based demographics of Gardner Schools relative to its Athletic Programs and student participation:

When comparing income-based demographics within the school system, a parallel correlation of LMI demographics can be surmised by comparing the Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility characteristics. (In fact, the Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility qualifications are even more conservative than LMI income guidelines.) For the current school year, a family of four would meet the “Reduced Meals” category if the household income falls below \$47,638 and would meet the “Free Meals” category if the household income fell below \$33,475. Given these parameters, the following characteristics exist:

#### Gardner Middle School

- 518 Total Students
- 280 “Free Meals” – 54%
- 46 “Reduced Meals” – 9%

#### Gardner High School

- 785 Total Students
- 367 “Free Meals” – 47%
- 86 “Reduced Meals” – 11%

#### GALT

- 135 Total Students
- 30 “Free Meals” – 22%
- 4 “Reduced Meals” – 3%

Within these three schools, there is a significantly large population of students who fall within one of the income-based review categories. All three schools have student levels of significant proportions (GMS [63%], GHS [58%], and GALT [25%]) of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. At the current time, these students can partake in every other extracurricular activity, other than interscholastic athletics, without a user or participation fee. To compete in interscholastic athletics, student families are required to pay a user fee of \$100 or higher (depending upon the sport) with a family cap of \$200 per player.

More than 50% all high school and middle school students fell into the Free or Reduced Lunch categories. Encouraging participation is very important given the correlation between athletics and

academic success. We are confident that the increase in proportions of students participating in athletics who also receive free and reduced lunch, is a metric that validates the success and LMI benefits of this program.

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.

Seeing this increase in participation rates of the target population in the programs third year of being funded by CDBG funds, gives us hope that we are increasing the equity and opportunity for all students to participate in athletic programs. As continuously reported, providing students with positive opportunities and activities outside of the classroom effectively strengthens their abilities within it. Given such, we feel this program is having a positive impact on individuals that will result in future successes that goes beyond the athletic field and into the classroom, and beyond to overall individual and community health and well-being.

The established program guidelines were presented during an advertised RFP process. It was later vetted by the CDBG Steering Committee as well as the Gardner City Council. Both bodies have unanimously supported this program and the goals set forth by it.

In conclusion, the Gardner Athletic Program will fund athletic user fees for 300-320 LMI Gardner residents who participate in student athletics. As required by the program, the Athletic/Recreation Director will provide an invoice of the LMI qualified participants. Our staff, within the Development & Planning Office, will review for accuracy and provide reimbursement.

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization’s experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

The Gardner Public Schools Athletic Department has established a sustainable and equitable funding model that eliminates athletic participation fees, ensuring access for all students regardless of financial circumstance. For the past six years, the department has successfully waived all athletic fees through diversified revenue sources, including year-round fundraising, gate receipts, and strong partnerships with booster organizations. This approach directly reduces financial barriers for low- and moderate-income students and promotes inclusive participation across all athletic programs. As a result, Gardner has experienced substantial growth in student participation, program stability, and overall athletic development, demonstrating both fiscal responsibility and a clear commitment to equitable access.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Full user fee offset	\$15,000
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>

**Source(s) of Other Funds:** See narrative above.

**City of Gardner**  
**Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds**

<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	North Star Family Services, Inc.
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	758 Main Street, Leominster, MA 01453
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	Shauna Neidigh
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-466-1704, sneidigh@northstarfs.org
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	758 Main Street, Leominster, MA 01453

**Project Description (add space as needed):**  
Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

Bonnie’s Place is a guiding light for families with children experiencing homelessness in the Tri Cities of Leominster, Fitchburg, Gardner, and surrounding communities. Bonnie’s Place provides 24-hours, 365-days-a-year shelter where five families at a time may reside in dignity in a safe and comfortable house while working on their individual barriers to housing security. We serve approximately 20 families a year comprised of about 60 people.

Bonnie’s Place ensures no family has to worry about where to sleep, go to bed hungry, have dirty clothes, or unmet medical and mental health care needs while they are in our program. Our case management services work with families to gain or improve employment, manage finances and save money, strengthen physical and mental health, obtain housing, and assist them with anything they may need to become self-sufficient. By the time they are ready to move into permanent housing, families have gained the skills and resources necessary to remain stable for themselves and the next generation.

Specifically, our program provides the following services:

- Safe and comfortable emergency housing in a residential neighborhood. Every family has a private, lockable bedroom with a bed for each family member and share common spaces such as kitchen, living room, dining room, bathrooms, laundry room, playroom, and playground.
- Whatever needs a family requires, whether that be food, clothing, toiletries, bedding, school supplies and even birthday presents for the children. Warm meals are provided daily by a rotation of 300 volunteers.
- Improved health and well-being of every family member. We ensure each person has medical insurance and connect them to appropriate medical and mental health care providers. Many of these needs have been neglected and families are often behind on immunizations. We teach families the appropriate use of community service providers, such as police, hospital emergency rooms, emergency medical technicians and mental health crisis units.
- Intensive, individualized case management for families to gain stability and independence. Our case manager meets with each family at least once a week, and often more, to provide accountability and support. This includes aiding families with employment, locating childcare, obtaining transportation, learning how to budget and manage their finances, directing them to appropriate resources, and more.
- Trainings for families to help them build life skills that they can take with them when they exit the shelter. Topics include nutrition, stress management, resume writing, positive parenting, job searching, and interviewing, tenant rights, etc.

- Financial literacy education and accountability. This involves teaching families how to build a family budget, prioritize spending, earn consistent money, recognize negative patterns of spending, be accountable for their financial choices, management of credit scores, and repairing their financial rating, and save first, last, and security deposit for next home.
- Stress management and self-care. Many clients have previously engaged in unhealthy coping techniques such as substance use, emotional eating, and withdrawal from positive relationships. We assist them in identifying negative patterns and help them build healthy habits. We also support clients who are in recovery from addiction by providing randomized drug screenings to assist in sobriety.
- Outdoor playground and indoor playroom stocked with educational toys and books for children. Project Apples comes every one to two weeks to read and do crafts with the children and give them free books. Paws for People comes once a month with Badger Blue, a therapy dog.
- Ensure each child is enrolled in school or appropriate childcare. We consult with school counselors and administration at the children’s school and assist with IEPs, autism, ADHD or behavioral issues.
- Refer families to multiple service providers as needed, such as counseling, food pantry, clothing pantry, diaper pantry, DTA for food stamps, childcare vouchers and cash assistance, social networks such as Mommy and Me, playgroups and libraries.
- Remain in contact with families for up to 18 months after they leave Bonnie’s Place to provide continual support as needed.

All of the work that North Star conducts with families is to get to the end goal of attaining a stable, safe and food-secure housing situation for each member of the family. Ultimately, this leads to a strong sense of hope and well-being that fosters a child’s development and allows the entire family to thrive.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

Many may think that most people who are experiencing homelessness are single men. Yet, 76 percent of all people experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts were doing so in families with children, the highest share in the country (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). Unfortunately, our state had a 74 percent increase in family homelessness between 2023 and 2024. These numbers only report the families that are recorded. We know the true numbers are even higher as many parents don’t seek help for fear that their children will be taken from them.

With the closure of Gardner Emergency Homeless Mission, Bonnie’s Place is needed for Gardner residents more than ever. As the only community-based shelter for homeless families in our region, Bonnie’s Place is not part of the Commonwealth Emergency Assistance shelter program. This allows us to prioritize local families and accept those the state cannot (40% denial rate). Each member of the family can remain together near their jobs, schools, and support systems. However, this means that we do not receive state funding for the shelter and must raise every dollar needed to provide these vital services.

All families have at least one child under the age of 18 or are pregnant, are unhoused, are extremely low or very low income, and have been denied shelter in the Commonwealth Emergency Assistance shelter system. About 80 percent of the families are led by a single mother. The large majority are from minority populations. Most of the adults in our program have either not finished high school or have a high school diploma and no further education. Most earn minimum wage. According to the National

Low Income Housing Coalition, a person working minimum wage in Massachusetts would need to work 98 hours a week to afford a modest 1-bedroom rental home at Fair Market Rent.

Homelessness significantly impacts multiple aspects of health. With the challenge of finding a place to sleep or food to eat, people experiencing housing insecurity don't prioritize health. Their stress levels are at an all-time high, increasing mental health issues and risk for substance abuse use. They are likely malnourished as they lack a refrigerator or even space to keep healthy food available. Children may experience developmental delays and are years behind in necessary appointments and vaccinations. People often lack transportation to medical appointments and have an increased use of emergency departments. Homelessness worsens chronic medical conditions, increases the risk of infectious disease, increases the risk of experiencing violence, and leads to higher levels of mortality. North Star ensures that each member of the family has health insurance and connects them to needed healthcare providers and community resources.

Everything we do at North Star is to help these families become stable and independent. We provide emergency housing and case management for approximately 15 to 20 families each year. Families are able to stay for up to a year to transition to permanent housing and self-sufficiency. We routinely have a wait list of approximately 75 families and refer more than 300 families to other agencies.

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.

For 22 years, North Star has provided ongoing shelter and comprehensive case management services for our community.

The immediate impact we see at Bonnie's Place is that families become stable and they experience decreased stress. Once their basic needs are met, the families can begin to work on their individual barriers to housing security. Clients that go through our program gain valuable skills that can use for the rest of their lives to maintain stability and self-sufficiency.

Indicators that we know the program is successful:

- Families are meeting each of their individual goals in their progress plan set up with the case manager.
- Families experience improved health. Family members are caught up on immunizations and medical appointments, including dental, vision and mental health as needed. Clients are getting treatment for any existing conditions.
- Parents are actively seeking employment, tracking each application and interview.
- Families learn financial literacy. They are budgeting their income and expenses, improving credit, reducing debt, and saving money for first, last, and security deposit for their next home.
- Families move into affordable and permanent housing.
- Continued follow-up with clients show that they have maintained independence.

It is very rare for a family to return to North Star because they are homeless again.

In 2024, Bonnie's Place served 23 families comprised of 64 individuals (26 adults, 38 children). We celebrated 12 families who successfully gained permanent housing.

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

Since the agency's beginning in 2003, North Star has helped families with children experiencing homelessness find hope and a home. A Leominster resident, Bonnie Hathaway, saw the need for services for homeless families and approached her church with the idea of joining with Interfaith Hospitality Network/Family Promise. Originally, the agency was named the Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network and along with partner churches offered shelter in churches, convents and multi-family apartment houses, as well as provided meals and support services. In 2015, a permanent site was secured in Leominster. In 2019, the board of directors chose to end the affiliation with Family Promise and changed the name to North Star Family Services, Inc.

We have proven that our model works, impacting the lives of nearly 400 families over the years.

**Key staff:**

Dr. Jon Hogue, President & CEO  
 Tabitha Cardona, Vice President of Administration  
 Jana Murphy, Shelter Director  
 Lesley O'Connell, Case Manager

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits.

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Case management salary (\$50,000 annual salary with vacation days, sick days and retirement matching)	\$17,000
Heating oil	\$8,000
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	\$25,000
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	\$374,900
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	\$399,900

**Source(s) of Other Funds:**

Amelia Peabody Foundation  
 CDBG Leominster  
 CDBG Fitchburg  
 Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts  
 DCU for Kids  
 Fred Harris Daniels Foundation  
 Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
 Greater Lowell Community Foundation  
 Health New England  
 Katharine and Winthrop Crane Foundation  
 Main Street Group Foundation

Nypro  
Rollstone Charitable Foundation  
Schwartz Charitable Foundation  
Rockland Trust  
Town Fair Tire Foundation  
United Way of North Central Massachusetts

<b>City of Gardner</b>	
<b>Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds</b>	
<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	St, Paul's Episcopal Church
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	79 Cross Street, Gardner, MA 01440
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	The Rev. Tim Crellin
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-632-0925 <a href="mailto:tim@stpaulsgardner.org">tim@stpaulsgardner.org</a>
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	same
<b>Project Description (add space as needed):</b>	
Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.	
For more than five years, St. Paul's has been offering a program we call Laundry Love. Volunteers from the church go to a local laundromat and pay for the machines for any individuals and families who need support. We serve 20-30 families each month.	
<b>Unmet Need:</b>	
Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.	
Low and moderate income residents of our community who live in housing that does not provide laundry facilities often struggle to afford the cost of doing their laundry at a commercial laundromat. St. Paul's volunteers go to a local laundromat monthly and pay for laundry for people who need assistance. This helps families direct funds to other needs. We post on FaceBook so that residents will know when this service is available.	
<b>Project Timeline/Milestones:</b>	
Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.	
St. Paul's provides this service on the third Saturday of every month year-round.	
<b>Agency/Organization Capacity:</b>	
Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.	
Laundry support is provided entirely by volunteers.	
<b>Project Budget:</b>	
Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .	
<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Laundry support (\$250/month x18 months)	\$4,500
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	\$4,500
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	\$4,500
<b>Source(s) of Other Funds:</b>	

<b>City of Gardner</b>	
<b>Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds</b>	
<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	St, Paul’s Episcopal Church
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	79 Cross Street, Gardner, MA 01440
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	The Rev. Tim Crellin
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-632-0925 <a href="mailto:tim@stpaulsgardner.org">tim@stpaulsgardner.org</a>
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	same
<b>Project Description (add space as needed):</b>	
Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.	
<p>Beginning in 2022, St. Paul’s established a community garden. Originally, we had 12 raised beds. We have expanded each year, so that we now have 27. All of the produce we grow is donated to the Garden Community Action Council for distribution through their food pantry outreach. Each year we generate hundreds of pounds of healthy produce for low and moderate income clients of the CAC. With the support of Community Development Grant funds, we propose to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Add 3 additional raised beds to the vegetable garden</li> <li>-Reconfigure the other side of our property so that we can plant 20 fruit trees</li> </ul> <p>We will also repair a crumbling masonry wall that would eventually collapse onto the adjacent sidewalk, improving safety and the appearance of the property, which is across the street from a public park.</p>	
<b>Unmet Need:</b>	
Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.	
<p>Low and moderate income residents of our community often do not have access to fresh produce. Fresh produced is expensive in the grocery store, and therefore residents often stretch their grocery dollar with other types of food, even though fresh produce is essential to a healthy diet, especially for children. Also, dry good and canned goods are the items most often donated to and distributed by food pantries. By providing fresh fruits and vegetables to the clients of the Gardner CAC, we propose to meet a need for healthier food on the tables of people in need in our community.</p>	
<b>Project Timeline/Milestones:</b>	
Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.	
<p>Early spring 2026: Landscaping work to reconfigure property</p> <p>Late spring 2026: Build and fill 3 new raised beds for vegetable garden. Apply compost and plant 30 raised beds with vegetables. Plant 20 fruit trees</p> <p>Summer to fall 2026: Tend garden and fruit trees Harvest fresh vegetables for the CAC</p> <p>Spring and summer 2027: Apply compost and plant 30 raised beds with vegetables.</p>	

Plant 20 fruit trees  
 Tend garden and fruit trees  
 Harvest fresh vegetables and fruit for the CAC

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization’s experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

All of the gardening at St. Paul’s is done by a volunteer team. We have work days in the spring to get the garden prepared and planted. We meet weekly throughout the summer and fall to tend the garden. We have a watering schedule throughout the summer. 2026 will be our fifth summer of growing produce for the CAC.

The Rev. Tim Crellin, who has more than 30 years’ experience in community gardening, oversees the project.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Landscaping including repair of a masonry wall, reconfiguring hillside for drainage, cutting back overgrown trees and soil improvement	\$40,000
3 new garden beds, including frame, soil and compost	\$1,500
Compost, fertilizer and plants for existing 27 beds	\$5,400
Twenty dwarf fruit trees	\$3,000
Signage for orchard	\$250
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	\$50,150
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	\$50,150
<b>Source(s) of Other Funds:</b>	

## City of Gardner

### Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds FY26

<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	Voices of Truth Corporation
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	PO Box 873, 66 Parker Street, Gardner MA 01440
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	Bernice Richard
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-277-1012
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	Various locations

**Project Description (add space as needed):**

Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also, provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

The proposed project will strengthen domestic violence prevention and survivor support services in the City of Gardner through a combination of direct educational services and community-wide coordination. Funding for Voices of Truth will support the facilitation of five trauma-informed workshops focused on financial abuse, as well as partial support for a Domestic Violence Task Force Coordinator to oversee planning, collaboration, and implementation of related prevention and education efforts.

Voices of Truth will facilitate five workshops, each approximately two hours, addressing the dynamics of financial abuse, its impact on survivors' safety and economic stability, and available local and regional resources. Workshops will be offered at accessible community locations and will be free of charge. Across the five workshops, the project anticipates serving approximately 70 low- to moderate-income Gardner survivors of domestic violence or individuals at risk of financial exploitation within abusive relationships. Eligibility will be documented through confidential participant intake forms completed prior to workshop participation. Intake forms will collect required demographic information, and all documentation will be securely maintained to ensure compliance with CDBG requirements. These workshops are designed to reduce barriers to safety and independence by increasing awareness of financial abuse, improving financial literacy, and connecting participants with advocacy and support services. By addressing financial abuse, which is a primary factor preventing survivors from leaving abusive situations, the project directly supports housing stability and economic security for low- and moderate-income residents. Additionally, participants in the workshops will be eligible for a one-time \$25 payment toward the utility or rental expense of their choice. This will require a form with the utility or rental company, account number, and address. This aid would be paid directly to the debtor. Refreshments will also be provided during the workshop.

Funding will also support a Domestic Violence Task Force Coordinator, who will convene monthly meetings of the Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force and coordinate project activities between meetings. The coordinator will facilitate collaboration among key stakeholders, including law enforcement, service providers, schools, health care institutions, faith-based organizations, and community partners. Responsibilities include overseeing workshop planning and outreach, strengthening referral pathways, supporting prevention initiatives, and ensuring services are responsive to the needs of low- and moderate-income residents. The FY26 funding will accomplish the following:

*Networking and Service Coordination/Collaboration:*

- Task Force members will meet monthly to ensure that local service providers (including police, advocates, health care providers, and schools) coordinate domestic violence response efforts and that identified service gaps are met.

*Prevention:*

- The Task Force will collaborate with the Gardner High School on prevention initiatives. High school students will be educated about Healthy Relationships. School-wide campaign will include healthy dating, and students will create posters. Hold educational meetings with behavioral and substance use providers, as well as Human Resources departments, through the Chamber of Commerce.

*Health Care Initiative:*

- The Task Force will work with medical facilities to develop and improve domestic violence screening and referral protocols so that survivors who come through these health care systems are supported and are connected with local advocacy services.

*Police and Courts:*

- The Task Force Coordinator will maintain regular contact with the Gardner Police Department's domestic violence civilian advocate to support the needs of police-involved survivors.
- The Task Force will work with Gardner District Court to provide information and resources to support the needs of survivors going through court proceedings related to domestic violence.

*Education and Outreach:*

- An annual domestic violence awareness proclamation and vigil will be held in October.
- An annual Teen Dating Violence awareness proclamation for the Gardner High School students
- Community outreach with GCAT National Night Out event and other health fairs
- General outreach and education information will be distributed throughout the community via social media platforms, cable, and radio interviews.
- Seminars will be held for the community on the dynamics of domestic violence harm reduction programs.

The coordinator role addresses a critical community need by ensuring that the above-described domestic violence prevention and response efforts in Gardner are cohesive, sustainable, and effective. This position enhances the impact of direct services by integrating them into a broader, coordinated community strategy.

By combining direct education with coordinated community leadership, this project advances the Community Development Block Grant objective of benefiting low- and moderate-income individuals while improving safety, economic stability, and quality of life for Gardner residents.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

Domestic violence remains a critical and ongoing public health and safety issue in the City of Gardner, disproportionately impacting low- and moderate-income residents. As demonstrated by recent tragedies in 2020 and 2023 and ongoing police data, domestic violence incidents in Gardner occur at a rate that exceeds what is formally reported. Research indicates that only one in seven incidents of domestic violence comes to the attention of law enforcement, suggesting that hundreds of Gardner residents

experience abuse each year without accessing formal systems of support. This indicates that additional community response options are necessary to meet the needs of survivors in the community.

Gardner’s semi-rural context further compounds this issue. According to a 2015 literature review by a University of New Hampshire researcher, domestic violence in rural communities is often more chronic, more severe, and more likely to result in fatalities than in suburban or urban areas. These dynamics are evident locally, where survivors frequently face limited access to shelter, transportation barriers, and a lack of nearby specialized services. As a result, many victims, particularly those with low or moderate incomes, remain in unsafe situations due to financial dependence, housing instability, and fear of retaliation.

A significant unmet need within the Gardner community is education and prevention related to financial abuse, a common but under-recognized form of domestic violence. Financial abuse (e.g., restricted access to income, coerced debt, damaged credit, and economic control) is a major reason that survivors are unable to leave abusive relationships. Gardner currently lacks structured, trauma-informed programming that helps survivors identify financial abuse, understand its long-term impact, and access tools and resources to increase economic independence. This gap disproportionately affects low- and moderate-income residents, who have fewer financial reserves to begin with and limited access to financial counseling or advocacy.

In addition to direct service gaps, there is an ongoing unmet need for coordinated, sustained community response efforts. Since the closure of the Battered Women’s Resource agency in 2007, Gardner has experienced a longstanding shortage of local domestic violence infrastructure. The establishment of the Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force has helped address this gap, leading to meaningful progress such as increased victim identification, prevention initiatives in schools, partnerships with law enforcement, faith communities, and health care providers, and expanded community awareness. However, the scope and complexity of domestic violence in Gardner require consistent coordination to ensure these efforts are effective, aligned, and sustainable.

Without dedicated staffing, collaboration across systems, including law enforcement, schools, health care, faith communities, and service providers, becomes fragmented, limiting the community’s ability to respond proactively and prevent future harm. The Task Force is essential to address this unmet need by facilitating collaboration, overseeing prevention and education initiatives, supporting direct services, and ensuring that low- and moderate-income survivors are connected to appropriate resources.

The proposed project responds directly to these unmet needs by combining targeted financial abuse education workshops with coordinated community leadership. Together, these components strengthen Gardner’s capacity to prevent domestic violence, reduce economic barriers for survivors, and improve safety and stability for vulnerable residents, advancing the Community Development Block Grant goal of benefiting low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

The Domestic Violence Task Force Coordinator will be implemented from July 1, 2026, until June 30, 2027.

The workshop timeline will be prepared and implemented from July 1, 2026, until June 30, 2027. Five workshops are planned, with a projected goal of one per month. The locations will vary based on sign-up. Our goals are to utilize the Old English Village, the Levi Memorial Library, and the Gardner Police Department.

The milestone will be measured by the number of workshop intakes, and a survey will be conducted at the end of each workshop.

**The chart below outlines the expected outcomes of the project activities.**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
Projected planning and coordination/Task Force meetings	Task Force goals are developed and implemented. More victims receive the full spectrum of needed services, community awareness of services increases, and youth are educated on healthy dating.
Networking and Service Coordination/Collaboration	To increase membership and consultation, while building a networking system
Direct services: Workshop	Survivors will be able to identify financial abuse and how to restore financial independence.
Prevention	High School students and the community will learn about healthy relationships, the warning signs of abuse, how to help a friend in an unhealthy relationship, and where to get professional help. Reduced rates of violence
Healthcare Initiative	The task force will work with emergency room staff to increase referrals to local advocacy services.
Police and Courts:	To continue providing the Safe Night Project for police officers. More victims' lives are saved. Providing backpacks for children helps more children view officers as safe authority figures. More survivors will have the support and guidance needed to navigate the court system.
Education and Outreach	More residents can identify abuse, know where to get help, and be effective supporters. More victims get help.

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for the implementation of the proposed project.

Voices of Truth is a nonprofit organization located in Gardner, MA. We are designed to support victims and survivors of domestic violence and develop programs in line with our mission statement by promoting healthy relationships in collaboration with our community stakeholders, in keeping our community safe. Our first successful project was the formation of the Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force in 2018. We believe human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or other status.

Our organization operates on an all-volunteer basis with a 3-year commitment. We have been in operation since 2005, doing only support groups. We became a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit in 2017 and expanded our operations to establish the Gardner Domestic Violence Task Force. Our volunteers are all trained as Domestic Violence Advocates, understanding the dynamics of domestic violence.

**Workshop facilitators credentials:**

*Lizz Rhodes* - MSW, LCSW, has over 10 years of experience in the field of Domestic Violence. She is our volunteer educator.

*Bernice Richard* - Board Certified in Mental Health Coaching and Biblical Counseling, has over 25 years of experience doing support groups in the field of domestic violence, and is retired as a counselor for an all-male prison in the Substance Use and Domestic Violence Programs.

Facilitators and educators consist of an MSW, LCSW with over 30 years of combined experience working in the field of Domestic Violence, and a Board-Certified Mental Health Coach and Board-Certified Biblical Counselor with a Certificate in Domestic Violence Advocacy, Safe Plan Advocate, and Danger Assessment. Our training consists of the Dynamics of Domestic Violence, Cycle of Violence, Safety Planning, and Healthy Relationships.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Planning and coordination/Task force meetings 240 hrs @ \$25 ea	\$6000
Workshops (5) 120 hrs @\$25 ea	\$3000
Materials / Supplies	\$300
Community Awareness	\$1000
Social media	\$1200
Staff Training	\$500
Printing	\$750
One-time payment utility assistance \$25 x 70	\$1750
Refreshments	\$500
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	<b>\$15000</b>
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	<b>\$15000</b>
<b>Source(s) of Other Funds:</b> Fundraising, donations	

**City of Gardner**  
**Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds**

**Agency/Organization Name:** Department of Community Development and Planning

**Agency/Organization Address:** 115 Pleasant St.

**Agency/Organization Contact:** Amy Yuhasz

**Phone and Email:** 978-991-5841, ayuhasz@gardner-ma.gov

**Project Location Address:** City Hall Avenue between Connors St. and Pleasant St.

**Project Description (add space as needed):**

Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

The proposed project is the sixth phase in a series of downtown infrastructure improvement projects. Phase 6 consists of improvements to City Hall Avenue, between Connors Street and Pleasant Street. Proposed upgrades include new crosswalks, new sidewalks, new curbing, street lighting upgrades, and accessibility improvements. Please see the attached Conceptual Plan.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

The proposed project is part of the Downtown Urban Renewal Area that received a Slum and Blight Area Designation from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Infrastructure projects within the Downtown Urban Renewal Area are a priority for the City's CDBG funds. The project aligns with the priority on the City's 2022-2025 Community Development Strategy Priority List: "Reconstruct or alter streets, sidewalks, and public buildings to allow for handicap accessibility and to encourage pedestrian travel."

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.

August 2026:

- Notice to proceed with preparation of the plans and specifications needed for bid documents issued to Tighe & Bond.

December 2026 - February 2027:

- Final bid documents prepared, including state and federal wage decisions, and bid issued
- Bids opened and bid awarded to lowest most responsive bidder

March - April 2027:

- Construction contract executed
- Preconstruction conference conducted
- All required permits secured

May 2027:

- Construction begins
- Construction oversight performed, employee interviews conducted, payroll records reviewed and requests for payments reviewed and processed

July - August 2027:

- Construction complete and final payment issued
- All required information entered in Intelligrants

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

Tighe and Bond, the City's on-call Engineering Firm, the City's Department of Public Works and the Department of Community Development and Planning have several years of experience completing similar projects. The Assistant Director of Community Development and Planning will take the lead in coordinating with all parties to ensure timely completion of the project.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Please see the attached Engineer's Opinion of Probable Cost – note that this is currently being updated to reflect Phase 6 and current construction costs.	
Construction and Contingency	\$672,693.00
Design Services	\$49,100.00
Bidding and Construction Services	\$42,600.00
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	<b>\$764,393.00</b>
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	<b>\$764,393.00</b>
<b>Source(s) of Other Funds:</b> N/A	

**ENGINEER'S OPINION OF PROBABLE COST**

**Tighe&Bond**

**Project: Downtown Improvements - Phase 5**  
**Location: Gardner, MA**

Prepared By: MPW / ND  
 Date Prepared: 11/6/2024

Estimate Type:  Conceptual  Construction  
 Preliminary (w/o plans)  Change Order  
 Design Development @ \_\_\_\_\_ % Complete

Item No.	Quantity	Unit		Unit Price	Amount
<b>Phase 5</b>					
1	1	LS	Mobilization and Demobilization	\$ 26,000.00	\$ 26,000
2	1	LS	Traffic Control	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000
3	350	CY	Unclassified Excavation	\$ 90.00	\$ 31,500
4	200	CY	Processed Gravel	\$ 50.00	\$ 10,000
5	400	SY	Concrete Sidewalks	\$ 120.00	\$ 48,000
6	75	LF	Granite Curbing (New)	\$ 70.00	\$ 5,250
7	550	LF	Granite Curbing (Remove and Reset)	\$ 40.00	\$ 22,000
8	100	SY	Concrete Wheelchair Ramps	\$ 140.00	\$ 14,000
9	125	SY	Hot Mix Asphalt Patch and Roadway Repair	\$ 60.00	\$ 7,500
10	950	LF	12-inch Painted Pavement Markings	\$ 6.00	\$ 5,700
11	17	EA	Victorian Light Pole and Foundation	\$ 13,500.00	\$ 229,500
12	17	EA	Electrical Handholes	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 34,000
13	1,400	LF	Electrical Conduit and Cabling	\$ 60.00	\$ 84,000
14	1	LS	Electrical Tie into Service Box	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000
15	950	LF	Grind Pavement Markings	\$ 2.00	\$ 1,900
16	150	SY	Loam and Seed	\$ 25.00	\$ 3,750
Phase 5 Subtotal:				\$	553,100
Police Detail:				\$	20,000
Contingency (15%):				\$	83,000
Escalation (3%):				\$	16,593
Phase 5 Construction and Contingency Subtotal:				\$	672,693
Design Services:				\$	49,100
Bidding and Construction Services:				\$	42,600
<b>Total Conceptual Estimate Phase 5</b>				<b>\$</b>	<b>764,393</b>



**City of Gardner**  
**Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds**

<b>Agency Name:</b>	Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.
<b>Agency Contact:</b>	Stephanie Marchetti
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-630-7435, smarchetti@veterans-outreach.org
<b>Project Location:</b>	268 Central Street Gardner, MA
<b>Agency Name:</b>	Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.

**Project Description (add space as needed):**

Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

In this application, the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center (a private non-profit organization) requests funding to add much needed accessibility and efficiency updates to our 268 Central Street location. If fulfilled, this will improve accessibility for clients and residents- who are largely senior and disabled veterans- as well as increase the energy efficiency and safety of our property. Requested are the following:

- Automatic door openers for 268 Central Street entrances
- Window replacement for 268 Central Street transitional supportive shelter program

This property is not just the headquarters for MVOC’s regular clients (of which there are approximately 600 annually), but also the location of 7 low-income studio apartments for veterans and a 12-bed transitional shelter program for homeless and high-risk veterans. Within this property, 90% of veterans meet low to very-low income standards. Additionally, 85% veterans in our studio apartments are 60+ and 50% of the veterans in our transitional shelter are 60+.

Many of our residential and visiting veterans have physical disabilities, so the addition of automatic door openers at each of our entry/exit points will make it easier and more comfortable for those with mobility issues and physical disabilities utilize office and living spaces. At this time, the pathways to these doors are clear and traversable, and there is an elevator within the building that makes moving throughout the floors easy as well, but there are 4 entry points in need of an upgrade. These entry points are our public-facing front entrance, resident entrance, pantry entrance, and rear entrance.

The window replacement requested will specifically be for the third floor of this property, which is home to our 12 bed transitional shelter program. This past summer, the MVOC contracted with Red Dog Roofing to replace 4 windows; we are asking for assistance with the replacement of the remaining 8. Red Dog is a company we already have a relationship with and we are looking to extend our contract with them to finish this job. While this shelter program is largely funded via a federal VA grant, capital expenses are not permitted and therefore local grant and/or foundation funding is needed for these types of improvements. Our current windows are approximately 20 years old and many have gaps and are also not able to be safely opened. This improvement will not just affect the efficiency of the building but also add necessary safety and quality of life improvements for the residents of those rooms.

For each of our residential floors, income of the residents is assessed on an annual basis by MVOC’s Finance and Benefits Assistant as well as by the handful of vouchersing agencies that have provided project and tenant-based vouchers for these spaces. Residents complete income verification forms as well as submit copies of bank statements as well as social security, DTA, and other income source letters to ensure their eligibility for our services and their housing.

Please note that the MVOC employs a full-time Facilities Manager that can install the door openers. Additionally, the MVOC is only asking for 75% of the funds needed for the door openers and will use alternate funds for the remaining cost- this is to account for the 25% of non-Gardner resident traffic that this property sees.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

This project will greatly increase the MVOC's ability to appropriately support the physical disabilities of the population we serve. The veterans and veteran families supported by our headquarters and housing programs come to us with a variety of physical needs, both due to their time in the service and their age. Increasing the accessibility of our properties will allow us to broaden our housing acceptance rates to those who require these accommodations, and better serve those who are struggling here already without them.

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.

Door openers will be ordered immediately upon award and set into place within 90 days. We will contract with Red Dog to have work performed as soon as items are ordered and weather permits, with work to be completed not later than June 30, 2026.

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

MVOC Executive Director, Finance Director, and Facilities Manager will be involved in this project.

- The Executive Director serves to identify and purchase required items
- The Finance Director serves to process all expenditures within accordance to regulations
- The Facilities Manager serves to assemble and/or install all materials

The MVOC has a long standing history of providing housing and supportive services to veterans, over 40 years. Additionally, we have operated housing programs since the 1990s. We are well poised to carry out the mission of this project swiftly and successfully.

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits .

Line Item (add lines as need)	CDBG Funds Requested
(4) automatic door openers	\$15,000
Installation of new CT board and batten siding on dormers	\$7,700
Installation of new windows and removal of previous windows	\$9,200
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	\$31,900
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	\$3,750
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	\$35,650
<b>Source(s) of Other Funds:</b> state earmark funds	

**City of Gardner**  
**Application for Community Development Block Grant Funds**

<b>Agency/Organization Name:</b>	North Star Family Services, Inc.
<b>Agency/Organization Address:</b>	758 Main Street, Leominster, MA 01453
<b>Agency/Organization Contact:</b>	Shauna Neidigh
<b>Phone and Email:</b>	978-466-1706, sneidigh@northstarfs.org
<b>Project Location Address:</b>	758 Main Street, Leominster, MA 01453

**Project Description (add space as needed):**  
Please provide information on the scope of the project, how the project will benefit low- and moderate-income Gardner residents, and an estimate of the number of low- and moderate-income residents who will be served by the project. Also provide information on how the income of beneficiaries will be documented.

North Star Family Services provides stable housing, comprehensive services, and advocacy for families in need of support. Since the agency’s beginning in 2003, originally named Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network, we have helped nearly 400 families with children experiencing homelessness find safety, security, and hope.

North Star operates two locations, Bonnie’s Place and Journey Home.

**Bonnie’s Place:** Bonnie’s Place provides temporary shelter, food, and comprehensive case management services to guide families with children experiencing homelessness to stability and self-sufficiency in permanent homes.

**Journey Home:** Journey Home is North Star’s first foray into creating and managing permanent supportive housing. Journey Home is an apartment complex that provides permanent and supportive affordable housing for 15 families in Leominster. A case manager is on-site to help families maintain independence. Construction took about a year and families moved in August 2025.

North Star began because one woman saw a need in the community and gathered others to meet that need. The shelter became a beacon of hope for families with children experiencing homeless find hope and a home. Over the years, it has become increasingly difficult for families to find affordable housing once they graduate from our program. Following in our founder’s footsteps, our visionary leadership undertook the monumental task of creating permanent supportive housing to address this challenge. We were told by many local leaders that it would be impossible for us to obtain the necessary local, philanthropic funding, yet we raised \$2 million through a local capital campaign. The remaining \$7 million was raised through state and federal funding, as well as private grants and foundations.

Current administration is not content to rest at the completion of the seven-year process to build Journey Home. We know the need for supportive affordable housing in the Tri City area far exceeds the 15 units we added this summer. We are eager to create more housing options that are truly affordable with the continual support needed to help struggling families maintain independence in our region.

We’ve been through the process of conducting a capital campaign, dealing with government funding and regulations, and working with architects and contractors. We learned a lot and anticipate that we can navigate the process faster for a second building. To have greater impact, we need to invest in staff and systems that make our work happen.

North Star is seeking funding to support pre-housing development and fundraising work to build a 25-unit supportive affordable apartment complex next to Journey Home. North Star owns seven acres of buildable land and utilities were extended to the lot. This building would provide safe and comfortable housing for 25 low-income families in the Tri City area. As we did with our first housing project, we will work with MOC to collect applications and confirm income requirements. Mayor Nicholson is familiar with North Star and has spoken with administration about the need for creating more affordable housing in our region.

**Unmet Need:**

Please explain how the proposed project will address an unmet need.

Most people living in Massachusetts recognize that we are in a housing crisis. With not enough housing for residents in the state, rents and home prices have far outpaced income making home ownership and even rental units out of range for many people. Governor Healy has stated that Massachusetts needs 220,000 new homes by 2035 to meet the demand for housing in the Commonwealth.

Very few, if any, developers in our region are focusing exclusively on affordable properties. North Star's objective is to create permanent, supportive and affordable housing for very low-income families.

**Project Timeline/Milestones:**

Please provide a timeline for implementation of the proposed project. Note that the anticipated period of performance for FFY2026 projects is from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027.

1/1/2026-1/1/2027: Federal, state and local fundraising/grantwriting.

- Congressional directed spending application
- Local Home Funds application
- CCRI application
- Charles Bank Homes Foundation application
- Housing bond bill-work with state legislators on line items.
- Capital campaign
- EOHLC-One Stop application

1/1/2027-1/1/2028: Pre-development work.

- Project feasibility, zoning
- Early architectural drawings
- Housing consultant strategy planning

**Agency/Organization Capacity:**

Please provide a brief summary of the agency/organization's experience carrying out similar projects. List key staff positions that will be responsible for implementation of the proposed project.

Since the agency's beginning in 2003, North Star has helped families with children experiencing homelessness find hope and a home. A Leominster resident, Bonnie Hathaway, saw the need for services for homeless families and approached her church with the idea of joining with Interfaith Hospitality Network/Family Promise. Originally, the agency was named the Montachusett Interfaith Hospitality Network and along with partner churches offered shelter in churches, convents and multi-family apartment houses, as well as provided meals and support services. In 2015, a permanent site was secured in Leominster. In 2019, the board of directors chose to end the affiliation with Family Promise and changed the name to North Star Family Services, Inc.

Now, as we are adding housing development to our services, we have shown we are successful with our first project, Journey Home, which opened to 15 families in August 2025.

**Key staff:**

Dr. Jon Hogue, President & CEO  
 Tabitha Cardona, Vice President of Administration  
 Shauna Neidigh, Director of Development  
 Jana Murphy, Shelter Director  
 Catherine Grant, Service Coordinator  
 Lesley O'Connell, Case Manager

**Project Budget:**

Please provide a detailed project budget. For any proposed staff costs, please list the rate of pay and fringe benefits.

<b>Line Item (add lines as need)</b>	<b>CDBG Funds Requested</b>
Housing development	\$30,000
Fundraising development	\$20,000
<b>Total CDBG Funds Requested:</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
<b>Other Non-CDBG Funds:</b>	<b>\$796,595</b>
<b>Total Project Budget:</b>	<b>\$846,595</b>

**Source(s) of Other Funds:**

Amelia Peabody Foundation  
 Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts  
 Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
 Greater Lowell Community Foundation  
 Health New England  
 Katharine and Winthrop Crane Foundation  
 Main Street Group Foundation  
 Nypro  
 Rollstone Charitable Foundation  
 Schwartz Charitable Foundation  
 Rockland Trust  
 Town Fair Tire Foundation  
 United Way of North Central Massachusetts

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STEERING COMMITTEE

## Meeting Minutes

November 25, 2025, at 4:30 p.m.

Members present: Chairperson Jason Stevens, Director of Community Development and Planning; Michael Nicholson, Mayor; Elizabeth Kazinskas, Councilor; Robert Cormier; and Amy Yuhasz, Assistant Director for Community Development and Planning (non-voting, ex officio)

Members absent: None

Also present: Julie Meehan, Gardner CAC and MVOC, Terri Hillman, Gardner CAC, Jennifer Dymek, Gardner CAC

ANNOUNCEMENT - Any person may make a video or audio recording of an open session of a meeting, or may transmit the meeting through any medium, subject to reasonable requirements of the Chair as to the number, placement and operation of equipment used so as not to interfere with the conduct of the meeting. Any person intending to make such recording shall notify the Chair forthwith. All Documents referenced or used during the meeting must be submitted in duplicate to the Director of Community Development & Planning pursuant to the Open Meeting and Public Records Law. All documents shall become part of the official record of the meeting.

Director Stevens called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. and read the above announcement regarding recording of the meeting.

### 1. Public Hearing:

#### 1.1 FY2022-23 CDBG Mini-Entitlement Grant Activity Budget Changes:

Transfer of \$158,206.52 in unused funds from the 205-213 Main Street Demolition project and the Downtown Phase 4 project to the Gardner Community Action Committee and the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center for public social services

Assistant Director Yuhasz explained that the \$158,206.52 in unused funds is available from two projects that were completed under budget – the 205-213 Main Street Demolition project and the Downtown Phase 4 project – and staff has been working to develop a plan to reallocate those funds. Given the current uncertainty around Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and the potential implications of changes to the program and the growing need for food assistance in Gardner, after consulting with representatives from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and the Mayor, staff contacted the Gardner Community Action Committee (CAC) and the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center (MVOC), the two agencies operating the largest food assistance programs in Gardner, to see if they had unmet needs that would be eligible for CDBG public social service funds and could be expended quickly, preferably by December 31, 2025.

In response to that outreach, Ms. Yuhasz said that both agencies submitted applications which were provided to the Committee in their meeting packet along with a spreadsheet that summarizes their requests. If the Committee were to approve their requests, there would be a little over \$9,000 left unallocated. Ms. Yuhasz stated that the good is that since the last meeting, the City received approval of an extension of the FY2022-23 grant term through June 30, 2026y. She added that if the Committee were to approve the CAC's and MVOC's requests, staff would work to execute agreements with both agencies right away.

Ms. Yuhasz walked the Committee through summary of each agency's request as stated in the spreadsheet provided in the Committee's meeting packet. Ms. Yuhasz asked for questions or comments. Mayor Nicholson spoke in support of the funding requests and stated that this is a good way to reallocate the funds to meet the moment that we have with the funds that we have available to meet the community needs. Mayor Nicholson added, as a point of record, that the CAC's governing documents say that the Mayor appoints a representative to the CAC's Board of Directors, and he noted that his appointment, Ms. Hillman, was in attendance, but he does not foresee any issues related to that appointment.

Councilor Kazinskas spoke in support of the applications and stated that both applicants provided incredible detail in their requests, and it makes the job of the Committee so much easier. She also expressed her appreciation that process was carried out thoroughly and quickly, especially given the current uncertainty regarding federal funding. For the CAC request, she was pleased to see that the application included the purchase of food, because the agency knows best what they need and donations might not always address those needs. Council Kazinskas again expressed her full support for both applications and said that she is grateful for the work that MVOC and CAC do and the impact they have on the lives of Gardner residents.

Chairperson Stevens asks if there were any other comments. Julie Meehan, the Executive Director of CAC and representing MVOC's Board, thanked the Committee for their consideration in helping meet the needs of Gardner. Chairperson Steven's pointed out that CAC's request is for 90% of the project costs, since it has been determined that of the people the agency currently serves in the region, approximately 90% are Gardner residents. Chairperson Stevens stated his support for the applications and Mayor Nicholson stated his support for the high level of collaboration between the two agencies.

Chairperson Stevens asked for a motion on the proposed transfer. Mayor Nicholson made a motion to approve the transfer, and Robert Cormier seconded it. Motion passed 4:0.

Before moving on to the next public hearing, in response to the Committee's request at their October meeting, Assistant Director Yuhasz shared the current CDBG income limits with the Committee and stated that these are the limits that CAC and MVOC's programs will utilize.

### 1.2 FY2024 CDBG Mini-Entitlement Grant Activity Budget Changes:

Transfer of up to \$791,342.51 allocated to the School St. School Demolition project to a new Greenwood Pool Pavilion project and cancellation of the School St. School Demolition project

Assistant Director Yuhasz referred to the revised Estimate of Probable Cost and preliminary plan prepared by Tighe & Bond for the Greenwood Pool Pavilion project and included in the Committee's meeting packet. The revised estimate is \$782,970, which is about \$100,000 more than their original estimate. Ms. Yuhasz stated that the increase in cost is attributable to the Build America, Buy America Act requirements and a general increase in construction costs. Based on the Committee's discussion at their last meeting, Ms. Yuhasz stated that she did send Tighe & Bond an email to ask about the loaming and seeding included in the Greenwood Pool Demolition project and whether they thought it was appropriate to carry that out as part of the demolition project, and she said she will share their response with the Committee. In addition to funds available for reallocation if the loaming and seeding is not carried out under the demolition contract, there may also be funds from the contingency budget line item, as they have not needed to utilize any of those funds. Ms. Yuhasz recommended that the Committee allocate the full amount of funds from the School St. School project to Phase II in case bids come in higher than expected. Councilor Kazinskas asked if funds available from Phase I would be able to be used for Phase II. Director Stevens responded that any available funds from the demolition project will be reallocated to another project.

Mayor Nicholson added that they did conclude the RFP process for School St. School. There were two proposals received and reviewed by the Review Committee. The Mayor stated that he took the unanimous recommendation of the Review Committee, and an offer has been accepted and a closing is pending. Details of that sale will go public once the closing is recorded. Until that happens, all of the submissions to the RFP are still considered privileged. The sale of the property is officially moving forward, so that frees up this money, and he spoke in support of moving the full amount into this project.

Mayor Nicholson asked about the conceptual design and the portion of it that's in the Zone C Buffer Zone and whether that means additional conservation review is required. Assistant Director Yuhasz and Director Stevens confirmed that additional Conservation Commission review would be needed. Director Stevens added that there will likely not be a fence surrounding the area and that has been communicated to Tighe & Bond.

Committee member Cormier asked about the deadline for the expenditure of FY2024 funds. Assistant Director Yuhasz stated that the City received an extension of the expenditure deadline for FY2024 funds through December 31, 2026.

Chairperson Stevens asked for additional comments in support of or against the proposed transfer. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the proposed transfer of up to \$791,342.51 allocated to the School St. School Demolition project to a new Greenwood Pool Pavilion project and cancellation of the School St. School Demolition project.

Councilor Kazinskas motioned to approve the transfer, and Robert Cormier seconded. Motion passed 4:0.

## **Regular Meeting**

### **Meeting Minutes:**

#### **1.** Vote to Approve minutes of Regular Meeting, October 28, 2025

Councilor Kazinskas motioned to approve the minutes as presented, Robert Cormier seconded. Motion passed 4:0.

#### **2.** **New Business:**

##### **2.1** Review of FY2026 CDBG Application Schedule

Assistant Director Yuhasz walked the Committee through a tentative proposed schedule for completion and submission of the City's FFY2026 CDBG Mini-Entitlement application that was included in their meeting packet and asked for the Committee's feedback. She stated that she researched the process from prior years, and noted that there used to be an initial application that the City asked applicants to complete, followed by a final application, but she could not determine what happened in the interim between the initial and final application to be able to know the benefit of having two submissions. The Assistant Director recommended that only one application be used for FY2026. She also recommended that training for applicants be provided but that it not be mandatory like it was last year. She will record it and send it to people at their request. Councilor Kazinskas and Director Stevens both spoke in favor of that approach.

The tentative schedule includes a meeting on December 16th to review the City's FY2022-2025 Community Development Strategy (CDS), which is a document that the City submits to the State which summarizes unmet needs in the City and how CDBG funds could be used to address those needs. The CDS relies on information from other planning documents like the Gardner Redevelopment Authority's Urban Renewal Plans and the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan. There is no public hearing required for the CDS, it just needs to be presented at a public forum, so notice of the meeting does not need to be published 15 days in advance. There's no requirement to revise the CDS this year. It's required to be revised next year, so the Committee can discuss whether it would like to make any changes during the meeting. Also proposed are January 20<sup>th</sup> and January 27<sup>th</sup> meetings to review applications received. Assistant Director Yuhasz said the Committee does not need to have two meetings, but she would like their feedback on whether they think they are needed. The consensus of the Committee was that they would schedule two and if they don't need to have a second one, they will cancel it.

A final public hearing to review the application before it is submitted is scheduled for February 24<sup>th</sup>. Assistant Director Yuhasz pointed out that only one public hearing is required as part of the application process, but she stated that she wants to ensure that the Committee has enough time dedicated to the review of proposals. Mayor Nicholson added that these public hearings offer an opportunity for members of the public to attend and participate and he likes the idea of the training being recorded. Director Stevens added these meetings allow the Committee to check in and ensure that deadlines like the potential submission of a Timely Expenditure Waiver request are met, which will need to be submitted in February 2026 if required expenditures are not met. A waiver request will most likely be needed for FY2024 and possibly FY2022-23. Councilor Kazinskas expressed her support for having a schedule in place to ensure that the process is completed on time.

#### **3.** **Old Business:**

##### **3.1** Status of FY2025 CDBG Mini Entitlement Grant

Assistant Director Yuhasz said that the City has not received additional information regarding the FY2025 application after the initial award letter was received by the Mayor. She added that the School St. School design project that was included in this application was not scored since that demolition project is not going forward, so the \$90,000 allocated for that project will need to be reallocated. Assistant Director Yuhasz stated that she plans to include the reallocation of those funds and other unallocated funds in the FFY2026 application process.

##### **3.2** **FY2022-23 Project Updates**

###### **3.2.1** Demolition of 205-213 Main Street

Director Stevens said that, as reported previously, the demolition of the property has been completed, and the Gardner Redevelopment Authority (GRA) has been working towards the land sale. The draft purchase and sale agreement is currently

being reviewed by the buyer. The GRA will need to ensure that the buyer has the limited environmental remediation information on the site – unused oil in the oil tank and lead paint that was found in parts of the building – which is light compared to other projects. Once the closing is held, all the information related to the sale will be public. Mayor Nicholson asked for confirmation on whether for CDBG, which funded the demolition, anything else needs to be done. Director Stevens responded that the CDBG-funded demolition is complete and nothing else needs to be done, but it remains on the agenda until the sale is completed so the Committee will know that the property has been passed on and given a new life.

### 3.2.2 Greenwood Pool Demolition

Assistant Director Yuhasz said that she was there that morning and the structure is fully down, all the bricks have been removed, and the area where the building was had been backfilled. Only a few items remain to be completed on the project, including installation of electrical service and loam and seed, which could change based on Tighe & Bond's feedback. She added that the project has gone smoothly and Associated Building Wreckers and Tighe & Bond have both been great to work with.

## 3.3 FY2024 Project Updates

### 3.3.1 Social Services

Assistant Director Yuhasz told the Committee that the grant agreement for the Gardner Athletic Program was fully signed and the department will work with them to submit an invoice for the athletic scholarships that have been provided and get the income and demographic data that is required. Gardner Emergency Housing Mission's project has been completed, and Voices of Truth needs to submit a final invoice and report which is due at the beginning of January. After those invoices and reports are received, this can be removed from the agenda.

### 3.2.2 Demolition of School Street School

Director Stevens stated that this was already covered during the public hearing discussion and asked if there were any additional questions or comments.

Mayor Nicholson announced that a new member, Neil Erickson, the former police chief, will be joining the Committee as a Mayoral appointee, and the Executive Aide position was just posted and once that's filled the Committee will have a Mayoral designee as well.

Director Stevens asked if there were any other questions or comments, and hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn. Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Kazinskas and seconded by Mayor Nicholson. Meeting adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

*All documents referenced or used during the meeting are part of the official record and are available in the Department of Community Development and Planning pursuant to the Open Meeting and Public Records Law.*

**CITY OF GARDNER**  
**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**  
**FY2022-2026**

**Introduction**

The City of Gardner's Community Development Strategy (CDS) summarizes the City's various efforts to engage in community-based planning and priority setting, staying consistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principals, and outlines a plan of action intended to accomplish specific community development goals. The current CDS will be used to direct resources from all sources toward projects that address the needs identified by the community as high priorities.

**Target Area**

The City's Urban Renewal Area (URA) received a ten-year Slum and Blight Designation from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Community (formerly the Department of Housing and Community Development) on July 1, 2016, allowing the city to carry out Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects in the areas using the national objective of prevention or elimination of slums or blight on an area basis. As a result, infrastructure and public facility projects located within the existing Urban Renewal Area boundaries will be prioritized for CDBG and other funds. Other neighborhoods with concentrations of low- and moderate-income residents will also be prioritized for funding.

**Planning Documents**

*Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (2017)*

*Downtown Urban Renewal Plan (2011)*

*Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Plan (2012)*

*Open Space and Recreation Plan (2023)*

**CDS Goals and Priorities**

Economic Development

There are two distinct economic development goals in the City of Gardner – to diversify the local economy and increase job opportunities by encouraging and facilitating retention and expansion of Gardner based businesses as well as attracting new businesses to Gardner while promoting reinvestment in older industrial and commercial properties. To that end, the City will continue to coordinate economic development efforts by maintaining funding for the Economic Development & Finance Manager (EDFM) position. The EDFM will continue to implement the approved urban renewal plans; identify and develop a new industrial business park; assist and expand training opportunities for the local workforce; provide support to new and existing businesses throughout Gardner by organizing company tours with potential partners; act as a conduit between the City and the Chamber of Commerce, Square Two, NewVue Communities and other organizations for marketing and technical support such as sign and façade improvements, marketing, business expansion efforts and networking with other business owners; and partner with local non-profit agencies to assist in challenges facing the local workforce such as job training, job-related transportation issues, job-related childcare, education and financial literacy and self-sufficiency programs.

Housing: Expansion and Retention

The City of Gardner is committed to expanding housing opportunities in appropriate locations to meet the needs of Gardner's population. Gardner has partnered with local and regional non-profit organizations to enhance and rehabilitate properties creating safe and affordable housing and repairing dilapidated buildings. Many of the properties in the Downtown Urban Renewal Area are mixed use properties with retail or commercial endeavors on the first floor and apartments on the upper floors, which, due to a variety of reasons, remain mostly vacant. In order to facilitate the redevelopment of these vacant properties, and others

throughout the City, in addition to rehabilitation of homes to address lead/asbestos, code compliance and safety modernization, the City must increase the quantity and availability of parking, expedite the process for taking control of tax title properties, assess current zoning and promote smart growth districts, address storm water management practices, and partner with local agencies and developers to invest in the existing infrastructure. The City must also continue to support residents by partnering with local banks and non-profit agencies to identify properties that are in pre-foreclosure, distribute information regarding the availability of foreclosure counseling, and assist with post-foreclosure issues. Education for first time homebuyers is also crucial in foreclosure prevention.

### Open Space and Recreation

The City of Gardner's current Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was developed in 2023 and runs through 2030. . The overall purpose of the OSRP is to provide Gardner's residents with a diverse system of interconnected open space areas and quality recreational opportunities that protect natural resources, promote public health, and enhance the quality of life. Enhancing the quality of life in a community must maintain a careful balance between equity, environment and economy. Overall goals of the OSRP include to protect and improve the quality of existing open spaces, parks, and recreational opportunities; implement selective expansion of open spaces, parks, and recreational opportunities; protect water resources and improve water quality; accommodate new growth where the environment can best support it; increase public awareness, use, and stewardship of the City's water resources, forests, parks, conservation areas, and recreational opportunities; expand multimodal connectivity by improving bicycle and pedestrian paths, trails and sidewalks; sustain the recent focus on improved maintenance of existing recreational facilities; ensure parks and playgrounds are safe and family friendly; upgrade existing sidewalks and build connections between existing sidewalks; and improve coordination of municipal efforts and better support volunteer initiatives.

### Transportation

The City's goals include increasing access to transportation options and ensuring safe, accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit and vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities, including those with disabilities, allowing safe and convenient travel throughout the City. To that end, the City continues to advocate for increased bus service to allow working parents and the underemployed better access to childcare facilities and employment opportunities; upgrading State Route 2 and improvements to the Community Rail System serving Northern Worcester County, to include the recent addition of the North Central Pathway Connector on Park Street; promote walking and biking opportunities within the City and advocate for bicycle racks on buses to allow travel between communities for recreational purposes; apply appropriate Smart Parking standards and strategies in the target areas and increase the availability of parking in the target areas; continue to upgrade the sidewalks to ADA/MAAB standards and repair deteriorated infrastructure which will include preparing and implementing a pavement management plan; provide better traffic control features such as line painting and cross walks; and increase the enforcement of traffic laws and ordinances.

The City has entered into a Community Compact with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and has created a Complete Streets Policy outlining its commitment in obtaining its transportation goals. The City has received three grants from MassDOT for the Complete Streets Project. The more recent grant will improve the Parker Street and Central Street intersection, while past grants constructed part of the North Central pathway Connector and upgraded sidewalk infrastructure and incorporated a bike lane connecting the city ends.

## Special Needs

It is important the residents of Gardner have equal access to municipal and regional services, activities and programs. To that end, the City will continue to evaluate its ADA Transition Plan and make recommendations where necessary; provide auxiliary aids and services that allow municipal communication improvement; increase the support available to persons having special needs, including, but not limited to, the elderly, the homeless, survivors of domestic violence, low and moderate income persons and people with disabilities; expand partnerships with local and regional health, social and human service providers; support efforts of private developers to create affordable and market rate senior housing; expand existing City efforts to rehabilitate substandard housing, particularly inaccessible, multi-family buildings; continue to upgrade the existing infrastructure with ADA compliant curbs and ramps to make travel more accessible; and provide support to address public health priorities including those dealing with addiction, mental health and physical disabilities.

## **Priority Projects**

<b>1. Reconstruct or alter streets, sidewalks, and public buildings to allow for handicap accessibility and to encourage pedestrian travel.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, Complete Streets, Chapter 90, local</i>
<b>2. Upgrade existing infrastructure, particularly in the Downtown Urban Renewal Area and Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Area.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, Complete Streets, Chapter 90, local</i>
<b>3. Apply appropriate “Smart Parking” standards and strategies and increase availability of parking in the Downtown Urban Renewal Area.</b> <i>Years 1-4. Shared Streets and Spaces, local</i>
<b>4. Implement the approved Downtown and Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Plans.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, Complete Streets, Chapter 90, MassDevelopment, local</i>
<b>5. Restore, enhance, build and support diverse recreational facilities and/or activities.</b> <i>Years 1-4. MassTrails, PARC, CDBG</i>
<b>6. Implement the Open Space and Recreation Plan including, but not limited to, acquiring, protecting, and maintaining open space and environmentally sensitive lands.</b> <i>Years 1-4. MassTrails, Mass MVP, PARC, CDBG</i>
<b>7. Support and expand economic security and self-sufficiency programs.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, local, private</i>
<b>8. Work cooperatively with area for-profit and non-profit service agencies to implement the CDS.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, local, private</i>
<b>9. Selectively demolish buildings that are beyond re-use in the Target Area.</b> <i>Years 2. CDBG</i>
<b>10. Rehabilitate dilapidated buildings within the existing URA boundaries and adjacent census blocks as well as target neighborhoods of high LMI concentration.</b> <i>Years 1. CDBG, private</i>
<b>11. Attract and assist businesses opening in, relocating to, or already existing in Gardner.</b> <i>Years 1-4. CDBG, MassDevelopment, EOED, local, private</i>
<b>12. Redevelop vacant or underutilized land and buildings, particularly in the Urban Renewal Areas.</b> <i>Years 1-4. MassDevelopment, EOED, local, private</i>
<b>13. Rehabilitate non-code compliant and/or construction of affordable single and multi-family homes.</b> <i>Years 1-4. Housing Bond, HOME, private</i>

### Proposed FFY2026 CDBG Mini-Entitlement Application Schedule

Completed	Date	Task
√	Tuesday, November 25, 2025 CDBG Steering Committee Meeting	Review proposed FFY2026 application schedule
√	Friday, December 5, 2025	Prepare post for website, add address to ad Send legal ad for RFP to paper by 3 p.m.
√	Wednesday, December 10, 2025	Publish ad for FFY2026 RFP in Gardner News, post on website and JS to send email to Councilors/St. Paul's/MVOC
√	Thursday, December 18, 2025@11	Conduct application training for potential applicants
√	Tuesday, December 30, 2025	Send legal ad to paper for 1/20 1/27 public hearings – publish on 1/6
√	Thursday, January 8, 2026	Responses to RFP due by 4 p.m.
√	Monday, January 5, 2025	Submit current FY22-25 Community Development Strategy to EOHLC (required submittal due 2 weeks prior to public forum where CDS is presented)
	Tuesday, January 20, 2026 CDBG Steering Committee Meeting	Public Hearing: Initial review of proposals Review FY22-25 Community Development Strategy
	Tuesday, January 27, 2026 CDBG Steering Committee Meeting	Public Hearing: Continued review of proposals, if needed
	Tuesday, February 17, 2026	Application available from EOHLC
	Tuesday, February 23, 2026	Submit required list of proposed activities to EOHLC (within a week of application availability)
	Tuesday, February 24, 2026 CDBG Steering Committee Meeting	Regular Meeting: Update on application status and possible review of revised Community Development Strategy
	Friday, February 27, 2026	Submit timely expenditure waiver request to EOHLC if the following are not met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90% of all FY2022-23 funds drawn in EOHLC's grant management system</li> <li>• 40% of all FY2024 drawn in EOHLC's grant management system</li> </ul>
	Tuesday, March 24, 2026	Public Hearing: Final review of application
	Monday, April 6, 2026	Present proposed projects to City Council – resolution to endorse application
	Tuesday, April 7, 2026	Obtain Mayor Nicholson's signature on application forms and certifications
	Friday, April 10, 2026 <b>(4/21 deadline)</b>	Submit application to EOHLC through the new grants management system